Of Secret Wars and Roses
De las guerras secretas y las rosas

by Dinorah Sandoval

Short Story and Study Guide for Secondary Social Studies, English, Spanish and Advanced ESL classes

Teaching For Change
Washington, D.C.
About the Teachers' Guide:
The original version was prepared by Ronette Youmans, assisted by Gail Draper and Iris Edinger; revised in 1990 by Kathy Davin and Deborah Menkart.

About the translation:
The translation was the joint effort of Kathleen Ganley, Spanish teacher, Minneapolis Metropolitan Community College; Teresa Ortiz Johnson, Augsburg College in Guatemala; and Gladys Frontera, Translator, Mayor's Office on Latino Affairs, Washington, D.C.

About the artwork:
The cover illustration is a wood-cut courtesy of the Nicaraguan Cultural Alliance. All the illustrations within this curriculum (except on page 35) are by Rini Templeton used with the cooperation of the Rini Templeton Memorial Fund and can be found in the beautiful, bilingual collection of over 500 illustrations entitled El Arte de Rini Templeton: Donde hay vida y lucha - The Art of Rini Templeton: Where there is life and struggle, 1989, WA: The Real Comet Press. See Appendix A for ordering information. The illustration on page 35 is by members of a community of displaced persons in Soyopango, San Salvador called Comunidad 22 de Abril.

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ISBN 1-878554-02-6

Published by Teaching For Change

Manufactured in the United States of America
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Of Secret Wars and Roses

PART I

The noise of the cars outside Coliseum Street penetrated the profound silence of the morning. Deep within the vast maze of tenement buildings, in the loneliness of one of the apartments, Patricia pulled her pillow from under her head and covered her ears with it, trying to block the deafening traffic that had interrupted her sleep. Minutes passed and the sound increased, now with the heavy tapping of rain against her bedroom windows, like small annoying pebbles tossed by an intruder from the mountains above.

The girl opened her eyes slowly, yawning, stretching her slender brown body, untangling herself from the white blanket that was wrinkled evidence of another night of troubled dreams. She rose, muttering under her breath and, half-awake, stumbled into the small adjoining bathroom. She paused, letting the softness of the silk nightgown caress her body as it fell tenderly to the floor. After pinning up her dark, cascading hair, she entered the warm and inviting steam of the shower.

She closed her eyes and enjoyed the feel of the water pulsating over the gentle curves of her body, a halcyon river flowing gracefully through sloping hills. She cherished these moments, these quiet times when she could let her thoughts run free. Time stood still here. Patricia was weightless, selfless — experiencing an airy freedom impossible to feel anywhere else, especially since coming to this country. She let her mind race as she bathed, allowing it to leap through time, across continents, and into long-forgotten corners of memory. Her thoughts skimmed the high, damp grasses of the rolling hills of El Salvador and flew just above the rooftops of crowded shops that lined twisted, narrow streets. Her mind’s eye fleetingly captured the laughing face of a childhood friend lost to her forever — and in the moment it took to focus upon the image, it was blurred and washed away by her own tears.

She thought of Javier and shivered. For a moment she felt weak, uncomfortable. She hated the pressure, but something tingled inside when she thought of him. He would want an answer today; she could stall no longer. She imagined his dark, curly hair, his powerful looking shoulders, and the sparkle in his soft brown eyes. There was much that was desirable about him. And she was no longer the shy little girl who was interested only in play. She liked him, and she was not afraid. But somehow, a part of her said no.

The tensions of yesterday seized her reflections. He had approached her at school, just as many others were beginning to do. She didn’t quite like being noticed, being whistled at, feeling heads turn and eyes following her as she walked by. But he was different; he seemed to want to know the real Patricia, the one beneath what his eyes could see. He listened intently as she spoke, never letting his gaze roam about her body like the others. Javier had walked her home and, in the darkness of the street below her apartment, put his arms around her before saying good-bye. She managed to avoid a direct answer when he asked her out, and rushed indoors to escape the teasing of her older sisters who had been watching behind half-closed curtains. She recalled how it
felt — her face flushed with embarrassment. And the solitude of her bedroom, she remembered, did little to quiet a heart that raced with the excitement of his touch...

A hand tapped on the foggy glass surface of the shower door, startling Patricia.

"Are you going to be in there forever?" asked her mother. "You’re going to be late if you don’t hurry."

"Okay, okay—I’ll be right out," Patricia said. She slipped out, wrapping herself with a giant pink towel.

"Your friend Sonia called late last night, after you were asleep. She wants you to go to a party with her —"

"That girl has a party every week," Patricia muttered.

"I really wish you would try a little harder to adjust to things here," her mother urged. She was a petite woman with smooth brown skin and long straight, glossy black hair. "Sonia is only trying to help; it wouldn’t be a bad idea to go along with her once in a while. It would certainly be better than staying home and reading all those books that give you crazy ideas about life."

"I’ll think about it," Patricia lied, ending the conversation. Patricia dressed quickly and simply; she was not one to fuss over her appearance. While searching in her closet for a coat, she paused, noticing the small white box that held almost everything from her old life and her old home. Somehow, she managed to keep it hidden here, away from her mother and nosy brothers and sisters. There was so much her mother did not know, so much that kept them apart. Lately, the two had become strangers. Life had become a series of arguments between them; maybe it was Patricia’s age or her differing views of life — she did not know. Sometimes there were impenetrable silences in the apartment, thick and cold like a morning fog. Yesterday, when Patricia had returned from work, her mother sat at the dining room table writing a letter. Patricia spoke, but the woman said nothing, and never bothered to look up... This hurt more than she cared to admit. Maybe in the time the two lived apart from each other, each had crossed wide lands of experience and were no longer able to touch. America...

She reached high on the shelf and brought the box down. Sitting on her bed, she unwrapped the tissue that covered her most precious possession. It was a book — an ordinary book of poems — but priceless to her. Slowly she opened the pages in the center and saw it there. A red rose lay pressed between the pages. The petals, delicate and beautiful, were perfectly dried, frozen in a fragile moment of happiness. Her mother never knew of this instant, never was aware of her little girl discovering love, blossoming into womanhood. If she had, the scene in her aunt’s home would have surely happened here. Patricia’s cousin Carmen ran away from home last week when her mother accused her of having a sexual relationship with her boyfriend, which was not true. There was screaming and crying; there were threats and things...
thrown. Carmen was now living with a friend. Patricia remembered hearing her aunt and her mother, crying in each other’s arms, wondering if life would ever be simple again, wondering if the price of freedom was too great here. America ...  

PART II  

The breeze blew her hair into her eyes, and as she brushed it aside she saw him running toward her. He was a tall, strong young man; his short brown hair was tossed by the wind. She smiled, waiting impatiently with open arms to hug him. She loved to see him wearing that red sports shirt and his old Levi’s jeans. In his ever-present backpack, he was carrying the various reading books which were his constant companions. Armando embraced her, speaking cheerfully. “Hi, Bicha! How are you?” he kissed her on the cheek.  

“Very good-- you know how much I love Fridays!” He hugged her, and together they walked to a bench in the front side of a park on the street leading to San Jacinto, here Armando studied art. It was a small, quaint park, filled with roses of every hue. Patricia loved it: almost no one went to this park. It was quiet and clean. It was also the place where Armando had told her for the first time that he loved her.  

Because he seemed sadly preoccupied, she remained silent as they walked, waiting for him to speak. “We only had one hour of classes today,” he said at last. “The compas came over to give us a speech. I wish you could have seen the pictures that they brought from Chalatenango. Puchica! They are strong evidence of the situation there.”  

“What do the pictures show?” Patricia asked.  

“They show the way the peasants are treated there. They live in houses made of mud, and during the rainy season, the houses flood, and they have to live in shelters that they make from plastic bags and tie to the trees. Everything, everything has been taken from them...”  

His voice broke and Patricia could read the anger in his eyes. They sat in the solitude of the park, Patricia looking at him with profound affection.  

“Guess what I have for you,” Armando said suddenly.  

“What? Tell me!” she demanded, curious with excitement.  

“Close your eyes!” He opened a bag and took a yellow book out of it.  

“Okay, my eyes are closed ..”  

“Don’t cheat!”  

“All right, I’m not cheating.”
He put the book in her hands and then softly told her to open her eyes.

"A book of poems from Roque Dalton!"5

"Do you like it?"

"My God, how did you get it?"

"A compa had it and he sold it to me."

"I always wanted to read his work, and now it's mine. Thank you, Flaco!"8

He playfully shoved her to the grass and began tossing rose petals that lay strewn about into her face, her hair, her clothes, while she laughed.

•

Footsteps hurried down the hallway; quickly, Patricia replaced the box and slipped into her coat.

"You haven't left yet?"

"I'm leaving now —"

Patricia's mother eyed her suspiciously, but said nothing. She followed her daughter into the living room, watching her gather her books and head for the door.

"Since you don't work today, hurry home because I need someone to look after the boys and ..."

"I'll be here."

"The rooms need straightening up and —"

"I said I'll be here."

The two watched each other from a distance made greater by the remoteness felt between them. With a quiet earnestness, Patricia asked, "The park on the street leading to San Jacinto — do you think the roses are still there?"

"I have to work and feed the children and pay rent. I go crazy trying to do everything at once and you want to ask me about roses?" The mother was fighting back tears. "Stop worrying about what is gone forever. If you want roses, grow them here!"

"Don't you ever wonder —"
“There’s too much pain in wondering!” the mother screamed. “What can I do? What can anybody do? Why do you insist on punishing all of us with grief? It is hard enough to live life here! Can’t you under —”

Before the woman could finish, Patricia was out of the apartment and down the stairs, the cold wind blowing tears back into her face as she ran along the sidewalk.

PART III

It was a long run home from the park and she couldn’t be late; everyone would be suspicious. Time — so precious and rare — she had let time slip away. But it was wonderful being with Armando, being held by him. It was nearing nightfall, and the silent city was inhabited by grand, barely illuminated buildings and monuments. On every corner there were police, with or without uniforms, holding walkie-talkies. Police cars. Gray military cars. Machine guns pointing in every direction. Her home — a sprawling barracks. She ran past shabby lean-tos where families lived on top of one another, past emaciated dogs on dirt roads — the ghostly period of a country besieged by its own army. As the curfew approached, the city quickly emptied. People quietly, quickly slipped away. In feverish haste, they scrambled for last buses. An occasional automobile whizzed past Patricia with seemingly senseless speed. Soon she was safe indoors, peering through her window across the city, thinking of Armando and his safety. She watched the weight of an endless night fall. She watched the frightful emptiness — the hours when anything was possible — the arbitrary arrests, disappearances, torture, beheadings, assassinations, terror...

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The ring of the school bell brought Patricia sharply back to reality. She darted into her first class, French. Once in school, she tried to concentrate but found it hard.

She had a headache; they came regularly since she arrived here. As the teacher spoke, Patricia looked out of the window and thought of her mother. Why were they worlds apart? Why was there no trust, only suspicion and accusation? When Carmen left, Patricia’s mother predicted that the same thing would happen to her own daughters before long. Although she could not speak for her sisters, Patricia vowed that it would never happen to her. What was the point of being a good student when your efforts were not acknowledged at home, when no one had a good word to say to you? Patricia had always received good grades at school — never any fails or D’s — but it seemed to count for nothing as far as her mother was concerned. And, because of this, lately Patricia had received three fails in English and had failed a major test in algebra — her first ever. Would her mother even notice? Probably not. Just two nights ago, in fact, Patricia’s stepfather yelled at her when she was up late after coming home from work, busily studying for a biology test. He complained that he couldn’t sleep because the light in the dining room where she studied was on (he slept on a sofa bed in the living room). Rather than argue as she had done in the past, Patricia decided to go to bed and fail the test on the following day.

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Her mind wandered, floating again to places whose memories brought only pain. She remembered her cousin Mario proudly showing his back with the marks of recent torture to a group of younger children, tiny women scraping the ground as if they were mad, children old beyond their years, covered with dried mud, scouring the countryside for their daily sustenance, men gathering wood to replace a portion of a house burned by soldiers. Patricia thought of her last day in El Salvador, spotting her favorite teacher walking among the corrugated tin barracks in the capital. He shook her hand warmly and congratulated her for being able to leave.

“But,” said Señor Martinez, “use the talents God has given you to help your people, wherever you may go. You are such a fine writer; you have a valuable tool that can be used as an instrument of change. When you write, you give us hope that others see our condition and are in solidarity with us. Before, we had liberty... and we shall have liberty again. Write about us. We are people who have lost everything; all we have is our lives. Tell others what you have seen here...”

A note landed on Patricia’s desk. It was from her friend Silvia, a girl who also once lived in El Salvador but had been here for a few years. “He called me last night and asked all about you,” it said. “He wants to see you at lunch. I told him that I would bring you to him.”

Patricia folded the piece of paper and hurried out into the crowded hall after class ended. Silvia caught up with her.

“Girl, you don’t want to go around with Javier? ¡Mensal! If I were you I wouldn’t think twice. All the girls here would just die if they had the chance to —”

“I haven’t had time to notice,” Patricia evaded, weaving around a group of guys who stopped their chatter and watched the two girls pass.

“Haven’t had time to notice,” Silvia mocked. “C’mon! He’s cute! Go with him.”

“Is that all you think about now?” Patricia asked pointedly.

“Can you name anything better?” she giggled.

Silvia looked in the direction of her friend for an answer, but Patricia was gone.

PART IV

He placed a handkerchief over her eyes.

“Keep this on. If I catch you slipping it off, you might find yourself going swimming,” he cautioned.
From his idle threat she knew exactly where she was. It was a game they often played. She allowed herself to be led. “If this dress gets wet, Flaco, I won’t be the only one gurgling underwater,” she hissed menacingly.

“Oh, I’m so scared,” Armando deadpanned.

They started at the end of the street where a tiny stream curved a windy path through the village. It was a strange stream. Sometimes it was as pure and as clear as a mirror, and other times it was stagnant and at low ebb, dark and murky with mud -- as unpredictable as their home and their lives.

She knew the surroundings like the markings on the palm of her hand. There were lots of mango trees on her right behind a fence that belonged to a wealthier neighbor. She told Armando about the afternoons that she and her brothers spent cutting down mangos and pepetos. He threatened to take her to jail, and she kicked him in his shins. They continued down the dusty street. At her left there was a cemetery for the rich, separated by a cliff. Soon they stepped upon a cement boulevard, the one on which the only bus passed, the one which divided the city in two. One one side were homes resplendent with trees, grassy knolls and flowing pools. On the other side were the simple homes of mud made by simple, natural people. She could hear cackling hens; she could smell goats. He removed the blindfolds and they stood before the Rodriguez house. Surrounding the house and its tall flowers was an endless wooden fence. On it were messages written by lovers, one after another. At the bottom, beautifully scrawled in sweeping lines and colorful paints, were the words “To Patricia, with all my heart and soul. Love, Armando.”

“How many of these lovers still feel this way?” Patricia asked after gaining control of her emotions.

“This is an old place,” he replied quietly, his reassuring arms around her.

“Many of the people on this wall now have children of their own. The newer names, like here — and here — I’m not so sure... One of them, perhaps, had to flee... another, maybe this one here, disappeared from sight altogether. Others, like this one up here, were written by men who had to sacrifice love to help their country. I see sad women — young women — come here sometimes to see all that is left of their happiness...”

“That is so terrible, Armando. Why did you put our names here if we are together — and since we will always be together?"

“We live an uncertain life, and these are uncertain times."

“But the trouble has been far from here; they say it may be over soon."

“Puchica, I have difficult decisions to make. There are not many options. I am twenty, and the compass need the help of all men if the struggle is to succeed. How
long can I be here? I can join them now, or be killed later because others in my family have been sympathetic ..."

His voice trailed off, and the two stood there, each quietly thinking the unthinkable.

"Promise me," Patricia whispered.

"Promise you what?" he asked.

"Promise me that nothing will happen to us."

"Now you know that I cannot —"

"Promise me that nothing will take you away."

"Please, please don’t cry. Listen, let’s enjoy what we have now, while it is here. God knows there is so little else ... Besides, death is not the end of one’s existence. If, I, uh, go, you will know why I go. Through the crucified campesino there is the most genuine hope on the horizon for El Salvador’s resurrection. You know that if I go my spirit will remain here — with you always. And that spirit will rise — the same spirit given by all the disappeared sons and daughters — it will rise again in the Salvadoran people left behind to carry the torch we have lit. The spirit, the fires, will never die. Never."

Without saying a word, the two huddled figures headed back through town along the dusty road, their elongated shadows stretched out before them. There was nothing to say. All things were known between them, all things were felt. Just before their paths divided for separate homes, Armando snipped a red rose from an untended garden close to the road. Carefully, he placed it in her hair.

"Keep it always," he said quietly.

"I will put it in water, and keep it only until I see you tomorrow," she joked, not laughing. "Then you can give me another one. And another and another and another and ano —"

"Shh —" He placed a finger on her lips, then slowly brought her face to his and gently kissed her. "Some things, if you care for them and cherish them, will never die."

PART V

"You see, I told you she would be here," Silvia said cheerfully.

Patricia looked up from her seat on a bench in a shaded, serene part of campus.
Silvia stood in front of the bench, Javier next to her.

“Well, I guess I'll leave you two alone,” Silvia said airily.

Patricia watched the girl walk away. She had nice legs, but still Patricia felt that her dress was too short. And she wore too much makeup. How things had changed since they played together along the narrow street of San Cristobal. America ...

“I hope I'm not disturbing you,” Javier began. “Can I sit down?”

Patricia nodded icily. She did not know why she was being so cold toward him. He was handsome. He was friendly and popular.

“Would you rather be somewhere else?” he asked. “You look sort of uncomfortable.”

“Where I want to go is beyond travel ...”

Javier wrinkled his face, frowning heavily. He interrupted politely. “Please, let's just take a walk, okay?”

The two began to stroll slowly together. He stared at her while she looked off in the distance.

“Is it me?”

“No, it isn't you.”

“I feel that it is. It isn't fair not to tell me what's going on.”

“There's too much to tell.”

“For months I've wanted to know you. I've sent notes through your sister. I've asked your friends and they assure me that you're seeing no one. I got up the courage to ask you out myself, even though I was afraid. You're so different... so unreadable...”

“What you want from me I cannot give.”

“Patricia, how in the world do you know what I want? I am not like all the others here; don't listen to what people say.”

Patricia shook nervously, in anguish over what to say to him. She began in English, but her soul erupted and the words flowed freely in Spanish. “No, it isn't you... I — I can't because I love someone else.”

“Well if you do, you do,” he countered in her language. “But you must face facts. That 'someone' is not here; your friends have told me that you go nowhere, you call
or write to no one. So, it must mean that the ‘someone’ is from your past. I cannot compete with the past — but when you’re ready to live in the present, I’ll be here. I will wait as long as needed, and one day you will realize that memories can’t keep you warm forever.”

Javier stared into her eyes for a moment, read nothing, and then slowly began to walk away.

"Javier, wait!" Patricia called. He did not turn around, so she ran after him. "You don’t understand," she said. "It really isn’t you. It’s me. I’m pretty mixed up and I don’t know who I am or where I belong sometimes."

"Look," he said finally. "I don’t want to take his place. I want a chance to make a special place of my own. We don’t have to get there right away. It’ll take time. Half the fun will be getting there. Can we at least try it — as friends?"

"Well —"

"Can I at least call you tonight?"

"We don’t have a phone, so —"

"SIlvia says she calls you all the time!"

The lunch bell rang loudly, giving Patricia a chance to escape the tangled web she had begun to weave for herself.

"I must go," she said, hurrying toward her English class.

"I’ll call tonight!" he yelled after her. He smiled as she tore into the building, admiring the figure that couldn’t quite be hidden in her casual clothes.

PART VI

Night — when evil reigns under the cloak of darkness. Night — an anxious calm, when all life flutters like the scarlet leaves on trees in the moments just before a storm...

Patricia lay sleepless, unnerved by the peaceful drone of a younger sister, who slept a few feet away. She thought of night. In the distance she could hear the buzz of planes. She knew well what was happening. No doubt the rebels had been flushed from their encampments in the countryside and had sought safety and supplies in a village nearby. They blended easily into civilian life: it was a frustrating game of hide-and-seek for the government troops who chased them.

The rebels mustered popular support whenever they came into town. Their
support came from poor people, tired of unjust wages, broken promises of land reform, poor medical and educational opportunities. These people, numbed from years of random brutality, were often sympathetic to the revolution. But the rebels brought trouble with them when they came. First came the low hum of the planes and the indiscriminate bombings of homes, churches and schools. Then followed the soldiers. The townspeople would try to flee, bleeding and dazed, from the bullets and the sweeping fires. The soldiers would catch those not fit to escape — the wounded, the sick and the elderly. Fancying them to be subversives, the soldiers would often slaughter them. Stores would be looted, water pipes would be ripped up, cows and goats would be maimed, bellowing in pain so excruciating that the farmers who returned had to kill them to end their suffering. Patricia shuddered, recalling her uncle’s story of the city of La Escopeta. He had owned a small café there, and returned after the departure of the soldiers to recoup his losses. He found a ghost town. The city had been ravaged. His café, once a popular night spot, was a total wreck — nothing could be salvaged. The work of a lifetime had been reduced to rubble. He told of how he stood in the middle of the building strafed by machine gunfire and cried out to the heavens, his arms outstretched in supplication ... a pitiful figure standing alone in a gruesome picture of shattered bottles, bodies and blood ...

The wind around her modest home swirled and whipped dust into a frenzy, obscuring a night already thick with fog. The chopping rhythm of a helicopter hovered overhead, its blaring lights fixed upon a cluster of homes in the enclave where Patricia’s family lived. The voice on the loudspeaker was ear-splitting, telling every person indoors to come outside. She heard her smaller brothers wailing in fear, the adults scrambling about in hushed voices. As she rose, she watched the exaggerated shadows of soldiers race past on the clay walls of her bedroom. She dressed quickly and went outdoors to join the rest of the neighbors, the noise of her footsteps drowned by the rumbling motors of military trucks pulling to a stop.

The people stood silently, speaking only when addressed. Patricia hated to see proud men she loved and respected shrink, become small and subservient. She bowed her head and pretended to be invisible. When she looked up again, the sight gave her heart a sudden jolt. Seated in the back of one of the military trucks, his hands roped together, was Armando. Their eyes met for an instant, but he quickly averted his gaze. He had been beaten, she could tell; his shirt was torn. She wanted to rush to him but something in his look made her stop.

“Do you know this man?” the soldier asked Patricia’s mother.

“I have never seen him in my life.” she answered nervously.

“Has he asked for anything — has he spoken of the rebels?”

“No, sir,” answered Patricia’s older brother.

The commanding officer strolled slowly among the frightened people, peering into the eyes of each one, pausing where he sensed weakness. Patricia glanced at Armando
once, then again, but he kept his head down and his eyes closed.

"I don't have to tell you people what will happen if I find out that you are lying to me, do I?" The officer continued to pace, stopping in front of Patricia, fixing his icy stare upon her.

"You — young girl — you want to live, no? You don't want to spend some time with my men, do you? Well then, speak. Save yourself and the others. Do you know this man?"

Armando opened his eyes and stared at her, showing no emotion. Patricia looked directly at the young man on the truck, her face calm, her heart burning with pain.

"I asked you a question! Do you know this man?"

"... No, no sir ...

"You will look at me when you speak!" He grabbed her, a large hand on each side of her face. Patricia felt the tears welling up inside, but fought with them, conquered them. She looked into the eyes of the officer.

"I don't know him, sir. He — he is nothing to me ...

The officer released her, satisfied. He moved on, questioning a few of the others. Patricia could not force herself to look at Armando. She stood in the swirling dust from the helicopter, shaking imperceptibly...

"If you know any of those cursed rebels," the officer swore, "let them know there is no place to hide. Every one of those traitors against El Salvador will die!"

He hopped into one of the military vehicles and sped off, the other trucks following.

The women in shawls clutched their babies and thanked the heavens that no one had been harmed. The men, growing large again, privately cursed the soldiers and led their wives and children back into their homes. An old toothless woman, the last among them, turned to get a glimpse of the helicopter flying up into the thin swirls of fog. A muffled cry distracted her. The old woman squinted and walked to a figure some thirty feet away in the darkness. A knowing tear ran down her wrinkled face as she watched a sixteen-year-old girl scream and pound the earth with her fists, an earth too numb from the ravages of war to feel the grief, to absorb the loss felt by another broken soul.

PART VII

The RTD bus lurched forward into heavy traffic, spilling Patricia's books into the aisle. She had been lost, deep in thought. Where was she? What time was it? Often she rode the bus to escape the prison of her life, the stifling cycle of school, work and home. She was headed in the direction of downtown where she would do some idle shopping
before going back to the apartment. Riding the bus also gave her time to think, time to sort out her scrambled feelings for Javier. What would she say if he called? She was almost certain that Silvia would give him the phone number. Could she ever tell him of the pain?

A hand tapped her lightly on the shoulder. “Excuse me, but I think you dropped these books --.”

“Oh, thanks,” she said, accepting them.

The man was about forty, somewhat fat and very unshaven. He looked as if he had been working at a construction site; a hard-hat lay next to him on the seat. Since they were at the rear of the bus, they were seated facing each other, and Patricia found this a little awkward. The man quickly smiled and picked up a Spanish newspaper and began to read it. She peered at the headlines and watched his huge, hairy stomach rise and fall as it breathed through the holes in his dirty t-shirt.

“Terrible, just terrible, isn’t it?” the man asked. He reached under his jacket on the seat and pulled out a bottle hidden in a brown paper bag. He drank from it, wiped his lips with his forearm and waited for Patricia to respond.

“Terrible? What is terrible?” she asked, hoping that this would be brief.

“The war — the war back home,” he said.

“How do you know where I am from?” she inquired, curious.

“The eyes, the eyes say it all. I saw you looking at the paper with those sad eyes. I am from the capital; I used to live on 29th Street — and you?”

“I’m from the capital, too. I lived in San Cristobal.”

“Small world, isn’t it? I try not to think about that place too much — you know what I mean? What good can it do?”

“What good can it do to forget?” she shot back.

“Let them work it out themselves. The rebels are almost defeated; soon there will be peace again and everything will return to normal.”

“And what is normal?” Patricia sat straight. “I think the Salvadoran Revolution is a necessity for our people to find their freedom —”

“At what cost?” he yelled. Passengers nearby turned their heads. The man collected himself, and continued — this time in Spanish, in an impassioned whisper. “Have you forgotten the innocent villagers? They are shot, they are losing their farms — too many civilians are being sacrificed! And for what? Too many harmless people are