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

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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-by. 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 been 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!" 

"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!"

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 understand?"

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...

* * *

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.

Of Secret Wars and Roses

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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? ¡Mental! 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
disappearing — all for a bunch of crazy rebels who do nothing but stir up trouble!”

“Sometimes what is most dear requires a high price.”

“Price? What do you know about price? What do you know about pain? Look at you; you’re young, your whole life is ahead of you. Many people cannot start over — their lives are ruined!”

“I am ruined too, can’t you see?” Patricia screamed. “Don’t you dare tell me that I know nothing of pain. How can you judge?”

The bus was packed now; half of the riders were looking at the two foreigners fight a secret war in a strange language, staring incredulously. The man stood, gesticulating wildly as the bus swayed.

“I judge only the murderers! I judge only those who do not leave when they have the chance! Be glad you are here. Don’t look back. For too long I stood my ground, trying to be neutral, praying to God to bring peace. And then those dirty rebels cost me everything — everything!”

“You have nothing! What is life without freedom? What is peace when those who are oppressed suffer in silence? A spineless peace such as yours is no peace at all!”

“Listen to me; just listen. Tell me why they had to bring the war to my door. Why couldn’t they keep it away from the innocent people? They know our government will squelch them wherever they hide. One morning the planes came, as they did almost every day. I hurried my wife and children out of the house — we normally ran to safety in the fields. My parents did not move. I yelled to them, but they answered, ‘We are tired of running; we are not leaving this time.’ The rebels ambushed the soldiers there, and in the fighting my father was shot in the back and my mother was burned beyond recognition. I knew then that there was little hope, that all was lost.”

The man was in tears. Patricia bit her lip, searching for words which did not exist for her.

“I took my savings and my family and left,” he continued. “I still remember that last day, those last moments. After leaving the airline counter I walked up to a police officer. He looked at my family and my passport, and I looked at him, closely. Squinting his eyes, he seemed to have doubts. He asked me where I was going. I answered him quickly and confidently. He then lowered his eyes and stamped our passports. While crossing the runway toward the plane, I felt an urge to run back and tell them who I was. I was the patient and law-abiding Salvadoran! Gone for good! But I kept walking, and didn’t look back.”

There was a pause. Finally Patricia spoke, “I hope you never sleep at night.”

“I sleep soundly,” he retorted. “I am alive, and my family is here. As for the rebels,
may they rot in hell! They can kill and be killed until blood covers the entire countryside. I really don’t care!"

Patricia, with her head aching and her vision blurred, bolted from the bus and into a sea of pedestrians downtown.

PART VIII

It was drizzling but that did not seem to deter most shoppers. She wandered along Broadway, her mind racing. She saw only faces — faces of people from every place on the earth. African faces, Asian faces, Latin faces. They all seemed so happy, and she couldn’t understand why. There was no sad longing for home in their eyes that she could read, there was no concern for familiar things lost, for faraway wars. They rushed about from sale to sale, lifetimes apart from where they must have begun. She stopped where an overhang from a store protected her from the rain. She spotted signs in innumerable languages, she heard music blaring from a thousand lands, but somehow she couldn’t believe that any of those things were substitutes for home.

Then something caught her attention. On a corner across the street, singing a familiar song that echoed from her childhood, a leathery-faced old man stood selling roses, roses like the ones she used to admire in the park close to San Jacinto. She ran out into the street; cars swerved to avoid her. Soon she was buying roses, all the roses her money could buy. The man asked why — why so many.

“I never want to forget,” Patricia said simply.

The man watched the pretty young woman board a crowded bus carrying armfuls of roses, smiling as if he understood.


Patricia sat in her bedroom reading a chapter in her biology book. Her sister Maria burst through the door, pulling the snagged telephone cord along with her. Maria plopped on the other bed, continuing a frivolous conversation about something meaningless. Patricia eyed her with contempt for a moment, and then resumed her study. When there was work to be done that evening, the boys helped her get it done — even after her late arrival — but Maria ran off to the park to be with her boyfriend. “She is so hard to comprehend,” Patricia thought. “She has always been so cheerful, always smiling, never caring about little things such as the miseries of other people... But maybe she’s lucky. If you think too much, it can frustrate your life and make the future impossible to bear...”

“Hey, that’s weird,” Maria giggled. “You know that call waiting thing that I had installed on our phone — you know, the one you never use — well, it beeped, and guess what? The call’s for you. I think it’s that cute guy Javier from school.”
Patricia delayed a decision on whether to accept the call. She lingered in that instant familiar to most immigrants, suspended between an old and a new home, and old and a new self. From the window where she now stood, she admired the vase of freshly cut roses in front of her on the sill, breathing deeply to take in their sweet aroma. She thought of the small white box in her closet; in her mind’s eye she skipped along a dusty path lined with mango trees past pastures of grazing goats, a red rose adorning her hair.

Notes
1 slang: girlfriend (used with close friends)
2 a suburb in El Salvador’s capital, San Salvador
3 short for compadres, meaning allies, buddies, friends
4 slang: “Wow!” Expressing excitement or awe.
5 Salvadoran Poet (1935-75)
6 nickname for someone thin
7 slang: dummy, idiot.
8 tropical, oval-shaped fruit, having green skin; sweet, juicy, yellow-green inside.
9 long, green fruit; the seeds are eaten, good with lemon and salt
BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON EL SALVADOR

The first people who lived in El Salvador were Nahua Indians who came from Mexico as early as 3000 B.C. Later, other indigenous people settled in the area. Most of the region was inhabited by Mayans from A.D. 100 to A.D. 1000. The Pipil Community took the lands during the end of this period. For 500 years they raised crops, built cities and developed their weaving skills.

The early Mayans depended on farming their corn fields (milpas) for survival and developed highly accurate calendars to aid in planting and harvesting. Their calendar was also used to guide religious ceremonies. The Mayans, unaided by telescopes, tracked planets with great precision thus reflecting a knowledge of math and astronomy.

In 1522, Spain invaded El Salvador. The majority of the Indians were killed and much of their land confiscated. The Spanish replaced the staple food crops with export crops. Initially they planted indigo and cacao, but by the mid-1850s coffee covered the country.

In 1930, Salvadoran peasants, armed with machetes, rebelled against the wealthy coffee-growing families. The military responded by massacring thirty thousand peasants over a two-week period. They peasants were lined up behind churches, thumbs tied behind their backs, and shot. They were buried in mass graves. This genocidal act was expanded by the government to a policy of banning every vestige of Indian culture including language, traditional clothing and music.

In subsequent years, the landowning oligarchy controlled a series of military governments often installed by fraudulent elections. They continued their expropriation of land from small farmers.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the large landowners accelerated their violent takeover of peasant land so that they could produce more coffee, cotton and cattle for the profitable export market. Six families held more land than 133,000 small farmers. By 1975, 40% of peasant families were left with no land at all, not even rented land. Three-quarters of Salvadoran children could not get enough to eat.

Beginning in the 1960s, the Catholic Church helped create the Christian grass-root communities in which peasants, led by a priest or one of the peasants, studied a passage of the Bible and discussed how it related to their own lives. They came to realize that their poverty and hunger were not the will of God but the will of wealthy families. They formed agricultural cooperatives and organized rural unions which pressed their demands for land, affordable prices for credit, seed and fertilizer -- and freedom from repression by the large landowners and their government.

The response of the oligarchy was to accuse the church of promoting communism and instigating class warfare. In 1977, the Reverend Rutilio Grande became the first of many priests, nuns and lay workers murdered for their participation in the grassroots Christian movement.

The 1979 military coup ushered in a junta that promised reforms, but violence from the military and the death squads (composed mostly of off-duty military personnel) reached unprecedented levels. More than one thousand people a month were killed in the first year of the junta. Within a few months after the coup, the real reformers, realizing that power remained with military officers determined to crush all dissent, resigned from the government and joined the opposition.

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The opposition consists of the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR) and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN). In early 1980, more than one hundred and fifty groups, representing hundreds of thousands of teachers, factory workers, professors, farmworkers and others, united to form the FDR. Guillermo Ungo, who had resigned from the junta, became FDR president. The FDR is aligned with the five guerrilla groups that formed the FMLN, the military arm of the opposition. The FMLN takes its name from Farabundo Martí, a militant attorney who organized workers and peasants during the 1920s and was one of the organizers of the 1930 rebellion.

In early 1980, Archbishop Romero wrote a letter to President Carter asking that the U.S. stop aiding the military. He also suggested to the Salvadoran soldiers that they should not kill fellow Salvadorans. In March of 1980, Archbishop Romero was murdered while he was giving mass. Three American nuns and one lay worker were raped and murdered in December of that same year. Over 70,000 people have been killed or “disappeared” since 1979.
VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT - Part I

Directions: Use the meaning of other words in the sentence (or paragraph, and the meaning of the short story as a whole) to help you decide what each underlined word means:

1. The noise of the cars outside Coliseum Street penetrates the profound silence of the morning.
   - *penetrate*: a) to leave  b) to come in  c) smooth
   - *profound*: a) complete  b) noisy  c) to not be lost

2. 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.
   - *vast*: a) quiet  b) huge  c) something to cook with
   - *maze*: a) open field  b) confusing paths  c) surprise

3. She closed her eyes and enjoyed the feel of the water...a halcyon river flowing gracefully through sloping hills.
   - *halcyon*: a) rough and uncomfortable  b) deep, fast  c) peaceful

4. ...something tingled inside when she thought of him.
   - *tingled*: a) to sleep  b) to have sharp feelings under the skin as from excitement  c) to move or walk quickly like a soldier

5. He would want an answer today; she could stall no longer.
   - *stall*: a) to do later  b) to cry from sadness  c) to do quickly

6. He listened intently, never letting his gaze roam about her body like the others.
   - *intently*: a) having no patience  b) with much attention  c) nervously
   - *gaze*: a) body  b) a wild animal  c) a long look
   - *roam*: a) to run everywhere  b) to travel  c) to stay

7. Somehow, she managed to keep it hidden here, away from her mother and noisy brothers and sisters.
   - *noisy*: a) having large, long noses  b) younger  c) wanting to know others’ personal business

8. The petals, delicate and beautiful, were perfectly dried: frozen in a fragile moment of happiness.
   - *fragile*: a) easily broken  b) strong and hard  c) to show anger

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VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT - Part II

Directions: Use the meaning of other words in the sentence (or paragraph, and the meaning of the short story as a whole) to help you decide what each underlined word means:

1. It was a small, quaint park, filled with roses of every hue.
   
   quaint: a) large, with a lot of space  b) unusual beauty  c) empty
   hue: a) having a good taste  b) faster, quick  c) color

2. Because he seemed sadly preoccupied, she remained silent as they walked, waiting for him to speak.
   
   preoccupied: a) brave, strong  b) thinking of other things  c) full of excitement

3. The two watched each other from a distance made greater by the remoteness felt between them.
   
   remoteness: a) closeness  b) a feeling of being far away  c) love and happiness

4. With a quiet earnestness, Patricia asked, “The park on the street leading to San Jacinto—do you think the roses are still there?”
   
   earnestness: a) wanting to play  b) seriousness  c) wide

5. “Why do you insist on punishing all of us with grief?”
   
   insist: a) to listen quietly  b) to forget  c) to continue
   grief: a) much sadness  b) much happiness  c) a beautiful dress

VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT - Part III

1. It was a long run home from the park and she couldn’t be late; everyone would be suspicious.
   
   suspicious: a) thinking someone has does something wrong  b) thankful  c) to believe in the truth

2. It was nearing nightfall, and the silent city was inhabited by grand, barely-illuminated buildings and monuments.
   
   inhabited: a) decorated  b) disturbed  c) lived in
   illuminated: a) very dark  b) having light  c) not strong

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3. 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.

shabby: a) old b) clean c) large
emaciated: a) beautiful b) strong c) hungry, thin
besieged: a) protected b) to make a decision c) attacked and destroyed

4. As the curfew approached, the city quickly emptied.

curfew: a) sunrise b) legal time to stay off the street c) time

5. In feverish haste, they scrambled for last buses.

haste: a) hurry b) to be sick c) to walk slowly

6. An occasional automobile whizzed past Patricia with seemingly senseless speed.

senseless: a) intelligent b) quiet c) not intelligent

7. She watched the frightful emptiness — the hours when anything was possible — the arbitrary arrests, disappearances, torture, beheadings, terror.

arbitrary: a) chosen without good reason b) legal, important c) few, not many

8. Once in school, she tried to concentrate but found it hard.

concentrate: a) to sleep b) to grow taller c) to pay attention

9. When Carmen left, Patricia’s mother predicted that the same thing would happen to her own daughters before long.

predicted: a) to guess the future b) to laugh or smile c) to say something is not possible

10. Although she could not speak for her sisters, she vowed that it would never happen to her.

vowed: a) sang in a high voice b) wrote on paper to remember c) made a promise

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VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT - Part IV

Directions: Use the meaning of other words in the sentence (or paragraph, and the meaning of the short story as a whole) to help you decide what each underlined word means:

1. “If this dress gets wet, Flaco, I won’t be the only one gurgling under water,” she hissed menacingly.
   
   menacingly: a) with respect  b) filled with love  c) as if there is danger

2. He threatened to take her to jail, and she kicked him in his shins.
   
   threatened: a) to warn  b) to meet  c) to do better
   shins: a) front part of the leg  b) stomach  c) chin

3. On one side were homes resplendent with trees, grassy knolls and flowing pools.
   
   resplendent: a) poor, old, ugly  b) to hurt  c) shining brightly
   knolls: a) floors  b) top part of a bottle  c) hills

4. “This is an old place,” he replied quietly, his reassuring arms around her.
   
   reassuring: a) dangerous  b) greenish in color  c) giving confidence to someone or trust

5. “Puchica, I have difficult decisions to make. There are not many options. “
   
   options: a) choices  b) soldiers  c) a white bird

6. Armando snipped a red rose from an untended garden close to the road.
   
   untended: a) taken care of  b) rich  c) not cared for

7. “Some things, if you care for them and cherish them, will never die. “
   
   cherish: a) good to eat  b) to look for  c) to show love and care for
VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT - Part V

Directions: Use the meaning of other words in the sentence (or paragraph, and the meaning of the short story as a whole) to help you decide what each underlined word means:

1. “I got up the **courage** to ask you out myself, even though I was afraid.”
   
   **courage**:
   a) strength  
   b) fear  
   c) enough money

2. Patricia shook nervously, in **anguish** over what to say to him.

   **anguish**:
   a) fun  
   b) anger  
   c) pain

3. She began in English but her soul **erupted** and the words flowed freely in Spanish.

   **erupted**:
   a) to become silent  
   b) to break open  
   c) to begin again


   **countered**:
   a) argued  
   b) laughed  
   c) to count with numbers
VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT - Part VI

Directions: Use the meaning of other words in the sentence (or paragraph, and the meaning of the short story as a whole) to help you decide what each underlined word means:

1. Night—when evil **reigns** under the cloak of darkness.
   
   **reigns:** a) controls   b) makes wet   c) dies

2. Patricia lay sleepless, unnerved by the peaceful **drone** of a younger sister.
   
   **drones:** a) to hit   b) to cut a hole   c) to make a long, low sound

3. No doubt the rebels had been **flushed** from their encampments in the countryside and had sought safety and supplies in a village nearby.
   
   **flushed:** a) to lock up   b) cleaned out   c) wrong

4. These people, **numbed** from years of **random** brutality, were always **sympathetic** to the revolution.
   
   **numb:** a) to feel no pain   b) to put away   c) a dry place
   **random:** a) private, not belonging to others   b) different   c) not ordered or organized
   **brutality:** a) good treatment and behavior   b) bed, painful treatment   c) heavy rains
   **sympathetic:** a) agreeable to, welcoming   b) safe   c) changing the decisions a lot.

5. First came the low hum of the planes, and the **indiscriminate** bombings of homes, churches and schools.
   
   **indiscriminate:** a). careless choice   b) unreal, like in a dream   c) having many questions

6. He had owned a small cafe there, and returned after the **departure** of the soldiers to **recoup** his losses.
   
   **departure:** a) time to arrive or come   b) leaving   c) friendliness
   **recoup:** a) to get back after losing something   b) to return   c) to pass over

7. The work of a lifetime had been reduced to **rubble**.
   
   **rubble:** a) trash   b) to make better   c) an enemy
8. 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*...

*strafed*: a) shot everywhere  b) missed, not touched  c) kissed  
*supplication*: a) wanting more of something  b) asking or praying for something  c) to show interest

9. He was a *pitiful* figure standing alone in a *gruesome* picture of shattered bottles, bodies, and blood.

*pitiful*: a) hopeful  b) sad  c) an evening meal  
*gruesome*: a) pretty  b) sharp  c) horrible, ugly
VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT - Part VI (continued)

Directions: Find the meaning of the following underlined words by writing their numbers next to the definitions below.

1. The wind around her modest home swirled and whipped dust into a frenzy, obscuring a night already thick with fog.  

2. She heard her smaller brothers wailing in fear...

3. Patricia hated to see proud men she loved and respected shrink, become small and subservient.

4. Their eyes met for an instant, but he quickly averted his gaze.

5. When she looked up again, the sight gave her heart a sudden jolt.

6. The officer continued to pace, stopping in front of Patricia, fixing his icy stare upon her.

7. "Everyone of those traitors against El Salvador will die!"

8. An old toothless woman, the last among them, turned to get a glimpse of the helicopter flying up into the thin swirls of fog.

9. A muffled cry distracted her.

10. ...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...

Definitions:

- turned
- people who go against their country
- to take attention away from
- crazy, fast motion
- crying
- destruction
- a quick look
- hiding
- jump
- under the control of someone else
- a long look
- softened

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VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT - Part VII

Directions: Use the meaning of other words in the sentence (or paragraph, and the meaning of the short story as a whole) to help you decide what each underlined word means:

1. Often she rode the bus to escape the prison of her life, the stifling cycle of school, work, and home.
   
   **stifling**: a) exciting, fun b) killing c) fresh, clean

2. “How do you know where I am from?” she **inquired**, curious.
   
   **inquired**: a) asked b) yelled in a loud voice c) sat, not moving

3. “Many people cannot start over — their lives are **ruined**!”
   
   **ruined**: a) growing b) destroyed, killed c) painted

4. The bus was packed now; half of the riders were looking at the two foreigners fight a secret war in a strange language, staring **incredulously**.
   
   **incredulously**: a clearly understanding b) not paying attention c) with surprise, not believing

5. “They know our government will **squelch** them wherever they hide.”
   
   **squelch**: a) to get rid of: to throw out b) to feed c) to lose and never find

6. “The rebels **ambushed** the Soldiers there...”
   
   **ambushed**: a) to give a party for b) surprised and attacked c) hid so they couldn’t find

7. “While crossing the runway toward the plane, I felt an **urge** to run back and tell them who I was.”
   
   **urge**: a) opposite b) warmth c) desire, want
1. It was drizzling but that did not seem to deter most shoppers.

   drizzling: a) sunny  b) cheap  c) lightly raining  
   deter: a) stop  b) to walk on  c) a place to shop for clothes

2. She spotted signs in innumerable languages, she heard music blaring from a thousand lands...

   innumerable: a) too few to count  b) the same  c) too many to count  
   blaring: a) sounding soft  b) sounding loud  c) stopping

3. Her sister Maria burst through the door, pulling the snagged telephone cord along with her.

   burst: a) break  b) open  c) stay behind  
   snagged: a) straight  b) broken, cut  c) confused, twisted

4. Maria plopped on the other bed, continuing a frivolous conversation about something meaningless.

   frivolous: a) unimportant  b) very important  c) studying for a long time

5. She lingered in that instant familiar to most immigrants, suspended between an old and a new home, and old and a new self.

   suspended: a) put inside  b) taken out of  c) held above

6. ... in her mind’s eye she skipped along a dusty path lined with mango trees past pastures of grazing goats, a red rose adorning her hair.

   adorning: a) taken off  b) making more beautiful  c) falling down


**VOCABULARY TAUGHT USING TOTAL PHYSICAL RESPONSE**

When students are physically responding to words, the language has more concrete meaning. They demonstrate their understanding by doing the action. The following list of verbs are action verbs, and can be taught by modeling and performing. Hopefully, this way of teaching vocabulary will add variety to your class.

No more than ten verbs from the list should be covered each day to avoid confusion.

**Procedure**

1. Teacher models action denoted by verb while giving a command to students to do the same action. EXAMPLE: Tap on the desk.

2. After modeling a verb verbs, teacher commands WITHOUT modeling, and monitors students actions. (The class as a whole is performing the action.)

3. Teacher selects small groups, rows, or individuals to respond to command, to further monitor acquisition of vocabulary meaning.

4. Students are instructed to create their own original commands using target vocabulary. EXAMPLE: Tap on your head.

**VOCABULARY NOT NEEDING PROPS (intransitive verbs)**

**LITERARY TERMS - Figurative Language**

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| VOCABULARY NEEDING PROPS (transitive verbs)**

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Personification

Directions: Find the noun in each of the following sentences that is given special attributes by the underlined verb. To what is each of these nouns being compared?

1. She let her mind race, allowing it to leap through time, across continents, and into long forgotten corners of memory.

2. Her thoughts flew above the rooftops.

3. The tensions of yesterday seized her reflections.

4. He never let his gaze roam about her body like the others.

5. Evil reigns under the cloak of darkness.

Metaphor

In the following sentence, what is the “web” Patricia has made with Javier?

1. Patricia had a chance to escape the tangled web she had begun to weave for herself.

Simile

Directions: Match the beginning of the simile to its comparison by writing the number in front.

1. There had been silences in the apartment ___as a mirror.

2. The heavy rain tapped on her window ___like a morning fog.

3. Sometimes the stream was as pure and as clear ___like annoying pebbles tossed by an intruder from the mountains above.

4. Life flutters at night ___like the scarlet leaves on trees in the moments before a storm.

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Directions: Label each of the sentences below as “simile” or “metaphor.”

1. 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.

(The water is compared to ____________ and her body is compared to ____________.)

2. 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.

(Different experiences are compared to ____________.)

3. She knew the surroundings like the markings on the palm of her hand.

(Her surroundings are compared to ____________) 

4. “The spirit will rise again in the Salvadoran people left behind to carry the torch we have lit.”

(Spirit is compared to ____________)
LITERARY TERMS

Mood

1. Discuss why the writer chose to begin and end her story with rain. Talk about mood, and the different connotations of rain: tears, sadness, pain, or a cleansing process.

2. Discuss how mood can be created through description: compare the description of the park on the way to San Jacinto (Part II) to the opening of Part III.

3. Discuss how different moods are conveyed through dialog between Patricia and her mother (Part I) as compared to the dialog between Armando and Patricia (Part IV).

Flashback

1. What technique does the author use to give information about the past? Where do the flashbacks begin? What characters are in the main story? What characters are in the flashbacks? Why doesn’t the writer just explain Patricia’s past memories in regular narrative form?

Symbolism

1. What is the symbolism of the rose? How would the story be different if Patricia kept a daisy in her white box? A rose has thorns. What are the thorns in Patricia’s life, especially in regard to those she loves? Why not a white or pink rose?

Active and Passive Voices

Change to active voice:

1. The image of a childhood friend was blurred and washed away by her own tears.

2. His short brown hair was tossed by the wind.

Change to passive voice:

1. The man quickly picked up a Spanish newspaper.

2. The noise of the cars penetrated the silence of the morning.
ROLE-PLAYING

1. You are the mother of a daughter or son. You are worried that your daughter or son isn’t making friends or going to parties.

You are the daughter or son. You may get angry, or try to explain your behavior to your mother.

2. You are telling your partner, whom you love, good-bye. You know that you may never see your partner again. What do you want him/her to remember about you?

You and your partner are in love, but your partner is telling you that s/he must leave. Perhaps you will never see each other again. What can you say to your partner so that s/he won’t leave?

3. You are the man on the bus. Without looking at the story, act out the argument on the bus with another student. Remember to use his feelings and opinions, even if they are different from your own.

4. Someone is trying to ask you out. You are saying no for some reason. You can decide what reason.

You want to go out with someone who has not shown much interest in you. When do you give up? How do you convince him/her to give you some attention or time?

5. Finish the argument between Patricia and her mother, when her mother says, “Stop worrying about what is gone forever. If you want roses, grow them here! What can anybody do? Why do you insist on punishing all of us with grief?”

6. When the soldier asks Patricia, “Do you know this man?” what if she answered “yes”? Finish the dialog between Patricia and the soldier, possibly bringing Armando into the scene.
WRITING EXERCISES

Writing A Letter

1. Pretend you are one of Patricia’s sisters writing to a friend in El Salvador about Patricia and about your own life. Why are you so different from your sister? Why do you think it is so hard for your sister to adjust to her new life?

2. Pretend you are Javier, trying to be a friend to Patricia and not scare her away. Write Patricia a letter.

3. Pretend you are Patricia writing a letter to Armando explaining how you felt when you saw him in the truck. How did you feel when he looked away. How did you feel when the military was questioning you?

4. Pretend you are Armando, answering Patricia’s letter. Do you understand Patricia? Do you feel that she turned against you?

Journals

1. Read an excerpt (such as the introduction, pages 92, 241 and 283) from Aníe Frank: Diary of A Young Girl, by Anne Frank (Double Day and Company, Inc., Garden City, New York.) Take one of Patricia’s experiences in the story and write it as a first-person journal entry (her argument with her mother in Part I, her meeting with Javier in Part IV, her witnessing Armando’s capture in Part VI, or her argument with the man on the bus in Part VII). Use The Diary of Anne Frank as a model of first-person writing.

2. Describe a personal experience you’ve had, and write about if from both the first and third-person points of view.

3. Write about a favorite memory from life in your native country or your childhood. Patricia keeps memories in her small white box. Where do you keep yours? When do they come back to you?

4. Patricia says that her mother “never knew of this instant, never was aware of her little girl discovering love, blossoming into womanhood,” as she opens the box and takes out the rose. Write about a secret you’ve kept from your parents. Why have you never told them? Will you ever talk about it with them?

Supplemental Texts

Fifth Chinese Daughter, by Jade Snow Wong
Farewell to Manzanar by Jeanne Eakatsuki Houston
The Woman Warrior by Maxine Hong Kingston
Lito, the Shoeshine Boy by Davis Mangurian
A Day in the Life by Manlio Argueta (Each chapter is described from the point of view of a different character. Especially interesting is the Salvadoran police officer’s point of view.)
COMO TU

Yo, como tú,
amo el amor, la vida, el dulce encanto
de las cosas, el paisaje
celeste de los días de enero.

También mi sangre bulle
y río por los ojos
que han conocido el brote de las lágrimas.

Creo que el mundo es bello,
que la poesía es como el pan, de todos.

Y que mis venas no terminan en mí
sino en la sangre unánime
de los que luchan por la vida,
el amor,
las cosas,
el paisaje y el pan,
la posta de todos.

LIKE YOU

I, like you,
love love, life, the sweet charm
of things, the celestial
landscape of January days.

Also, my blood boils
and I smile for the eyes
that have known the burst of tears.

I think that the world is beautiful,
that poetry is like bread, for everyone.
And that my veins don't end in me
but in the unanimous blood
of those who fight for life,
love,
things, landscapes and bread,
poetry for everyone.

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1. In Part II Armando gives Patricia a yellow book of Roque Dalton's poetry, and she asks him, "My God, how did you get it?" as if the book were difficult to obtain. Why might this poet's writing be hard to get?

2. Do you think the speaker in the poem ("I") sounds more like Armando or Patricia? Why? (Copy words from the poem that support your answer.)

3. How is poetry like bread, according to the speaker in the poem?

4. Copy the words from the poem that show the poet feels a part of other people—that he is not separate from them.

5. One of the rebels sold Dalton's book of poetry to Armando. Why do you think a revolutionary would like this poem? Copy the words that support your answer.

**EXTRA CREDIT for Spanish speakers:

Using the original Spanish version, show the other non-Spanish speaking students how the poet uses alliteration. Why did he choose to repeat these consonants?
Sources for Further Reading and Activity

BOOKS

A passionate, first hand account of young lives caught in the maelstrom of Central America.
Children of the Volcano provides a unique forum for the voices of children and youth.


The autobiographical prose/verse novel is a retrospect of the real, surreal and magical memories of childhood in El Salvador, into which the ugly realities of war gradually intrude.

A love story set against the events of 1932 when thirty thousand peasants were massacred in Izalco, El Salvador.

One of El Salvador's preeminent writers describes the daily life in this novel about a peasant family in El Salvador. Available in English and Spanish. (By same author: Cuzcatlan.)

An excellent social, political and economic history of El Salvador.

A detailed synopsis of the history and current economics/politics of each Central American country.

Teacher strategies and student worksheets. Copies of this publication may be obtained from the Curriculum Editorial and Production Unit of the Office of Curriculum Development and Support, Room 613, 131 Livingston Street, Brooklyn, NY 11201. (718) 596-4907.

Traces the roots of underdevelopment and crises in the region by examining the shared and individual histories of the Central American nations.

A tool for educators and community advocates concerned about creating schools responsive to the needs of immigrant students and a diverse world. BRIDGES presents 75 academic programs to address the barriers faced by immigrant children in the schools. Available for $15 + 6.5% sales tax from California Tomorrow, Fort Mason Center, Building B, San Francisco, CA 94123, (415) 441-7631. Also **Crossing the Schoolhouse Border: Immigrant Children in the California Public Schools** ($12.)


Dr. Clements practiced medicine in El Salvador with only the supplies he could carry on his back. In this absorbing first person account he describes the special tragedy of children caught in the crossfire of war.


The English edition of the memoirs of a legendary revolutionary figure of El Salvador. (There are also many books of poetry by this author.)


Comprehensive background information on the roots of revolution throughout the Central American region.


A thoroughly researched study of the “Communist threat” in Central America. Also describes alternative approaches for peace in the region.


A combination of oral history and photojournalism, this book features conversations with over eighty Nicaraguans from various walks of life and differing political viewpoints.


This volume represents the results of the first study in El Salvador of the Hemisphere Migration Project. Sponsored by Georgetown University's Center for Immigration Policy and Refugee Assistance, the research focuses on the characteristics of Salvadoran emigrants and the impact of their departure on the economy and society of the country. $7.50 + $1.00 postage.


A comprehensive, well-documented report on immigrant education in U.S. public schools. Order from NCAS, 100 Boylston St., Suite 737, Boston, MA 02116-4610: $12.95 + $2 postage.

Paschke, Barbara and David Volpendesta. **Clamor of Innocence.** SF: City Lights, 1988.

Collection of short stories by Central American authors.

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A detailed account which explains why there is a war raging in rural El Salvador and what frequent aerial bombardments mean for the people living there.

A moving collection of short stories by contemporary Central American authors.

Drawings of the war in El Salvador by children between the ages of 8 and 14. Order from NECCA.

Publishers/Distributors

Space does not allow a complete listing of the books available on Central America. The following publishers and organizations have catalogs of additional resources.

American Friends Service Committee
1501 Cherry Street, Philadelphia, PA 19102 (215) 241-7169
Educational resources and action tools on U.S. military policy, human rights and disarmament issues.

Central America Resource Center (CARC)
PO Box 2327, Austin, Texas 78768
Books with an analysis and background on Central America, published by PACCA (Policy Alternatives for the Caribbean and Central America), FLASCO (Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales), Westview Press and others.

Children's Book Press
1461 Ninth Avenue, SF, CA 94122 (415) 664-8500.
Beautifully illustrated, bilingual folk tales from Central America and the Caribbean. Stories from Central America include The Invisible Hunter and Uncle Nacho's Hat. Designed for 4-12 year olds but enjoyed by all ages.

Ediciones del Norte
P.O. Box A130, Hanover, New Hampshire, 03755
Latin American literature in English and Spanish.

Four Walls, Eight Windows
P.O. Box 548, Village Station, New York, New York 10014 (800) 835-2246
Literature in English, including And We Sold The Rain ($9.95 + $2.50 postage).

Institute for Food and Development Policy/Food First
145 Ninth Street, San Francisco, CA 94103 (415) 864-8555
Research and education center that works to identify the root causes of hunger and food problems in the United States and around the world and to educate the public as well as policymakers about these problems. Extensive collection of books, curricula and audio-visual materials on Central America. Included in their catalog are two excellent classroom guides -- Exploding the Hunger Myths (junior/senior high) and Food First Curriculum (upper elementary).

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Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers
World Awareness Series, Price Building, Maryknoll, NY 10545
Focus on Central America. four unit supplementary curriculum for grades 7-12 ($12) and Central America Close-up, video portraits of youth in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua ($38.80).

Media Network
121 Fulton Street, 5th Floor, New York, NY 10038
Media guides on films and videos about Central America.

Orbis Books
Maryknoll, New York 10545
Books on liberation theology and poetry.

Oxfam
Educational Resources, 115 Broadway, Boston, MA 02116 (617) 728-2541.
An international agency that funds self-help development and disaster relief in over 30 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. Also prepares and distributes educational materials on development and hunger issues.

Readers International
PO Box 959, Columbia, Louisiana 71418
Contemporary literature from Latin America, the Caribbean, the Middle East, Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe.

Real Comet Press
3131 Western Avenue #410, Seattle, WA 98121-1028 (206) 283-7827
Publisher and distributor of: bilingual collection of over 500 drawings entitled The Art of Rini Templeton: Where There is Life and Struggle ($14.95 + $2 shipping).

Resource Center
PO Box 4506, Albuquerque, New Mexico 87196
The Inter-Hemispheric Education Resource Center is a research and policy institute which has gained an international reputation for providing cutting-edge research and analysis about such topics as U.S. economic aid programs, low-intensity conflict, U.S. food aid and farm policy, the foreign operations of private organizations and churches and the deepening crisis in Central America. The Resource Center produces and distributes a large selection of books, pamphlets, and slide shows on Central America and the Caribbean. Some examples are • The Central America Fact Book ($11) and • slide show - Dollars and Dictators ($65/purchase, $25 rental).

South End Press
300 Raritan Center Parkway, PO Box 7816, Edison, New Jersey 08818-7816 (800) 533-8478

Springboard Software
7808 Creekridge Circle, Minneapolis, MN 55435, (612) 944-3915
Software including Hidden Agenda, an interactive simulation in which the player becomes the newly elected president of a mythical Central American country that has just overthrown its dictator.

State Department
Bureau of Public Affairs, U.S. Department of State, Washington, D.C. 20520
For the administration position, request documents on specific topics from the State Department. Most Department of State publications are made available to Federal depository libraries throughout the country. Contact university or public libraries to determine depository status. Or write to the Public Information Division, Room 5819A at the above address for free single copies of nonsubscription publications. To be placed on a mailing list, write to the Office of Opinion Analysis and Plans, Room 5815A at the above address.
Video Project: Films and Videos for a Safe and Sustainable World
5332 College Avenue, Suite 101, Oakland, CA 94618 (415) 655-9050.
Over 100 documentary films and videos on critical global issues for sale or rent.

Westview Press
5500 Central Avenue, Boulder, Colorado 80301
Distribute and publish books on Central America.

PERIODICALS

Central America in the Classroom
PO Box 43509, Washington, DC 20010
See About the Publisher on last page of this curriculum.

Executive News Summary
Central America Resource Center, 1407 Cleveland Avenue, St. Paul, MN. 55108 (612) 644-8030
Monthly 12 page synopsis on Central America from over 60 publications. $20/year.

NACLA Report on the Americas.
North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA), 475 Riverside Drive Room 454, NY, NY 10115.
Detailed, well-documented reporting on Latin America and U.S. policy in the region. $20/year.

Sojourners
PO Box 29272, Washington, DC 20017
Sojourners is an independent Christian monthly highlighting popular struggles and the role of the progressive church in the United States and the Third World. $21/year.

Third World Resources: A Quarterly Review of Resources From and About the Third World
Third World Resources, 464 19th Street, Oakland, CA 94612
Organization - $30/one year. Individual - $30/two years.

ORGANIZATIONS

Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES)
PO Box 12056, Washington, DC 20005 (202) 265-0890.
Through hundreds of local chapters and affiliates, CISPES works to provide political support to the liberation movement in El Salvador, and to apply human rights and anti-intervention pressure on U.S. policy makers.

Ecumenical Program on Central America and the Caribbean (EPICA)
1470 Irving Street, NW, Washington, DC 20020 (202) 332-0292
Publishes educational materials on Central America and the Caribbean. Also organizes delegations.

Environmental Project on Central America
300 Broadway Suite 28, SF, CA 94133 (415) 788-3666
Through research, education and legislative action, EPOCA shows the links between war, poverty, the policies of transnational corporations and environmental destruction.

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Madre.
121 West 27th Street Room 301, NY, NY 10001 (212) 627-0444
A women’s organization linking North American women with women in Central America.

New El Salvador Today (NEST)
PO Box 4762, Berkeley, CA 94704 (415) 549-2114.
Supports efforts of displaced people in ES to repopulate their villages and restore community construction and development.

Network of Educators’ Committees on Central America.
PO Box 43509, Washington, DC 20010 (202) 667-2618.
Publisher/distributor of classroom resources on Central America, including this volume. Organizes educators’ tours to the region. Publishes bi-monthly newsletter, Central America in the Classroom.

Quixote Center.
PO Box 5206, Hyattsville, MD 20782 (301) 699-0042.
Coordinates material aid campaigns, such as Quest for Peace and Communities of Peace and Friendship (CPF); publishes materials and lobbies Congress. With the assistance of CPF funds, Nicaraguans have built schools, homes for teachers, child care centers and clinics.

Salvadoran Humanitarian Aid, Research, and Education (SHARE)
Box 16, Cardinal Station, Washington, DC 20064

TRAVEL INFORMATION AND OPPORTUNITIES

Schools

CNE (Casa Nicaraguense de Español)
2330 W. 3rd Street, Suite 4, Los Angeles, CA 90057 (213) 386-8077.
Learn Spanish while living in Managua with a Nicaraguan family. Write for information and schedule.

NICA (Nuevo Instituto de Centroamerica)
PO Box 1409, Cambridge, MA 02238 (617) 497-7142.
Learn Spanish while living with a Nicaraguan family in Esteli. Learn about life in Nicaragua firsthand. Write for information on program costs and current schedule.

Study Tours

Center for Global Information.
Augsburg College, 731 21st Avenue, South, Minneapolis, MN 55454 (612) 330-1159.
Coordinates experiential travel programs to Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, the Philippines and the Middle East.

NECCA. See About the Publisher on last page of curriculum.

Witness For Peace.
PO Box 567, Durham, NC 27702. (919) 688-5049.
Visits zones of conflict in Nicaragua to show solidarity. Faith-based organization.

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Travel Agencies

Tropical Tours
2667 E. Florence Street, Huntington Park, CA 90255 (800) 421-5040 (outside California) or (800) 854-5858 (inside California)

Marazul Tours
250 W. 57th Street, Suite 1311, New York, NY 10107 (212) 582-9570 or (800) 223-5334.

Other Information

Travel Programs in Central America
PO Box 50211, San Diego, CA 92105 (619) 583-2925
Comprehensive guide to travel opportunities in Central America.

Bridging the Global Gap: A Handbook to Linking Citizens of the First and Third Worlds
Global Exchange, 2141 Mission St. #202, San Francisco, CA 94110 (415) 255-7296
Answers to the question “What can we do?” (Global Exchange also sponsors tours.)
Central America and the Caribbean
De las guerras secretas y las rosas
escrito por Dinorah Sandoval

El ruido de los autos afuera, en la calle Coliseum, penetró en el silencio profundo de la mañana. En el laberinto de edificios, en la soledad de uno de los apartamentos, Patricia sacó su almohada debajo de la cabeza y se cubrió los oídos, tratando de sofocar el ruido estruendoso del tráfico que interrumpía su sueño. Pasaron algunos minutos y el ruido aumentaba, mezclándose ahora con las gruesas gotas de lluvia que golpeaban las ventanas de su alcoba, como piedrecillas fastidiosas lanzadas por un intruso desde lo alto de las montañas.

La muchacha abrió los ojos lentamente, bostezando, estirando el cuerpo delgado y moreno, y se desenrolló de la arrugada sábana blanca, evidencia de otra noche de pesadillas. Se levantó, hablando entre dientes, medio despierta, tropezando a su paso por el pequeño baño adyacente. Se detuvo y se sintió acariciada por la suavidad de su camisón de seda cuando lo dejó caer con ternura al piso. Después de recogerse el pelo largo y oscuro, entró en el vapor caliente y provocativo de la ducha.

Cerró los ojos y disfrutó de la sensación del agua que resbalaba suavemente sobre las curvas de su cuerpo, como un río sereno que fluye con gracia cuesta abajo. Ella sabía apreciar esos momentos, momentos tranquilos, cuando podía dejar vagar sus pensamientos con libertad. Aquí el tiempo permanecía inmóvil. Patricia se sentía sin peso, sin presiones, experimentando un aire de libertad que le era imposible sentir en otros lugares, especialmente después de llegar a este país.

Ella dejaba vagar su imaginación mientras se bañaba, permitiéndose viajar a través del tiempo, a través de los continentes, hacia el interior de los rincones ya olvidados de su memoria. Sus pensamientos apenas rozaban la alta y húmeda hierba de las cuestas de El Salvador, y volaban sobre los techos de las tiendas apiñadas, alienadas en las calles estrechas y llenas de curvas. El ojo de su mente capturó momentáneamente la cara risueña de un amigo de la niñez al que había perdido para siempre, y en el momento en que pudo enfocar la imagen, ésta se volvió borrosa y se disolvió entre sus propias lágrimas.

Pensó en Javier y se estremeció. Por un momento, se sintió débil, incómoda. Odiaba la presión, pero algo se le estremecía dentro cuando pensaba en él. El quería una respuesta hoy; ella no se podía demorar más. Se imaginó el pelo moreno y rizado, los hombros fuertes, y la viveza en sus ojos morenos de mirada tierna. Había mucho en él que le atraía. Y ella ya no era la tímida muchacha que sólo quería jugar. Javier le caía bien y ella no tenía miedo. Pero, de algún modo, una parte de ella decía "no."

La tensión de ayer atrapó sus pensamientos. El se le había acercado en la escuela, tal y como otros chicos, que ya habían comenzado a hacer lo mismo. A ella no le gustaba que los otros le prestaran atención, que le silbaran, que sus miradas la siguieran cuando ella pasaba caminando. Pero, él era diferente; parecía querer conocer a la verdadera Patricia, a la Patricia que realmente
existía más allá de lo que se podía ver a simple vista. El la escuchaba atentamente cuando hablaba, nunca fijaba la mirada en su cuerpo como los otros. Javier había caminado con ella a la casa, y en la oscuridad de la calle de su apartamento, le había echado el brazo alrededor de los hombros antes de decir adiós. Cuando él le pidió que salieran, ella evitó tener que dar una respuesta y se apuró para entrar y escapar de las burlas de sus hermanos mayores que estaban mirándolos detrás de las cortinas medio cerradas.

Recordó cómo se sentía. Su cara se sonrojó, turbada. Y la soledad de su cuarto la ayudó un poco a calmar su corazón, que latía excitado al pensar en cómo la había tocado.

Una mano tocó la superficie nublada de la puerta de cristal de la ducha, asustándola.

"¿Vas a estar ahí metida para siempre?", preguntó su madre.

"Vas a llegar tarde si no te apuras."

"Está bien, salgo ahora," dijo Patricia. Salíó, aseándose con una toalla grande y rosada.

"Tu amiga Sonia te llamó anoche ya tarde, después de que te habías dormido. Quieres que vayas a una fiesta con ella."

"Esa muchacha tiene una fiesta cada semana," murmuró Patricia.

"Me gustaría que trataras de adaptarte un poco más a las cosas de aquí," su madre le insistió. Era una mujer pequeña con la piel morena y suave, el pelo negro largo, lustroso y lacio. "Sonia sólo trata de ayudarte; sería buena idea que salieras con ella de vez en cuando. De seguro sería mejor que quedarte en casa y leer todos esos libros que te dan ideas locas sobre la vida."

"Lo pensare," mintió Patricia, poniéndole fin a la conversación. Patricia se vistió rápidamente y de forma sencilla, no es de esas chicas que se preocupan mucho por su apariencia. Mientras buscaba un abrigo en su armario, se detuvo, notando la cajita blanca donde guardaba casi todas las cosas de su vida pasada y de su tierra. De alguna manera, se las había arreglado para guardarla allí, escondida, fuera del alcance de su madre, sus hermanos y hermanas metiches. Había tanto que su madre no sabía, tanto que las mantenía separadas. Ultimamente, las dos eran como dos extrañas. La vida era una serie de discusiones entre ellas; quizás se debiera a la edad de Patricia, o a sus diferentes perspectivas de la vida. Patricia no lo sabía exactamente. A veces, había un silencio impenetrable en el apartamento, como la neblina matinal gruesa y fría. Ayer, cuando Patricia regresó de su trabajo, su mamá estaba sentada en la mesa de la sala escribiendo una carta. Patricia le habló, pero la mujer no dijo nada, ni siquiera se molestó en mirarla. Esto le hirió mucho más de lo que ella hubiera querido admitir. Quizás durante el tiempo en que las dos vivieron separadas, cada una había cruzado tierras vastas de experiencia y ya no podían tocarse una a la otra.

América...

Ella extendió la mano hacia el estante y agarró la caja. Sentada en su cama, desenvolvió el pedazo de tela que cubría su posesión más querida y preciada. Era un libro, un libro ordinario de poesía, pero para ella era tan valioso que jamás se le podría poner precio. Lentamente abrió las páginas del centro y la vio
allí. Una rosa roja entre las páginas. Los pétalos, delicados y bellos, se habían secado perfectamente, congelados en un momento frágil de felicidad. Su madre nunca se había enterado de esos momentos, nunca se había dado cuenta de que su niña había encontrado el amor y se había hecho mujer. Si lo hubiera sabido, la escena de la casa de su tía se hubiera repetido también aquí. La prima de Patricia, Carmen, huyó de su casa la semana pasada cuando su madre la acusó de tener una relación sexual con su novio, lo cual no era cierto. Hubo gritos y llanto, hubo amenazas y se tiraron cosas entre sí. Ahora, Carmen vive con una amiga. Patricia recordó oír llorar a su tía y a su mamá, abrazadas, preguntándose si la vida sería sencilla otra vez, preguntándose si el precio de la libertad aquí era demasiado grande. América...

PART II

La brisa le llevaba el pelo a los ojos, y al echarlo a un lado, vio a un hombre joven, alto, y fuerte que venía corriendo hacia ella. El pelo corto y moreno, despeinado por el viento. Ella sonrió, esperando impaciente con los brazos abiertos para abrazarlo. Le encantaba verlo en esa camisa roja deportiva y sus viejos "Levi's." Dentro de la mochila que siempre llevaba consigo, tenía varios libros, sus compañeros constantes. Armando la abrazó, diciéndole alegremente: "¡Hola, bicha! (1) ¿Cómo estás?" Le besó en la mejilla.

"Muy bien, ya sabes cuánto me gusta que lleguen los viernes."

El la abrazó, y juntos caminaron a un banco que estaba frente a un parque en la calle que iba a San Jacinto, donde Armando estudiaba arte. Era un parque pequeño, pintoresco, lleno de rosas de todos colores. A Patricia le encantaba este parque, casi nadie iba a visitarlo. Era tranquilo y limpio. También era el lugar donde Armando le había dicho por primera vez que la quería.

Armando parecía estar preocupado y ella se quedó callada al caminar, esperando que él hablase.

"Sólo tuvimos una hora de clases," dijo finalmente.

"Los compas (2) vinieron a darnos un discurso. Me hubiera gustado que vieras las fotos que trajeron de Chalatenango. ¡Púchica! Era evidencia bien marcada de la situación allí."

"¿Qué hay en las fotos?" preguntó Patricia.

"Muestran la manera en que se trata a los campesinos allí. Viven en casas hechas de barro y durante toda la época de lluvias las casas se inundan, y tienen que construirse un refugio con bolsas de plástico amarradas a los árboles. Les han quitado todo...todo."

Se le quedó la voz, y Patricia podía ver la cólera en sus ojos. Se sentaron en la soledad del parque, Patricia le miraba con profundo afecto.

"Adivina lo que tengo para ti," Armando dijo de repente.

"¿Qué? ¡Dime!" le pidió, curiosa de emoción.

"¡Cierra los ojos!" Abrió una bolsa y sacó un libro de color amarillo.

*(1) término cariñoso *(2) compadres
"Bien, ya están cerrados los ojos..." "¡No hagas trampa!"
"Ya, pues, no estoy haciendo ninguna trampa."
Le puso el libro en las manos y suavemente le dijo que abriera los ojos.
"¡Un libro de poesía de Roque Dalton!"
"¡Te gusta?"
"Dios mío, ¿cómo lo conseguiste?"
"Un compa lo tenía y me lo vendió."
"Siempre he querido leer sus obras, y ahora es mío. ¡Gracias, Flaco!"
Jugando, él la empujó al césped y empezó a tirarle unos pétalos de rosas que estaban por el suelo, por toda la cara, el pelo, la ropa, mientras que ella se reía.

* * *

Oyó pasos apurados que venían del pasillo. Patricia volvió a guardar la caja y se puso el abrigo.
"¡No has salido todavía?"
"Ya me voy..."
La madre de Patricia la miró sospechando de algo, pero no dijo nada. Siguió a su hija hasta la sala y la miró agarrar los libros y acercarse a la puerta.
"Si hoy no trabajas, apúrate al regresar a la casa porque necesito que alguien cuide a los niños y ...
"Aquí estaré."
"Hay que limpiar los cuartos y..."
"Le dije que aquí estaré."
Las dos se miraron desde una distancia inmensa, la cual se hacía aún mayor por la distancia que ya existía entre ellas desde antes. Patricia le preguntó con seriedad, "El parque en la calle que va a San Jacinto, ¿crees que todavía están allí las rosas?"
"Tengo que trabajar y alimentar a los niños y pagar la renta. Me vuelvo loca tratando de hacerlo todo a la vez, y tú quieres que te hable de las rosas?" La madre se aguantaba las lágrimas. "Deja de preocuparte de lo que terminó para siempre. Si quieres rosas, cultiva las aquí."
"¿Nunca te preguntas...?"
"¡No seas demasiado precavido!" gritó su madre. "¿Qué puedo hacer? ¿Qué puede hacer uno? ¿Por qué insistes en castigarnos a todos sintiendo tanta angustia? ¡Es muy difícil vivir aquí! No puedes enten..."
Antes de que pudiera terminar, Patricia ya estaba fuera del apartamento y había bajado las escaleras. Al soplar, el viento frío le devolvía las lágrimas a la cara mientras Patricia corría por la acera.

PART III

Era un trecho largo del parque a la casa, y ella no podía llegar tarde. Todos sospecharían... el tiempo, tan preciado y tan único... ese tiempo que ella había dejado pasar... pero era tan
maravilloso estar con Armando, estar en sus brazos. Al anochecer, la ciudad silenciosa estaba habitada por los grandes edificios y monumentos apenas iluminados. En cada esquina había un policía, con o sin uniforme, llevando radio transmisor portátil. Había patrullas de policía. Autos militares, grises. Ametralladoras apuntando hacia todas las direcciones. La casa de ella, unas barracas tendidas y desparramadas. Corrió cerca de unas champas casi destruidas, donde las personas vivían unas encima de otras, y cerca de unos perros flacos que corrían por caminos de polvo y tierra...la época espantosa de un país sitiado por su propia milicia.

Al acercarse la hora del toque de queda, la ciudad se vació rápidamente. La gente, sin hacer apenas ruido, huyó de prisa. Apurados, se apiñaban confusos, desesperados por tomar los últimos autobuses del día. De vez en cuando, un auto le pasaba de cerca a Patricia, a tanta velocidad que no parecía llevar dirección alguna. Muy pronto, llegó a la casa, y se sintió segura. Mirando por la ventana, veía la ciudad, pensaba en Armando y su seguridad. Observaba la pesadez de un anochecer sin fin. Miró el vacío espantoso, las horas en las que cualquier cosa podía suceder y ser posible, las personas detenidas arbitrariamente, las desapariciones, las torturas, las decapitaciones, los asesinatos, el terror...

*

El toque del timbre de la escuela la llevó de un golpe a la realidad. Patricia se apuró para llegar a su primera clase, el francés. Al estar en la escuela, trataba de concentrarse, pero le era muy difícil.

Le dolía la cabeza. Esto le ocurría mucho desde su llegada aquí. Mientras hablaba la maestra, Patricia miraba por la ventana y pensaba en su madre. ¿Por qué estaban en mundos tan distintos? ¿Por qué no existía la confianza, y sólo sospecha y acusaciones? Al irse Carmen, la madre de Patricia había dicho que lo mismo les pasaría a sus propias hijas pronto. Aunque no podía hablar por sus hermanas, Patricia juró que esto nunca le pasaría a ella. ¿De qué valía el hecho de ser buena estudiante si los esfuerzos no eran reconocidos en casa, si nadie tenía palabras de ánimo que decirle? Patricia siempre recibía buenas calificaciones en la escuela. Nunca sacaba "D" ni fracasaba, pero esto parecía no tener significado alguno para su madre. Y por eso, por primera vez en su vida, Patricia no había aprobado los últimos tres exámenes de inglés, ni uno de los exámenes más importantes de álgebra. ¿Se daría cuenta su madre? Probablemente no. De hecho, sólo hacia dos noches, su padrastro, al llegar a casa del trabajo, le había gritado por estar aún despierta, estudiando diligentemente para un examen de biología. El se quejó de que no podría dormir con la luz encendida en la sala, donde ella estaba estudiando. El dormía en un sofá-cama en la sala. En vez de discutir como en el pasado, Patricia decidió acostarse y fracasar en el examen del próximo día.

Su mente estaba distraída, divagando otra vez por lugares que
sólo le traían recuerdos llenos de dolor. Recordó a su primo Mario que mostraba orgullosamente su espalda marcada con heridas de la tortura más reciente, ante un grupo de jóvenes, las mujeres pequeñas arañaban la tierra como si estuvieran locas, los niños aparentaban tener más edad de la que habían cumplido, envejecidos, cubiertos de lodo seco, recorriendo el campo para encontrar la comida diaria, los hombres recogiendo madera para restaurar una sección de una casa quemada por los soldados. Patricia pensó en su último día en El Salvador, al ver a su maestro favorito caminar por las barracas de hojalata en la capital. El le dio la mano con ternura y la felicitó por poder marcharse del país.

"Pero," dijo el señor Martínez, "usa el talento que Dios te ha dado para ayudar a tu gente, dondequiera que vayas. Eres una buena escritora, tienes un talento valioso que puedes usar como instrumento de cambio. Cuando escribas, nos das la esperanza de que otros vean nuestra condición y estén en solidaridad con nosotros. Antes, teníamos la libertad...y la tendremos otra vez. Escribes sobre nosotros. Somos un pueblo que lo ha perdido todo, y que ahora, sólo la queda la vida de su gente. Cuéntales a otros lo que has visto aquí..."

Una nota cayó de repente en el escritorio de Patricia. Era de su amiga, Silvia, una muchacha que también había vivido en El Salvador pero ya había estado aquí por unos años. "El me llamó anoche y me preguntó mucho por ti," decía la nota. "Quieres verte a la hora de almorzar. Le dije que me llevaría a donde esté él.

Patricia dobló el pedazo de papel y se apuró para salir al pasillo lleno de gente después de terminar las clases. Silvia la alcanzó.

"Chica, ¿no quieres salir con Javier? ¡Mensal! Si yo fuera tú, no lo pensaría dos veces. Todas las chicas aquí se morirían si tuvieran la oportunidad..."

"No he tenido tiempo de preocuparme de eso," Patricia la evadió, pasando cerca de un grupo de jóvenes que dejaron de charlar al ver pasar a las dos chicas.

"No he tenido tiempo de preocuparme," dijo Silvia burlándose. ¿Ay! Es guapo. ¡Sal con él!

"¡Y es en sólo eso lo que piensas ahora?", le preguntó directamente a Patricia.

"¿Me puedes sugerir algo mejor?" se rió.

Silvia miró a su amiga esperando una respuesta, pero, Patricia ya se había ido.

PART IV

El le cubrió los ojos con un pañuelo.

"No te lo quitas. Si te veo quitándotelo, es posible que te encuentres de repente nadando," le advirtió.

Al oír esta "amenaza," ella ya sabía exactamente dónde estaba. Jugaban mucho a este juego. Ella se dejaba dirigir y llevar por él.

"Si este vestido se moja, Flaco, no seré yo la única que esté haciendo gluglú bajo el agua," ella chifló amenazándole.
"Ay, tengo tanto miedo," bromeó Armando.
Empezaron a caminar por una calle donde un riachuelo pequeño bordeaba el pueblo. Era un arroyo extraño. A veces, el agua era tan pura y limpia como un espejo, y otras, se estancaba y oscurecía con lodo y fango, tan fácil de predecir como sus vidas y hogares.

Ella conocía este lugar como si fuera la palma de su mano. Había muchos árboles de mango a su derecha, detrás de un cercado que pertenecía a un vecino rico. Le contó a Armando sobre las tardes cuando ella y sus hermanos cortaban mango y pepetos.* El la amenazó con llevarle a la cárcel, ella le dio un puntapiés en la espinilla. Sigieron caminando por la calle polvorienta. A la izquierda, había un cementerio para los ricos, separado por una barranca. Muy pronto, caminaban por una avenida de cemento, la cual dividía la ciudad en dos y por donde pasaba el único autobús. De un lado, había casas fabulosas con árboles, lomas de hierba y piscinas. De otro lado, había casas humildes de barro, hechas para gente humilde. Ella podía oír el cacareo de unas gallinas; podía olor las cabras. El le quitó la venda de los ojos y vio que estaban frente a la casa de los Rodríguez. Rodeando la casa y las flores, había un cercado de madera, inmenso. Muchas parejas de novios habían escrito varios mensajes en este cercado. Al fondo, escritas bellamente con pintura roja, estaban las palabras "A Patricia, con todo mi corazón y alma. Con amor, Armando."

"¿Cuántos de estos novios todavía se sienten así?" preguntó Patricia después de controlar sus emociones.

"Este lugar es muy viejo," respondió Armando tranquilamente, abrazándola y haciéndola sentir en confianza.

"Muchas de las personas mencionadas en esta verja ya tienen sus propios hijos. Los nombres escritos recientemente, como aquí, y aquí, buen, no estoy tan seguro. Uno de ellos, quizás, tuvo que huir, quizás éste aquí desapareció. Otros, como éste aquí arriba, fueron hombres que tuvieron que sacrificar el amor para ayudar al país. Veo mujeres tristes, mujeres jóvenes, que vienen aquí a veces a ver lo que les queda de su felicidad."

"Esto es tan horrible, Armando, ¿por qué pusiste nuestros nombres aquí, si estamos juntos, y siempre estaremos juntos?"

"Vivimos una vida incierta, y ahora estamos viviendo tiempos inciertos."

"Púchica, tengo que tomar decisiones difíciles, no hay muchas opciones. Tengo 20 años, y los compas necesitan la ayuda de todos los hombres para que la lucha tenga éxito...Por cuánto tiempo puedo estar aquí? Puedo juntarme con ellos ahora o ser asesinado más tarde porque algunos en mi familia han simpatizado con..."

Su voz se apagó, y los dos se quedaron allí, cada uno pensando lo inconcebible.

"Prométete," susurró Patricia.
"¿Prométete qué?" preguntó él.
"Prométete que nada nos va a pasar."
"Ya sabes que no puedo..."
"Prométete que nada va a llevarte lejos de aquí."
"Por favor, por favor, deja de llorar. Escúchame, disfrutemos de lo que tenemos ahora, mientras estemos aquí. Diós sabe que no
nos queda nada más... Ademáns, la muerte no es el fin de la existencia. Si yo, uh, me voy, vas a saber el por qué. En el campesino crucificado está la esperanza más genuina, en el horizonte, para la resurrección de El Salvador. Sabes que si me voy, mi espíritu va a quedarse aquí, contigo siempre. Y ese espíritu se levantará, el mismo espíritu que han entregado todos los hijos desaparecidos. Se levantará otra vez entre la gente salvadoreña que se ha quedado tras nosotros para llevar la antorcha que hemos encendido. El espíritu, la llama, nunca va a morirse. Nunca.

Sin decir una palabra, las dos siluetas juntas se dirigieron al pueblo por la calle polvorienta, sus sombras largas y estrechas frente a ellos. No había nada que decir. Todo quedaba entre ellos. Antes de separarse por rutas distintas para ir a sus respectivas casas, Armando cortó una rosa roja de un jardín algo des cuidado que estaba cerca de la calle. Con cuidado, la colocó en el pelo de Patricia.

"Guárdala siempre," dijo callado.

"La pondré en agua y la guardará sólo hasta que te vea mañana," bromeó ella sin reírse. "Entonces, puedes dármarla otra, y otra, y otra, y..."

"Cala." Le puso un dedo en los labios, acercó lentamente la cara a la de ella, y la besó suavemente. "Algunas cosas, si las cuidas y las acaricias, nunca morirán."

PART V

"Ves, te dije que ella iba a estar aquí," dijo Silvia alegremente. Patricia levantó la mirada desde el asiento de la banca ubicada en una parte sombreada y tranquila del campus. Silvia estaba frente a la banca, y Javier a su lado.

"Pues, supongo que los dejaré solos," dijo Silvia casualmente. Patricia la vio irse. Tenía las piernas bonitas, pero todavía Patricia la veía que el vestido le quedaba demasiado corto. También llevaba demasiado maquillaje. Las cosas habían cambiado tanto desde que jugaban juntas en las calles angostas de San Cristóbal. América...

"Espero que no te moleste," empezó a decir Javier.

"¿Puedo sentarme?"

Patricia replicó friamente. No sabía por qué estaba tan fría con él. Era guapo, amable y popular.

"¿Preferirías estar en otro lugar?" le preguntó a ella.

"Pareces un poco incómodo."

"Donde yo quiera ir está más allá de donde se puede viajar..."

Javier frunció la cara, dececido. Le interrumpió cortésmente.

"Por favor, caminemos, ¿bien?" Los dos comenzaron a pasear lentamente. El la miraba mientras ella miraba a lo lejos, distante.

"El problema, ¿soy yo?"

"No, no eres tú el problema."

"Me siento que si lo soy. No es justo que no me digas lo que está pasando."
"Hay demasiadas cosas que decir."
"Por varios meses, he querido conocerte. Te he mandado notas con tu hermana. Les he preguntado a tus amigas, y ellas me aseguran que no estás saliendo con nadie. Saqué valor para pedirte que salieras conmigo, aunque tenía miedo. Eres tan diferente, tan difícil de leer..."
"Lo que quieres de mí no te lo puedo dar."
"Patricia, ¿cómo es que sabes lo que quiero? No soy como los demás aquí, no hagas caso a lo que diga la gente."
Patricia se estremeció, nerviosa, angustiada de no saber qué decir. Empiezó a hablar en inglés, pero su alma estalló y las palabras le salieron a borbotones, como un río, en español.
"No, el problema no tiene que ver contigo...Yo...Yo no puedo porque amo a otro."
"Pues si es así, es así," él respondió en el idioma de ella. "Pero tienes que enfrentarte con los hechos. Esta "persona" no está aquí; tus amigas me han dicho que no sales a ninguna parte, que no escribes ni llamas a nadie. Entonces, esto tiene que ser que esta "persona" es de tu pasado. No puedo competir con el pasado, pero cuando estés lista para vivir en el presente, aquí estaré. Esperaré el tiempo que sea necesario, y un día te vas a dar cuenta de que los recuerdos no te pueden mantener por siempre."
Javier la miró fijamente a los ojos por un momento, no leyó nada, y entonces empezó a marcharse lentamente.
"Mira," dijo por fin. "No quiero tomar el lugar de él. Quiero tener la oportunidad de tener un lugar especial para mí solo. No tenemos que llegar allí de inmediato. Tomará tiempo, lo emocionante es llegar allí. Por lo menos, podremos intentarlo...¿como amigos?"
"Pues..."
"Por lo menos, ¿puedo llamarte esta noche?"
"No tenemos teléfono, entonces..."
"¡Silvia dice que te llama siempre!"
El timbre de la hora de almuerzo sonó, dándole a Patricia la oportunidad de escapar de la telaraña que había empezado a tejer para sí misma.
"Tengo que irme," dijo, al apurarse hacia la clase de inglés. "Te llamo esta noche," gritó detrás de ella. El se sonrió mientras ella salía corriendo hacia el edificio, admirando su figura, la cual no se podía esconder bajo la ropa casual.

* * *

La noche...cuando el mal reina bajo el manto de la oscuridad. La noche...esa calma ansiosa, cuando la vida entera revolotea como las hojas color escarlata de los árboles, unos instantes antes de desatarse una tormenta...
Patricia, echada sin poder dormir, nerviosa por el ronquido
apacible de su hermana menor, que dormía cerca, pensó en la noche. En la distancia, podía oír el ruido de unos aviones. Sabía bien lo que estaba pasando. Sin duda, habían forzado a los rebeldes a marcharse del campamento, y habían buscado un lugar seguro y varias provisiones en un pueblo cercano. Se mezclaban fácilmente con la vida de los civiles. Era un juego frustrante, el jugar a las escondidas con las tropas del gobierno que los perseguían. Los rebeldes reunían el apoyo popular cuando iban al pueblo. El apoyo provenía de la gente pobre, cansada de recibir sueldos injustos, promesas rotas de reforma agraria, y de tener pocas oportunidades para servicios de medicina y educación. Esta gente, oprimida por años de brutalidad, favorecía casi siempre el lado de la revolución. Pero, los rebeldes les traían problemas cuando iban allí. Primero, llegaba el ruido de los aviones y los bomberdeos indiscriminados de las casas, iglesias y escuelas. Después, llegaban los soldados. La gente intentaría huir, desbocada, desangrándose, huyendo de las balas y el fuego que arrasaba devorándolo todo. Los soldados capturarían a los que no podían huir, a la gente herida, los enfermos y viejos. Imaginando que eran subversivos, los masacrarían. Saquearían las tiendas, romperían las cafeterías de agua, masacrarían las vacas y cabras, que mugirían de tanto dolor que los campesinos que regresaban tendrían que matarlas para ponerle fin a su sufrimiento.

Patricia se estremeció, tembló de horror al recordar la historia de su tío cerca del cantón La Escopeta. Él había sido dueño de una cafetería pequeña allí, y regresó después de que se fueran los soldados, para recuperar lo que había perdido. Se encontró ante un pueblo espantoso que había sido saqueado. Su cafetería, antes un lugar muy popular por las noches, estaba completamente en ruinas. No se podía salvar nada. El trabajo de una vida entera estaba reducido a escombros. Contó cómo se quedó en medio del edificio bombardeado por las ametalladoras, y gritó al cielo, los brazos extendidos, suplicantes. Una figura triste de pie, solitaria, en medio de una escena horripilante de cuerpos, sangre y destrucción.

El viento se arremolinó alrededor de su casa, esparciendo el polvo en medio de un frenesí, oscureciendo aún más aquella noche que ya era densa por la niebla. El ruido rítmico y cortante de un helicóptero revoloteaba arriba, sus luces fuertísimas fijas encima de las casas en el distrito donde vivía la familia de Patricia. El altavoz estaba a punto de reventarles los oídos, diciéndoles a todos que salieran de sus casas. Ella oyó los lamentos de sus hermanas más pequeñas. Los adultos corrieran en desorden por aquí y por allá, con voces ahogadas. Al levantarse, vio las sombras alargadas de los soldados pasando a toda prisa, reflejados en las paredes de barrio de su alcoba. Ella se vistió rápidamente y salió afuera para juntarse con los demás vecinos, el ruido de sus pasos ahogados por los motores retumbantes de los camiones de los militares que estaban deteniéndose.

La gente se quedó en silencio, hablando sólo cuando alguien le dirigía la palabra. Patricia odiaba ver a los hombres que amaba y respetaba, que ansiaban antes con orgullo, y cómo se encogían de
hombros y se volvían pequeños, serviles. Ella bajó la cabeza y fingió ser invisible. Al levantar la cabeza otra vez, vio algo que le dio un vuelco repentino a su corazón. Sentado en la parte trasera de uno de los camiones militares, con las manos amarradas, estaba Armando. Sus ojos se encontraron con los suyos por un momento, pero él desvió la mirada rápidamente. Se dio cuenta de que lo habían golpeado; su camisa estaba rota. Ella quería lanzarse corriendo hacia él, pero algo que notó en su mirada la hizo detenerse.

"¿Conoce a este hombre?" el soldado le preguntó a la madre de Patricia.

"Nunca lo he visto en toda mi vida," dijo nerviosamente.

"¿Les ha pedido algo...les ha hablado de los rebeldes?"

"No, señor," contestó el hermano mayor de Patricia.

El comandante paseaba lentamente frente a la gente espantada, mirándolos con atención a los ojos, haciendo una pausa cuando notaba que alguien flaqueaba. Patricia le dio un vistazo a Armando otra vez, y otra vez, pero él mantenía la cabeza hacia abajo y los ojos cerrados.

"No tengo que recordarles lo que pasaría si me entero de que están mintiendo, ¿verdad?" El oficial continuaba paseándose y deteniéndose frente a Patricia, fijando la mirada helada en ella.

"Tú, muchacha, ¿quieres vivir, no? ¿No quieres pasar un rato con mis hombres? ¿Habla entonces! Sálvate a ti misma y a los demás. ¿Conoces a este hombre?"

Armando abrió los ojos y la miró, sin mostrar ninguna emoción. Patricia miró directamente al joven en el camión, la cara calmada, el corazón quemándose de dolor.

"Te estoy preguntando algo...¿Conoces a este hombre?"

"No, no señor..."

"¡Mírame cuando hables!" La agarró. Unas manos largas le tocaron ambos lados de la cara. Patricia sintió las lágrimas dentro de sí, pero luchó por controlarlas, y lo logró. Miró al oficial directamente a los ojos.

"No lo conozco, señor. Él...él no tiene nada que ver conmigo."

El oficial la soltó, satisfecho. Continuó interrogando a los demás. Patricia no tenía ya fuerzas para mirar a Armando. Ella se quedó de pie, envuelta en el polvo que se levantaba por el movimiento del helicóptero, temblando imperceptiblemente.

"Si conocen a cualquiera de esos malditos rebeldes," juró el oficial, "advíranles que no hay ningún lugar donde podrán esconderse. ¡Cada uno de esos traidores de El Salvador morirá!"

El subió a uno de los camiones militares y se apresuró a marcharse, seguido de otros camiones.

Las mujeres envueltas en mantones agarraron a sus bebés y dieron gracias a Dios de que nadie había sido herido. Los hombres, sintiéndose fuertes y grandes nuevamente, maldijeron callados a los soldados y se dirigieron con sus esposas y niños hacia sus casas. Una mujer vieja, sin dientes, la última de ellas, dio la vuelta para echarle un vistazo al helicóptero que volaba hacia arriba, hasta los remolinos delgados de la niebla. Un llanto
callado la distrajo. La anciana echó una ojeda y se dirigió hacia una silueta en la oscuridad. Una lágrima familiar le bajó por la cara arrugada mientras miraba a una muchacha de 16 años gritar y golpear la tierra con los puños, una tierra demasiado entumecida por la destrucción de la guerra, por la carga de sentir la pesadumbre, por absorber la pérdida de otra alma destrozada.

PART V

El autobus RTD dio una sacudida en medio del tráfico denso, y los libros de Patricia se cayeron por el pasillo. Había estado muy pensativa. ¿Dónde estaba? ¿Qué hora era? A menudo, subía al autobús para escaparse de la prisión de su vida, del ciclo asfixiante de la escuela, el trabajo y la casa. Iba hacia el centro, donde iría de compras inútiles antes de regresar al apartamento. El irse en autobús también le daba tiempo para pensar, tiempo para discernir sus sentimientos confusos hacia Javier.

¿Qué le diría si él llamara? Estaba casi segura de que Silvia le daría el número de teléfono. ¿Le podría hablar del dolor que sentía?

Sintió una mano que le tocó el hombro. "Perdón, pero creo que estos libros suyos se le cayeron." "Oh, gracias," le dijo, aceptándolos.

El hombre tenía más o menos 40 años, era gordito y estaba sin afeitar. Parecía que había estado trabajando en construcción, tenía un casco de trabajo a su lado, en el asiento. Por estar en la parte trasera del autobús, estaban sentados cara a cara, de frente, y para Patricia esto era un poco incómodo. El hombre sonrió de prisa, agarró un periódico en español y empezó a leerlo. Ella miró fijamente los titulares y observó, a través de los huecos de la camiseta sucia, el estómago enorme y peludo del hombre que subía y bajaba al respirar.

"Terrible, absolutamente terrible, ¿no?" le preguntó a ella. El metió la mano bajo su chaqueta en el asiento y sacó una botella escondida en una bolsa de papel. Tomó un trago, se secó los labios con el antebrazo, y esperó la respuesta de Patricia.

"Terrible... ¿qué es terrible?" le preguntó esperando que su respuesta fuera breve.

"La guerra, la guerra en nuestra patria," le dijo.

"¿Cómo sabe de dónde soy yo?" le preguntó, con curiosidad.

"Los ojos. Los ojos lo dicen todo. La vi mirando el periódico con los ojos tristes. Soy de la capital. Vivía en la calle 29... ¿Y usted?"

"Soy de la capital también. Vivía en San Cristóbal."

"Es un mundo pequeño, ¿no? Trato de no pensar demasiado en ese lugar, ¿me entiende? ¿Para qué sirve?"

"Para qué sirve olvidar?" le dijo Patricia, fuertemente.

"Déjenos solucionarlo entre sí. Los rebeldes casi están derrotados, pronto vendrá la paz otra vez y todo regresará a la normalidad."

"¡Y qué es normal?" Patricia se enderezó. "Creo que la
revolución salvadoreña es necesaria para que la gente encuentre su propia libertad..."

"¿A qué precio?" le gritó él. Unos pasajeros los miraron. El hombre se calmó y siguió, esta vez en español, con un susurro monótono, impasible. "¿Se ha olvidado de los campesinos inocentes? Les disparan y están perdiendo sus parcelas de cultivo. ¡Demasiados paisanos están siendo sacrificados! ¿Y para qué? Demasiada gente indefensa está desapareciendo, ¡todo por un grupo de rebeldes locos que no hacen nada más que crear problemas!"

"A veces, lo más querido cuesta muy caro."

"Caro? ¿Qué sabe usted lo que es pagar un precio por algo? ¿Qué sabe del dolor? Mirase. Es joven, todavía tiene toda la vida por delante. Mucha gente no puede empezar de nuevo... ¡sus vidas están destruidas!"

"¡Yo también estoy destruida! ¿No lo puede ver?" gritó Patricia. "No se atreve a decírmelo que no sé nada del dolor. ¿Cómo puede juzgarme?"

El autobús estaba lleno ahora, la mitad de los pasajeros estaban mirando a los dos extranjeros luchando una guerra secreta, en un idioma extraño... los miraban incrédulos. El hombre se puso de pie, haciendo muchos gestos mientras el autobús oscilaba.

"¡Juzgo sólo a los asesinos! Juzgo sólo a los que no se van del país al tener la oportunidad de hacerlo. Debería estar contenta de estar aquí. No mire hacia atrás. Me quedé demasiado tiempo tratando de permanecer neutral, rezándole a Dios que trajera la paz. Y, entonces, los sucios rebeldes me lo quitaron todo, ¡todo!"

"¡Ud. no tiene nada! ¿Qué es la vida sin la libertad? ¿Qué significa la paz cuando los oprimidos sufren en silencio? Una paz sin espinas como la suya no es la verdadera."

"Escúchame. Sólo escúchame. Dígame por qué tenían que traer la guerra hasta mi puerta. ¡Por qué no podían mantenerla lejos de la gente inocente? Saben que nuestro gobierno los encontrarán en cualquier lugar donde se escondan. Una mañana, vinieron los aviones, como todos los días. Hice apurar a mi esposa y a mis hijos para salir de la casa. Normalmente, corríamos al campo, donde estábamos más seguros. Mis padres no se movieron ese día. Les grité, pero me contestaron, "Estamos cansados de correr, no saldremos esta vez." Los rebeldes acecharon a los soldados allí, y en la lucha, le dispararon a mi padre en la espalda y quemaron a mi madre hasta el punto que el cadáver no se podía reconocer. Supe entonces que había poca esperanza, y que todo estaba perdido."

El hombre estaba llorando. Patricia se mordió el labio, buscando palabras que no existían para ella.

salvadoreño paciente que cumplía siempre con la ley. ¡Ido para siempre! Pero, seguí caminando, y no miré hacia atrás."

Hubo una pausa. Por fin, Patricia habló. "Ojalá que nunca pueda dormir bien por las noches."

"Duerme muy bien," replicó el hombre. "Vivo. Mi familia está aquí. Y que esos rebeldes se pudran en el infierno. Pueden matarse y morir hasta que la sangre cubra todo el campo. ¡No me importa nada!"

Patricia, con mucho dolor de cabeza y la visión borrosa, se bajó bruscamente del autobús, y se dirigió hacia el mar de peatones en el centro.

PART VIII

Estaba lloviznando, pero esto no parecía impedir que la gente hiciera sus compras. Ella andaba errante por la calle Broadway, su mente acelerada. Veía sólo las caras, caras de gente de todos los lugares del mundo. Caras africanas, caras asiáticas, caras latinas. Todas parecían tan alegres, y ella no podía comprender el por qué de su alegría. No había evidencia en esos ojos de ningún sentimiento de nostalgia por sus países. No había interés por esas cosas conocidas y familiares ahora ya perdidas, ni por las guerras que estaban ocurriendo en lugares tan remotos. Iban de prisa, de una venta de rebajas a otra, unas vidas ya muy distantes de donde se originaron. Se detuvo bajo el alero del techo de una tienda que la protegía de la lluvia. Se dio cuenta de que había letreros en un sinúmero de idiomas, oyó música a todo volumen proveniente de miles de tierras diferentes, pero de ningún modo podía creer que estas cosas pudieran sustituir a su tierra.

Entonces algo le llamó la atención. En una esquina, cruzando la calle, cantando una canción familiar que le hacía recordar su niñez, un hombre viejo con la cara curtida estaba vendiendo rosas...rosas similares a esas que había admirado en el pasado en el parque cerca de San Jacinto. Se echó a correr. Al cruzar la calle, los carros se desviaron para evadirla. Pronto estaba comprando rosas, todas las rosas que podía comprar con el dinero que tenía. El hombre le preguntó, "¿Por qué? ¿Por qué tantas?"

"Nunca me quiero olvidar," dijo Patricia sencillamente.

El hombre siguió con la mirada a la bella joven hasta que se subió al autobús con los brazos llenos de rosas, y él se sonrió, como si entendiera.

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Patricia se sentó en su alcoba para estudiar un capítulo de biología. Su hermana María entró de repente en el cuarto, halando el cordón enroscado del teléfono. María se echó en la otra cama, siguiendo una conversación frívola de algo que no tenía sentido. Patricia la miró con desprecio por un momento, y después, se puso otra vez a estudiar. Cuando hubo trabajo que hacer esa noche, los chicos la habían ayudado a terminarlo, sin importar que había llegado tarde a la casa. Pero María, no. Ella había salido al
parque con su novio. "Es tan difícil de comprender," pensó Patricia. "Siempre ha sido tan alegre, siempre sonriéndose, nunca se preocupa de las cosas de los demás... Quizás ella tenga suerte. Si uno piensa demasiado, se puede frustrar la vida y hacerse de un futuro imposible de soportar."

"Ay, ¡qué extraño!" se rió María. "¿Recuerdas esa cosa que adelanta las llamadas que mandé a instalar en nuestro teléfono? Tú sabes, la cosa que nunca usas... Pues, sonó, ¿y sabes qué? La llamada es para ti. Creo que es ese chico guapo, Javier, de la escuela."

Patricia se tardó en tomar la decisión de aceptar o no la llamada. Tardó un instante, ese instante tan familiar para la mayoría de los inmigrantes, ese instante suspendido entre un viejo y un nuevo hogar, un viejo y un nuevo ser. Cerca de la ventana, de pie, Patricia estaba admirando el florero con las rosas recién cortadas en el alféizar, y respiró profundamente para impregnarse del aroma dulce de las flores. Pensó en la cajita blanca en el gabinete, mientras la visión que tenía en su mente se perdía vagando por un camino polvoriento, bordeado por árboles de mango, pasando por senderos donde había varias cabras, ella llevando una rosa roja adornado su pelo.

n.b. La presente traducción fue revisada por la Oficina del Alcalde para Asuntos Latinos del Distrito de Columbia (D.C. Mayor’s Office on Latino Affairs.)

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