

The Search

by Carolina Luna



*In homage to Kansas,
for vindicating me in uncertain hope.*

Sometimes, when I smoke marijuana, I can see all of her: she appears—as always when I manage to visualize her face—dressed as Pierrot. The straight hair pulled back into a long pony-tail, sturdy and shining; the very white face with a black stylized drop, held on her cheek; the eyebrows, lines of fine pencil marking an expression of sad questioning or absurd doubt in a neutral expression.

Thus, her image, like a razor's edge, rips the darkness of my closed eyelids. I could say that I almost feel the odor given off by her skin beneath the white silk of the murmuring suit.

My friends say she doesn't exist, that it is the totally imbecilic excuse I give so I don't have to get involved with anyone, that maybe I'm in the closet and what I see is a transvestite and I wear black leather to attract faggots.

I say let them think what they want. At bottom they're pissed because I get more women than they do when that's where it's at. And faggots never dare dress like that because they're afraid to, and they don't have the wherewithal. They never think that

women like it; or maybe they don't have a good reason to do it like I do, since I dress for her and every time I see myself in the mirror before going out with the jeans or the leather tight around me holding me in, I think of her hands and her thighs between mine.

They say I really am jacking off big time. Well, so what? Who is it hurting? José, who's a better buddy, doesn't take me seriously, but at least he doesn't fuck with me. Condescendingly, he listens to my delusions. He knows I don't need to smoke to see her.

The other day while I was shaving, I could swear that I saw her in the mirror, sitting on the edge of the bed, waiting. But, when I turned around, she was gone.

José has been with me several times when I think I've seen her in the street, always turning a corner, just the quick flash of her hair at night, the unmistakable silence of her footsteps.

Sometimes I only feel her there: José and I exchange looks with tacit agreement and cut short our friends or whoever we're with; I start up the motorbike and we go looking for her. He wants to meet her too. I've told him that she is very unhappy. I know it. In my dreams I make her despair my own: I have seen her in the sea, scratching the water on the surface; or huddled in a corner of an enormous room, sur-

rounded by invisible rats. I have seen her bleeding to death with her wrists held up damning the sky: her hands of crystal, like trees, are born in the center of my body, reverberating, infinite, like the echo of her scream.

One dream especially obsesses me since it is the only one where I can participate. With her back to me, I see her at the end of a melancholic hallway, looking at the afternoon, one of her hands on the glass of a large window. I go toward her slowly; I arrive, put out my hand and call her over her shoulder. Invariably, when she turns her head, I wake up.

I have never been able to see her face without the make-up of the costume. Her hair hides it. Besides being an obstacle, it is also the object of confusion. If I see someone on the street with hair like hers, I go up to her and call to her from the back; she turns to look at me... and nothing. Nothing happens. It might sound stupid, but I'm convinced that when I touch her, I will know her name. I will know that it's she. I only need a touch, a visual contact and I'll be certain.

Time is short. She also hallucinates silhouettes, faces in shadow. But her desperation is greater because she doesn't manage to fill the vacuum with the search. She doesn't have faith. Perhaps she hasn't been as close to me as I have been to her; perhaps, deadened by routine, she doesn't perceive the intensity of my desire; perhaps...

Little faith, unnecessary, anachronistic idealism. Sometimes, also, when I smoke, the blackness inhabits my brain. Then I open my eyes and allow other sensations, different from her absence, to attack me. And then I open a couple of beers, sing boleros, weep and feel that no particle of my body, that no breath of my immateriality makes any sense. That's why when she's not there, I prefer not to do anything. It's better to sleep: I work asleep, just like I eat asleep, I sleep asleep.

Depression, they call it. This incites José into lugging me like a package to the theater tonight.

"What better place," he smiles, "to find a Pierrot, of whatever sex?"

And I agree, with that minuscule, disagreeable, boring worm of the depressed, hope, crawling up my chest. A couple of heads of straight hair among

those present and, of course, the cocktail party after the opening, finally convince me.

The play trundles on; it doesn't interest me. But it was sufficient for the recognizable figure to appear to get me on my feet from a sudden rush of adrenaline: the white mask of feigned dark weeping looked at me even before I stood up.

Muttering and my friend's hand brought me back down to my seat.

"She saw me!"

"Shhh!" says José.

I lower my voice. "It's her. She looked at me!"

I see her frown.

"It's part of the play. She has to look at the audience."

"But..."

"Wait for the party, would you?"

The waiting: unknown arrhythmia. I'm in a cold sweat.

It's even worse when the play is over and a few minutes later I see the actors gradually come out. José greets and talks to some acquaintances. I try to do the same. A straight-haired blonde watches me. I cannot manage to be perceptive. I sweep the room with my glance; I see Pierrot and, at that moment... I don't know what to do. José sends me a questioning look; I don't know if I'm pale or flag red because waves of blood seesaw up and down my face.

"Be right back," I say and I advance three steps toward the ghost. That's as far as I go, and then I'm paralyzed again. I turn back to look at José: a bit annoyed by my indecision, he encourages me to continue. With her back to me, Pierrot talks to two people; one of them has already seen me and is observing, perplexed, rather discretely.

The waiter passes and I take a moist glass. I want to dry my hands on the black leather pants and can't manage it.

"Is this attitude normal in me?" I think. No. Is it the signal. Yes.

I walk, decided, or resolved to meet with another disappointment.

As naturally as possible, extremely agitated, in a total paradox, I put the index, middle and ring fingers of my left hand on Pierrot's shoulder when, at the same time my lips open to say,



“Ana,” and the ghost turns around.

Knowing. They say that knowledge is pain.

When we looked at each other, we knew.

She tries to say something but can't. I watch her go dumb, or is it that suddenly everything around me became a concrete silence.

I think I take seconds to react, another few in introducing myself, putting down the drink, asking permission and taking her hand so vigorously that she murmurs a soft cry. I cannot, I repeat to myself, cannot, under any circumstances and despite everything, lose her now.

At the motorbike, she refuses to get on.

“Please,” I beg. She looks at the ground, avoiding my eyes. “Please, Ana.”

She finally gets on. The weight of her body on the machine is barely perceptible. Her hands... the times I had imagined the warmth of her fingers on my waist.

I won't stop until I get to the beach.

I start up and accelerate. Again, time is short, but in a different way.

At some point on the way she comes closer to me and her breasts brush my back. Contradictory sense of reality-unreality. Quiet and movement. The oncoming lights on the highway when we leave the city force me to stay sober.

I park near the sea. I don't move so as to not stop feeling her body holding mine; I don't even want to breathe. The sea, full of night, bursts phosphorescences on its edge.

She loosens her hold a little. The odor of her body under the perfumed fabric comes to me mixed with the breeze.

Her voice comes as though it was again faceless; the timbre, only slightly lower than I remembered.

“Nobody really knew why you left that afternoon. Everyone thought that it had just been too much for you.” Silence. “Only Emilia, because she saw me trying to get the stains out of the sheets. Only she. Her age and my guilt gave her the right to slap me. You would have been far away by then.”

I lower my head.

“I'm sorry.”

“She said something. She said, ‘It's no good running away. You're damned.’”

Ana's voice becomes inaudible. Then, she lets go of me and walks to the sea. I follow her. I watch her untie her hair. I never imagined such agony on seeing the image yearned for for years.

Nevertheless, together with Ana I recover my meaning, my place on this surface plagued with arbitrary reliefs. Next to her I assume myself in life and in pain with no rebellion, since in them we gave ourselves a beginning.

The high moon shines on the mask more beloved by me than by anyone. And Ana's features, almost divined, when she turns her head to look at me with her black weeping, sparkling with translucent tears, are the most venerated features in my memory.

“I have dreamed about you, Bernardo. I haven't slept in peace a single day.”

“And I? What can I say?” I respond, faithful to a sudden irony for myself alone.

She murmurs, “I can't,” two or three times before I can bite her lips, lick her mouth, quiet my hands' eagerness for her body.

Afterwards, I hear us in the anxiousness of feeling ourselves.

The reflection of her light hairs reminds me of that afternoon, yellow and cold, when, hours after our mother's burial, amidst the weeping of what was still stupefaction, we made love while I remembered *Dust in the Wind* by Kansas. I was 15 and something ordered me, telling me I had to leave. Something that was not her pale body, surprised and almost adolescent. Perhaps her eyes, perhaps the weeping repressed in her pupils, her tear ducts dry...

That same contradictory voice today tells me as Ana moans under my weight that in her belly I find answers, from her answers, balms; and the secret daily life we choose to live will definitely relieve the emptiness of feeling ourselves—or knowing ourselves—to be apart, even if we are damned. ■■■

SHORT STORY TAKEN FROM CAROLINA LUNA'S BOOK *PREFIERO LOS FUNERALES* (MEXICO CITY: FONDO EDITORIAL TIERRA ADENTRO, 1996), PP. 12-18.

