

Floripondio

With one hand Marie pressed down the left side of her open book while waiting for Guy. They had agreed to meet at 4:00pm at Cafe Bisetti, but without a watch or a phone, she had no way to know the time except that her coffee was already getting cold, which was a feat in this weather.

She uncrossed her legs to release the sweat moistening the seam where her thighs met. Heat radiated from her skin, from the air molecules about her. The relentless humidity of summer in Lima induced an insurmountable lethargy that translated into a conditioned complacency: "Do not stir," it whispered, "do not cause friction, the parent of heat."

Even crossing the street to walk in shadow became a calculated move as it extracted precious energy, produced a new torrent of perspiration.



Marie had returned to Lima that morning by plane from the jungle of Tarapoto, the doorway to the Amazon, and had splurged on a taxi from the airport to go to her old apartment in Barranco, where she had been living until six months prior with her friend Anita, a Spanish ex-pat.

As agreed, Anita had left a copy of the keys in the shadow under the back left tire of the 50's VW beetle with rust and chipping forest green paint that sat forever outside the blue house on Calle Fidelli.

Inside, the adobe house throbbed in heat from the courtyard that was connected through an archway to the kitchen and back bedrooms. Marie stood fanning herself with the door of the open freezer to cool her face. She filled a glass from her water bottle and placed it in the fridge for later. Then she collapsed onto Anita's bed and stared vacuously at the window above her, willing the curtains to come to life in a breeze. They remained limp, dripping in

their own quiet swelter.

Marie indulged in her *flojera*, sprawled in a giant X bloated by the humidity until 3:00pm rolled around and she had to shower quickly and gather herself up to go to Bisetti to meet Guy. They'd settled on the time and place via Facebook messenger the previous day.

When she got there, she snagged a small table in the corner that faced the entrance and took out her decrepit copy of *Rayuela* with the pages unglued from the binding and slipping out in small chunks of chapters.

At first she avoided making eye contact with the *mozos*, acting as though engrossed in her reading, but when one of them came over (the thin one with the black curls piled on top of his head), she ordered an americano. He returned ten minutes later, placing a mug before her from his little tray along with a sugar caddy that she politely tried to refuse.

Her appetite had abandoned her because of the heat and, though she didn't want to admit it, nerves. Now coffee on an empty stomach began to feel calamitous. She took small sips, could feel the caffeine raze her veins, making her heart palpitate faster. She reached into her purse and took out a plastic bag of *maní con pasas* she'd bought at a *tienda* on Grau on her walk over in case her hunger should strike. She sneaked a small handful, rinsing her mouth with another swig of coffee.

Cortázar's words stretched out towards her but failed to penetrate her thoughts. Instead, she used the story of La Maga and Horacio as a backdrop to muse over anecdotes that she might share with Guy from her trip. Maybe a story from the weeks she spent hitchhiking through Chile and Peru or that night in Bolivia she got drunk with backpackers and locals and climbed up a small mountain in Potosí for a ceremony to celebrate *3 de Mayo*. Maybe one about the son of a *shaman* at the volunteer site in Tarapoto, from which she just came. She'd tell him how he drank tiny vials of *ayahuasca*, calling it his "jungle medicine." How he'd return to their campsite giddy and strange, repeating "*perdona la letra*" and "*I'm speaking spanish!*" or impersonating Hugo Chavez with a militant "*en mi país la gente toma*

leche!" finishing always with mad, jovial laughter.

She toyed with the idea of telling Guy about the coffee farm owner in Chanchamayo.

Her first move out of Lima was the coffee plantation, Finca Peña Blanca, where she'd arrived by bus, *colectivo*, *mototaxi* and motorbike up a in a two-day long trip to a place that didn't exist on Google Maps but was located somewhere in a vectorized green expanse of earth.

She could start into the story by talking about the farm dogs, Triste and Feliz, or the cat that went mad with rabies and sat with its head twitching maniacally on a swivel for a week.

She could explain how she stayed there with the farm owner's nephews, a sixteen-year-old and fourteen-year-old, and two other volunteers, a Belgian guy and a girl from Luxembourg named Elena.

She could talk about the bat that flew around her bed as she slept and how she was alone on the first floor of the wooden structure that had no rooms, just windows with heavy, wooden shutters. How the two boys would watch her and Elena practice yoga. How the older one seemed to be expecting something from them as he'd sit too close and ask about the stretches while keeping his eyes fixed on their bodies.

She could explain how the farm owner arrived one evening and how Elena had warned her that he had a relationship of sorts with the previous female volunteer, an Austrian girl who'd left days before Marie's arrival. How he openly gazed at Marie as she bit into a mango and repeated her name softly in the darkness of the smoky kitchen as if the sounds themselves were caresses against her wrist.

She'd tell him about their weekend in Pichanaki, a small city that was even hotter than Lima and how they went out dancing for Valentine's Day and the clubs were so steamy and

packed, she almost threw up because she couldn't breathe. How at the end of that weekend he had invited her to go away to another city, to Satipo, with him alone on his motorcycle.

She'd tell him how the following weekend, when the nephews and the Belgian had gone into town, he'd come to the farm alone on his motorcycle despite the pouring rain and muddy road that led up the mountainside with a backpack full of ten half-liter bottles of Cristal lager instead of the food they'd asked him to bring back.

She and Elena had stayed behind, hoping to avoid the coercion of clubbing, an excuse for him to dance with them, to get close. Instead, the three of them sat around a candle stuck to the wooden floor with its own melted wax as he attempted to coerce Marie and Elena to keep drinking more and more beer, passing a plastic cup around and around.

She'd explain that she'd tried to beat him at his insidious challenge by drinking her share, outlasting him enough to avoid his passes and watch out for Elena. The last beer she had made her feel sick and indomitably sleepy. She curled onto the nearest mattress on the floor beside Elena's bed and slept.

She'd tell him that she woken up, half-delirious, feeling the farm owner's rough hands grope down her belly, his tongue slopping around her ear. How he grabbed her head to turn it and put his mouth on hers as if she was a ragdoll—he had assumed she was out cold.

She thought she would make a joke out of it for Guy and tell him how Peruvian men, especially in that jungle region, seem to take their cue from the dogs. She would explain the theory with the story of Triste, the female farm dog, who hid at night under the raised concrete stove to escape incessant mounting by her brother, Feliz. How he whined frantically if anyone even touched her.

But Marie knew that she would probably not have the courage to say any of this to Guy. Her pulse now was beginning to mimic the one she felt that night when she escaped the farm owner, when she woke suddenly from her stupor, pushed him away, and fled to the safety

of Elena's bed just feet away, dashing under the mosquito net to curl beside her in fetal position while Elena whispered, "What's wrong, Marie? What happened?"



She glanced up at the entrance of Bisetti just in time to catch Guy waltz inside. He coolly slipped off his aviators, tucking them into the front of his shirt before looking out over the café in search of her. A surge of blood flushed her face as his gaze swept in her direction. She dropped her eyes and turned the page in her book, although she hadn't even gotten past the first sentence.

"Hey, Marie." Guy stood before her, drumming his fingers on the table before pushing back his chair to sit, keys jangling slightly from behind him. "Sorry I'm late."

"Oh, hey," she closed up her book, "it's fine, I like, just got here."

"You like it?"

"What?"

"*Rayuela*. You borrowed it from me right?"

"Oh yeah. It's pretty interesting so far. Kind of disorienting I guess, but I think it'll be good. All the French names and stuff sorta throws me."

"Yeah, it's one of my favorites. I read it like three times. You find something new every time, something you missed before. And you can read straight through or jump around. *Rayuela* you know, *jump or hop* or however it is. The French stuff's not so important. It's just Cortázar being a dick."

"Really? I feel like he does it because translating it would sort of destroy some of the

meaning or the impact, you know?”

The *mozo* came by with a menu that he handed to Guy who thanked him and glanced at Marie.

“What did you get?”

“Just coffee.”

He nodded and put the menu down on the table, adjusting his septum ring and unfolding his sunglasses from his shirt to place them before the napkin dispenser. He leaned back in his chair and folded his skinny leg squarely atop the other knee, bobbing his foot in the air.

“So how have things been?” she tried to sound genuinely curious (as if she hadn’t been scouring his Facebook page lately, searching for pictures of his new girlfriend).

“Yeah, good, really good. I’m doing this work with *Proyecto Clandestino* a non-profit that does investigations of cases from the era of *terrorismo* doing printing and graphic stuff for their exhibitions and all, so I’ve been busy with that and well, I moved, last week or no, the week before. But yeah everything’s good. So how was your trip?”

The *mozo* reappeared now. Guy handed him the menu and asked for a *maracuyá* juice. Marie offered him a close-lipped smile to indicate she was fine and was sorry for not ordering more. She wondered if he had picked up on her accent, if he wondered how she had gotten mixed up with a punk like Guy, all tattooed with giant gauges whistling through his earlobes, dressed head-to-toe in denim and poised with indifference.

“Right yeah,” she picked up, “I think you were talking to them about a job before I left. Congrats! My trip, yeah, it was really great, not what I was expecting to do, you know, but I guess I didn’t really know what to expect. I thought, like, I’d be doing more trekking and camping, but I ended up volunteering on some farms, which was cool.”

“Farms, huh? I think I saw a picture of you sitting in front of a wooden house with some dogs. Where was that at?”

“Oh yeah,” she’d hoped he would see that picture of her, had been anxious to upload it to Facebook when she got internet in the next city, to see if he would ‘Like’ it or at least see it, see that she was out doing things, living.

“That was in the Selva Central, in Chanchamayo, yeah. It was a coffee plantation, only it wasn’t like, the main harvest, and it was rainy season still, so we didn’t have a whole lot to do, but it was definitely an intense experience. You know, rustic house and no electricity and a bat flying around my bed at night. Cooking with fire. It was just a couple other volunteers, the farm owner’s nephews and sometimes the farm owner...Just the *machismo* there, you know, it’s different, more...pronounced...”

“*Bacán*. A coffee plantation. You love coffee. Yeah the *provincias* are different from Lima. So are you done traveling now?” He had thrown his pack of Domingo tobacco onto the table and began patting himself down in search of papers. Marie almost lifted her bag from the floor to offer hers, but he found his before she could decide.

“Um, well for now I might stay here for a little I guess. Like to work and stuff to save some money and then hopefully keep going up north, up to Ecuador and Colombia and maybe Venezuela, though I’ve heard some crazy stories from...well I only met two people who had actually traveled there. But yeah, I feel great, I feel like I could keep going for a while, as long as I can stretch my funds.”

Marie saw the white light bulb above the table reflected in the black surface of her half-sipped coffee, and she thought it was overtly beautiful seeing it in that way. She leaned forward a bit, wishing to glimpse her reflection there. She wondered if she looked different to Guy now. If that haze of love had worn off and her shiny exterior dulled so that now he found her nose more crooked than he remembered, her skin blotchy and hair frizzled.

The picture of the new girl she saw on Facebook flitted through her head, the one of the two of them together in what she assumed was his new apartment. The girl had weird sticky-outty teeth, but she was thin with tattoos like Guy, not nearly as many, but enough to make them match better than he ever had with Marie.

She wondered how they'd met, if he'd thought of her when it happened. If he'd compared their bodies the first time they had sex. She imagined him squeezing the girl's boobs with desperation thinking, "Finally! A real woman!" Marie had always joked that Guy was having a secret affair with a woman who had huge breasts, a *tetona*, had sent him a picture of a massive brassiere draped over a city she found online, laughing and telling him it was evidence of his infidelity. It was all to mitigate her insecurity about her body, about her small breasts, barely a handful to cup even when they were swollen because of her period.

The funniest part of her joke was that he *had* cheated eventually when she was away for a month back in the states visiting her family. He claimed it was Marie's fault because when she left, he had been uncertain about whether she wanted to continue seeing him, though Marie thought she'd been clear about coming back to stay with him.

She thought of the day when they'd sat on a bench in Parque Kennedy and Guy wanted to kiss Marie who told him no. The idea of kissing him seemed so unappealing, she couldn't bear it, but she said it was that she didn't like showing affection in public.

They fought a lot. Mostly when he got drunk (which was often) and would get angry, picking fights over any small thing. They'd argue, and then she'd spend a few days contemplating breaking up with him before caving to his apologetic calls and texts.

The *mozo* stood directly before the table as if trying to face Marie while putting the juice in front of Guy, tossing a straw down as an afterthought. He offered Marie another americano, but she shook her head and murmured '*no gracias*' and smiled again without showing her teeth.

“Well that’s cool,” Guy continued as he stabbed the straw into the glass, “yeah I did some traveling in the past couple of months. A little hiking and stuff, you know in Yauyos, the reserve you had told me all about, but it was rainy season. I was the only person there. And I went back to Tarma, too. I hiked up to that *laguna*, remember we didn’t have time to go?”

“Oh nice. Yeah I was glad you ended up going on that trip. To Yauyos I mean. I think I saw a picture of you on Facebook at a *laguna* with, with I guess she’s your girlfriend maybe?”

Marie immediately regretted mentioning the girlfriend, and yet she knew that was half of the reason she’d wanted to meet with him. To gauge whether he still cared about her or if the new girlfriend had really replaced her while she was gone for six months. If she was so easily replaced. Guy adjusted his septum ring again, centering it and twitching his nose slightly before he sipped his juice and nodded.

“Yeah I love the weather there, it’s nice and cool. Lima in the summer is terrible. The heat. I can’t stand summer.”

Marie waited for him to say more. Guy fiddled with the straw in his juice, swirling it around the cup before sucking up the last of it. He sat sideways in his seat, so she stared at his profile, his wavy hair a bit overgrown and frizzled, the mole of his right cheek darker than she remembered.

He looked thinner, too. Like maybe he’d been smoking a lot and eating little. Or worse, like maybe he’d been doing more drugs. More cocaine. She’d done it once with him, curious to see if it was so different in Peru, where it is produced, than in New York, where it is rampant. Anita invited them to go to a concert, Dengue Dengue Dengue, two DJs from Lima who were finishing an international tour at a club called Noise in Barranco.

They’d shared the little square of folded up notebook paper Guy bought it in, taking turns going to the bathroom with it at the club. Alone in the stall of the women’s room snorting

an indeterminate amount out of her palm, Marie felt pathetic and sad, wiping her nose excessively to be sure she wouldn't betray herself when she walked out.

In New York she'd always done it with someone, usually in a bathroom but never alone. Pinned in Marie's memory was a red stall in the women's bathroom at a gay club on 14th St. and her friend Greta's long, manicured fingernail that cupped a bump for her to snort while Greta rubbed her other finger over her gums to get the residue. She savored that moment as they left the bathroom laughing, feeling potent and untamed.

Maybe it was wrong, maybe she was contributing to the perpetuation of a violent industry, but for once Marie had a taste of power. She imagined that was what it must be like to walk the streets of New York without the fear of attracting the wrong kind of attention the way women in midtown did in their elegant clothing, dripping in the confidence of wealth and privilege.

When she walked alone to her apartment on Avenue A that night, she laughed to herself, almost skipping as she went through the dark streets without double-checking shadows for lurkers, without the feeling of eyes watching her, running their lustful thoughts over her thighs. She would not live chained to fear of "what if I provoke him"—with my midriff bared or my high heels or red lipstick. The high gave her a sense of something akin to freedom. Maybe it was freedom's drifter cousin.

But with Guy the high wasn't the same. There was no magic, no potency. Other guys in the club jostled around her, and Anita's boyfriend tried to introduce her to his friends who stood too close and looked too eagerly at her body while Guy was in the bathroom. She wanted to be alone suddenly, to dance without feeling like a disco ball on display. She didn't want Guy to pull her close to him like she belonged to him. But she let him do it anyway, if only to shield her from the others.

They returned to the apartment she shared with Anita where they continued drinking Pisco and ginger ale on the back patio until they ran out of both. She couldn't remember much

about the sex she had with Guy that night except that his mild foot fetish was amplified by the coke, and he counted each of her toes as he kissed them on his knees at the edge of the bed. In the morning they'd laughed about it while they languished under her sheets for the entire day.



Guy began rolling his cigarette at the table, crinkling up the paper before placing a pinch of the tobacco in the center. He always smoked without filters. Not because he liked it stronger but because he was too lazy to improvise with paper.

"I have filters if you want," Marie offered now, feeling that the silence yawning between them had gone stale.

"Nah it's fine," Guy licked the paper and sealed it, giving it an extra roll over all to smooth it before tapping it twice on the table. He swept the loose tobacco bits into the pouch and closed it, putting everything away into the respective pockets of his denim jacket. She sensed he was ready to leave.

"Sorry, you can go smoke if you want. I just sat inside because I wanted to read and didn't know when you'd come. It's just really hot out."

"*No te preocupes*. I'll just go smoke real quick and come back." He got up, leaving her there watching after him as he pulled his phone from his back pocket.

Marie went to the bathroom, taking her bag with her as she crossed the room, remembering to flip the light switch outside before entering this time. As she washed her hands, she lifted onto her toes to look in the tiny, oval mirror. Her cheeks were uncharacteristically flushed, probably from the coffee and heat. She wiped the under-eye smudges of her eyeliner with a piece of toilet paper. Her hair had cooperated for some reason, though usually with the humidity she wore a crown of dark baby hairs that curled

up as if rising to the sun. She'd braided it wet and left the house, a damp circle blooming on the back of her shirt.

When she returned to the table, Guy was back, facing her empty chair now with his wallet in his hands. She put her bag down and sat, swinging her legs under to face him.

"Hey, sorry, but I have to cut out, I got a work call, and I have to go check some prints."

"Oh, ok, yeah no problem." Marie couldn't hide her surprise, though she hoped she'd masked her disappointment.

"But it was great seeing you. I'm glad your trip is going so well. If you're gonna be around the city for a while, we should do something."

"Yeah, definitely." Marie watched him pull out a s/. 5 bill and one *Nuevo Sol* coin and leave it on the table to pay for his juice.

"Do you want your book back?"

"No, no. Keep it. A little present from me," he looked her in the eyes and for a second, not even a full second, Marie caught a flash of tenderness, "Ok, ciao, cuídate Marie."

With that he left her there. She stared after the receding three-eyed tiger head patch she'd watched him sew onto the back of his jacket one night when she stayed at his dumpy shoebox apartment on the other side of the *Metropolitano* track surrounded by auto shops and street dogs. The swinging doors of the cafe flicked shut behind him.

Marie pushed her coffee mug away and scooped the money he'd left into her bag. She felt deflated and stupid for having expected something of the meeting. Her throat clenched as if she would cry when she noticed Guy's aviators were still folded on the table. She grabbed them and darted out after him.

Outside, she squinted into the light. People milled about the plaza across from the cafe, every bench in shadow taken by a set of parents whose children roller skated or chased after bouncy balls, and a band played in the raised gazebo, prompting a few older couples to dance slowly, pained under the hot sun.

Looking down the street, she spotted Guy's tiger jacket on the opposite sidewalk headed down Avenida Pedro de Osma. He walked with a girl whose arm draped about his waist. Her black shiny hair waterfalled around a tiny backpack that accentuated her violin figure and a sliver of pale skin where her black tank top didn't quite meet her black jeans.

Marie stood mesmerized by the spectacle, measuring herself against the girl, her petite frame and pancake bottom. Guy's arm appeared behind her suddenly, and Marie cringed as she watched him give the girl's butt a playful slap before sliding his hand into her back pocket. They continued walking entwined like two teenagers in the goofy grips of love until they disappeared around the corner at Jirón 28 de Julio. Probably going for *chela* at Piselli's.

And now pressure in her face, tears welling, her chest tight and heat rising from everywhere. Why did it hurt so badly to see him with her? She was happy for him, wasn't she? She had abandoned him. She had ended it.

Yet she sort of depended on having him there, or at least having someone who cared about her, loved her even, existing in the world. If nothing more than to take comfort in the fact that someone did. Even if he was bad for her. Even if she didn't love him back.



Once they had smoked a joint in her bedroom with weed that Anita's boyfriend had gotten for them. They listened to The Slackers and sat on her bed with their backs slouched against the lime green walls where Marie had taped up postcards and random pictures cut

from local art gallery pamphlets. As they smoked, Guy drummed on the bed and assumed his usual role as YouTube DJ.

The Redlight album was on, the one with the song that Guy had played for her one night in her room a few months into their relationship that had the smooth, jazz trumpet and the chorus line that he repeated quietly, passively to her, “distance may make a heart grow fonder, but honey, you don’t have to wander, to make me say, those three words...”

Marie asked him to play that song she liked, the one that had the line, “54-46 was my numbah...” Toots and the Maytals? he’d half asked half stated. She nodded and shrugged to say, “maybe?” When the song started, she knew it was exactly what she wanted to hear and it gave her a slight adrenaline spike and goosebumps. She kept trembling and wanted to close the window but felt anxious suddenly, wary to make any movement as she watched Guy on the bed beside her, looking alien of a sudden with his brown curls and tattoos. The song gave her a twinge along her spine and at once she realized she loved Guy, or at least that she could actually be quite in love with him.

Terror inked through her veins, increasing the chills and goosebumps. She had the urge to hide from him, to tell him to go home so that she could never call him back. At the same time she wanted to hug him until he pushed her away, to keep him there forever, if only to sleep beside her so she could feel his light breath on the nape of her neck. At night he curled beside her, near enough to feel him there but without infringing on her comfort as she slept with her back to him, his hand resting timid and warm on her waist.

“Excuse me, miss, you left the check?” The curly-haired *mozo* called to her from the outer doors of Bisetti. Marie sucked in a hard breath.

“*Ay perdona*, I’m coming.” She turned to go inside, the *mozo* holding the doors for her as Peruvian manners would dictate.

“You know you shouldn’t leave your bag like that,” he warned her back at the table, “It could get stolen. You have to be careful with your things here in Lima, *muchos ladrones*. I had my eye on it for you, but *cuidado* eh, not so many guys are nice as me.”

He winked at her, showing off his thick eyelashes while wiping the table and collecting her mug in one fluid movement. Marie forced a polite smile and dug for loose *monedas* at the bottom of her bag to avoid needing to get change from him. She touched the s/. 20 bill floating around, which would mean a s/. 7 tip, generous by Lima standards, but she didn’t care, she needed to leave. Gathering her things, she handed him the bill.

“*Gracias*, let me get you change,” he grinned, leaving her a moment to escape. She got up to go, then twirled about and replaced Guy’s sunglasses on the table in front of the napkins and rushed out of the doors.



Marie scurried down the sidewalk to the quiet backstreet that would take her towards the *malécon*. She knew there would be people there—joggers and cyclists and dog walkers and families strolling and teenagers nuzzling each other and the D’Onofrio vendors, sad in their angry yellow uniforms, perspiration at their temples as they pedal their ice cream carts along the sidewalk—but on the *malecón*, she was bound to find a solitary bench and a view of the Pacific. She craved a glimpse of that haze where the earth peels off into the horizon, blurring sky and sea. The dimensions went flat in that haze, and she could almost understand how someone could believe the earth was one smooth plane.

Before reaching an empty bench by a small garden, Marie stopped at a Brugmansia tree. She knew the bell-shaped flowers that drooped gracefully from their stems as angel’s trumpet. The creamy white of the petals had always captivated her, no matter how many she passed. She’d become a connoisseur of the trees that grew all over Lima. She judged their forms, the balance of the flowers in space, the artful asymmetry some possessed.

She'd pointed to them once on a walk with Guy, asking what they were called. "*Floripondio*," he'd responded, explaining that the flower could be boiled and ingested as a potent tea, causing an intense drowsiness and hallucinations.

It had the nickname "Devil's Breath" rumored to be used as a date rape drug or fed to tourists in order to rob them. Guy had tried it with friends when he was younger and spent three days under a spell of languor with terrifying visions. The amount of the scopolamine leached from the plant was difficult to measure if you didn't know how and could be lethal. She didn't believe him at first. How could something so dangerous be there within reach?

She plucked one flower from the tree now and held it as if her hand was a branch, letting it dangle there, sun filtering through the petals. Days before she left New York to move to Lima, she spent an afternoon at the Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx and had stooped to take a photograph beneath a stone statue of an angel holding a bell-shaped flower just so. Marie imagined herself turning to stone, rooting on the spot, solid and unmovable. The flower shuddered softly in a sudden breeze.

Hunger pains. She brought the flower to the bench and sat beside it, pulling out the thin plastic tube of *maní con pasas*, slurping it down in a huge mouthful of salty peanuts and raisins. She took her book out and laid it on her lap. The image of Guy smacking the girl's butt replayed in her mind as she ground the *maní* with her molars.

Though she would never be able to tell Guy, or anyone, the most disturbing part of what happened that night with the farm owner in Chanchamayo wasn't that he had waited until Marie was asleep, until he had assumed she was passed out from the beer. It wasn't that after she escaped from him, he'd stood there in the shadows before Elena's bed, panting like a beast uncertain whether or not he should let his prey escape.

What disturbed her most was that she hadn't stirred at first when he touched her because it was familiar. How many nights had she drifted to sleep when she felt Guy behind her in bed running his hands over her belly, squeezing her thighs, sticking his tongue in her ear

and slobbering over her like a dog unable to contain itself before a bit of meat fallen within reach. Marie had never protested, had never considered it a violation—even the nights that she barely woke to Guy’s touch—until that night when she woke to the farm owner’s hands on her skin.

Marie watched as the sun stretched over the Pacific, loosening up for its swan dive below the horizon, heading east for the night. She opened the book then, *Rayuela*, and read the opening of chapter 7 that she had stared at for an hour without actually reading.

Still, she struggled to understand it all, to understand it completely, but she translated parts of it to herself, “...I trace the outline of your mouth, I am drawing it as if it could come off in my hand, as if your mouth would part and it would be enough to close my eyes and undo it all and begin again, to bring forth each time the mouth that I desire...and by a chance I don’t seek to understand it coincides exactly with your mouth that smiles beneath the one that my hand draws for you...”

Marie, still digesting the words, glanced up as an older man walking his dog passed in front of her bench. His eyes darted away quickly, as if she’d caught him gazing at her. His Beagle strained fiercely on its leash towards the grass. She examined him with a disdainful stare until he passed out of her field of vision.

She smiled to herself then, teeth and all, as she twirled the flower in her fingers and let it plummet through the air to land on the ground by her feet. She suddenly felt potent and untamed as the sun left a rose-tinged flush in its wake.