Richard bent to kiss an averted face but his son, sinewy, turned and with wet cheeks embraced him and gave him a kiss, on the lips, passionate as a woman's. In his father's ear he moaned one word, the crucial, intelligent word: *"Why?"*

Why. It was a whistle of wind in a crack, a knife thrust, a window thrown open on emptiness. The white face was gone, the darkness was featureless. Richard had forgotten why.

Luisa Valenzuela

I'M YOUR HORSE IN THE NIGHT

The doorbell rang: three short rings and one long one. That was the signal, and I got up, annoyed and a little frightened; it could be them, and then again, maybe not; at these ungodly hours of the night it could be a trap. I opened the door expecting anything except him, face to face, at last.

He came in quickly and locked the door behind him before embracing me. So much in character, so cautious, first and foremost checking his—our—rear guard. Then he took me in his arms without saying a word, not even holding me too tight but letting all the emotions of our new encounter overflow, telling me so much by merely holding me in his arms and kissing me slowly. I think he never had much faith in words, and there he was, as silent as ever, sending me messages in the form of caresses.

We finally stepped back to look at one another from head to foot, not eye to eye, out of focus. And I was able to say Hello showing scarcely any surprise despite all those months when I had no idea where he could have been, and I was able to say

I thought you were fighting up north
I thought you'd been caught
I thought you were in hiding
I thought you'd been tortured and killed
I thought you were theorizing about the revolution in another country

Just one of many ways to tell him I'd been thinking of him, I hadn't stopped thinking of him or felt as if I'd been betrayed. And there he was, always so goddamn cautious, so much the master of his actions.

"Quiet, Chiquita. You're much better off not knowing what I've been up to."

Then he pulled out his treasures, potential clues that at the time eluded me: a bottle of cachaça and a Gal Costa record. What had he been up to in Brazil? What was he planning to do next? What had brought him back, risking his life, knowing they were after him? Then I stopped asking myself questions (quiet, Chiquita, he'd say). Come here, Chiquita, he was saying, and I chose to let myself sink into the joy of having him back again, trying not to worry. What would happen to us tomorrow, and the days that followed?

Cachaça's a good drink. It goes down and up and down all the right tracks, and then stops to warm up the corners that need it most. Gal Costa's voice is hot, she envelops us in its sound and half-dancing, half-floating, we reach the bed. We lie down and keep on staring deep into each other's eyes, continue caressing each other without allowing ourselves to give into the pure senses just yet. We continue recognizing, rediscovering each other.

Beto, I say, looking at him. I know that isn't his real name, but it's the only one I can call him out loud. He replies:

"We'll make it someday, Chiquita. but let's not talk now."

It's better that way. Better if he doesn't start talking about how we'll make it someday and ruin the wonder of what we're about to attain right now, the two of us, all alone.

"A noite eu so teu cavalo," Gal Costa suddenly sings from the record player.

"I'm your horse in the night," I translate slowly. And so as to bind him in a spell and stop him from thinking about other things:

"It's a saint's song, like in the *macumba.* Someone who's in a trance says she's the horse of the spirit who's riding her, she's his mount."

"Chiquita, you're always getting carried away with esoteric meanings and witchcraft. You know perfectly well that she isn't talking about spirits. If you're my horse in the night it's because I ride you, like this, see? . . . Like this . . . That's all."

It was so long, so deep and so insistent, so charged with affection that we ended up exhausted. I fell asleep with him still on top of me.

I'm your horse in the night.

The goddamn phone pulled me out in waves from a deep well. Making an enormous effort to wake up, I walked over to the receiver, thinking it could be Beto, sure, who was no longer by my side, sure, following his inveterate habit of running away while I'm asleep without a word about where he's gone. To protect me, he says.

From the other end of the line, a voice I thought belonged to Andrés—the one we call Andrés—began to tell me:

"They found Beto dead, floating down the river near the other bank. It looks as if they threw him alive out of a chopper. He's all bloated and decomposed after six days in the water, but I'm almost sure it's him."

"No, it can't be Beto," I shouted carelessly. Suddenly the voice no longer sounded like Andrés: it felt foreign, impersonal.

"You think so?"

"Who is this?" Only then did I think to ask. But that very moment they hung up.

Ten, fifteen minutes? How long must I have stayed there staring at the phone like an idiot until the police arrived? I didn't expect them. But, then again, how could I not? Their hands feeling me, their voices insulting and threatening, the house searched, turned inside out. But I already knew. So what did I care if they broke every breakable object and tore apart my dresser?

They wouldn't find a thing. My only real possession was a dream and they can't deprive me of my dreams just like that. My dream the night before, when Beto was there with me and we loved each other. I'd dreamed it, dreamed every bit of it, I was deeply convinced that I'd dreamed it all in the richest detail, even in full color. And dreams are none of the cops' business.

They want reality, tangible facts, the kind I couldn't even begin to give them.

Where is he, you saw him, he was here with you, where did he go? Speak up, or you'll be sorry. Let's hear you sing, bitch, we know he came to see you, where is he, where is he holed up? He's in the city, come on, spill it, we know he came to get you.

I haven't heard a word from him in months. He abandoned me, I haven't heard from him in months. He ran away, went underground. What do I know, he ran off with someone else, he's in another country. What do I know, he abandoned me, I hate him, I know nothing.

(Go ahead, burn me with your cigarettes, kick me all you wish, threaten, go ahead, stick a mouse in me so it'll eat my insides out, pull my nails out, do as you please. Would I make something up for that? Would I tell you he was here when a thousand years ago he left me forever?)

I'm not about to tell them my dreams. Why should they care? I haven't seen that so-called Beto in more than six months, and I loved him. The man simply vanished. I only run into him in my dreams, and they're bad dreams that often become nightmares.

Beto, you know now, if it's true that they killed you, or wherever you may be, Beto, I'm your horse in the night and you can inhabit me whenever you wish, even if I'm behind bars. Beto, now that I'm in jail I know that I dreamed you that night; it was just a dream. And if by some wild chance there's a Gal Costa record and a half-empty bottle of cachaça in my house, I hope they'll forgive me: I will them out of existence.

Translated from the Spanish by Deborah Bonner

Luisa Valenzuela

Who, Me a Bum?

(ARGENTINA)

When I'm in front of my bowl of lentils and I count them one by one, I tell myself that we've seen better days—right, kid? And I pat myself on the shoulder a bit, gently of course, not like before when a hearty slap on the back didn't bother me any. Not now though, the old mechanism is breaking down what with food being so scarce. Get out of here, they shout at me, you have to make room for somebody else, and I put my violin in its case, that is to say I tuck my head between my shoulders—the only thing that belongs to me—and go to the subway station to get warm.

There's a great ruckus in the station and, remembering the old saying that there's much to be gained from confusion, I take advantage of it to slip in free through the entrance for those with commuter tickets. Nobody says a word to me, they're all yelling and running around. Somebody complains:

"Damn it, he would choose this time of day to jump under the train, disgraceful, committing suicide when everybody's on the way to work, no one has the right to do that, what's the boss going to say, you've always got some excuse he's going to say, why did that guy have to choose my train, I'll be late and what can I say, it's all that imbecile's fault."

I immediately identify, but I'd be hard put to tell with which of the two: the guy that's complaining or the suicide. A few years ago I'd have identified with the grouch, but now it's with the suicide. Perhaps I'm wrong. Perhaps I should have committed suicide when I was called teacher and wore a suit and tie and was eager to get to the classroom on time, whereas now I can allow myself the luxury of complaining since I've nothing to lose. Not any more. When you're risking something your protest is weaker, it becomes hollow and you don't allow yourself to take it too seriously for fear it might boomerang, as everyone knows. But now—why not?—a punch in the nose for the sake of protest might do me some good since I was such a coward in the past. Protesting would be like being born again, I'd be again on the alert, so here I go:

A suicide, gentlemen? What a disgrace, what a scandal. He has no consideration for those of us who have to be at work on time. He must have been somebody who didn't know what it was like to work, to have to earn a living by the sweat of one's brow. A brow that's none too noble or full of ideas but

nevertheless—beg your pardon, I shouldn't digress. A suicide, gentlemen, ladies—you women who must be working in this time of starvation when a husband's salary isn't enough to pay for food. And now the subways aren't running and we must be above ground and find some other means of transportation, and so we lose more time and money. A suicide who doesn't appreciate the harm he's doing us by choosing this early morning hour instead of throwing himself under a train at ten at night, say, when only idlers are riding the subway. And all that just to call attention to himself.

"And what do you think you're doing? Stop yelling—you're under arrest."

"I was protesting like a good citizen—"

"Yeah, yeah."

Obviously, protesting isn't for me. But here behind bars I at least have my own place and it's not as cold as they say. I've already written my name on the wall and an almost illegible comment on the police in general and Corporal Figueras in particular. Apart from that, I can only note that the shouting bothers me a lot—the moaning and groaning and those swear words in the night when one doesn't know where they come from or why.

In the past I was a Spanish teacher in high school and so I know what I'm saying, or rather I know how to say what I'm saying. The screams in the night wake me up, and I feel the same healthy indignation as the man who protested the suicide in the subway. I want to protest now too, but my mind is distracted by these grotesque drunks who share my lodgings but not my humiliation. The cries send shivers up my spine every night and it's getting worse; I demand to be transferred to a penal institution like everybody else. Get me out of this infernal police station.

They're finally letting me go. Yes. They've pushed me out in the street: good-by to food that's awful but regular, good-by to a flea-ridden blanket but a blanket nonetheless. Back to seeing where I can get a little dough for eats, back to the daily grind, to this city that's more and more impossible, where I can't even get in a little morning snooze because the 8:37 A.M. suicide comes then and interferes with my rest.

Translated from the Spanish by Helen Lane

LUISA VALENZUELA BIOGRAPHY

Luisa Valenzuela (born 1938) is an Argentine writer of both fiction and journalistic works. She is among her nation's most significant writers, best known for the style of writing that blends magical and fantastic elements into prose known as magical realism, a style often associated with Latin-American writers such as Gabriel García Marquez and Julio Cortazar. Valenzuela is also one of the most widely translated female South American writers. As Naomi Lindstrom wrote in *World Literature Today,* Valenzuela "has created numerous narratives in which authoritarian rule in society is mirrored by patriarchal domination in relations between men and women."

Luisa Valenzuela was born November 26, 1938, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, to parents Pablo Francisco Valenzuela, a physician, and Luisa Mercedes Levinson, a writer of note in Argentina. Valenzuela, an insatiable reader since childhood, attended a British school in her youth.

Began Journalism Career as a Teen

Given her parents' place in society and the family's connections with academics, Valenzuela was able to meet writers such as as Jorge Luis Borges, Ernesto Sabato, and Peyrou in her youth. Her parents were a formative influence: "As a child I thought writing was dreary, drab, but they loved it," recalled Valenzuela in *Americas.* "They could be quite obnoxious but funny. That impressed me that writing was more lively than one would think." While she originally hoped to become a painter or a mathematician, writing eventually won out over those early career aspirations.

Valenzuela's first journalistic work appeared in magazines including *Esto Es, Atlantida, Quince Abriles,* and *El Hogar* while she was still in her teens. Her first short story, "Ese Canto," was published in 1956. Valenzuela also worked for a time at the Biblioteca Nacional, where Borges was the library's director. She went on to earn a bachelor of arts degree from the University of Buenos Aires.

In 1958 Valenzuela married Theodore Marjak, a French merchant marine and moved with her husband to Normandy, where her daughter, Anna-Lisa, was born. It was while living in France that Valenzuela wrote her first novel, published in 1966 as *Hay que sonreir* (published in English as *Clara),* which she wrote while her daughter was napping. In a review of the book, a reviewer for *Publishers Weekly* called the tale a chronicle of "the bizarre, brutal existence of characters on the fringes" and a "harsh, provoking yet graceful tale of exploitation."

Divorcing her husband after five years of marriage, Valenzuela moved to Paris and began working as a writer for Radio Television Française. She returned to Buenos Aires in 1961 and worked as an editor at *La Nacion,* the Buenos Aires newspaper, as editor of the Sunday supplement from 1964 to 1972. "I learned a lot from journalism because when I began to work for the supplement to *La Nacion* I stayed there for nine years," Valenzuela commented in an interview with *Matrix.* "I had a boss, Ambrosio Vecino, who was a literary man and was very keen on style. He taught me how to express ideas in a very concise way." Journalism "allows for a horizontal view of facts, as opposed to the vertical, in-depth, literary vision," she went on, adding: "I still appreciate journalism because I'm so interested in the world, and there are many issues that make me want to express an opinion, so I still use journalism as a tool and write columns and keep my fiction free of 'messages.'"

Fellowship and Grant Allowed for Travel

A collection of short stories titled *Los hereticos* was published in 1967. Valenzuela was subsequently awarded a Fulbright grant in 1969 that allowed her to participate in the International Writers Program at the University of Iowa. The result of this fellowship award was the novel *El gato eficaz,* which was published in 1972 and translated as *Cat-o-Nine-Deaths*.

Valenzuela began her freelance journalism career and started lecturing about writing in 1970. Over the course of the next two years she traveled to Barcelona, Paris, and Mexico on a grant from the National Arts Foundation of Argentina. Her journalistic work appeared in publications in the United States, Mexico, France, and Spain, as well as in various publications based in Buenos Aires.

These publications included *La Nacion, New York Review of Books, Vogue,* and the New York-based *Village Voice.*

Left Argentina

Returning to Buenos Aires in 1974, Valenzuela discovered that the political situation in Argentina following the death of Juan Peron had degenerated into a paramilitary dictatorship rife with violence and repression. Between 1976 and 1983 some 20,000 Argentine citizens "disappeared." Continuing to work as an editor, Valenzuela also found fictional inspiration in the political regime under which she now found herself living, resulting in another short story collection, *Aqui pasan cosas raras,* published in 1975. Valenzuela had been teaching at Columbia University periodically since 1973; in 1979 she was offered a writer-in-residence position and decided to move to the United States to escape the political repression. "I decided to leave in order not to fall into self-censorship," she told a contributor to *Belles Lettres.* "Exile may be devastating, but perspective and separation sharpen the aim." At Columbia University she became a teacher in the school's writing division from 1980 to 1983, the year she was awarded a Guggenheim fellowship.

Her fellowship allowed Valenzuela to move across town to New York University, where she was appointed visiting professor in 1985. She held that post until 1990, traveled frequently to lecture, and was a guest speaker at writing conferences in locations throughout the world, including the Americas, Israel, and Australia.

Political Repression Informed Fiction

Valenzuela became a fellow at the New York Institute for the Humanities in 1982 and belonged to the Freedom to Write committee of PEN's American Center. Her concerns with human rights issues prompted her to join Amnesty International.

As an essayist noted in the *Dictionary of Hispanic Biography,* Valenzuela's work continues to revolve around themes of politics and women's issues. Also rooted within her work is the violence and suffering experienced in many Latin American countries under authoritarian regimes. In her novel *Cola de lagartija*---translated as *The Lizard's Tail*- --the protagonist, a cruel sorcerer, is based on Jose Lopez Rega, Isabel Peron's Minister of Social Welfare.

Z. Nelly Martinez, writing in *World Literature Today,* observed that Valenzuela's "main pre-occupation throughout the years has been the repressive character of our primarily masculinist Western culture. Thus the fate of women . . . as well as that of all marginalized peoples, is at the center of the fictional realms she creates." Martinez maintained that through the power of language

Valenzuela "has obsessively defied the established order," be it masculine, political, or religious, "with her own fictional practice."

"Another salient feature of Valenzuela's style is her approach to language as not only the means of conveying a theme, but also as the object of the story," added an essayist in *Feminist Writers.* For Valenzuela, "Language is supple and malleable, its purpose can be different for different people, and the denial of access to its multiple ranges of applications is seen as another form of oppression. Valenzuela contends that, as a writer, she is always discovering new meanings to words and that she hopes to unlock their secrets each time she endeavors to write something new."

Eventual Return to Argentina

With democracy restored to Argentina in April of 1989 Valenzuela returned to Buenos Aires. Returning on occasion to New York City, she continued to write prolifically, as evidenced by the publication of the novels *Novela negra con argentinos*-- -translated as *Black Novel (with Argentines)*---and *La travesia* as well as the 1990 short-story collection *Realidad nacional desde la cama (Bedside Manners).* A *Publishers Weekly* contributor, in a review of *Black Novel (with Argentines),* dubbed the work "powerful, unusual and unsettling." Reviewing 2001's *La travesia,* Lindstrom described the novel as, while "not the most strikingly innovative of Valenzuela's fictions," nonetheless a book with "a good dose of social satire, a tricky and fast-paced plot whose diverse strands are well coordinated, and a cast of memorably weird secondary characters."

Valenzuela's works have been translated into English and have appeared in anthologies. Among the published collections to appear in translation is *Strange Things Happen Here: Twenty-Six Short Stories and a Novel* (1979), which includes the novel *Como en la guerra* (*He Who Searches*) as well as stories from *Aqui pasan cosas raras.* Among her best known works in translation are *Other Weapons, The Lizard's Tail, Black Novel (with Argentines),* and *Bedside Manners.* Much of her work has been published in translation outside the Americas, including Japan, and her books can be found in French, German, and Portuguese translations, leading to her acclaim as the most widely translated of the South American female authors.

"Valenzuela could be placed into the post-boom generation of Latin American writers, following on the heals [sic] of the explosion of popularity of authors who enjoyed a widely translated readership in Europe and North America," concluded the *Feminist Writers* essayist. "She is emphatic, however, that the Latin American boom was a sexist phenomenon, since all the writers

recognized within that group were men, and since women whose writing was of comparable quality were virtually ignored."