

**MEMORIA DEL SILENCIO EN EL PAÍS DE LA ÉTERNA PRIMAVERA  
(MEMORY OF SILENCE IN THE LAND OF ETERNAL SPRING)  
BY LINDA GIRON**

**(pgs. 6 - 8)**

**VIEJO BOLO #3.** Lupita la linda [the beautiful], the bride-to-be.

**VIEJO BOLO #1.** Or, would luck have it that you left Fernando at the altar to marry me?

**LUPITA.** *Laughing.* ¡Pícaros! [Rascals!]

**VIEJO BOLO #1.** But am I right?

**LUPITA.** ¡Claro qué no! [Of course not!]

**ALL VIEJOS.** ¡Ay Diós!

**LUPITA.** But you are all invited to the wedding!

**ALL VIEJOS.** The whole pueblo [town] is invited!

**LUPITA.** Pero don't you come borrachos [wasted]. ¡La boda va ser bien finita! [The wedding is going to be very refined!]

**VIEJO BOLO #1.** ¡Ay Diós! Pero, Lupita, cerveza [beer] is our passion!

**VIEJO BOLO #2.** A borracho without chicha [alcoholic corn drink]...

**VIEJO BOLO #3.** Is like a poet without poetry!

**VIEJO BOLO #2.** And a poet without poetry...

**VIEJO BOLO #1.** Is just a sad, lonely man.

**VIEJO BOLO #3.** The ghosts would smell our tears all the way from Petén!

**VIEJO BOLO #2.** And no one likes ghosts at their boda.

**MARI.** Ghosts aren't real.

**VIEJO BOLO #1.** Don't let them hear you say that! There are many ghosts in these parts...

**MARI.** How many?

**ALL VIEJOS.** Ah...

**VIEJO BOLO #1.** More than you can count...

**MARI.** Oh really?

**VIEJO BOLO #2.** This does not scare you? *MARI shakes her head.* ¿Cómo te llamas, niña?  
[What is your name, girl?]

**MARI.** Mari.

**VIEJO BOLO #3.** ¿Mari como María?

**VIEJO BOLO #2.** ¿O, Maricela?

**VIEJO BOLO #3.** ¿Marichuy?

**MARI.** No, just Mari.

**ALL VIEJOS.** Sólo Mari... [Just Mari...]

**LUPITA.** Mari is my primita [little cousin] from Jutiapa.

**ALL VIEJOS.** ¡Jutiapa!

**LUPITA.** But we really should go...

**VIEJO BOLO #2.** Jutiapa is a long ways from here!

**VIEJO BOLO #1.** And you have never seen a ghost in Jutiapa, Mari?

**MARI.** No.

**ALL VIEJOS.** *Turning to each other knowingly.* Ah...

**LUPITA.** Mari! We really should go. *She grabs Mari to leave.*

**MARI.** Wait! ...Are there really ghosts here?

**VIEJO BOLO #3.** ¡Claro que sí! [Of course!]

**VIEJO BOLO #1.** They sleep in the mountains...

**VIEJO BOLO #2.** Deep en el bosque [in the forest]...

**LUPITA.** Those are only legends.

**MARI.** What do they look like?

**VIEJO BOLO #1.** They are just like you and I!

**VIEJO BOLO #2.** Except they speak in whistles like the birds.

**VIEJO BOLO #3.** Or the chirps of a cricket...

**VIEJO BOLO #2.** Y... if you sing the right tune they will speak with you too.

**LUPITA.** I'm leaving, Mari!

**MARI.** What's the song?

**VIEJO BOLO #3.** It is different for everyone.

**MARI.** How do you know?

**ALL VIEJOS.** You learn it the day find your truest tristeza [sorrow].

**(pgs. 13-19)**

**PACO.** *Beat.* You see those rosas, Mari?

**MARI.** Sí.

**PACO.** Years ago, your great grandfather, Papa Carlos, built this little house, piedra a piedra, and planted this garden for your great-grandmother. One day, when your great-grandmother left to go work at the fincas, picking maíz, café, plátano, todo eso... Papa Carlos stayed home and planted a tiny little bush of pink roses. Pink was her favorite color. Filled with excitement, Papa Carlos forgot every chore for the day. Instead he sits on the bench and waits. He waits and waits and waits— all day. Until, finally la mamita, comes home! And when she sees those roses...

**MAMA CHELO.** ¡Aaaay, qué feas! ¡¿Santo Dios, Carlos, que hiciste?! [How ugly! Saintly God, what have you done?!] Mirá, these leaves have more wrinkles than my face, more thorns than petals and that ugly pink!

**PAPA CARLOS.** ¡Sí! Pink to match the house!

**MAMA CHELO.** Ah yes our house that is the color of stomach medicine. Nuestra casita y rositas de *Pepto Bismol!* [Our little house and roses the color of Pepto Bismol!]

**PACO.** Then my grandfather, con la cara bien roja [with his face very red] says to her:

**PAPA CARLOS.** Pero, mi'amor, they said this type of rose could outlive me—!

**MAMA CHELO.** ¡¿Y eso qué?! [What of that?!] What is the point if we have the ugliest roses on the street? Ah, I see it now! We will be winners of “El Jardín Más Horrible” [The Ugliest Garden] forever!

**PAPA CARLOS.** ¡Ay no, amor! What I mean is... they will live forever to be a reminder of my love for you long after I am gone!

**PACO.** ...A few years later la mamita grew sick. All those pesticides from the working in those fincas took to her lungs. Y pues when mamita Chelo passed away... Papá Carlos, con una tristeza *tan profunda* [with a sadness so profound], tried tearing out all the roses! But, over the years, the roses had grown so thick and strong that he couldn't touch them without catching a handful of thorns. So they stayed. Then, after he passed estas rositas refused to die. Not even the war could touch them...

**MARI.** The war?

**PACO.** Si. La guerra civil. I was a little older than you when it began. Y for thirty-five o thirty-six years, el gobierno was led by dictadores militares. Bad men who stole acres of land from the people, selling the land to fruit companies from the north. So, el gente rebelled. I had friends fighting in guerilla forces with nothing more that a few shotguns, rocks and sticks. It worked for a time. Until they started burning acres of land—la tierra arrasada [scorching of the earth] they called it—it tore apart hundreds of pueblos from Ixtahuacán to Huehuetenango, Xococ... even here. So much of the land was scorched. But by some miracle, la mamita’s roses survived the fires, un poco tostaditas, of course. But here they stand...

**MARI.** How?

**PACO.** Love is like sunlight.

**MARI.** So, Papa Carlos...?

**PACO.** Si. After la mamita, he gave all his love to those rositas. *Beat.* And Irma... she is like those roses. *He chuckles.* Years ago, my father warned me, “Paquito, nunca te enamores de una mujer de ojos verdes! [never fall in love with a green-eyed woman!] She will leave you nothing but heartache.” But, I couldn’t resist! ‘Era una *belleza!* [She was a beauty!] She still is. Solo que, la vida [Except life] ...the war especially, it... yo creo que le pasaron unas cosas [I believe some things happened]... pero she won’t say anything about it, even to me. Now that she is older, she... pues, no sé, people change... *Beat.* Perdonáme, Mari, you’ve already lost half the day hearing me go on about silly roses... Lupita can’t go without her wedding dress! *IRMA enters.*

**IRMA.** Where is it?

**PACO.** Where is what, my love?

**IRMA.** *She throws Lupita’s dress fabrics to the ground.* La caja... de mi mamá [my mother’s box]... where is it?

**PACO.** *To Mari.* Little mouse, you better go. *Taking the fabrics.* Take these to Lupita...

**MARI.** But—

**IRMA.** Mi caja! [My box!] / Where is it?!

**PACO.** Mari, go! *MARI rushes off.* / Shh... mi’amor relax. Maybe, you just lost it in your nose... ‘ira, you can fit papayas in those nostrils!

**IRMA.** No, this isn't a joke! Her box is gone! It's all my fault, I took it and then... I don't know I can't remember!

**PACO.** Then let's sit and try to remember together, there's no point having a big panic, no?

**IRMA.** ¡No! ¡No puedo hallarla, por ningún lado! [No! I can't find it anywhere!] What if... what if somebody stole it? Voy a llamar la policía. [I'm going to call the police.]

**PACO.** ¡Irma, no! Stop, por favor. Calmáte. [Please, calm down.] Look at me. Esa caja no existe, [That box doesn't exist] it was lost / years ago; it's been gone—

**IRMA.** No! / No. It is not gone. It cannot be gone!

**PACO.** Irma, mi'amor, you told me yourself, you haven't seen it since the war.

**IRMA.** War? No... no, I don't remember. No! Son mentiras. [They're lies.] You're lying!

**PACO.** I would never lie to you, Irmita.

**IRMA.** No! I think you stole it! ¡Ladrón! [Thief!] Give me my box—!

**PACO.** Irmita, I did not steal it—during the war, Irmita, come, try to remember—

**IRMA.** No! Let go of me! You stole it— give it back! Please! It's my mother's! Please, it's all I have left—Let go!!

**PACO.** Irmita, I never stole—!

**IRMA.** Liar! Let go of me! *IRMA pushes PACO, hard. Flashback. A doctor's office. The scene shift is cold and intrusive. IRMA stares out a window. PACO recovers.*

**PACO.** Irma, please... *A doctor enters.*

**DOCTOR.** Okay, Señor Francisco, if you can sign this for me please.

**PACO.** Claro.

**DOCTOR.** Gracias. Bueno, Señor Francisco, after what you have told me about Señora Irma. Given the regularity of these panic attacks, I believe perhaps Irma may be dealing with a mild form of *TEPT*... —Are you familiar with this term, Señor Francisco?

**PACO.** ...No.

**DOCTOR.** El trastorno por estrés postraumático, o TEPT [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD], is a mental disorder commonly found in soldados after war or any individual who has experienced un evento traumático [a traumatic event]—puede ser un asalto sexual [could be sexual assault], near death experiences, war... y muchas veces las memorias [and many times the memories] or thoughts of these events and their traumas can trigger panic attacks. ¿Si entendés? [You understand?]

**PACO.** Sí, my wife— Irma, she... her family was from Río Negro.

**DOCTOR.** I'm sorry.

**IRMA.** Sorry for what?

**DOCTOR.** Disculpe Señora. I remember the reports from Río Negro. After the massacre, they say there are still many families missing. It must have been very traumatic. *IRMA continues to stare out the window in silence. Beat.* It's all right if you don't want to talk about it.

**PACO.** ...So, you're saying this post-traumatic stress is also making Irma lose her memory?

**DOCTOR.** Well, yes and no. The panic attacks Irma experiences are a common symptom of *TEPT*. Pero, la pérdida de memoria [but, her loss of memory], absent-mindedness, these are likely early symptoms of *demencia* or Alzheimer's—which I believe could be linked to her *TEPT*.

**PACO.** So she has Alzheimer's?

**DOCTOR.** Y *TEPT*. Sí. *Paco turns to Irma who has not once detached herself from the window.*

**PACO.** But you have medicine, no? A cure?

**DOCTOR.** I am afraid not, Señor. *Silence.*

**PACO.** ¿Irma? ¿Mi' amor?

**DOCTOR.** This will be a difficult adjustment for you both... Si me permiten [If you'll allow me], I can talk about some treatment options—

**IRMA.** We don't need it. Thank you, doctor. Paco, ya nos vamos. [Paco, we're leaving.]

**DOCTOR.** Señora—

**PACO.** Irma—

**IRMA.** Paco, no te estoy pidiendo. [Paco, I'm not asking.] We are leaving.

**PACO.** *He leans in to hold her hand.* Irma, maybe we should listen—

**IRMA.** No, Paco, ¡ya terminamos aquí! Déjame ir!! [We're done here! Let me go!]

**PACO.** Okay. Okay, mi'amor, we are leaving.

**DOCTOR.** Respectfully, Señor, her infrequent episodes may not raise concern now but without an early treatment it is likely she is only going to get worse and faster than you expect—

**PACO.** Thank you Doctor, but she is my wife, I will take care of her however she sees fit. Muchas gracias. *Doctor exits. As Paco holds Irma, the scene restores itself to the present.*

**PACO.** Irmita, escucháme [listen to me], la mamita's jewelry box is gone. Do you remember? You lost it during the war, después de que la tierra fue arrasada [after they scorched our lands], try to remember...

**IRMA.** *Backing away further.* No...

**PACO.** Don't worry Irmita... This box, the gold, the money— it is all just chicle [bubble gum] money! Irma... *Beat. Irma is distant. Beat. Paco sits. Beat. Irmita, mi'amor? Come here. Sit. See how the sun sets... Mirá, como tomatío! The more ripe it is, the sweeter its light. Laughs. He keeps his gaze towards the sun. Irma is remembering... Irma then sees Paco and smacks him with a rag. ¡Ay, Irma!*

**IRMA.** ¿Cómo qué “Ay, Irma?” [What do you mean, “Ay Irma?”] What are you doing sitting around? Mirá, que finito, bien sentadito allí. [Look, how luxurious you are, sitting so cozily there.] Is that all men are good for? Sitting around, como huevón [like a big lazy egg], saving the

world with pensamientos [musings] and pretty words? Do something useful. Wipe up this chicken blood. *Irma hands him the rag and exits back into the house. Paco thinks to respond. Instead he lets out a small, doleful chuckle...*

(pgs. 37-39)

**IRMA.** Pues, al principio, todo estaba tranquilo [Well, in the begin, everything was calm]... but then it happened, just like they warned us. Military men started creeping into our village. They started shooting guns—y la gente [and the people], all the people were fleeing their houses—llevando cosas [taking things], running around haciendo bulla en la calle [causing commotion in the streets]... I tried to take some things—mamita's jewelry box and pictures. And I went to find my sister, Elia. She wasn't in her room, she wasn't outside. Así que, yo corrí [So then, I ran], I ran across the pueblo when a soldier took my arm. They were taking everyone into the church for some kind of town meeting. That's where I found her.

**DOCTOR.** She was alone?

**PACO.** Sí. I came home después del trabajo. I ran in, almost breaking the door because I hear these screams coming from inside. I was afraid...

**IRMA.** I was so afraid of losing her again. So I grabbed Elia's hand. But then all the lights went out... it was black. Someone screamed, "The doors are locked!" So the people panicked. Empezaron a quebrar todo [They started to break everything]—they broke chairs into windows trying to escape... Then Elia let go of my hand. I tried calling out for her, but the crickets! The grillos were always so loud in Quiche and that night it was like they were screaming. And it was so dark... you couldn't see anything except black smoke and a small orange glow... and the floor... It was... it glittered. I couldn't take my eyes off the floor!

**DOCTOR.** She was on the floor.

**PACO.** Sí, I found her laying there, temblando [trembling].

**IRMA.** ...I felt myself shaking. I must have been dreaming because I kept seeing estrellitas scattered over the tile. My feet wanted to follow the little stars... and they lead me to a door. All around people kept pushing violently. Y de repente, alguien me empujó [And suddenly, someone pushed me] and I fell hard into the door, it swung open and I fell right down, hitting every little star on the floor. And then they were all over my face y mis manos: they glittered, como la

gasolina... I have to feel my way around because it's so dark. It must have been a bathroom. There was a sink and a small window... I was going to wait for Elia there but the crickets were screaming louder! Elia hates loud places. She's a quiet girl; con una voz tan tranquila como la brisa. That breeze... someone left the window open. Tal vez Elia se fue por ahí! [Maybe Elia escaped there!] It was quiet outside. So, I climbed out and I went as far away from the screams because that's where she would be...

**PACO.** And she's screaming all to herself, her arms folded in, just laying... And of course, being the way she is, she doesn't want the family noticing something wrong with her. Pero me da miedo, Señor. [But it scares me, Sir.]

**DOCTOR.** Usually caregivers are able to find ways to snap their patients back reality. Oftentimes a gesture or loud noise can shake them back.

**PACO.** Yes, sometimes that works. Not always. Recently, it has gotten harder to bring her back. Y cada vez [And everytime], I'm scared that I'll lose her for good—that she is not going to come back... What do I do then?

**DOCTOR.** Well, we wait.

**IRMA.** ...And I kept waiting for her. I thought, tal vez [maybe]... Elia followed the stars, too. I waited for the orange to fade away. I waited for the crickets to stop screaming...

**PACO.** ¿Perdón? [Excuse me?] You just want me to wait? I thought you had some treatment to offer! My wife, she can't keep fading away from me! My niece's wedding is in a week—!

**DOCTOR.** Señor, your wife is approaching the late stages of Alzheimer's. The treatment we have to offer are only most effective for early prevention, even then, it's not a cure. It only delays the inevitable.

**IRMA.** ...I waited until the smoke lifted and until each feather of ash settled on the bones of our church. But... maybe, Elia didn't follow the same stars I did. Tal vez seguía otras estrellas [maybe she followed different stars] and they took her elsewhere, far away from our pueblito destruido, más lejos de las memorias del silencio [from our destroyed little town, even further than the memories of silence]...

**PACO.** What are you saying?

**DOCTOR.** I'm saying, the best you can do is to keep her comfortable and enjoy however many lucid days you have left with your wife. What do you think?

**PACO.** I... *The doctor exits. The scene restores into the inevitable present.*

**IRMA.** What do you think?

**PACO.** What?

**IRMA.** Do you think she followed the right stars? Yo creo que sí. [I think so.]

**(pgs. 42-46)**

*1982. Two days after the military attack on a village that is now unnamed. The air is purple with the hue of memory. It is raining. Irma enters slowly. There is a skeleton man tied to a post.*

**EL ESQUELETO.** I heard them...

**IRMA.** Who? *He turns, indicating the pueblo's destruction.* Oh...

**EL ESQUELETO.** All through the night... they've looted our homes, slaughtered the cattle, everything! Y la escuelita [And the our little school], our farmlands, the church, they have burned it all. Todo negro, negro y quemado [Everything black, black and burnt]... *Beat.* Can you help me, Irma? Untie me please? *IRMA walks toward him.* Sorry... I must smell like a burnt chicken now.

**IRMA.** Está bien.

**EL ESQUELETO.** Los soldados [The soldiers] forgot about me and took everyone else inside the church. Did you see?

**IRMA.** Yes.

**EL ESQUELETO.** Well then, you know what they did after that... to everyone in the village—except you, you got away!

**IRMA.** Sí.

**EL ESQUELETO.** Buena suerte. [Good luck] And me... They just left me here! *Laughs.* I cannot rest here! *IRMA finishes untying him. He gets up and walks towards the edge of Río Negro.* Thank you for helping me, Irma.

**IRMA.** What will you do now?

**EL ESQUELETO.** ¡Púchica! No sé... maybe I will find somewhere to rest. Would you like to come with me? We can find a safe place for you before I rest.

**IRMA.** Gracias... pero me voy a quedar aquí, just for a little while. If the roses survived the fires, maybe I can find some things to take with me.

**EL ESQUELETO.** Very well, pero tené cuidado [but be careful], Irma. Stay far from the roads. The trees have told me, for they have seen. There is no safety, except in the shadows. *He exits. IRMA searches. Just then, noises approach. IRMA hides underneath the bush. CARLOS enters, a rifle slung over his shoulder. He searches the kitchen, taking anything of value. He finds la mamita's box. IRMA watches through a window as he takes the small box and begins to open it. She gasps. CARLOS hears and goes out the front porch in search of her. Lifting the branch of roses with the rifle—*

**CARLOS.** Irma?

**IRMA.** Carlos...

**CARLOS.** You're alive!

**IRMA.** I am. So are you... *He nods.* Where did you get that gun?

**CARLOS.** *Lying.* Oh... I found it. What are you still doing here? The soldiers will find you.

**IRMA.** I came back to find mother's box... You found it. *CARLOS nods, hands it to her.* And well, I thought I'd look for some clothes, anything...

**CARLOS.** *Beat.* Where will you go?

**IRMA.** No sé. I heard stories, from other villagers. They fled their pueblo over las montañas, through the forest until they found somewhere safe. Some went as far as México.

**CARLOS.** Is there really somewhere safe?

**IRMA.** I don't know, but we have to go find it.

**CARLOS.** If you don't? *Beat.* Many people die in the forest—hay animales... soldiers are still out there looking for survivors.

**IRMA.** Then we'll be smarter than them. Here. *Holding out a large blanket.* It's burned on one side, but we can use it for shelter. There really isn't anything left— Carlos, take it. *He shakes his head.*

**CARLOS.** I'm not going.

**IRMA.** What do you mean?

**CARLOS.** I can't. *Beat.* My father, he's... you know him.

**IRMA.** Sí pero, you're not him.

**CARLOS.** Yo sé, but he supports the military, Rios Montt is like a compadre... Even if I tried to go against him—

**IRMA.** But you said you didn't support any of it! You said that you would fight!

**CARLOS.** I don't! I just— It's just... He gave me a choice, Irma. A gun or a bullet.

**IRMA.** *Backing away.* What? So now you're—what? You're one of *them* now?

**CARLOS.** No, I'm not! I was just trying to stay alive, Irma. Like you. I'm not actually—

**IRMA.** How do I know that?

**CARLOS.** I'm not going to hurt you, Irma. I would never. You know that! —Mira, we're alive and maybe... If you stay, I can talk to my father! We can keep you safe, you hardly look—

**IRMA.** Look what? You were going to say it, weren't you? I told you never to use that word!

**CARLOS.** I'm sorry.

**IRMA.** Are you? Is that why you made this... arreglo [arrangement].

**CARLOS.** ¿Qué? Arrangement? What arrangement are you talking about?

**IRMA.** This. You, that gun, your devil of a father—

**CARLOS.** That doesn't mean anything!

**IRMA.** It doesn't mean anything? You knew they were going to raid our village. Didn't you? How long?!

**CARLOS.** It doesn't matter, Irma, I can keep you safe!

**IRMA.** Where is my father, Carlos? *Beat.* You saw my father didn't you? Answer me!

**CARLOS.** Mirá, Irma—

**IRMA.** And my mother? What? *Beat.* Are you going to tell me that my parents didn't matter enough to keep them safe too? What happened to my parents, Carlos?

**CARLOS.** You don't want to know.

**IRMA.** What happened to my parents, Carlos? Or are you too much a coward to tell me you gunned them down— And Elia? Elia was eleven! You knew Elia, my own sister!!

**CARLOS.** I didn't— not her. She wasn't there. I didn't see her.

**IRMA.** But you saw my parents. *He nods.* You saw them die. *Beat.* You're responsible for killing them.

**CARLOS.** They forced us—

**IRMA.** Murderer.

**CARLOS.** I was only trying to stay alive—!

**IRMA.** My father was right about you. You're worse than a rat. You're sick! Desgraciado [Degenerate]!

**CARLOS.** Irma, you don't understand—!

**IRMA.** ¡Sos pura porquería [You're pure shit]! You actually think I would forgive you? What? Because you had no choice? *Beat.* Cobarde. [Coward.]

**CARLOS.** Don't call me that.

**IRMA.** You, less than human, ¡basura inmunda—! [Filthy shit!]

**CARLOS.** *He raises the rifle.* Watch your mouth.

**IRMA.** *Laughs.* Or what? You'll shoot? ¿Haber si tenés huevos para matarme? [Let's see, do you even have the balls to kill me?] Go ahead. ¡Dispará, cobarde! *Elia appears behind Irma.* Dispará—! [Shoot!]

**ELIA.** Irma?

**IRMA.** Eli—?! *Gunshot. Blackout.*