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Managua 4:30 P.M. · Richard Elman

IN MANAGUA, at the cat house *El Abrujo*, Sophy, a young whore told me, "I should get one of those pallet mattresses such as the peddlars sell and the people use. Then I could take my business to the soldiers."

She was pale and pretty, with dark hair, doll-like, and small-breasted; and she was very angry she wasn't seeing any of her best customers any more. She said she had been used by some of Managua's leading doctors, engineers, and military men, with and without her good friend Alma, the fake blonde; and she truly resented the disuse to which she had been put of late by the curfew, the state of martial law, and the contact bombs at night.

Because I did not wish to sleep with her, and had only given her 40 *cordobas* as a tip for talking to me, she claimed she was also very very hungry and would talk much better in the Hotel Incontinental dining room.

"I don't wish to feed you," I said.

"Why not?" She wiggled her little hips, and there were two blush marks on her pale smooth waxy cheeks. "I am very hungry."

"Because you are not my type."

"Then you would like my friend the *rubia*," Sophy said, "Alma . . ."

"I don't think so. Not now . . ."

Sophy glanced at me suspiciously. The truth was I had no desire, and she was too petite, too child-like, and cold. I knew she would be frightened of me.

Sophy said, "A doctor examined my pussy the day of Matagalpa and I was declared healthy . . ."

"Bravo," I said. "It is not that."

Then she said all the foreign press who had come to Nicaragua to cover this war were "*maricones*" ("sissies") and the women reporters were all "*bichos*" ("bitches, dykes"). She also said she was very good and I would see if only I would let her come with me, or we would do it right here, with Alma, who was a little bit taller than she was and had nipples "like *genipes*" that I would surely like to take into my mouth and suck.

The image of those little pink sweet fruits hardened me a moment, and then I drifted off into my own numb self-righteousness again: I just couldn't go with Sophy, even though I knew she was very hungry. It would be like talking dirty with my daughter: embarrassing, funny . . .

Sophy's face turned solemn. She wondered why I had come to Nicaragua.

"To learn about the people," I said, "and the war . . ."

"You did not come to make *chi chi*?" she asked, peevishly.

"Really it doesn't matter," I assured her. "That sort of thing is everywhere and when one wants to have it one can have it easily. I don't wish to take your time. But I did wish to talk . . ."

“To talk of what?”

“About your customers,” I said, and lied a little, in addition: “I heard you were the fanciest whore in all of Managua . . . and the best . . . for a story I would even pay you . . .”

“*Si claro*,” she went.

Nodding slowly with her small perfect oval face, she leaned toward me then, and spoke with an ever-increasing earnestness: “I will tell you a story. People say the Somozas are bad. They are only saying what they heard others say. I know . . .”

“Before the battles I used to go dancing every night in the week when I wasn’t working with my boy friend at the Frisco Disco . . .”

“You know the place? It was not too far from here in Managua only they burned it down, *los rebeldes*, because it was owned by some Somoza people.”

Sophy pronounced her *zs* softly, like *ths*, as Spaniards do, and every time she waited to see if I would notice how classy she sounded.

Then she said, “The brother of General Nemesis from Masaya he owned it and he had lived in your country and that is why Norberto called it Frisco Disco . . .”

“That was a very nice place, with a lotta lights and good music, and all the best people would come there. Somotha’s son, *El Mayor*, Tachito, he would come there, too, and once they said Bianca Jagger of the Rolling Stones when she came to visit with her family here but I didn’t see her and I don’t know . . .”

“So one night I am just there with Rudolfo my boy friend and we are both very tired because we have been fucking all the time, all night long and all day, too, on this big holiday in Holy Week, and was a lot of work, you know, and we just wanted to take it easy and dance, you know . . .”

She grinned at me for approval. When I grinned back she took one of my cigarettes off the end table, lit up, and went on.

Sophy said, “In the middle of the floor is this man he is one of my customers, and he is there with his daughter, and I am embarrassed for him—you know—and I don’t want to say anything because even those things can happen and I say to my Rudolfo don’t look you . . .”

“So we are just dancing in the lights when this man he sees me, and he is a very rich man, and *pues*, he wants to talk. We should come home with him and his daughter, and all make *chi chi* together but I don’t want to because I am so tired and I wish to be all alone tonight with Rudolfo; and I don’t think it is such a good thing to do anyway . . . a father and his daughter . . .”

“He has an awful lot of dollars this man and he will give me \$100 if we will come with him and Rudolfo I know will be angry with me if I say no so I’m saying yes I think so but first I must go to pee pee. You know . . .”

“Because I am afraid I am bleeding and that would not be so nice for all concerned.

“When I come back Rudolfo is there with the daughter and the man I will call him Jonas dances with me and then he becomes very intimate with me on the dance floor and he says his daughter wants *me* very much, too, and that is why we are going and he is paying so much money because it is her name day . . .

“I look at this girl he calls his daughter and she is not so pretty, but she is clearly his daughter. Well I think I could do worse. A woman is so easy, and soft . . .

“So we go home with them *los dos* and it is like always, you know, and afterwards I am so disgusted with what has happened I call them both ‘vos.’ I refuse to be familiar with them, and I tell Rudolfo, ‘Never again.’ That is what we do here in Nicaragua: to use ‘vos.’

“You know?”

“I know.”

“It was Rudolfo who had the girl the second time after me and he give her too much pleasure so I try with her again because I have to know how he is feeling with her, and I think that way, you know.

“And . . . with the man,” she added, abruptly, “I have had not too much pleasure because I don’t like his breath . . .

“So afterwards,” Sophy shrugged, weakly, “we went home and slept and I had such a bad headache in the morning because we took all this cocaine. You know,” she added again, “those were how you say the Good Old Days over here in Managua . . .”

I asked, “When was that?”

“Before the terremoto . . .”

“1972?”

“Even before. For I was very young . . .”

“And since?”

“The same. Every night in the week. You call that fun?”

Sophy was giggling at me, as if spoofing our seriousness together. Her face, all red and slightly sweaty, seemed very childlike.

Something about her animation touched me. If it was sex it was also something else, too: she seemed alive for the first time since we had begun to talk.

I asked, “Why did that man have so much money? What did he do?”

She thought a moment, her brow wrinkled.

“He was just a Jew . . .”

“Just?”

“He sold *things*,” she said, “to the Army, and he had cotton and race horses . . .”

“And now?”

“Maybe he is in the Coconut Grove, Miami, with all the others . . .”

She smirked mischievously.
“And his daughter?”
“She is just Rudolfo’s whore but she is no good, I tell you, because she likes girls. They please her more . . . ”
She seemed angry, and then bemused.
I said I was sorry if she had lost her pimp to some rich man’s daughter.
“It’s the same with me,” she shrugged. “Once I liked Rudolfo. Now I no longer care for such people . . . ”
“Do you have another?”
“*Claro*, because now I do it only for the money.” Sophy caught her lip between her teeth: “And for you, for love . . . ”
She was coquettish again, blinking her long greasy black eyelashes.
“I would suck you dry,” she said, huskily, “if you would only let me . . . ”
“So you’re thirsty as well as hungry?”
“I want to make *jeeg-jeeg* with your *pelotas*.”
She made a motion with her hand as if she were bouncing a ball, and then she said, “I say *pelota* because *cojones* is for anybody . . . a *campesino*. No?”
I asked, “How did the Frisco Disco burn?”
Disappointed with me, Sophy said, “Maybe it deserved to happen . . . ”
“I guess others thought so . . . ”
“I could put my tongue into your asshole,” Sophy said.
She wasn’t smiling any more. Sophy really seemed to want me and it was not for business alone. She wanted somebody, a man, because she was hungry, and frightened of being alone.
I could not insult her.
“If we go to your room could we just hug each other and be gentle?”
I hoped I was expressing her feelings equally.
“You know,” I told her, “I’ve seen so many cadavers the last few days I’m not sure I’m feeling at all sexy.”
“You will talk dirty to me,” Sophy said. “I spik English and I will understand.”
“You will see,” she went on, leaning heavily against my arm as we walked, “I will get you hot. You will have a big one . . . ”
In her bedroom, naked, she seemed even smaller, like a little nubile girl, and I reached out to her, and we hugged close, and did nothing for a few minutes.
Then Sophy broke it off and went and sat up on the bed; like some bourgeois lady instructing her maid, she gave me the ground rules for our sexual encounter:
No kissing.
Man on the top because I looked so large.
She eats me but I must not eat her pussy.
No love bites.

Positively no more talking.

I was not to touch her clitoris.

"Half an hour either way," she said, "for \$25 . . ."

"How much would you charge just to take a shower with me Sophy?"

"Now or later?"

"Only," I declared: "A shower and maybe another little hug . . ."

Sophy cursed me. I must surely be a big *cabrone*. She had lust for me. Desire. Couldn't I tell?

"Don't you like?" She was pointing with a finger between her legs, and wiggling: "*Chi chi baby ooo*," went Sophy.

Words like that.

She pointed again and with a little pout said, "I don't like this but this is the way it must be done. As if we were making a baby together."

Again I started to demur, but thought better of it, gave her another 50 *cordobas* tip, and started to dress, and leave.

Sophy no longer pretended she was angry.

I had paid for her time, and she knew it.

As I went toward the door she asked me, "Do you know *el senior* John Gerassi?"

"*Periodista?*"

I was a little startled.

"Si," she said. "Because he is the one *Norte Americano* who understands us here in Nicaragua. Do you know I read his book *The Great Fear* six times? I think I should like to fuck this John Gerassi someday. *Truly* . . ."

"Are you a Marxist?" I asked.

Trying to put it politely.

"Si," went Sophy again. "And I hate you and all your countrymen for what you have done to me and all my people . . . with these Somozas . . ."

She hit the z hard, crudely, and glided off into a dull glazed look of reproachful silence again.

"Sophy," I told her: "You are a very clever woman *sin dudas* so I am sorry . . ."

"You I don't really hate," she went on. "But I feel sorry for you and I don't like you anymore because you don't want to make love . . ."

"And neither do you," I reminded her.

"Who don't want to make *chi chi?*" She seemed irate: "What you say?"

"With you it's just a job," I explained: "*Sin passion* . . ."

"*Passion?*" She sat back and folded her hands on her lap and mimicked me.

She looked very pretty, just like a little airport souvenir stand doll. Sophy said, "I hate my fucking country . . . and all these stinking cunts make me sick . . ."

"*Suerte* Sophy . . ."

"*Buenas*," she replied, a little blankly.

It was as if we had just passed each other on a street corner in a small town somewhere. The last I saw of Sophy, as I closed the door quietly, she sat naked, with her knees up in the air, in bed, and brought a finger toward her vagina to give herself such pleasure as she would no longer allow any other living creature to give to her, if, indeed, she ever had.

It was dark outside on the street, though only just a little after six P.M. The National Guardsman on the corner pointed his grease gun at me and demanded to see my ID.

He was an old man, one of the auxiliaries who had been called up to replace the Commandos and Black Berets fighting in Masaya and Leon.

When I showed him my credentials, he let me pass, but not before pointing a finger at me and giving me a reproach. "*Peligrosso*," he said. "Dangerous. There is nothing but whores around here, and *terroristas* . . ."

"They are not the same," I said.

"Be careful for the bombs," the Guard said, as he gave me a little shove with the butt of his weapon to let me know I could go on my way.