

The Telephone Call

Laura Salinas

I called home this Friday, as I usually do. I was supposed to tell whoever picked up the phone to tell Apá to pick me up the next day. On Saturday mornings, Apá would have to drive fifty minutes to the university and pick me up at the only site he was familiar with, the dorms. After a year and a half of the same routine, I rehearsed what I would really say and dialed home. Amá picked up the phone on the third ring. After we exchanged our usual, “¿Cómo estás Mi’ja?”, “Bien amá ¿y usted, cómo ha estado?” I told her I wasn’t going to be able to go home this weekend y luego luego she wanted to know *que por qué no*. Immediately, I had to excuse myself.

“Pues, lo que pasa es que tengo que estudiar para un examen el lunes para mi clase de arte, y el sábado tengo que ir a una conferencia, ¿sabe? Pero a lo mejor tengo chansa de ir a la casa la semana que entra.”

Right away amá interjected.

-¿Entonces le digo a tu papá que vaya por ti la semana que entra?-

Not having much choice in the matter, I agreed to have apá pick me up the following weekend.

“Sí amá.”

We made plans for the weekend and couldn’t decide whether to have a *carne asada* at the park or dine out at amá’s favorite Korean restaurant where you can grill your food right at the table. Suddenly, as if remembering she had left a pot of beans unattended on the stove, amá tells me.

-Oye Mi’ja, ya no deberías de andar comprando esos libros.

What amá meant with, “You shouldn’t be buying those books,” I wasn’t sure. “What books?” I asked myself. I pecked into the boxes filled with my books stored in her garage and thought that maybe she had gotten a hold of my Trujillo, Moraga, and Anzaldúa collection. I’m sure that the *Lesbian Sex* book

would have been more than enough reason for her to send me away with one of my grandmothers in Guanajuato. My curiosity got the best of me and I had to ask.

“Oiga amá, ¿A cuáles libros se refiere?”

Amá told me that I received a big box in the mail and that she was going to save it for me until I went home, but because she was sensing these bad vibes y bueno, *la caja le dio muy mala espina*, she went ahead and opened the package. I didn’t buy that. What I mean is that I understand getting bad vibes from a headless chicken left on the steps of your house or maybe answering a phone call with a heavy breather on the other line, but a box?

Continuing with her story, she told me that when she opened the package she found four books inside. Before I could ask her to describe the covers for me so I could figure out which book club had sent them, she told me she had burnt the book with the pictures of naked people in it, and the other one, with the cover of a bleeding heart on fire as a small angel stood in the background watching.

I could picture my mother standing in the back yard ripping the pages of the books and feeding them to the grill as my brother’s pitbulls watched in confusion. I began to feel as if a small, yet vital, part of me had been snatched away and thrown into the same flames that consumed my books. amá began her reasoning for burning my unpaid belongings by telling *me que los libros eran muy cochinos* and that it was better that I not see the way this one man had a stick shoved up his butt. The sting in my cars and the knot in my throat began to grow. I asked myself if it ever occurred to amá that I may have needed those books for my classes. Did she even remember what I was majoring in? I’m sure that would have clued her in as to why I bought those books in the first place. Or did she even care? I wanted to ask her so many things and tell her even more. I just wanted to tell her, “amá, I am twenty years old *estudiando historia del arte*. Once in a while *voy a ver gente desnuda*. ¿Y sabe qué? Es OK.”

Finally, something did shoot out of my mouth.

- ¡ No quiero que ande traseulcando mis cosas! ¿Entendí?

Never having raised my voice at *amá*, I immediately felt that I should have apologized to her. Instead, I let the silence swallow my guilt. *amá* finally spoke and continued with her reasoning for having gotten rid of my books. The ringing of my ears made it impossible to listen to *amá's* excuses. Having lost the patience to listen to *amá* I tried to restore my misunderstood books.

As I pictured the bleeding heart with the real flames created by my mother I mourned the loss of my Denise Chávez novel that would now cost me twenty-three something at a regular bookstore. There was also the art book titled *Love and Sensuality Through Art* or something like that. I was almost certain that the naked people who offended my mother so much were none other than the ones frolicking about in Bosch's triptych, *The Garden of Earthly Delights*. Maybe *amá* would have been happy to know that in the first panel, depicting the Creation of Adam and Eve, Jesucristo wasn't naked. From the second panel, all the sex-crazed nymphs guilty of committing sins of the flesh are later punished in the third panel along with the other immoral, vile, and corrupt derelicts of society. And then again, I don't think she would have cared because the people in that last panel were naked too. I was curious to know what artists, other than Bosch, offended my mother as she browsed through the pages. Could it have been the voluptuous Rembrandt women, who like Bathsheba sitting at her bath, lounge about invitingly? Or maybe it was *la Maja Desnuda*, who in the painting dares you to approach her. Then in another painting where *la Maja* is completely clothed, she dares you to come even closer. Then I remembered, *The Dancer in Repose*, a Diego Rivera creation found in the second gallery on the right hand side of the *museo Dolores Olmedo*, hidden among one of the barrios in Xochimilco. The dancer, Modelle Boss, sits on a stool looking to the side, her body radiates tremendous energy. As your eyes follow the curves of her body, you can not overlook her sensuous, strong thighs and her chocolate colored nipples, perhaps, chocolate flavored, too. I wondered if Frida

Kahlo had any paintings that may have been included in this book, but can only imagine *The Broken Column* to be representative

of most of her work. Bitterly, I wondered if any of the forty-nine nails found on her body had anything to do with her mother.

Amás voice called for my attention and my voice reassured her that I had not hung up on her. I told her that I needed to hang up and that I would see her next week. We said our good-byes. As usual, *ama* reminded me to keep drinking carrot juice *para que se me curen los ojos*. As I hung up the phone *amá* smiled at me from a picture sitting on the dresser. It took time before I could smile back.