



Mundo Local (Local Living)

The Fight for mi Querida Daniela

It was a fight for love, a brawl borne out of the depths of my soul and inspired by my first and only affection, my last and everlasting adoration.

“¡Carajo! ¡TOMA!...grrrr...Quedate quieto...ayyy... ¡uhhh!”

Punches launched wildly, right and left, arms swung and swayed, and bodies shoved and slammed. My breaths were quick and audible, consistent and rhythmic, like those of a caged

horse sampling freedom for the first time. So much despair was stored in me that I could not really tell, at times, if I was hitting my objective square in the face, striking the floor, or beating myself to a pulp. I could only see streaks of red, and I don't know if it was blood I was looking through or the color of wrath. The fight had one name, one source, and one purpose, and her name was *Daniela, mi querida Daniela*, the sweetest, most beautiful creature known to man.

To relate the story, I must go back to the summer of 1981, to a beautifully quaint city hidden under the gentle mantle of a thriving but controversial country. Maracay is this city. It's full of beauty, honor, and natural wealth, and at times plagued by bits of chaos, political mischief, and revolutionary ideas, but never enough to overwhelm its sense of family, friendship, and love. I'm referring to Venezuela, the land that hosted my birth. Gorgeous women parade the streets and traffic always succumbs to their gleaming grace and exquisite taste (and rightfully so). Women are perfectly beautiful and innocent and represent the delicacy that we men lack, which must be absent in us. Men must adore and protect the sanctity and purity of a woman. As such, we put them on pedestals and ensure their lives are void of the horrors of confrontation, especially through the calloused hands of other men. Of course, we don't unilaterally practice these sentiments but we do hold them in high esteem and proclaim them to be an ethical aspiration.

Girls learn this at a young age. As they mature, they learn to look for these qualities in a prospective mate. Their fathers strive to shelter them from any harm and from the immature nature of boys, and of men, of course. Knowing how boys are taught (to explore, venture, and play), fathers keep their daughters under constant surveillance and family, friends, and neighbors help by keeping their eyes open and their tongues close to the parents' ears whenever they see or learn anything suspicious.

Up in the mountains, in the neighborhood of *El Castaño*, I saw her for the first time, *mi querida Daniela*. She was slim and perfectly molded. The heavens took their saintly time in creating her. Her short brown curly hair gleamed radiantly. Her eyes were a shade between blue and gray with a hint of emerald green, and all of it resting on a round, soothing pillow made of soft flesh decorated with long, lavishly curled eyelashes. The cat-like rays in her irises were distinct and clear. Her smile, words could not do justice. It was uninhibited, showing her innermost self without regard or remorse, full of innocence and with faultless sophistication and perfect intonation. Her exquisiteness was so alarming I felt lost in her presence. I could not speak intelligibly nor could I rid myself of abnormally clumsy gestures. My heart plunged out of my chest in reverberating palpitations if I even came within yards of her.

It was quite by chance that I met her in *El Centro Comercial Parque Aragua*, in downtown. Barbara, a girl I'd known for years, introduced her to my friends and me.

“¡Hola, muchachos! ¿Como estas loquillo?” And Barbara gave me a kiss on the cheek. *“Mira, te presento a Daniela...Look, this is Daniela Santos. Daniela, this is Francisco...Giovanni...and Adolfo...”*

“Ni...ni...nice meeting you, Da...Daniela.” Adolfo stuttered as he replied.

“Nice meeting you, too. We just saw a movie. It was great! The plot was full of twists...” Daniela proceeded to tell us about the movie with all kinds of details. Her whole face morphed passionately with every crease of the story, stretching and opening her eyes wide-open for suspense and tenderly relaxing her countenance for sweet poignant moments. Her hands moved all the while, pointing and miming. She was confident and at peace with herself. She was easily able to carry and even monopolize any conversation.

I don't know how apparent it was to the girls, but we were each of us awestruck and without much to say or do. Daniela and Barbara didn't stay long, probably because of the awkwardness of the situation, which didn't surprise me. As soon as they left, I knew I'd fallen in love. I know it sounds naive and even stupid, especially after such a short meeting, which barely provided us a brief moment to acquaint ourselves. Somehow, her striking beauty and her penetrating personality graced and enamored me. We didn't talk much after they left and simply went our separate ways.

From that moment on, I couldn't stop thinking about her. She was a complete distraction. My obsession with her grew in me like some type of mental disorder. I didn't diagnose it as such, but I was painfully aware of it. I was aware of how it controlled me. I couldn't really pay attention to any one thing longer than a few minutes without gazing and immersing into my innermost thoughts, of which Daniela was the star.

I don't think my apparent disorder was evident to my friends, or so I thought, since I did my best to conceal it from the world. Winning her interest occupied my every thought. I came up with great plans to start a conversation with her and rehearsed every word. I wanted to ask her to go to the movies or have a snack with me. The excitement of the plan kept me awake at night. I became restless and found that I was filled with energy. I'd wake up the following morning earlier than usual, ready to embark on the accorded plan. As the hours of the morning came to pass and the crucial moment inched closer, my courage completely faded and I felt disheartened. It happened so many times, in fact, that I started losing faith and became very sad and deeply depressed.

Barbara, in passing one day, told me that Daniela often visited her aunt in *El Castaño*, where I had seen her first, which was also my neighborhood. I saw her a few times, but I never

summoned enough nerve to talk to her. I would simply wave and smile from a safe distance. I was perpetually tongue-tied and dumbfounded. I did whatever it took to get a peek at her smile and invented seven hundred and one different ways to see Barbara, in the hopes of being near Daniela. The days passed and the thought of her became a permanent fixture in my mind.

Much to my dismay, I learned that my two best friends were also entertaining the thought of getting close to Daniela. This discovery revealed itself during Carolina's birthday party – she was one of Barbara's best friends.

"Epa, Francisco, Adolfo, Toto, you guys are already here!" I said.

"Bright and early, pana. We didn't have anything to do, so we came early." Adolfo said this with feigned dispassion.

"Toto, how are you and Carolina getting along?" Francisco asked.

"Lately it's been very awkward, but we'll see. How about you? Is there anybody in your mind these days?"

"Well, I've been thinking about somebody, but I doubt she's been thinking about me." Francisco answered. *"You guys remember her, don't you, that girl, Daniela?"*

"Barbara's friend, from the mall?" Adolfo and I shouted back simultaneously.

Our tone was harsh and startling, confessing our own feelings for Daniela. We didn't like the idea of chasing the same girl, especially because of our code of honor, which bound us as friends (and as fools!). We tried talking it out and struggled to force one another to give up the idea of Daniela...

"Look, Giovanni, it's my turn. And Adolfo, come on. You guys can't be as crazy for Daniela as I am."

“Don’t kid yourself. You’ve always been too impulsive and selfish. You always want what we want just to antagonize us or compete with us, or whatever the reason.”

“Forget it, both of you. She won’t go for either one of you two.” Adolfo interjected with a severe, throaty voice.

It was during this party that all hell broke loose, despite our fraternal ties. Words escalated to a full-blown confrontation of colossal proportions. I was thankful Daniela hadn’t yet arrived at the party. In fact, there wasn’t anybody else in the living room, no one outside of Toto and a guy and two girls we didn’t know. Toto quickly realized what was happening and tried to buffer us from each other, but as much as he tried, his efforts were in vain. It took but a mere breath before we were at each others’ throats, which brings me back to the fight, the rage, and the agony with which this story began.

No one could stop us or even touch us. No one dared. I don’t know how long it took. All I remember is that, at some point, we were all on the floor, and in pain, drenched in sweat, puzzled, and dazed. Silently, without uttering a word, as friends and men of honor often do (or so we thought), we decided to let the fight judge our destiny and fate, to judge our future with Daniela. Whoever won the fight would prove his worthiness and win the coveted price. The inevitable verdict wouldn’t be the result of so-called *machismo*, as some folks might say, but that of friendship, of true respect. Although it was ultimately up to Daniela to decide and accept, it was in our hands as friends to choose who would try wooing her first without having the others intervene. I don’t think any one of us considered the fact that we found it impossible to talk to her or even approach her, let alone chase her. Nonetheless, we made our silent and very violent agreement and managed to keep our friendship intact, if not stronger. We also agreed, out of respect for each other, to retire that subject forever from subsequent conversations.

“¿Y ahora qué?”

Okay, we’d fought, we’d compromised, and we’d decided, but “*now what?*” I still couldn’t talk to her, even after receiving the green light from my friends. What a joke. I couldn’t face her, much less initiate any proposition of intimacy. The only thing I could do was think of her in the still of the night, when the distance between us freed me from the effects of her bewitching smile. That’s when I thought of yet another plan. It was brilliant! And it would save me the dreaded *tête-à-tête* with Daniela. I had to take advantage of the courage the stars afforded me when I was alone at night, and so I decided to write her a *love* letter.

I started to write the letter on Friday and finished it on Sunday night. Surprisingly, writing the letter was not intimidating. It seemed to slip my mind that my note would eventually reach her hands and fully convey my feelings. So my shyness disappeared and the words flowed with ease. They freely manifested themselves...

Mi querida Daniela,

No sé como empazar...I don’t really know how to begin, except to say that my life has suddenly been graced, and changed forever. I understand now what it means to long for something so badly that it inflicts excruciating pain, and it emanates from deep within my soul...

The product of that magical weekend was a letter that personified my very spirit, from its roots. It was vulnerable, innocent, passionate, and ornate with sweet, unadulterated, and unmitigated love. I felt warm, happy, and satisfied, as though I was already a victor. I envisioned Daniela and me in the park holding hands and content in each other’s presence. I’d embrace her and we’d hold one another cheek-to-cheek.

The weekend came and went and Monday arrived without delay (perhaps too soon). I was to see her again that day. This time I had a letter to give her and my love to proclaim. I couldn't afford to lose courage. Knowing that I visibly shook in her presence, which I knew was my weakness and my doom, I had to recruit the help of someone else to deliver the letter and I had to do that very early, before I chickened out of that as well. Once in motion, no soul could withdraw the letter. The picture painted in its threads wouldn't erase or smudge.

My chest pounded and my voice cracked as I asked Omar, who usually sits next to me, to hand her the letter, since Daniela sat on his other side. Omar gave her the letter in the middle of Social Studies. That class was one of several we attended together in fourth grade at the *Instituto Educacional Aragua*. As soon as Omar handed her the letter, my world was immediately blurred. I was living an alien life and on the brink of something new and extraordinary. She took all of eternity to read the letter (at least that's how it felt). I couldn't bring myself to look at her. All I could do was rest my head down on my *pupitre* with my head in hands and my heart lumped up in my throat.

Omar suddenly tapped me on the shoulder and passed me a small note, which was written on a piece of paper from a *Snoopy* pad. It was pink, yellow, and cut out in the shape of a doghouse, with Snoopy resting on the roof. She folded the note in two. As I took the note into my hands, my breaths were short and my chest swelled up and down, trying unsuccessfully to find a steady beat. My hands shook but I opened it slowly. I was afraid of its contents and afraid of what my life would be like after reading it...

“¡Si! ¡Si! ¡Si!” it said, below a red drawing of our hearts linked and pierced by Cupid's arrow.

My life was never the same after that moment.

Flor Andina

Te deseo un feliz día,

Tiempo de celebración y alegría.

Hoy,

El día su esplendor nos enseña,

Entre nubes grandes y pequeñas.

¡Mira!

Los pájaros cantan un son,

Y cantores no son.

¿Por qué?

Es por un festejo Patronal

Instituido en un Enero especial.

Esa hora,

El sol merideño dijo “¡Presente!”

Ante un espectáculo candente.

¡Uiiii!

Amor puro nació,

En cara dulce y rostro suave.

Y ahora,

Esa flor es el sol

De su propia creación.

¿Que cosas, no?

¡El universo entero el mundo sabe

Que vacío fuera sin esa flora de los *Andes*!

Flower from the Andes

The birds in the sky sing and celebrate

The blissful birth of a flower girl.

The heavens couldn't help but cry "*Hurray!*"

In the midst of such an explosive day.

She's the sun embracing the Andes

And the life-giving blood of her valleys.

She's the blue, red, and yellow

Of all the rainbows in the meadow.

She's the peace of a summer day,

Reason enough for love in more than one thousand ways.