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Jose Garcia Villa

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Young Writer in a New Country

By JOSE GARCIA VILLA

IN THE homeland . . . I was young. I wander to the rocks on the beach and pass my hands through my hair. It is so soothing. Like the touch of a woman whom you love but have never seen. I lift my face to the moon and wish I were naked that I should see how the silver of its rays would melt against my form. It may be that at these times I am mad, but my being is infinitely happy, infinitely tender. If suddenly the moon should hide, I would lie on the sand and wait and wait. I am in love. I would creep and crawl and bruise my flesh to find my love . . .

What I am trying to say is that in the homeland I was young. I love you, said she. I love you. I love you.

She is the young moon, the young swan, the young doe . . .

. . . You are very young, said my father to me. What he meant was: I will come in between.

He was my father and he was strong. Not physically, I mean, for he was thin. But he was strong. Someday when I am a father, too, I will never be like him. I will never say to my son, you are very young, if I meant, I will come in between.

She said she loved me. She said she'd wait. Do not be long in America, she said.

And America . . . In New Mexico the winds blowing, carrying sand. Here my first home in the new land . . . here my first friend the other side of the ocean . . .

Here Aurora and Georgia. Here Joe and Wiley—Jack, Rey and Louise.

And all the time the sands of New Mexico, windscattered, windloved.

At night, in the new country, I would say to myself: America, America. I lie in bed quietly, trying to think what

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it really means. A wind blows through the open window and makes me shiver. America is cold, for the moment that is my thought. In the homeland—never any snow. In the homeland, greenness. O green, O warmth, O bamboos unforgotten . . .

In America it is cold. But Ernest, my roommate, does not find it so. He has lived in America all his life. He plays the trombone. He likes to play the trombone. America has taught him to play the trombone. What a strange train of thoughts. Ernest. America. Trombone.

What I want to say is that I could not make out anything. I lay in bed, wanting sleep to come, but all the time my lips kept saying: America, America—fondling the words, wanting to know what they meant. But nothing got solved in my mind.

But about Father—it was clear, it was very clear. When he said to me, You are very young, I knew what he meant. I knew why he chose those words. They are very good words and if I were my father and I wanted to act like he did, I would have used the same words: You are very young . . .

You see, in the homeland I was young, but my father was a liar when he said, You are very young.

She did not lie but in the end she became a liar. What I mean is that when she said, I love you, she meant it, every word of it, but Time changed her.

She could have written: I want to be free. You are free and I am free . . .

That would have been very easy to understand.

But Time that hurts also knows how to heal. David, first friend in the white land. David who was poor, who wore slovenly clothes, whose eyes were soft. Of nights, walking on the streets, reciting poetry . . .

This is all very clear. I have asked America, the country America: Why don't you make more Davids? I asked

the question because it was the only way to express myself. He was not a liar and he could never end a liar: David. . . . Do you get what I mean?

But I know: Davids die poor. Even in my country Davids are not many. Civilization does not want Davids: You got no speed, David. You must be left behind. . .

Do you see America getting clearer in my mind? Do you see myself getting articulate, getting voice? Little by little calm comes to my mind. Little by little comes my white birth . . . a white cool birth in a new land.

It was then that my stories were born. Of the homeland and the new land. Some of you may have read them . . . they were cool, afire with coolth.

I, father of tales. Fathering tales I became rooted to the new land. I became lover to the desert. Three tales had healed me.

And now I am in New York.

Before that Chicago, Milwaukee, Washington . . . but now New York.

In the daytime movement and in the nighttime movement. And, Lord, I am tired . . .

What I am trying to say is that I left the desert, the desert of my white birth . . . and now I want to return to it. I want it to enfold me completely, I will surrender, I will never leave it.

But in the homeland, *there* I was young . . .

Do you get what I am driving you to see? I am crying for the desert, for the peace of the desert.

Will the native land forgive? Between your peace and the peace of a strange faraway desert—Between your two peaces . . .

O tell softly, softly. Forgive softly.