

The Guerrillero

ALBALUCÍA ANGEL

IT WAS THE POET Ana Becciu who introduced me to the works of the Colombian writer Albalucia Angel. The literature of Colombia has suffered from the overwhelming shadow of Gabriel García Márquez, whose name has become synonymous not only with all of that country's writing but also with that of the rest of Latin America. Albalucia Angel's work shares no common ground with that of García Márquez. Her stories are not sweeping pageants; they are snapshots of a character's life, moments captured out of context, scenes rather than complete biographies. Her novel Dos veces Alicia (Twice Alice) echoes the voice of Lewis Carroll, both in its dreamlike plot and in the invention of a language, making readers believe that what they are following is a demented detective story. "The Guerrillero" is a more traditional tale, which nevertheless preserves the looking-glass quality of the novel: it is told by a woman speaking to herself, author becoming character, reflecting as she does the sordid background of her country's political landscape.



NOW YOU'LL SEE, Felicidad Mosquera, when they all arrive with their machetes, threatening, asking you where in hell has he hidden himself, then you'll confess. They'll ask. They'll force you to betray him because if you won't talk they'll take the old folks, like they did two days ago with your friend Cleta, remember, or they'll put your hands into the fire, like Calixta Peñalosa, or they'll slice open your belly, after all—all of them—have used your body. That's how it is, Felicidad. That's how it is. You should have gone with him, then you wouldn't have suffered. You wouldn't be dragging yourself around, crying and moaning, looking for anything that might do as a weapon, pushing the few bits of furniture against the door. That night, when Sebastian Martinez's dogs began to howl as if they'd smelled the devil, and you saw him there, suddenly, standing ever so still, his trousers in shreds and his white shirt all bloody, then you should have spoken, said anything, any excuse to make him whisper good-night and creep back where he'd come from, but no, too bad it didn't happen that way. Bad luck, Felicidad. You made him come in without a word, you pulled up a chair for him, he let himself fall heavy as lead, and then you saw the other wound on his skull; *I'm tired*, was all he mumbled; and then collapsed like a horse on the floor. Whatever got into your head, Felicidad Mosquera? What evil star dazzled you then, what evil wind blew through your heart to stir up the fire, to blind you? Because you were blind, blind. The shivers you felt when you looked upon his face and realized he was so handsome. That you liked his black moustache. The nervous urgency with which you went to boil water and prepare the herb plasters, somehow wasn't yours. Because you've always been cool-headed. A watchful heart. Careful. You never let yourself be trapped into these things. Whatever happened to you, tell me. Whatever came over you when instead of saying good-bye, once he felt better, and began to go out at night to

take a walk, to get firewood, offering to pump water, instead of saying yes, well thank you, see you sometime, you said no, it was no trouble, why didn't he stay a few more days. What happened, damn you. I can't understand. Felicidad Mosquera, I don't recognize you any longer. I never thought you'd change this fast, go from black to white, as you did, from one day to the other. Because the trembling you felt when he looked at you with his dark eyes, or the stammering, like a little girl, when he asked for the salt and barely touched you with his fingers as you put it in his hand, everything in you turned upside-down, the current changed, your cables crossed, so how in God's name didn't you notice it. Putting salt into another person's hand is stupid, brings bad luck. Bad tidings. And what about that day when instead of letting him go off on his own to get some air, you flushed, all red in the face, when he offered to walk together for a while, and crossing the bridge he held your waist, because it shakes so much was his excuse, but you felt how the heat boiling on his skin began to seep into you, burning, hurting, a cry inside you. A deep, deep moan. They're coming, Felicidad Mosquera. They'll come shouting that they know. Kicking everything in the house, as they did with Prospero Montoya's wife, when they left her stuck inside the well, her belly sliced open and the baby inside. They won't let you make the slightest move. When they arrive like that they're all ready to kill you. To leave no trace. They'll say they know so that you go for it. But only God and you are witnesses. The only witnesses of the meeting in the fields, on the river bank, between the scented sheets; who else will swear if only you felt the delight, the sex entering your body, searching your smoothness, changing you into streams, twilight, sea; who else will know the movement of your thighs, burning, your hands searching; touching the groin forcing sweetly your way into life. Who else heard his groans. His loving search. His long, drawn-out

orgasm as you sank into a silence of moist membranes, a quick throb of blood, a hurried quiver of muscles, which then relaxed rippling through the entire body, an inside scream bursting upwards, like a torrent. And who's to judge you, Felicidad Mosquera, if only God and you can swear that this is true. No one will dare. They can search your very innards, cut you in two with their machetes, drill into your senses, pierce your heart, they will find nothing. Not a whisper. Don't look like that. Throw your fear overboard. Don't curse any more: he's far away and all that counts is that he lives and carries on fighting. You won't say a word. Not even if they set fire to your shack, ram themselves into you, or bottles, or do what they did to others to drive you crazy; take courage, Felicidad Mosquera, don't cry or moan any more. Open the door yourself. Stand upright in the doorway. Hold their eyes.

Translated by Alberto Manguel