

ESTRELLA DEL VALLE

Shut Down, Baby

I NEVER LIKED the story of Rosita Elvirez, a poor woman, she was murdered because she didn't want to go dancing, later they made her a ballad and then an example for all women, women, like me, who have got into despising men. That's why, I tell you, Mister, I don't blame myself, yes, I love to dance, here everything is so pretty, the lights, the people, when the MC announces, "Here tonight, we have the most important representative of Tex-Mex: Tish Hinojosa and her band," and couples go out on the floor to dance, get together, move away, get closer, one, two, look, *así, así*, a little bit closer, and well, everything is fine until you meet a gringo who wants to dance with you, and you pretend not to understand him, but he follows you and follows you until he forces you to be with him, of course, then he asks for a few six-packs and *zaz!*—before you know it he forces the beer on you, and you end up with a stupid face, just gulping down the beer and far from the table, everybody looks at you, but nobody does anything to defend you, everybody laughs because, of course, they know you're *hecho en México*, you're not from around here, you don't know how to drink with a gringo, and they force you to sit, and they laugh at you, your *Torreonero* accent. You know how that feels, Mister, well, it's horrible, yes, you can't say no because this guy is stronger than you and takes you to the dance floor and

comes so close to you, puts his hands on your back and his hands go down, go down, Mister, until here, look, until here, and he doesn't let go. He drags you all over the floor and then whispers in your ear, "C'mon, baby, let's get cozy," but you don't like it, but he's insistent, and well, you go out of there, leaving Tish Hinojosa singing alone "Jesusita in Chihuahua" to cumbia, country, western, that pisses you off, look, because you buy your ticket to see Tish, not to go out with some tasteless gringo, well, like I said, Mister, you leave and they take you over there in the dark where they think they can take advantage of you, where you can't scream or ask for help. Don't look at me like that, it's true, these guys think if you're alone, they can do anything they want with you 'cause they're white and you're brown, that's why they take us over there and lift our skirt, tell us, "More, more, Spanish girl? Do you wanna more?" and you keep quiet, wanting to get rid of them, feeling their white breath mixes with mine, then I have to act in self-defense 'cause gringos want to go too far with me, they see me alone in a foreign country where nobody wants to speak Spanish and nobody does anything and I do like dancing, I have always liked it since when I was a little girl, Mister, but these guys, they're all the same, white or pocho, all the same, they don't know how to dance the way I like; imagine if a white girl were in my shoes, ah! true, then yes, poor little gringa, she's so alone, so pale, like Mennonite cheese, and then yes, you guys will justify what she does, but you're alone in this country, Mister, and that's why they abuse you and, well, at this moment, just at this moment when you remember my piece of Chamizal Park, the dead laborers, you remember you always carry the knife stashed in your bra in case something happens and well: zaz! suddenly this white jelly-like thing stays on your hand, it doesn't come off, it stays on your hand, you hear the screams, but you understand nothing, and you know the others can hear, but they don't pay attention because they always take me far away, away, where nobody hears anything, then I shut them up – zaz! zaz! – so that this thing on my hand comes off, so that you shut up once for all, so that I can go

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back and keep on dancing 'cause I put on a new dress I bought in the mall to enjoy dancing and the damn gringo ruined it, but he keeps bugging me, his body follows there and you have to bury him, because in El Paso it's so windy and sand falls down and you can't bury them deep enough, the wind makes sure to leave 'em exposed. Now, will you let me go, let me go, no? No, I don't know how many, six or seven or more, all of them were white men like you, Mister, like you don't listen to me when I'm telling you I don't want to dance, I don't want your six-packs, I want nothing from you 'cause you speak only ingles and I'm warning you.

translated by Toshiya A. Kamei