

## International Velvet

*"I felt disturbed, my nerves on edge; it seemed as though someone was emptying a box of pins into my brain..."*  
Clemente Palma

Xalvadora stepped back after Alvaro removed his boots. It wasn't that his left foot was metallic, nor was it the foot's strange mercurial glow that caused her to stumble back with alarm – no, it wasn't that at all. When Xalvadora looked down again at Alvaro's bloodless ankle, she saw her own face staring back – wasted, and pallid with terror. She turned away. Alvaro's warm, soft fingers fell gently on her bare shoulders, his palms hot on her skin. Her breath fell back. She stared over the park where the setting sun cooled like doused bronze. The modern world was quietly turning dark. She could smell cigar smoke on his breath, her stance dipped as she thought of the warmth of his tongue.

They stood still for a while. Her eyes searching the view. Rows of twisted olive trees faded black into the evening. *Why him*, she thought – his sullen cheeks sucking into sharp jaws – dark earthy beard collapsing like a shallow grave. He locked his fingers over her belly, the rough skin of his hairy arms all freckled and dark like dirty tallow. She looked down at the park. People still sat on benches. Neon lights began to flitter and spit over tall iron fences griddled by retiring commerce and the flow of electric light. The city's heavy salt air thinned with a chill. *But where had all the doves gone*. Without the resignation of light, she couldn't tell time from the date, she felt *'...everywhere at once in one constant place.'* Crucial thoughts hung on memories of the sea where breakers rose to be flung

back off rock like prayer. Could Alvaro have known how the old city's naked sea had haunted her all her life, how every star splintered violently in her dreams? Some olive trees came to life again with the soft lighting in the park. Wine glasses on the windowsill cradled a universe of stars, the cold colloquial wind swirling with the sound of traffic. She could feel his penis throbbing hot and hard, a tight angry knot weeping into the small of her back. He pressed his weight harder against her skin. His bubbling breath boiling deep in the atoll of her collarbone. As streetlights withdrew the burden of time, she casually turned. Kissed him. Lips, hard against his. Mouth, flat against his mouth.

Togara Muzanhenamo