

## PILAR AND JUAN TIRSO

by Yolanda A. Reid

The Velez family lived in a large three-story house, six blocks away from where I lived. Mrs. Velez was a slim woman, thirty years old, long suffering, with flawless piel canela skin and a beauty mark on the left side of her face.

She had two little girls: one dark, one fair. The younger child (Paloma) was sweet, kind, naive, two years old. The older child (Perla) was stubborn, greedy for attention, commanding, unruly. Four years old. My duties were to sit with them, entertain them, and keep them out of their mother's hair.

Mrs. Velez--or Pilar, as I called her--lived on the first floor with her husband, Juan Tirso. Irene Bermudez (Juan Tirso's sister) and Gustavo (her husband) lived on the second floor with their child. The third floor was rented out.

Soon after my first day with the Velez family, I ascertained the problem as perceived by Pilar, for she complained openly to her sister-in-law in my presence.

"Irene, te digo, esa criatura no vale la pena."

It was Juan Tirso. Two nights before Juan Tirso had stayed out all night, as he had done before. But last night Juan Tirso took his girlfriend, Daisy Jimenez, to the movies and Pilar had followed them. She sat three rows behind the two lovers, watched as Daisy nuzzled Juan Tirso's ear, whispering and giggling.

"I remember," Pilar said, "how he used to whisper and make love to me. My blood boil. I rush up to Daisy and pull at her hair. She screamed and her hand--it look polished, perfect, like a plastic back-scratcher--form a claw. She tug at my hair. I rip her dress. We scream like hyenas.

"I hold her neck in a vise. I hear Juan Tirso yell, 'You're going to kill her!' He try to pull us apart while he say, 'Pilar, mi amor.' It take three ushers to pull me from her. 'Pendeja!' she scream. I scream, 'Put a! Desgraciada! You are like a demon from hell.' And so she is."

She continued, "We come home together. We sleep. In the middle of the night, Juan Tirso ask forgiveness and I forgive. We make passionate love: the air just over the bed was like the air in the church. You know? Sanctified. First it filled with sin, then absolution. This is how I see our love. Asi es." She shrugged her shoulders. Lo amo."

Juan Tirso was absolved. Pilar had forgiven him. The sinner was penitent.

For the next few weeks, Juan Tirso was a dutiful penitent father and husband. The first time I saw him brought home to me the core of Pilar's problem, like the pit of a plum, stony and hard. It was his beauty.

He was of medium height, but robust, muscular, with long black lashes, and eyes the

color of sorel, a dark brown pencil-thin mustache, and dark curly hair he wore slicked back with brilliantine on his 'Daisy nights'. Those were the nights he went carousing with or without Gustavo. He had probably married too young.

To me, he was polite but distant, preoccupied.

I watched as Juan Tirso played games with his daughters, bringing them treats, candy, toys, and whirling them in the air. I overheard Pilar tell her sister-in-law she was pregnant. Juan Tirso was not happy with this event. Not truly, she said. But she would, of course, have the child.

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With the spring came hydrangeas, crocuses, tulips Pilar had vigorously planted. She smiled often now. Her dark straight hair skimmed her shoulders as she knelt in the garden, while Perla, Paloma, and I folded grey paper cranes. Juan Tirso was affectionate, as usual. "You are too good for me," he would say as he kissed her tenderly on the cheek.

By and by, in Pilar's fifth month of pregnancy, the delicate Irene went out one night in rainy weather and became ill with pneumonia. Pilar tended to Irene, and two households, for six weeks while Gustavo fretted over his wife. At first, Juan Tirso was proud that his wife--the good woman--would do this great thing for his sister, but after a while (two weeks only) he became bored: he needed attention. Each night, Pilar was too weary for anything. At the end of the second week, I suppose, he drove by his old haunt to play pool and loll the time away.

By the third week, I sat with both girls in the front yard when a small pimento-red Ford pulled up. A young woman with auburn hair, long fingernails, in a tight dress, and heart-shaped dark glasses exited from the driver's side. She said, in a slight accent, "Is Juan Tirso at home?"

I was about to answer when Juan Tirso approached her, grabbed her arm as he ushered her toward the car. She tried to embrace him, and it seemed to me he grudgingly accepted the embrace, as she muttered his name and sobbed.

"This must be Daisy Jimenez," I said to myself. They whispered as Juan Tirso comforted her. He returned inside the house, got a leather jacket, and they were off.

At suppertime, he returned to kiss his daughters good night. He told his wife that his friend was moving and that he would be helping him this evening.

Pilar was stoic. "Of course, mi vida. Do not worry. I will not wait up for you."

She asked me if I could stay three hours with Paloma and Perla. I agreed. She went to a desk in the living room, placed a small pearl-handled gun in her purse, then left after her husband.

A couple of hours later, Pilar returned. Her clothing, disheveled; her face, wild-eyed. Yet, she moved with serenity. She entered the living room, went to the desk, and retrieved the gun in the drawer.

Twenty minutes later, Juan Tirso entered the house. "How could you do this to me? You have humiliated me. You have dishonored me," he said.

She looked incredulously at him. "You speak of honor? It is you who have dishonored ME."

At this ruckus Irene descended in her nightgown, with Gustavo. Irene put the coffee pot on the stove to heat, as she said, "What is all this noise? The neighbors will think. . . ."

But Juan Tirso interrupted her. "That she's loca, that's what the neighbors will think. Do you know what she did?" He approached his wife now as he spoke, "This woman, the mother of my children, the woman who is my life,--do you know what she did?" He whirled round to look at Gustavo and Irene, who was sitting down, obviously weary from the commotion and still recuperating.

Gustavo said, "Now let us calm ourselves. Juan Tirso, please. You see what this is doing to Irene."

"I'm all right," said Irene. "Let us hear, for pity's sake."

"Perdoname, Irene."

"Oh no, it is I whose forgiveness you should beg!" Pilar said.

"I am a man. I do not ask forgiveness from women who try to SHOOT me."

Gustavo seemed horrified. "Is this true? You shot at him? No lo puedo creer."

Pilar shrugged her shoulders, a mischievous smirk on her lips: "I shot in the air and in his general direction. I really aim at Daisy. I only wanted to scare the little rabbit away. Gustavo, serias capaz de cualquier cosa si tu vida fue volando por una ventana. Besides, no one was hurt."

Over the next few days, Pilar's friends and acquaintances phoned or came over. They had heard she had shot at her husband and his paramour. They came, at first, to offer advice, some to offer condolences, but by the time they had left they had laughed and gossiped and felt inspired that a woman they knew had taken control of her life, so to speak.

All the women admired her. They praised her. The house was full of women's laughter. I saw Juan Tirso leave and enter through the side door, a sour miffed expression on his face.

After a week, he decided to leave, and left to live with his younger brother, Jesus.

As he left, Pilar said, "I will weep no more for that man."

She busied herself with the children, sewing dresses for them. She and Irene went shopping at Nordstrom's for new clothes. That done, Irene suggested a trip to an Arizona spa. A two-day special. So they went.

Pilar returned, radiant.

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Meanwhile, Juan Tirso came once a month to collect the rent from the tenants upstairs, but each week he visited the little girls in his sister's upstairs apartment. Once, as I took the little girls downstairs to their mother for milk and chocolate-chip cookies, I heard Juan Tirso lament to his brother.

"She looks better than when I first met her. Ay, que guapa!" he said, shaking his right hand in the air. "I miss her."

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As midsummer approached, Juan Tirso moved into the third floor apartment. He said it was more convenient. He could see the children and go to work, he said.

At this time, Irene pled his case. A month afterward, Pilar and Juan Tirso reconciled.

"We go to California," Pilar said later. "Juan Tirso is partner in his brother's furniture-moving business. I gonna be happy to get away from Juan Tirso's TEMPTATION. You know what I mean? I know his nature. But--he tell the priest. He ask forgiveness. I forgive."

She paused. "I also decide to become a paralegal." She then embraced me. "I don't know WHAT I gonna do without you, Yamila."

At the time, my family and I were preparing for a trip to the Greek isles. We planned to spend all August there.

That evening, as I went home, the images of Juan Tirso's radiant face (his brows like a pair of wings),--and Pilar's, and Daisy's as well--seemed tattooed on my soul, emblems

of my childhood. I suppose this--my thirteenth summer--was a tumultuous time in my life, for, as I re-read my journals, I realize that my life changed on that night.

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Yolanda A. Reid's poems and short fiction have appeared in literary journals/e-zines, such as [www.womenwriters.net](http://www.womenwriters.net), and others. "Porridge & Cucu: My Childhood"--her first novel--is now being considered by a publisher. To read an excerpt, please visit her web site at <http://www.geocities.com/yareid2003/index.html>.  
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