

Toyon Literary Magazine

Volume 67
Issue 1 *De Dos Lados*

Article 12

2021

Rara

Short Latina
None

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Recommended Citation

Latina, Short (2021) "Rara," *Toyon Literary Magazine*: Vol. 67 : Iss. 1 , Article 12.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/toyon/vol67/iss1/12>

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Fay knew exactly how to pack a good suitcase. She had not been anywhere but here and never there, but she was always thinking about running away. She had this odd feeling, a peculiar feeling that she was not in the right world, dimension or time. Everyone called her “rara.” She didn’t exactly feel “rara,” but rather special, even magic.

Ever since her arrival, her body seemed to repel living on this earth. Her spine curved since birth, and her lungs always too weak to breathe on their own. Her mother always placed her on her belly so Fay would not choke. As she grew, her legs went inward, knees knocking against each other. Still she walked and fell, and got up again. Her scabby knees were a sign of more than a clumsy toddler. And so, they placed metal rods to guide her legs into place. Then her feet stopped developing and so they put steel shoes on her feet to weigh her down. Soon, her eyes gave up and were too weak. And so, they placed rounded glass on each eye, enlarging them to help her see. Fay wobbled down the street, each step heavy and mechanical, each look like a fish in its bowl.

Feeling like a superhero, she ran, jumped without fear, for once equipped to live on this earth. Children often pointed and laughed but she did not care. She knew this was only a suit for this earth, one that would come off when she went back to her real home. She dreamed of the day she would float by the lightness of her feet and see with her soul. Her body might have been modified for this earth, but her behavior was not something anyone could control.

Fay spoke at an earlier age than most, full sentences, sometimes other languages. She had conversations when no one was around and served Coca-Cola and saltines as she hosted her invisible friends. “It’s just a phase,” everyone said, but it never passed. Instead, she began to act quite oddly, whispering her secrets to the

flowers and talking to dogs with her eyes. Soon enough, she started to ask her own questions, feeling more out of place than ever before, each day, desiring to be home. She sought answers from her mother.

“¿Por qué soy más morena que tú?” she asked her mother daily.

“¿Mi quieres?” always followed.

“¿Por qué mis brazos no son como los tuyos?” Referring to her unusually hairy arms.

“¿Mi quieres?” was always the last question as she fell asleep holding on to her mother’s hand.

Never feeling settled, and always feeling missing, Fay began to test her abilities. She knew she was not an ordinary child. She began to predict the weather and move objects with her mind. She could tell when someone was sad, and feel their heart.

She began to question if her mother was her own. She couldn’t possibly be the daughter of a mother so angry. Fay was always in trouble, always being told “No.” Her mother never let her show her gifts. Fay was discouraged from playing with animals. Discouraged from crying when others cried. Always told to be clean, never play with the insects that followed her or the flowers that bloomed besides her. One day, Fay had enough of the world that rejected her. She decided it was time to plan her escape.

Every day, she packed what she thought was practical and important. She stuffed a fresh pack of Galletas Marias and two Yakults into a small baby blue suitcase with metal clasps. “This should be enough to sustain me on my travels,” she thought to myself. The blue satin pockets inside, held a tin box full of buttons, each unique in its own way. They once belonged to her earthly grandmother’s old garments but Fay took on the task to guard them. Some buttons bigger than others, none alike, none less valuable. Golden like coins and encrusted with precious jewels. Among other things Fay always packed was a sweater in case it got cold and a pair of white socks in case she had to travel in the rain. The lace that adorned them made her feel pretty despite the blocky shoes that slowed her down. She

looked at her suitcase each day and evaluated, ensuring all that was precious to her was held within. You see, the treasures in your suitcase are the most important. They will help you tell the story of where you came from, how far you have traveled and remind you of your past life.

As each day passed and no one came to rescue her, She laid in bed thinking of what her life was supposed to be. Fay prayed that someone was looking for her and the night would come when they would come through the window and take her away. Fay placed the suitcase under the bed just in case that night was the one. Her mother thought this was all a game and said, "tienes mucha imaginación." But, Fay was certain that it was not her imagination. No, she was certain of her switch at her birth. The reasons are still unknown, but there are several theories. "Somewhere out there is my real family, one that loves me," Fay mumbled as she fell asleep.

Having a suitcase is only the beginning of leaving a place behind. Before going on any adventure, you must accept that you might never come back. You must always be ready to leave, sometimes without saying goodbye. Fay was okay with that, she was certain no one would ever miss her. "One day, mamá will call my name and I will not come. She will come to my room, search for me in my tent, push aside my clothes in the closet and not find me. She will notice my blue suitcase gone, and then she will cry and wish she has told me she loved me. She will be sorry and cry and cry for me. She will look at my picture and know I left for good," Fay thought to herself and replayed the scenario over and over in her mind. On the days Fay lied about going to her aunt's house to play, she practiced leaving, all part of her "training," as she called it. This was her way of ensuring she would not hesitate to leave when the time came.

A forest was at the end of the block and a river that ran through the trees. Each time, Fay practiced, she further away than the last. Every time, she imagined what was deep within the forest. Each time, she ran back before it went completely dark, but one day, she would not return. The night would fall and she would be far away. Far enough to not hear her name called, far enough to not be found.

Fay had enough and devised a most brilliant plan. Fay would leave during her mother's daily afternoon naps, as she was always tired. She planned to escape then, to grab her suitcase, put on her shoes and walk out the door. On the day of her planned escape, it was a particularly sunny day. "Perfect for traveling," Fay thought to herself. It was lunch time and Fay wished mamá was a better cook so she could take some of the food with her or at least travel with a full belly. Instead, she pushed away her plate, "I am full!" Her mother glared at her but accepted the plate. Fay never really had the taste buds for most human food anyway. She often rejected everything her mother cooked.

After dinner, mamá announced, "me voy a dormir. Ven, tú también." Fay frowned, "I am not sleepy, can I play with my paper dolls?"

"No. Vente a dormir," Her mother ordered. Fay wondered if she knew her plan. "No! ma, please? I'm not sleepy!" Fay whined, hoping she would give up and let her be.

"Ven paraca," she demanded. As Fay climbed into bed she was reeled in and entangled by her mother's arms and legs. Fay wiggled and groaned trying to escape her mother's embrace.

Fay's mother then made a deal to appease her, "if you do not fall asleep in 60 seconds, you can leave. Just count," her mother instructed.

"Okay!" Fay responded, sure she would win.

Time passed, more than 60 seconds. Fay opened her eyes to darkness. She lay on the bed, alone and all she could see was the light that came through the cracks of the bedroom door.

She realized she had failed at her mother's game. That night, she drew another escape plan.

The solution was clear, to leave before anyone was awake to see her. This time, there would be no one to stop her. And so, Fay went to bed, dreaming of the new life that awaited her. She thought of the friends she would make, imagined what her real mother looked like, and thought of her as a fairy, the Queen of the Fairies. Fay drifted into her dream and received her own wings and her crown as her mother's princess. Mousy friends who lived within the trees pre-

pared a special drink for Fay to drink and shrunk her to their size. She went to their tiny parties and sat in their chairs and drank from their tiny cups made of walnuts. She lay on a bed of grass and was covered by a blanket made of webs. The pillows were flower buds and lightning bugs illuminated her room. She felt home for once, like she belonged, but most importantly, she felt loved.

Morning came, but the sun was just rising. There was no time to waste, but for the first time, Fay wanted to say goodbye. She distracted her thoughts, but thinking of the home that awaited her reminded her why she had to leave. Fay gathered her suitcase once again, opened it to ensure all she needed was there. Fay snapped it shut and walked to the door. She undid the bolt and turned the knob slowly. Fay stepped out to the cold morning air. All was still colored blue but the light of the sun and its warmth could be felt. One could hear the birds sing, talking to each other about their plans for the day. Fay closed the door behind her slowly and stopped it from slamming.

Fay began to walk towards the forest and wanted to look back. She knew that if she did, she would regret it all and her bravery would go away. So she kept walking and soon, she could hear the current of the river. The water was wild and rushing, pushing the rocks and the leaves out of its way. Each step Fay took, she could feel closer to home than ever before. Soon, her legs began to feel constrained. She took off the metal brace that surrounded her waist and the metal rods that guided her legs. Her spine aligned and began to walk in a straight line. Her feet began to feel heavier than usual. So, she set her suitcase down and removed her steel shoes and replaced them with her white lace socks. As she kept walking, her sight became blurry, so she removed the rounded glass from each eye and placed it on top of a rock. Fay did not see anything magical or extra ordinary yet, but her body knew where it was heading.

She came to a path that led to a hill. Fay climbed up and held onto the grass that covered it. Upon descent, she decided to roll her body down. She giggled at every turn until she stopped and saw a stone road, not gray and broken pavement with broken glass like

she has seen before. No, this road was made of different sized stones, none alike, just like her grandmother's buttons. The stones, each surrounded by bright moss and peaking flowers felt like a carpet under her toes. The mist that fell that morning wet her socks but the softness welcomed each step she took. The town was silent until Fay heard the sounds of water splashing and spilling from a white marble fountain. The water that flowed was clear and pristine. The bottom of the fountain was adorned by mosaics of every color. Like precious jewels, they shone as the sun hit the water. The immense peace overwhelmed Fay and she realized she had arrived at her true home. She had walked through a secret portal that only those who belong can enter. Fay continued to walk and go deeper within the village that was part of her new kingdom. There were chickens running without an owner and brick houses with tin roofs and gardens surrounding them. Towards the middle of her kingdom there was a green gazebo surrounded by yellow and white flowers with yellow buds at their center. Fay sat on the bench with her suitcase at her side to decide what to do next.

There was a loud hypnotizing ringing of brass. Fay thought they were church bells and walked towards them. The church was like no other she had ever seen before. The church was surrounded by pink trees and lush grass. The church was entirely made of white stone, and had golden doors. Fay identified it as her castle and the bells announcing her arrival. Fay was finally home and a new life awaited. The world she had left behind never accepted her, judged her for being special and rejected her gifts. Now, she could reign as the princess she knew she was all along. Thinking about meeting her new family excited her, and so she grabbed her suitcase and ran to the church doors. She imagined the feast set out for her, one that she would enjoy. She thought of the joyful dancing that would follow, and the balloons and confetti that would fall upon her once she walked through those golden doors.

Fay stood in front of the doors, knocked softly, but no one came to greet her. So, she knocked harder, with a little closed fist. When no light went on through the stained glass windows, and no one

answered her call, Fay began to worry. And so, Fay put her little blue suitcase down and banged as hard as she could with both hands. When no one let her in, she began to kick the door in frustration. Fay took five steps back, took a big breath, held it in, enlarging her cheeks and blew as hard as she could. But, she was powerless in this world. The golden doors remained shut for her. She ran her little body against the door, but nothing happened. Her eyes began to water and tears fell from her eyes onto her warm cherub cheeks. She did not sob, or cry out. Her sorrow went much deeper. "What does this mean?" she thought. For if she did not belong to that world nor this one, where could she be safe? Where she could lay her head? Where would she be loved?

She stopped, wiped her tears with both hands, stepped back and stuck her tongue out at the grandiose church building. "¡Ya no te quiero!" She yelled as hard as she could. The birds perched on the pink trees flew in fear of Fay. She grabbed her suitcase and began to miss her earthly mamá and wondered if she missed her too. Fay began to run back, she crossed the green gazebo, passed the white marvel fountain, and ran up the grass hill, walked through woods and exited the magical forest. Fay found her rounded glass for her eyes and placed them on her face, laced her steel shoes back on, and secured to her waist her metal brace that guided her legs. She was glad they still fit her body and even felt comfortable for once. She ran back home, feeling like centuries had passed. Fay was surprised to find the ordinary door of her earthy home, just a bit ajar. She wondered if anyone missed her if her mamá would welcome her back. Fay walked through the door and the house was still sleeping. There was no sound but the fans that sat on the window sill of their small house. The bedroom door was still closed, so Fay walked back to the room, unpacked, took off her shoes, undid her brace and removed the rounded glass from her face. Fay went under the covers with her mamá and embraced her. She understood that her purpose was always to be on this earth and placed in this family for a reason. She vowed to protect her mamá with all her gifts and save her from herself. One day, Fay would help her pack and they'd both go on an

adventure together to a new world. Fay would be there, to teach her how to pack a good suitcase.

