

## THE NESTING INSTINCT

Houses had always seemed to him a retreat, a place from which to surveil the outside world. To her they were a passion, a work in progress, a vehicle rather than a destination.

- No me gusta esa, she said about a building he'd pointed out, a post-colonial villa with louvred wooden shutters, mottled brickwork and a pleasing aspect of decay. He was trying to learn Spanish, she was helping him. But he was a slow learner and sometimes she grew impatient.

At one point they stayed in a wooden beach house; it made him think of a song that was being played a lot on the radio. Somewhere else they slept on the sand itself. They had a tent, but they didn't use it. He took it out from its bag one time to see how to put it up, and that was it. They wanted something more substantial than nylon for the roof and walls of their first co-habitation.

- I like that.

- No, I think that one's better.

- Oh, guau, look at that one! ¿Que lindo, no?

- ¿Que piensas de esa casa ahi, la azul, cerca de los arboles, entre la blanca y la roja?

- Si, es OK. Pero prefiero esta más.

Lying in one of the many beds they shared as they travelled up the coast, he watched a spider hanging motionless from its web, stitched across the corner where the ceiling met the walls.

- It's like a spider, he said. Spiders have various modes. Web-building mode, waiting mode, eating mode, mating mode. Now that spider, it's in waiting mode. It hasn't moved a nanometer in the last thirty minutes.

- Maybe its thinking, she said. Maybe it's in thinking mode.

- Thinking of what?

- Of mating, she said, and grabbed his leg.

He laughed and squirmed away.

- I think it's happy, he said. And swinging his feet from the bed he walked the few steps over to the aged fridge that sat chuckling to itself in the corner of the room.

- Anyway it's a she, she said, rolling onto her stomach and reaching for a magazine. Spiders are always girls.

- ¿Porque?

- Porque las gusta comen sus hombres.

- ¿Oh si?

- Sip.

- Pues, if you're going to eat me then you won't be wanting this sandwich.

A proposition which, as he'd hoped, she loudly protested.

The next day, driving along the coastal highway, they saw another house. Large, streamlined, modernist, its jutting concrete balconies and calm flat rooves lent it the air of being involved with its surroundings and yet removed, as if it were both busy going somewhere and yet somehow happy standing still.

He was driving and she was fiddling with the stereo but they turned their heads and pointed and cried out together.

- That's it! Esa. La ultima. La perfecta. The one.

Their eyes met and they smiled and they drove in silence for a while, his hand on her thigh, her hand on his, listening to the music she had chosen, thinking of stopping somewhere soon to find a hotel for the night, happy in the careful manner of couples on the run from the feeling that their love is nothing more than a kind of extravagant holiday.