



THE RODRÍGUEZ TANGO

by Tony Beckwith © 2001

IT WAS COOL IN THE LOBBY of the old hotel, and the lights were dim. Such a welcome relief from the heat of the streets! Fernando and Mariluz stepped through the doorway and walked hand-in-hand across the tiled floor. The desk clerk looked up and grinned, “*Buenas tardes.*”

Fernando said, a little curtly, “Mr. and Mrs. Rodríguez.” The clerk nodded and wrote in the huge ledger. “Your keys Mr. Rodríguez,” he said, and grinned again. Fernando shepherded Mariluz to the elevator, carrying an overnight bag in his other hand. As the elevator door closed on them the clerk’s grin dissolved into a smirk. “Rodríguez!” he said knowingly, rippling his eyebrows up and down over his skinny forehead.

Summer in Madrid is always hot, and before air-conditioning changed things, many families were separated during those weeks or months. The wives went to the beach with the children while the husbands stayed in town to work and commuted to the coast on the weekends. Over time, hotels noticed that on those warm

nights in the half-empty city an above-average number of guests were called “Rodríguez.” This surname is, of course, as common in Spanish as Smith is in English. And the guests, of course, were those hard-working husbands and their equally hard-working secretaries.

This summer trysting evidently became so commonplace that the idea entered the language in the form of the name that had graced so many hotel registers. To this day Madrileños will say: “I’m a Rodríguez,” when their wives are out of town — though it doesn’t necessarily mean that they are misbehaving.

Mariluz swept into room 348, looking radiant. Fernando closed the door and threw his arms around her. “Mariluz!” he said urgently. “Open the bag, Fernando!” she whispered, then moved to the windows to close the heavy, wine-colored curtains, shutting out the view of the evening sky.

Fernando opened his bag, took out a cassette player and set it on the nightstand. He said, “Are you ready, *mi amor?*” Mariluz came towards him with her arms open and her lips slightly parted. She stood as close to him as she could and looked up at his handsome face. “Yes!” she murmured. He reached back and pressed the start button on the cassette player. As the music filled the room he put his arm around her waist, she put her outstretched hand in his, and they moved as one, as dancers in a dream. The music was strong and rich, with an irresistible rhythm like the pull of an ocean tide, and a baritone voice that sang the mournful lyrics of a tango.

Tango has many moods, and Fernando always pushed the bed against the wall to make room for them all. It was different every time. Sometimes Mariluz chose the music; sometimes she let him surprise her. They danced to everything they could find, from the scratchy recordings of early classics that crackled with a brittle, glaring intensity (and seemed so Italian), to the cerebral jazz-fusion of the later styles. In a thoughtful mood one evening, Fernando observed, “Tango is a voice for ordinary people. It’s like the blues, or flamenco.”

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“I like tango far more than flamenco!” said Mariluz, whose family was from the south.

“Young people tend to turn away from what their parents like,” he replied patiently, his hand firmly on the small of her back. “But I think it might be cyclical, like fashions. Maybe one day

sevillanas will come back into style.” And they did. But by then Fernando and Mariluz Rodríguez had air conditioning in their apartment, and stayed at home in the evenings with the kids. ★

