

“With a format that evokes the ‘One Thousand and One Nights,’ this is not a book for the faint of heart. Beatriz Parga returns with a new hit “El Macho Latino,” an unconventional novel about love, narrated in a provocative and picaresque style. The protagonist, Sofía Martínez, meets the man of her dreams, a poet with a ponytail. “What are they going to live on,” question her mother and two aunts, who intend to prevent the marriage by any means possible. They decide to use a trip to Italy – to the picturesque region of Cinque Terre – to tell Sofía nightly tales about the infidelities and lies of “El Macho Latino” (the Latin macho). Many men and women may have experienced similar stories, as real and full of humor as the ones they will find in this delightful book.”

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CHAPTER V

“MACHOS” WITH A MASK: THE MORALIST

My friend was a beautiful Cuban with cat-like eyes, who came to New York with her parents when she was just an adolescent. She never dreamt that she would find the love of her life at such an early age. He was a man who spoke slowly and dispassionately, yet he won her heart. He was not particularly attractive, but Elena soon realized that Roberto, a young Ecuadorean whom she’d met at a bingo game at her church, was the man of her life.

Five years later, and with two sons, a four-year-old and a two-year-old, Elena considered herself lucky. Roberto was responsible; he liked to work. He was a good husband and father, just as he had promised when he proposed to her one sunny afternoon in Central Park.

He didn’t lend a hand around the house, but Elena knew that it was not in his nature to do so, so she didn’t fight about it. He didn’t know how to fry an egg,

or sew on a button. "Just as well," she thought. "He is the kind of man who will always need a woman in his house."

They lived in New York, until they got tired of the freezing winters and left for Santo Domingo, where Roberto had found a good business opportunity.

"There you will not have to wash dishes or clean the bathroom," he told his wife. "You will have a maid at home and will be able to live like a queen."

As soon as she arrived on the island, Elena felt captivated by the aroma of the earth, the blue sky, the friendliness of the people. Besides, they would no longer have to remain indoors every time there was a snowstorm.

"The difference is that here you will be able to enjoy life more. In New York one only lives to work," said Ernestina, Elena's mother, and who three years earlier had moved to the Dominican capital.

With two small children and the heat that she was not accustomed to, it was not easy to organize their household. But within a week of her arrival, the neighbors had already offered to find a maid who could help her with the children and the kitchen.

Elena looked carefully at the first applicant for the job, and immediately she was taken by her beautiful white smile, her ebony skin, and the abundant hair, which she had adorned with bougainvillea flowers.

"She is too pretty. Better find another woman," warned her mother.

“That is no problem,” said Elena. “My husband is a serious man, one who has the highest moral standards. I trust him completely.”

She felt lucky to be married to such an honorable man, even though he was perhaps somewhat puritanical. He did not allow her to wear clothes that showed too much of her neckline, or tight pants, or short skirts, or to spend time with divorced women. Deep down, however, she admired his integrity, his Christian devotion, and his great strength of character.

Not paying any attention to her mother’s warnings, Elena hired the beautiful mulatto woman. Her name was Santos. She was slim and had such shapely legs. She was always in a good mood. Early each morning she would prepare the coffee and then carry a tray with the two cups: one for Elena and one for Roberto.

“Good moooooorning,” she would say with a smile while entering the bedroom, the tray covered with a well-ironed and starched cloth.

“I don’t know what I would do without her,” Elena would tell her husband. “She’s with me all day, and the children adore her.”

Six months later Elena was so happy in her new home that she vowed never to return to New York. She now had several friends with whom she would go out to the park, engage in lively conversations, exchange recipes and the neighborhood gossip. They would also go out with their children to the nearest ice-cream parlor, celebrating – almost on a weekly basis – the birthday of one of

the kids from her group of friends. Her husband would come home for lunch, and would come home early from work as well. Life couldn't be any better.

One night, Elena woke up after hearing the howling of some nearby cats. She looked at the clock on her night table; the fluorescent hands indicated it was 2 a.m. She extended her arm out over the sheet to her husband's side of the bed, and noticed that he wasn't there.

"Roberto?" she asked before turning on the light.

Roberto was nowhere to be found.

Surprised and worried, she searched the three floors of the big house, running down the staircase as she screamed her husband's name.

Suddenly, she heard her husband's voice. He sounded upset, speaking loudly, as if he were scolding someone.

It was then, while crossing the terrace that led into the kitchen, that she saw the beautiful mulatto woman completely naked. She shyly covered her bosom with one hand, while the other one covered her more intimate parts. Roberto questioned her out loud.

"You are an immoral person. How dare you walk around the house like this? Don't you realize that this is a house of decent people? I can tell you are used to behaving like a woman of the streets. It is disgusting to see you behaving so shamelessly."

"Roberto," interrupted Elena. "What are you doing on the terrace in your underwear?"

“It was very hot, and so I came down to get something cold from the refrigerator. And I found this woman walking around the house naked! This cannot be, it cannot be. This is outrageous,” he said furiously, staring at the maid with a defiant look.

“Well, she won’t do it again. Maybe she doesn’t have any pajamas,” said Elena, defending her young employee who, her head down, remained silent.

“You don’t have clothes to sleep in?” asked Roberto angrily.

“No, sir,” said the woman, still covering herself in embarrassment.

“Well, if you do not have clothes to sleep in, that means that you have spent your entire life sleeping naked. You have no shame. How can you be so disrespectful to my family?”

“But, sir,” the woman attempted to speak.

“Don’t say anything. You are beyond forgiveness. This is incredible! You are shameless... Walking around the house like this. Never have I seen such insolence!”

Roberto shouted with rage.

“You are indecent. Tomorrow I will personally take you to the train station and send you home. I can’t allow someone like you to live in my house. You would set a bad example for my small children.”

“Honey, aren’t you exaggerating?” said Elena in a conciliatory tone, afraid of losing such a loyal and good worker. “Santos has said she won’t do it again.”

“That’s the least she could do! We can’t allow a woman with such unsavory habits to live in our house. Look at this! Can you believe it? She walks around the house at night completely naked. That cannot be tolerated! This woman has no moral principles. Tomorrow I am making sure that she returns to her home. I cannot allow this undesirable woman to continue living with us.”

Elena’s pleas to keep her efficient maid fell on deaf ears. Finally, as a macho man whose honor has been offended, he yelled one last time.

“She has to leave. She has to leave and that’s it! Stop begging. Tomorrow I will take this woman to the train station. She has bad habits and does not deserve to work in a decent home,” said Roberto while looking at the shape of her breasts and quickly removing his gaze.

The next day, Santos entered her employers’ room in a very subdued manner. She carried the usual tray with the coffeepot and the two cups.

Roberto gave her a withering look and said in a thundering voice:

“Get your clothes ready, because you are leaving! Get out of this room and wait for me downstairs. In ten minutes I’ll be at the door!” Those were his angry words as the beautiful dark-skinned woman placed the tray on the bed.

A few minutes later Roberto left the house with the maid en route to the train station. He had ordered his wife “not to say goodbye to such trash, with no principles or morals.” A bit saddened, Elena accepted her husband’s decision.

That afternoon, when Elena went to visit her mother, she asked her to look for a new maid. She then told her what had taken place the night before.

“And you believed Roberto?” Ernestina asked.

“Why wouldn’t I believe him? Mother, you know that my husband is a man of the utmost propriety. That’s why I am with him. If he weren’t like this, I would get a divorce and raise my children all by myself.”

Twenty years later, Roberto left Elena for Liliana, the young secretary in his office. Her whole world collapsed. How could a man with Roberto’s principles abandon his home and family?

It was then that Elena heard from her mother and a cousin that Roberto was never the good and faithful man he pretended to be.

“You should never have allowed him to take that maid to the train station,” said her mother. “Several people told me that what he did was set her up in an apartment a few blocks away from your house.”

“Why didn’t you tell me this before?” Elena demanded.

“It wasn’t worth it. I chose to remain silent because I didn’t want to break up your home and have you raise your two small children alone, “ said her mother.

“This story cannot be true,” said Sofía.

“Believe it or not, it is as real as we are. Back then my friend was young and naïve, and she believed her husband.”

“You’re right,” agreed Peregrina. “I know who you’re talking about. Years later, when her husband fell in love with someone else, this good woman had to

undergo psychological treatment for a year. She could not live without the man who had been the center of her life since adolescence, and whom she believed would never betray her.”

“Did she ever recover from such misfortune?” Sofía asked.

“Yes, and she remarried. But from that moment on, she always tried to protect herself. Never again did she believe so innocently in someone else...”

Elena’s moment of revenge would finally come 12 years later, when Liliana, the woman for whom Roberto broke up their home, left him – old and infirm – for a young bodybuilder who worked in her company’s cargo section.