

Duende is a coming of age novella exploring the shell game of memory. Employing an older/younger narrator, *Duende* explores the liminal space between childhood and adulthood where memories make sense in hindsight, which ultimately distorts the initial event. It uses flamenco as an extended metaphor to explore the process of becoming. *Duende* also investigates narrative structure. Employing the form of a great stellated dodecahedron, *Duende* was created to be read in any order, starting from the beginning, middle or end. The whole of the narrative is much bigger than the sum of its parts.

Excerpt from *Duende*

With August came the blinding heat that drove Sevillanos to seek refuge in the beaches surrounding Portugal and Spain. Daniel's family shuttered their *bodeguita* and headed north to Asturias. My language school also closed, and I spent my days in Lola's studio learning the *farruca*, a melancholic, virile, deliberate dance whose severe attitudes and quick intense footwork absorbed my longing. Because the *farruca*, was traditionally performed by men, Lola let me practice in jeans, my body's center lowering, chest lifting, hips still. With its dramatic shifts in tempo, the *farruca* allowed for interpretation. There was graceful phrasing filled with lunge-like steps, soundless turns and elongated arms. Liquid movement gave way to heel stamping *subidas*, to increase the tempo, punctuated with sharp poses and long *escobillas* to show off footwork, and ended with a *llamada* or a call which invited the guitarist to slow the rhythm back to its original tempo. Over intricate improvisations of the guitar's melody, my arms took the focus of movement, affording me a playfulness that mimicked Daniel's charisma and led me through a series of turns that covered the length of the studio's floor. Dancing its molten sequences, taking space, the *farruca* emboldened me. I'd leave the studio and swagger my way

home, stopping to test drive my fledgling Spanish on shop keepers re-opening for business after the day's siesta.

In September, Lola enrolled me in a secondary school, and I didn't see Daniel, for he too was back in school, having traded hedonistic misdemeanors for the mind bends of *Bachillerato* preparation. When another dead girl turned up in the marshy lowlands of the Guadalquivir River, I made my way under the wide arc of the sky towards Fabiola's. Daniel was sitting at an outside table, legs sprawled, the nexus of his group. Scattered around the plaza, candles winked on tabletops like drifting embers. In the shadow of an old church, I stood very still, counting the *farruca*'s 4/4 rhythm, conjuring the butterfly fluttering of guitar strings. My arms rose to third position, my chest arching up and out, gliding my feet forward as my arms returned to my sides.

"I thought I'd see you tonight." Daniel's curls, lionized by the summer sun, had grown longer; he wore them tied back at the crown of his head.

"You return from vacation and another girl turns up dead. Coincidence?"

Daniel creepified his voice. "Be afraid. Be very, very afraid." His voice returned to normal as he switched to Spanish. "Everyone, this is Lava. Lava, this is, well, everyone."

In my head, my feet were accenting the 1, 3, 5, and 7 beats of the double measures while my fingers made fanning movements behind my back. I gave a smile to the conga line of faces.

"Come on. Let's get you a *caña*." Daniel grabbed my hand and led me inside Fabiano's. His palms wore a dress of sweat. We sidled up to the bar and got walled in by people. "How was the rest of your summer?"

The heartbeat of *tacón* steps echoed in my head. "Good." Flamenco, with its language of violence and romance, had consumed my boredom and impatience. "I was with my cousin a lot. How was Asturias?"

“Fun.” The corners of Daniel’s mouth gimped upwards. “Lots of tourists.” He looked at me as if to figure out how tall I was. “You seem different.” Above his upper lip, a thin sheen of sweat played hide and seek with the bar light.

“Different how?”

“I don’t know. Like you, but more so.”

People swelled towards the bar, pushing me into Daniel.

“Sorry,” I said, stepping on his sandaled feet.

He righted me. “Your giggles are brimming with sympathy.” He feigned pain. “Ow. I think my toes are broken. Qw! And now my arm is too.”

“I didn’t hit you that hard. This time anyway.”

“I see. The lady’s got a lust for violence. Maybe you’re the killer dumping vulnerable young girls in the scenic panorama of Andalusia.”

“May be.” We clanked glasses and drank. “We’re all possible killers.”

“I don’t believe that.” He stifled a burp.

“Look at soldiers and police officers. They don’t think ‘I want to kill someone. I think I’ll join the force,’ but then they do.”

“They kill because of their jobs. They have to.”

“That’s my point. We are possible killers. And police don’t always have to. You’ve heard of ‘Hands up, don’t shoot.’?”

“That’s America.”

“What about accidental killers like drunk drivers? Or even better, the self-glorified disillusioned who shoot up schools and churches.”

“Those are extremes, and America, and not people in general.”

Siren lights spun in my funhouse mirror of memory. “Drug addicts, not nationality specific, who kill because they need a fix.”

“That’s very specific. Do you know anyone that’s actually happened to?”

I held my glass of beer to my heating face. “How about people who kill to protect their families?”

“Again, how often does that happen?”

“But it does, and that’s my point. We all have the capacity for violence, maybe even to the point of killing.”

“Okay, under what circumstances could you kill?”

I sipped at my beer. “Rage. What’s so funny?”

“You say ‘rage’ so calmly. I might —for love.”

“That is so cliché, not to mention contradictory.”

“Says the raging teen. How so?”

“Love is supposed to be benevolent, sometime redemptive, but violent?”

“You said it yourself. Someone is protecting his family, the people he loves.”

“Maybe protecting them is about ego, to be the hero. Or maybe it’s something instinctual, so there’s no before thought. It could also be a sense of duty. But none of those motivations are love.”

“Crimes of passion?”

“Passion isn’t love. It’s like facon. It’s mock love.”

“Facon’s really good food.” Daniel gave me his big eyes as mirth wrinkled his mouth.

Our conversation lulled as we got lost in a staring context moment. A bead of sweat slid down the bowl of my back.

Daniel finished his beer. “So.”

“So,” I volleyed the word back to him.

“Do you want to get out of here?”

“Okay.”

Daniel’s hand slithered my waist, leading me through a sea of patrons. Along the plaza, café tables spilled with people as if the city’s streets had magnetized all of Seville from their homes. I breathed deeply. The faint smell of citrus underscored a perfume of jasmine teasing the dry night air. Cigarette smoke from a nearby table laced the sweetness, panthering it like a stealthy *compàs* beneath a flamenco guitar melody. When I snagged Daniel’s eye, the emotional canon of flamenco compressed like silk scarves into a magician’s pocket.

He weaved us through a knot of narrow streets towards the Guadalquivir where the frosted sky had turned the river a milky pewter. We walked down some steps to the embankment and followed the water. The memory carousel in my mind spun images of splayed insulation and crusting discarded socks littering the overgrown lawns of my neighborhood in Detroit, derelict houses fingering their way onto our block, their glassless windows like phantom eyes tracking my every move. Here was the gentle laughter of the river echoing off an embankment lined by Crayola-hued houses and the faint strum of guitar music to accompany our walk. When Daniel pulled me close and kissed me by the river’s edge, I was mystified by the luck of life.

That first kiss begot another and then another like beads on a string. The inside of Daniel’s mouth was a racetrack full of dangerous curves. I ran slick. We found a bench where we lost our hands in each other’s clothes. I was on my back and he was on my front, and I thought about saying stop when the *farruca*, with its urgent rage and beauty, pulsed through me, sparking something wild, something vivid. In my head echoed a stampeding *escobilla*, building in rhythm

to rival Daniel's breathing, until he was on his back and I was on his front, astride, and confused as to what to do. My heart beat between my legs. Like learning flamenco, I stopped thinking and let myself feel as my world condensed to a spear of pain which melded into warm, elastic wetness. My hips rocked back and forth, finding Daniel's rhythm, finding their way. Behind my eyelids were swirls of color: the iris, orange and yellow of sunset, now a twirling flamenco skirt. I was spinning to crescendo, an ecstatic furor which climaxed with an arm raised in triumph, a wild breathless second cut short as Daniel pulled out and came. As our rhythm collapsed, I slipped from the park bench, catching myself on one leg as Daniel stilled, exertion coloring his cheeks, his bared teeth fixed in a grimace of animal taxidermy, eyelids twitching. I was desperate for a mirror for I wanted to see if I looked different too.

"Do you have a tissue?" Daniel's hips jostled.

He was blood stained, the remnants of a burnt out fire. "Let me check." Swinging my leg around, I knelt beside the bench, pressing my thighs together as I rummaged through my bag.

"Here."

He took a Kleenex from the pack. "Thanks," and wiped himself. "I didn't think it'd be your first time."

"Why not?"

"You're American."

"You're funny." I turned away to clean myself, thankful for the cobalt dark. There was a constellation of blood on the hem of my skirt, which I hid under my knee. "Is that ok?"

"I guess." He threw the tissue with my tissue towards the river. It caught on the concrete lip of the causeway before a gust of river breeze turned it into a tumbleweed.

A moment before, we had been interlocking puzzle pieces; now only the ghost heat remained. I stood, arms and chest moving in slow motion stateliness, while the drilling ferocity of my heels went from mischief to murder in the space of a phrase.

“You are full of surprises,” said Daniel, his eyes on my feet.

Flamenco is decision making with no regrets. I sat back down and pulled him close, pecking his salty, linty neck, inhaling his scent of beer and sweat, musk and mollusks, sun-roasted dust and dry leaves. “Don’t worry. I won’t obsess over you because you were my first.”

Daniel looked dubious, the man he was not quite yet twinning beneath the child he used to be.

Tilting back my head, I promised the unfeeling stars. “Not even a little.” A tear slid from eye to ear. I stood. “I should go.”

“I’ll walk you.”

“It’s okay. I know the way.”

“We’re going the same direction.”

Morning twilight broke as we approached the street in our own pockets of silence. A beat started as a wiggle in my shoulders, tremoring through my torso until it lodged in my hips, flower bulbing my body. Swaying to my own rhythm, I turned to Daniel, my right hand twisting up, index and middle fingers touching my right temple and then away. My feet followed, striding into a world that was black and blue and made of outlines.