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Three weeks after the wedding, Juan's dream of returning to the terra had become a conviction. Now it was urgent that they escape the blighted city, scrape the dust from their tongues and find their home ground. They would join a farm collective. They would be citizens of the soil.

Alicia hadn't collected her cleaned wedding dress before Juan promised it to his cousin; everything must be sold, to raise funds for self-sufficiency. Her hoard of books, her winter coat with the rabbit-fur collar, her stereo with the five slots for CDs, her dancing photographs in gold frames; they were all stealthily removed over a matter of days. She ran her fingers over each new space at night, after Juan went on duty, his garnered cash in a nylon money belt under his uniform. One day she missed her bus, and skittering hopelessly after it, she glimpsed her coat in the pawn shop window, pinned with a stranger's brooch.

Alicia took to wearing every piece of jewellery she could cram on. Her library colleagues' teasing followed her as she tapped down the aisles. Was she still going dancing every night? They would need sunglasses for the glare. Hadn't she got her man? She smiled and smiled, stoic, bewildered. Her rings snagged on every book she touched.

Soon the bulge at Juan's midriff was big enough; they dragged their suitcase, a mattress and the wedding saucepans downstairs. Alicia had hidden a box of shoes in her cleaning cupboard, and she whisked them into the truck while Juan was busy with neighbours, shaking hands and slapping backs. But as he swung onto the highway, Juan glimpsed the scarlet of her favourite pair in the rear-view mirror, and she was forced to abandon them. Despite his impatience, she crouched by the kerb and built a defiant cardboard shrine, shoes arranged like soul mates around the edge of the box, their toes pointing coyly down.

The collective was a mix of Marxists, flower children and farmers, housed in a sagging farm. When they arrived, Juan fell into the arms of fellow travellers, and was taken to a Party meeting in the barn. Alicia had an uneasy conversation with a girl in a cheesecloth dress, while she was looked over by a woman with bulging forearms. Neither of them seemed impressed.

She hovered inside their bedroom doorframe for weeks. It wasn't clear what she was supposed to do, as the farmers did not want help, and meals were scavenged. There was no interest in books, or at least not in bourgeois novels; no music. No one cleaned. The only picture in the house was a curling postcard tacked to the kitchen wall with a farm nail. It was a photograph of a couple dancing in an empty ballroom. The woman's leg was coiled around the man, their rapid moves beaten by the shutterspeed. There was nothing written on the back except the photographer's name and the word 'Tanguedia'.

One afternoon, she pocketed the card and pinned it up

above their mattress. No one seemed to notice. Two days later she took an armchair, and a brown cushion; she put them by the curtainless window. Then she sat down, and propped her feet on the box of saucepans.

The Party members quarrelled, and Juan found himself confined to their room, jabbing and swooping his hands, expounding on his betrayal. Eventually he looked at his wife. She was looking out the window at the farm cat, which was batting a piece of red plastic between its paws, and she was smiling behind her hand. Her foot beat a tiny beat. He said her name twice before she looked at him, and her expression of indulgence didn't change. Juan roared, desolate, and swiped at her.

She fell languidly, mockingly. Juan stormed out before he had considered where to go. Eventually he remembered a sympathetic glance from a fox-haired girl who always wore a chain of bells around her waist. She became his destination.

Alicia lay still for an hour, then got up and tested the damage with a finger. Apparently her father's belief that Communists punched like girls was true. She was awake, clear-headed, ready to move. She unpinned the postcard, picked up the keys and the money belt, and strolled out to the truck. As she got out to unhook the gate by the barn, she heard something above the idling engine; a rhythmic thudding with tinkling bells. It was enchanting, the first playful sound she had heard in a month. She put a double hip twist into her walk, in gratitude.

The new library had a grand revolving door, a gesture towards keeping out the dust. It entranced the barrio children, who spent hours spinning in its solid embrace without ever reaching the hall. The librarians had a policy of indulgence; occasionally one of the children would push too hard on the brass bar, and be ejected across the tile floor to bounce off the front desk. The dazed human cannonball could then be forcibly placed in a chair in the children's section to recover. This was as close to a literacy program as the library endowment came. The car dealer who had funded it fancied himself a patron of the Arts, not a philanthropist; he preferred exhibitions to social programs. Today they were hanging grand-scale photography around the foyer: 'Suenas del Barrio', 'Barrio Dreams'. The title had caused some ribald comments, but the photographer was another local made good, so they were suppressed.

Alicia was shouldering through the door when she caught a flash of red through the smeared glass. The image flicked at her again as the doors rolled around, and again, and she teetered briefly. A large photograph was hanging above the desk. A cardboard box, shoes paired around its edge, the barrio in the distance. She walked up to it and touched a bare finger to the over-sized shoes.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Jess Gabriel.