

Ruben and Norma

Ruben Ortiz met Norma at a carnival for Holy Family. They'd both grown up in Brownsville and had lived in the neighborhoods that were near the church. Ruben introduced himself to Norma next to the dunking booth and they started dating a week later. They were serious almost from the very beginning, but Ruben didn't sleep with Norma for the whole two years that they were boyfriend and girlfriend. It wasn't because he didn't try. It was because Norma said, If you really love me you'll wait. This frustrated Ruben, but on their wedding night he felt a certain virile pride knowing he was the first man to touch his new bride. He was twenty-four and she was barely twenty-one. Norma was embarrassed at the sight of their bodies and the sounds they made when they were together. For Ruben, her awkwardness was a clear sign of how she had waited to give herself to him completely. He had only slept with two girls before he met Norma, but he considered himself more of an expert than those numbers might make a person think. He was the older, more experienced lover and she was his young virgin. They were happy with their love for the first few months. Then Ruben started noticing Norma was acting kind of strange. If they started in one room of the house—like the living room or the bathroom—she'd make him stop and wouldn't go any further until they went to the bedroom. Once he snuck into the shower while she was shampooing her hair and she screamed at him as if he'd broken into the house like some criminal. He left the bathroom, dripping wet and without a towel. And he could forget doing anything in the morning or afternoon because she never felt comfortable with the lights on. If they did happen to make love during the day, she made them stay under the blankets.

"You want to get on top?" he'd whisper to her.

"No."

"Why?"

"I don't like it, Ruben."

"Why not?"

"It doesn't feel right. Is that a good enough reason? You always want to do it another way and I never ask you why. Maybe you don't like how we make love. Maybe I'm doing something wrong."

"I didn't mean it that way, Norma. It's just that we do it the same way every time."

"We don't have to do anything if you don't want."

Ruben wouldn't argue back because he was afraid to ruin the moment. He tried to relax and tune out the sound of Norma's rosary swaying from the top of the headboard, the crucifix clicking against the dark wood.

Norma wanted their love making to be special and not taken for granted. In high school, she'd known girls who treated their bodies like carnival rides. A few ended up pregnant, others ended up with broken hearts. She'd had boyfriends and one of them had stopped going out with her when she wouldn't sleep with him. For Norma, making love was a sacred act between a husband and wife. This is what she'd been taught growing up and she didn't have any reason to doubt it. Her parents had a happy marriage and she never saw them kissing or hugging one another in front of other people. Norma wanted to be with Ruben, but she thought it should be in the privacy of their bedroom. Having sex on the sofa or in the shower felt nasty, like something they might be caught doing, something less than love.

When they were together Norma felt as if her body was glowing from their love. She hadn't experienced the incredible sexual pleasure people talked about, but in a way she didn't want to. She was afraid that if she enjoyed it too much their lovemaking would become less meaningful. In her mind, she was protecting them. She let herself moan louder than she actually felt, but she thought she was paying her husband a compliment. People were probably exaggerating about how great it felt anyway. She liked sex, but never enough to let herself go and risk their love.

Ruben couldn't understand when Norma wasn't in the mood. It started off just being once or twice a week, but with time it became four nights in a row that she didn't feel like doing anything. There was no way for him to predict it. Sometimes Norma would ask him if they could please just hold each other, and other times she'd only say, "No, Ruben." He couldn't decide which of these was worse. If he said he didn't want to *just* hold her, she'd get upset and say all he

wanted her for was sex, that he didn't really care how she felt, that he was using her, and then he'd try to shrug this off by saying, How can a husband be using his own wife? He loved her. He wanted to be close to her. Maybe she was the one that didn't love him. Eh? Had she ever thought of that? And then she'd asked him if he ever thought of anything besides sex? Ever? Ruben complained, but he also wondered if he was asking for too much, if this was the way married people were supposed to be. It was their first year of marriage. He didn't have anybody to ask, and even if he did, this wasn't the kind of problem he was comfortable talking about.

Ruben and Norma rented their small two-bedroom house. They were saving a little each month to buy their own place some day. Ruben taught social studies at one of the middle schools, and Norma was a teller at Texas Commerce Bank. When she wasn't working, she spent her afternoons cooking or visiting her parents. Ruben usually stayed home and watched tv. He liked sports, especially boxing. He'd grown up watching the boxing matches from Mexico. These days he liked to check out the big title fights, the ones from Las Vegas—De La Hoya, Holyfield, Tyson—which meant he needed a special pay-per-view box hooked up to the tv. Ruben and Norma already had the regular cable, but he didn't want to pay the extra money for the special connections. When a fight came up he'd go over to a friend's house, usually another teacher from work, and see the matches. Everybody who showed up pitched in a few dollars. Norma thought he should go ahead and buy the pay-per-view box and save money in the long run. He was pretty sure she was only trying to get his mind off their problems. Ruben finally went along with her idea, but he told himself it wasn't going to make the other stuff go away.

Bradley was the one who said he could hook them up. He lived in Ruben's old neighborhood and had worked for the cable company until he was laid off. Before he left, he happened to stow a few cable boxes in the trunk of his car. He called them his going-away presents. For \$200 cash he could attach one of these boxes to the tv and add an extra fifty channels, including the pay-per-view, except now every fight would be totally free.

Since Bradley was a few years older, he and Ruben never really hung out when they were growing up. Ruben remembered riding his

bike by Lincoln Park and seeing Bradley and his friends hanging out on cement picnic tables, drinking their quarts of beer. His family was from up north, but they'd moved down to Brownsville when he was still a baby. He learned Spanish growing up on the East side of town. For a white guy—güero and with red hair—he pretty much fit in everywhere he went. People accepted him, and no one really said anything or made fun when he messed up a word or two in Spanish. He brought his mother to Ruben and Norma's wedding reception and he spent the night dancing with one girl after another. The guy knew how to dance—rancheras, polkas, cumbias, huapangos, you name it. Ruben's father liked to say that Bradley wanted to be mexicano more than most mexicanos he knew.

"¿Qué onda, bro?" Bradley was standing on the front porch. He carried the cable box and the connections in a brown paper bag.

Norma was out buying groceries. Ruben opened the screen door and shook Bradley's hand in all the ways reserved for dudes from the neighborhood.

It took Bradley a few minutes to hook up the extensions to the back of the entertainment center. Ruben handed him the tools and tried to make himself useful. After everything was connected, Bradley turned on the tv and they drank the beer Ruben had bought for this afternoon. Bradley slouched extra low on the sofa as they cruised the channels.

"You're sure there's no way the cable company can find out I have it?" Ruben asked.

"N'hombre, you're totally safe. No way they find out."

The channels switched on and off before Ruben could make out what was on the screen. It took Bradley a few minutes to find what was he was looking for.

"There you go, Ruben. Watcha las babies."

Bradley drank some beer and cocked his head back, all proud. On the screen, two blonde women were sitting in a hot tub without any clothes on.

"*The Pleasure Channel*. No extra charge for you, bro. They show videos twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, Thanksgiving, New Years, Fourth of July. A toda madre."

The blondes are smiling to themselves and looking at a young guy cleaning the pool next to the hot tub. It's an expensive hotel where normally there would be more people lounging around, holding

drinks with tiny paper umbrellas in them, but this afternoon it's just a young pool guy and two naked blondes. The guy is wearing cut-off blue jean shorts. His hair is pulled back into a ponytail. The younger blonde has a tattoo of a butterfly on her chest. When the bubbles from the hot tub wash over her chest it looks as if the butterfly is bathing itself. The older blonde invites the pool guy to join them. He says he'd like to get in the hot tub, but he can't because he has a lot of work to do and the new boss might get mad. The same blonde woman says she's the new boss they just hired and she thinks he needs to take a break right about now. The other blonde is rubbing his leg up and down, real slow.

"¡Qué loco! If it was me, I'd be in that water like in chingas. I'd be like, Move over mamacita, here comes Bradley. You only have to call me for dinner one time, you know?"

The blondes finally convince the pool guy to join them, but they won't let him get in wearing his shorts. The younger blonde, the one with the butterfly tattoo, wags her finger at him. The guy starts unbuttoning his shorts and the camera moves in for a close-up of the other blonde licking her lips. The camera doesn't show the guy again until he's in the water. The blondes move closer to him, running their fingers through his hair and over his chest. The younger one kisses him on the neck, then gives him a little bite.

"Which one would you take, Ruben?"

"I don't know, man. That's a tough question."

"Me, I'd take the blonde," Bradley said and he cracked himself up big time.

It stopped being funny when they heard Norma pulling into the driveway.

"Don't freak out. Calmado. Bradley's got it under control." He switched the channel to a cop show where a bare chested man was being handcuffed.

They helped Norma unload the groceries from the car. After they were done, Ruben packed the rest of the six-pack in Bradley's paper bag and walked him out. He thanked Bradley for his help and handed him the \$200 folded in half.

"Orale, bro. Don't watch too much tv, eh?" Bradley laughed as he drove away.

During dinner, Norma talked about an old high school friend she'd seen at the grocery store, but Ruben had other things on his mind. He wasn't sure which blonde he liked better. If he had to pick one, he'd probably go with the younger one. She was prettier, except for the butterfly. Something about it bothered him. He'd never imagined himself with a girl who had a tattoo. It was funny to think of Norma with a tattoo. She'd probably never even seen anything like *The Pleasure Channel*. Bradley said there were chicks who got hot watching sex videos. Ruben knew his wife wasn't like the chicks Bradley was talking about, but he thought it was worth a try anyway.

Ruben and Norma watched tv after they finished eating. He was switching the channels when they spotted a rock video. A guy dressed like a woman was singing into the camera. He wore a large black wig, bright red lipstick, a painted on beauty mark, mini-skirt, and high heels. They both shook their heads at the crazy way the guy was dancing. Ruben clicked the remote. Next there was a silver necklace for sale on a shopping program. The hostess was excited and saying there were less than two minutes left for them to get in on this special price. The seconds ticked away on a digital clock in the upper left hand corner of the TV screen.

"What do you think? Sounds like a good deal, no?"

"I don't need it, Ruben."

"Yeah, but that's a good price."

Norma shook her head and Ruben clicked the remote control. A few minutes later he stopped on *The Pleasure Channel*.

It's early morning and a woman with long hair—maybe as long as Norma's—is riding a black horse across an open field. She's wearing an English riding helmet, black jacket, tan riding pants, and long black boots. She's holding a whip. Violin music plays in the background. Her red hair is flying in the wind behind her. She rides the horse into a stable. A man wearing tight jeans and a plaid shirt with no sleeves pitches hay into one of the stalls. It looks like he and the rich woman have met before. He calls her Mrs. Phillips. She calls him Thomas. The man has muscles like a football player, not like a man who works in a stable. He holds the horse by the bridle and pats it on the neck. The camera shows the woman staring at the man's muscles. He's sweating and his muscles shine in the early morning sun. He helps the rich woman off the horse.

Neither Ruben nor Norma said anything about the video. He wished he could be sitting across the room to see her reaction.

The man is taking the saddle off the horse when the woman hits the man on his butt with her whip. The man turns around, grabs the woman by the wrists and pulls her up next to him. The man says, I'll teach you how to use a whip. She says, I can't wait for the lessons to begin. He carries her into the stall and undresses her. The horse nods its head as it looks at the man and the woman having sex on the hay. The woman is saying, "Faster, dammit, faster!" She still has the whip in her hand.

"Did you know this was on cable?" Norma asked.

"No."

"Is there anything else on?"

"Why? What's wrong with this?"

Norma snatched the remote out of his hand as if she hadn't heard his question. She clicked past a few channels to a documentary about a man guiding a dog sled to the South Pole.

Ruben was surprised Norma had let them stay on *The Pleasure Channel* as long as she had. He thought there might be some hope. Half an hour later they started getting ready for bed. Ruben turned on the smaller TV in the bedroom to watch the late news. He had a plan. After the lights were off, he'd see if she wanted to do more than hold each other. He'd bring up the video by joking about whether she was interested in going horseback riding. His idea might have worked, but Norma fell asleep during the weather report.

The next day at work, Norma heard a few of the other tellers talking about a bachelorette party they'd been to. Norma had made up an excuse about having a headache when they invited her. She felt awkward being the only married one in the group. After hearing what went on she was glad she hadn't gone. Rachel, the one getting married, was drunk and dancing with two guys at the same time. "You missed a good one, Norma," one of the women said and tried to imitate the bride by thrusting her hips in and out as she shuffled across the floor. Norma thought she was better off at home. She was a little curious about the videos, but she felt embarrassed saying so in front of Ruben. He might think that she really liked them and then there was no telling what he'd want to do.

This same morning Ruben was explaining to his classes how South Texas used to be a part of Mexico not that long ago. His students were interested in what he was saying, but he kept forgetting dates and had to search through his notes. He couldn't stop thinking about the videos. Each time he mentioned the historical significance of the Nueces River, he imagined the two blondes bathing in the cool water.

He tried watching *The Pleasure Channel* with Norma that night. He couldn't believe it that the blondes were on again. It was as if he'd willed them to appear and there they were. He left it on to see what Norma would say. It didn't take long.

"Why are you stopping it there?"

"It looks interesting. And anyway, we paid money for the channel. We should get our money's worth."

"Is that all you're going to watch now, dirty movies?"

One of the blondes was sitting on the pool guy's lap while she kissed the other blonde. For a second, Ruben wondered why Norma had to be old-fashioned. He also wondered what it was like to kiss a girl who liked to kiss girls. Then he switched the channel.

Ruben waited for Norma to leave the house before he watched the videos. He shut the curtains and locked the doors in case she came home early. Sometimes he imagined he was in the hot tub with Norma, but most of the time, he was in there with the blondes. It was difficult for him to completely relax, though. He had to take down the wedding photo that hung on the wall facing the sofa. Norma's smiling face made him feel funny, like she was spying on him. But once he slipped into the fantasy, it didn't take much for him to get turned on. His first afternoon alone he made a mess of the sofa and worried about how well he had cleaned it up. He sprayed enough air freshener until he was sure he'd killed the smell of sex in the room.

His favorite video was one he called "The Copy Machine Lady."

A businessman is working in an office by himself. There's a knock at the door and a tall, sexy woman walks in carrying a silver briefcase that holds her tools. She says she's there to fix the copy machine. Someone called about a problem with it jamming. The businessman and the copy machine lady pause to look at each other when she says this word, jamming. He leaves her to work on the

machine but keeps staring at her from his desk. She's wearing a short gray skirt that crawls up her long legs whenever she bends over to look inside the machine. She catches him staring and smiles at him. The man comes out of his office to see if she needs any help. She asks him for something to copy, so she can test out the machine. He says he has an idea. The businessman takes her left hand and places it on the copy machine screen. He presses the **START** button. Then he copies other parts of her body, one by one, until she is completely naked and sitting on the copy machine. A green glow of light rises from between her legs.

Ruben was glad when he heard De La Hoya was defending his welterweight title. There hadn't been a good fight in months. He mentioned the fight to Danny Solis, one of the P.E. teachers at the school, and the next thing he knew the guy had invited himself over to the house, although he had to check at home first. His wife didn't like him going out. She'd already caught him with a woman who worked in the principal's office. He had to move out of the house and in with some friends for almost a year before his wife took him back.

On Saturday night, Danny showed up like he'd come from work. He wore a pair of black knit shorts and a gray T-shirt that fit tight around the arms and chest. Ruben grabbed a couple of beers and a bag of chips from the kitchen. Norma was at her sister's house but had made a pot of chile con queso. When Ruben walked into the living room the TV was on *The Pleasure Channel*. Danny had heard about it from another P.E. teacher.

"Blonde chicks, man," Danny said, "I bet those two would do you all night until it fell off."

"Hey, isn't the fight almost starting?"

"What's your hurry? You don't like seeing them getting it on?" Danny crammed a fistful of chips into his mouth.

Ruben felt weird watching a video with Danny, especially one he'd watched on this same sofa.

"I think there were supposed to be girls boxing before the main event," Ruben said.

"What do you want to see that for, man? Chicks with bloody noses? ¿Todas catiadas?"

"They're okay. Some of them are good boxers."

"Maybe you're right, Ruben. But me, I don't like to see that kind of stuff."

Ruben couldn't wait for the main fight to start. He ate the chips and queso to get his mind off the videos. The blondes and the pool guy were still splashing around in the hot tub.

Danny cracked open his beer and took a swig. "The one with the butterfly tattoo looks like she likes it from behind."

Ruben started keeping a daily record of how often he and Norma made love. He marked the dates in his teacher's planner book as soon as he got to work. They'd make love one night and the next five nights she wasn't in the mood: Can't we just hold each other? It was during these mornings when he was alone that Ruben questioned whether she even liked sex and if the times they were together were consolation prizes for him waiting. He'd stopped bringing up the subject because she always treated him like he was a sex maniac, which he was pretty sure he wasn't.

One night, Ruben woke up and realized he was in the bed alone. A blue light radiated from the living room. He found Norma sleeping on the sofa. Her mouth hung open and a drop of saliva formed a spot on the cushion. The TV was on *The Pleasure Channel* and the remote lay in her open hand. She was smiling as if she was having a nice dream. In the background, he could hear the rich woman and the man having sex. The horse was snorting almost as loud as the man.

Ruben didn't exactly like the idea of Norma watching the videos alone. He would've thought about it more, but he noticed she was wearing one of his large T-shirts and it had moved up her thigh, enough to where he could see her panties. They were white and cut higher on her hips than most of her other panties. They were new. He'd never seen her wear these before. French panties, he thought they were called. Her legs looked smooth. Ruben could smell the cocoa butter lotion she used. He reached out and touched her.

"No, Ruben."

"I was helping you get back to bed."

"No."

She staggered to their bedroom. The bathroom light cast a ray across the top of the headboard. Ruben maneuvered his way through layers of sheets until their bodies touched. He faced her back and smelled the shampoo in her hair. He curled his arm around her waist

and slid his hand down to her legs. They were softer than he remembered them ever feeling. He kissed her neck and slipped his hand under her T-shirt.

"No, Ruben."

"Come on."

"It's late."

"So?"

"I'm sleeping."

"You're talking in your sleep then. Maybe you can make love in your sleep."

"That's not funny, Ruben."

He ran the tip of his finger along the edge of her panties.

"I said no. Quit it." She turned to face him.

"Why not? I'm your husband."

"That doesn't mean you own me."

"I didn't say that."

"You act like it. You act like you want me to lie here with my legs open."

"What's it matter? You wouldn't do it anyway."

"You want me to? Is that what you want?" She lay on her back and spread her legs in the air. "Go ahead, what are you waiting for? Be a man."

"Shut up, Norma."

"What's the matter? You don't like the panties?"

"Stop it."

"Want me to take them off for you?"

"Shut up."

"I thought you wanted your woman."

"I want my wife, what's wrong with that?"

She put her legs down. "For what? You're going to fall asleep as soon as you're done."

"I can't get sleepy?"

"Why can't you understand your wife doesn't want to do anything right now?"

"Because she was watching those videos."

"So what if I was watching them? There was nothing else on."

"I don't care. I don't want you watching them."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't."

“Why?”

“Because I don’t want my wife watching videos. That’s why.”

“You can’t tell me what to do.”

Norma locked herself in the bathroom. She couldn’t believe how he was trying to control her. This was the first time she’d ever seen the videos alone. She thought that by watching she might learn some small thing she could do when they were together in bed, so maybe, in this way, things would get better for them. But the videos only made her miss Ruben’s touch. She fell asleep wishing they could make love, even if it was there on the sofa. Her body was warm all over and she wanted to feel him inside her. When she woke up, Ruben was touching her legs like one of the men in the video. Norma missed him, but she felt like he was trying to use her. And now he was telling her what she could and couldn’t watch? She hadn’t done anything wrong. He was the one who kept turning it to that channel. She came out of the bathroom half an hour later wearing a pair of checkered pajama pants her mom had given her for Christmas. Ruben lay in bed, pretending he was asleep. He stayed up another hour because he couldn’t stop smelling the cocoa butter.

The next day he made his classes read to themselves silently. He needed to think. He tried to imagine how long she could’ve been watching the videos and if there were any signs this was happening. The less he came up with the more he was sure she had been doing it behind his back. It could’ve been going on all along, even before they got married. What if she was one of those chicks Bradley said got hot with sex videos? Ruben felt like an idiot for not seeing this sooner.

After work he stopped at a bar near the mall. Ruben entertained himself by gazing at a fake waterfall cascading onto the bar. It was happy hour and he doubled up on his bourbon and Coke. He drank heavily because he knew Norma hated it when he drank too much. He smoked because she hated this too. Each drag felt like a payback for her not accepting him. It didn’t make sense, he knew this. But what did? That he caught his wife watching videos on *The Pleasure Channel*? That she didn’t want to be with her own husband? He didn’t want her watching videos without him, but at the same time, he didn’t want her to be old-fashioned and conservative when they were in bed. He wanted it both ways. Was he asking for too much to want his wife to be sexy, but not too sexy, not sex crazy? Guys were

supposed to be that way. They couldn't help themselves really. But women should be different. His wife, she should be different. She shouldn't have been watching the videos, that's all there was to it. Not alone anyway. It was confusing. He ordered two more drinks.

He paid his tab and drove a few miles down the road to a topless bar called Camachin 11. He bought himself a drink and found a table in the back. A tall, skinny girl wearing a purple thong was dancing on stage. Her light brown hair reached her narrow shoulders. Ruben thought she looked young to be dancing. The place was empty except for three older men sitting at a table near the stage. They wore dark suits and looked as if they might be rich Mexicans from the other side of the river. They were watching another girl, with short hair and a see-through shawl, dance over one of the men sitting at the table.

When the girl on stage finished dancing she came to Ruben's table and introduced herself as Sandi.

"Hi, Sandi," he said. Ruben felt happy to be talking to a girl who wore almost no clothes.

"Would you like a lap dance?"

"I don't think I have enough money."

"That's okay, I'm sort of tired. Dancing makes me tired. Can I just sit on your lap for a while?"

Ruben said yes, but he wasn't sure if this was going to cost him any money. After buying his last drink he only had four dollars in his pocket. He couldn't remember the last time he'd been in a topless bar and if the girls were always this friendly. Sandi sat sideways on his lap. He didn't know exactly where to put his hands and he felt like a small child asked to hold a toy but not to play with it. Ruben finally put his arm around her shoulders and she wiggled closer to him. She had a thin shaving rash along the edge of her thong. In the past, he had imagined how smooth a talker he would be if he ever really met a dancer, but the words weren't coming to him now. He tried his best to not stare at her chest while she was talking.

"Do you like my perfume?"

Ruben took a deep whiff and smiled.

"It's called Peaches. My mom gave it to me for my birthday. She's always sending me stuff from home. She and my dad live in Corpus. Last week she sent me a box of cookies, but I couldn't eat more than one because I don't want to get fat. I gave the rest to the doorman.

My mom would kill me if she ever found out. She's the only one in the family that even talks to me anymore. My father doesn't talk to me on account of my life choices. My brother's the same way."

"That's too bad." Ruben wanted to say more to make her feel better.

"You probably won't believe this, but I'm actually a very nice girl. I'm not like some of the other people who work here. I only came by your table because you're really cute and kind of sexy."

"You think so?"

"Yeah, I like your ears. You have real cute ears."

Ruben smiled. He looked around and saw the other dancer sitting on the lap of an old man who was sticking dollar bills in her thong. The girl kissed the old man on the cheek.

"I bet you have money at home," Sandi said. "Maybe you can come back before we close and we can go for a ride in your car. I'd like that."

The sun blinded Ruben when he first walked out of the bar. The alcohol was wearing off and he began to feel bad, guilty about how he let a naked girl sit on his lap. His clothes smelled like smoke and he drove with the windows down. He was sorry he had let things get bad at home. All he ever wanted was to be closer to his wife. The truth was he didn't really like the videos that much. Being with Norma was better than anything he could imagine, better than videos, better than fantasies, better than a naked girl with glitter eye shadow. He and Norma didn't have to do anything wild or crazy, just be together.

She was sitting on the sofa when Ruben walked in the front door. He sat next to her.

"Norma, I need to talk to you."

"Where were you? You smell like smoke."

"Thinking, figuring things out, it doesn't matter where I was." He motioned with his hand as if to say they had much more important matters to talk about. He was glad when she let him go on talking because he didn't want to have to lie about the topless bar, saying what he was about to say wasn't going to be easy. He took a deep breath and spoke. The words came out slow and measured as if he were translating a language he'd never heard.

"Look, I'm sorry about what's been happening. In the bedroom, I mean. I wanted to change you into someone you're not. It was stupid."

Norma nodded. "Ruben, you know I love you even if I'm not in the mood."

"Yeah, but I wasn't thinking right. I was a real pendejo about the whole thing. We started getting the videos and everything got out of control. I wish we'd never bought the hook-up. I'm going to see if Bradley will buy the box back from me. It's not worth it. I'm sorry about last night, about what I said."

"I was only watching the videos because I thought...."

"It's okay, Norma, I love you. You don't have to explain."

Ruben held her in his arms, not too tight, or sexy, but enough so she'd see he was serious about everything he'd said. She liked the feeling of being in his arms again. They stayed this way for a few minutes. When he let go of her, she kissed him on the cheek. Then she kissed him on the mouth softly and he thought he knew what was coming next. She kissed him on the neck, once, twice, the last one more of a love bite. They stood up from the sofa together and started inching towards the bedroom, but Norma stopped him. She undid his pants and pushed him onto the sofa and took off her dress and panties. She straddled him.

She was louder than he remembered her being. The sofa slid forwards and backwards, repeatedly thumping against the side wall. His right leg hung off the edge of the sofa and bumped into the coffee table. She moaned even louder now. He called her name, but she didn't answer. Ruben shut his eyes and Norma pushed herself onto him more. She gave him a tiny bite on the ear. He wanted to tell her that she didn't have to do this for him. They could make love, nice and slow, in their usual way. He tried to sit up and change positions, but she pinned him to the sofa. She rocked back and forth on top of him. Ruben's face was masked in her long dark hair. She tightened her legs around him. His body sank deeper into the sofa cushions. Norma arched her back. "Faster, dammit, faster!" she said. He looked up and tried to hold onto his wife a little tighter.