

# Tanya

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## **Abstract**

This is a short story written by me.

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## **Short Story**

Your hips sag over each side of that tiny broken chair. Your eyes look inwards, to your sorrow. At least it is yours. The damp house is not yours, nor the chair. It all belongs to them (you point to the sky and your eyes roll high). You rest an old shoebox on your knee and quietly take out and show me each certificate they have given you: once a year for working hard; once every five years for dedication to the job; once every ten years for devotion to the goals of the revolution; and then you always win 'hardest worker' too. You have never missed a day. Not in 27 years! Except when you gave birth. Your youngest son enters and you are silent once again. You murmur something to him as he takes the tin pan outside to fill with water for his evening wash. I do not understand what you say. We laugh about this; my lack of understanding, your quiet voice. He tells me that Cubans are lazy talkers, but most of the time you just seem too tired. You sigh after each murmur, and then you clear the space between your nose and your throat with the panicked sound of a lost goose circling an empty pond. Your body is robust and when you throw your head back and laugh you seem like a young girl and you are so beautiful. Your beauty dissipates quickly with your laughter; we are all desperate to make you laugh.

Your firstborn stumbles in noisily and you click your teeth. He is drunk and looking for a dollar to buy more rum. His drinking makes him aggressive, yet more affectionate than the others. He is somehow very exposed, and his tenderness permeates us all. We feel we are all in it together when he is around. He has a sad smile and twisted brow, shrugging his shoulders at his own hard luck and tripping over his feet. He makes you shake with laughter, and me. A real clown. Do you remember that time when

he said that my teacher from England could stay with him in the little room next to the bathroom? No need for a hotel! He had been sleeping there since that argument with his wife. The guttering had broken and all the shit from the next twenty households was festering right underneath the toilet. The men had tried to fix it with a piece of piping and an old brush. The smell just kept getting worse. It was really quite funny when he said that. Afterwards he drank and drank and then collapsed sleeping in the doorstep like an old fool. You just frowned down at him with your screwed up nose so very close to his, a concerned mother inspecting her child, trying to work out what went wrong.

The rice is ready. You put your certificates back, on top of your fifteenth birthday photographs and one of a man I don't recognise sitting in a deck chair. You get up slowly and drag your feet across the floor to switch off the pressure cooker and plug in the electric fan instead. It is getting dark but the heat of the day's sun is still hanging upon us. The fan rotates unwillingly, jerking slightly every now and again before settling back to its routine. You load each plate with rice and beans, and sing a name softly to designate plate to person as you swing around and place it on the table. As we shovel food from plates to mouths you fall asleep in that tiny broken chair with your head hung forward, cradling your life in that shoebox on your lap.

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