

ANTONIO DÍAZ OLIVA
(ADO)

TRANSLATED BY LISA DILLMAN

LUEGO DE NUESTRA EXPERIENCIA FORMATIVA,
Y LUEGO DE LA DESAPARICIÓN DE JORGE,
CON RAQUEL DECIDIMOS CASARNOS.



R A B B I T S

AFTER OUR FORMATIVE EXPERIENCE, AND JORGE'S DISAPPEARANCE, Raquel and I decided to get married. Her mother was happy, she even cried, said we'd be happy, that it was the right decision, without a doubt; her father, on the other hand, was more reserved in his felicitations and, after a few minutes, went and shut himself in his room.

The old man was like that. Silent and restrained.

He'd lock himself up with his books, his maps, our journals. He spoke only rarely to his wife, and to Raquel even less. Of course, while it's true that Raquel's parents didn't talk to each other much back then, I didn't understand that there was something lurking beneath that silence. I was eighteen, newly returned from my formative experience, and struggled to grasp, in those early days as Raquel's husband, that the silence between her parents was the same one that enveloped the entire commune.

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But this was no Bavaria Village, no Colonia Dignidad. Just a hippie commune. Chilean hippies, which are not the same as gringo hippies or European hippies. Still, to the military, we belonged to the same category as those German groups off somewhere in the south, which is why when they found us, in the '80s, after the commune had been up and running for nearly ten years, they made a deal. Why didn't they just take us all prisoner? Send us to the National Stadium or Dawson Island? I don't know. Sometimes I wonder that too. I look back at some of the photos, the ones of the founding members, with their long hair, dirty clothes, sandals, and backpacks—later they did get more formal—and I wonder.

And I truly don't know.

I was young, but not that young. Plus, my mother was one of the founders, though I don't remember much about her, now that I'm trying to reconstruct the story. My father I remember even less, since he was one of the first deserters.

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The formative experience, yes, I'm getting to that.

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At the age of seventeen, after a ceremony, all of the founders' children were sent out for a year of freedom. We had preparatory sessions. Spent more time than usual with our families. Were released from evening chores. And we were given two hours to write in our formative journals. What did we write? Anything. Anything that came into our heads; any act or event we felt was important to our human development. Until the day arrived.

Of course, there was no knowing what day that would be, since it was a surprise. There would be a knock on the door, one of the founders would take us to the wooden gate—usually Raquel's father, who was the closest thing the commune had to a leader—and say goodbye, and suddenly we'd be on the outside, in the elements. There we were. We walked down a road. It was this rocky trail, and it took nearly two and a half hours to get to a wooden hut where someone was awaiting us. We never found out who, though it was probably some soldier in civilian clothing, delegated by Pinochet, aka Pinocchio, to ensure that the community remained isolated. He'd be the one to take us to the city in a minivan that, I later learned, was the same as the kind used to take children to and from school. The drive brought us to a big house in the center of the city. And that's when our formative experience began. A year to do whatever we wanted. Enough money for the first few months.

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And at the end of the year, a decision: either we went back to the commune, or we left it forever.

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There were a few signs. Like, shortly before our formative experience, my mother died. Or like, the first rabbits began to appear, though in the beginning we didn't take much notice.

When my mother died, I was sent to live with Raquel and her parents. I was sixteen, so this was a year before my formative experience. One thing I never understood was why they wouldn't let me see her before she died, why I wasn't allowed to say *ciao, vieja, I'll miss you, thanks for everything*; why they wouldn't let me close her eyes myself, with my own hands. Raquel's father denied me that, just as, years later, he forbade Raquel from seeing her mother's body. Said it was part of our education.

That we'd be better for it.

Whole beings, physically and spiritually.

I remember that at the ceremony—it was the same funeral ceremony when anyone from the commune died—my mother had already been buried, and they gathered us all to pray. Then the founders reminisced about the newly departed. And after that we held hands and had a moment of silence. I didn't feel the urge to cry. I think, for the first

time, what I felt was rage. Rage at not knowing who controlled my life. Raquel's father concluded the ceremony. That morning—a Sunday, I believe—Raquel came up to me, took my hand, and told me we were going to live together. I gave her a smile, but it was hollow. I kissed her. We were already boyfriend and girlfriend by that time. Founders' kids mixed from a young age in our commune. And the founders liked that, of course; it was the only way to keep multiplying, since we had no contact with the outside world.

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I had no trouble adapting to Raquel's family. In part because, when my mother died, I became a silent creature, unlike the person I am today. I had no self-awareness, and no awareness of what was going on around me. I went to the commune school in the morning and to the fields to work my shift in the afternoon; I went to all of the mandatory activities for founders' kids. But I wasn't really present. I adapted to Raquel's house because it was functional and silent; and, in the end, functional people, the ones who still have no regrets, were the ones who never opened their mouths. I was functional back then too. I believed in the commune and did exactly what was asked of me, to the letter. But my mother's death split my life in two: a happy and obedient past and an uncertain present,

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flat and dull as the commune activities. As the speeches the founders made us memorize; indeed, as the legacy we would supposedly inherit.

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Raquel was washing the dishes and I was drying. It was night; we'd already finished dinner. There was this game we used to play, telling the difference between what we remembered and what we thought we remembered from our childhood. Raquel was talking about this image she had of her father, back when he'd been a singer in a band. But actually, she said, rinsing the wooden cutlery, what I truly remember is a song. What song, I asked? I wanted to know if she really did remember the song, or if it was a memory of someone telling her about the song. She didn't reply. There were still dishes with little chunks of polenta and spinach on them. I asked again. What song, Raq? She didn't reply. Look, she said. And pointed out the window. I looked. Through the glass I saw two red dots and then, elsewhere on the patio, two more red dots. And then two more. And two more. And on and on until I began to feel afraid. Raquel dropped the dishtowel and the knife she was washing and stood still a few seconds. I remember that the sounds of her father working filtered up through the stairwell that night; you could hear the sound of the typewriter, one of the few items