

## La Loca

She walked down the same street everyday at the same time, 9:00pm, just getting off the train on her way home. Her days were always the same, up at 7:00 am, out of the house by 8:00 and off to work, where she dealt with what she felt were crazy people all day or at least till 5:00. Then off to another train and a bus to get to school by 6:00. She always thought of Ricky Martin in times like this and could hear him singing what she dubbed her “theme song” Livin la Vida Loca!!

You have to be crazy to run this routine everyday, all day, but she knew that Livin la Vida Loca and being La Loca today would lead to good things in the end; it would one day pay off. Wrapped up in her usual thoughts she walked down the street to her small apartment, where she lived alone.

“Oye mami” she hears in the distance, then another voice “lookn good today, esta guapa” all brings her back to reality.

The same boys sat on the same corner every night doing the same thing, nothing! She would smile, wave and sometimes give them a hard time about doing nothing with their lives, but she liked them and they liked her. They liked that she was smart and did not speak like the other girls in the neighborhood, she would introduce them to new words and their meanings and they could often be heard in the neighborhood using their new words. She liked that they kept her grounded and never allowed her to forget her culture and the proud people she was a part of, even on days when she couldn’t wait to get out of here and become someone else. The boys always seemed to play her favorite Salsa songs late at night and Marc Anthony, Tito Nieves or Jerry Rivera would sing her to sleep. She

felt safe in some way with them there because she knew they watched her the whole way down the street and today would be no different.

Every night as she walked down the street they watched her curves move from side to side, but she knew as long as they watched her curves, as most men did, nothing would happen to her. The boys on the block, no matter how young or old would jump in an instant if something went wrong as she walked home.

Lying in bed tonight Loca, or Crazy as everyone calls her, thinks about how much she appreciates having “men” to protect her but can’t understand why there can’t be one man to protect her.

“I’m damaged, beyond repair, past help, I can’t open up to anyone let alone a man in, I can’t trust, I have no faith that someone would be there for me the way I need.”

“People look at me and think that my life is well put together, that I am motivated and will do whatever it takes to accomplish my goals.”

A lot of my co-workers wish they could be like me, “you are so strong and motivated”, “I wish I could be as focused as you are.”

Yet no one knows the truth. “Truth is I stay busy with work and school so I can’t get lonely, if I’m busy working or studying then I don’t have time to remember that I have no one.” “Truth is on the days where work or school do not consume me I find other avenues to drown my loneliness.”

Loca’s loneliness started when she was very young, no father to teach her real love and treat her like a princess and a mother who blamed her for her father leaving. At a young age she learned that her looks and sexuality would give her the attention she was not getting at home, boys always told her she was beautiful and would give her all the

attention she wanted just for sitting in a parked car with them. Her mother noticed this as well and it only made life worse for her. Very early on she learned to get what she needed from them, money and clothes and as she got older vacations, money for rent, cars, whatever she wanted she got it, it just became that simple. As time went on in her mother's eyes she became a "puta" or a whore, but Loca knew her mother was jealous and only wished she could have what Loca had.

While she was young these men brought her into a world that she knew she would have never experienced without knowing them. A world full of drugs and sex and very high pay offs for providing both. Because she knew so many men from drug dealers to lawyers she knew where to find the best drugs in the city, and many of those men taught her how to properly please a man.

Lying in bed she thinks about all the men that have gone through her life and through her. She hears the music and the boys outside her window, laughing, cursing and singing. "I wonder if they know who I really am." "Would they talk or even look at me in the same way if they knew that when I am not at work or at school that I am allowing myself to be used?" "I work hard, in school and at my job, I'm carrying a 4.0 GPA and will more than likely make the dean's list again this quarter, I have the highest sales penetration in my department and I get into any club without waiting in line and easily can have any man in that club."

Voices continue to fill the night, people talking, laughing and yelling. "I can't wait to leave this place, the yelling, the cursing, all the noise, but part of me knows this is where I belong this is what I deserve."

Loca looks over at the clock and sees it is getting late, knowing she has to get up and start the day all over again brings her back to reality. The noise of the street no longer seems so loud or bothersome. She closes her eyes listening to the sounds of Tito Nieves (the boys have decided to change the vibe) and he puts her to sleep.

Another day, another morning, another bus and train to start off her day, but today is a good day because it is Friday. She purposely never schedules classes on Friday and if her boss is in a good mood then everyone gets to go home early and let the party begin!! One of the girls in the office is throwing a party tonight and of course she was invited because La Loca is the party, she is the one to get things started and close it out for the night, always the center of attention or like her mother used to yell “intremetia”.

Loca always had to be in the middle and that is what her mother meant when she yelled it to her. “Call me what you want” she would yell back but she knew that she would be nothing like her mother. Her mother was not educated, worked like a slave for no money and at a young age her mother already looked old. Loca knew she would get an education, never work harder for someone else than she could for herself and always kept her self looking good. Tonight would be no different!! She would be the center of attention and everyone would know it.

She had a great week at school and her paycheck showed that she had a good workweek, now she was going to have a great weekend. Sitting at her desk she could not help to think about the party. Loca had brought her clothes with her and would change for the night’s festivities at David’s house, one of her many friends but the only one who was lucky enough to accompany her. David is the same man who had bought the outfit she

would be wearing tonight; she only thought it would be polite to wear the dress that he had paid for.

“Give him a chance to squirm all night, just dying to get his hands on me, I mean of course I will give him a lil’ someth’n someth’n, a girl has got to eat.”

She was quickly brought back to reality by the sound of her name “Yaitza, Yaitza!”

“Que, WHAT!!”, she hollered back, momentarily forgetting where she was, only to see her boss standing there peering at her over her cubicle wall,

“I’m sorry Mr. Davis, this sale that just came through has me a bit perplexed, I’m not sure if the vendor.....”

Mr. Davis cut her off, “Yaitza, the sale is not important right now, I need to speak to you and some of the other girls right away!”

As La Loca looked around she could not help to wonder what all the drama was about, “well I guess no one is going home early” she thought to herself because that announcement always came to entire room “we never have to go to the announcement.”

Her and the other girls from her department filed into the conference room just wondering what all the drama was about. Mr. Davis waited till everyone was seated then he began to speak. “Our department has not been doing so well this year and as we move into the 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter we find ourselves looking for ways to reduce cost.”

Loca looked around and saw the look of concern on some of the other girl’s face, “were they thinking what I was thinking?” “Well I have nothing to worry about, I am the top sales person here and they would never get rid of me!” She stopped thinking long enough to hear her boss say “the company has decided to get rid of our department.....”

“What, are you kidding, Oh my god” is all you heard go through the room.

All of the ladies looked at each other in disbelief and some already had tears in their eyes.

Loca jumped up and quickly everyone remembers why she is called Loca, “what the F are you talking about?” “You can’t just call us all in here and tell us we have no jobs, and I’m the best Sales person out there, you would be stupid to lose me!”

“Unfortunately being too good can be a bad thing”, replies Mr. Davis...

“are you, what, you have to be joking!” “So now being too good is a bad thing, I have made more money for this company.....

”Yaitza please this is hard on everyone and yes you have made our company more money in this past year however the company has had to pay you the most bonuses because of those sales and we can’t keep paying out those types of bonuses.”

“Crazy!” is all she could think and by the look on everyone’s face they all had the same thought. Whatever Mr. Davis said after that was a blur, she heard something about severance packages and something about benefits, but all she could think about was getting the hell out of there and the strongest liquor David has in his bar, she was gonna be good and drunk tonight, because she did not want to deal with the news of today and how it would affect her future.

All of the ladies slowly moved out of the conference room back into the offices, only to sit and wonder, some cried. You could hear other people in the office asking what had happened or what was going on. Theresa, the one having the party, asked if everything was ok. “We just all lost our jobs.” “The company has to cut back and we are it”, “but you are their top Sales person” .....

“yes but I guess that was a problem too, paying me has become too much of an expense for the company.”

“Mija, girl that is crazy, what are you gonna do?”

“Right now I don’t know and the only thing that is on my mind is your party, I will deal with life after the weekend.” “I’m sure some of my friends will help out, so I’m really not worried.”

“Girl, tu si eres loca! You can’t always depend on some man to take care of you and be there for you!” “What are you gonna do when these men decide they are tired of being used by you, especially the ones who really like you.” “You are a good person, really you are, you are smart, beautiful and very caring, but sooner or later these brothers are gonna get tired of your game.”

“Yeah, yeah mama I hear you, but can we not talk about this now or tonight for that matter.” “I just want to pack up my stuff so I don’t have to come back to this stupid place, I don’t want to have to deal with people feeling sorry for me, please.”

“Ok, ok, no talking about this, but you have to think about it!” “So, forget all the crazy shit, are you still coming to the party?”

“What, girl are you Loca?” “When have I ever missed a party?”

Missing a party was not an option for La Loca! No matter what was going on in her life or in the world, if there was a party she was going to be there. Loca purposely hits school hard during the week so she would never have to decline a party because of homework or a test. Losing a job affect her going to a party, Never! Theresa was glad to hear that Loca would be in attendance, even though she felt bad for the girl and wish she would stop and think about her future, she knew a party without her would not be a party.

Loca took the train to David's house because it would be quicker than the bus and she just wanted to get there, take a hot shower and get rid of the day that was stuck to her like a hot July day. As the train sped by she watched all the gray, dirty buildings fly by, she often thought about the people who lived in those buildings and wondered if their lives were anything like hers, fake and empty, or were the people in those buildings happy and loved one another despite living in some of the worse conditions the city could offer.

“What are they like, who are they and why don't they move”, is what she thought anytime she made this trip to David's. She loved going to David's, of all the men that have come and gone David was different, he never pushed her to talk about her past or why she is the way she is. He never forced her to think about her future and where she was headed and why was she hell bent on taking that path alone. He just let her be her! His apartment was a haven, a get away from the “boys in da hood”, as she often called the young men on the block, to the noise of everyday life. He had great taste and his apartment was so inviting, everything was well decorated in just the right colors with the right pieces of art, warm Earth tones, browns, tans with a pop of red here and there, it was just right!

David was one of the most fierce men she had every met. He thrived on working out and keeping his body fit, he thrived at making his business, Time, a success and teaching other young men how they could take their knowledge of the street and apply it to life. David was a teacher during the day but at night he rented a small space where young men could come and hang out, however the price for hanging out was time! David made sure that those young men gave back time, to their communities, to their churches, to the old ladies down the block. He believed that if all young men had a place to release the day

they would not be so bent on releasing that bad day on their girlfriends, their mothers or the old lady down the street. Time, is what he called this big idea and he was sure that Time would become a national phenomenon. Some of his Time grads, as he called them, were successes for him already. One going to Princeton on academics, another to Georgetown for Basketball, and here is the kicker, even after they are gone and in their new fancy schools, they still had to pledge time! He encouraged them to hold time meetings in their dorm or rec rooms with boys from the local schools and pass onto them what they had learned. With this David knew that Time would grow and become such a strong force in the community that everyone would have a chance!!

As she got off the train and walked the two blocks to David's place she focused on getting her "game face" on, "never let 'em see you sweat." "Never show a man a moment of weakness, show him your strength and he will always see that you are not the one to play with."

She shook off the day and the bad news that ended her day, she started thinking about the party, the music, the people and the men she could meet. Yes Loca never stopped meeting men, even if she came to the party with a date, "you never know who are going to meet and you should always be prepared", was something else she lived by.

The further she walked the better her mood got, when she reached David's front door and rang the bell, Yaitza was in party mode, La Loca was out and ready.

"David!" she yelled when he answered.

"You know if you would just take the key that I made for you, you would not have to wait." "Oh David, not that again, I told you I don't want a key to your apartment, I'm not ready for that."

“Can we please not have this discussion tonight and just enjoy the night and the party” as she gently kissed his full lips. She knew how to get to him, he knew it and he knew she knew it, so he just gave in and stopped the conversation, but inside he wanted her to have that key and be a part of his life. He could just never figure out why she was so guarded about her feelings and her future.

Most women would be wrapped up in finding the one, getting married and having kids, but not Yaitza. Yaitza was all about the next party and what the next person could do for her, if you could not “do something” for her than she did not waste her time with you, simple. All of his friends told him she was a gold digger but she was what he wanted and he would not let anyone tell him what he should do.

Even though he was used to their usual jokes upon her arrival he knew something was wrong, he could see it her eyes. Her exterior showed “party” but her “eyes” spelled trouble. “Que pasa” was the extent of his Spanish but he knew that he would get the normal response “nothing is wrong” and he would accept it, however tonight was different, it was something in her eyes and he had to get to the bottom of it.

“David, nothing is wrong, can we just please enjoy the night?”

“How can we enjoy the night when something is clearly wrong, I have offered my help, my love and my life to you but it does not seem like it will ever be enough, for you or for that void that fills your eyes in times like this.”

“There is no void, the only problem that exist today is you bothering me about a problem or an empty void that is not there, if I tell you I am ok then believe me I am ok!”

David gave up, like he does most of the time and just started to get undressed. He reminded her of the time because heaven forbid she would be late.

As David walked away she felt something in her that she had never felt before and for some reason she started to cry. The void David was talking about was true, but how can you trust anyone if as a child you could not trust anyone. Why would she trust David when David clearly understood why she was there and had no problem providing her with what she needed? She heard David moving around, the shower, singing (man he had a horrible voice) the water and more singing.

“David, how do I tell you that I want someone to be there for me and take care of me, take away all the hurt and insecurities from over the years?”

Before she knew what she was doing she found herself in the shower with David, “what are you doing”, he said, “you still have all your clothes on, you are gonna get .....” Loca stopped him with a kiss.

“I can’t do this anymore, I don’t want to do this anymore but I don’t know how to stop.”

“Baby, I have told you from day one, I got you, no matter what, you just have to let me.”

“Don’t worry about how, just let me do it and you will see how, have faith and trust in me.”

She had no idea how she was going to do any of that, have faith or trust that he will take care of or be there for her when no one else ever has. All she could think of was the boys on the block who made sure she made it home safe every night, she never asked them to; they never told her that they looked over her but she just knew they did. She had faith in them; she trusted and knew if something happened to her while she walked down the street they would be there.

“That is the faith I need to have in myself right now”, she thought to herself. “In order to trust David and give myself a chance I need to have faith in myself.”

David held her and knew that something was working in her mind, he could feel it, but he did not push and did not ask, when the time was right all of it would come out and he would be there.

David and La Loca never made it to the party.