

SOMEWHERE IN THE SILENCE

By Phyllis Houseman

CHAPTER ONE

Wednesday, April 20, 1961 — 4:00 a.m. ECT — Loja, Ecuador

The tolling vibration of the old German grandfather clock woke Karlos Von Lessing, jolting him out of a deep sleep, the details of his dream still vivid.

A smile lingered.

Get going. Only 14 hours until she arrives.

Climbing out of bed and crossing the room, he threw open the casement window. In the distance, a crescent moon glimmered on the swirling mists above the tree line. The *páramo* cloud of Southern Ecuador roiled down from jagged Andean peaks.

Something flushed a sandpiper out of the nearer hillside grasses. He remembered hearing the bird's eerie up and down call from decades ago. Impossible now.

Closing the window, the fantasy of Belinda Brown broke into his thoughts again. The dream actually featured *two* Belindas.

During the months he wrote to her about the sale of his father's library, her answers provoked visions of a slender, tall blonde, the cliché of a California Golden Girl.

He imagined her somewhere in her early thirties, with calm blue eyes holding a flicker of humor.

In a couple hours, he'd fly north to meet the real Belinda when she landed in Quito, later this afternoon. Yesterday, he sent a telegram confirming the changes in the itinerary for her trip from Los Angeles.

Originally, he planned to have her fly into Guayaquil. Now he had to see his doctor in Quito before Belinda arrived. Rubbing his tired eyes, he knew he couldn't postpone the appointment yet again.

In the telegram, he still didn't include the information he withheld from her all these months. How stupid to keep her in the dark. Concealing the fact of his deafness might destroy the friendship they developed in their messages.

Of course it would. What had he been thinking? How could she ever trust him once she found out about his lie of omission?

But tonight's dream provoked laughter, not a sense of loss. For this version revealed a petite girl with huge gray eyes closer to warm smoke than a cool blue sea. Instead of being fair, she possessed gold-brushed, olive skin and long, dark hair framing her oval face.

When the new Belinda appeared in his room in the middle of his reverie, she walked up to the Golden Girl and dramatically pointed to the exit door. Not protesting, the blonde lady scurried out of the bedroom, out of his dream.

The raven-haired Belinda then took his hand, leading him out the door and down the winding staircase to the lower floor, into the dusky silence of his father's library. Even in the dream, the floor-to-ceiling shelves of books produced an aura of peace that always calmed his racing brain at the end of a day.

She looked up at him, her full lips parted, her gaze direct. With her face inches short of his, a soft voice spoke to him in musical, faintly accented Spanish.

“Karlos, de alguna manera, tu has capturado

Mi corazón en este cuarto tranquilo.

Pero no tango miedo, cariño.

En algún lugar en el silencio,

Voy a robar el tuyo.”

“Karlos, somehow, you have captured

My heart in this quiet room.

But I am not afraid, darling.

Somewhere in the silence,

I will steal yours.”

He wrote little poetry in his life and couldn't understand where these words came from, or how he *heard* the melodious stanzas. But he would never forget the verses, or the waves of anticipation they evoked.

The vibration of the clock on the half-hour again reminded him he had a plane to catch in less than two hours.