

Roberto Carlos Ortiz

## Sweet Nature

When the *gringo maricón* asked to take my picture with his digital camera, the *jno!* came out fast and in Spanish. I had already noticed them throughout the apartment, framed pictures of brown-skinned guys and *morenitos*. I got paranoid for a while and started looking for a little red light on the walls. He must think I'm some dumb spic, I said to myself as I glanced around, but I'd heard about hidden cameras and I didn't want to end up in no horny barrio boys website.

The old gringo just looked disappointed and put down the camera. His sad ugly mutt face made me feel bad. He had been real sweet to me so far. He wasn't at all my type, with that skin so pale you wanted to scream: *¡Sol gratis!* But it had been one of those really slow nights at the bar where you just end up swallowing your pride and hooking up with whatever you can get. At least I had been able to play the whole poor Latin boy thing and get free cocktails from my *amigo americano*. I could tell he was really into me, even throwing in Spanish words at the bar. He was trying hard to sound sexy, but he only made me laugh with his bad gringo accent.

I'd figured the flattery and the alcohol would be enough to forget his shortcomings in the beauty department, but that whole taking my picture thing turned me off, so I tried to turn myself back on by looking at my hot and spicy cousins from south of the border. Their cheesy smiles and modeling school poses took me back to days of frustrated *quinceañera*, Miss Universe or *telenovela* dreams. They also made me long for a good piece of *macho*, the kind I craved for while jerking off but regretted asking for when I had to deal with real life *machista* bull crap.

"What do you think?" he asked. "*Guapos? Calientes?*"

You're a damn dirty old gringo, I thought, but I smiled and said: "Yeah, *muy guapos.*"

They weren't bad looking but they were nothing to brag about. However, I already knew that what was barely cute to drunken Latino eyes could be *muy caliente* to sober gringo ones. The one man that really caught my eye was a very cute *negrito* with a big grin on his face who was leaning against a veranda that overlooked the beach.

"His name is Milton," the gringo said, looking over my shoulder. "I met him while doing business in Rio de Janeiro. We met during my very first day, as I walked down the beach. He was the one who approached to me, just looking for conversation, which was kind of funny, given the language barrier. We smiled more than we talked. He was so charming that I had to take him home. He surprised me by being shy in bed. It turns out he had never been with a man. And I liked him more then. I also respected him. I was pretty certain he had his share of offers."

Yeah, I thought, and I bet you he took them too.

“He told me had been living on the streets. Rio de Janeiro is a really beautiful city, but life is very tough down there in Brazil, you know? So I asked him to come and stay with me. We lived together during the two months I spent there. I met some of his friends, including his girlfriend, a very beautiful girl. They were all people of the streets, and some would come and stay with us sometimes, but they didn’t seem to mind that we were together, not even the girl. He was a sweetheart, always trying to help his friends. I could see they took advantage of him, but Milton had such a good soul. I was heartbroken when I couldn’t bring him here to the States. I wanted to keep in touch, but he had no address to write to. I took this picture during the first morning we spent together. It must have been right before I asked him to stay with me. I like it because you can clearly see his smile, which reflects his good heart.”

I was astounded, listening to him. Gringos can be real dumb sometimes, I thought. I mean, what are the chances that a cute Brazilian virgin living on the streets will pick you up on the beach? And what about that so-called girlfriend? The whole thing screamed *puta* to me. I was tempted to share my suspicions about Milton, but I saw no point in breaking his fantasy. Besides, I’d already learned my lesson. The whole thing could easily turn against me: Why do you think Milton was a hustler? You think all black men are like that? Aren’t *you* prejudiced?

I could’ve easily snapped back that you don’t end up with my kind of unruly hair and a nose that verges on the flat side with a family of just white folk, but I doubted that my *blanquito* one-night-stand was aware of such things. Or he could have turned out to be half Italian, a tenth Indian, or something like that. Everyone somehow seems to be ethnic in this country nowadays.

So I just smiled sympathetically, put back the picture, and kept looking at the others, trying to guess where they were from. Spanish? Mexican? Cuban? *Boricua*? I rarely missed, except with those Central Americans. I'm just no good with that part of the *maricón* geography.

I was surprised to find, among the dark-skinned men—most with drunken eyes and all in different stages of undress—a picture of the gringo standing alone in front of a Spanish church. He must have been around my age, at least ten or fifteen years younger than now. He was hot back then, I noticed as I picked up the frame, all fresh-faced and lanky, with shaggy blonde hair.

“Sergio took that picture,” he said, grabbing it from me.

“He was a cute Peruvian banker who had been taking a summer-long seminar in Madrid. I met him on the fast train to Seville, while I was backpacking through Europe. It was his last weekend in Spain, his last chance to see Andalusia. He was very happy to find someone with whom to talk and I was glad to practice my high school Spanish. By the end of the train ride we had agreed to travel together all weekend.”

Let me guess, I thought. And you also fucked all weekend long, but you were his first, which made everything special and memorable.

“We arrived in Seville late in the afternoon, so most of the sights were closed already. We just walked around, took some pictures, had dinner, and went to sleep. We shared a hostel room, but nothing happened between us that first night. It never even crossed my mind.

“The next day we rented a car and he drove us to Granada. That’s where things got a bit awkward. We arrived Saturday afternoon and went to a cheap hostel listed on my guidebook. There was an older Spanish man at the front desk who told us there were two rooms available. He looked us up and down before handing us the keys so we could check out the rooms and pick. We left our bags in the lobby and walked up to the first room, which only had a queen-sized bed.

“We stood silently at the door for a couple of minutes. Whenever they ask me, I always say that it was there, standing next to Sergio, that I first confirmed that I was gay. I was a virgin then and very naïve, but as I felt him next to me, in front of that queen-sized bed, surprised that we had been mistaken for a couple, I suddenly realized that I would’ve have liked it if we were.”

Yeah, I said to myself, and you’ve been fucking Latin boys all over the world ever since.

“We kept quiet and went to check out the other room, which had two twin-sized beds. Sergio chose that one. I didn’t say a word. There was not much conversation during dinner, but I felt the new unspoken tension between. However, nothing happened that second night either.

“We spent the following day sightseeing at the Alhambra, checking out local restaurants, taking more pictures of each other in front of the sights, and drinking at the neighborhood bars. We barely talked, but then, back at the hostel, as we were getting ready to sleep, Sergio told me for the first time about his fiancée, and how he was having second thoughts about marrying her. There is nothing out of the ordinary about a young man having last-minute doubts about his wedding. The odd thing was

the way he looked at me straight in the eyes while he talked. I could feel a really intense longing coming from his eyes that made me feel uneasy.”

Finally, I thought as I sat on a chair, here we go. Let the fucking begin.

“I can remember that yearning look clearly, but back then I was too slow or too scared to fully grasp what was happening. Sergio must have also been too scared to try anything with me. And so nothing happened during our last night together either. We just drove back to Seville early next morning, dropped off the car at the agency, and took the fast train back to Madrid.

“We parted ways at the Atocha Station. As a child, I had fancied a teary train station departure, like the ones I’d seen in Hollywood films, but I just turned around quickly and barely managed to utter a quick adios. We didn’t exchange numbers or addresses. I didn’t even smile.”

What? No fucking? Not even a kiss?

“When I got my pictures developed I realized that, although we took turns taking pictures of each other, I did not have a photo of him. He didn’t have one of me either. And, of course, there was no picture of us. I only have photos of me standing alone in front of the Andalusia sights, and the memory of Sergio looking at me from the other side of the camera. That’s why I made it a habit to photograph all my lovers, all except you, who seems so afraid of my camera.”

The gringo smiled sadly and sat down on the sofa, holding the framed picture in his hands. I didn’t know what to do or say. As I looked at him, I figured the gringo wasn’t that bad after all, especially after losing that drunken and horny look. I also

noticed he wasn't that old and ugly either, and took a deep breath. I still didn't want him to take pictures of me, though. *I don't take pictures of my lovers*, I reasoned, as I stood up and slowly began to unbutton my shirt. I don't even have pictures of those lovers that meant something to me. I always rely on memory.

If the gringo asked again, I figured I would just say no once more, in soft-spoken English, to be nice. Then again, I thought, the guys did seem happy in the pictures, and the gringo fondly remembered them.... Damn *gringo maricón*, I said to myself as I slowly unzipped my pants and approached the sofa, taking advantage of my sweet nature.

## Author Bio

Roberto Carlos Ortiz is a New Orleans-based writer, scholar, and filmmaker born in Puerto Rico. Roberto has previously published fiction at *Harrington Gay Men's Fiction Quarterly*, besides publishing scholarly articles about classic Spanish-language cinemas. He is currently working on his first novel and a collection of essays about the female stars of classic Mexican cinema.

Citation: Ortiz, Initial. 2010. 'Sweet Nature'. *Polari Journal*, 2 (October 2010), [www.polarijournal.com/resources/Ortiz-Sweet-Nature.pdf](http://www.polarijournal.com/resources/Ortiz-Sweet-Nature.pdf) (accessed <insert date>).