



IDENTANA

THE GODDESS WHO HUNTS ALONE

Compelling. . . . A fascinating, frightening tale of heartbreak."

—*Chicago Tribune*

A NOVEL BY

CARLOS FUENTES

AUTHOR OF *THE ORANGE TREE*

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DIANA

THE GODDESS WHO
HUNTS ALONE



TRANSLATED FROM THE
SPANISH BY ALFRED MAC ADAM



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DIANA





No bondage is worse than the hope of happiness. God promises us a vale of tears on this earth, but at least that suffering comes eventually to an end. Eternal life is eternal bliss. Rebellious, unsatisfied, we argue with God: Don't we deserve even a taste of eternity during our passage through time? God has more tricks than a Las Vegas cardsharp. He promises us joy in the hereafter and sorrow on earth. We convince ourselves that knowing life and living it well in His vale of tears is the supreme defiance of God. Of course, if we are triumphant in our rebellion, God gets even: He denies us immortality at His side and condemns us to eternal pain.

Contrary to all logic, we ascribe logic to the Divinity. We tell ourselves, God could not be the creator of misery and suffering, human cruelty and human barbarity. We say, in any case, it was not a good God who created that but a bad God, the God of appearances, the masked God whom we can overcome only by wielding the weapons of evil that He him-

self forged. Sex, crime, and, above all, the imagination of evil: aren't these also the gifts of a malevolent God? So we persuade ourselves that only if we murder the usurper God will we, clean in body, mentally free, see the face of the first God, the good God.

But the great cardsharp has yet another ace up his sleeve. When we've worn out body and soul trying to reach Him, God reveals that He is only what He is not. All we can know about God is what He is not. To know what God is is something neither saints, nor mystics, nor Church Fathers know; not even God Himself knows. He'd collapse, fulminated by His own intelligence, if He knew.

Bedazzled, Saint John of the Cross is the mortal who has come closest to God's intelligence, just so he can communicate this news to us: "God is Nothing, the supreme Nothing, and to reach Him, we must travel toward the Nothing, which cannot be touched or seen or understood in human terms." And to humiliate hope, Saint John leaves us only this terrible passage: "All the being the creatures possess, compared with the infinite being of God, is nothing . . . All the beauty of the creatures, compared with God's infinite beauty, is the greatest ugliness." Perhaps Pascal, French, a saint, and a cynic, is the only thinker whose wager saves both our conscience and our concupiscence: if you wager that God exists and He doesn't, you lose nothing, but if God does exist, you win everything.

Standing between Saint John and Pascal, I give God a nominal, that is substantive, value: God is the shorthand term for what brings origins and destiny together in a single embrace. The reconciliation of these two terms has been humanity's immemorial task. To choose origins alone is at first a lyrical, then very quickly a totalitarian nostalgia. To wed

oneself exclusively to destiny can be a form of fatalism or fortune-telling. Origins and destiny should be inseparable: memory and desire, the living passage in the present, the future, here and now . . . That's where I'd like to locate Diana Soren, a woman perversely touched by the Divine.

Standing between Pascal and Saint John of the Cross, I would like to create a mythic, verbal world for her that would approach the mendicant question that stretches out its hands between earth and heaven: Can we love on earth and someday deserve heaven? Instead of being penitents, flagellants, hermits, or creatures starved for life, can we fully participate in it? Can we obtain and deserve earthly fruits without sacrificing eternal life? Without begging forgiveness for having loved "not wisely but too well"?

Christian mythology, which opposes charity to the implacable judgment of the Old Testament, does not attain the beautiful ambiguity of pagan mythology. The protagonists of Christianity are always themselves, never others. They demand an act of faith, and faith, Tertullian said, is absurd: "It is true because it is incredible." But what is absurd is not necessarily ambiguous. Mary is a virgin, though she conceives. Christ rises, though He dies. But who is Prometheus, he who steals the sacred fire? Why does he exercise his freedom so as to lose it? Would he have been freer if he hadn't used it and lost it though he didn't win it either? Can freedom be conquered by a value other than freedom itself? On this earth, can we love only if we sacrifice love, if we lose the person we love though our own acts, our own failure to act?

Is something preferable to everything or nothing? That's what I asked myself when the love affair I'm going to tell about here ended. She gave me everything and took every-

thing from me. I asked her to give me something better than everything or nothing. I asked her to give me something. That something can only be the instant in which we were, or thought we were, happy. How many times did I ask myself, Will I always be what I am now? I remember, and I write to recover the moment when she would forever be as she was that night with me. But all unique things, amatory, literary, in memory or desire, are quickly abolished by the great tide that always rolls over us like a dry flame, like a burning flood. All we have to do is leave our own skin for an instant to know that we are surrounded by an all-powerful pulsation that precedes and survives us. For that pulsation, my life or hers, our very existences are unimportant.

I love and I write to obtain an ephemeral victory over the immense and infinitely powerful mystery of what is there but does not show itself . . . I know the triumph is fleeting. On the other hand, it makes invincible my own secret power, which is to do something—this very moment—unlike anything in the rest of our lives. Imagination and language show me that, for imagination to speak and for language to imagine, the novel must not be read as it was written. This condition becomes extremely dangerous in an autobiographical text. The writer must be lavish in presenting variations on his chosen theme, multiply the reader's options, and fool style with style through constant alterations in genre and distance.

This becomes an even greater need when the protagonist is a movie actress, Diana Soren.

It's said that Luchino Visconti provoked a combination of surprise and delight in Burt Lancaster during the filming of a scene from *The Leopard* when he stuffed with silk stockings a bag supposedly filled with gold. Diana was like that: a sur-

prise for everyone because of the incomparable smoothness of her skin, but most of all a surprise for herself, her skin surprised by her own pleasure, astonished at being desired, smooth, perfumed. Didn't she love herself, didn't she feel she deserved herself? Why did she want to be someone else? Why wasn't she comfortable in her own skin? Why?

I—and I lived with her only for two months—want to run even now to embrace her again, feel her for the last time and assure her that she could be loved with passion, but for herself, that the passion she sought did not exclude her true self . . . But the chance for that is gone. We leave a lover. We return to a woman we don't know. The eroticism of visual representation consists, precisely, in the illusion that the flesh is permanent. Like everything else in our time, visual eroticism has accelerated. Over the course of centuries, medallions and paintings were created to make up for the absence of the loved one. Photography accelerated the illusion of presence. But only cinematographic images simultaneously give us evocation and immediacy. This is how she was then but also how she is now, forever . . .

It's her image but also her voice, her movement, her undying beauty and youth. Death, the great stepmother of Eros, is both overcome and justified by this reunion with the loved one who is no longer with us, having broken the grand pact of passion: united until death, you and I, inseparable . . .

Only movies give us the real image of the person: she was this way, and even if she's acting Queen Christina she's Greta Garbo, even if she's pretending to be Catherine of Russia she's Marlene Dietrich. The Soldier Nun? But it's only Maria Félix. Literature on the other hand liberates our graphic imagination: in Thomas Mann's novella, Aschenbach dies in

Venice with the thousand faces of our imagination all in motion; in Visconti's film, he has only one face, fatal, unexchangeable, fixed, that of the actor Dirk Bogarde.

Diana, Diana Soren. Her name evoked that ancient ambiguity. Nocturnal goddess, lunar metamorphosis, full one day, waning the next, a silver fingernail in the sky the day after, eclipse and death within a few weeks . . . Diana the huntress, daughter of Zeus and twin sister of Apollo, virgin followed by a retinue of nymphs but also mother with a thousand breasts in the temple at Ephesus. Diana the runner who only gives herself to the man who runs faster than she. Diana of the crossroads, called for that reason Trivia: Diana worshipped at the crossroads of Times Square, Piccadilly, the Champs Elysées . . .

After all is said and done, the game of creation defeats itself. First because it takes place in time, and time is a fuck-ing bastard. The novel takes place in 1970, when the illusions of the 1960s were doing their best not to die, assassinated but also vivified by blood. The first revolt against what our own fatal fin de siècle society would be: so brief, so illusory, so repugnant, the sixties killing their own heroes, the U.S. saturnalia devouring its offspring—Martin Luther King, the Kennedys, Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Malcolm X—and enthroning its cruel stepfathers, Nixon and Reagan.

Diana and I would play the Rip Van Winkle game: what would the old man say if he woke up after sleeping for a hundred years and found himself in the United States of 1970, with one foot on the moon and the other in the jungles of Vietnam? Poor Diana. She saved herself from waking up today and seeing a country that lost its soul in the twelve Reagan–Bush years of spurious illusions, brain-killing banalities, and sanctioned avarice. She saved herself from seeing

the violence her country brought to Vietnam and Nicaragua, which boomeranged back to the sacrosanct streets of a suburbia profaned by crime. She saved herself from seeing the primary schools drowning in drugs, high schools becoming mad, gratuitous battlegrounds; she saved herself from seeing the daily random death of children murdered by pure chance when they happened to look out a window, fast-food customers machine-gunned with hamburgers still in their mouths, serial murderers, unpunished looters, ritualized corruptions because theft, fraud, murder to obtain power and glory were part—why not?—of the American Dream.

What might Diana have said, what might the solitary huntress feel, seeing the children of Nicaragua mutilated by weapons from the United States, seeing blacks kicked and their heads split by the Los Angeles police, seeing a parade of grand liars in the Iran-Contra conspiracy swearing the truth and proclaiming themselves heroes of freedom? What might she say, she who lost her child, of a country that is seriously considering sentencing child criminals to death? She would say that the 1960s ended up by going white, fading like Michael Jackson, the better to punish anyone of color. I'm writing in 1993. Before the century ends, the burning graves, the dry rivers, the swampy slums will fill up with the color of migrant Mexicans, Africans, South Americans, Algerians, of Muslims, and Jews, over and over . . .

Diana the goddess who hunts alone. This narrative, weighed down by the passions of time, defeats itself because it never reaches the ideal perfection of what can be imagined. Nor does it desire that perfection, since if language and reality were identical, the world would come to an end, the universe would no longer be perfectible, simply because it would be perfect. Literature is a wound from which flows the indispens-

able divorce between words and things. All our blood can flow out of that hole.

Alone at the end as we're alone at the beginning, we remember the happy moments we save from the deep latency of the world, we demand the slavery of happiness, and we only listen to the voice of the masked mystery, the invisible throb that in the end manifests itself to demand the most terrible truth, the sentence that brooks no appeal, of time on earth:

You did not know how to love. You were incapable of loving.

Now I'll tell this story to admit just how right the horrible oracle of truth was. I didn't know how to love. I was incapable of loving.



I met Diana Soren at a New Year's Eve party. Actually, it was a double celebration the architect Eduardo Terrazas staged at his house: the New Year and a reconciliation between me and my wife, Luisa Guzmán. Eduardo and I had shared a little house in Cuernavaca during 1969. I would write from Monday to Friday, then he and his girlfriend would come down from Mexico City for a weekend devoted to friends, food, and alcohol. Lots of women passed through. I had turned forty in 1968 and gone into a midlife crisis that lasted the whole year and culminated in a party I gave for my friend the American novelist William Styron in the Opera Bar on Avenida Cinco de Mayo, a tarnished but flashy leftover from Mexico's *belle époque* (supposing there really was such a thing). The Opera was down at the heels—too many domino matches and near-misses at the spittoon.

I invited all my friends to honor Styron, who had recently published *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, a very successful

and very provocative book. The parties most provoked were members of black organizations who said that Styron had no right to speak in the voice of a black man, Nat Turner, who in 1831 led an uprising of sixty fellow slaves, burning buildings and killing in the name of freedom until he himself was killed in a woods where he'd survived on his own for two months. Because of his insurrection, the slave laws were tightened. But because they were so tight they kindled even greater revolts. Styron recounted one—but only one—of the stations in the calvary of the United States, which is racism.

When Bill feels he's being hounded in his country, he calls me and visits Mexico, and I do the same when Mexico starts getting on my nerves, knowing I can always take refuge on Martha's Vineyard, Bill's island on the edge of the North Atlantic. Now the two of us were living in a little house I rented when I separated from Luisa Guzmán. Located in the cobblestoned neighborhood of San Angel, a separate city until recently, where families from the capital would vacation in the last century and that now survives disguised in monastic robes amid the noise and smoke of the *Periférico*, the beltway around the capital, and *Avenida Revolución*.

My neo-bachelor residence was constructed out of debris salvaged from torn-down buildings. It was designed by another Mexican architect, Caco Parra, who specializes in combining huge hacienda doors, pilasters from nationalized churches, ancient beams from the long-disappeared age of the viceroys, sacrilegious columns, and profaned altars: a complete history of how the privileged havens of the past were transformed into the civil, transitory sanctuaries of the present. Using all these elements, Parra built strange, attractive houses, so mysterious that their inhabitants could wander into their labyrinths and never be seen again.

Martha's Vineyard, on the other hand, is open to the four winds, incinerated by the sun for three months of the year and then battered by the frozen blasts of that great white whale the North Atlantic. Whenever I think of Styron holed up on his island, I imagine that Melville's Captain Ahab sailed out to kill not the whale but the ocean, Neptune himself, just as the Belgian imperialists in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* fire their cannon not at a black enemy but at an entire continent: Africa. On Styron's island, even during the hottest months, the fog rolls in every night from the sea, as if to remind the summer that it's only a transient veil that will be torn open by the great gray cloak of a long winter. The fog comes in from the sea, over the beaches, the cliffs at Gay Head, the docks at Vineyard Haven, the lawns and the houses, until it reaches the umbilicus of the island, the melancholy inland ponds where the sea recognizes itself and dies, drowned.

In winter, the sea howls around the island but not as loudly as my guests at the Opera. I was imprudent enough to invite, willy-nilly, all my current girlfriends, making each one think she was my favorite. I loved to create situations like that: dissimulated passion, rage on the verge of augmenting passion, jealousy about to overflow like a wound to stain our blouses, our shirts, as if we were bleeding from our nipples—all this enabled me to see clearly the fragility of sex and to celebrate instead the vigor of literature.

So I invited not only my lovers to the party at the Opera but new writers like José Agustín, Parménides García Saldaña, and Gustavo Sáinz, who were fifteen years younger than I and who deserved the laurels already wilted on much older heads—mine, for instance. Totally free, uninhibited, funny, mortal enemies of solemnity, these members of the Onda

movement wrote to a rock beat and were the natural stars of a party that also wanted to say to the authoritarian, murderous government of October 2, 1968: You last six years. We'll last a whole lifetime. Your saturnalia is bloody and oppressive. Ours is sensual and liberating.

Such justifications did not absolve me of the frivolity—to say nothing of the cruelty—of my erotic games. At the time I believed, despite everything, that literature, my gospel, excused everything. Others surrendered in the name of literature to drugs, alcohol, politics, even to polemics as a literary sport. I—and I wasn't alone—succumbed to love, but I retained my right to keep my distance, to manipulate, to be cruel. I was only too happy to wear the costume of Belzebros, the Lucifer who inhabits the shining moral armor of the chivalric hero Amadis of Gaul. No sooner does Amadis lose his heroism and yield to passion than he becomes his enemy brother, Le Beau Ténébreux: Don Juan.

The Don Juan temptation is erotic but it's also literary. Don Juan endures because nothing can satisfy him (or, as the best contemporary incarnation of Don Juan grafted onto Lucifer would sing it, *I can't get no satisfaction*). It's a fact that the insatiability of the rake from Seville opens the doors of perpetual metamorphosis to him. Always desirous, always avid, he never ends, never dies: He continually transforms. He's born young, and after just a few love affairs (two or three in Tirso de Molina), he becomes old in an instant, sated but unsatisfied, an evil and cruel gentleman (in Molière). Tirso's perverse and juvenile cherub becomes the actor Louis Jouvet's mortal mask, a rationalist Gallic gargoyle who no longer believes that adolescence will last forever (he repeats, whenever reminded of death, "Let's hope it's a long way off") but who wears his own death mask. Byron, to avoid competition,