

Geraldo No Last Name

Sandra Cisneros

She met him at a dance. Pretty too, and young. Said he worked in a restaurant, but she can't remember which one. Geraldo. That's all. Green pants and Saturday shirt. Geraldo. That's what he told her.

And how was she to know she'd be the last one to see him alive. An accident, don't you know. Hit and run. Marin, she goes to all those dances. Uptown. Logan. Embassy. Palmer. Aragon. Fontana. The manor. She likes to dance. She knows how to do cumbias and salsas and rancheras even. And he was just someone she danced with. Somebody she met that night. That's right.

That's the story. That's what she said again and again. Once to the hospital people and twice to the police. No address. No name. Nothing in his pockets. Ain't it a shame.

Only Marin can't explain why it mattered, the hours and hours, for somebody she didn't even know. The hospital emergency room. Nobody but an intern working all alone. And maybe if the surgeon would've come, maybe if he hadn't lost so much blood, if the surgeon had only come, they would know who to notify and where.

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But what difference does it make? He wasn't anything to her. He wasn't her boyfriend or anything like that. Just another brazer who didn't speak English. Just another wetback. You know the kind. The ones who always look ashamed. And what was she doing out at 3:00 A.M. anyway? Marin who was sent home with her coat and some aspirin. How does she explain?

She met him at a dance. Geraldo in his shiny shirt and green pants. Geraldo going to a dance. What does it matter?

They never saw the kitchenettes. They never knew about the two-room flats and sleeping rooms he rented, the weekly money orders sent home, the currency exchange. How could

they?

His name was Geraldo. And his home is in another country. The ones he left behind are far away, will wonder, shrug, remember. Geraldo—he went north . . . we never heard from him again.

Making Meanings

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First Thoughts

1. There's a lot we don't know when we finish reading Cisneros's sketch. Write down questions that you think are left unanswered. Be sure to share your questions, and some of their possible answers, with other readers.

Shaping Interpretations

2. At the end of this little sketch, Cisneros says "they" never saw certain aspects of Geraldo's life. Who are "they"?

3. After Geraldo dies, Marin says she can't understand why their meeting mattered, why she spent so many hours in the hospital waiting room. Why do you think she keeps thinking about the meeting and wondering what it meant?

4. Exactly what do you know about the character of Geraldo? What inferences, or guesses, can you make about the kind of person he was?

5. Do you think this story is about love? Talk about your responses in class.

Connecting with the Text

6. Look back at your Quickwrite notes. Are there any similarities between the "brief encounter" you described and the one in the story? Explain.

7. Review the letter from a young woman who has immigrated to California from Mexico (see Connections). How does her letter home affect your responses to Geraldo's story?

Extending the Text

8. Geraldo has no identification papers and may be an illegal immigrant. In what other ways can people become lost in our society? How might that happen, and to whom?

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