"They've taken over our section," Irene said. The knitting had reeled off from her hands and the yarn ran back toward the door and disappeared under it. When she saw that the balls of yarn were on the other side, she dropped the knitting without looking at it. 25

"Did you have time to bring anything?" I asked hopelessly. 26

"No, nothing." 27

We had what we had on. I remembered fifteen thousand pesos in the wardrobe in my bedroom. Too late now. 28

I still had my wrist watch on and saw that it was 11 P.M. I took Irene around the waist (I think she was crying) and that was how we went into the street. Before we left, I felt terrible; I locked the front door up tight and tossed the key down the sewer. It wouldn't do to have some poor devil decide to go in and rob the house, at that hour and with the house taken over. 29

Translated from the Spanish by Paul Blackburn

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the relationship between the narrator and his sister in "House Taken Over." What does it represent?
2. Describe the house and explain its history. Why is it taken over by noises? What do they symbolize?
3. Why do the brother and sister acquiesce at the end of the story?
4. What is the meaning of the story? Can there be different interpretations?

LUISA VALENZUELA

*Luisa Valenzuela (b. 1938) is one of the few Latin American women writers who is well known in the United States. Several of her novels and short story collections have been translated into English—*The Lizard's Tail *(1983),* Other Weapons *(1986),* He Who Searches *(1987), and* Open Door *(1989)—and she has received several literary awards and fellowships. Valenzuela was born in Buenos Aires and grew up in an intellectual environment. Her mother was Luisa Mercedes Levinson, a respected Argentine author. She graduated from the University of Buenos Aires, then embarked on a career as an editor and free-lance journalist for local newspapers and magazines. Valenzuela has traveled extensively and has lived in France,*

Mexico, and the United States. Over the past twenty years, she has been a member of the faculty of Columbia University and New York University.

Valenzuela's fiction challenges the prevailing social, political, and religious institutions in Latin America and pays particular attention to male/female relations, marriage, and sexual taboos. Her critique posits the possibility for change through mutual understanding and collective action. The story "I'm Your Horse in the Night" documents the experience of the political underground in Latin America.

I'm Your Horse in the Night

The doorbell rang: three short rings and one long one. That was the signal, and I got up, annoyed and a little frightened; it could be them, and then again, maybe not; at these ungodly hours of the night it could be a trap. I opened the door expecting anything except him, face to face, at last. 1

He came in quickly and locked the door behind him before embracing me. So much in character, so cautious, first and foremost checking his—our—rear guard. Then he took me in his arms without saying a word, not even holding me too tight but letting all the emotions of our new encounter overflow, telling me so much by merely holding me in his arms and kissing me slowly. I think he never had much faith in words, and there he was, as silent as ever, sending me messages in the form of caresses. 2

We finally stepped back to look at one another from head to foot, not eye to eye, out of focus. And I was able to say Hello showing scarcely any surprise despite all those months when I had no idea where he could have been, and I was able to say 3

I thought you were fighting up north
I thought you'd been caught
I thought you were in hiding
I thought you'd been tortured and killed
I thought you were theorizing about the revolution in another country

Just one of many ways to tell him I'd been thinking of him, I hadn't stopped thinking of him or felt as if I'd been betrayed. And there he was, always so goddamn cautious, so much the master of his actions. 4

"Quiet, Chiquita. You're much better off not knowing what I've been up to." 5

Then he pulled out his treasures, potential clues that at the time eluded me: a bottle of cachaça and a Gal Costa record. What had he been up to in Brazil? What was he planning to do next? What had brought him back, risking his life, knowing they were after him? Then I stopped asking myself 6

questions (quiet, Chiquita, he'd say). Come here, Chiquita, he was saying, and I chose to let myself sink into the joy of having him back again, trying not to worry. What would happen to us tomorrow, and the days that followed?

Cachaça's a good drink. It goes down and up and down all the right tracks, and then stops to warm up the corners that need it most. Gal Costa's voice is hot, she envelops us in its sound and half-dancing, half-floating, we reach the bed. We lie down and keep on staring deep into each other's eyes, continue caressing each other without allowing ourselves to give in to the pure senses just yet. We continue recognizing, rediscovering each other. 7

Beto, I say, looking at him. I know that isn't his real name, but it's the only one I can call him out loud. He replies: 8

"We'll make it someday, Chiquita, but let's not talk now." 9

It's better that way. Better if he doesn't start talking about how we'll make it someday and ruin the wonder of what we're about to attain right now, the two of us, all alone. 10

"A noite eu so teu cavalo," Gal Costa suddenly sings from the record player. 11

"I'm your horse in the night," I translate slowly. And so as to bind him to a spell and stop him from thinking about other things: 12

"It's a saint's song, like in the *macumba*. Someone who's in a trance says she's the horse of the spirit who's riding her, she's his mount." 13

"Chiquita, you're always getting carried away with esoteric meanings and witchcraft. You know perfectly well that she isn't talking about spirits. If you're my horse in the night it's because I ride you, like this, see? . . . Like this . . . That's all." 14

It was so long, so deep and so insistent, so charged with affection that we ended up exhausted. I feel asleep with him still on top of me. 15

I'm your horse in the night. 16

The goddamn phone pulled me out in waves from a deep well. Making an enormous effort to wake up, I walked over to the receiver, thinking it could be Beto, sure, who was no longer by my side, sure, following his inveterate habit of running away while I'm asleep without a word about where he's gone. To protect me, he says. 17

From the other end of the line, a voice I thought belonged to Andrés—the one we call Andrés—began to tell me: 18

"They found Beto dead, floating down the river near the other bank. It looks as if they threw him alive out of a chopper. He's all bloated and decomposed after six days in the water, but I'm almost sure it's him." 19

"No, it can't be Beto," I shouted carelessly. Suddenly the voice no longer sounded like Andrés: it felt foreign, impersonal. 20

"You think so?" 21

"Who is this?" Only then did I think to ask. But that very moment they hung up. 22

Ten, fifteen minutes? How long must I have stayed there staring at the phone like an idiot until the police arrived? I didn't expect them. But, then again, how could I not? Their hands feeling me, their voices insulting and threatening, the house searched, turned inside out. But I already knew. So what did I care if they broke every breakable object and tore apart my dresser? 23

They wouldn't find a thing. My only real possession was a dream and they can't deprive me of my dreams just like that. My dream the night before, when Beto was there with me and we loved each other. I'd dreamed it, dreamed every bit of it, I was deeply convinced that I'd dreamed it all in the richest detail, even in full color. And dreams are none of the cops' business. 24

They wanted reality, tangible facts, the kind I couldn't even begin to give them. 25

Where is he, you saw him, he was here with you, where did he go? Speak up, or you'll be sorry. Let's hear you sing, bitch, we know he came to see you, where is he, where is he holed up? He's in the city, come on, spill it, we know he came to get you. 26

I haven't heard a word from him in months. He abandoned me, I haven't heard from him in months. He ran away, went underground. What do I know, he ran off with someone else, he's in another country. What do I know, he abandoned me, I hate him, I know nothing. 27

(Go ahead, burn me with your cigarettes, kick me all you wish, threaten, go ahead, stick a mouse in me so it'll eat my insides out, pull my nails out, do as you please. Would I make something up for that? Would I tell you he was here when a thousand years ago he left me forever?) 28

I'm not about to tell them my dreams. Why should they care? I haven't seen that so-called Beto in more than six months, and I loved him. The man simply vanished. I only run into him in my dreams, and they're bad dreams that often become nightmares. 29

Beto, you know now, if it's true that they killed you, or wherever you may be, Beto, I'm your horse in the night and you can inhabit me whenever you wish, even if I'm behind bars. Beto, now that I'm in jail I know that I dreamed you that night; it was just a dream. And if by some wild chance there's a Gal Costa record and a half-empty bottle of cachaça in my house, I hope they'll forgive me: I will them out of existence. 30

Translated from the Spanish by Delorah Bonner