Dianne De León

Two Worlds.

One Soul

Dianne De León

Two Worlds,
One Soul

Copyright © 2011 by Dianne De León

First Edition-November 2011

ISBN

978-1-77067-288-8 (Hardcover) 978-1-77067-289-5 (Paperback) 978-1-77067-290-1 (eBook)

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form, or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information browsing, storage, or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

This is a work of fiction. All the names, places, characters, and events in this book are fictitious. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is purely coincidental.

Edited by: Andrea Montaño and Marilyn Ortega Artwork by: Miko Zen

Published by:

FriesenPress

Suite 300 – 852 Fort Street Victoria, BC, Canada V8W 1H8

www.friesenpress.com

Distributed to the trade by The Ingram Book Company

Contents

Chapter 1	1
Chapter 2	5
Chapter 3	7
Chapter 4	11
Chapter 5	13
Chapter 6	15
Chapter 7	17
Chapter 8	19
Chapter 9	23
Chapter 10	25
Chapter 11	29
Chapter 12	33
Chapter 13	35
Chapter 14	37
Chapter 15	39
Chapter 16	41
Chapter 17	43
Chapter 18	49
Chapter 19	53
Chapter 20	55
Chapter 21	57
Chapter 22	61
Chapter 23	65
Chapter 24	67
Chapter 25	71

Chapter 26	75
Chapter 27	77
Chapter 28	79
Chapter 29	81
Chapter 30	83
Chapter 31	85
Chapter 32	89
Chapter 33	91
Chapter 34	95
Chapter 35	97
Chapter 36	99
Chapter 37	101
Chapter 38	103
Chapter 39	107
Chapter 40	111
Chapter 41	115
Chapter 42	119
Chapter 43	121
Chapter 44	123
Chapter 45	125
Chapter 46	127
Chapter 47	129
Chapter 48	131
Chapter 49	133
Chapter 50	135
Chapter 51	137
Chapter 52	139
Chapter 53	141
Chapter 54	143

Para mi Señorita.

Chapter i

Iliana Carpio:

Ever since I can remember, I wanted to be a flamenco dancer. My mother said that I would make everything about dance. If we were at the dinner table and she asked me to get a spoon, I would *zapatear* all the way to the kitchen drawer, get the spoon, and *zapatear* all the way back to the table.

There was a brief time when my mother enrolled me in ballet classes, but I never felt like I fit in. I resembled many of the other students with my dirty blond hair, light eyes, and slender body, but that was where the similarities ended. I had grace and strength and flexibility, but my instructors always seemed to be exasperated with me. It wasn't as though I was trying to be difficult or different; I was just bored. I wanted to use the mirrors to choreograph a routine of my own rather than participating in what we were practicing at the time. I also had a hard time with the music; it had no soul to it.

My spirit longed for thumping, clapping, stomping, and everything flamenco. I was lucky to have found flamenco in the first place. My parents had always encouraged me to express myself and, fortunately for me, researched other types of dancing I could study. I was only six years old when I attended my first flamenco lesson, and it is one of my first and fondest memories of a beautiful and passionate craft. I even remember the smell of the studio where we practiced. From the moment you walked in, you could smell the sweat. It reminded me that everyone was earning

the right to be there. I also remember the floors echoed as you walked on them. I didn't mind that there were so many of us crammed in a room that you had to fight for space to see yourself in the mirror. It was where I learned to build my character. Even at that young age, I knew if I was going to stand in the front, I better be good. I better have practiced enough to be confident and not have to follow anyone. No matter how much the floors were swept, they always had a dusty film that created the most amazing resonance when my heels hit. It was the complete opposite of what I remembered from my short time as a ballet dancer. The soft pink slippers were a clear contrast to my loud, black high-heeled shoes. In short, my spirit never failed me when it came to what I always knew: a flamenco dancer is what I was forever meant to be. It was the first day of the rest of my professional life. From that moment forward, flamenco was a friend that would never leave my side. It was the one constant in my life and I subconsciously knew it, even back then.

Luna De La Garza:

Ever since I can remember, I was a flamenco dancer. My dad was the famous dancer, Dante De La Garza and my mother was a well-respected *cantaor* from the town of *Cádiz*. My father said I came out dancing from the womb. He said my feet would not stop moving and he knew from that moment, I would be his protégé. And that's how it would come to be.

We'd be cleaning the house and out of nowhere my father would ask my mother to start a song and he would break out in a *bulería* towards me and partner up. It didn't matter my age or how short I was, he'd always treat me as his equal. What I loved most about those times is he would never correct me during my dance. He would let me do anything and everything that came naturally to me; everything was allowed. It wasn't until after we finished that he would teach me how to enhance my movements or my footwork. My siblings enjoyed dancing in our home too, but my father always told me, "Tú eres la Luna de mi cielo," meaning: "You are the moon in my sky" and that said it all.

I remember guitars, palmas, dancers, cantaores, costumes and the passion that accompanied our way of life and how it surrounded me. My father being a dancer made our family instant celebrities in my hometown of Sanlúcar. As a result, in our travels, we couldn't go anywhere in Europe without being recognized. It was a great way to grow up. I wouldn't know any other way of living. I was born a dancer and lived as one my entire life. My upbringing was a series of rehearsals at home, which included a room with hardwood floors and mirrors. There were other famous dancers in and out of our home on any given day. Some of my fondest memories were on Sundays, when my parents would have barbeques at our house and performers throughout the area would bring their families. We would all eat, laugh and tell stories about auditions or performances. There were always plenty of guitars, cajones and the people to play them. Then the cantaores, who by that time had had a few drinks, would start creating their own story in song that usually had the room roaring in laughter. It took me a long time to really understand what they were

singing or what was so funny, but I didn't care. I just loved the fact that joy and a robust spirit lived in our home.

Iliana:

As I became older, flamenco was the only thing I knew. I would attend school like everyone else, but my notebooks had pen scribbles of famous flamenco dancers' names that I would see in pictures hanging on the studio walls. Practices became more frequent, including private lessons at the encouragement of my instructors. I saturated myself with anything having to do with flamenco.

My father was born in Central America, but came to the United States when he was 23 as a professional soccer player. It was in New York that he met my mother, a Colombian native who came to the United States through her work in radio. They fell in love and were married within a year. I had two other siblings that didn't care much for dance or music like I did. We moved from the big city of New York to the much smaller and very different city of Albuquerque, New Mexico. Growing up, I felt very blessed to have the full attention and support from my parents to pursue my dancing.

I eventually moved back to New York to do just that, but I always returned to New Mexico as my sanctuary. I was fortunate enough that I spoke English and Spanish, as Spanish was used during flamenco lessons. It wasn't long before I was being asked to perform in major productions. At first, the parts I danced were small, but because of the venues I was attracting, I quickly became a professional. In other words, I was paid to perform. It was never about the money, but where and with whom I would perform. I had already received a full scholarship to attend Julliard by the time I was in ninth grade and soon I began traveling with a troupe out of New York. My dream was to study and perform in Spain. It was simply a matter of time.

By the time I was 18, I had already traveled most of the United States and parts of South America dancing. My parents eventually stopped worrying about all

the traveling I was doing. They knew I was doing what I wanted, I was pursuing my dream. They hired a private tutor to assist me in finishing my schooling. I earned my diploma without enthusiasm. I felt it was simply a document needed to satisfy my parents, but deep inside I knew that my real education would come through my travels, reading, and dancing. And I was right.

Luna:

Time passed and flamenco became a bigger part of my life. I was a student at the famous studio *Instituto de Baile* where my father learned and taught dance and my mother sang. I even became an instructor for beginning students. At twelve, I was performing with my father on a regular basis and at the same locations. The venue always included a marquee with his name in lights. It wasn't long before my name was included on the same bill. It usually read, "Featuring Luna De La Garza."

Growing older, my father performed less and I, of course, performed more. I saved a copy of the schedule where I was the main act - the last performer. It was a great moment for me and for my father, because I knew in his eyes he had passed his legacy on to me. At 18, I had traveled all of Europe, Asia, Africa, and South and Central America. I started making money dancing, finally. I began to travel more with the troupe rather than with my family. My mother and father continued their spirited life at home while I traveled and continued to expand on my experiences.

During my travels, I had become reacquainted with a long-time childhood friend, Gabriél. He and I, like my mother and father, met in a dance studio. Gabriél was a dancer like me. When we met, he was seven and I was six. I never thought much of him back then; I just remember that our parents were friends with one another. Soon though, he'd start coming to my house on Sundays with his parents and we would either be dancing along with the adults or we'd talk about dancing or music or other flamenco topics on the front patio. Gabriél was always in my life. I can't recall a memory that was not attached to him somehow. He too started earning a living dancing flamenco and became quite good. I believe it was a relief for both our parents for us to be able to travel together. While we were young it was like an adventure, as he was my best friend. That would change as the years passed and grow to something more.

Iliana:

"La Leona" became my professional name, meaning "The Lion." Most people in the dance community and the press linked my name to my dancing because they said "I attacked the floor," or that there was "animal instinct" to my style.

I never had a very serious relationship in my teens or even as I got older. I was content dating on a level that was enough to make me feel good for a while, but nothing ever serious. I had a reputation for leaving men after I had gotten what I wanted from our brief affairs. Honestly, I didn't feel the connection most women spoke of when one was "in love," but I did give quality time, energy, and commitment to my boyfriends at the time. Of course, it was no surprise that most of my relationships were with other dancers or guitar players from our dance troupe. It made for some awkward times when the relationship was over, but true to my character, my exes were quickly transitioned from lovers to dance partners. It didn't bother me; I was a professional.

I began dating women in my early 20's. It was very natural for me. It was no wonder I could easily detach myself from the men I had dated. I guess I always knew deep inside that I was far more attracted to women than to men, especially on an emotional level. Up to that point, I had never met "the" one.

That would change.

I admired the females in my life from an early age. In my hometown of Albuquerque, I was fortunate enough to see The International Flamenco Festival performance on a yearly basis. During the festival, top dancers from Spain would come to conduct workshops and end with performances. It was during this time that I would meet, study, and dance with legends that until that time had lived in pictures on the walls of our studio. There was one dancer in particular who I was

really fond of. Her name was Luna De La Garza. Years later, I would joke that I knew her way before she ever knew who I was because her picture was in our studio and in my room, and her name on my notebooks. It was actually her father, Dante De La Garza, who headlined many of the festivals. I had heard that his daughter would one day perform at the Festival, but currently was busy building her reputation. Every year, the two weeks of the Festival were the most exhilarating of my life. It reinforced my goal of studying in Spain. When the Festival and the workshops were over, I'd always feel like I wanted to travel back to Spain with them to continue my learning. Eventually, I'd go to Spain and study and I would have my meeting with Luna De La Garza.

Luna:

As I said before, my earliest memories always included Gabriél. Nobody knew him like I did. Gabriél was so talented and good looking, but he was never aware of how handsome he really was. He trained hard and took his dancing very seriously. Because of his work ethic, he quickly made a name for himself in our area and throughout our region. When people met him, they didn't know how to read him because he was serious by nature and so quiet. On the outside, he appeared intimidating, but inside he had a most gentle spirit. He was masculine enough to pull off his dancing. We basically grew up together, playing outside, celebrating birthdays, and going to performances and even funerals. Gabriél said he had always loved me. I remember the first time he said it—he was only seven. He'd bring presents all the time... silly things like flowers from a garden or a tadpole from a pond. Once he gave me a marble he'd found on the side of the road—anything to profess his love. That was Gabriél.

I remember when my feelings started changing for him. When other dancers or women tried to approach him, I could feel it. For so long he was like a brother to me and then I would see him dance alone or partner up with another woman and I realized that I had fallen in love with him. My parents never pushed me toward him, but I think they could see the obvious happening and never criticized our relationship. It was not until my 20th birthday that Gabriél and I first kissed. We laughed about it years later, because as passionate as he was as a dancer, he didn't know what to do with me romantically! I too didn't possess the experience or knowledge, but our affection was tender and we developed a love for each other and it worked. It didn't surprise anyone when we began to hold hands or occasionally kiss hello or goodbye. In public our affections were minimal; he was so shy. When his passion did show, it was during our performances together. Being on stage with him reinforced my feelings of love for him.

He earned the nickname "La Sombra" or "The Shadow," meaning dark, quiet, and usually by my side. By the time we were in our mid-20's, we were booked for many of the same shows or would ask to be booked together as a package. With Gabriél everything was easy; it was almost like we were one. Even though our fame and popularity were growing, we were still the same two people that practiced

together at my parents' home. I think our image in the press was far bigger than it was in our heads. This was probably what kept us grounded.

We were finally booked in the festival that my father was very fond of in Albuquerque, New Mexico. He would boast of the color of the mountains, the terrain, the scenery and the weather. It was then that I met Iliana Carpio.

Chapter q

Iliana:

By the time I met Luna, I had already developed quite a name for myself in the United States. I lived in New York, but still stopped in Albuquerque quite a bit; it served as the perfect sanctuary when returning from my performances. I had always appreciated the pace of the city and usually needed some R&R from time to time. I had been invited to perform in the Festival the same year Luna made her first appearance as well. It was an important date in both of our lives professionally and personally. The Festival had become one of the most attended and respected performances of that region. When I heard that Luna De La Garza had been booked, I rearranged my schedule just to make sure I'd be in Albuquerque at the same time. I also heard she was staying at the Doubletree Hotel downtown, near the studio. It took everything I had to contain my excitement for meeting her, but I figured I'd eventually see her in the studio during our rehearsals.

Luna:

Gabriél and I arrived in Albuquerque about eight in the evening on a warm summer day. While driving to our hotel room, the most stunning sunset welcomed our arrival. I knew why my father spoke so highly of Albuquerque and New Mexico. He had given me a list of places to visit including: Old Town, The Tramway, and the Sandia Mountains. He told me to eat at the Monte Carlo Restaurant and insisted I try the "New Mexican" food from Garcia's Kitchen and Sadie's. Gabriél and I felt like little kids. We had never been to the United States before! We had much hard work ahead of us, but we also looked at it as a vacation.

Iliana:

I stopped by the studio about 10:30 that evening. I wanted to begin putting my routine together. There were just a few people in the studio who were getting ready to leave. The owners offered me a warm welcome and mentioned Luna was in the studio rehearsing. I went upstairs to a hallway that overlooked the studio where Luna was practicing. The first thing that struck me was that no one else was in the room with her, no guitarist and no other dancers, just her. And even though there was no music playing, there was music in the air. She was quietly singing her own song! I knew that her mother was an amazing singer, but I didn't know she could sing too! The concentration on her face was nothing short of excruciating. At times she'd whisper a melody, stop her movement and sing all at once, then regain the melody and movement again in one swift move. TICA! TICA! TICA! The sound of her footwork. Luna would accompany herself with palmas, footwork and song, creating her own choreography to her own music. Truly enchanting. She wore a long red practice skirt and a tight white T-shirt revealing her muscular, toned arms. Her hair was not like I had seen in performances—tight and slick. She had a gorgeous pony tail that started from the very top of her head all the way down past her back. Her wavy jet black hair hung beautifully. Her commanding hands were graceful, but powerful all the way down to her fingertips, which she used to snap intently to the sound of her own song. I couldn't take my eyes off of her. She mesmerized me. I finally managed to pull myself away from my post and enter her room to introduce myself.

Luna:

In Spain, we always knew who was who in the world of dance, regardless of where the dancers were from. I had known of Iliana through my father and through

publications we'd received. We had been working on an exchange program with people from Albuquerque to offer opportunities for students who wanted to come to Albuquerque to receive training and learn the English language. Other students would have a chance to learn Spanish and study at the most prestigious school in Spain. Iliana's name had been mentioned many times. I thought she had the interest and the talent to go to that next level with us. I was so excited knowing I was to meet the famous "La Leona" in person. I had seen her on video only and even then, her magnetism was contagious. I knew she would be a great addition to our troupe and that our top instructor "La Doña" would enjoy a new challenge. It was in Albuquerque that I met her. I remember that trip very well; it my first time in New Mexico and it was the first time she and I were first put on a bill together. It would later become our "anniversary" date, because of the great memories we had created. I was intrigued to meet her. I recall hearing her say hello upon her arrival to the studio, and I had heard her walk up the creaky, wooden stairs. At that moment, I felt the need to perform for her. In flamenco, there is always someone watching you, a guitar player, other dancers, your partner or your instructor, but this was different. I wanted to impress her. Later on she joked by saying that I could have done the do-si-do and she would have been impressed. As she laughed at her own joke, I had to ask her, "What is do-si-do?" When she showed me the awkward movement, I had to laugh too! What I couldn't believe was how long she watched me without saying anything. I found myself doing movements that were experimental and free. I even sang, which I didn't do often because someone else always did the singing for me. Here in Albuquerque, the circumstances did not lend themselves to this and in a strange way I was grateful. I felt more independent and had to figure things out for myself, hence my singing. The one thing I remember most is that I rather enjoyed her voyeurism.

Chapter b

Iliana:

"Ole, Bravo!" were my first words to her. I was so enthralled by her... I wanted us to be close from that moment on, and we were. She greeted me warmly with the usual two kisses on the cheek. She thanked me in English with a rather sexy strong Spanish accent. I responded to her with "Bienvenida!" We made small talk about the flight, the hotel accommodations, the show, and the rehearsals to come and then I moved on to the topic of her dancing. I asked her if what she had been practicing was what she was going to perform for the Festival. She said she was playing with different ideas and she asked me what I had planned on doing. It was then we decided to start practicing in the same studio, and in doing so, we realized we were coming up with a routine together. Don't get me wrong, I was still focusing on my solo premiere and wanted it to be memorable, but I was more excited about doing a performance with her and choreographing something for the two of us.

Luna:

I remembered being relieved and impressed by her Spanish, although we constantly went back and forth with Spanish and English. We were able to communicate as if we had known each other forever. I have been described as "an old soul." I believed Iliana to be one also. I felt from early on that we had known each other for a very long time; we had a natural comfort with each other. That comfort was built stronger over time, along with an enormous amount of tension. On that very day, I remember noticing just how much she resembled a lion as she had been affectionately titled. She had radiant green eyes and the color of her hair was that of a majestic, African lion. Her movement was stealthy, but not slow, she always seemed to attack in the smoothest delivery. Her skin glowed with a healthy caramel tint that

just finished her whole persona. As intrigued as I was to talk to her, I was just as interested to dance with her. I knew that I would learn from her and she would from me. It didn't take long for both of us to agree that we wanted to dance together for the performance. It was a very daring decision. Both of us should have wanted to do only a solo and not want to share the spotlight with anyone else, much less two females dancing together. But it wasn't like that with us. I was thrilled to share the stage and feel her energy.

Iliana:

The next few weeks were a blur. Rehearsals, rehearsals! My solo performance was solid. The music we had selected was incredibly sexy, passionate, solemn, and powerful all in one. It was a journey of music and it fit with the journey we were both taking. Luna had a poorly taped version of a song that her dad had shared with her. She was regretting not having her mother here to sing it. The musicians were thrilled to learn the piece and added a flavor that excited me. There was no mistaking our chemistry. Everyone in the room would stop and stare; they had become completely taken with exhilaration and enthusiasm. I saw heads nod in recognition and acknowledgment. As far as Luna and I were concerned, we were challenging each other in the most positive way. When I danced across from Luna, I was inspired by her movement and could easily counter and bring it back to her while simultaneously just wanting to stop and watch her. Just when I thought I would have a favorite interpretation of the music, she would do something more distinctive that would leave me in awe.

I remember Gabriél being in the picture and present at some rehearsals. He was the perfect pillar for her. I'd see him come over and listen to her intently when she spoke. He'd never say much, but I could see his adoration for her, even after all the years they had been together. He picked his music early on and I noticed that he was very methodical about his approach to dance. Once he had decided on his choreography, he would not change from his own creative script. He was decisive, not impulsive. I never felt anything but distant admiration for his style and strength of dance. I was also relieved that he was not the kind of partner that had to be around Luna all the time.

Luna:

What started off as a vacation for Gabriél and I and a performance that would establish my reputation in the United States, ended up being quite the opposite. From the night I met Iliana, I didn't spend any time in the studio without her. We were constantly showing each other dance moves, which we would approve with delight, and then move on to the next section. The piece of music I chose was one I had always wanted to choreograph but had not known when and where or with whom. Gabriél was surprised when he heard the musicians learning the piece. He didn't say anything to me, but I knew by the look on his face he thought perhaps he and I would have danced the piece together at some point. Gabriél would speak to me without words.

Dancing in the same room with Iliana was like being in a constant state of high tension. It wasn't a negative thing, but it did take a lot out of me by the end of the night. When I'd get back to the hotel I'd be asleep in minutes. With no threat, I felt I had met my perfect match. Iliana inspired me as I suspected I did the same for her. I was aware that there were many people wanting to spend time with each of us, but I didn't want anyone to take away from the time we had together. Once you dance with someone, you know a side of them that no one will ever see. There are sounds and movements that a dancer makes that only a partner standing close will hear and see. I remember a strand of her hair falling from her bun, it was stubborn like I would imagine she would be! That hair made its way across her forceful glance and it would stop me in my movement. I'd never seen beauty like this. I had never been taken by a dancer's flair like I was taken by Iliana's. She practiced in black pants, so as to really see the movement in its bareness. But because of that, I too would see every bend, every part of her legs tighten. She often wore tight shirts, for the same reason. She said she didn't want a "visual distraction," but I saw it differently. I saw her as a visual distraction.

Iliana:

I had taken extra time to do everything right the night of our performance. I had invited Luna to a day of spa treatments for us and she loved the idea. She had never really prepared in that way and she said it would be a great treat. We both received massages with full body scrubs and wraps. We had our nails done and facials too. By the time we left, we both were ready for a nap. The time for our performance was quickly approaching. When I dropped her off at her hotel, I told her I was nervous, but I was very excited to be dancing with her. She said she had heard this in an American movie: "If I don't tell you later, I'm having the time of my life ..."

I was torn about getting her flowers, for obvious reasons. By this time, my feelings for Luna had grown. I couldn't describe it to anyone, but I felt as though anyone could see right through me. Against my better judgment, I ordered three dozen red, long-stemmed roses for her. I knew it was not the most subtle thing to do, but I wasn't trying to be subtle. The card read, "Gracias por tu inspiración, Te deseo suerte esta noche. Siempre, Iliana," meaning, "Thank you for your inspiration, I wish you luck tonight. Always, Iliana." When I arrived to my dressing room that evening, there stood a beautiful bouquet of stargazer lilies from her. Her card read, "Que tu luz brille como la estrella que eres. Gracias por tu talento... estaré bailando con tigo y para ti. Luna" meaning, "May your light shine like the star that you are. Thank you for your talent... I will be dancing with you and for you. Luna." That did it! I was captivated! I still have that card and a stargazer from that evening.

The night of the performance, Luna was stunning. It wasn't just I that thought so. Backstage, I could hear people whispering about how striking she looked. She wore a dress that her great grandmother had made and had passed down through the family. She had never worn it and I thought she looked as remarkable as a

blushing bride. When I saw her, I let my attraction show. I stopped and put my hand on my heart and told her I was honored that I would be dancing with the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. She thanked me and expressed how beautiful she felt around me.

The performance was spectacular! It was as exhilarating as it was strenuous! We captivated our audience so much so that nobody in the house could stay in their seats! There is no feeling like that of an engaged audience. I heard chants from the crowd that included my name, Luna's name, and many shouts of "Ole!" Luna chose all my favorite moves during our rehearsals for the performance. When we danced across from each other, she was completely stoic, almost unyielding. Out of nowhere she'd smile at me, as if to both challenge me and drive me at the same time. It worked. I had never felt so inspired to do my best and to see the best across from me.

At the end of our performance, we didn't leave the stage without hearing the audience yelling, "Bravo! Mas! Otra! Encore!" We acknowledged the musicians several times and did an impromptu acoustic dance. The crowd could not contain themselves. I felt a force coming from the audience that almost knocked me over. The short solo displayed yet another side of Luna- a little flirtier, more lively and more playful. I stayed with that vibe and danced more for her than for our appreciative audience. We both exited the stage while the music was still playing. We looked at each other on the side of the stage and embraced one another with passion. That hug encompassed the very emotion we were feeling at the success of the night and would enhance those feelings we had for each other. It seemed like time stood still that very moment, but soon enough we were interrupted by the stage manager who asked us to go back to the stage to receive our gifts of gratitude thrown by the audience, roses and other flowers. A few of the male dancers had gathered at least 15 to 20 flowers that had been thrown. A stranger gave us both an enormous bouquet of flowers, which made me feel like my city embraced her as well. By the time we left the stage, we could still hear the audience whistling and yelling for us. We were greeted by crew members, family, and friends congratulating us individually and together for our accomplishment. I lost track of where Luna disappeared to, but I figured we would meet up later... and we did.

Luna:

My debut in the United States was seductive and passionate. There were too many emotions for one body to feel at one time. I could have exploded, my passion ran so high! This was one of the most memorable evenings of my life! I couldn't retain every memory and was always thankful to have the opportunity to see a playback of my performance. When Luna and I talked about that performance, years later, we both agreed that it was our evening to shine and we would never forget it. I don't know if it had to do with the magic of New Mexico, meeting Iliana or performing my best performance ever—I just knew I would never forget it. I was completely and wholeheartedly content with my life at that moment. I was now ready to celebrate ... and that we did!

There was talk of a local club that had a salsa band playing that night. I loved to dance and Latin music was my favorite. I decided on a comfortable pair of jeans and a loose-fitting sexy white blouse. I was feeling very free and exuberant from our performance. Once we arrived at the club, I knew the night would be enjoyable. We were greeted by the owner, who could not have been more pleased with our presence. She had attended the performance and went out of her way to ensure we had the best table. We were seated right up front, next to the band. She said all food and drinks were on the house. Because of the excitement of the day and before the show, I remembered I had not eaten anything all day. Quite a few dancers, crew members, family and friends had shown up and before I knew it, there was a party going. I felt completely at home. A number of us took to the dance floor immediately.

Even Gabriél found himself letting go and celebrated the success of our night. I was thrilled to dance to something that I didn't practice and that I wouldn't be judged on. I had always loved Latin music and the band seemed to be in the groove. Each song seemed to top the last, nobody left the dance floor. There was an old *cumbia* the band performed that brought back great memories of my parents dancing. "El Caballo Viejo" was one of my parents' favorite songs to dance to. "Cuando el amor llega así de esta manera... uno no se da ni cuenta..."

What I loved about that evening was that everyone seemed to let go, women dancing alone, men dancing on the edge of the dance floor with or without partners, no rules! By the time the first set was done, everyone seemed warmed up and thirsty; then came the tequila shots. I was not a big drinker, but that night was a celebration. When we got back to the table, the owner of the club had shots for the entire troupe waiting. We all took our shot in hand and raised our glasses, toasting to the triumph of our performance. Mine went down very smoothly with a little burn at the end. Another round came from another table who had attended the performance as well. The evening and the fun had begun! When the second set started, I was feeling completely relaxed, but filled with energy. It was then that I made complete and total eye contact with Iliana and before I knew it she stood in front of me and said I owed her a dance.

Dancing with Iliana was amazing, yet again. It felt like we were still dancing for each other in our performance. I could feel her circling me, almost like a bullfighter. I let her stand behind me and I wouldn't turn around. I could feel her coming closer to me when I finally felt her body on mine. We were instantly on the same move, the same pace, the same direction. Her hands were barely guiding my hips and I allowed my arms to rise up in the air. I could smell her perfume, which triggered me to turn around and get closer to her neck. "You smell so good," I told her. We continued dancing through the night. There were times when we'd pair up with other people and there were times we all danced as a group in a big circle, each person taking turns to show off their moves in the middle of our circle. And then, somehow, we would find each other again, the longing satisfied.

I don't remember how much I had to drink that night, but what I do remember was the drink Iliana and I shared together. I must say, I had never done that before and would never again, but I did enjoy it. Iliana followed me back to the table and told me to follow her to the bar. I did so and when we got there she asked the bartender

for two Washington Apples. I had never heard of this drink and she proceeded to tell me how it was made. It was a red colored drink made with Crown Royal, Apple Pucker and a splash of cranberry juice. We got our drinks and without saying a word, she proceeded to grab a strawberry from the bar counter and took a bite out of it, never taking her gaze away from my eyes. With the other half that remained she slid the juicy strawberry slowly up my chest from the last open button on my blouse. She then went on and slowly licked the trail of juice from my chest. I was completely paralyzed! In one smooth swoop, she tilted her head back, finished the drink and put the rest of the strawberry in her mouth and kissed me. She kissed me! When she did, I could taste the bits of fruit, the liquor, and the juices of her own mouth. She not only swallowed the entire strawberry, but she kissed my entire mouth. Bits of fruit from her tongue landed in my mouth. "Ahora tú," she said, "Now it's your turn."

I told her I had never done this before. I joked that Americans had such "interesting" customs, but that I would try. I carefully picked the biggest strawberry I could find at the bar. I don't know what made me do this, but I was moved to lick the tip of the berry as to tease her. Then I took a very deep bite into the fruit so that the juiciest part of the heart was exposed. "Wow," she whispered. I remember that when I did that, it only made me want to take it further. I took the remainder of the strawberry and decided to run it all the way up her neck. Then I did what I had never done to any woman or to anyone for that matter. I slid my tongue from her neck all the way up, licking the juice until I got to her ear; and then once I was there a noise came out of me that surprised me, perhaps representing what I was feeling at that moment. I too, let the liquor slide down my throat easily and proceeded to finish the remainder of my fruit then to her mouth. This time, our kiss was slow, deliberate. I could feel her gently lunging for my mouth as if she wanted more fruit, more of my mouth. When we finished, we looked at each other and didn't say a word. We didn't have to and wouldn't even try to describe what we felt, but what I did know is that we knew we should get back to the table or we would be interrupted eventually.

When we got back to the group, I saw that Gabriél was staring out, not really engaging with the others. At the table, he looked at me with a rather sad expression. He never said anything, but when I got closer he took my hand and kissed it as I sat down. He said he was tired and that he wanted to leave. I didn't have a chance to say goodbye to Iliana. When I took a final look back to see if she was close by, at least to wave goodbye, all I saw was her in the middle of the circle of about 10 people dancing all around her. She didn't see me. We left back to Spain the next morning.

Iliana:

I had been driven all of my life. There was nothing that knocked me down or deterred me from my goals until after that night. I was completely surprised to know that Luna and Gabriél had left. For some reason, I thought I'd be able to talk to her again. I had hoped to see her and spend some time with her away from the studio, away from everything. I wanted to know what she felt after our performance, after our dancing, and after our kiss. I experienced a side of her that I wanted to explore even more. Luna had been known as a very serious and intense person; I had found a deeper side of her that she had not shown many. I thought for a moment and knew I didn't have a way of getting in touch with her. I supposed I could have called the studio, but I wanted a more direct and personal way of contacting her. I decided that I would let it go and continue with my agent to work as much as possible. The problem was that I found myself very distracted. From the moment I woke up until the point I fell asleep, I had visions of Luna all day in my mind. A few of my colleagues started noticing my distraction and mentioned it to me. My mom asked me if I was okay and I told her I was fine, but she knew better. It's not that I didn't want to tell her, but I hadn't wrapped my head around the situation myself. I couldn't put it into words or even explain what I was feeling, to anyone.

Professionally, I was getting great reviews. I was going through so many emotions that I didn't know how else to express what I was feeling, other than to get with my choreographer, guitarist, and singer to create material for myself. I was not normally as involved with that portion, but things were different during that time. I felt that it was the only outlet that I had and I inundated myself completely. Some very passionate, but painful movements were flowing from me. I didn't quite realize how much it was affecting me until I saw a picture of myself in a magazine article.

The picture was taken during this rough time and, boy, did my pain ever show. I guess I wasn't able to hide it, even professionally.

Luna:

My time and experience in New Mexico changed me, but I didn't want to admit it. From the moment I was born everything in my life seemed to be predetermined and set. I didn't have to decide to be in dance, I was born a dancer. I didn't have to decide where to work, I taught, lived and breathed dance. Even when it came to love, Gabriél was the person that made sense. I was comfortable with this. I felt happy. I was doing what I was supposed to be doing. So even though I had a "life altering experience" in the United States, I wasn't ready to alter the life I had always known. I was in some kind of denial, but it didn't feel like that at the time. For now, I simply continued living my life. I had become very busy after that trip. We scheduled a mini-tour through Europe, where Gabriél and I began traveling quite a bit. We were hardly ever at home. I think it was a chance for us to get back to our routine. He never said anything about what he may have seen at the nightclub in New Mexico. I guess I didn't expect any words to come from him; I knew him well enough to know that even if something had bothered him, he would never mention it. I think he was happy and comfortable back home with our routine. I loved Gabriél and I appreciated him. I knew there was not another man for me. I just had never considered there could be a woman for me.

Chapter w

Iliana:

Without knowing what was happening with Luna, I was going a little crazy. I wondered if I had done or said something wrong, if I should have done something different. I analyzed every conversation I had with her, everything that happened the night of our performance. I was completely obsessed. It wasn't healthy, I know. I felt helpless. When I danced, she was on my mind. When I was home trying to relax, I never felt peace. I didn't know if I would ever feel in control of my emotions again. It only got worse when I started calling her. I felt as though she was avoiding my calls.

I tried to call her using the excuse that I wanted to collaborate with her in her area. I attempted calling her studio too, knowing she taught there. Each time I'd get the same response from her studio, she was either on tour or performing elsewhere. I was feeling depleted in my efforts to communicate with Luna. I decided to let go of what I thought was a connection we had made. Perhaps she had regrets of what had occurred between us. Maybe I was the only one thinking about this. I thought to myself that I had to let it go to keep my sanity. It wasn't easy. A few times I even called anonymously; I still received the same response, "No está, mensaje?" No, I replied, I don't want to leave a message. Disappointed, I'd hang up.

And so I began to try to live my life without thoughts of Luna. I slowly began dating again, nothing serious, just enough distraction to keep me from being lonely. Deep inside my heart though, I knew I was lying to myself. In dating other women, I'd compare them to Luna. Nobody complemented me the way she had, nor brought out the passion I felt with that kiss we shared. Nobody.

I was booked for a performance in Los Angeles near the holidays and was looking forward to the month-long stretch of time I'd be there. I had many friends in L.A. and I had many good times there too. It was lively and filled with party and

fun. I was quickly becoming recognizable out in public. I'd be given star treatment in restaurants and hotels wherever I went. I admit I'd never thought about the fame that came with my profession, but I enjoyed the notoriety and attention. With fame came danger too; I had become reckless. I was living the life of glitz and glamour. I attended concerts, benefits, and parties of all kinds. I wanted to be seen, to live freely and dangerously. With Christmas quickly approaching, I flew home for a few days but quickly jumped on a plane right back to L.A. I wanted to ring in the New Year with the idea that I'd start fresh and innovative. I was ready to focus seriously on my career. I wanted to reach higher goals and perform in cities I'd never been to. Yep, that is where I was mentally when I got the phone call.

Luna:

That winter flew by. Gabriél and I were fortunate enough to book performances and tours that kept us busy. We did not book anything during the Christmas and New Year's holidays as we wanted to be home with family and friends.

With the New Year fast approaching, I was feeling a desire for something new, something unfamiliar. I had an idea. I thought about implementing an exchange of instructors, an opportunity for one of our dance instructors to study in the United States in exchange for an instructor from the United States to come to Spain. I would be lying if I said I didn't have Iliana in mind. The problem was, I was unsure if she'd want to take advantage of such an opportunity. I tried to find her but was unsuccessful. I knew there was no specific studio I could call. I did not know how to use a computer very well, but I had heard of being able to search information through Google on the internet. I drove to our studio and sat myself in front of the computer. I didn't want anyone to know who I was searching for, but I had no idea how else to find Iliana. I vaguely asked our payroll manager for instruction on how to search for information. She offered her assistance, but I didn't want her to know what I was doing. She felt my discomfort and clicked a button that said "internet". She pointed to an area where I could type in a word or set of words and click search, then she walked away, respectfully giving me privacy. I typed Iliana's full name and clicked. I couldn't believe all the information I could see! I read everything connected to her name. There were articles from the New York Post, reviews, interviews, write ups, tabloid articles, lifestyle ads, the information was endless. I was so proud of her accomplishments. The reviews were sensational. I read gossip articles of relationships she had been in, but nothing confirmed. She was stunningly beautiful in all photos I saw. She appeared classy and fashionable. I was able to see who she was performing with and where. I recognized some. She was seen in photos with famous actors, politicians, athletes, and authors. I let my mind wander about who she might be dating and wondered if it was it serious. I wondered if she had thought about me...and there it was! Her telephone number! I was nervous. I think I had been hiding some emotions about her and didn't realize it, until now. I thought to myself, I don't want to hide these emotions; I must call her. I wrote the number down, but realized it was too late to call her with the time difference. I folded up the piece of paper, turned off the computer, and left. When I got home, I was feeling restless; I

couldn't sleep. I wanted to call her. I poured a glass of wine in hopes of calming my nerves. After turning in for the evening, I dreamed of all the images I had seen on the computer- a montage of her face, her life, etc.

I woke early the next morning, eager to call. I nervously pulled out the paper and began to dial. An agent answered my call. I was disappointed when she mentioned Iliana was unavailable. I set my emotions aside and left a message communicating my interest in speaking to her about a project and then said goodbye. I didn't know how long it would be before I'd hear from her or if I would at all. I waited in anticipation for a few days, but my hope was fading. To free my mind, I put on some guitar music to practice a routine I'd been working on. The phone rang. I picked up quickly and said hello, then heard two simple words. "Al fin."

Finally.

Chapter u

Iliana:

The minute I heard Luna's voice, it all came back to me. A flood of emotion ran through my entire body. I tried to calm my voice as to not sound so giddy. We made small talk for a few minutes; it was so nice to hear that familiar rasp in her voice. She said she'd wanted to reach out to me for some time, but had difficulty finding me. She began talking of this exchange program. She asked me if I wanted to travel to Spain to study under a prestigious and very well known instructor named La Doña. Of course I'd heard of La Doña, but thought she was no longer teaching. I was thrilled! This could be the opportunity for me to learn from the best--what an honor it would be! I asked her how soon the program would begin; she said, "Ayer!" (Yesterday!). We both laughed and then there was a nervous silence. I realized I'd missed Luna. I had missed her laughter and our good times while she was here in the United States. She wanted me there soon; she said she would make all the arrangements. I mentioned just having gotten back to town. I had been booked up to a year in advance and my agent may or may not like the idea of me going to Spain. For a moment I closed my eyes and imagined myself in Spain. I pictured myself following this path. This was an opportunity of a lifetime -- to study with Doña, a legend in her time. I told her I was very interested, but would have to speak to my agent and look over my schedule. We exchanged phone numbers, and I told her I would call her in a few days.

I called my agent, who was not exactly thrilled about my intent to travel to Spain. "We'd have to cancel and reschedule all engagements," she said. I pleaded and compromised. I agreed to perform anything scheduled within the current week, but I wanted to go to Spain. Reluctantly, she agreed. I felt I had no ties here and it wouldn't be too difficult to pick up and go. I was worried about a few things, I must admit. I

was worried about my emotions with Luna. It had been 7 months since I last saw her. I had gotten back to the person I used to be: the independent, happy, and confident woman. I had felt vulnerable around her before, but the excitement of seeing her again overshadowed any of the worry. I told myself I would behave professionally around her and I would make this a wonderful experience. I'd advance in my craft by learning from one of the best and even better, I would get to experience Spain.

I made the call a few days later; I was so excited to tell Luna the good news. I told her I would arrive in about a month; I had some performance obligations and wanted to visit my family before going. She was as thrilled as I and said she would take care of all the arrangements: my schedule, practices, room and board, transportation, etc. She sounded very excited at my decision to go.

I made a special trip to New Mexico to visit my family; I knew I wouldn't see them for awhile. I needed a taste of home before leaving. I'd traveled the world but no place had the food or people of New Mexico. I couldn't resist the tastes and smells of good New Mexican food, especially homemade by my mother. I was able to relax and enjoy my family and share with them my excitement about going to Spain. They said they would miss me, but they were very supportive and wished me well.

Luna:

From the moment I heard Iliana's voice and of her coming to study in our school, my entire outlook changed. I told Gabriél of my wish not to book performances outside of Europe; I wanted to stay close to home. I didn't explain my reasoning, but he knew it was because of Iliana. I didn't want to be a rude host and leave her alone. He didn't say much about it, but he did double book his and my private lessons schedule to keep money coming in. As part of the exchange program, we chose another dancer who would study in New York. It was a difficult choice to make since Spain has so many talented flamenco dancers.

I found myself counting the days to Iliana's arrival. When the day finally came, I met her at the airport. She looked absolutely amazing! Her hair was pulled back in a high ponytail; she looked tanned and fit. (Oh yeah, and those sexy high heels...) You wouldn't have known she had just taken a 14 hour flight. We embraced for what seemed an eternity, without any words. She thanked me for the opportunity and said this was like a dream come true for her. She said little other than her desire to study hard while here in Spain. I told her she deserved such an opportunity and certainly earned it. I noticed she was somewhat withdrawn personally; maybe it was the long flight...

We got to talking business the minute we got into the car. I mentioned upcoming performances and her opportunities to partake in them. She kindly said it may be a possibility, but her focus was to train and absorb as much as possible. She was unsure if she would have the time. I was a bit disappointed, but for selfish reasons. I had enjoyed performing with her and was hoping for another occasion to perform together again. Maybe that time had passed. Maybe *our* time had passed.

I found her an apartment close to the plaza; close to quaint bistros, aromatic bakeries, flower markets, and a local grocer. She fell in love with the area immediately.

I had decorated her apartment to make her feel at home. I personalized it as I would my own home. She seemed to appreciate every detail. I had fresh flowers placed in vases throughout the apartment. She leaned into a bouquet and smelled a rose. I mentioned not knowing her favorite flower, but wanted her to feel as welcome as possible. She unpacked a few things and we were off. I drove her around a bit and to the studio where she would spend much of her time. I mentioned that her training would begin early in the morning since Doña had always trained at that hour. Her classes were long and often grueling. She left no room for error in her teachings, but appreciated hard work that would leave you exhausted at the end of each day. I had trained with her many times and knew first hand how difficult it was to please her. I had a feeling Iliana had no idea of the hard work ahead of her, but I had no doubts she would achieve all she set out to do here.

The rest of our afternoon was spent driving, showing her around town and important places she'd need to know about. She spoke of her focus; she was methodical in her desire to succeed. She mentioned it being equivalent to earning a PhD, and would not let anything stand in the way of her intention. I wasn't sure if what she said was meant for me to hear personally, but I took it as such. By no means did I want to be a distraction; I was just hoping we would reach a deeper level of some kind while she was here. I sensed something very different in her attitude. For now though, I was content to have her here in Spain, doing what she loved doing and doing it close to me.

La Doña:

I had seen many dancers over the many years I'd taught flamenco, some with talent, some not. I could see talent in a child from the moment they walked into my studio. The talented were good, but I taught them to be great. I enjoyed teaching those who wanted to find their talent and release it. Some of the best dancers in the world trained under me. I knew Iliana had that talent the first time I saw her dance. Her style was not what I was used to seeing; she was like a wild horse who'd look you in the eye with a ferocious glare. I was never quite sure what to expect from her. But when she danced, it all came together. She was unpredictable, and her style had a classic feel, almost nostalgic. She danced like my mother...

Iliana:

The combination of rich wood and dust, the aroma of the studio, they were all part of my experience walking into Doña's studio for the first time. I could feel the essence of other great dancers who studied here before me. Traditional reds, memorabilia, and pictures of dancers graced the studio walls. The sound of my shoes as I walked in even sounded different, more crisp and alive. The quality of this studio brought back a memory of my father talking of how Mexican beer tasted better in Mexico.

I was nervous for my first lesson; I felt sick that morning. I'd studied under many talented flamenco instructors at some of the most impressive places around the world, yet I felt like a novice walking into my first day with Doña. I knew her style of teaching, and sometimes it could be unforgiving. My passion was dancing and I hoped that Doña would notice. I craved her approval, and was willing to work hard to get it.

At 86, Doña displayed the grace of a gazelle, but the strength of an ox. Her "palmas" were so loud, my ears would echo in pain. Her voice was that of a smoker with a heavy rasp and her back muscles were well defined. She'd sing occasionally to help with a routine. Her years of training maintained her youth and physique; I thought to myself, I could only hope to look that good at her age.

Doña introduced me to her personal guitarist, a famous figure in the flamenco world which was intimidating to me. I felt a bit of honor as well. After all, he was here in the studio because of me. The same went for the "cantaor". The famous Rafael "El Canche" was also present and would be for several of my teachings. Their expressions were straight faced. I didn't know what, if any, opinion they would have of me, but I was curious. I was determined to prove to all of them that I was here to work hard and earn the respect they had all earned.

It was during the first few weeks of training that I thought about quitting. I had never worked so hard. I was not afraid of the work, but didn't feel good enough to train under Doña. I thought maybe this opportunity was best suited for somebody with more talent than I. I was feeling overwhelmed. I was not feeling a connection with Doña and saw her frustration with my footwork. I was even working with a "palo" or "stick" to help me with my timing, but the sound of the palo left a thumping in my mind afterward, making it hard to sleep at night. I practiced at home after full day rehearsals. I even started recording my practices so I could retain the many routines I had learned earlier in my day at the studio.

There was an area upstairs where people could overlook into the dance studios. I'm sure some dancers who watched thought they should be in the position I was in, because they might have more talent. After long days at the studio, I was exhausted. My feet were full of blisters from the overwhelming footwork Doña had me doing. She expected extremely loud and strong footwork at all times. She was expressionless and never smiled. She'd make sounds if you did well or sounds if you did something she was displeased with. A "hmmm" meant you did well, a "hmmmff" meant you did horribly.

I felt like I was disappointing Doña and Luna. I was also very torn about how I was handling the Luna issue. She had tried calling me several times when I first arrived weeks before, but I felt if I started to talk to her I would become vulnerable again. I didn't want to do that even though every fiber in me wanted to share with her what was happening to me on a daily basis. I wanted to let her know how much I missed her and was thinking about her. But I didn't. That part was hidden in a very deep place and I wasn't ready to expose it to her or even to myself. And so Luna's calls stopped coming. Even though I knew I probably hurt her feelings by not responding, I justified it somehow to myself. The truth would come out eventually.

Doña:

Iliana was working very hard and I was pleased, but I knew something was holding her back. I did not know what it was, but knew in order for her to focus and reach peak performance, she would have to find out what it was and take care of it. I would do my best to help her, but she needed to recognize there was a problem.

Iliana:

And then came the lesson to top all other lessons. Something was different the minute I arrived. I didn't see Rafael or the guitarist, who had both been in the studio faithfully for 6 weeks now. I noticed two glasses and a brown bottle on a small table. Close by was a record player. A record player? I hadn't seen one in years. When Doña arrived, she didn't have her *palo* either. Was she changing our routine today? She always had her *palo*. I was on edge, but tried my best to not show my emotion. Doña walked up to me and said, "Si quieres ser una leona cuando bailas es una cosa, pero no vas a vivir en una jaula. Hoy te vas a escapar." It meant, "To be a lion during your dancing is one thing, but you will not live in a cage. Today you will escape."

Doña walked over to the record player and placed the needle on the record. I had always enjoyed the sound of the first few seconds of the scratching the needle made before the music began. I listened to a most intriguing voice and gorgeous melody. I could tell the record was old; I had never heard any of the songs either. There was a harp and strings in the music, some classic sounds mixed almost with symphony tones. They were dark and moving. I started to ask about the music when she interrupted me with a question. "Did you know I make my own liquor?" She caught me off-guard, as she usually didn't speak to me on a personal level. "No", I told her. She walked over to the table and lifted up the bottle. She said the recipe she

had made was from her great, great grandmother and had been passed down to her. This particular bottle was aged 22 years and today she was opening it; it was a special day. I thought she was kidding, but it wasn't in Doña's nature to make jokes. She said that she could tell I was missing the palo and perhaps my inability to move was making her regret she didn't bring it! "What's the matter?" she asked me. "You can't move without it?" She chuckled and removed the seal from her homemade bottle of "Brucha." She said the last time she opened a bottle was to celebrate the life of a friend of 68 years. That day her friend had told her she was dying of a long-time illness. The two of them had opened that bottle to celebrate their lives together; they sang songs, danced, laughed, and cried. Two days later she passed away. I'm thinking today must be a special occasion, but what could it be? Why was it me, why now? She grabbed our glasses and poured from the bottle, offering one of the glasses to me. "Brindamos por tu escape," meaning, "Here's to your escape." She raised her glass to me and drank. She let out a low hum and simply nodded as if to remember something of her past. I drank from my glass and the back of my neck felt hot and my head immediately felt tingly. It tasted warm, like oak, it was dark and robust. I hadn't had any alcohol in the six weeks I was training and felt a quick buzz. We drank a bit more and made small talk. She said, "Now we will practice." I did what I was told and got into position. I asked her about the music playing, but she raised her hand up as if to say, no talking, just dancing. She then asked me to interpret the music. I was dizzy from the alcohol, but also because we were dancing impromptu, which we had never done before. Usually, our dance was very structured. I was nervous about this approach. I stood in the middle of the floor and she started the song again. I started to move. I felt myself letting go as I heard the notes of the guitar, the strings, and the voice. I glanced over at Doña, who wasn't even watching me; she was pouring me another drink. I danced, I drank, I moved, I was drenched in sweat. Was it her "Brucha" that was causing me this reaction? I felt a cleansing of my body; I pounded on the wooden floors. Look inside, reach deep and dance, she directed. I felt weightless. I continued to let my movements flow; I was enjoying this experience immensely.

I was unaware of how much time had passed. Soon enough, Doña and I finished the bottle of her homemade "*Brucha*." I felt completely intoxicated. I could no longer hear Doña's voice commanding me to reach, to look inside or to let go. I wasn't sure what was coming over me but I danced harder, with more emotion, faster, louder. I couldn't stop dancing. And then I couldn't stop crying. I started to think of Luna. What seemed trapped inside was coming out with every step. I couldn't contain it. It was exhausting, both physically and emotionally. Everything I had inside was no longer lingering. It had escaped.

The music stopped. And Doña suddenly appeared in front of me. She thanked me for my honesty. I didn't understand her reference. She said because of my honesty, she too would be honest. "Yo soy la que está cantando." "It is I that is singing." "De este momento, tienes que bailar como si tuvieras Brucha en tus venas. "From this point forward in your life, dance as open as if you had 'Brucha' running through your veins." Then she looked me directly in the eye and said in Spanish: The lion is unleashed! And in an instant, there stood Luna in the doorway. Doña passed her and told her to take me home and take care of me...

Luna:

I had not seen Iliana since she'd been in Spain. I had tried to keep the communication with her but she did not return any of my phone calls. I knew she was busy but I had hoped for time with her here. Knowing that she was in the same country and same city was driving me crazy. Even Gabriél noticed a difference in me. He made a comment stating he thought she and I would spend some time together while she was here. I looked at him rather sternly and said she was busy, he and I both knew studying with Doña required complete focus. Who was I kidding? I wanted to spend time with Iliana. I wanted to share this experience with her, and I was frustrated that I hadn't spent any time with her. He knew I was conflicted, but we never talked about it. Always the polite gentleman, he didn't argue or question me. I knew Iliana had focus and I didn't want to take her away from it, but it was so difficult staying away.

I was surprised when Doña called me to the studio. She didn't mention why, but I drove there promptly. I heard a beautiful piece of music playing in the background. I had never heard this piece before but it sounded like Doña's voice. There was talk that she had made some recordings, but she never did perform and she rarely shared her music with anyone. I knew something extraordinary was happening at the studio that day. I felt tremendous energy when I walked in. My eyes immediately fell on Iliana, who was dancing a tearful, heartfelt performance. I could feel her emotion, her pain. I didn't want anyone to notice, but my eyes were filling with tears. I was never privy to Doña's "Brucha," but had also heard of this as well. I wondered what had happened at the studio; my trainings with Doña never included alcohol or her sharing of her treasured songs. Some part of me didn't feel surprised;

Iliana had an effect on people, touching hearts of the most stubborn too, even Doña. And of course, she touched and opened my heart...

I escorted Iliana back through town to her apartment. It was no easy task to walk an intoxicated dancer home. I was careful not to attract attention our way; she was becoming well known in this area and was a stranger to no one. Luckily, she was very distracted; reminiscing and talking about the music, the "Brucha," the unleashed lion and the blood rushing through her veins. I couldn't make sense of what she was saying, I just kept agreeing with her. She was charming and playful and I felt happy to be around her, even in her state. She was stunning. Her wild hair made her all the more attractive. She looked like she'd lost some weight too, surely from the training she'd been receiving. Her muscles appeared to have more definition, almost stencil like. We were arm in arm; I could feel her bicep flex as we walked. I could smell a slight aroma of perfume, her natural sweat and of course, alcohol. Her scent was lovely. I wanted to inhale her continually... I had to focus; I had to get her home safely. I had a feeling she might not remember much of this tomorrow.

We finally reached her apartment. I was able to find everything I needed to care for her. She had not made many changes since I'd been there last. A few pictures of her family were spread throughout and a dried lily lay in her kitchen. I led her to her bedroom. She managed to stay awake long enough for me to remove her shoes. I massaged her feet and she let out a gentle sigh. There is no mistaking a dancer's feet. The torture they endure is in fact grueling. I proceeded to undress her and told her I was going to get something more comfortable for her to sleep in. When I returned, she had already fallen asleep. I couldn't believe how beautiful she looked. Her muscular body had finally relaxed. I watched her. I listened as her breathing became slower and deeper. I wondered if she was dreaming already. Was I in her dream?

Iliana:

I woke to the sounds of movement in my kitchen and the aroma of good cooking. I tried to gather my senses. "What happened yesterday?" I asked myself. I had some clear images, recollecting my lessons with Doña. I remembered feeling very free and images of Luna in my dancing and the melodic song that I will always treasure, because it was Doña who was singing. I remembered the "Brucha;" I never felt intoxicated like that before. It stirred my emotions, made me want to let go, to move and feel the sensation of freedom. I learned the lesson Doña taught me the day before. I didn't ever want to dance where my talents are hidden or overshadowed by fear again. I wanted transparency and freedom to flow through me. To this day, I am forever grateful to Doña. As I tried to piece together the rest of the day, Luna walked in and said, "Buenos dias, Bella."

Having a revelation the night before must have lingered in my soul, because the moment I saw Luna, I simply started to cry. She came to the bed and held me while I cried. I said, "I'm so sorry." She stroked my hair and told me it was ok. She held me so tight; I didn't want her to let me go. I felt relief in crying and being held by her. It was difficult to hold in my tears. From the moment I had decided to come to study in Spain, I'd made up my mind that I would not allow my heart to get tangled up in Luna the way it had in New Mexico. I felt guilty about not answering her calls; it tore me up inside. I had been there over a month already and hadn't even shown her how thankful I was for the opportunity. When I finally let out what seemed like my last tear, I looked at her and told her how much I had missed her. I said truthfully that the experience we shared in New Mexico was unlike anything I had ever felt. I also mentioned that by her leaving so abruptly, I knew she probably did not feel the same. Either way, I did want her in my life and I was hoping we could start over. She

said she would like that, and that we could start by enjoying a good breakfast and spend the day together.

Luna:

I already had in mind what I wanted us to do. Iliana showered and quickly dressed casually after I had told her we were going on an adventure. I told her to bring her camera; we were going to explore. By the time we left her apartment, the day was already warm and welcoming. We walked to the nearby bakery where I bought us fresh meats, cheeses, chocolates, wine, and some fruit. I was so excited to have her all to myself. We were quickly on the road to Bilbao, a place she'd never been. We were looking forward to seeing The Guggenheim as we played tourist for a day. The drive was a little quiet at times, but there was always background music coming from the radio. We laughed and shared stories too. We stopped often to take pictures. Iliana loved to take pictures; she was childlike in this way. I found it endearing. When we arrived in Bilbao, we bought water from one stand and homemade jewelry from another merchant. She engaged easily with the locals, asking questions about many things. This was surely a day she needed to relax; it was as if she hadn't talked to anyone in months and finally had the time to do so.

Chapter ib

Iliana:

Traveling to see The Guggenheim was exciting for me. Taking pictures... breathing in the fresh air... I was so happy I didn't have to be in the studio. I "Googled" information about the places we were going while in the car with Luna. She laughed and said she couldn't understand why I was doing that prior to arriving at our destination. I told her I had to be prepared. I read to her what I had found, "The curves on the building were designed to appear random. The architect, Frank Gehry, has been quoted as saying that, 'the randomness of the curves is designed to catch the light.' When it was opened to the public in 1997, it was immediately hailed as one of the world's most spectacular buildings in the style of Deconstructivism, although Gehry does not associate himself with that architectural movement. Architect Philip Johnson called it 'the greatest building of our time.'" "Don't you see?" I asked her. "We may not get the inside scoop." She just laughed and asked me what "scoop" meant!

I was happy and enjoyed the day, taking pictures of the famous "Puppy" and "Spider Maman" and the many angles of glass and titanium. I took pictures of Luna too, and pictures of the two of us enjoying our day. I was having an amazing time with her. I wanted to buy souvenirs to remember this day. I escaped Luna long enough to buy her some things without her knowing. I thought a CD of cello music would be perfect to listen to on the ride home. I bought a coffee table book for each of us. I always felt there was a theme of flowers between us. Because of this, I bought her a replica of "The Tulips", which we had seen in the museum, to be delivered on her upcoming birthday. I was so filled with excitement, I almost told her, but I didn't want to ruin the surprise.

Luna:

Magical! That is the word for our day together. I remember it well. So much beauty, it was almost overwhelming how incredible The Guggenheim was to my senses. I was intrigued with the site, the architecture, and the art. As much as there was to see and do, what I most enjoyed was Iliana. She was charming and social. Nothing bothered us this day. It was awe-inspiring to wander in a place with such culture and history and to be together. I wanted to take Iliana to experience Pelota Vasca. I had been several times and knew she would enjoy it too. The Pelota drew crowds of people. We arrived and bought tickets. I was unsure if she was ready for the noise and the cheers coming from the people to support the players. Once we sat down, we joined the other fans in unison. I tried to explain how the game was played and how fast the ball could propel in the air. I could feel the excitement of the game and of our time together. What an alive and festive event! When it was over, I was exhausted from all the laughing and cheering. On our way home, Iliana pleasantly surprised me with a CD. We put it to play and heard a beautiful collection of cello pieces. It helped create the perfect setting while the sun set on our drive. Then I did something I never thought I had the nerve to do. I parked the car on the side of the road, turned up the music, and danced for Iliana with the sun as my backdrop.

Driving back, we talked and laughed about things we had seen, eaten, explored, and shared. I thought to myself how perfect a day we spent together. Iliana put her seat back and closed her eyes. In a few moments, I could hear her breathing go from rhythmic and shallow to slow and deep; she fell asleep. As she slept, I drove and as often as I could, I watched her...

Iliana:

The next few weeks were a blur. Grueling rehearsals, exploring Spain on the weekends, and of course, time with Luna. My dancing had improved dramatically. I had matured in ways I never imagined. I felt ready to conquer any challenge set before me. Doña agreed I was ready to perform. Luna had begun preparations for an upcoming performance and asked me to be the headliner. What an honor, me, the headliner in Spain!

It was important for me to do well in the upcoming performance. I wanted to gain respect from the community, I wanted positive feedback and reviews. I was ready and knew that no matter what happened after this, I'd be fine.

The anticipation in the weeks prior to the performance was immense. Costumes were being made, songs were in the process of being completed, media contacts were generated. Doña seemed rather pleased with my dancing. There was much planning and strategy involved in preparing for the performance. It was themed, *Ayer, Hoy, Y Mañana* (Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow). I had learned so much, grown so much, I felt like I captured a culmination of all that I had been through and I was able to bring it out in my dance. The emotion, the passion, my growth in skill, it was all coming together. Personally, I felt I would never be the same; I felt I would forever be changed by this experience.

Doña and I continued practicing with the *palo*. She continued playing a routine pattern with me that we had begun weeks before. I was unsure why she continued the repetition and the same rhythmic patterns, but I had become very familiar with it. Three days before the performance, Doña mentioned she had something for me, she said it was for the performance. She walked out of the studio for a moment and returned. She walked in with a glass in her hand, something I had not expected. I was

confused. Maybe she was going to share another glass of her homemade "Brucha," I thought. She drank from the glass and just stood there, staring at me. I felt a bit uncomfortable as she wasn't saying a thing. Finally, she said, "Te doy permiso" or "I give you permission." I said, "Perdón?" She said she was giving me permission to use her song for the performance. I didn't understand at first but then she motioned to the guitar player in the studio. Without a word, Doña started with the pattern and Reynaldo began playing his guitar at the same time. Then Doña started singing the song I had heard during my battle with the "Brucha." It hit me! All along, she had been playing the rhythm of her song with the palo during our rehearsals! I listened in awe. Hearing her sing live almost brought me to tears. Her voice was still strong and she displayed all the bravado in her movements as if she were a fearless 25-year-old. She continued with the palo and I could hear it all coming together. All that was missing was for me to dance. I started to dance, looking in the mirror at the same time. I wanted this image etched in my mind, all of it, all that was happening at this very moment. Here I was, me, trained by one of the most famous dance instructors of all time and she was singing for me, while I danced to her song! There are no words to express the emotions running through my body at that moment. I could have died, I was so happy! The next few days included more detail of the movements in the piece. We used recordings for the rehearsals, but when Doña said she would sing her song the night of the performance, I broke down and started to cry. "No sé cómo agradecerle" (I don't know how to thank you). She said, "Baile bien, eso será suficiente" (Dance well, that will be enough).

I was so thrilled with all of it, I had to share my news with Luna, but it turned out she knew about it all along. Her smile at my excitement moved me in a way I can't explain. I teased her for not telling me. She said Doña would have her head if she had told me. The reason for the secrecy is that Doña had made Luna responsible for the publicity and promotion of the show, but didn't want any prior public attention put on her. Of course, this was difficult for all of us to understand. Doña had not performed on stage in public for more than 30 years! She was famously known to sit in the back row of performances as to not draw attention to herself. When the lights would dim before a show, only then would she be escorted to her reserved seat. Doña was quite mysterious and I had grown very fond of her. I admit, the mere thought of her being on the same stage with me was too much to comprehend. I was humbled. She felt like a grandmother, full of unconditional wisdom and advice.

The entire time I spent in Spain, I called my mother every single day. She was filled with excitement for me and supported me every step along the way. I invited her and my dad to the performance in Spain, but she mentioned she had had a prior commitment and would be unable to attend. I found it odd and was disappointed, but I told her I understood; they had seen so many of my performances in the past. I also invited my sister to come to Spain to see me dance. She had always said she was interested in seeing Spain someday and I thought this would be a perfect opportunity for her. She too said she couldn't get away on such short notice. I was saddened, but again, I understood; it was short notice. I told all of them that I would record my performance and send it to them. I couldn't tell them the truth of how hurt I was and that it wouldn't be the same to dance without them in the audience. I couldn't

tell them that the most influential choreographer of all time was going to sing for my performance, nor could I tell them that my dancing had never been stronger. No, I didn't say any of that. I let it go.

Luna:

The performance was approaching very quickly, I was so nervous! I wanted everything to be perfect. As the promoter and coordinator of this fantastic event, I felt much pressure, even more than if I were performing myself. I wanted this to be an experience of a lifetime for Iliana. I found myself checking and double checking every fine detail. She shared with me wanting to have her family with her at her performance, and how disappointed she was that they would be unable to attend. What she didn't know was I had already made plans to have her family flown to Spain to watch her performance. I had to search Iliana's phone for her mother's telephone number, which made me feel sneaky, but I wanted it to be a surprise. I called her mother about a month prior to the event and requested her presence and that of Iliana's father and sister. I asked them to be my guests and they accepted graciously. Her mother also thought it would be fun to surprise Iliana and promised to keep it a secret. This would be a difficult secret to keep, as I could see Iliana's sadness when she mentioned her family would not be coming to Spain. Her mother felt her sadness and almost told her the truth, but kept her promise knowing how happy she would be to see them when they did arrive. Surprising Iliana would be no easy task. As a matter of fact, it was almost impossible.

The night prior to the performance, I took Iliana out to dinner. Naturally, she looked exquisite. We didn't say much to one another; I could tell she was nervous. A few moments later I looked across the dinner table and noticed she had tears in her eyes. As I looked at her, she began to tell me all of the emotions she was experiencing. She said she was nervous about this most important performance, and that she was sad that her family would be unable to attend. She went on for a few minutes with her emotional distress and sadness. I knew I could bring her relief if I just told her about her family. I thought about it for a few minutes and before I knew it, I began to laugh a little. I couldn't help it; she looked adorable in her frenzy. I could see her look of confusion at my laughter so I got up from the table and hugged her while she was still explaining her feelings. I told her to calm down, that I did understand and that I had a surprise for her. I had planned on surprising her later, but she had left me no choice. She stopped talking and wiped the tears from her eyes and I flashed a smile of reassurance. "Tu familia viene a España a verte." (Your family is coming to Spain to see you) "Surprise!"

For a moment I had no idea what she was going to do, she simply stopped everything and gave me a blank stare. Suddenly she began to cry even harder, but this time I knew it was a cry of delight. We embraced. Giving this surprise to Iliana was different than giving Gabriél a surprise, I thought. He never liked surprises and usually didn't react to them, especially the way Iliana did. This is not to say Gabriél was not grateful....it just wasn't the same. I had arranged for Iliana's family to show up at the restaurant while we were still at dinner, but not until later so that I could

be alone with her awhile. Once we ordered dessert, I got a call from Iliana's mother, who was just outside the restaurant. Perfect timing, I thought. I excused myself from the table to go greet her family and tell them where Iliana was seated. I stayed back to watch them unite. Her mother tapped Iliana on her shoulder and Iliana's face lit up! She was so excited to see her family. I smiled and cried at their reunion; it was just as I had imagined it to be. When I returned to the table, Iliana embraced me with a most gracious squeeze, "¡Gracias! ¡Gracias!" she said as tears streamed from her face.

I had also arranged a type of documentary of all the dancers, performers, choreographers, and crew that were involved in the show, including Doña. She had very few, but powerful words of praise for her student, Iliana. I hired more videographers to shoot from different angles, instead of the usual back-only angle shot. In the end, the documentary would be an entire story of the performance from start to finish.

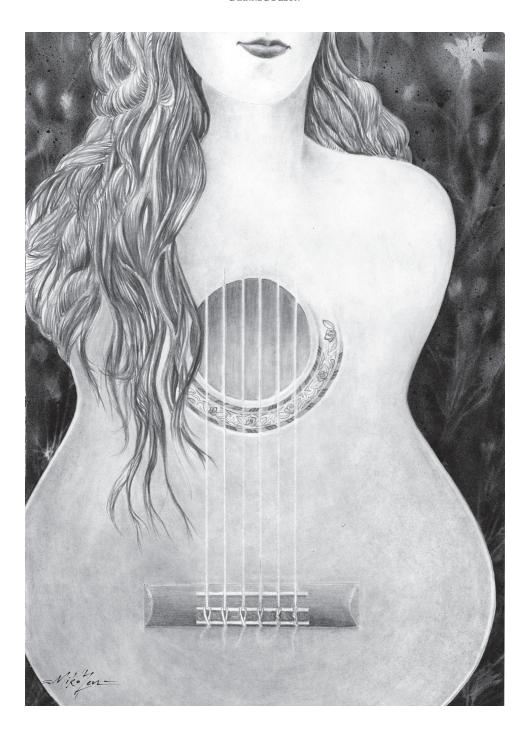
I planned well for Iliana the day of the performance. I had arranged for her to receive a massage and a hair and makeup artist. I ordered a gorgeous bouquet of flowers to be delivered to her apartment and her dressing room; all things she had done for me back in Albuquerque. Every gift made me feel like a child. I was excited and couldn't explain it other than it felt so natural to give to her; it was all from my heart. The final gift I had planned was the most splendid. From the moment I knew Iliana would be studying in Spain, I knew of a seamstress that would only commit to making very few outfits per year. I called her up and asked if she was already committed for the year and of course she had said yes. With some serious persuasion, it worked, she agreed to make an exception for me only because she knew me and my family so well.

I had the pleasure of designing the dress Iliana would be wearing for the performance. However, putting on paper what was in my mind was proving to be difficult. I had dreamt of how Iliana might look and what dress she'd wear. I imagined how beautiful she would look in a dress that would accentuate the curves of her body. I wanted the back of the dress designed low cut and sexy to expose her soft sculpted back. I'd close my eyes and see the contours of her body, her smooth skin, and her long slender legs. I imagined her in vivid colors as if she were standing right in front of me. With the help of the seamstress, we were able to work every detail to get her dress perfect. To add that special touch, I was able to incorporate some beadwork with beads from Iliana's grandmother.

The day of the performance finally arrived. I asked Iliana what she had planned on wearing. She had chosen a dress she'd previously worn which was stunning, but I told her I had a gift for her. I pulled out a slightly decorated large box and handed it to her. I had been anticipating her reaction for so long, I didn't know what to expect. She untied the colorful bow, opened the box and began to remove the tissue inside. I enjoyed watching her excitement and expression. That alone made all my efforts worthwhile in creating her dress. I had put my heart and my soul in the design and wanted her to feel it. Once she got a glimpse, she immediately put her hands over her face. For several minutes she stood there and cried. I stood there, watching her. I knew her tears were those of happiness. She stood in front of me and took my hand and put it on her heart. Then she embraced me fully with her entire body. I closed my eyes and smiled; it felt so good. The moment was so tender, I couldn't help but

to melt in her arms. I almost couldn't contain the energy coming from inside my body. I noticed during our embrace, she began playing with my hair. No woman had ever done that to me before. A tender sensation ran through my body at that instant. Our embrace lasted a few moments, but when we finally let go, we were face to face. Her beautiful green eyes were filled with tears. I thought to myself how striking this woman was, so naturally stunning. "Te gustó?" I asked her.

"There are no words." She expressed that having me in her life made her feel like the luckiest woman in the world. She said she couldn't imagine her life without me in it. I told her I couldn't wait to see her dance, especially in the dress. She was so excited with her dress; she wanted to try it on. She ran off to put it on and swirled back in. Her hair was unruly and wild. I stood there, stunned. I noticed every detail of the dress and how perfectly it complemented her body. She ran her hands through the dress, feeling the texture, the softness, and every detailed hand-sewn piece, touching every bead. I told her the beads came from one of her grandmother's dresses and she twirled around, elated that some part of her family was close to her and would be for the performance. She ran to the mirror like a child, and twirled and twisted to see every detail. "I feel beautiful," she said to me. "You are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen, Iliana," I told her. "Now you are ready."



Iliana:

Flamenco is about soul, strength, and power. Some of the best performances of my life made me feel like I could conquer anything. When an audience is in a theater watching every step you take, it makes you feel empowered. The elation that runs through your body is unparalleled. There is nothing more satisfying than when you hear the music and you feel you have interpreted it for your audience, when you are one with the singer and when you hit every step perfectly in your footwork, with your body, your expression, and your hands.

Of all my performances, I believe this was the absolute best. I danced perfectly to the sounds of Doña's voice. The music was literally flawless. My family couldn't have been more proud. The press wrote striking reviews of our outstanding performances. My favorite memory of the evening had nothing to do with me at all. I felt like a princess with the dress Luna had made special for me; it made me feel sexy and magical. But all of that aside, as many know, once a flamenco performance is over, if the audience wants more, they will get more. There were three powerful standing ovations! The audience obviously didn't want the night to end and neither did we. We all gathered on stage in a very loose semi-circle in order to allow each person to enter the center and do a short solo to keep the audience engaged. I heard Doña from the wings of the stage; she was singing. Most of us had not seen Doña after she sang for my performance. We thought she had left, which was typical in nature for her to do. To make believers of us all, she appeared from behind the black curtain. The audience could not contain themselves. The excitement and emotion raised the roof as she appeared on stage. A legend, Doña stood in the spotlight and absorbed the well deserved recognition the audience gave her. We all knew and felt we were taking part in a special piece of history. At some point, Luna joined us on stage. She

stood next to me as if to experience the moment with me. We made eye contact and were so taken by the elation of the crowd. All I wanted to do was hold still that very moment. But this was Doña's moment, and she did everything to embrace it. Her standing ovation was cheerful, and she obliged by singing an encore. She sang a song about a man who had lost his love, but truly he had just left her for another woman at the bar where he was drinking, only to learn later she had left with another as well. It was playful and the audience roared in laughter. Doña had been keeping "palmas" as she was singing in the middle of the stage, surrounded by all of us. We were all keeping time with her as well, when all of a sudden she broke out in full dance. Nobody expected to see a dance performance from Doña; she had retired so long ago. I saw her face as she danced with grace and a smile. She glowed with pure bliss. She absorbed all the love and admiration from every single member of the audience and put that energy into an even more elevated presence. Even at her age, I had never seen such grace or sensuality come from a dancer. Looking into the audience, I could see emotion and tears coming from the faces of those who cherished the talent of this amazing woman. Doña made her way down the stairs and into the audience and continued to dance. We followed her as if it were practiced. I thought the audience might become unruly, but they were content to have her pass by, singing and dancing while the rest of us followed, keeping time with our "palmas," laughing and encouraging her: "Olé!!" She led us to the front of the theater house. It was a fantastic end to the show and one of the most amazing memories I will always treasure. Following Doña was symbolic, as she was a pioneer in her art of flamenco dancing.

The following day, the buzz of the performance was only enhanced by the endorsement and rave reviews that were given by local and international press. My acceptance was solidified, but more importantly, Doña had been able to reignite the allure of classic flamenco to all audiences who followed flamenco. She even captivated a younger generation of dancers who were able to see what true flamenco talent portrayed.

Luna:

My mother phoned me to tell me the news. I told her I needed to hang up. All I can remember is that I wanted to get in my car and drive. What I most remember about the news was that the evening prior was incredible, almost dreamlike. I drove towards Iliana's apartment quickly. I was shaking and nervous and found myself driving as fast as I could. I was unsure if anyone would beat me with the news, but I knew she would need comforting. When I arrived at her apartment, she was still asleep. It took her some time to answer the door, and when she finally did, she smiled at me, but quickly noticed I was not doing well. Once she let me in, I burst into tears and said, "Doña murió." (Doña has died.) Very little information was available; close friends and relatives did not seem to know much either. What I had heard is that Doña had some illness she'd known about and recently hadn't been feeling well. I consoled Iliana by telling her that she motivated Doña to continue dancing to her very last day. Iliana and I tried to piece together any and all information possible to try to make sense of her death. Iliana told me the night that Doña opened the

bottle of "Brucha" she had said it was a celebration. Maybe she knew then and was celebrating her life. We cried and held one another for a very long time. After getting ourselves together, we left the apartment. The city had published a front page story with a photo of Doña from the previous night's performance, along with a full story of her entire life, including pictures throughout her career. The locals were in shock of her passing, men and women alike. In her will, it was said that all of her assets would be sold and the money would be donated to the local school of flamenco so that young girls and boys could study. Nobody knew much more than that. We returned to the apartment and all Iliana and I could do was sit and cry. She made tea and we simply reminisced about each of our experiences with Doña.

We had been in Iliana's apartment for most of the day when there was a knock at the door. There was a woman who was dressed very professionally, her hair in a tight bun, like a librarian. She shook Iliana's hand forcefully and asked if she could take a few minutes of our time; it concerned Doña. She had left something for each of us. We offered her to come in, but she stated there was no need. Out of nowhere, she pulled out the palo. She handed it to Iliana and said Doña insisted she wanted me to have it. She took it and realized what an amazing sense of humor Doña had. There was a note attached that translated to, "May this help you never to lose your rhythm in life." Iliana was so touched. Then the woman pulled out a small box, a ring box, and handed it to me. Before I opened the box, I looked at the woman, confused. I opened it and was incredibly moved and humbled. I couldn't speak. It was a ring. The woman stood in the doorway still, trying not to show emotion, but her eyes welled up with tears. She explained to Iliana it was a ring Doña had always worn. Even as a little girl, I remembered her wearing it. She never took it off and I told my mother that I had loved the ring so much I had always wanted to ask Doña if I could try it on. As I grew older, I remembered wanting it replicated. Gabriél even tried to find a similar ring, but never did. "Ella lo diseñó," the librarian-looking woman said, meaning Doña had designed it herself. She handed me a note that said, "Única, lo verdarero, como tú." Meaning, "Unique, the real thing, like you."

Iliana:

After a week of recuperating from the performance and attending services for Doña, I was feeling the need to prepare for my departure. I knew I'd return someday, but after spending almost four months daily with Doña, I felt empty and without direction. Everything reminded me of Doña. Even my relationship with Luna seemed somewhat surrounded with Doña's presence as well. I could feel the entire city grieving. Doña was an icon, surely to be missed. Her absence had me filled with such great sadness that I felt the desire to leave as soon as possible. I began making arrangements with my agent to book me for performances. I had begun to gain even more recognition after Spain's performance and wanted to honor Doña. I didn't want to lose what I had learned from her, not to mention I was in demand to perform, especially now. The crew from Spain promised me they would open any performance with me in any city I chose. I appreciated their support and would graciously accept the offer. I began to pack, which was easy. I had not accumulated much in my apartment. I was hardly there and most of the time it was just a place of relaxation. While packing, I saw the palo set against the wall. I had to hold it, feel it, each crevice defined by the many dancers that had been trained by it. It made me feel like I was holding a world of experience, history, and life in my hands. I gripped the palo and felt all the sweat, the pain, and the joy it represented. It had now become one of my most cherished possessions.

Luna:

I'm not exactly sure what I was feeling at that moment. But when I thought of Iliana leaving, I felt empty. It was a sadness that overwhelmed me and she had not even left yet. I knew when I was around Iliana, everything just felt right. All I

wanted to do was gaze at her, without ever saying a word. Every minute I was away from her, all I could do was think about her. Every detail of her was engrained in my memory: her hair, her smell, how graceful her hands moved, her posture, the way she walked I had distinct feelings for her, and they were all entangled within my heart. With Gabriél, there were feelings, but they were different from what I felt for Iliana. I couldn't quite put to words these emotions, but I knew that when I was around her, I felt settled and calm. When Iliana told me she would soon be leaving, I was obviously less than happy, yet I was unsure what I wanted from her. My emotions were all over the place. I had questions surfacing that I didn't have answers to. Did I want her to stay? And if so, to do what? Live here? I didn't know what I felt, but I did know that I didn't want her to leave. Before I knew it, time had passed quickly as I found myself picking her up to drive her to the airport. Prior to her departure, there was a going away party for her. The party included the cast, members of the press, family, and friends. She seemed content to move on, but I couldn't comprehend how strong and ready she was to leave. What made this difficult for me was that I couldn't talk to Gabriél about it. He could tell something was unsettled within me, but he stayed quiet. Considering I didn't know exactly what was happening to me either, I wasn't quite ready to try and express myself. We understood one another's silence and respected it just the same.

As Iliana and I drove to the airport, we sat in silence. Finally, I couldn't take it any longer, the stillness in the air. I asked her if she was going to miss me. She just looked at me with a puzzled stare, as if she didn't understand. "Luna, yo quiero pasar toda mi vida con tigo, pero no lo queires así. Si algún día estas lista o ves que quieras eso, estaré lista con brazos abriertos." Translation: "Luna, I want to spend my life with you, but that is not what you want. If someday you are ready for that, I will be waiting with open arms." We arrived and parked, words unspoken. I didn't know how to respond or what I should say. How would it work? Where would we live? How would our families react? Did this mean that my love for Gabriél was not real? This couldn't be. I still loved him! What would the public think? I never imagined I would be attracted to a woman as I was to Iliana. I was taken aback by all the emotions dwelling inside of me.

It was almost too much for me to comprehend. I believe what happened next was that I simply shut down. I found myself having to let go of Iliana and watch her board the plane without knowing whether I would see her again.

Iliana:

I was thankful to be back home, though my stay in Spain was incredible. It had changed something inside of me. Above all else, Spain moved me emotionally. I felt I had learned to articulate myself expressively and more exquisitely through my dancing. I also was slowly beginning to accept that even though I did want to have something with Luna, she was not in the same place I was. I convinced myself to move forward, and in a short period of time I had begun working on a production similar to what I had done in Spain. I was blessed to work close to home this time. My troupe and I would be performing at the very well known La Fonda in Santa Fe, on the same bill as María Benítez, a local, well-respected, and phenomenal flamenco dancer. I loved Santa Fe and looked forward to working and spending some good quality time there. It was a beautiful new setting for me. I was staying at a very quaint casita close to downtown, which would be my home for the next few months. Santa Fe is home to some of the most amazing galleries, churches, restaurants, and of course the downtown plaza. Summertime in New Mexico is known for its colorful skies and brilliantly lit sunsets. I fancied all the cuisine there, which offered food I could not find in New York, or anywhere else for that matter. I enjoyed chili rellenos, sopapillas dripping with honey, and calabacitas. I enjoyed the red chili as much as I enjoyed the green. It's amazing I didn't gain weight each time I'd go out. The production crew seemed to enjoy every place I recommended as well. I had begun spending some time with a woman named Paola. She was a dancer as well and we enjoyed each other's company. Most people with the crew and those close to our troupe knew we were involved, but most never spoke to me of it. It seemed like everything was falling into place and I was feeling very comfortable, until I received another phone call.

Luna:

The minute Iliana left back to the United States, I felt lonely and so confused. I had always known my way, but somehow I was feeling lost. I would take long walks by myself and wonder what it was that was happening to me. My sadness grew and I felt like my life was in turmoil. All I wanted was peace, but I had none inside of me. I could talk to no one, except for the one person who was causing my anxiety. But, from what I had heard, she was back home performing and getting along just fine with her life. She seemed in control, while I felt like my world was falling apart. She had expressed to me that she was ready to be with me months prior in Spain, but what did that mean? Would we have lived as a regular couple would? What would our families say? Our friends? The press? I wanted to scream. Gabriél, bless his heart, tried to be understanding. He took on the role of my best friend, but I couldn't express to him what I was feeling. I had always shared everything with Gabriél... my thoughts, my fears; there was nothing I held from him, but this was different. What was I supposed to say? I think I'm in love with a woman? Where would that leave him? There were so many unanswered questions. I needed to talk to Iliana. Maybe she was going through some of the same feelings I was going through. I wasn't even sure if she wanted to talk to me, but I had to try. I told Gabriél that I needed to take some time for myself. When I told him, I could see disappointment and pain in his expression. He knew something was bothering me; he was feeling my distance. He said he wanted nothing more than to be able to help me through whatever it was that I was experiencing, and that he would be here waiting for me. His words tore at my heart. I could probably have changed my mind and stayed, but I knew over time the restlessness would eventually resurface. I felt a little peace in talking with Gabriél, and was able to reverse my inertia. The first thing I thought of was to call Iliana. I had missed her so much; I wondered continually about her. She was always on my mind and in my heart. I was hoping she'd feel the same. I made the call.

Iliana:

When Luna called me, it was not only surprising, but also confusing. Months had passed and we had not talked to each other at all. I told Luna she was very welcome to come see me in Santa Fe, but once I got off the phone with her, I knew I might be creating some chaos in my life. I had always strived to live in peace, but somehow I managed to make decisions that didn't always reflect my intentions. I thought of Paola. She and I had been spending quality time together, intimately as well. We enjoyed each other; it felt good to feel good again. It was not a complicated relationship. Paola had been with women in the past and did not come into my life with any "baggage" as they say. We simply enjoyed one another. I admit though, deep in my heart I had missed Luna, but had convinced myself that we were not meant to be...until the night she called me. When the phone rang, all I said was hello and the next ten minutes I listened to Luna cry and tell me how much she missed me and how confused she was. She explained that she didn't know what was happening to her, but she needed to talk to me. She said she also understood if I didn't want to see her, but in the same breath she said she could really use a hug from me. For about ten seconds there was silence, "Estás allí?" she asked. "Yes, I'm here," I told her. She said she wanted to leave immediately; she didn't want to say anymore over the phone. "Cuando llegas?," I asked her. She said she would be arriving the next day at five in the evening on American Airlines and asked if that was ok. "Yo te recojo." I told her I would pick her up and that I was looking forward to seeing her.

When we hung up, Paola asked me who I was on the phone with. I told her it was Luna and she would be coming to Santa Fe to visit. Paola and I had talked about my relationship with Luna when we first started dating. I told her that I did have feelings for her then. "Have you slept with her, Iliana?" The look in her eyes let

me know that her feelings for me were strong. "No," I told her. As much as the truth scared her, she had to know. "All I ask is that you be honest with me," she said. "Just tell me if you find yourself wanting to be with her. I can't take it if you lie to me; I can handle the truth." My answer to her was in a kiss. At first I kissed her softly; then we kept kissing—leading to more. I can honestly say that I was very present during our lovemaking. Once she fell asleep, I thought of Luna's voice over the phone. I felt restless and excited; I was anxious to see her. She did not sound like herself. She sounded troubled; not at all like the stoic, calm woman I had met. I never took a chance at assuming whether someone was gay or not. It was a personal issue. There was something though, in how comfortable Luna seemed with her sexuality. I felt like I had opened a door to her comfort toward me sexually; perhaps I was wrong. I knew for a fact that she wasn't ready for that possibility between us in Spain. Maybe now, after almost five months, she had some sort of revelation. I stopped for a moment; I didn't want to get ahead of myself in thought, especially now. My life was going very well. My dancing was on track, I had a solid relationship, and things in general were flowing smoothly. I planned to be there for Luna, but reminded myself that keeping peace in my life was important too.

Luna:

I was not trying to cause problems for Iliana. What I really wanted were answers—some understanding from this person whom I felt understood me. My trip on the plane felt eternal. My mind raced and I was filled with anxiety. I couldn't wait to catch up with Iliana. Finally, as the plane descended towards the beautiful New Mexican landscape, a sensation of relief came over me. I could feel my anxiety lifting. All I could see was the most gorgeous colored sky. The clouds were tinted with hints of pink and orange; it was breathtaking. As I debarked the plane and made my way toward the baggage claim area, I saw her. I walked toward her and I could see that face I had missed so much; she was as beautiful as I remembered her. She smiled and gazed at me the very same. We embraced for a moment, and at that moment I could feel all of my tensions ease. It felt good. No...it felt absolutely wonderful. We made small talk about my flight and our families and we got into her car for the hour drive to Santa Fe. I finally let my worry go. As we drove north, the Sandia Mountains looked majestic. Everything around me was bursting with color as sunset approached. I thanked her for being so patient with me. She laughed and put her hand on my leg and asked me if I was okay. I began by telling her I didn't feel okay, and that I was hoping by taking this trip I would soon feel peace again. I let it flow, all the words I had bottled up inside. I cried as I spoke softly about it. I was a bit uncomfortable, but asked her when it was that she thought she wanted to be with women. I asked if it was different than being with a man. I imagined it was different, but I wondered how exactly. Did she tell people? How did they react? I wondered and continued asking questions. I had never had a bad relationship with a man, and wondered why I might want one with a woman.

"Wait, wait!" Iliana said as she laughed at all my questions. "One question at a time." Of course by that time we had arrived at her place in Santa Fe. We took

in my luggage and settled in. She put some water to boil for tea and we decided to have dinner delivered. Iliana said we had all night long to talk and catch up; she was so patient and kind. As the hours drew on, she listened to every word, every concern, my curiosities, insecurities, fears, and fantasies. I felt completely comfortable talking with her, but most importantly, I felt safe. We talked for hours, until we were interrupted.

Iliana:

I didn't claim to be an expert with Luna and the questions she had, but what I did tell her was my truth, my emotions, and my experiences. I started by telling her that when I was young, I was attracted to boys, and later as I got older I did date men. I had had great relationships with men, but it just didn't feel complete when I wanted to get very close to them. My emotions felt limited and then I'd end the relationship for whatever reason, almost like there was never a total connection. I knew it had nothing to do with the men I dated; I knew it was me. In my early 20's, I met a woman whom I knew was gay. We spent some time together, and when I was around her, I felt giddy, curious, and excited. I described to Luna my first kiss with a woman and the feelings that came from it. It was a feeling I'd never forget. It was that missing piece that I just didn't have with any man I had ever kissed. After that first experience, I knew I'd continue to be with women. Each experience was always more intense than the last. Every woman would teach me something about myself. I told her that moving away had given me the freedom to be myself and to explore the opportunity to date women, which would later solidify that I loved being with them. I had become more comfortable with myself and my sexuality; I seemed more confident, and with that, more people simply accepted me. I always felt acceptance. I told her that I had some relationships that were very fulfilling. I also found that women who were truly interested in me, really liked me for who I was. It's all I could ask for. The press had never really delved into my personal life that way. I knew people knew about me, but they didn't treat me any differently. I did share with Luna that at first my family, particularly my mother, didn't understand. She asked questions like, "Are you sure? Why you? Was it something I did to make you this way?" She worried I would be discriminated against in my work, but it never happened. I was never

judged based on my sexuality when it came to my dancing, and I could certainly live with that. I soon found that in this line of work, surrounded by other artists, dancers, entertainers, etc., there were plenty of other gay women. At times, I'd share with my mother about particular women who were gay. I think it helped her to know that I wasn't alone, that I wasn't the only gay woman out there. There were gay women who were beautiful, sexy and feminine too.

I told Luna that the men in my life were more like brothers to me. Most of them enjoyed talking about women and of course I enjoyed it just the same. They loved the mutual interest.

Luna listened to all my stories intently; then came a knock at my door. It startled me as it was two o'clock in the morning. As soon as I heard the knock though, I knew it was Paola. I had not phoned her all evening. She had been calling, but my phone was in my purse. I looked at Luna as if to say, "I'm sorry for the interruption." When I opened the door I was greeted with a raised eyebrow from Paola. She came in and assessed my home with one swift look. As she could see, there was nothing really happening other than conversation and leftover food. She quickly calmed her tense expression and introduced herself to Luna. She apologized for the interruption, but said she was worried because she hadn't heard from me and wanted to make sure I was okay.

Luna apologized for having kept me away for so long. Then they both looked my way. Paola asked if she could speak to me in private. We made our way to my bedroom. When we got to the bedroom, she closed the door. I apologized simply for not having called her earlier and said that the time had escaped us. "I already see a change in the way you are behaving with me," she said. "You couldn't even call me to tell me you were okay... nothing? Is she going to stay here?" she asked. I told her that I'd find a place for her to stay tomorrow, but yes, she'd be spending the night.

One thing I despised with women and relationships was a dramatic scene. I told her that she would have to trust me and I would appreciate it if she wouldn't make a big deal of it. She said she wouldn't cause a scene, but she also said she would be staying with me. I told her Luna and I were not done with our conversation. Paola said she accepted this, but also said she would be staying. She'd go to bed and allow the two of us to finish our evening. I knew in order to respect my relationship with Paola, I had to allow her to stay with me.

Paola came out into the living room where Luna had started cleaning up the food and said, "I'm going to bed, but I want you to feel like you can stay up as long as you need to." At that, she kissed me good night in front of Luna and went to bed. "Parace que me tienes mucho que contar," Luna told me, meaning, "It looks like you have much to tell me".

Luna:

What I had feared the most was that Iliana might be involved with someone. How could I have expected her to be alone? I envied Paola's ease with Iliana. She seemed very natural in the way she carried herself. I wanted to be that way!

There was an awkward moment after Paola left the room. My frame of thought had changed and I no longer felt like talking. Iliana and I just looked at each other and kind of chuckled. I wanted to know if it was serious and she said it was. She said it was an easy relationship, without difficulty or drama and that Paola was a very nice woman who made her happy. She then asked me about Gabriél. I said he was fine. I said that he knew I had some things to settle. She then asked me if I was going to have difficulty being around her and Paola. I told her no, I would be fine. But when it was time to say good night, I couldn't help but think of the two of them in bed together. I felt restless about this. I could imagine what I would do if Iliana were next to me, what I wanted to do to her body. But I couldn't. I had fantasized about what it would be like to be held by a woman, to be held by Iliana. I had only been with one person my entire life, and it was Gabriél. I ached for her. I felt that my opportunity had passed. Months ago she cared for me; now things were very different. I had to start working on myself. This is not what I had in my mind, but I had to change my intent and attitude with Iliana quickly. I had to try to make the best of this trip. I knew this would be hard to do. From the moment I met Iliana, I was drawn to her. I was pulled emotionally by her. It was no different now, girlfriend or not.

Iliana:

Is it possible to be in love with two people at the same time? I didn't want this to be happening, but as the days passed and I spent time separately with each woman, my answer was yes. It is possible. In the mornings, I'd go to the theater to rehearse with the troupe, including Paola, who was part of the cast. I appreciated that she was very professional in front of all the crew. We had held each other the first night Luna had stayed over at the casita. Without words, this reassured me things were okay between us and I was grateful to her for not making a fuss. Neither Paola nor I liked complication in our lives, so we made it a point to move on from this difficult situation. I continued using my time practicing and making the performance tight, and seeing that every detail was being taken care of.

In the afternoons, I'd meet up with Luna and we'd spend time with one another. Usually, we walked or drove the streets of Santa Fe. Sometimes we'd sit for hours on the plaza and watch people and talk. I was intrigued in learning about Luna and her life, and she about mine. We were so comfortable around each other. In those hours we spent, I didn't think of Paola. I don't know if that made me a bad person, but I was able to compartmentalize my thoughts and feelings for each woman. At the end of our evenings, I'd go back to my casita and Luna would go to her place. I'd always look forward to our next time together. She'd spend her mornings writing, exercising, and making sure things were being watched and cared for back in Spain. This quickly became my routine, and it was working, so it seemed.

Luna:

I was spending hours every single day with Iliana and I was mesmerized with what she had to say and what she shared with me. I was starting to become more

comfortable with myself. I think I needed to be away from my "usual" environment without worry of what Gabriél, my mom, or dad might think. My time in Santa Fe was proving to be a peaceful and picturesque backdrop to my journey. Everyday I'd discover a new gallery, a café, or a charming shop or music bar. Some of the best pictures I've ever taken were during that summer. I knew I'd eventually invest in property in Santa Fe; what a perfect escape, I thought.

I remember one night, something in particular happened. The cast was gathering to celebrate the opening of the show. There were about twenty of us and there was mention of the celebration being held in a gay bar. I wasn't familiar with that type of environment and was nervous at the thought. I wanted to go, but I was afraid people might see right through me. A bunch of women were laughing as they were walking to their vehicles to go out. I think Iliana realized I was not ready for that step. It may seem silly, but it was a big deal for me then. Everyone seemed comfortable in their own skin, but I was not. Iliana looked disappointed in me. I couldn't tell if she was upset with me or upset for me. I watched her leave with Paola and the other women and it really affected me. I got into my car and started to cry. I could hear them singing songs from the performance and knew I wanted to be that carefree, but it was so much deeper than just going out for one night. If I joined them, would it mean I would have to embrace this lifestyle, this way of being? I wasn't sure I was ready to do that. Nobody knew this, but I stayed in the parking lot and watched as everyone drove off. I stayed for about twenty minutes, not able to leave, because I couldn't see; I couldn't stop my tears.

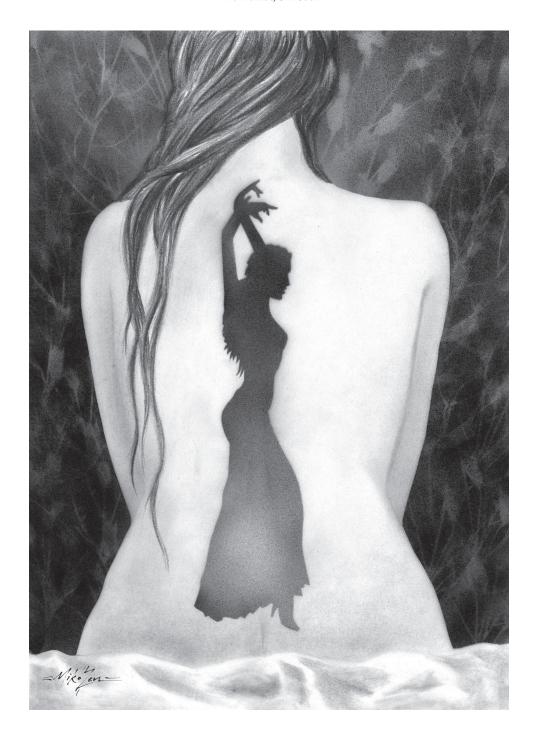
Iliana:

Possessing inner peace and personal awareness are gifts to oneself. If you don't have them, there is nothing or any one person that can give them to you. I was learning that as much as Luna wanted to find herself, she hadn't. I was at a point in my life that I wanted to be there for her, but I was also past the point in my life that she was currently questioning. I had already gone through these things myself, and was unsure I could be there for her. Frankly, I wasn't quite sure she wanted what I wanted anyhow. I knew I wanted to be with women for the rest of my life. But Luna, I wasn't so sure. This is what made a big difference between her and Paola. I knew Paola was grounded with herself. I needed a woman that was comfortable with herself as well as comfortable with me. As selfish as it may sound, I wasn't ready to be with Luna if she didn't know what she really wanted. It would take some time, but I felt Luna would eventually find herself and her direction.

Luna:

My spirituality always seemed to help me through everything in my life. This time was no different. I didn't want to feel as though I was being dishonest or misleading to anyone, but most importantly, to myself. I knew I had to be true to myself. My feelings for Iliana had grown. I never thought I would or could feel this way for a woman. I only wanted to spend my time with her. I was beginning to feel as though this was not a temporary thing. My feelings were deep and avoiding them would be untrue to myself. The minute I met Iliana, a whirlwind of emotion had transpired in me that I couldn't ignore. I admit thinking about Iliana had me looking at my life as I had never thought possible. Accepting this was complicated; knowing that who you thought you were your entire life could change, was difficult to accept. Embracing

the idea that I might be a gay woman wasn't settling well with me. But what I knew was that I had fallen in love with a woman, gay or not. In general, most people ask women, "Are you seeing someone? Do you have a boyfriend? Are you married?" If so, they ask, "What is *his* name?" The idea of never getting married also entered my mind, and children? If I were to ever live a gay lifestyle, did that mean I wouldn't ever have a child? So much was going on in my head, it almost seemed unfair the questions I had. For some women, these types of questions would never arise. I had never had to deal with this kind of emotional complication, but now I was staring at a life full of questions and the answers were just not coming to me. Shortly thereafter, despite of all my unanswered questions, I simply let go...



Iliana:

There are places that inspire. It was a Saturday morning when I heard a knock at my door. I had been asleep, and Paola had not spent the night. I thought it might be her, but was pleasantly surprised when I opened the door and saw Luna. She had a smile on her face and said she wanted to "kidnap" me again for the day. I had much to do, but could not resist her invitation. I joked with her saying she couldn't kidnap the willing. She said it was okay since I wasn't a kid anyway! I quickly got ready and we were out the door. Luna had done some research on some of the places she wanted to see while she was in Santa Fe. I was thrilled at the idea. I had lived just a town away, but knew there were places I had always wanted to see, but hadn't. Seeing some of the places with her only made it more special. We started our day at the Cathedral Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi. Close by, we also ventured to see the art galleries on the famous Canyon Rd. Each event was enhanced by Luna's presence. She made everything more colorful and fun. I enjoyed hearing her perspective; whether she spoke of an intriguing piece of art, her love of history, even her appreciation for the adobe architecture. Even food tasted better while I was in her company. We stopped at Tia Sofia's for a bite to eat. Between the two of us, we managed to eat every morsel of blue corn enchiladas, fideos, and an entire basket of sopapillas. We accompanied our meal with a pitcher of margaritas, which didn't help my effort to hide my affection or attraction to her. I just wanted to kiss her, right there, in front of anyone lucky enough to be sitting near us. At that moment, Paola was not with me, in mind or body. Feelings I had for Luna were flooding back, feelings I'd thought I'd put away when I left Spain. My feelings were alive and wanted to be shared. Before we knew it, the day had turned to night. There was a composition of color in the sky that took my breath away. The universe was giving the two of us the gift of a gorgeous sky to

fit our perfect day together. I think the *margaritas* were doing their part in drawing us closer as well.

Luna:

Ah, yes. That day was so magical, everything about it was perfect. I was open to Iliana, to her love and to my feelings for her. I remember leaving the restaurant and walking toward a plaza nearby. I was so excited to see guitarists playing that I grabbed Iliana's hand and practically ran to where they were. They were playing flamenco. I joined in with palmas and they instantly knew who we were and encouraged us to join them. I was so moved by the music and Iliana's presence; I danced in front of her, for her, and with her. I blocked everyone else out; I could only see her. She was clearly enthralled with me at that point. I danced around her, getting close to her, then pulling away. Yes, I was flirting; and she was flirting back. It felt like foreplay, and it was just as intense as if we were in a room by ourselves. It didn't take long before we had an audience applauding, encouraging what they were seeing. At that moment it didn't matter what anyone saw or thought. I stepped right in and never looked back. I was performing for Iliana and whoever was present that evening was witness to my adoration for her. It didn't take long for Iliana to dance back to me. I've never been so taken by someone's skill and allure all at once. I don't know how long the song lasted, but when we finished dancing, the plaza had filled up and the roar of applause surprised us both. We thanked them and the guitar players and simply walked away. We took a drive up Hyde Park Rd., to one of the most romantic resort spas called Ten Thousand Waves. This would be the place where we would finally let every emotion, every desire, and every fantasy come to life.

Never in my life had I felt so sexy. The private, outdoor hot tub was nestled in its own cove, surrounded by pine trees and with a million stars dotting the dark blue sky above. The light from the stars was enough to see just more than Iliana's stunning silhouette. I couldn't take my eyes off her. And when she let her robe fall to her feet, my body burned with an all-consuming desire. I wanted her. I wanted to kiss her mouth and her neck and her breasts, which were so firm and so beckoning. I wanted to give myself to her, totally, and let her, only her, only Iliana, answer my own call, the pulsing wetness inside me. And so, like a new person, like a Luna I never knew before, I too let my robe fall, and slowly descended the few steps into the tub.

Iliana

As Luna dropped her robe, all of those months of longing and wondering and waiting welled up into an intense, electric desire for her. My body was in charge and there was no turning back. My breathing became deep and audible. My skin, never hotter or more alive, yearned to touch hers, to rub, to caress, to mesh. My own hunger, my own wetness, more intense than ever before in my life, was not, however, as demanding as my need to satisfy her.

I followed her lead, into the tub, and stopped to appreciate the moonlight glistening

on her back. Then I took a deep breath and, before letting it out, I swept her hair over her shoulder. It took her breath away and, instantly, thousands of goose bumps painted her skin. I wanted to kiss each one, but instead continued to move in slowly against her, my front to her back, my heat to her curve. Then my tongue, apparently with a mind of its own, licked the nape of her neck, just below her hairline. Luna let out a quiet moan of approval and turned to face me. Now our breathing was in unison, heavy and rhythmic. She backed away, teasing me and making the distance ever more painful. I gladly obliged, and took one more step forward to devour her mouth with mine, then her breasts, then all of her. More graceful, more beautiful than we'd ever danced before, our bodies moved together as one, giving and taking, giving and taking, and loving each other, fiercely and fearlessly.

Iliana:

After that evening, Luna joined the summer production and I made the decision to tell Paola the truth. I explained what had happened and we agreed to end our relationship. I was not happy with what I had done and knew it would hurt Paola, but I had no regrets. I'd been in love with Luna for some time and I was finally able to act on my feelings.

I had an idea, but I was unsure how Paola would react. She said she wasn't surprised. She said she knew when Luna was coming to town that we'd end up together. I told her I honestly wasn't expecting any of this to happen, but it didn't matter what I was saying to her at that point. She said it would be foolish to stay in the production as it would be too difficult to see me with Luna. She would be leaving the production immediately. I tried to convince her to stay, but she wouldn't have it. I even offered to pay for the money she would have made during the production but she wouldn't take it. I guess I was trying to end things between us peacefully, but I suspect I may have selfishly been trying to ease my guilt at the same time. To be honest, I think Paola handled this more graciously than I would have, had this happened to me. She didn't cause a scene when she came to pick up her things. I communicated to the dance troupe she was no longer in the show. I knew in time, people would know the truth, but I didn't want to disrespect her in any way by telling anyone what had happened; it was a private matter, between Paola and me. Once she was gone, I never heard from her again. One of the most regretful things I must live with is that Paola had never done a thing to hurt me; she had always been good to me. I always thought that I could have said or done something differently to ease her pain, but there was nothing I could do; the damage had been done. I felt like an insensitive coward. I felt sick for causing Paola so much pain, but I knew deep in my heart, it was the best

decision for me. My guilt was so tremendous, I was sure my behavior would come back to haunt me, like karma.

Luna:

I joined the summer production and spent every moment with Iliana and I loved it. I felt so alive with her! I knew I had to talk to Gabriél, but I knew I didn't want to do it over the phone. We hadn't talked on a daily basis like we used to; in fact, we rarely spoke since I'd been in New Mexico. He had respected my request for space to "discover and find myself," and I appreciated him for this, but it was becoming more difficult to avoid the few questions he did ask. He didn't pressure me, but I knew I'd have to tell him what was happening eventually. Besides Gabriél, my family had become curious about my lack of communicating with them as well. Either way, I was not pleased with my actions. He was working in Europe with a troupe out of Spain. It made me feel better to know he was busy. I still was unsure when I'd go back, but I knew I wasn't ready to go back now.

I was also not pleased that my actions had caused hurt to another human being. I thought about talking with Paola, but knew it would make no difference. Iliana mentioned how upset Paola was, that she wanted nothing more to do with her and that she left Santa Fe the very next day. I only wish I had had the ability to identify my feelings six months before, perhaps avoiding the suffering Paola was experiencing. I had great guilt in knowing I took another woman's lover. Honestly though, in my heart, Iliana was mine to love. Perhaps I was selfish in my thinking, but I only wanted to be loved by Iliana and to love her in return. I was now in the arms of a woman and this was where I felt I belonged. The entire summer was like living in a dream.

I felt that Iliana and I had created a daily routine, one that soothed me and brought back a sense of normalcy into my life. I found myself continually wanting to discover a more intimate part of Iliana. I fantasized about her and the two of us. I don't think she had any idea of how awestruck I was by her; I never tired of her. I wanted to experience every part of her. I felt tremendous peace at working on myself and being with Iliana. We had begun to think about where we'd go after the tour ended in September. We had to make some decisions. Iliana had her home in New York and of course my home was in Spain. I was thrilled at her suggestion to go back to New York with her. She mentioned that her agent could find work for both of us. She talked about all the places she wanted to take me. And so it was settled. I would make a living out of New York with the woman I loved.

My time in New Mexico was most memorable. I found my true "Self" and was finally beginning to find comfort in my own skin. I was in love.

Iliana:

I had never lived with anyone before. Paola and I were together for just a brief time, but she didn't live with me. I have to say, living with Luna was amazing. I was excited that she was coming back to New York with me. I wanted to share my home with her, show her all about my life, the city... my friends. She was ecstatic when I spoke of what our life would be like together. I wanted everyone to know that my heart belonged to Luna. New York would be a good fit for her; she loved the city. She enjoyed New Mexico, but she was ready to move forward. As much as I was enjoying our performance tour, I too was looking forward to starting a new chapter in my life, with Luna.

Before traveling to New York, Luna said she needed to go back to Spain. I wasn't prepared for that, not just yet. I understood she had to see her family and discuss with them what had transpired between us since Gabriél had last seen her. I had great respect for Gabriél. I couldn't understand how he didn't just get on a plane to New Mexico to find out what was going on with Luna. He was a patient man. She had asked for time and space and he had granted her what she needed. I was nervous for Luna, but anxious for her to face her family and Gabriél. As the time drew near, she too was filled with anxiety, but she was ready to talk to her family on her own terms. I wanted to be there with her, but she insisted on traveling home alone.

By this time we had established a deeper comfort level than I had ever felt with anyone. Luna and I held one another all night, every night; it was natural and easy. If I turned over in bed, she'd find me and hold me. If she moved, I'd do the same. I fit into her and she into me. I loved the feeling of her warm skin next to mine. Her long hair would lie softly on my skin; I'd smell it while she slept. I could hear her sigh during the night. It made me feel like my presence gave her peace. In the morning, I'd

ask what she dreamt the night before and she'd always say, "Yo sueño con tigo despierta y dormida," meaning, "I dream of you awake and asleep." During our time together, we discovered many wonderful things we had in common. I didn't know she was an amazing cook, as I enjoyed cooking as well. We'd surprise one another with different dishes. We'd drink wine on the balcony watching the busy city go by. We enjoyed watching movies and reading too. Outdoors, there was never a lack of things to do together. We often found time to ride our bikes, hike, people watch, explore, shop for antiques, or simply walk the city. And of course, getting together with friends and going to a club with live music always proved to be an enjoyable time. I had always relished my independence and freedom, but with her, I felt more complete.

Luna:

Fall came quickly and soon Winter as well. Our "gig" was complete. We had a quick celebratory gathering for the crew, friends, and family, which is typical at the end of a performance tour. I enjoyed my time in New Mexico and had an entire photo album of memories to hold on to. I made the decision to go to Spain alone to talk with my family and to Gabriél. It had been so long since I'd been home. When I arrived, I was very nervous. Everyone had thought I had decided to stay in New Mexico because of the opportunity it provided me to perform. Financially, it made sense. I had often communicated my desire to spend time in the United States, and of course, nobody thought anything strange about that, other than the fact that Gabriél was not included in my plan. On the other hand, he knew a bit more. He had felt my distance for weeks, even months prior to my coming home and knew that I was going through something significant inside. He thought it was odd that I had taken a job that would keep me away for so long and so far away. Even so, he never questioned why I was doing it. When I finally got to Spain I was thrilled to see my family as I had missed them so; but I was anxious.

Gabriél:

I don't like to talk about her time in New Mexico; it was a very painful time for me. People say I don't talk much and I know this to be true. I never liked to talk to anyone about my emotions; I only trusted Luna. I had never met anyone who captured my heart like Luna had. When I felt her slipping away, I didn't know what to do; my heart and hopes collapsed. I couldn't force her to stay when she wanted to go to New Mexico. I felt lost and empty while she was away, but I respected her need to go. I held on to the hope that she would return with the answers she had questions to, and that she would come back to me. I had hoped her time away had built strength in our relationship, but my hopes failed me.

Luna:

When I arrived in Spain, I had been practicing what I would say to Gabriél and my family, but somehow the news had already arrived. I called my mother and in hearing her voice on the other line, I could tell something was wrong. She was crying softly. She told me that a tabloid newspaper had run a story with pictures of me and Iliana with a title that read, "Amantes," which translated to, "Lovers." My mother asked me why the media would say such a thing; they knew I was with Gabriél. She said just because Iliana and I had danced together didn't mean we were lovers! There were other comments too that she just didn't understand. I knew that a phone call was not the appropriate way for me to answer any of her questions and said I'd be there soon. I called Iliana right away to share with her what had happened. She was worried that this was going to be very difficult for me to handle. She didn't think I was prepared to deal with this type of pressure from my family or the media. She too was confused as to why the media would be so blatant about their presumptions. The media had never treated her this way. I did eventually find out that it was Paola who had "mentioned" to the press that they may want to inquire about my relationship with Iliana. There were several reporters and photographers interested in the story who had flown from Spain to New Mexico to follow us to possibly get some photos to try to confirm the rumors.

When I arrived at my mother's home, she handed me all the magazines she had collected with pictures of me and titles of my sexuality. I was devastated at the hurt I could see in her eyes. I was upset at how quickly the media had turned on me. I'd always had a favorable relationship with them throughout my career. I felt violated and felt their intention was pure malice. I would deal with my emotions toward the media later; right now I had much to discuss and explain to my family.

Given the reaction my mother had with the stories she had already read, I knew this was not going to be easy. I also knew Gabriél, who had been out of Spain for the last few months, had probably already heard or seen something about Iliana and me as well. In telling my family about me, I wanted to be clear about my news. I wasn't ashamed or embarrassed about what was transpiring in my life, and that was what I intended to tell them. I wanted to deliver the news in my own way but the media beat me to it, and their way wasn't so gentle. It was not fair to me, my family or Gabriél. And with Gabriél still out of town, I had no way of getting in touch with him. I was worried and was left with an anxious feeling in my stomach. It would be a few weeks before he would return.

Luna:

I had heard many "coming out" stories. Each story contained its own unique twist. Some were funny, while others were painful, but all were memorable. Mine, well it was a bit of everything.

I remember gathering my family together to discuss what had transpired with the media and how it connected to my life. They were as anxious as I was to get to the truth. I sat in front of all of them and told them that in spite of the love I felt for Gabriél over the years, I had fallen in a deeper kind of love with Iliana. I told them I felt that being in love had nothing to do with gender, and that the only way to be true to yourself, was to follow your deepest, truest feelings. I told them this was how I felt about Iliana.

My sister, who was the comedian of the family, broke that moment of deafening silence by saying, "If I were gay, I would want to be with Iliana as well!" She stood up and embraced me with a hug and said what any sister would want to hear at that moment. She told me I was beautiful, talented, and deserving of happiness in this life, whether it was with a man or a woman! I started to cry. We hugged each other even more tightly. Before I knew it, my father stood up and wrapped his big arms around us both. He said, "Mis hijitas, I love you both very much." Once we collected ourselves, my father told me not to worry about anything in relation to my dancing career. He said that our name would stand strong and no matter what the media had to say in bad taste it was a waste of time. My brother, not a man of many words, stood up and kissed me on the forehead and said if anyone said anything to him, he would kick their ass personally with his flamenco boots! I looked over for my mother and noticed that she wasn't saying anything. She was just looking at the floor. I looked

around the room for a second, wondering what she was thinking. I asked everyone if I could have a moment alone with her.

I sat down in front of her and took her hands. We just cried. We didn't say a word to one another for a long time. Finally, she looked up at me and said softly that she didn't understand the whole thing. She said she was worried for me. She could already see how this type of lifestyle could be more difficult and how people could be so cruel. I understood what she was saying; no parent wants their child to be hurt by words of other people. I hadn't thought about that part. I thought she'd be upset about my lifestyle specifically, and how it would hurt Gabriél. I told her that I had come to Spain to tell Gabriél in person, but the media had probably already sabotaged my plan. I feared his reaction when we would meet but I would deal with it then.

We then talked about Iliana, but I wasn't ready to communicate details about our relationship. What I did say was that I was in love and very happy. She looked into my eyes and sighed. She said she would pray that the life I had chosen would not be a difficult one. She also hoped people could know how caring and generous and beautiful I was on the inside....spoken like a true mother. After that, we embraced for a long time; I knew we'd be okay.

Luna:

I felt much relief after communicating with my family. I didn't have a clue what any of their responses might be like. I knew how much they loved me but I was honestly surprised by their obvious support of me. I had yet to speak with Gabriél. I had learned from his mother that he had taken on another tour that would keep him away for at least another month or so. The timeframe would lead into the Christmas holiday. I asked his mother how I could get in contact with him. I could tell she knew. All she said was that he would contact me when he was ready to speak to me. She was curt but not angry. I wanted some type of closure with him but it was apparent I was not going to have it anytime soon. I talked to my parents about it and they said I must respect Gabriél and how he must have been feeling. I knew that I was the closest person in his life, and even though I hurt him, I still wanted to be the person he should be talking to.

I recalled not too long ago Gabriél giving me the space I needed to process my feelings. I knew now I must do the same for him. I shared my feelings with Iliana; she said she completely understood. I knew Iliana was not insecure about my relationship with Gabriél; she actually seemed to sympathize with him and wished it could have turned out differently.

When his mother told me he would contact me, I didn't know if that meant he'd call in a few days, weeks, or even months. I was very close to his family as mine was to his. I was hoping this would not tear our families apart. His family was not hurt with me and my relationship with Iliana; they were just sorry that they were losing a daughter. They were also worried for Gabriél, but they knew he would eventually understand. His family was very spiritual and his mother would only say, "Sólo podemos orar por él."

"All we can do at this point is pray for him."

I continued my contact with his family but things would never be quite the same. I eventually left Spain without being able to see Gabriél, which left a hole in my heart and my soul.

Iliana:

After two weeks of being away from me, Luna returned to New York! While she was away, I was filled with a complexity of emotion. I was so nervous at what her family might say or how they would react to her news. I was relieved when she told me through her tears over the phone that all had gone well. I was so proud of her. I knew that a negative reaction from her family or close loved ones could easily devastate or scar her emotionally.

Gabriél, on the other hand, was a different story. I'd never felt animosity toward him. When I did work with him in Spain, I could see why Luna loved him. He seemed to love Luna deeply. I felt for him. I knew Luna was hurting inside when she left Spain without having been able to speak to him. I continued to wish and pray that the three of us could get through these difficult times and somehow be friends, at least at some point. I tried putting myself in his position. He obviously had loved Luna his entire life; she was the woman he was going to marry and spend his life with; now his dream would end. His world had been turned upside down, I thought. I didn't know how to fix this; all I could do was support Luna.

In the meantime, New York quickly embraced her. She pleasantly adapted to her new life with me. We enjoyed turning my apartment into ours. We had some things sent to us from Spain. I really wanted her to feel like I was welcoming her into my life and my space; I wanted her to feel it was her home too. She worked on remodeling one of the extra rooms in the apartment. She'd been collecting and framing pictures, articles and memorabilia and other personal tokens having to do with our dancing and our lives. She converted a room in the apartment into a dance studio where we could practice, which I enjoyed with her constantly. She put articles of our dancing into handmade frames from Spain, including artwork we'd bought

on trips together. She painted the room to look like a mock flamenco stage. I was touched to see that she had taken Doña's *palo* and put it on a stand with a picture of her close by. She put up the dried flowers I had given her from our first performance. There was a cowboy hat she had bought me in Madrid, New Mexico. There were even a pair of my first ballet shoes, hardly worn, and a pair of her first flamenco shoes that hardly had any sole left on them. She'd even kept a playbill from our Spain and New Mexico performances. There was a picture she had taken of our names on the marquee and had it enlarged. A picture of her and Gabriél when they were young, was particularly endearing. I saw pictures of her mother at a younger age singing, while her father was dancing. So many countless treasures filled this room and our hearts. It was filled with our history, many beautiful memories. I hoped to fill it with plenty more memories as our lives progressed. It became our favorite room in our home.

Luna:

I loved living in New York! I felt rejuvenated and alive! I'd never lived away from my family, or Gabriél for that matter. I felt like a teenager moving off to college for the first time, and here I was approaching my late 20's! Iliana was well known in New York, and because of this we were treated well. I quickly became familiar with the subway system and enjoyed it. I felt like I was finally happy with who I was. Just as my father had said, once the rumors and initial drama subsided, it was business as usual. Most of the public didn't really care who I was seeing. There were many gay people in the world of art, dancers, singers, and entertainers in New York.

Gabriél was weighing heavily in my heart; he hadn't called. I had heard that he was working and traveling with his dance troupe, but he was not doing well emotionally. I had recently seen an article on the internet, a picture in particular, and he didn't look good. Almost a full year had passed and we still hadn't spoken ... not since I was in New Mexico. He had lost weight. He was still in good shape, just thinner. His hair was loose, not his usual tight, slicked back ponytail that had become his trademark look. He'd even grown some facial hair, which he used to say he didn't like. I read some of his reviews. Some commented about his lack of passion and fire, which he was known for having. I could feel like there was something missing; it hurt my heart to know this. I guess I didn't want to assume that it was about us, but I couldn't help to wonder. He'd made it clear that he didn't want to speak to me and I had to respect his wishes. He was my first love; I still had feelings for him. This was something Iliana and I had discussed openly. I was completely open with her and she was with me; this I was grateful for. I couldn't imagine having a relationship with anyone where there wasn't complete honesty. There were times our conversations were awkward, but I felt the trust and was completely comfortable with her.

I was challenged with Iliana's popularity. I trusted her, but she was so magnetic and desired by many! She'd engage with men and women alike, but always kept me secure in her feelings for me. Gabriél was desired as well and was often approached by women, but most people assumed we were married or he was reserved enough that it looked as though he never was interested. But being with Iliana, it wasn't quite

so obvious we were a couple and it made me nervous at times. There were times where it would be difficult until she'd clarify we were a couple. Some still flirted anyhow, but she always managed to make her point with grace and was never perceived as rude; and of course she was never disrespectful to me.

I felt support from Iliana, just as I had from Gabriél. It was different, but just as assuring. One day she and I were talking about things. I mentioned my future, my dreams, and all that I wanted to accomplish in this life. I told her, as Americans would say, "When I grow up..." I said that I had always wanted to own a dance school for under-privileged children. I mentioned that money should never be an issue if a child wanted to dance. It was a dream close to my heart. "Besides," I told her, "I love children." I remembered my mother and father taking in children who wanted to learn, but could not pay for lessons. My parents were heroes to many children, some of whom became quite successful dancers. I wanted to continue giving, just as my parents had. Iliana was thrilled with the idea. She was very excited and said we could make it happen. She began by helping me look for spaces for a studio. She also said she knew people who would be more than happy to contribute with funding or whatever was necessary to make my dream happen. She even spoke to a friend who was a newspaper reporter for the New York Times who said as soon as the school opened, she would run an article. I was so excited by her support; I began to believe this could really happen!

Just then, I got a call. It was about Gabriél. His mother was clearly upset and said he had been in a terrible accident and asked if I could fly in to see him. I asked her if he had asked for me; she said no, but that he'd been acting irrational for some time and I might be the only person who could reach him. I felt a deep desire to see him, but was worried about what Iliana would say and feel. His mother had asked me to see him, which meant this was something very important to her. But maybe Gabriél wouldn't want to see me at all? I decided to go to Spain.

Iliana:

I knew this day would come, I just didn't expect it to be like this: an accident. What kind of accident? Gabriél's mother had mentioned he suffered some broken ribs, a fractured collarbone, and bruising. He apparently had already been released from the hospital, but she didn't know many more details. All his mother would say is that he hadn't been doing well in recent months, and didn't provide much more than that. She did mention that drinking had become a more constant part of his life now, which surprised me; since Luna said he never really drank before. I was concerned for Luna emotionally, of course. She didn't know what to expect. He had not requested her presence; it could prove to be a mistake if he received a surprise visit from her. I would give her the support she needed in spite of the horrible feeling I had in my stomach: fear, which I never shared with her. I gave her my blessing to go.

Gabriél:

I was not built like other men. I was a dancer. Everything in my life was based on what I felt inside. I felt lonely and I felt pain. I did not want to speak with anyone, nor did I want to see anybody. I didn't want to think. I just wanted to be alone. I hated feeling this way. My friends constantly supported me and told me I would find someone new, that I would look back at this time and all would be ok. It made me sick inside to think about it. It was so much more than that. I knew I had given more of myself to her than I had ever given to anyone. I gave freely to her, because it felt right in my heart. I never imagined losing her. It was not arrogance; I just didn't imagine anyone would ever come between us. It didn't matter who it was that took her away from me; the fact was, Luna was no longer mine. She was gone. I lost myself and didn't want to come back. I even lost my love for my dancing; I felt no joy.

I began drinking socially after dance performances, trying to get over her—thinking that the drinking would help me cope. It did for a while, but usually I regretted the feeling in the morning and only felt worse later. I became agitated for no reason and it scared me. I was never aggressive before, but when someone would try to console me, it made me angry and reclusive. Eventually, the crew and my friends stopped talking to me for fear they would upset me. Maybe it was for the best; I had no desire to talk anyhow.

I avoided travel back to Spain when I knew Luna was there. I would have probably tried to convince her to stay with me, but I feared the truth. I desperately wanted to see her, but I knew she was no longer mine. I assumed by not seeing her, it would make it easier for me, but it didn't. I didn't want to know about her new life. The tour in a different environment helped a little, but in my frame of mind, it

probably wasn't a healthy choice either. I was reckless and I knew I was not dancing at my full potential.

The accident was no accident. I was in a bar after a performance with some of the crew when some guy started taunting me about Luna. At first, I didn't know what he was talking about, until one of my friends looked at me to see if I was listening. He used a less than respectful phrase about Luna being a lesbian and that she was no longer the lady he thought she was. He asked why I wasn't man enough to keep her satisfied. I didn't care what they were saying about me, but at that moment I felt out of control. A rage came over me and I took a leap toward him. Before I knew it, there were four of them. I managed to take on three of them before the owner of the bar grabbed me by the arms, but they continued to attack and punch me. I was numb. One of the managers of the tour grabbed me and whisked me away; he wanted to avoid bad press. I was taken to the hospital with fractures to my ribs and a broken collarbone. My manager called my mother. She was worried about me and my emotional state. I was upset she was called; I didn't want her to worry. She drove two hours to come see me and all I could tell her was that I was in a minor car accident. I knew she didn't believe me, but she didn't pry with more questions. I assured her I was fine, but she knew better.

I spent one day in the hospital. Although I was still in pain, I needed to continue dancing to keep my mind busy. I drove back to the hotel where we had been staying, but later that evening had a difficult time sleeping. I was in such discomfort I decided to go to the studio we were using to rehearse to see how much pain I'd be in before the next performance. I took a bottle of brandy and some music I'd listen to whenever I was down... not a good combination, but that was what I was feeling. When I got down to the studio, I put my music to play. I could feel the burn of the alcohol going down my throat and how it soothed me afterward. I danced in pain, but it didn't matter. I wanted to feel the pain; I wanted to feel something. I looked in the mirror and didn't like what I saw. I looked beaten. My hair was a mess and I looked worn emotionally. My thoughts took me to deep despair, and suddenly there was Luna.

Luna:

My heart pounded as I watched. I almost turned around to walk away, simply because of the pain I could see he was in. I was unsure if this was a good idea, but I couldn't move. I stood frozen, watching him. I knew the music well; he only listened to it when he was sad. Through the years, I'd find him alone, sometimes in a darkened room, listening to music like this. I never asked him why, but I could tell it was his time to be alone.

When the song was over, he looked over to grab a bottle close by. That was when he saw me. He tried to turn away, probably so I could not see his face with bruises. He looked lost and broken. He didn't say a thing; he just walked the other way and then walked in circles like a matador circling a bull, cautiously deciding what step to take next. It hurt me that he wouldn't look at me; it hurt me that he

didn't say anything. Finally, he put one hand over his face and the other gesturing me to go away, "¡No quiero que me veas así!" "I don't want you to see me like this."

Gabriél:

A flood of emotion ran through my body. I felt sadness, passion, embarrassment, and, most of all, shame. Shame that I looked and felt the way I did. I didn't have the strength to deal with all that had happened to me, and my face surely represented this. I couldn't look at her without thoughts of wanting to kiss her. She spoke my name and it took me back. It didn't matter what happened, I just needed to feel her, to touch her. She slowly started walking toward me. I told her, "No! No vengas aquí!" Don't! Don't come close to me! As dark as the studio was, I still didn't want her to see me. I, on the other hand, with a little light coming through a window, could see her. She looked radiant. Every step I took away, she gently placed another toward me. It felt like a dance.

Luna: "Gabriél, talk to me."

Gabriél: "I don't want to talk."

Luna: "Just tell me something."

Gabriél: "I can't, I just can't talk to you."

I reached a wall and faced it with nowhere else to go, helpless and vulnerable, trapped. I knew she was coming up behind me and I'd have to face what I had been avoiding for over a year, a death I had not accepted. My heart raced, I had no

way of controlling my emotions. I was beside myself and then I felt her touch me; I broke down.

Luna:

I reached for him and he started to cry. Seeing him cry shattered my spirit. At first, he wept quietly. He couldn't control himself and even though he still couldn't face me, I embraced him. I could feel his body shaking. I held him as hard as I could. It felt right. He was the first person I had ever fallen in love with, and at that particular moment, I wondered if perhaps I was still in love with him--not the same feelings I had for Iliana, but it was love nonetheless.

As if he no longer had the strength to hold himself up, he fell to his knees, weeping. I let myself fall with him, holding him. He finally turned and faced me while on the floor. I held his face. He looked gaunt with deep circles under his eyes, which I had never seen before, but still as handsome as I had always remembered. His jet black hair was a mess, sweaty from rehearsing. I could smell alcohol on his breath. I wiped tear after tear from his face, but they wouldn't stop. "I'm sorry," I said over and over. He said, "I still love you so much Luna, I don't know what to do." I continued holding his face in my hands, gently bringing his cheek to my lips. I caressed him with my hands, trying to console his pain. I tried to kiss all the tears that were falling, but he moved his face and found my mouth with his and we kissed. I didn't stop him. Our kisses grew longer and harder. Our bodies found each other as well, he caressed my body and I his, and soon we found ourselves on the dance floor again. After almost a year of loving Iliana, Gabriél and I were making love.

Gabriél:

When I woke up in the morning, I was on the floor of the studio. Luna was not there. I didn't feel her leave. Never before had I given so much of myself, physically and emotionally, to someone. I wasn't sure what was going to happen from that point forward, but I did feel relief. I didn't remember talking much, but it seemed there had been no need for words. I was drowning in pain and grief and Luna helped me feel as though I was going to be okay. I feared I couldn't handle seeing her, but looking back at the evening, it was impossible to think I couldn't. I made my way back to my hotel room to shower and right as I opened the door the phone rang; it was Luna. She wanted to talk.

Luna:

There was so much going on in my mind that morning. I knew I needed to speak with Gabriél immediately about what had happened. I called him and we planned on meeting at a park we used to go to. It was a beautiful morning. We met and strolled along one of our old walking trails. As soon as I saw him, he told me he knew that I was letting him go. He embraced me with every ounce of his love. I couldn't believe his understanding; he wasn't upset. He said he knew I was in love with Iliana. He said he could feel it. I shouldn't have been surprised by his words and actions; nobody knew me better in this world than Gabriél did. When we made love the night before, I wanted to touch his soul. I wanted him to feel how much love I had for him ... how much I would always love him. I felt I reached him, deep in his soul, where he needed to feel love.

I was unsure what was going to happen after that evening, but I felt in my heart that we would be okay. I didn't expect any type of blessing from him about Iliana, but

at least I could move forward knowing he and I still felt love for each other. I finally knew why I had loved this man as much as I did. No other human being could have loved as unconditionally as he loved me. It was true love.

Before boarding the plane back to New York, I called Iliana and told her I was looking forward to coming home. She asked me how things went with Gabriél and if he was ok. I didn't want to lie, but I also didn't want to explain things over the phone. I told her I would tell her everything when I got back to New York. I was uncertain whether she sensed anything about what had happened between Gabriél and me, but the whole experience solidified my feelings for her. I truly was in love and wanted to be with Iliana. My love for Gabriél was just plain different. I didn't know if Iliana would understand, but this is how I felt.

When the plane arrived in New York, a limo was waiting to pick me up. As I stepped into the car, there were rose petals everywhere. I was anxious. I really just wanted to tell Iliana what had happened and move forward. I prayed she would see that my feelings for her were stronger than when I had left. I didn't know how she would react, but I was eager to tell her the truth.

Iliana:

There is something about being with a woman.

It is a connection I can't begin to explain.

My insides were telling me something, but I couldn't put it together. Luna and I had never had jealousy in our relationship. In fact, I had never been in a relationship that lacked basic trust. I wanted Luna to feel secure about telling me anything, but I felt anxious to hear what had happened in Spain.

I had a performance the night of Luna's arrival, so I had a limousine pick her up. She surprised me in return by showing up at my performance. After the show, she embraced me, kissed me, and handed me a beautiful long-stemmed red rose. She immediately said she wanted to find a quiet place to enjoy a drink and talk. We chose a place where the lights were dim and the atmosphere intimate. I was still filled with the energy of my performance and seeing Luna; as stunning as always. I just wanted to consume all that I had missed while she was away. I could tell she had much on her mind. She seemed nervous and quickly ordered a double shot of Crown. I ordered a glass of wine to help me unwind. She swallowed her drink swiftly and began her story. She told me that in the deepest part of her soul, she wanted to spend her life with me. She continued by saying she had longed to build a life such as ours, to love me unconditionally, to support me and to be forever faithful. She started crying softly, which confused me as I was unsure where her words were leading. She said she didn't want to hurt me and wanted a pure and solid relationship with only me. In her next breath, the words she spoke confirmed the fears I had been feeling while she was gone. She said she had been intimate with Gabriél.

What?

At that point, I stopped hearing the words. Her mouth was moving but everything came out garbled.

Then I pictured It. The two of them.

I definitely wasn't expecting to hear those words after all the love she had just professed. She didn't look up as she continued. She explained that it wasn't an act of lust, but one of closure. A goodbye, so to speak. She said it wasn't planned, and that it was not her intention to continue anything with Gabriél. She said desperately, as she grabbed for my arms, "I love you so much and I know this is what I want..." She tried to explain further, but I couldn't listen any longer. I didn't understand; I was frozen in the moment. I looked around me and suddenly felt a rush of emotion run through me. I had to leave. I abruptly stood up and told her I had to go. She got up to leave as well, but I told her I needed to process what she had just told me. I could see desperation all over her face, but it didn't matter. I left the restaurant immediately and hailed a cab. As the cab drove away, I turned back and could see her rushing out of the restaurant.

Luna:

I was heartbroken. It wasn't that I didn't understand her being upset, I just wanted her to see where my heart was now, and that Gabriél and I were over. I guess no words would have provided her comfort at that point. I went home alone. I unpacked. I cried and tried to sleep, but couldn't; all I could do was pace. Before long, the sun was coming up. Iliana had not come home. Where could she have gone? When would she be back? Would she still want me? Did I make the biggest mistake of my life? Was I losing her?

By the third day, I was starting to lose hope. I hadn't heard from her and neither had her agent, who had been looking for her as well. I couldn't eat and I couldn't sleep. I had no energy. I was devastated. I had my phone next to me every moment, should she call. The waiting had me feeling worried, empty, and overwhelmed with sadness. I was beginning to feel unwelcomed in the apartment we had made our home. With no word from her, I wondered if I should leave. I started to feel like she had made her decision to not be in my life. I began packing a few things together; maybe she was waiting for me to leave. I cried as I packed; I knew I couldn't continue to stay in the apartment and live this way, not knowing. I hadn't stopped crying for three days and I was a mess. Before walking toward the door to leave, and as I turned back to see what I was losing, she walked in.

Iliana:

When I walked into the apartment and saw Luna standing near the door, she looked dazed and distraught. I could tell she was not doing well. I did not say a word; I walked over to her and embraced her with all I had. She broke down in my arms. I could see her carrying a bag and asked her where she was going. Still hugging me, she told me she thought she should leave. I told her she wasn't going anywhere. I kissed her on her forehead and told her, "I don't want you to go; I want you here with me."

I had gone through the long process of breaking down every detail of what had occurred in Spain. I tried to step back and imagine myself in her position. I also imagined Gabriél's position and what he had been going through. When I did this, I could not be angry with Luna. Gabriél had been in Luna's life since childhood. I was sure saying goodbye was most difficult for both of them. They shared a love that was unconditional. I could always feel how loving they were with one another and I didn't believe Luna would intentionally hurt me. I believed in her; I trusted what she was telling me was the truth. I thought of what people might say; they'd think I was crazy. But that didn't matter. I felt clarity and I did feel at peace after working it through. I also remembered that I had fallen for Luna while she was with Gabriél. Of course I didn't intentionally try to break up their relationship; I simply followed my heart. Love happens without notice or arrangement of the perfect scenario. I realized I could spend my energy on being upset and lose Luna; or I could be grateful for having her in my life to love. In order to move forward, I vowed to myself that I would support her and love her; I would hold no resentment or speak of this again.

Luna:

Sometimes the person you love the most is the one you hurt the most. I didn't have such intentions going to Spain, but I did hurt Iliana. She forgave me. She believed in me. She understood my behavior had come from a place of love. She understood my connection with Gabriél and embraced our love for one another. We talked openly with our hearts and I was relieved she still wanted me in her life; I never felt more love for her than at that moment. As the day drew to a close, we held each other and made emotional and passionate love. I wanted to express to Iliana that all my love was for her and her only. We held each other close afterward and drifted off to sleep.

I was feeling renewed the next morning. I was looking forward to moving on with our future together. Since New Mexico, I hadn't taken good care of myself; there hardly seemed enough time with my new life with Iliana. My eating habits had changed; I had lost some weight and hadn't done as much dancing to keep in good shape. I felt new beginnings for the two of us.

Iliana:

And so it was written, that short chapter of our lives. We picked up where we had left off before Luna went to Spain, but with a new outlook. I continued to book both of us for performances and Luna began working to make her dream of opening her school a reality. She met with designers, builders, and financiers. I also helped where I could in introducing her to all who would help. I was thrilled to watch her motivation to make her dream come true. She had such passion with her vision that we became selective in choosing what performances we'd dance in. We decided on only doing local shows and performances close to home in order to move more quickly in getting the dance school open. Eventually, our dancing shoes were replaced with working boots and our castanets with gloves. We found a wonderful location for the school with the help of a realtor friend. Apparently a wealthy couple were divorcing and wanted to end things quickly. The property was large, for New York standards. It was a 3200 square foot space with high vaulted ceilings and real hardwood floors. It had a remodeled kitchen and 2 baths. We arranged to see the property and fell in love with it the moment we saw it. It was a stand-alone building about 5 stories high. It had large windows that overlooked the city. Luna and I were looking around when the owners happened to show up. We introduced ourselves and immediately Luna began to explain what our intentions were with the building. I took a step back and just gazed at Luna; I was mesmerized with her all over again. Luna took the couple through each room communicating what purpose each would have. One room would be for costume creation and design; another would be the music room. By the time we saw the entire property, the couple loved the idea that their beautiful home could be used for such a worthy cause. What happened next stunned both of us. They offered to reduce the price by \$20,000 as a contribution to

our project. They also said they would take care of all closing costs so things would not be delayed. They asked if they could be part of the ribbon cutting ceremony, and, of course, we agreed. So now we had a building! Everything was falling into place perfectly, but there was still much to be done. We had a contractor and designer working with Luna's ideas. I found myself very interested in watching the progress and how engrossed Luna was in accomplishing every detail. At this rate, I thought, we would soon be able to open our doors.

The next few months continued at the same pace. Luna's heart was dedicated to her institute, while I practiced for upcoming performances. At times, she'd get up at five in the morning and would not sleep until two or three that next morning. She said she couldn't sleep, so she preferred to keep busy with the project. At first, I was worried that she was working too hard, but I didn't say anything; I didn't want to discourage her dedication to reach her dream, so I did my best to support.

Luna:

During the project, I felt like I was walking on air. My relationship with Iliana felt perfect. We had moved on from past issues stronger than ever and we continued to build on our love for each other. My project too, was moving along. I was so busy, I felt like I couldn't get enough done in the day. I knew I was pressing myself physically too. I wasn't eating as well either; there just wasn't enough time. Iliana would make food for me, but there it sat three hours later. She'd get on me about taking care of myself and at the same time supported my ideas and vision. After her long days, she'd change her clothes and pick up a hammer or help with the painting... whatever she could do to help. She was quite handy. As busy as we were though, we always found time for "personal" interruption. Iliana was incredibly romantic, as was I. I would hide secret surprises for her to find. She'd surprise me with my favorite candy or food she'd have delivered from Spain, just so she could prepare a romantic dinner or surprise dessert for me. She'd occasionally slip me a note with something written that would make me blush. I too would find myself stopping for a moment, just to look at her, but she always caught me. I saw how sexy she'd look even in her dirty work clothes. Even after an exhausting day, we'd always be filled with the desire to be intimate. I always found the energy to make love with her. At times early in our morning, we'd talk for hours after the sun would come up. I never tired of her and even though the project had me completely drained, I always looked forward to our time together.

I told Iliana I wanted to slow down on my performance schedule a bit. I wanted the opportunity to focus on the opening of the institute. She agreed, but continued her rigorous schedule, all while continuing to help me with my project. She was becoming increasingly worried about my weight loss, but I had no appetite. She insisted I either slow down or go to a doctor for a check up. To ease her worry, I made an appointment with her physician, Dr. Garcia. Blood tests were run and I explained my lack of energy. I described to the doctor that I was more tired than usual, but I was working extremely hard on the project. I communicated that after performances recently, I was finding it was harder to recover; it was taking longer.

Dr. Garcia said she'd have results for me as soon as possible. I was surprised to get a call the very next day from the doctor's office. They asked if I could come in. I didn't think anything of it until I told Iliana. She had a look of concern on her face, and that scared me. I asked her if it was typical for a doctor to call and ask to see a patient in person to review the results. By the look on her face, I could tell something might be wrong. I immediately called the doctor's office back and asked if I could go within the hour; the doctor agreed that would be a good idea. Iliana wanted to go with me. We didn't say many words on our way there. I kept telling myself not to worry. I really didn't know what was happening; it was Iliana's expression that was frightening me. As powerful a woman as I knew her to be, I knew I was looking at her vulnerable side this day. She held my hand the entire way to the doctor; I could feel her fear. When we arrived, we went in to see the doctor together. The moment Dr. Garcia saw us, she gave Iliana a hug and began to make small talk. There was a moment of awkward silence afterward. I wanted to know the reason why we were there. We sat down across from her desk holding hands and I'll never forget that moment or how she said it. "I have some great news for you and I have some news that is not so great. The great news, Luna...is...you are pregnant. Congratulations. The not so great news is that your blood results also reveal you have cancer."

Iliana:

I can't remember what part of the news surprised me more, her pregnancy or the word cancer. I looked at Luna and saw only shock. I didn't know how to approach either issue with words at that moment. After a few moments of silence, I looked at Luna and said, "We are going to have a baby!" We embraced. We cried. I remembered that Luna and I had a conversation over a year prior when she stopped taking her birth control. She joked about it saying she wouldn't be needing "that" anymore. We often talked and imagined about how great it would have been if I could have gotten her pregnant. We'd fantasize about which features we would want our child to have. I knew that Luna wanted children and I often wondered when we would start exploring those options. I knew that given our schedules, at that point we were too busy to consider the possibilities. It didn't take too long to realize that she had returned from seeing Gabriél about three months earlier.

There were so many questions racing through my mind. Her lack of appetite and her weight loss were what scared me. I couldn't believe I didn't recognize the signs. But what signs? Luna didn't seem like she was experiencing any pain. After a few moments of elation and thoughts of a baby, Dr. Garcia interrupted with a more serious look this time. She said that in Luna's blood results, one thing stood out. It was anemia. That is what triggered her to look deeper. Her fatigue had been justified by her working so much, I thought. But when we both thought about it, it seemed to fit. I'd often ask her if anything was wrong, but she'd always respond by saying that being with me made everything right. She said she was so happy and busy she didn't even fathom the thought of being ill.

Dr. Garcia began to explain that lymphoma and pregnancy together were rare. She continued with statistics, percentages, medical terminology and scenarios that

made Luna and I go from positive and ecstatic to downright terrified. "Pregnancy creates a great amount of estrogen in the body, which could encourage existing abnormal growths to develop more aggressively. Changes in the immune system during pregnancy can also create an atmosphere in which cancer cells thrive," Dr. Garcia said. More tests would be required, many tests, to know exactly what our options were, including the baby. After all that talk, there was silence. There was so much to process. The only thing Luna said was, "No matter what happens, I want this child to live."

Luna:

A baby? I couldn't go as far as saying, "How did this happen?" because I knew. I should have known it would only take one time with me. How would Gabriél feel knowing I was carrying his child? At that thought, the responsibility of bringing my child into this world was my new focus. I knew I had a long road ahead of me and decisions and options to consider, but none was more important than to do everything I could to deliver a healthy baby.

I admit up to that point, I had never thought of death. I was too young to think of such things. I was invincible. I had so much to do; I didn't stop to think there might be another plan for me. My spirituality reminded me that it wasn't my will, but HIS will that determined all things. Iliana and I went home and held each other. That's all I wanted was for her to hold me. I didn't want to talk. Later that evening, I told Iliana that I didn't want to tell anyone anything just yet. I wanted the two of us to take our time with one another and to make certain our decisions were ours. A baby? I told Iliana I wanted to eat better even though I didn't have an appetite. Dr. Garcia had said it would take a "delicate balance" of work and rest in order to go through the process of being pregnant with cancer. I knew Iliana was still in shock. I wanted the two of us to take time and to process it all together. That night, she stayed so close to me. She rubbed my back gently and played with my hair. She comforted me with kisses on the back of my neck as she held me from behind. I could tell she didn't want to let me go. I didn't want her to let me go. I felt the security of her arms around me and my worries, for the moment, were gone.

I had an appointment the following day to run more tests and to determine how I would approach my treatments and care for myself during my pregnancy. The child inside of me was already facing its first challenge; I had to fight for my child too. Iliana said that no matter what I chose to do, she was going to support me. And so it was. Within a matter of one week, the results were in. I had all the information I needed to know. Stage three cancer...

I said immediately that chemotherapy was not an option. I had planned on carrying my baby until it was healthy enough to be delivered. Dr. Garcia said 32 or 33 weeks was a good goal to set. I had to deliver a healthy child, no matter what circumstances I was facing. There were many options, in terms of medications and such. I insisted on the purest form of medications; I didn't want to harm my child. My prayers were that God would give me the strength and the life to bring my child into this world, as healthy as possible. I asked Iliana not to mention my cancer to

anyone. She agreed and respected my wishes. Perhaps it was a little selfish, but I only wanted good news and communication surrounding me, not pity or sadness. We made a vow to each other that night, to live and love one another to the fullest capabilities our hearts would take us. I knew I was asking much from her as I knew she was filled with fear for my health. She put on her brave face and was my anchor. She never let me know her fears; she didn't show any sadness, but I can only imagine what she was feeling. All she continually said was she would always be by my side. "Whatever you want, whatever you need, I will be here."

I was very determined about what needed to be done and how I wanted things to be. My body, however, had other intentions. I started fighting constant pains, wondering whether they were pains from the cancer or part of my pregnancy. I figured it didn't matter, as long as the environment I was providing was a healthy one. Iliana researched what to eat during pregnancy and what to avoid when battling cancer. She'd spend time on the phone with doctors and herbalists to see what approach would be best for me. I loved her and how she took care of me. I knew she was trying desperately to do whatever it was she could do to keep me healthy. We didn't talk about death, but she often said, "I need you here with me."

Iliana:

Finding the person I wanted to spend the rest of my life with was not easy. When I found Luna, I never thought about our life together being cut short because of illness or cancer; I imagined us growing old together. My thinking was different now. My sole purpose at that point was to keep Luna healthy, comfortable, and loved ... nothing more. This was our biggest challenge and we would face it together. We weren't in denial by any means, but we both chose to focus only on the positive. There were days she'd be in pain and her body weak. Her breathing was easily labored with the simplest tasks, yet she still tried to do so much. We scaled her performances to very few. From that moment forward though, I recorded on film every show she did. I took pictures, many pictures. Even with all our fears, it was a beautiful time in our lives and I wanted to capture all of it. I'd often steal a precious moment and snap a photo of her while she wasn't looking. She was smiling in every one too. In the mornings, we'd begin our day by thanking God for another day of life and for the baby's health. We had always considered ourselves spiritual, but her cancer confirmed and renewed our belief in God and His will in our lives. We asked for the ability to accept and live the best way we could under the circumstances. We made every moment count together, filling them with plenty of laughter. I hadn't lived my life this way until I heard that word, cancer. Yes, I'd traveled and performed all over the world, I'd loved and I'd lived, but not like I had with Luna. We took the little things in stride, so to speak. There was never an issue that couldn't be dealt with. Even the delays with the institute were part of our way of learning patience and true appreciation for all things. Luna's grace and acceptance made me love her that much more.

Luna:

As we continued to live, literally day to day, we didn't know what to expect about my health and the baby. Enough time had passed and Dr. Garcia had advised us that the baby seemed to be growing normally and that, if we wanted, it would be ok to share the news. She did know that I was not ready to share any news concerning my cancer. I was adamant about keeping this private, between Iliana and me. It was four months into my pregnancy that we shared our news of the baby with our families. I told my mother over the phone. She had always wanted a grandchild. Then came the questions, "Is it Gabriél's baby?" "Does Iliana know?" "Whose baby is it?" I told my mother that the child was Gabriel's, but I wanted to tell him myself. I told her Iliana was thrilled to be having a baby with me and that she would be sharing the good news with her family as well. My mother said that nobody had heard from Gabriél in weeks and even his parents were worried. The last they had heard was that he left his dance tour. I knew that Gabriél had the right to know about the baby, but I was unsure how he would react to the news. I knew he would be a good father; he had always wanted children. I guessed that once he knew, he'd want to be a part of the baby's life. I grew concerned as time passed as I was still unable to find him. I had to move forward.

I continued my project with the institute and taking care of myself and the baby. My life with Iliana was very loving and growing stronger with each passing day. My parents flew to New York to help out. My father was excited to see the institute and wanted to assist in any way he could. My mother dove in too; she took me shopping for baby clothes and helped turn one of the rooms in the apartment into a nursery. We shared the news with Iliana's family and said we'd be visiting them in New Mexico soon. There were times during my pregnancy that I felt completely normal, but it was getting more difficult for me as time passed. I was tired all the time and my mother commented on my weight, saying it looked like I was losing weight rather than gaining the weight she thought I should. Iliana did her best to ease my mother's worries by giving her excuses as to why I was always tired. I knew it was unbelievably stressful for Iliana to keep quiet about the truth. I felt for her and how she was enduring all the sudden changes in our lives.

Having both my parents near me during this time was wonderful. Iliana took many photos of us together. My parents were able to see me perform as well. At one of my performances, I invited my father on stage with me, which brought the audience to their feet. Most of the audience recognized my father and appreciated the gift of seeing him. I had always been close to my parents, but now that I was pregnant, I felt closer—especially to my mother. The desire of wanting only the best for your child can be overwhelming. All I wanted was a baby born healthy and in a loving environment. I couldn't share my cancer with my parents, not yet. I wanted them to experience my pregnancy with pure joy. My parents lived a very tranquil and peaceful life; it was a blessing to enjoy their support and love while they visited us. The few weeks my parents spent in New York gave them the opportunity to volunteer in helping with so much more. Every single day, my father would work at the institute, while my mother and I would spend quality time and see the city.

Three weeks passed and it was time for my parents to go back home to Spain. It was so difficult to see them go, I didn't want to say goodbye. I became attached while they were with me. I was very emotional about their departure, but my mother kept assuring me I would be fine. She assumed it was nerves or my hormones. I just looked at her when she said all would be okay. I said, "Tienes razón," meaning "You're right."

Chapter qu

Iliana:

I was still distracted by the fact that Gabriél didn't know about the baby. I felt he had a right to know he was going to be a father. I knew it would be a matter of time before he would learn of her cancer as well. I'd asked around the community if anyone had heard where he might be. I didn't tell Luna I was inquiring about him, but I had to try.

Spring turned into summer and it was becoming more difficult for Luna to breathe because of the humidity. It was about this time that my parents were insisting we come out to New Mexico. We made the decision to see if the dry desert heat could bring relief to her. I was nervous, because even though the baby seemed to be developing well, I could see Luna becoming weaker. We didn't talk about it, but I could see her energy level diminishing since her diagnosis in March. There were times I'd tell Luna that I had errands to run, but really I'd go off to be alone, to cry. I never wanted her to see my weakness and fear. I was so frightened by her cancer and worried about her health and the baby. I didn't want to lose her. I was worried about being in New Mexico and seeing my mother. I kept thinking she'd see my pain; she knows me too well. I knew the trip to New Mexico would prove to be a relaxing time for us. We were able to find a week in between performances and the institute could wait. Luna was a little torn about leaving her project, but I told her a change of pace would do her well. Her birthday was coming up and she said there was something she wanted me to give her. I told her I'd give her anything; all she had to do was ask. She said she'd tell me in New Mexico.

When we arrived, it was just as I thought it would be. The tranquility was just what we both needed. My parents were happy to see us, and my mother was very kind to Luna and catered to her needs graciously. We spent quite a bit of time driving

and enjoying the beautiful scenic landscapes Luna had wanted to revisit. Most of the time, it was just the two of us; we enjoyed many quiet and pleasant moments. I continued documenting as many memories as I could through photos. I couldn't get enough of them; thankfully, she was patient with me and my camera. Unfortunately, New Mexico didn't change Luna's condition like I hoped it would. We slowed down our pace. At times, we'd just decide to stay and listen to music in my parents' backyard as I read and Luna would sleep.

One evening, when Luna had already retired for the night, I went outside for my quiet moment of tears that lived inside of me constantly. I didn't realize my mother had stepped out to the patio as well. She walked over to me and commented on how warm the air felt and how the horses loved that time of the evening. She didn't know I was crying; I tried desperately to hide my tears, but the moment she turned to look at me, I couldn't hide it or hold it in any longer. I asked her if she wanted to take a walk, fearing Luna might wake up and hear me talking to my mother. I didn't want to disrespect Luna's wishes, but not being able to communicate my fears and pain was much more than I could handle. My mother and I walked along the dirt road just down the driveway. It was dusk, but dark enough to keep my tears somewhat hidden. We walked for a short while without speaking. I could tell she was anxious to hear what was troubling me. I broke down and told her about Luna's cancer. I talked and talked and she listened intently. She comforted me with words only a mother could speak. She began to cry with me, worried about the battle Luna was facing. She couldn't believe we had decided to keep the news of the cancer quiet; she thought it was much too big of a burden for the two of us to bear. I asked her to say nothing to my father; I didn't want Luna to feel as though I betrayed her. I felt though, that I needed to release some of my emotions so that I could be stronger for her. My mother said she'd pray and that prayers were what was needed to be accepting of what may come. We walked back home and didn't speak. We held each other's hands tightly all the way back.

Luna:

I enjoyed our stay in New Mexico and felt so very welcomed by Iliana's parents. They were wonderful. And with my birthday coming, I told Iliana about my surprise. With three days left on our vacation, I told her I wanted to celebrate my birthday in Las Vegas. She looked surprised at my request. I told her I couldn't help my curiosities about the images I had seen on TV. I wanted to experience it. Iliana didn't question me; she just said she'd take care of everything, just as she always did.

She arranged our flights that very day and mentioned we'd fly in at night to appreciate the intensity of the city lights of Las Vegas. She was right; it was amazingly intense to see the city lights! We were in Las Vegas! She surprised me with tickets to "O" at the Bellagio, "The Color Purple," "The Lion King," and Bette Midler at Caesar's Palace. Every show was magical or majestic in some way. The productions made my heart swell. We strolled into the Paris hotel and enjoyed delicious crepes. I learned how to play Roulette and Black Jack for the first time. We walked into the New York New York where I heard screams coming from the top of the

hotel. I wanted to see what the excitement was all about. We reached the top and saw a roller coaster ride, in which I insisted Iliana ride. She looked concerned, but I was so excited about it and wanted to see her ride it. She finally agreed. We bought her ticket and while we waited in line, I got the video recorder ready. I gave her a kiss and she got into the small car and took off. I enjoyed seeing her smile. I wanted her worry to go away, if just for that moment. Later the same day, we took a romantic ride on a gondola on the waters of the Venetian. I bought silly souvenirs too. I sipped on a virgin daiquiri at the Mirage and later she enjoyed a piña colada at the Palms. On our last evening in Las Vegas, we were walking back to our hotel just a few blocks away when the water symphony show guided our way. We stopped and settled onto a cement wall to videotape the show. It was breathtaking and made for a most memorable 29th birthday.

Iliana:

We when we got back to New York, Luna's health worsened. She continually sounded labored in her breathing. Luna was in stage three to stage four; at this point her prognosis was poor. She was given about eight months to live. Her symptoms seemed to have intensified very quickly. It was explained to us that stage four cancer was inoperable, but treatable with chemotherapy. Dr. Garcia knew that Luna did not want chemotherapy, but when her symptoms worsened so rapidly, she felt the need to remind her that there were other options. Luna wouldn't hear of it.

Fall arrived. It was becoming more and more difficult to spend time working on the institute. Luna made me promise that I would follow through with opening the school with or without her. I kept assuring her she was going to see it open herself, but inside I didn't know if this would be. She was most comfortable at night when we were in bed together, so we spent as much time as we could there. I don't know how we managed, but we did continue to make romance, joy, and peace part of our everyday lives. We'd shop our favorite market and plan our meals, though Luna was having difficulty with her appetite. We'd rent movies and make popcorn and snuggle on the couch and just hold each other. She loved it when I played with her hair; she always said it was soothing for her. We'd spend time in a warm tub while I massaged her aches and pains. I used lavender on her which helped her to sleep. And during those times, I would lie awake for hours, holding her and listening to her breathe.

Iliana:

We reached thirty-six weeks of pregnancy. We were relieved to reach this point knowing if the baby were to be born, there would be a good chance of normal development. We obviously wanted the baby to stay in the womb as long as possible, but only if it was not harming Luna. It became more difficult for her to hold down food and that was a worry for the baby as well. The doctor presented various scenarios of the baby's health, Luna's condition and the size of tumors present. Without treatment of the tumors, Luna would be ordered to bedrest from here on out. As we drove home, Luna said, "I think it's time we shared our other news."

Luna:

I knew my health was deteriorating fast; I didn't need a doctor to tell me this. I was experiencing constant pain and I knew it was not the baby. I had reached my thirty-sixth-week-goal with my pregnancy and now had to wait to see if my health could handle the baby a little bit longer. My motivation had changed over the last month; I was trying to stay positive, but couldn't help but to be sad. There was so much to live for; I didn't want to die. I wanted more time with Iliana, my baby, my family. I hurt so much inside knowing the sadness they would feel in my absence. I felt for my family and how my parents would deal with burying their daughter. I loved my family so much, I didn't want to go. I wanted to keep living, and I wanted to see the baby inside of me grow. My fears were leaving me inconsolable with what might come. I had to tell my family, Iliana's family, and of course I wanted to find Gabriél. My heart felt heavy knowing he didn't know he was going to be a father and worse than that, how he'd take the news of my disease.

I was restricted to bedrest. Iliana tended to all my needs. I couldn't imagine going through this experience without her; she was my world. We continued to be playful and loving in ways that made difficult moments fade, if just for awhile.

I woke up rather suddenly late one evening and looked at Iliana, who was still awake. A feeling of anxiousness ran through me. I cried softly and told her, "I need to have this baby." "You will," she told me, "You will."

Iliana:

Once we shared the news of her cancer with our families, everything was chaos. Both our families flew in; there was constant movement in our home. As much as I enjoyed my time with Luna alone, one on one, I felt relief, not having to hide her illness any longer. We kept the news to strictly family; we didn't want the press to be involved. I did a performance here and there to try to keep up an appearance; we knew eventually Luna's health would be news. Our privacy was invaluable at this point. Our home became our sanctuary. We stayed home in order to keep peace and tranquility in our lives. My heart winced at the sight of Luna's father, who could not filter his anguish. He said he needed to do more than just "sit around." He said he would work on the institute project to completion since we had both let go of working on it awhile back. Luna, who had repeatedly told me she didn't want all of our hard work to go to waste, was especially pleased with her father's motivation to help. I had promised her I would see to it that her institute would find completion. All the men in our family took charge while the women found it more comforting to tend to Luna at the apartment. It was bittersweet. Luna looked adorable pregnant. There were moments I'd forget she was ill, but then she'd have a violent physical episode to remind me of the truth. Our entire family continued to try and find joy in every moment.

The only missing link at that point was Gabriél. I knew that he would be unable to live with himself knowing Luna was so ill. I knew how much he loved her. I had to find him. I thought about some connections I had to possibly help find him. I had to do something.

It seemed nearly impossible to find Gabriél. It was as though he just disappeared into nowhere. I spoke to his parents who still had no idea where he might

be. They asked that if we did find him, to please contact them and let them know he was safe. Luna's parents shared the news of Luna's cancer with Gabriél's parents. They were like family; they were devastated. They had never judged Luna about her decision to leave Gabriél. In fact, they still loved and considered her a daughter. They offered to travel to New York, but Luna's parents said there was plenty of help, that prayers were what was most needed. Those prayers were desperately needed as Luna suddenly took a turn for the worse.

Luna:

I didn't remember what led up to my being in the hospital. I remembered waking up and there were only faces with smiles around me. My daughter was born. Dr. Garcia had consulted with Iliana and she was born by emergency C-section. She was small, but she was healthy and ever so beautiful. This was all that mattered; she was healthy. The pain I felt was dulled by the many stories of family already planning her future; she would be a dancer like me. "She already has rhythm," my brother told me. Iliana looked like she had not slept, but she was still beautiful and smiled at me in awe. I couldn't wait to see my baby. I was relieved beyond my wildest imagination that my child was given the chance to live.

I would soon find out there had been a build up of fluid surrounding my lungs, which had been drained thus making it easier for me to breathe. I was told a tumor near my airway was causing obstruction and was bleeding. It was recommended I have radiation treatment immediately to possibly decrease the obstruction and to control the bleeding. I refused. I wanted to go home as soon as possible to be with my baby and family. I carried her almost full term; she was just four weeks early. I was able to see her shortly after her birth. I finally felt peace knowing I had been able to bring her into this world. She was going to be loved by many. Iliana was beside herself with happiness. We had a moment alone, just the two of us and the baby. As we held her, she asked me what we were going to name our baby. I asked her if she had any suggestions. She thought for a moment and said, "I think the most appropriate name for a miracle that came from heaven is Cielo." Perfect.

Iliana:

Through my connections, I was able to find out where Gabriél was. He was in Chile with some friends. He had not been performing or working. He had been staying there since March, about the same time we began looking for him. I debated about calling him or taking a trip to see him in person. Luna's health was extremely unpredictable and I did not want to be far away from her. Her body was deteriorating rather quickly now. I decided to go home while everyone else was at the hospital tending to the baby and Luna. I had gotten a phone number and an address for Gabriél. I feared calling, but I had to. When I called, I asked for Gabriél and the person on the other end of the line hesitated and asked who I was. I told him my name and that this was concerning Luna. I was told to hold on and then Gabriél got on the line. In one flash, I knew that the news I was about to share with him would change his entire life. "Gabriél, you are a father, but Luna is very ill."

Gabriél:

I hadn't talked to Luna since the last time we took that walk in the park in Spain and we had solidified the end of our relationship. I knew there was nothing more I could do or say, but to let her go. I had lost my desire to dance. I knew there would be a day I would return, but not now. I had two friends who were brothers that I had known since grade school. They were originally from Chile, but had moved to Spain to start their own business. Through the years, I would take time to travel with them when I could. When it seemed I was at my lowest point, they offered their place to me and asked me to travel with them backpacking. I hadn't been back more than just a few weeks when Iliana called. I didn't have time to process why she would possibly be calling me, but I knew it had to do with Luna.

I was still in shock to know that Luna found out she was pregnant, was sick, and gave birth all while I had been away. Iliana was kind enough to congratulate me and tell me she and Luna had been looking for me for months. She filled me in on all the details of Luna's health. I was devastated and felt guilty for not being available to her in her time of need. I asked Iliana if it would be ok to see Luna. She said, "She needs you, Gabriél."

Luna:

I remembered opening my eyes and looking up at the ceiling. "I'm still alive," I thought. I looked over at Iliana's piercing green eyes. She was smiling at me. I didn't say any words, I just reached up for her hand and fell back to sleep.

Gabriél:

My thoughts were everywhere; I couldn't get to New York to see Luna fast enough. I thought I was going to explode with all the emotion absorbed inside my heart. I had so much regret about not keeping in touch with Luna, but at the same time, I just couldn't. However, when you know someone you love is dying, nothing else matters. I wanted nothing more than to see her and to offer all that I could.

I didn't know what to expect when I walked in to her hospital room; I was scared and very anxious. When I walked in, she was sleeping. There were a few family members visiting. I could feel sorrow and sadness across the room. Some of them quietly had tears streaming down on their faces. One of Luna's aunts was quietly praying the rosary as she sat in the back of the room. I looked over at Luna and noticed she was very thin; the bed looked so large holding her small frame. Her hair was still long, as I remembered it. There were tubes everywhere, medication and nutrition I supposed. She was hooked up to monitors too. I didn't know whether to touch her and wake her; I just wanted her to know that I was there. My heart was racing so fast. Regardless of knowing what stage she was suffering, she still managed to take my breath away. She was beautiful. No makeup, so very thin, she was still beautiful to me.

Luna:

I didn't know how long I was asleep; all I knew was that when I woke and looked at the clock, it was 2:43 in the morning. I tried to focus and looked around my room. When my eyes were cleared I saw Gabriél in a chair crying. He looked up and took my hand, "Aquí estoy, Luna," he said. "I'm here."

Iliana:

I can't explain it, but finding Gabriél and seeing him brought much peace to my heart. I felt like a weight was lifted from me. I wanted him there. He did not make me feel uncomfortable in the least and I hoped he was comfortable with me as well. Luna brought us together. I believe this was a testament to her character.

As the weeks went by, Cielo was growing stronger, and Luna became weaker. We were able to take Luna and Cielo home within two weeks of her birth. As we left the hospital, droves of our family followed. The press heard the news about the baby soon after we arrived home and respectfully asked for pictures, which we gave. Our close friends said she was already being embraced by the public.

Luna was a natural at being a mother. She soothed Cielo with just her voice. She would sing to her and Cielo would look at her as though mesmerized. I videotaped every moment of them together from the minute Luna took her into her arms....when she bathed her, sang to her, and when she slept with her. Our family knew these moments were limited, and would be treasured by Cielo one day.

After arriving home, both our fathers said they had a surprise for us. We got up in the morning like children before Christmas and drove to the institute. I wasn't prepared to see it completed. Our friend Mari, who worked with the press, had called to our home and spoke to Luna's dad and asked him to keep her informed of

Dianne De León

what was happening with Luna. Mari surprised us by being at the institute and said she had wanted to do a write-up on it. Now that the institute was complete, Luna's second dream would come true after all.

Luna:

I held Cielo in my arms as I entered the "Instituto." I was so proud and grateful to all who had helped get to this point. I showed everyone every newly completed room. Iliana had it decorated just the way we had talked about. Gabriél was speechless. He said he had remembered my dream of wanting to open my own school and here it was a reality.

The reporter took pictures and interviewed Iliana and me as well as my parents who gleamed. I was pictured with Cielo, which made the event even more special. The mayor was invited to the official ribbon cutting. Other members of the press attended as well. I was worried my energy level was going to be low, but my spirit wanted this more than anything. I had already suffered two seizures and the thought of having another episode at the ribbon cutting scared me. I put it all in God's hands. My little girl shimmered with all the excitement around us. With her big, beautiful eyes, she looked at each room; she was already a large part of this history in the making.

Iliana:

The morning of the institute's ribbon cutting, I found Luna taking a shower with the baby. I brought my camera in and captured some amazing images of Cielo and Luna laughing. Luna's beautiful long black hair was pulled to one side. She was holding Cielo and singing in her ear. Cielo was captured, silently listening to her mother's voice. She invited me in to join them; I did not hesitate. I held both of them, both of my girls. I kissed them and washed them and thoroughly enjoyed this priceless moment with my family.

We drove Luna as close as we could get to the institute and were pleasantly surprised by the crowd that had gathered. There seemed to be about a thousand people present. We didn't know how the word got out, but we were amongst so many people, all who were congratulating the two of us and thanking us for bringing such a monument to the community. Little girls and little boys ran up to us saying they wanted to take dancing lessons; Luna smiled in delight.

When it came time to cut the ribbon, I stood back and watched Luna take the giant sized scissors, along with the mayor, and with a roar of applause, she said, "May dance and the arts live in the children of our community!" At that, in one swift move, she sliced the ribbon, allowing all to come in and enjoy the sight of the new "Instituto de la Luna." It was a good day.

Luna:

After giving birth to Cielo and the opening of the school, my body had given all there was to give. I had reached all my goals and all my dreams to this point and now my body was failing me. I could feel myself fading in energy and so I took the opportunity to say my peace with each of my closest and dearest friends and family.

My body could only handle being awake for a few hours at a time now. I was becoming so weak and so tired. I was put on heavy medication to ease my pain. I didn't want to become incoherent, so I made a vow with everyone to limit conversations, and they respected my wishes. I wanted to speak with everyone, but it was exhausting and painful to see the expressions of those close to me when they saw me in the state I was in. Some of my family flew back to Spain; they couldn't bear to see me hurting so badly. At some point, after many goodbyes, only my parents and Iliana's parents, Gabriél and Iliana remained. I was relieved.

My family was given instructions from the doctors to make me comfortable at home; I wanted to be with Cielo. I wanted to hold and carry her, but I couldn't any longer. It brought me joy to see her laugh and play with her new family. She had already developed such a personality. I knew she would be fine as I watched Gabriél with her. He held her and loved her with such gentleness. She knew he was her daddy. I could see him transforming quickly. He was more upbeat; he was looking better and he showed pride in being Cielo's father. I knew he would be there for her; this alone gave me much tranquility.

I was most worried about Iliana. I knew Gabriél would be fine now that he had Cielo, and I knew Cielo would be loved and cared for, but I worried about Iliana and what her life would be like after I was gone. I wanted her to be happy. She was a natural caregiver to Cielo; she loved her with her entire being. I don't know how,

but Iliana had always managed to make me feel beautiful, no matter how I looked or what I was going through, even now. She loved me unconditionally. I was blessed.

Gabriél:

I never imagined what it would be like to be a father, but once Cielo was born, I only wanted to protect her and to love her. Yes, we had talked about children long ago, but to feel and to see yourself in your child's eyes... there is no comparison on this earth. My love for Cielo was immense, like I never imagined love could be. I knew it would be unconditional and forever. I wanted to be a good father; I needed to be if Cielo was going to be without her mother. I would never want her to experience the pain of feeling alone or empty without Luna. I wanted my baby to feel secure and to know I would always be there and do anything for her. I wanted most of all to give Luna the peace of knowing our child would be loved and cared for all the days of her life. I promised myself and I promised Luna I would never disappear again.

Iliana and I had grown closer rather quickly and I learned to love her and respect her even more as we spent time together. I could see her love for Luna was pure; I saw the way she cared for her. Her love for Luna was beautiful. I understood that love; I had once been there.

Iliana:

With each passing day, it became so difficult for me to see Luna suffering. Since her diagnosis, all I wanted to do was spend as much time with her as possible. I couldn't bear her suffering at this point and I soon began to pray for her suffering to end. As much as I could not imagine living without her, I knew I had to let her go. I felt so much pain seeing her parents as they prepared for the inevitable. And as for Gabriél, I saw only unconditional love pour from his heart every moment he spent with Cielo and with Luna.

We all took turns staying with Luna at her bedside so she would never feel alone during her suffering. One evening, I found Gabriél crying uncontrollably by her side. He was so private with his emotions; I didn't disturb or interrupt as I knew we were all processing in our own way. I understood his love for Luna; this was our common ground...our love for Luna, and now for Cielo. He and I shared this beautiful child with the woman we both adored. Cielo would need that support and love from each of us. I realized that the situation could be very complicated, but I was grateful that Gabriél and I could put everything aside.

It was a quiet Friday evening in October, and a rare quiet moment between Luna and I. She was in so much pain at this point; she was being heavily sedated on a regular basis. She was unable to stay awake long enough to enjoy Cielo now, but she'd stay awake just long enough to stare at her beautiful daughter before falling back to sleep.

Later that evening, I took her hand and held it close to my heart. She said she was chilled so I told her I'd be right back. I found a blanket we had gotten in Spain together and put it in the dryer for a few minutes. I returned to her room and gently laid the blanket on her. She woke up when I did this and smiled at me. "My, beautiful

creature, how did I get so lucky?" "I'm the lucky one," I said. "To have met you and be blessed enough to love you and to be loved by you has been the greatest gift for me. I have so much love for Cielo and to be able to be a part of her life makes me feel like I have a new purpose for my life."

"I love you so much, Iliana. I want you to know you have touched my soul like no one else. I'm so sorry that all this has caused you so much pain, but I pray that our memories will withstand and fill any emptiness or sadness you may feel. I want you to grieve, but then I want you to find happiness again, Iliana. I want to know you will be ok. I need you to do this for me."

My body began to shake uncontrollably as tears started streaming down my face. I knew her time was drawing near. I was so overwhelmed by my sadness; I was so scared to let her go. I didn't want her to see me suffering, but even more, I didn't want her to suffer any longer. I told her, "Don't worry about me, Luna; the love that we have shared is enough to carry me for the rest of my life. I want you to know that I will love Cielo with all that I have in my heart."

Luna labored in saying, "I want Cielo to be anything and everything she wants to be, Iliana. I want you to teach her to live life fully and I want her to experience and to explore and to be open. I want her to travel and to visit and to meet people from all over. Please give her a strong foundation so she will be strong in mind and soul. I want everything for her. Will you make sure of that for me, Iliana? Will you please promise me this?" Her breathing was slowing down, and it was difficult for her to talk, but I knew what she was saying was pouring from her heart and needed to be spoken.

I kissed her hands over and over, "Please, please don't worry about Cielo; she will have all that you ask for and more. She will be loved and she will learn about her mother. Her beautiful mother who brought her into this world. She will always have an angel guiding her from heaven. I know you will always be there for us, Luna."

Luna spoke softly now, "I like that, and I will. And just as the moon shines always, I will shine for you, my love. I will shine for you...

She started to drift off. "Please tell Cielo that. Tell her that I am always with her and that I love her. I love you, remember that; please remember me this way."

I gently placed my hand between her frail, thin fingers. She gripped my hand and as her eyes were closing she said one last thing, "Please hold my hand tight, but if we let go during the night, don't worry...my grandma will take me." She was referring to her grandmother who had passed away three years prior.

"Okay Luna, I won't let go..." She drifted to sleep and I cried silently in the darkness. She squeezed my hand one last time and then became still, peaceful. She was gone.

Iliana:

When Luna's death was announced in Spain, the mourning was followed by a big celebration to honor her. The day was filled with musicians, dancers, poets, and artists. The city declared the day "Día de la Luna" in remembrance of her dedication to the arts and to all the people whose lives she touched. There was even an avenue in her hometown designated in her honor, "Avenida de la Luna." Twenty-nine white doves were released at the beginning of the ceremony symbolizing her grace and flight to the heavens. The New York Post ran a special edition including her life story, pictures, and landmarks she had reached during her brief time here. A portion of the article read, "Even though she had not lived or performed very long in New York, she has been adopted by the city and the entire art world with open arms."

I promised Luna that Cielo would know her mother so I often played home movies for her to see. Cielo enjoyed watching the movies of her mother's performances. She would clap and try to imitate her mother's dancing. It brought me so much joy to see Cielo, who looked just like her mother...her beautiful big brown eyes, those I missed so much. She'd often stand right in front of the television and put her hands on the screen when Luna's face would appear. She'd look back at me with a big smile and say, "That's my mama."

Three years later at Instituto de la Luna.

Iliana:

"And one, step two, heel, stomp, heel stomp! Very good everyone! Let's try it again, one more time before class is over. Hands on your hips, ready? And one, step two, heel, stomp, heel stomp! Excellent class! We will see you next week!"

Just then, Gabriél walked into the classroom and our prized student screamed, "Papi!!" Cielo ran up to him and he scooped her up in his arms. He looked good. Cielo had brought light back into eyes and love back into his heart. He looked more mature now, with his black hair cut short. Cielo told him she was learning how to "make noise" today in dance class. He looked at her with surprise in his eyes and said he wanted to hear that noise. At that, he let her down and she ran to the mirror. She became serious and she performed her steps for him flawlessly. Gabriél and I looked at each other; we didn't have to say anything to one another, we just smiled. We were both thinking the very same thing. She danced like Luna.

"Your students are ready for you in the next classroom; are you ready?" I asked him.

He excitedly nodded and said, "Yes. I will pick up Cielo at your house later?" "Yes, we'll be there," I told him.

Cielo ran up to kiss her papi goodbye and then jumped into my arms. He walked over and wrapped his arms around Cielo and me, squeezing her in the middle as he gave her a kiss on her forehead. He walked us out into the darkness and Cielo pointed at the moon in the night sky. She said, "Look at the moon! Mama

Dianne De León

is watching over us." With that, Gabriél and I smiled at each other. We could all feel Luna's love coming from above.

Two Worlds, One Soul

Meet Iliana and Luna: two professional Flamenco dancers who have enchanted and captured the hearts of their adoring fans. Iliana has long known of Luna, Spain's own beloved gem. Luna will come to know her American counterpart (and realize she has met her match) during the International Flamenco Festival in Albuquerque, New Mexico – but she is ill-prepared for what is about to transpire. Bewitched by the land and the music and Iliana's beauty, Luna discovers a fire in her soul that she didn't know was there. Is it competition? Or is it something else?

Join them as they each journey down the road of self-discovery, tragedy, and triumph. And feel the pulse in your own soul as they find their way through the alluring, spell-casting magic of Flamenco dance.



