

# An Ugly Man

by Marcela Fuentes

On her lunch break, she dumps Luis for Daniel Townens, the ugliest man in the county.

She and Luis meet at the downtown café Luis hates. He picks a table next to the window to keep an eye on the parking meter. There's an old beater truck in the space he wanted and he grumbles that the guy is probably not even a customer. Nothing but hipsters eat here, he says, artsy gringos and uppity high-spanics like her, who like to spend money when they can make a fucking sandwich at home. He scowls out the café window.

Daniel Townens steps out of the credit union across the street. He stands on the sidewalk waiting for the traffic to clear. Daniel is lanky and mercilessly freckled. He wears dusty green coveralls with National Park Service stitched on the pocket. He has an unfortunate arrangement of teeth. They jut from his mouth like fossilized wood chips.

Fuck that's an ugly güero, Luis says. He thinks it's funny that Daniel is sweet on her. When she frowns Luis flashes a shark grin, all razor and gleam. Fuckin ugly, he says again, and bites his roast beef sandwich.

She doesn't tell Luis not to be rude. She purses her mouth around her straw and sucks cold lemon water. She pretends she's not listening, although the couple at the next table shift to look at him. Her face stiffens with the effort of indifference, lacquers over, smooth as riverbed sand.

In the desert Daniel glides over rocky caliche and scrub brush. He leads hikers and artists and anthropologists on expeditions through the chaparral, identifying varieties of lichens and cacti, spelunking for prehistoric rock art. But he crosses the street with his face to the ground, hunching his chicken-thin shoulders, a hank of dull hair splayed on his green collar.

He stops, his back to the café window, and digs in his front pocket. The small truck, white and latticed with dried mud, appears to be his.

Luis knocks on the glass and waves. Daniel squints. He offers an uncertain closed-lipped smile.

You're funny, she says, standing up. She walks out of the café.

Luis says hey-hey-hey, the word tugged out of him in sharp little jerks.

Daniel, she says. She steps into him, so close his head blocks the hard afternoon light. He smells like bluff sage and wind. His eyes are mild as cloud shadows. She sets her mouth on the wilderness of his mouth, lets it open against the rough structures of his teeth.

