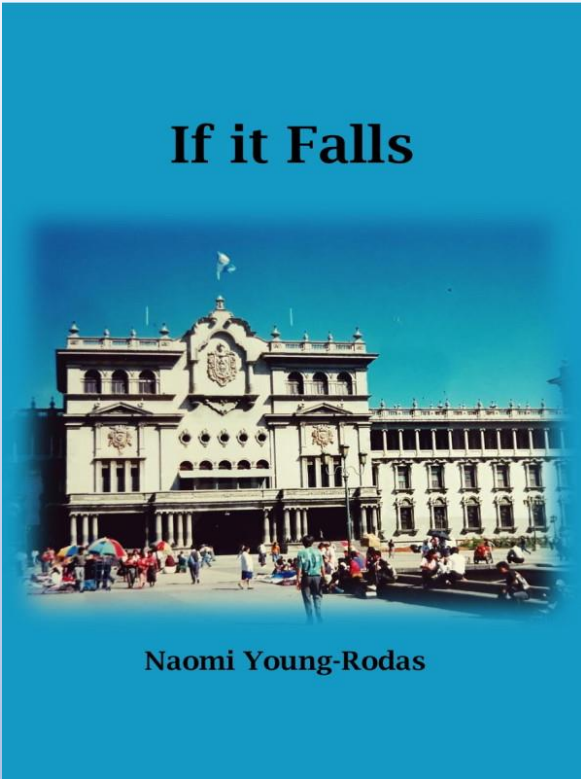


If it Falls



Naomi Young-Rodas

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Prologue

Raphael is a sensitive man. He cries at concerts, he cries at films, but especially he cries at poetry. The great writings of his continent make him weep: Ernesto Cardinal, Pablo Neruda, Eduardo Galeano, Otto Rene Castillos. He would like to be able to write like that, but he can't write any more.

Some say there is nothing that doesn't move him. Others laugh at him, *machos* don't cry. Some say he's crazy. Crazy for love and grief for his *compañera* Lidia, gone *ya hace muchos años*, many years now, who died in pain, screaming out in the darkness of a mountain camp, while he held his hand over her mouth, frightened that her screams would attract enemy fire. You can see the scars on his hands where she bit him, almost to the bone, while the tears ran silently down his cheeks. That's when the tears began, and they haven't stopped since.

Raphael is a man lost in a world of words and nightmares. The nightmares come less frequently now, but still they come – always the same, pitch black, the blackness only revolutionaries hiding in the mountains know. Helicopters whirr overhead and in the distance, gunfire. In the glow of candlelight, sweat drips into his eyes and mixes *con las lagrimas*, the salt smarts. The pain begins in his hand; so unbearable he bites his own tongue to keep from crying out. But the ceaseless screaming is not his. He wakes bathed in perspiration, his hair soaked, bedclothes clinging to him like a straitjacket; he wakes before the silence that followed the screams, before the slap and the small weak cry of a newborn. There will be no more sleep.

Rising, he goes out to his small balcony, lights a hand-rolled cigarette and inhales, taking the smoke deep into his lungs. He keeps a supply already rolled; his hands shake too much to roll them at night. Sometimes they shake too much to light one. He stands on his balcony in the quiescent city. No one ventures out