

# I Watch Sophia Dance with Raphael

ANITA KESTIN

Sophia. She was a friend of my mother's, vivacious, Spanish, a wonderful cook. She introduced me to eggplant, which I first found bitter and sponge-like, but later grew to love.

She and her husband had no children and they traveled the world, lit up rooms, danced whenever they heard music, and asked awkward questions.

I was 15 when she asked me if I had ever been in love. I had not, but I had no idea how to respond. I was taken aback as I watched her cut the eggplant into rough cubes and wondered what to say.

"Can you keep a secret?" she said. I nodded, bracing myself for what would come next.

"When you do fall in love," she said, "when you get married, you must always keep some secrets to yourself-as I have." I steeled myself for what she might say next but from the living room came the sound of Salsa music. Sophia tossed the knife on the counter and threw herself into her husband's arms. I watched, mesmerized. I had never seen my parents' friends behave like this. Sophia and Raphael dipped and swayed in sync. Her body melted into his and their eyes were locked together except when Raphael spun her around, only to reel her in again.

Raphael left Sophia a few years later for a younger woman, but his new wife in turn abandoned him when he began to lose his sight. Sophia came back and took care of him until the end of his days.

And yes, I did fall in love and I did get married.

And years later, I have never forgotten the image of Raphael and Sophia dancing, oblivious to everything but the music and the way they around each other. I often think about how through their wild tango, coming together and falling apart and back together again, Sophia kept a part of herself for herself and herself alone.