

ANTHROPOLOGY AND HUMANISM

El tunchi en la casa de Sandra

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At the lunch table, Eliana tells us about Sandra's ongoing woes with the tunchi in her house.¹ Sometimes at night, she'll hear the steps of a child. At other times, someone will be in the kitchen sharpening knives or lighting the stove. One night, she awoke and found herself floating above her bed, suspended in mid-air. She closed her eyes tight and, much to her relief, felt her back firmly against the mattress once again.

But these days the tunchi doesn't just interrupt her sleep in the middle of the night, it follows her to work. She'll be talking to someone and an object will fall over or the person's feet will begin to hurt or itch. Moving away or finding a new apartment won't help her now. The tunchi will just shadow her wherever she goes. She needs serious help, Eliana says.

"What's that stuff she can put on her feet to help keep the tunchi at bay?" No one at the lunch table seems to know or remember, not even Mamita Magali.

Sandra's house was built over an old cemetery, Eliana tells us, and there were never any children that lived in the house. She's never held any parties either. There's never loud music playing. It's always quiet. Too quiet. There's nothing to scare the tunchi away.

She's had terrible luck with men, too. All of them get spooked, one way or another. She's had psychologists visit, and they've confirmed the presence of the dead. Padre Raimundo even came over to cleanse the house, but his efforts were all in vain. She needs someone living in the house with her, preferably a large *moreno* – Eliana jokes – that can satisfy her sexual needs and inspire fear in the tunchi. Maybe then the tunchi will finally let her be.

For now, though, the tunchi remains. Eliana suggests we should spend the night at Sandra's house, just to see what happens. But what if the tunchi follows one of us home? What if our feet began to itch? Then what would we do? What would you do if a tunchi came after you?

Note

1. The tunchi is ghost-like figure of the Peruvian Amazon region. It is often believed to be a spirit of the dead that has to pay penance in this world, retracing the steps of its past life, disturbing the living by moving furniture, displacing objects, or producing eerie whistling sounds.

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