

**As Happy as Ling  
(Sample Chapter)**

**By Carlos Aleman**

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*I like you when you're silent  
Because it's as if you were absent  
Far away and hurting  
As if you had died  
One word then, one smile is enough  
And I am happy  
Happy that it's not true*

- Pablo Neruda

Ocean waves were transmitting dreams like the dust from the Sahara that sometimes reaches the Caribbean. The surf receded with a fizzing sound as the shadows of palm trees stirred the sea. A man surveyed the beach, looking for pieces of styrofoam, the kind that wash onshore from cruise ships. He thought about combining a few large chunks with some old tires, and building a wooden frame to tether a raft.

This seemed like a much better solution. Rather than swimming himself to exhaustion and drowning on such a beautiful day, he could start over. If he survived the journey as a

*balsero*, he would awaken in a new world, a new person. The plan would not mend a broken heart, but made it possible to live another day.

He found the letter one evening, while searching for an old book. He grinned when he first looked at it, thinking it had been penned for him. And then—the labor pains of his death began, brought on by words so erotic, they could never be spoken. It shocked him that his wife could love another man with such intensity. Perhaps she had intentionally left the letter for him to find, and planned his devastation—callously wishing that he would leave her.

He didn't want to betray her expectations. His disappearance would atone for all their marital discontent, but never explain why his name had been blotted out of his wife's heart. *How can it be so easy to fall out of love?* He kept asking himself.

And then there were the children. They were a constant reminder of what his own father had done to wound his soul. They were also his most effective narcotic. How strange that it would all end this way. To lose what he could not live without. His hands, empty of the love he had always wanted.

And this is why he had to build a raft. Somewhere in a new world, perhaps he would also find true love, just as his wife had. No one can prove that love actually exists, but the letter seemed to be inspired by something so vulgar and vile, he could not deny its beauty.

## About the Author

Carlos Alemán (kär'lo-s äh-le-mähn) is a Cuban American, born in New York City. Carlos is fascinated by China and is studying Mandarin. He lives with his wife, Jean, in Florida. His web site is: [carlosaleman.com](http://carlosaleman.com)