

Happy Hails

I was hanging out with my friend Fred in *El Castillo*, the only bar in the Lake Chapala area that has a good pool table. As usual, we play “look-ahead eightball,” where you have to call your next shot. Sometimes my Mexican buddies, the Hose Brothers, identical twins and the most inventive entrepreneurs I’ve ever met, come in, but I hadn’t seen them in awhile.

I slugged down a *Negra Modela* while I waited for Fred to make an impossible shot to knock in his 3-ball, needing a triple bank. I said, “Wonder where José and Josb□ are, Fred? Last time we saw them they were selling Lake Chapala water they had cleaned up. They claimed it was the purest in the world, so they sold Holy Water rights to the Church and made a fortune.”

“Yeah,” Fred chimed in just before he scratched. “And the 51 foot ladders they sold to every guy in Mexico to bridge the 50 foot wall made them a bundle too.”

And then, like clockwork as if I had made a wish, we heard it. Mariachi music about as loud as two jet engines. We ran out the door to see what it was all about. A huge brass band was marching down the street and a couple of kids banging away on drums. The Hose brothers were out in front, without instruments this time, singing at the top of their Chicano lungs, both off key and dancing back and forth, some weird Aztec boogie I figured.

The band, still blasting away, filtered into the bar in back of the brothers who ordered beer for everyone. Of course they were joined by half the village of San Juan Cosalá. The bartenders loved the Hose brothers...they brought in big business. José spotted me in the middle of a flagrantly off key High C.”

“Hola, amigo!” he shouted over the noise. “Que pasa?”

We all hugged and high fived, then finally settled down around a table at the back of the bar. I asked the brothers where they had been. “Can’t tell jou,” José said in a whisper. “Top secret stuff.”

The brothers sometimes mixed up their ‘y’s, and ‘j’s in English and mix in some Spanish. My Spanish is so eccentric, according to them, they insist on speaking my language. “Is it business stuff?” I asked. “I promise we won’t tell anybody.” Fred nodded his assent vigorously.

“Ok, amigos....we be in Waterloo.”

“France?” I asked, perplexed.

“Towa,” he corrected. “We making big deal for hails.”

I looked at Josb□. He took English lessons once so I sometimes get him to translate José’s syntax. “What the hell’s a ‘hail?’” I asked him. “Snow balls?”

“No, big time *casa por* robbers” he said, translating, his hands making like a mask over his eyes. “Jou know....jails.”

“Jes,” José said. “Jike I say...hails.” They usually pronounced “j”s like an “h” when they speak English, like in “José”.

“What’s the deal with jails?” I asked, really at sea now.

“Latino *hermanos* get put in hail now,” José said sadly. “You Dobbs go wacko!”

“You Dobbs?” I asked.

“Jes. Nut hob on TV. Foam at mouth on *hermanos* not with papers.”

“Oh. Lou Dobbs, the CNN nut job who goes volcanic about ‘illegal aliens.’”

“Jes, but no is fair,” José said, morosely. “Business hire guys for cheap pesos, *hermanos* work hard, so fair deal for both. Even right wing nuts be for free trade, *verdad?*”

“Yeah, I agree,” I chuckled sympathetically. “‘Wing Nuts’ is a good term for these guys. Conservatives are talking all the time about ‘fair market value’ and ‘supply and demand.’ I don’t get it either. By their own arguments, US businesses need cheap labor and we have a country right next door full of cheap labor. It should be a win-win deal for everybody.”

“*Si*...but new *cojones* want some kind revenge for not be legal.”

“New *cojones?*” I asked. “What do gonads have to do with it?”

“Not gonads,” explained Josb□. “José mean neocons.”

“Jes. Yike I say. New cojones,” José said with a straight face.

I laughed, but I thought they might be right. “So your guys are going to jail. I read about that. So that’s why you went to Waterloo in Iowa? There was some kind of raid and they caught a lot of undocumented Mexican guys and put them in jail instead of just sending them home, right? And they didn’t even fine the businesses that employed them.”

“Jes,” José said. “So we get in hail building business. Jou guys’ hails all full of gringo robbers. No more room. Need more hails for us guys. Big money voted by new cojones in Congress. Josb□ and me be great construction guys.”

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” I said, flabbergasted. “You are going to build jails to put in your own people? I don’t believe it! And besides, you won’t get squat. Haliburton or somebody will get the contract.”

“No, we get big squat, ok. We be construction company, hire *hermanos* to build jails,” Josb□ said evenly. “They get *dinero*, send home. We be low bidder.”

“No way, José,” I said trying to be humorous over this ridiculous proposition. “I just can’t believe you guys would build prisons to keep your own friends in.”

José motioned for me to get closer, and shouted. “We get tequila first, then tell story.” He and his brother jumped up, bumped chests, did an elbow, fist, butt wiggle secret celebration thing and danced their weird Aztec boogie over to the bar. The music picked up, the entire mariachi band blasting away as the Hose brothers bought everyone tequila shots. Finally they came back to the table.

“Prison yook like Alcatraz outside,” José said, cupping his hands over my ear so nobody else could hear. “Happy hails inside.”

“Jes,” Josb□ repeated. “Razor wire on walls, guards all over but inside state pen be spa, pools, great food, girlies, world class mariachi bands 24/7, tequila from heaven. *Hermanos* love getting caught. They send for whole family. Pretty soon, no illegal *hermanos*, all be in jails having ball. We make mucho pesos from building. Everybody happy. Even new cojones. Lou Dobbs having big grin every night.”

“But,” José said, his finger raised like Socrates for emphasis, “Business not be happy. No more cheap work. So later, Congress pass big time bill. We be guests now, get out of hail, work, make mucho pesos. Car guys yike Ford buy

empty hails for make little cars, no more gas guzzle. Calderón y new US president hug yike yovers over new deal. Me y Josb□ be heroes.”

“Yovers?” I asked, impressed with their logic.

“Si,” Josb□ explained, correcting his brother’s pronunciation. “*Pero*, no kissing. Politics lovers.”

I still couldn’t believe it, but when they got up for more music, boogying and beer, I checked with my Blackberry. Sure enough Congress had allocated billions for new jails and Lou Dobbs was frothing at the mouth on filling them up with undocumented immigrants. Maybe this problem had a solution after all.

I was full of too much *cerveza* and tequila talking to the Hose brothers. “Gotta go, jou guys,” I yelled over the noise, alcohol turning my syntax into theirs as usual. I waved, staggering down the caratera. “I bisit jou in happy hail sometime soon, have big party.”

A mariachi blast, off key as usual, followed me down the street.