

## Venganza al Estilo Mexicano

“But I assure you, Captain Garcia, that’s what happened,” Teresa yells hysterically to the police officer in flawless Spanish, though slight mid-western American accent betraying her origin.

He will not come into the house, stands rigidly, taking notes as if he cared. Behind him in the street is a new Ford 150 truck, light bar still blazing, armed with a driver and two young men in the truck bed, stern expressions, looking around as if the enemy might at any minute ambush them, dressed like civil commandos, automatic rifles held in both hands at the ready, dark blue military-looking outfits, shiny leather boots, trousers tucked in stylishly, short sleeve shirts rolled up one notch to show manly muscles. Hair carefully combed. Teresa sees them over the officer’s shoulder as he writes things down. “He tried to rape me and robbed me,” she says, still breathless, hands gesturing to pantomime her terror.

“Rest assured, we will look into the matter, Señora,” he says loudly so that his colleagues will be sure to hear him over the truck motor noise. She can see the cute boy models laughing in the truck.

“Chingase!!...Go fuck yourself” she yells through the exploded hole in the screen the man had put his fist through. “I said he broke into my house, tried to rape me and stole money, for God’s sake. I’m going to call the American Embassy.”

“Of course, Señora. Contact your embassy by all means. You say he tried to rape you?”

She knows how ridiculous this sounds. Even while she is frantically explaining to the official standing on her doorstep, she is reliving it, how it really happened, in one way how ludicrous it was, in another how she knew she was about to die. *Tried to rape me. How old is he, maybe twenty-five? I’m sixty-five. But he did. He was hard, I could feel it through his pants. Be quiet, he commanded me in Spanish as he sat on my legs after knocking me down, arms pinning me. Groping my breasts. The blindfold. Trying to pull my slacks down. How did I manage to tell him this was silly? I’m an old lady, I told him. Why are you doing this? I was terrified, I was sure I was going to be murdered, and.....and I began to play with him, a word game, a save-my-life game, somehow I played and.....amazingly he bought it. Take my money, I said to him. I don’t want you to see my face, he said. Ok, let me up, I won’t look, I’ll get the money. And I did.*

*And he let me. He followed me to the bedroom, romance not his option now. I took my wallet from my purse, opened it and took all the bills out, eyes down, handed a fistful of pesos. And he left, broad athletic shoulders facing me as I peeked, little blond dyed pony tail in back, his Gucci shirt visible, stylish pants and shoes, me alive, him a fugitive. I thought, I'll recognize his voice, his back, somehow I'll get this little prick.*

“By all means, Señora. I am so sorry you were subject to this unfortunate incident. I assure you we will investigate this thoroughly.”

“Well, come in and see what he did,” Teresa says, pointing to the living room.

Evidence everywhere, she shows him. Strewn books, drawers emptied. Surely there are fingerprints. She tells him how she managed to carefully tear a tag on his shirt in mid near fuck, Gucci, obviously a well-dressed young man, perhaps from a wealthy local family though needing money for drugs she suggests to the officer? She wants vengeance. This horrible attack on a visitor, a guest, a lover of this gentle culture, though she has lived here for many years, helping at the orphanage, volunteering to teach English as a second language in the local elementary school, surely this young gangster will be punished.

“That will not be necessary, Señora, though *gratias* for the information. We will make known to you, and your embassy if you wish, our findings in a few weeks.”

She begins to wilt. Hopeless. She sits down right in front of the police officer, smashed screen door between them, and can not hold it back. Sobbing.

“Now, now, Señora, don't fret. We will bring the perpetrator to justice. Please come to the police station tomorrow and fill out the forms” He begins to be alarmed now by her hysterics, opens the fist blasted screen door finally and tries to lift her to her feet. She begins to wail inconsolably knowing now it is fruitless.

Later after they had left, safely latching her inner door, she sits in the dark for a long time. At last, she pours herself a glass of her best Mendocino pinot noir.

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The next day Teresa goes to the station. Captain Garcia who came last night is not on duty, she is told. Lieutenant Munoz is now on duty.

Munoz is a young, stoic, well dressed officer. He listens to her frantic story patiently, but finally tells her in passable English, to be seated.

She looks around at the tiny cubicle off to one side and behind the huge, ornate official entrance desk. The presiding officer, a movie stereotype with bushy mustache and huge belly, she mentally dresses him with criss-crossing bandoleers and sombrero along with his stinking badge, as he ushers her to what she sees immediately as the penalty box..

“Madam, were there any witnesses to your accusation?” he asks standing in front of her straight backed chair.

“My accusation?” she nearly shrieks, causing the young officer to back away slightly.

“Yes, madam. Did anyone see the exhibit?”

“Exhibit?” she asks. “Oh, you mean the attempted rape?”

“Si, madam.”

“Of course not. He broke into my home. He tried to....”

He interrupts her in mid sentence. “The captain has informed me of the accident,” he says.

She holds her tongue. Perhaps a problem in English vocabulary. “Do you mean incident?” she asks.

“Perhaps,” he says without emotion.

She switches to Spanish. “He broke in my house and tried to fuck me! He tried to fuck me, for God’s sake. And then he took my money and I am sure I would recognize him, his voice, his clothes, I tore a tag off his shirt that will identify his purchase, there are fingerprints everywhere...”

“Yes, yes, I am sure,” the policeman continues to say in English, not to be baited into real communication, she realizes. “Were there any police on site when this emanated to your abode?”

“Of course not,” she shouted. “Why would he invite the police to witness my assault, for God’s sake?”

“I cannot answer that, madam. It is the law,” he said. “Thank you for this officialment. We will be in communications at future.”

She realizes he is dismissing her politely. As she leaves seething, the officer behind the giant desk grinning, the spitting image of *The Treasure of Sierra Madre* bandido, she glimpses one of the young truck boys accompanying the captain the day before. A little blond ponytail pokes out under his hat as he walks away from her, swagger unmistakable.

Back at home, on her couch, she finishes the remainder of the pinot noir. As she sips, she remembers the playground bully in the sixth grade, Gordo, Gordon but aptly named, a big fat angry kid who picked on little boys and her for some reason intentionally bumping into her in hallways, shoving her away from her desk on the way to his own. *On the swing, Anna on the other, how high can we go, Gordo sitting down on the grass in front of us, and I know why. He wants to see our panties. And after school, following me home waiting until I’m alone, grabbing me from behind trying to rub my little breasts and I punched upwards breaking his grip, a trick my big brother taught me, turned around quickly and brought my knee up and he was on the ground holding his crotch and he never bothered me again. I stood over him and said very slowly, “If you bully anybody ever again, I’ll tell everyone I beat you up. And if they don’t believe me, I’ll beat you up in the playground.” And he never did. Sometimes I would catch his eye in the locker room. He would look away. He moved after school ended so I never saw him again.*

The wine is finally gone and she leans back, a small smile of remembrance, and sleeps.

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Teresa fusses with the kitchen help, her friends all gathered in the front room. *What to do about the orphanage budget shortfall? These sad little boys and girls, no parents, mothers dead from the disease, fathers long gone because of their needles or extra curricular fucking around. Shunned by their families, how can that be? This family centered country, babies are everything, why not an uncle to take care of them, grandparents, someone in the family, how can there be orphans here?*

She knows why, though. The San Antonio priest shook a bony finger at her when she went to the parish for a donation. “No, Señora. These children are

of the damned, like the sin of Cain. The seed of blackness, children marked by the devil. We need to be compassionate, pray for their poor, damned souls, but to help? No, not at all, Señora. God wills them to be alone. It is their destiny.”

She never went back to Mass after that. What kind of God would this be? Heartless, and Godless. Instead she reads the Gospels every Sunday morning when the bell for mass goes from one to three rings. She reads about Mary Magdalene, the whore. The lepers. The destitute, poor victims of an impenetrable cast system doomed to disease, hunger, misery all their lives. *Even the dead. Jesus would have embraced these beautiful, innocent souls, I know it. What is the matter with our damned Christian hypocrites?* She prays to the Virgin of Guadalupe, to the Mother of these sad, babies.

The discussion over snacks is business-like, how to raise money, how to get more volunteers, how to convince the churches to donate, which businesses were most likely to contribute and so on. The six of them are animated, somehow working together in this important cause in a way they would not normally have been able to, women against women in age old competition.

“Money, for God’s sake,” the tall woman interrupts. She is from North Carolina, strident, impressive in a way nobody likes, but she means business.

“If we can get money we can do anything.” Her name, Beverly Harper, long involved in the goings on around the Lake, talks on about her projects in Blowing Rock, the children saved, community involvement, money asked, money given.

“You’re right, Bev. I’ll help. I speak Spanish fluently,” Teresa says. “And I have a safe at home. I can be the banker when we collect cash, before we deposit in the bank.

“Now that I think about it, why can’t we use the Posada to make some money for the children? We can pick the kids that will portray Mary and Joseph from our orphanage. Nobody could refuse a donation after a Posada with some of those adorable children, could they?”

The newcomer, Sara, is recently from Canada. “What is a Posada?” she asks.

Teresa looks at her as if everybody should know about “La Posada,” but remembers that she did not when she moved here.

“Well, this is a Mexican tradition that goes back centuries, I’m not certain how long. But each night during the nine day novena before Christmas, there is a little procession in each village commemorating the pregnant Mary and husband, Joseph needing shelter during the night of Jesus’ birth.

“You can imagine Mary stopping Joseph, telling him that she was having pains, or perhaps her water broke, needing a safe place to sleep or at least to rest. The Gospel of Luke tells it starkly. There was no room in the inn. She had her baby in a barn, in a feeding trough, filthy and smelly, with animals all around. The poorest of the poor, the shepherds, are told by the angel Gabriel to go see the baby. Imagine cow shit all over where your baby is born, and not just any run of the mill baby either, we know,

“The Mexicans, though, have made up a nicer tale. According to the Posada ritual, sure enough Mary needs a place to sleep. She and Joseph go to several inns and they are refused entry. Probably they looked like the poor people they were and the innkeepers thought it might hurt business to give them a room. Who knows? But as they go door to door, they ask for entrance, are refused, and...well you will get a chance to see it, Sara. I can’t tell it as well as it really is, but the Mexican version, the Posada tradition, has a good ending. I promise that people will beg us to donate money after our orphanage Posada.”

They all laugh. In the days that follow, the women go to their friends, neighbors, walk door-to-door, raise money any way they can. They agree to meet weekly to plan and manage the Posada fund raiser.

And it works. They invade the business community, Mexican and gringo. Money comes in daily from her friends. When it is time to pay the bill at a restaurant, they ask to speak to the owner. Sweet smiles, complements, maybe flashing a little leg, *we want to come here often with our friends and, oh by the way, wouldn't you like to make a contribution to the orphanage, Señor?*

Good looking women make the best salespersons, Teresa thinks. Especially here in Mexico where women are everything and nothing.

The money rolls in, from real estate offices, from computer shops set up to accommodate Internet connections for the gringos. Teresa even goes to the police station, smiles at the *Sierra Madre* bandito officer at the huge, mahogany desk.

“Señor policeman,” she says, scanning around the station room, “surely you big men would like to help orphans, wouldn’t you?”

She gets a shrug and a twenty peso note. Two cents. On the way out, she sees out of the corner of her eye an officer staring at her, a muscular young man. She turns towards him, “*Buenas tardes,*” she says matter-of-factly. He returns the salutation without expression. She feels his stare as she walks down the street towards her home.

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Now it is Saturday evening. Hot, very dry. Friends of the Collection for Orphans ladies have dropped in all day, bringing money, accepting a little coffee and mousse cake, small groups come in and out the front door, excitedly predicting the splendid Christmas the children will have, toys, new clothes, several computers for games and instruction, especially for the ones with learning problems.

The word has gotten around about their success in the campaign. Thousands of dollars, American dollars and millions of Pesos, in just a week, cash to be deposited Monday to Lloyd’s Bank on Monday when it opened. Her safe, tucked in the corner of her office room next to a chair she bought in Tlaquepaque in Guadalajara, plain enough, but it has a laughing death skull on the top, the arm rests skeleton arms, boney hands on knobs, open as if in supplication. It is bizarre, but quite in keeping with the Mexican celebration of the dead, All Souls Day, death with a Mexican twist, with a sense of humor. She has put a decorative blanket over it so that it looks like a coffee table; heavy but moveable.

After the robbery she had asked Miguel, her gardener to put in reinforced bars on the two windows and change the locks on the door. He had suggested a heavy metal door, painted to look like mahogany. *This is a vault,* she thinks with admiration. She walks over to the chair, rubs the grinning skull affectionately for good luck. This safe is safe, she says to the chair, bends over and kisses the grinning cadaver on his sweet, familiar, bald skull.

That night, Teresa walks back from the restaurant with two of her friends, stops at the juncture of Six Corners to chat. The area is heavily populated. Once there were six streets that met at this spot, now only five, but still called by the original name.

She stops in the local small store, buenas tardes, hola, lots of smiles and she knows suddenly. *They all know what had happened and who did it. Some fear. Mostly polite. I can never be friends with these neighbors. They are afraid. Maybe I should take their hints. Fresh tomatoes, fruit, eggs for breakfast, a local newspaper in Spanish, of course, for later with the dictionary. "Gracias, Señora" the teenage daughter says as she takes my money, her little brother bagging the groceries.*

Walking down the cobblestone streets, Teresa sees a shadow. Back to the store. "Would you help me carry these to my house," she says to the little boy. He smiles and takes her bag gladly.

Shadow gone. He takes her key, opens the wall gate for her, she follows, he turns the locks in the inner gate, then the front door, turns the light switch on as if he had been here before. But of course, many of the houses here have the first light switch in the same place.

She gives him the contemptuous money she had gotten the day before at the police station, the twenty peso note which is a big tip to him. "Gracias, Señora, hasta luego, Señora." A big smile and running back to the store. She locks the door, two dead bolts. She feels safe now.

Back to the couch, a little CNN and off to bed she decides. Later, as she turns the TV off, she thinks she might have heard something outside so she turns off the lights, walks over to the open window and looks out. The gate is open slightly. Did I lock it after the boy left, she wonders?

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She is awakened by a noise. This time it isn't imagined or a dream, she knows. Something, small things, like hail but it never hails here, is tinkling against her window pane. She remembers pebbles against her girl's dorm window in college, her boyfriend sending love noises to her on the second floor. She very quietly gets out of bed and peers out the window. Someone is there. Another noise just past her window, then another, too small to break the glass but sharp enough. There is someone there, she sees vaguely, tossing things to her, intentionally waking her, trying to get her attention.

Should she call the police? She shakes her head. She knows where that leads. One of her friends? But which one, and she is not sure whether she is being overly concerned. Why would anyone toss little stones at her window in the middle of the night. Children of the neighborhood who heard about the

robbery? Teenagers laughing about the sex part of it? Was she considered a whore now by kids? She shakes her head. Even though she has lived here for years, she still doesn't understand the culture completely. Someone in college told her that she could read everything ever written about China but she would never be Chinese.

She has a gun now, borrowed from a friend after the "incident.". She tip-toes over the tile flooring to the front door, pulls over the easy chair, and sits, waiting.

When she awakes it is bright sunlight. She goes back in her bedroom. There is nothing unusual. Was it a dream, she wonders? She showers. The gun is safely back in the drawer next to her bed. Much later in the day after picking up her modest clutter and cutting up vegetables for dinner soup, she has decided what to do.

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The church is lit from the front with spot lights, villagers not able to crowd into the ancient tribute to God milling around, those closest to the entrance straining to see the ritual of appointment of the children, all anxious, waiting for the Posada to emerge from the doors and...a huge shout and the children came out, Mary, a somber eleven year old girl carefully dressed in the appropriate Mary attire and her shorter husband, Joseph, with a staff and a huge smile. He is having a good time. She is acting. The donkey is waiting off to the side. The little girl in the angel costume waits in front, sucking on her lollypop, oblivious to the goings on.

Gradually the women organize the procession. The children are adorable, Teresa thinks. The girl playing Mary is hoisted onto the donkey by her father and sits, proud and smiling, the center of attention. The boy Joseph stands next to the animal, staff in hand with a huge grin. The angel child is intent only on her lollypop, wings ready to fly at a command.

The local police are there with their guns, though inconspicuous, to make sure that there is order and also to participate. One of them is dressed in a fantasy Roman soldier costume, short skirt, helmet, spear at the ready in case any of the Biblically unruly get out of line.

The Posada starts down the courtyard of the ancient church, Teresa and her friends spread out to organize the crowd following, the pilgrims. They go to

the first house. Joseph knocks on the door with his staff. The door opens and a man looks at the boy. The children sing:

“In the name of heaven,  
I ask you for shelter  
because my beloved wife  
can continue no longer.”

And the heartless inn owner, looking at the poor couple, the gospel of Matthew ringing in the lyrics, sings back:

“This is no inn,  
continue on your way.

I am not about to open.  
You may be a scoundrel.”

The procession continues, block after block, each time Mary and Joseph are turned away. Finally they arrive at Teresa’s house. She has gone on ahead to be there when they arrive. Joseph knocks on her door. Teresa opens it and looks at the children. They sing the same refrain, “In the name of heaven, I ask you for shelter...” Teresa sings back,

“Oh...are you Joseph,  
your wife is Mary?  
I am so sorry...Please come in, pilgrims,  
I did not recognize you.”

The little girl angel with the wings and lollypop goes past the house, seemingly determined to walk all the way to the lake. Her mother yells at her to come back. She stops, looks around, lollypop at attention, frowny face in full bloom and stomps back to the head of the procession at the front door of Teresa’s house.

The children enter. Teresa and Beverly hand out candy to the children. Outside the other orphanage women are collecting money from the pilgrims, lots of money. Everyone in the village knows that the Posada children are

orphans, probably with AIDS, and they feel guilty for their familial neglect. The piñata is hoisted up on the tree limb in the street. A child is chosen, blindfolded and allowed to try to break the piñata with a bat. Teresa notices the irony of the piñata. It is a replica of a “little black Sambo” caricature. The boy swings, the piñata is hoisted out of his reach, the crowd yells with amusement and celebration. Thank God. Now Mary has a place to have her child, the Messiah. A girl is chosen, blindfolded and goes through the same pantomime, trying to hit the black treasure doll, to no avail. Finally a child hits it, the adult manipulating the piñata making it easier to hit and suddenly it breaks, candy falls all over the street, the children in the crowd knock each other over in their attempts to grab as much candy as possible, the adult crowd urging them on, clapping, whistling, yelling names.

Down the street from the piñata is a wooden tower made of scrap wood, at least twenty feet high. The police, including the Roman centurion, hold the crowd back while one of them lights a fuse at the bottom. The entire tower begins to catch fire, cherry bombs, whirligigs, pinwheels, rockets, the whole contraption explodes in a spectacular firework pyre. Children run around trying to catch the sparks in pans provided by their parents. No one seems to be too concerned about danger. Every child is yelling, running, catching pieces of the celebratory hell pyre.

Teresa is watching everything from her bedroom upstairs with her friend Beverly. The police are so intent on making sure the children are not hurt. These people love their children the way my country used to, she thinks ruefully to herself, except for these God forsaken babies, no fault of their own. The pilgrims are having a wonderful time. The orphanage women are reaping the crop of village guilt money. She notices the Centurion policeman standing apart from the others. He looks up and sees her, then goes towards the fireworks display.

“The Posada is such a success,” she says aloud to her friend. Bev says, “Oh, Terry this was such a good idea. It was so much fun, and the money, the money, just as you said. We can do so much for these kids now.”

Teresa smiles.

“Miguel,” she says to her gardener, “can you help me inside for awhile, please?”

“Si, Señora,” he says, always ready to help, affable. He is dressed as a pilgrim in the manner of Juan Diego, the peasant who was given the gift of the Virgin of Guadalupe apparition. She loves this old man who helps her with everything.

He has a family she has gotten to know well, little Teresa with her same name, lame from an accident, Camilla his wife, sweet and like her own sister.

“Tomorrow night we will have some piñatas for the neighborhood children. Can you help me put it into my front room?”

“Of course, Señora,” he says. They spend the next two hours, he on the ladder screwing in the pulley apparatus in the living room ceiling, she decorating all around with tinsel and crepe paper. Finally, he leaves, and she goes to bed. What a nice celebration, she thinks before she sleeps.

In her dream she hears tapping on her window or door, little pebbles calling to her.

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The children crowd into the house, wandering, laughing, in and out of the courtyard into the street, someone playing a harmonica, kids playing the Mexican equivalent of Simon Says, neighborhood mothers hovering over their beloved children, old women sitting, smiling, wagging fingers at the naughty goings-on. Finally after all the food is gone, it is time to have the piñata, the enormous piñata Miguel and she had put up the night before.

First Joseph, son of the mayor...of course nobody expects him to be able to hit the piñata, tonight dressed as Miguel was, a replica of Juan Diego, the miracle that converted all of Mexico natives in a decade, or so it was said.

Joseph misses. Joseph hits a glancing blow, the crowd applauds, the rope jacks the treasure out of reach, dancing with the unseeing Joseph.

Maria, the beautiful ten year old daughter of the chief of police, Captain Garcia, her Captain Garcia, is next, father and all the local policemen watching, clapping, loving the game, loving their game. Blindfolded, Maria nevertheless hits the piñata several times as befits the daughter of a police captain, and as a small hole appears, the children all start to whistle and whoop, Hershey kisses all over the floor. Gringo kisses. Real kisses too, Teresa thinks. *I hate the “gringo” word, I hate the gringo attitude, I hate being a...*and then Beverly shoos everyone out, confetti all over the room, the three of them cleaning up, sweeping, settling down, hugging before bed, Bev and Sara volunteers this evening, get ready for sleep in the extra bedroom.

Theresa goes around checking, turning off lights, looking in the back windows, closes the front door firmly, finally goes to her bed, in her own, her real bedroom, turns out the lights, the entire home dark now after all this wonderful

evening of kids, neighbors, friends, and sits on her bed, pillows in back, meditating, a short prayer to the Virgin of Guadalupe who's small tile replica is above her entrance, the Virgin, like no other virgin in history, not like any other Mother of God, no other apparition even comparable, nothing like the Virgin, she prays, she closes her eyes, she pleads "Please, please, please ..."

And she will not go to sleep, arms folded, sitting up waiting, waiting. And finally. A small noise.

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She can hear the key in the front door, scraping a little, she can imagine the front door opening, but can hear nothing else. The pebbles she does remember. The pebbles are her warrior armor she thinks, her....

Teresa gets up. She knows the gun is in the top drawer, but she leaves everything in the house as it is. Night softness, small sounds, the Virgin's answers, slow, slow, little careful movements over the front room. No sounds now, nothing to be heard, just...what...something?

Some motion. Very soft feet on the tiles she strains. Past the bedrooms. Past her room. She sees nothing, feels everything, sliding socks perhaps, going directly where she knows, panic for a moment, another prayer, another moment and she hears the door across the room open, perhaps a spring not oiled, or more likely her heightened senses, her prayer elongated, stretching into the blackness. Snoring in the adjacent room, Beverly and Sara long gone for the night, small noises in the office, the money, the treasure for these orphaned cursed children, these children of God, this God that will welcome everyone, this God that lets the worst, and sponsors the best, to happen. This Damned God.

Teresa slides over her bedroom floor, back hunched, her feline body responding now, purring, senses attuned, grinning, incisors exposed, a silent growl in her throat. She slides. Glides. She hears tumblers. She senses gears and greed all at once, a short silence, a click. She knows the safe, the money for these precious children, is open.

Teresa slams the door and shouts, "Vengar!"

She bolts the locks. She hears noises within, noises she has dreamed of, first at the window bars, she imagines, and then at the door, shoulder hurling against the fake, nice looking mahogany that would withstand a tank. *Thank you Miguel, thank you Virgin.*

Now Beverly and Sara are up, the noise inside the room deafening, slamming around. “Call the police,” Teresa tells Sara. “Here’s the number.”

While the noises within gains intensity, groans, Anglo and Mexican epithets, threats of Apocalypse proportions, Teresa goes over to the bar, opens a fine red wine, pours four glasses and smiles, toasting who? Toasting the Virgin probably, as Sara screams into the phone, “A burglar. A fucking burglar. Come now. Venga aqui!!!” Teresa sips her fine wine.

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It is quiet in the house now, the three women sipping their glasses of wine, but at last there is a knock on the door. Captain Garcia is standing there “Si, Señora. The problem this time?” he asks, pen in hand, notebook officially proffered, toy boys in the Ford truck, rifles at the ready for anything.

“Senor Captain Garcia,” she says in measured tones. “Would you like a glass of wine?”

“Regrettably, no, Señora,” he says officiously. “What is your complaint now, Señora?”

“Robbery,” she says. And smiles.

Garcia doesn’t smile. “And rape, senora?” he asks with a straight face.

“Just robbery this time, Captain Garcia. Please come in.”

“No, I think not, but thank you Senora. You say a robbery took place?”

“Si, robbery only this time, Captain. You expected...ah...much more? Is robbery enough?”

“And you have witnesses, madam, You know our laws by now?”

“As a matter of fact, I have exactly two witnesses, Captain...here they are. Beverly and Sara...please tell the fine officer, Captain Garcia, how we were robbed tonight.”

They cannot stop talking over each other, yelling, “the burglar, we could have...noise, the noise inside,...Teresa’s rape, something could have...Oh, my God, we....Mother of...” and on and on. The Captain patiently waits, pencil poised for important information.

“And, ladies, what was stolen exactly?”

Teresa looks at his notepad, at his dark glasses even now at night, and says, “Nothing, this time, Captain Garcia. But that is because of our vigilance.”

The Captain stifles a yawn. “And, if nothing was stolen, I suppose there is no crime?”

“Not at all,” Teresa says. “I have two witnesses to the attempted robbery.”

“Yes,” Captain says, making a few notes on his pad. “And a policeman was here on premises during the assumed crime?”

“Of course,” Teresa says.

“You had a policeman here to witness the crime, Señora?” Now he is attuned to her.

“Si, Captain Garcia. How is your daughter? We will have another piñata party soon, would you bring her again? She is such a precious girl...she helped decorate here earlier. You are a lucky man, Captain,” she whispers to him conspiratorially.

By now neighbors have come in the front door, murmurings, talking about their own problems, peering over the Captain’s shoulder, having discussions, what about the police, are they actually protecting us, hey Garcia, what the hell is going on? All this in raucous, noisy, simultaneous Spanish.

and...then Teresa goes to the office door, silent now for many minutes, puts her key in, clicks it, pulls the two other bolts, and opens the door. Beverly and Sara stand looking, mouths agape, silent for the first time since being awakened.

“This is not appropriate legalities, Madam.” Captain Garcia is waving his arms, swearing in several languages.

The young man stands in the middle of the opened room, half naked, crowbar in one hand, looking at the crowd. The safe is open. Money is spread all over the floor.

Theresa says, “Crime, two witnesses and a policeman. Sorry, Captain Garcia. The policeman witness seems also to be the robber. What a shame! Mea culpa. But the law is the law, is it not?”

She smiles, her friends look at her, neighbors yelling, waving, pointing at the culprit’s near nudity, his cute little pigtail known to everyone, children jumping

up and down pointing, the other policemen, automatic rifles at their sides, laughing in spite of themselves.

Loudly, to all in the room now, she says,

“Senor Captain. Do you see the “exhibit” now?”

The young man is reluctantly led down the stairs, into the truck. Teresa watches as the shackles are put on his arms and feet. The other policemen sit on either side, guns at the ready. The neighbors jeer, cheer, they know him by name, have known him from birth, yell his name, “Frederico, Frederico,…” shake fists, make gestures, suddenly a community united for a moment in justice.

As the truck leaves, neighbors laughing and slapping hands, she leans into the captain, near his ear, nobody paying attention. She touches her tongue teasingly and whispers, “Would you, too, like to come back later, Captain Garcia? I promise no locks on the door.”