

The Rape of Maria Dolores (continued)

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Every Sunday after mass, having received the body and blood of her Savior, and having dutifully deposited the requisite donation in the net basket that was passed amongst the faithful – which by its design eschewed coins for paper currency – Maria Dolores would walk from the church to window shop barefoot in the crowded streets of the center of town. She could barely contain her excitement at what she considered a display of the world's finest shoes and elegant clothing, notwithstanding she knew she would never possess them. What most consumed her attention however was the provocative lingerie so audaciously exhibited behind the transparent glass of the shop windows. The delicate lace fringed brassieres and scandalously transparent bikini panties she imagined all women of means wore concealed under their expensive clothing.

Too frequent for her to regard it as mere coincidence, Maria Dolores would encounter the police chief as she exited the church. Appearing to be inadvertently passing by, he would devoutly bow his head while making the obligatory sign of the cross. He would greet her with wet lips and a lustful, perverse smile. Because his mouth moved she knew he was speaking to her, bestowing the obligatory verbal “flowers,” the wantonly salacious comments, the whistles, the once-overs, required of men to unaccompanied females considered a procurable commodity on the street.

She was unable to hear what he was saying because of the clamoring horns and roar of the endless, disorderly traffic. In the anonymity afforded by their vehicles, the drivers permitted themselves an enraged and irrational disrespect of each other, and of the terrorized pedestrians scurrying to safety across the street. Their aggression betrayed a curious contradiction, for this society generally displayed, in face to face contact, a maximized formal and ceremonious courtesy. Maria Dolores, suspecting his words were indecent, she would bashfully fold her arms across her chest and hurry past, humbly lowering her head and averting her gaze.

It occurred to the young girl that she had no idea what color eyes the chief of police had, or if he had any eyes at all, for she had never seen him without his polished, mirrored sunglasses. On the rare occasions she dared to rapidly glance at his face, all she ever saw reflected were her own eyes wide with apprehension. The Conquistadors had no difficulty instituting the concept of privilege and deference for ones betters, which formed part of their Iberian cultural heritage – including averting ones gaze as a sign of

respect. Looking upon the visage of the Tlatoani in pre-Columbian America was punishable by death.

The chief of police was the mayor's first cousin. He was a sycophant, the creation of a parasitical environment, fawningly obsequious to the influential, vehemently ruthless and unmerciful to the vulnerable. A perpetual scowl and swollen lips that appeared never to have experienced a smile betrayed his angry and sullen disposition. He traced his lineage back to the Conquistadors who, armed with the sword and the cross, spawning pestilential disease, furiously despoiled and subsequently enslaved an entire continent. He was the reincarnation of their insatiable greed for precious yellow metal, which the natives referred to as "the excrement of the gods," feathers and turquoise being more highly prized. The Spaniards voracity was contemptuously described by the indigenous population as their falling on gold "like starving pigs."

Cortes justified this unrestrained lust by wittily prevaricating: "We Spaniards suffer from a disease that can only be cured by gold."

The swarthy, rotund, and mendacious chief of police resembled a ludicrous cliché in his mirrored sunglasses. Additionally, he was costumed in garish gold chains which shimmered with a resplendent brilliance. Hanging into the hairy chest under the unbuttoned shirt of his uniform was an ostentatious gold cross with an imposing ruby embedded in its center shaped in the form of a drop of blood; inverted it would have represented a heart. He also flaunted a pretentious gold bracelet with his initials encrusted with small diamonds in the thick metal, and a solid gold Rolex Oyster. Wedged into a taut leather belt that struggled to contain the folds of his overlapping stomach was a forty five caliber pistol displaying intricately engraved gold and silver handgrips.

The hammer of the pistol was perpetually cocked. In the relative privacy of their homes, husbands guardedly ruminated with their wives whether this constituted an ostentatiously valiant or an audaciously imprudent act that placed in jeopardy a considerably delicate part of the police chief's anatomy. The women chortled amongst themselves, and commented that should the pistol inadvertently fire, the police chief would continue through life without a brain, since it was obvious to all of them that his brain was located in his penis.

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Maria Dolores remembered the young foreigner specifically because she thought he was handsome, attracted by his tall stature and fair complexion. She assumed he was simply a tourist, interested in a foolish visit to those primitive ruins she had heard about that were hidden in the hills surrounding the town.

She watched him surreptitiously in that curious way women have of observing men carefully out of the corner of their eye while attempting to appear engrossed in performing the task of the moment. She wanted to assure herself that he was, indeed, visually appreciating her body which she now moved provocatively with a pronounced lack of subtlety. Even though he was sent by Saint Francis of Padua, she reasoned, it wasn't inappropriate to give the Saint a helping hand.

His insistent stare caused her to suspect he was undressing her in his mind, and she furtively glanced at the cloth stretching tightly across his groin for the indication that her efforts were eliciting the desired consequence.

She also scrutinized the fingers of his hands. She had eavesdropped on the women in town who insisted they knew from personal experience that the size of a man's penis could be determined by the length and thickness of his fingers; just as the orifice of a woman's vagina bore a relationship to the dimension of her mouth.

Maria Dolores continued her cunning and, she imagined, secret observation, feeling her heart pound abnormally. Although an adolescent, she was physically mature and well aware that her markedly large breasts were objects of constant attention. She normally attempted to conceal them by folding her arms across her chest in self-effacing modesty, however it was now her intent to use them as instruments of attraction.

With a damp rag she meticulously and unnecessarily scrubbed hard at the cracked wood of empty tables, weaving her shoulders excessively, forcing her cumbersome unfettered breasts to oscillate prominently under her huipil. The proposed strategy was to make her breasts flagrantly observable, and to harden the dark nipples by rubbing them against the soft cloth, making them distinctly conspicuous.

A barely perceptible, secretive smile quivered across her lips. She reasoned that had she been able to afford one of those sensual brassieres she delighted in ogling in the shop windows of the town, this maneuver would not have been effective.

She experienced an uncontrollable vanity, a self admiration even for her damaged body, a feeling of pride in her large, firm and erect breasts. She sensed that she possessed something irresistible, something that conferred on her a formidable power over the opposite sex. Having what others coveted caused in her an overwhelming feeling of indulgent contentment.

The sensation of having the foreigner visually undress her was not unpleasant; it was in fact her objective,

notwithstanding that from the time she was a child and could not understand why, she had been taught to press her thighs tight together and always be aware that her skirt fell below her knees. When she was older, she experienced firsthand the guarded sexual tension, that suspect, awkward distrust spawned between men and women.

Her mother and elder sisters, actually all of the women in the village, spent long hours admonishing young girls concerning men's obsession with intercourse. They cautioned them not to be foolish and allow themselves to be charmed by saccharine words, for men were all habitual liars whose sole objective was to possess their bodies and then abandon them, invariably with an infant they had to care for by themselves. The young girls were also instructed on how to manipulate unrelenting male desire to their advantage, possibly even leading to a formal marriage with the most promising choice they could encounter.

"Nunca se declaren a un macho. Si ellos se enamoren, dejen que estén dispuestos a ser humillados; avergüénzalos al declarar su amor. Y una vez estando con ellos, aunque las hagan feliz, no se lo digan. ¡Jamás!" (*)

() "Never declare (your affection) to a man. If they fall in love, let them allow themselves to be humiliated; shame them when they declare their love. And once you are (living) with them, although they make you happy, never tell them. Never!"*

Once each year, at the beginning of spring, the community dressed their virgins in long white garments to perform a ritual dance that undoubtedly had its origin in pagan fertility rites. As the girls danced in intertwining circles, they sprinkled the spectators with a viscous liquid from gourds hidden within large, hand woven reed baskets firmly held about their waist. The specious white liquid was milk mixed with flour; the baskets abundantly filled with large plantains that were painted to resemble penises.

Maria Dolores felt her mouth become succulent with saliva, as always happened when she became sexually aroused, and she spat on the earthen floor of the cantina to eject the secretion. With her bare foot she rubbed the phlegm into the hard earth until it was completely absorbed, leaving only an irregular damp spot.

She reacted to the young man's curiosity by teasing him, returning his lustful fixed stare with bright eyes full of mirth and mischief. Lifting her chin insolently she pulled back her shoulders to emphasize her breasts, displaying her arrogant narcissism unambiguously.

Her grandmother would have reacted differently. She would have bowed her head into her chest with great

embarrassment and hurried off modestly with small, delicate steps to hide her body, the object of lascivious inquiry. At most, if the young man held some interest for her, she may perhaps have permitted herself to giggle into her hand in flirting enticement as she rushed away. But this young girl had indulged in an experience unavailable to her grandmother. She had seen other women respond to similar male scrutiny in a different fashion, projected on a wrinkled, stained sheet nailed to the stone wall of an open air stable that served as the community's movie theater. So in imitation, she turned her back disdainfully on the young man and with premeditated, albeit hobbled steps, attempting to be evocative of the most notorious femme fatale of the silver screen, limped barefoot out the back door of the cantina and into the weeds.

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The young man stood over her and she watched as he unhooked the ostentatious belt buckle, his body swaying uncertainly from the effect of the alcohol recently consumed. He unzipped his pants and Maria Dolores reached down quickly to pull her skirt up over her thighs, above her abdomen, protectively tucking the folds under her breasts. Displaying her deformed leg was now less important than the risk of damage to her skirt. Her mother had just this morning given her the garment as the hand-me-down from another sister. The cloth was old and faded, worn thin in spots from years of use, but she had for a long time coveted the garment; had guarded jealous resentment that her mother had first given it to another sibling. Now that it was finally hers, she did not want him to tear it in his haste to penetrate her.

Angry at the violence he manifested by kicking her in the chest, it entered her mind to seek out the chief of police and file a complaint when he finished using her. She had been told that offenses were more severely penalized when the offender was a foreigner. She vaguely suspected that rape was officially considered a crime, and therefore the young man, being a foreigner, would not simply be given a perfunctory scolding by an inattentive and phallogentric judge, as always happened with these cases. The thought was quickly discarded however, when she visualized the police chief's mocking, mustachioed face.

Maria Dolores imagined him laughing at her and asking if she were filing the complaint because she had not enjoyed the experience. Or perhaps he would think she had invented the ordeal, after all it was reasonable to suppose he would doubt a handsome young person would be interested in sex with a cripple. Or perhaps this foreigner had enough money to buy the law, and then she would be in jail for having made a false accusation. The chief of police, obviously mandated by his official capacity, would be able to demand he personally inspect the wound the boy had inflicted. If she were truly fortunate, while he was investigating between her legs, he would limit himself to simply proposing she experience the benefit of fornicating with a real man.

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Maria Dolores opened her legs to receive him, and as he fell brusquely on top of her, she saw that he was unusually large and it frightened her. Being diminutive in stature, every part of her physique was commensurately small. She tensed her body to accept the anticipated pain, so that when he entered she only uttered a barely audible whimper at the tearing of her delicate flesh.

She made no other sound, did not cry out, did not object in any way to the violence, manifesting the fatalism that had existed among her people long before the arrival of the winged ships of the conquerors. A barbarity continued by them in the ruthless, unmerciful and remorseless human chronicle of subjugation, exploitation and extermination. Hers was acquiescence to one's fate, the determinant of the events of one's life, making useless any protest against this overwhelming, savage force. She was incapable of effectuating a response to a culturally imposed degradation. For her, the midwife had presaged it at the moment of her birth.

He panted harshly into her face, the liquor saturated saliva that dripped from his open, agitated mouth rolling down her cheeks. His breath was the combined stench of bitter tobacco and pungent alcohol and she concentrated on avoiding the urge to vomit. She was startled that only seconds later he finished, uttering a long moan of release as his body fell exhausted over hers. Relieved that the rhythmic tearing pain he was inflicting had ceased, a surprising sense of tenderness for him suddenly swept over her, although she was disconcerted he had totally ignored fondling her breasts, with which she had attempted to entice him, and he had neglected to whisper even a single word of endearment. He must have had such terrible need for a woman, she surmised.

Maria Dolores wrapped her arms around the young man's broad, muscular shoulders. She caressed him tenderly.

"Ay lova yu," she was startled to hear her voice haltingly declare in an unfamiliar idiom she had memorized from the movies. She felt suddenly guilty, but comforted herself by rationalizing that by pronouncing the words in a foreign language they did not possess validity.

In her child's mind she imagined this anonymous young man she was embracing leaving the church with her, their arms linked, gold bands adorning their fingers. She is dressed in a heavy white satin bridal gown, the long train sustained by two cherubs, the unfamiliar lace brassiere hugging tight, her face covered with veils, paradoxically weeping and laughing simultaneously. Her feet in sheer stockings, covered with shiny, high heeled patent leather shoes. White. They pinch her feet. Her mother embraces her warmly, and for the first time in all the years they have lived together, kisses her cheek, whispering in her ear how proud she is

of her daughter, and that it doesn't matter she wasn't any good at begging. Maria Dolores tosses her bouquet of flowers over her shoulder as her sisters, bursting with envy, rush to catch the prize.

Someone stands by a long, white, flower bedecked limousine holding the door open respectfully as they quickly jump in and the chauffeur speeds them away. The foreigner opens a satchel full of money and the two of them toss the bills out of the vehicle's windows. Her neighbors and their raggedy, barefoot children run after them, snatching at the floating currency, secretly resentful that Maria Conception's daughter, the beggar woman's daughter, would live a life of abundant leisure.

She is drifting through clouds. Flying in an airplane. He is taking her to one of those enormous cities she had seen in the movies, and in the photographs she had compulsively cut out of magazines. He is taking her to live at the very top of a glass building that touches the sky. There is a living room with a finished floor, and shelves for the collection of plastic dolls she will purchase. A bathroom with a toilet, and a sink with running water. A bed with a mattress. The kitchen has a washing machine. No. No need for that. The maid will wash everything by hand.

Of course she will invite her mother to live with her, and at night the two of them will reach out of the window and touch the stars, tiny pieces of the sun that have broken off, suspended in the velvety darkness.

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Abruptly the young man stood up and rapidly buckled his belt. He stared curiously as a thin white line of semen slowly issued and fused with the crimson blood from the wound he had occasioned, blossoming into an exotic orchid between her legs. She pulled her thighs tight together with the aid of her hands in a belated act of propriety, looking imploringly with large, moist eyes up into his expressionless, alcohol bloated face.

No word had been exchanged between them, only the rapid, agitated breathing and animal grunts of copulation. Still saying nothing, he reached into his pocket, removed a coin, and tossed it on her exposed abdomen.

"Whore," was all he mumbled in his almost unintelligible accent. Her dark radiant eyes suddenly eclipsed, becoming vacantly forlorn; eyes that had sparkled with intense anticipation. She watched impassive, lying unmoving on her back in stoic silence as he turned and sauntered away, without remorse, disappearing through the back door of the cantina.

Distraught that Saint Anthony had miscalculated in his choice of suitor, she determined to punish the Saint in the customary fashion, by turning his image upside down, standing him on his head until he complied with his mission. Should he continue to be recalcitrant, she would proceed with the sanctioned ritual burning of his effigy in retribution.

Turning the coin slowly in her fingers, she examined it carefully, suspecting it was counterfeit. Finally convinced of its authenticity, she speculated that the foreigner must be very wealthy indeed, for that one coin was more than she earned at the cantina for an entire week of work and abuse. She slipped it into the small pocket she had sewn earlier across the waistband of the skirt to hide whatever she did not want to share with the rest of her family, and sat up in the weeds, her urine wet blouse clinging to her back.

Maria Dolores wrapped the hem of her skirt around her fingers and delicately inserted them in an attempt to remove the semen he had deposited in her body, although she knew her efforts were futile and that when the first wet drops of the rainy season arrived, her mother's grandchild would also be born. She calculated her womb would be swollen big with the foreigner's child when the air was thick with the choking smoke of the brush fires ignited by the peasant farmers preparing the land for planting their crops; fires that in the dark of night glowed with a deep orange intensity on the slopes of the hills. The older women of the community complained through gummy, toothless mouths that the current burnings were paltry in comparison to those in their time, when the hills would all be ablaze, making them fear that the sky itself would soon ignite and be consumed.

She tried unsuccessfully not to think of the thrashing she would receive from her mother when, in a few months, it became obvious she was pregnant. It was customary for Maria Concepción to discipline her offspring with the thorny wooden switch that hung by a used shoestrapping next to a paper cutout of the Virgin of Guadalupe illuminated by a votive candle on the wall of their one room shack. The thorns on the switch were colored the deep brown of dried blood that originally had spattered a brilliant scarlet when they tore the bare buttocks of her children.

Maria Dolores was grateful that, unlike her mother, in the more enlightened and understanding attitude now prevalent in the changing culture of her community, she would not be stoned to death, commit suicide, have to invent a virgin birth, or flee to some undisclosed location when her baby arrived.

She found some solace in the thought that her child, a product of her union with the pale young foreigner, might have a light cinnamon complexion; a luxuriant, hybrid flower. If the baby were a girl, she thought, she would become part of the large extended family and join with the other women in the daily struggle for survival. If it were a boy, when he was grown he would leave his village to go into the Land Of The Foreigners.

This last thought disconcerted her, and she determined to use the coin hidden in the pocket of her skirt to pay the witch doctor to initiate the series of rituals necessary to assure her child would be female. Just to be sure, she would appeal to the Virgin of Guadalupe. She would go to the church with whatever change was left over and bribe the Virgin into heeding her cause by purchasing all of her votive candles.

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The chief of police pursued the young, crippled girl amorously, without respite, and without success. He offered her a life of inconceivable luxury in the mansion he owned on a lush, palm studded promontory overlooking the ocean, where she would be surrounded by innumerable servants to attend to her every wish.

The police chief's estate by the sea, whose questionable elegance made the Hearst Castle in San Simeon pale by comparison, was a replica of the Acropolis, perched on a tall cliff above the crashing ocean waves. The Neo Classical palace which constituted the principal edifice was an imposing white marble construction imitating the Parthenon, with a high relief frieze that unfortunately had not been sculpted by Phidias. Although preserving the millenarian glorification of violence, the frieze did not depict the chariots, the spears, and the shields of the Greeks at war; rather the carvings were illustrations of haciendas and sugar cane fields in flames, and railroad trains swarming with mustachioed men wearing wide brimmed sombreros, bandoliers across their chest, armed with the Gatling guns, Colt revolvers, and Winchester rifles procured from the Land of the Foreigners.

Off to one side was the Erechtheum, another white marble palace that had been converted into a private discotheque for the entertainment of the police chief's numerous friends; the staid Caryatids metamorphosed into representations of Aztec nobles, sculpted in black marble.

Towering fountains scattered across hectares of manicured lawns sprayed exuberant quantities of garish, multi colored water which cascaded over massive bronze sculptures - precise replicas of Mesozoic dinosaurs; a veritable Jurassic Park. Carrara marble statues and busts were strewn throughout, most were unmistakable portraits of the police chief clad in the long togas of antiquity with wreaths of laurel camouflaging his deeply receding hairline. Considering himself a poet specializing in tender verses of romantic emotions, passionate affection, and intense desire for a treasured object, perhaps even more talented than Jaime Sabines, the police chief also ordered white and black marble slabs to be engraved with his endearing poetry and the letters filled with 24 karat gold to make them more legible.

In a capacious, windowless room whose thick bronze doors were always shut, constructed deep below ground in the precise center of the principal mansion, and accessible only by an unlit narrow stone staircase, were cached the police chief's most prized possessions. This was the secret room in the enormous mansion to which only he had access. No one knew what was so jealously guarded in that space, and he never revealed its contents to anyone.

What the room contained were uncountable objects, all manner of objects, coated with the thick dust and delicate, transparent cobwebs of time. The thousands of unrelated items had only one thing in common: they were all damaged. There were broken clocks, broken lamps, broken plates and glasses, broken telephones, broken televisions, broken frames and broken bicycles. His most treasured collection however, were the innumerable broken crucifixes hoarded in a dark corner. Agonizing Christs, dismembered and fractured, exuding copious quantities of crimson paint suggestive of the blood that soiled the police chief's person in the merciless, inquisitorial cellars of police headquarters adjacent to the Honorable Palace of Justice. His broken prisoners, as their frightened eyes dilated in that dull, blank stare of oblivion, would embrace as the final image of their suffering an inverted crimson heart through the shimmering brilliance of his gold crucifix.

Over the years he had acquired his collection in several ways: inspecting the trash in different neighborhoods prior to it being removed by the sanitation department, responding to classified advertisements in the newspapers, attending every flea market and garage sale that came to his attention, and responding to classified advertisements in the newspapers. When bargaining for what to him was a singularly provocative item because it lacked some part undeniably impossible to procure, yet necessary for its repair, he would perspire profusely, licking his mustache with a nervous tongue. His excitement during these negotiations escalated to such intensity that he occasionally experienced his most memorable orgasms with a flaccid discharge that left the crotch of his pants wet with an intimate, revealing stain.

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Maria Dolores felt weary, her body heavy with fatigue. Her day had begun before sunrise and she had eaten nothing other than the two brittle tortillas lightly spread with leftover refried beans before starting her house chores and then hurrying to work. She still had eight more hours of work in the cantina, notwithstanding she was feeling hungry, drowsy and badly in need of rest. From the deep pocket of her skirt she removed a half slice of lemon she had earlier pilfered from the cantina, and devoured it eagerly to calm the sharp, insistent ache emanating from her stomach. She longed to be a child again, when her mother would put her to bed to dream in lieu of a meal.

The wind shifted, and a thin cloud of grey smoke crossed the field from the direction of the whorehouse, directly across the road from the cantina. The familiar sweet and acrid odor of burning plastic bottles irritated her nose and she sneezed. Looking up she saw the faraway figures of young girls playfully cavorting around a small fire that flashed bright green and violet as it consumed the toxic material they tossed into the flames. She was suddenly reminded that she had once again neglected to burn the garbage accumulating at the back door of the cantina.

The wind also carried their tinkling, high pitched laughter, and for the young girl it seemed an incongruous sound, for she could not imagine what there was in this world that could evoke such light heartedness. For Maria Dolores, the now almost unidentifiable sound of girlish laughter had virtually evaporated from her memory. In fact, her lips seemed so thick and heavy she doubted being able to force them into a smile.

She considered walking across the field to meet those girls. They were wearing long diaphanous negligees through which she could discern their sensual, expensive lingerie, and she was curious to know if the men they allowed to use their bodies were all as generous as the young man she had just been with. But just thinking of posing the question frightened her, for she didn't want to admit, as even a remote possibility, the persistent disquieting thought that was troubling her since receiving the coin now hoarded in the pocket of her skirt.

It seemed to Maria Dolores that she had been sitting in the weeds a long time, although no more than five minutes had elapsed since the foreigner had kicked her in the chest. She considered not showing up for work tomorrow in order to go see the witch doctor. She would have to make up some excuse because she did not want to reveal what actually happened. For Maria Dolores, being untruthful was not the equivalent of lying. It was similar to when strangers would ask her for directions to some unknown location, and she would make up an imaginary route just to be polite and not appear ignorant, hoping the strangers would find someone else to ask again, someone familiar with their destination, on the circuit she had hastily invented.

Since initiating her employment at the cantina, she had fabricated several pretexts for not working. She hoped her patron would once again believe her. If he didn't, he would invariably deduct her days pay, and when she gave her mother the money, it wouldn't be the full amount she expected to receive. That would provoke her mother to beat her with the thorny wooden switch.

"Ni modo."

It proved difficult for Maria Dolores to force her mind to concentrate on a resolution of her immediate problem, and she was intellectually consumed by the effort of her thinking. Finally, after long and at times

execrable subjective deliberation, her lips moving in the silent formation of her thoughts, she nodded her head affirmatively as the course of action she was going to pursue evolved groggily to a confused and solitary figure sprouting from the trampled weeds in a limitless expanse of nature. An inconsequential inhabitant of an irrelevant planet, itself not eternal, racing furiously through a black and hazardous universe toward an unpredictable and arbitrary fate.

EPILOGUE:

The sanctuary to the Virgin of Guadalupe was smothered in offerings of flowers and candles. It was a concrete affair, just large enough to accommodate the image of the Virgin and the offerings, located on the right side of a downhill blind curve on the narrow road that led out of the town. The travelers using this road would stop to light candles or place bouquets of flowers in her honor, imploring her protection on initiating their journey, or acknowledging gratefully their safe return.

It was a ritual conceived before the history of man to moderate the anxiety of his vulnerability to forces beyond his control. Originally the offering required the sacrifice of humans, later substituted by animals, and currently candles and flowers to appease presumably less demanding deities, as surmised by those who would interpret their capricious desires.

At varying intervals the roadside was lined with crosses sprouting like unusual vegetation. They marked the place where someone had died, either crossing the road or in some other natural or provoked circumstance. Some crosses were made of metal, others of concrete, and some of simple wood, depending on the economic circumstances of the surviving family. All contained a written legend that named the person who had departed this life, the date of the occurrence, and a brief description of the incident.

The crosses of those who had died recently were blanketed with fresh flowers; the older crosses were overgrown with unattractive weeds. On the anniversary of the death, and during the celebrations for the Day of the Dead, fresh flowers would cover the crosses of those who still lingered in the memory of the living.

Someone with entrepreneurial spirit, making the involuntary, but required surreptitious contribution to the chief of police, had constructed a rudimentary thatched lean-to directly across the road from the shrine, in the direction leading to the village. The travelers stopping to make their obligatory offerings could now refresh themselves with tacos and quesadillas, or boiled ears of corn steaming hot from the blackened aluminum pots set over wood fires. Warm soft drinks were available, and also beer.

The rainy season had begun and occasional squalls from the low lying black clouds showered the highway and parched ground nearby. On this particular day a bus full of foreign tourists, looking for something to reminisce about when they returned home, were on their way to stare at the stone ruins of the previous civilization that ruled this region. The bus stopped along the shoulder adjacent to the lean-to, which aside from the shrine was the only other formation above ground level in the desolate landscape; the thick woods that had once stretched across the mountains having long ago been illegally cleared. The bus driver purchased a bottle of beer and casually sauntered across the wet, infrequently traveled highway to refresh himself as he defecated in the relative privacy afforded behind the structure of the shrine.

The chief of police rounded the curve going in the opposite direction. He was aware there was no sign alerting vehicles to the steep curve, or to indicate caution due to the presence of the unexpected shrine, nonetheless he swiftly rounded the curve, speeding recklessly in his new brilliant red convertible with wide rim white wall tires. The car had no license plates, which he considered unnecessary since the vehicle had neither registration nor insurance. It had been reported stolen at gunpoint several months ago by a handsome young tourist who had that very same day crossed the border, winding his way along this very same mountain road. The officer who took the deposition acknowledged he was awed by the young mans transparent eyes and porcelain pallid features, which seemed to emanate a shimmering iridescence.

The chief of police was proceeding to his mansion on the seashore with his new acquisition: the crippled and conspicuously pregnant young girl sitting at his side. Maria Dolores asked him to stop the car, wanting to light a candle and offer a prayer to the Virgin. In his habitual, arbitrary manner, he stopped on the highway directly in front of the holy place, avoiding the bother of driving off the road and unto the shoulder. In reverence to the Virgin, he lowered his chin humbly into his chest and piously made the sign of the cross, culminating the ritual with the indispensable kissing of his fingers. Making the sign of the cross had long ago lacked any religious significance for him; it had evolved into a superstitious rite, a learned response to a visual stimulus. The image of a saint or a church provoked a repetition of the magical protective charm.

Maria Dolores used her hands to push her deformed leg toward the door. She was about to exit the vehicle when she noticed the baby girl pressing her small face against the transparent window of the tourist bus. The child smiled at her lavishly. The image was haunting, and immobilized her to her seat, for it was a disturbing reminder of her arrival to this town. She had also stared out the window of a bus, but there was no one for her to favor with a grin, nor any reason to be cheerful.

She paused, disconcerted by the complexion of this pallid child, so similar to that of the young man she had lain with in the field behind the cantina, and whose child was gestating in her womb. Anxiety tightened her chest, a spasm in her abdomen distressing the fetus, for she had yet to determine for the police chief's

benefit a rationale for the birth of his colorless infant.

Although she attempted to avoid it, her eyes locked with those of the baby girl, and she felt obliged to force a reluctant and unquiet smile. It was a lamentable hesitation, for the cheerful baby girl was the last fleeting and impermanent image Maria Dolores registered before the impact.

The scream of crumpling metal was deafening as the bus with the jade green circles, which had also left the mountain town for its return to the city, accelerated violently rounding the downhill curve and consumed the police chief's vehicle.

The foreign tourists who photographed the event insisted their pictures revealed the police chief's car being devoured by the voracious jaws of a giant serpent adorned with precious green jade. The indigenous population had a different interpretation. For them the form adorned with precious jade was none other than Quetzalcoatl, the feathered serpent, the pre Columbian deity born of a virgin, re-creator of the world after the flood, preacher of monotheism, miracle worker, sacrificed and risen to heaven. The Aztec Christ, the precious bearded twin of Cavalry with whom Cortez was confused, facilitating his conquest of an inviolable empire.

For them the photographs made visible, without doubt, the god Quetzalcoatl whom the Aztecs were expecting to return to earth in the figure of a man, in a Parousia reminiscent of the promise of Christianity, to punish the wicked who had offended him with their malevolence.

A pompously imposing monument today marks the location of the police chief's demise, and in the town a street that bears his name elevates him into the lofty ranks of the immortal. A dedication chiseled ornately into the monument's marble propagates for all future generations the myth of his existence, portraying him as an illustrious and honorable servant of the people. The inscription also prevails upon the Almighty to take him into His bosom and for his soul to rest in eternal peace.

A diminutive wooden cross is embedded to one side of the monument with the name of the crippled adolescent girl.

END

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