Crying of a Child

The home of the wealthy Sánchez family was located at number eight Madero Street, a thoroughfare that ran very close to the center of Silao, Guanajuato. Its facade was beautiful; it had a large double-leaf door, and two balconies overlooking the street. Upon crossing the threshold of the door, there was a long hallway from which opened, on the left, a grand living room and, on the right, the large main room. Behind the house there was a huge circular courtyard whose pillars were adorned with planters full of flora.

From the seemingly endless courtyard it was possible access other rooms, some connected to each other, whose doors were composed of wood and glass and covered by fine curtains. At the end of the courtyard were the dining room and an extensive kitchen, a meeting point for the entire family. No guest left that house without having eaten a three-course meal.

The owner of the house was Doña María, an elegant woman with a character as strong as she was stubborn. Eutiquio Sánchez, her husband, had died the previous year.

Doña María lived with her caretaker and favorite son, José Sánchez Ortiz. Doña María had another son, the eldest, and two daughters, all of whom lived near Madero Street, but each with their respective families.

They led mostly quiet, uneventful lives, but one day, peculiar things began to happen to the family members.

On a Sunday morning, in the courtyard of the house at Madero Street, a flock of ravens, blacker than the night, attacked Doña María while she was preparing to attend mass. Frightened, she tried to scare the birds away. Then, the cleaning woman brought out some granular salt and spread it all over the yard, surrounding Doña María.

Not long thereafter, José's son Benito, the little one of the family, began to have repeated nightmares in which he would hear three knocks on his door. In the dreams, the mysterious visitor would call Benito and ask him to open the door. Fear paralyzed the boy and he did not answer, either the first night or any of those that followed.

When he awakened each morning, he would see brown footprints just outside his bedroom door. Someone with muddy bare feet must have been standing right there during the night! After the first occurrence, he told his nanny and she begged him never to open the door. "It's a soul that's looking for an invitation to take you to the afterlife," she told him.

Another night, Doña María also heard knocks on the door of her room. She, with the fearless and determined character that distinguished her, opened the door wide to berate whoever had dared to interrupt her sleep. She didn't find anyone on the other side, but, looking down, she did discover a trail of muddy footprints.

The next day, she asked her son José to search the house to ensure there was no intruder still lurking there. While he was diligently engaged in this task, a devil's butterfly entered one of the rooms and landed in one corner. He tried to shoo it away, but the cleaning women shouted at him to stop, and the butterfly never left. The next morning, another one appeared in the room where José slept.

Sunday, July 14, 1968, became a notable day marking the lives of the Sánchez family and, above all, that of Benito, who was then seven years old. On that day, as on many others, José took Benito to the ranch he owned, so he could teach his son the tasks and responsibilities involved in managing a large parcel of land.

That Sunday, the Sánchez clan welcomed some visitors from the north, a couple of friends of the family. They arrived in a beige Chevrolet Impala automobile. Grandma María, impeccably dressed with silk stockings and new patent leather shoes, invited them to visit the ranch.

Everyone, including Doña María, her son José, little Benito, another even smaller girl who was also a grandchild of Doña María, and the visiting couple, spent most of the day on the ranch.

Returning home, while crossing the Silao River, the car became stuck in the mud. Meanwhile, it had begun to rain and the sky was quickly darkening.

The visiting couple did not hesitate to get out of the car. José quickly took the children out and led them to the riverbank. Focusing on his little son Benito, he admonished the boy not to move from there.

An old man who was riding a donkey happened to pass by the river at that moment. José asked him to go to notify the ranch foreman, and he agreed to do this. They would need a tractor and chains with which to retrieve the stranded car from its resting place in the mud. Then, he quickly returned to the vehicle to beg his mother to climb out.

Doña María refused; she didn't want to get her feet wet because she would catch a cold. José asked her to close the doors and windows to prevent water from entering the vehicle while they waited for the tractor to arrive.

In the distance, the old man, who was on his way to warn the ranch about what had happened to the car, shouted: "Boss, boss! A flash flood is heading towards you!"

Between the lightning and the sound that the earth made under the feet of little Benito, it could not be determined who snorted with anger: the sky, the earth, or the river.

José, now desperate, cried out at his mother to abandon the car, but she still didn't want to leave the seat that she occupied. Seeing that his plea was useless, he stayed as close as he could to the back door of the car.

The current, with a monstrous intensity, dragged trees, boulders, animals; everything it found in its path. It didn't take long to reach the place where the car was marooned.

A large rock shattered the windshield. Immediately, the river, as if transformed into a whirlwind composed of mud more than water, sucked Doña María right out of the car.

The people living nearby, who had left their homes when they saw what had happened, approached with ropes and chains, and with flaming torches to illuminate the riverbank amidst the gathering gloom.

Three times they managed to drag José to the safety of the shore. But, each time, he threw himself back into the water. He had to try to rescue his mother, who uttered chilling cries for help. During his last dive into the torrent, a passing boulder crushed his head, and he perished instantly.

His body was immediately swallowed by the torrent. Doña María, after appearing and sinking again on a couple of occasions, also disappeared. Waves and waves of blackish-gray debris were the only things that could be observed from the riverbank.

The townspeople ceaselessly searched for the corpses all that afternoon and into the night. They found them downstream late in the following day. The body of the elegant Doña María was trapped behind a dam. A flock of ravens surrounded her once again. Her son's corpse also surfaced not far from that place.

After the tragedy happened, many people paraded through the big house on Madero Street to pay their respects to the departed. On the third day of visitation, among that crowd, Benito spied two coffins. Inside the first, he managed to recognize his father José. In the second rested his grandmother, Doña María, although her remains were more swollen due to all the water she had swallowed.

Benito also noticed that some devil butterflies fluttered above the coffins before they moved away from the house. They departed, apparently satisfied that the ominous events they portended had finally come to pass.

Little Benito asked all the guests at the wake to take his father out of that box, to wake him up. No one seemed to hear his request. They finally asked him to leave the room where the coffins were. He still didn't fully understand what had happened.

The only thing that came to his memory was his father's voice telling him to wait for him by the river, and not to move from there. For years thereafter, Benito walked to the riverbank every day, incessantly calling his father's name between his laments and tears.

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