“La Bruja del Barrio Loco”: A Beginning[[1]](#endnote-1)

 Elisa cursed under her breath; she touched her lower lip. It was bleeding a steady stream of heat. She checked her teeth with her tongue and found none were loose. She held back her tears, and let herself be imbued by pure rage. Elisa visualized every detail of how she would tear that bitch apart, starting with her hair and splitting her cunt with the buck knife she stashed in the tire swing. That is if the police hadn’t found it.

 “I’m going to kill that fucking *bruja* with my bare hands!” she said wincing as her lower lip opened more.

 “Still haven’t had enough, puta?” said the husky voice through the slot of her cell door, “There is no bruja! You killed your husband and as soon as they find your son’s body, it’s an injection for you, you murdering bitch. I hope you end up in hell.”

 “Fuck you!” spat Elisa, “You damn lesbian, panocha licker!” Her string of filth was met with a laugh and a, “See you in three days, pendeja. I hope you take some time to repent.”

The slam of the metal flap sent Elisa in a tirade of fuck you’s and shove your God expletives. By the time she got to having the guard shove God into her ears, Elisa was exhausted.

She lay on the cool floor, not caring about the germs or fecal matter she was sure was there.

She thought about her little son Alexander, her perfect little son, with grey eyes and blond hair. He was her exact opposite. She was slim with long black hair and obsidian eyes. She called herself a pensive telenovela stereotype and even had unnaturally pink cheeks. Elisa was seria, serious, always analyzing the world. Her son was chubby with white, white skin, and he laughed all the time. The last time she had seen him, he had run up to her saying, “I poopied Mommy! Yawant it?”

Instead of cheering, she had yelled at him because he had smeared his shit from the bathroom all the way to the kitchen where she was in the middle of making a complex beef roast for her boyfriend Greg and his co-workers. Stressed out at the impression Greg and she were trying to make she had put her whole efforts into a new recipe and had been watching YouTube videos and reading books by Julia Child and others. She had just finished searing it and was going to put it in the oven and start making chiles rellenos, which was a time-consuming dish, when he ran in trailing the disgusting diaper behind him. She wished she could take her anger back because she had yelled at him and made him cry.

That was the last image she remembered of him, his confused, hurt face, then screaming cries. Of course, she regretted her visceral reaction, but never had a chance to soothe him and apologize. Within seconds, the room grew cold and, then, pitch dark. She reached for him out of protective instinct, but all she touched was the diaper and cold mess.

When the sun streamed through the kitchen windows again, he was gone. She had looked for him in the apartment still holding onto the diaper in her left had, but all the doors were locked. For a moment, she had also considered if she had gone crazy, and even inspected the roast. She did so methodically. When she found the empty roast package on the counter, which she had left it there, so she wouldn’t forget the weight of the roast, she looked elsewhere. She even searched in the vents. There was no sign of him anywhere. But so many crazy things had happened in the last few weeks since she encountered that maldita bruja, that this didn’t completely surprise her.

Still, she hoped that la bruja had cleaned him gently. That she was singing him old songs from Mexico to keep him from crying and treated him with love. After all, that vile whore did have a soft side to her. On Sundays, Elisa had seen the old woman giving homeless people leftovers, and food to the strays on the block. Once, the old bitch had taken a nestling and put it back in its nest.

 Then, she would envision the worst. Her son was 23 months old, advanced for his age, and unbaptized.

The weeks following his disappearance, she had researched everything about brujas. After all she was a graduate student and had immersed herself in Medieval and American colonial history at St. Mary’s University in Chicago. She was the best student in her program because she was so OCD about her research. She had read every book and even convinced Dr. Olsen to let her into the archives. One thing was clear, they coveted the fat of unbaptized children, so they could fly. She knew that sounded insane, but that bruja was evil absolute. She wasn’t a harmless lechuza like her grandmother had taught her, like those mythical harmless women Mexicans told tales about that turned into large owls and played mischief on cars. After she read that in book after book and even blogs, she cursed herself over and over for not listening to her mom, “Baptize my grandson, so he can be in the grace of God.”

But, she wanted to get married to her boyfriend first. It was his fault, too, not marrying her when he should have and for not taking her seriously about la bruja. Now, he was gone too.

She laughed and laughed—He wasn’t baptized either.

Neither one of them was really religious. In fact, she had only gone to a Catholic school because the university was newly institutionalized and accredited; it was developing a new graduate program that she could shape. The study of women had been her passion.

Images of blood stopped her. Blood everywhere. On the cliché white IKEA sofa. On her small plasma T.V. There was disgusting pattern on Alex’s books in a crazy swirly design as if she had been mocking her. And Greg’s heart in the middle of the living room wall, dead center. It was held by nothing, and even, now the forensics team couldn’t decipher what kept it there. Someone thought it was super glue, but it wasn’t stuck to the wall. The media started calling her the Cold Heart Killer. Even the guards and prisoners of the precinct wanted to call her that, and she always corrected the morons in her mind, Cold Hearted Killer.

As she detailed more of that awfulness in her mind, she started breathing rapidly and her head was spinning, even though she was lying on the floor. She felt like she was falling, falling, until she hit the ground with a thud.

The smell of citrus groves woke her up, “What?” She saw the stars clearly and heard the haunting tune of cicadas. She knew this place. This was where her father had taken her in Orange, Arizona to go to work, when she was around eight. It was their grove where they would have late night meals when he worked the second shift patrolling the orchard.

“Oh shit!” she cried truly afraid, “I’ve lost my fucking marbles!” She had stolen her son and killed Gregory, and now she was bat shit crazy.

Then she heard *her*, “Ya vez? Ahora si me quieres pedir perdon. Es. Tu. Pi. Da?” La bruja laughed and then howled like a tortured coyote.

“Fuck you!” she cried, “Give me my son back.” La bruja was wearing a gauzy white gown, and her hair was loosed. In the dark, Elisa couldn’t quite see her features. She rushed at her, but the woman vanished, and Elisa hit an orange tree, hard. The thorns scratched her face and arms and a lonely bee that had no business in the night stung her left elbow.

La bruja growled and filled the night, “Oh pues, no spic Spanish? Pendeja, di ‘I’m sorry’ perra. I. Am. Sohrrry. Stupid, say sohrry.” Her thick accent and crappy pronunciation almost made Elisa laugh, but she lunged again. Once more, Elisa hit her face, this time on gritty dirt.

Then, in the distance like a fading echo, she heard Alex, “Mommy? Where are you, Mommy?”

“ALEX!!!!” she screamed with her whole might, “I’M SORRY, BRUJA! BRUJA!!!”

She woke with a start screaming her son’s name. She searched the dark cell, groping at phantasms, but they grove and la bruja were gone. Something was itching in her scalp, and when she ran her fingers through it, there was a twig with an orange blossom. Her elbow also smarted; she felt it, and it was swollen. She thought maybe she had banged it, but she found a painful thorn embedded in it. She dug it out and held it, but then, dropped in the dark. Cursing, she felt for it in the dark, but what did it matter? Who would believe her? She stared at the clinical metal bunk; she refused to rest on it. Instead, she sat on the cold dirty toilet and counted the meager amount of toilet paper. There were five squares left.

She looked at the room and then at the security cameras. There was no way to line up the toilet seat, so she swallowed her pride and germ phobia and sat.

Elisa thought back to that day Alex vanished. After looking for him everywhere and hyper-analyzing the roast, she had walked the entire neighborhood. There was no reason to because in the city where she lived, the front and back gates were always locked. She looked in ridiculous places like inside the tire swing he loved so much, and even the tree where it hung, even though he was too short to climb up. There was no way someone had carried him over the gates so fast. The cameras.

Gregory had installed cameras in the front and back porch a few months back because someone had smashed her car window, probably la bruja, for all she knew. She checked the cameras, and nothing was there.

She called the police calmly, and said her boy had been kidnapped. When she gave her report, the officer was suspicious at her demeanor. By that point, she had gotten rid of the diaper and cleaned up the mess.

“Did you see the woman in your house?” he asked for the third time.

“No, the doors were locked, but it was *her.* Look, I can show you the camera footage.” She looked to his partner for support, but she seemed to be more interested in her i-Phone.

Right then, his partner, a young girl with blonde hair had nudged him. Elisa that was sure that was their signal for, “This one is crazy. Let’s move on.”

They left, and she did the only thing she could think of. She went looking for the bruja at that filthy shop of hers.

Like other shops in her neighborhood, the window boasted of tarot readings and limpias to cleanse people of their ills. But this shop owner was no benevolent healer. Elisa had crossed her over something so minor and petty. She looked in the window. The room was completely empty.

Six weeks before, Elisa had gone to that very shop looking for a love charm or something, a prayer to get Greg to ask her to marry him once and for all. Her best friend Cindy had encouraged her to go in. Cindy was into this stuff and had three tarot decks and so many candles she defied her abuelita’s devotions.

“It’s a new shop,” she had urged with her thick South Side accent, “Come on! We always do what you want.”

Elisa had walked in with an attitude, but the old woman had been convincing.

“Eres de Amado Corazon,” the old woman had said.

In fact, they were both from Amado Corazon, Durango, a small town boasting a population of 513. The woman had guessed that is where she was from, and indeed, Elisa had emigrated with her parents when she was a baby.

That drew her in. The shop had typical saints on one wall, some larger than Alexander, and unidentifiable herbs on the other. There was even some rare copal, a cleansing thing, Cindy had been talking about for ages. Elisa had sat down against her better judgment. For a few minutes, the old woman said nothing. She had tight braids like Elisa’s abuelita, but she was wearing a black Calvin Klein dress. Elisa was sure of it because she had seen it in a woman’s magazine and had admired it. The old woman’s earrings were silver with emeralds. She had dark, nut colored skin, like so many indigenous women selling their wares on the border. Yet, her eyes were not soft or kind. They reminded Elisa of a snake’s eyes.

Elisa had explained what she wanted in English, but the old woman said she needed to ask in Spanish.

“Oh fuck this,” she had told Cindy who knew more Spanish than her.

Cindy had explained with her grating English accent, “Quiero una oración para el amor. Una vela para que su novio le proponga, este, como se dice, get engaged, matri-, matr-i-monyyooo. No, no, no comprometido. Si. Oración para comprometido.”

The old woman held up her hand, “O.K., O.K. I can inglish.”

Elisa giggled at the woman’s accent, which drew a glare, “Yeah Cindy, don’t strain yourself. Look, I understand Spanish just fine. *Entiendo*.” The old woman held up her other arm for Elisa to shut up.

“Este Gregorio,” she had said clucking her tongue.

“What?” she said, “I didn’t—How do you know his name?” She had looked back to Cindy wondering if she was playing a trick on her, but Cindy looked equally surprised.

“Pues, looky, aqui esta bien claro,” she continued, pointing to grooves in her hand and running her dark pinky up Elisa’s ring finger.

“Your Gregorio es una basura, trash. Trash,” she had said decidedly, “No bueno. He es trash.” Elisa remembered now that the old woman had given Cindy a nasty look that made her turn way.

“Let’s go,” said Cindy changing her whole demeanor, “This woman’s a total fake.” She had grabbed Elisa by the arm and nearly dragged her out.

“Oyes, me debes $20 dolares!” the old woman had demanded on their way out.

But Elisa had grown furious at her judgment. Still, she drew a five and threw it on the floor, “That’s all you’re getting from me, you old hag.”

They stormed out, and she had said looking back before slamming the door, “Learn to speak English! Ingles!”

The old woman’s face had completely darkened; it was filled with a grin that was too large for her face. She held something between her fingers on the left hand, and the five dollars Elisa had flung on her right. Elisa couldn’t see what it was, but the old woman held it victoriously, waving it about. The five, she crushed and threw on the ground. Elisa thought it was trick of the eyes, but the bill never hit the floor.

Cindy and Elisa laughed at the incident and went to get $30 manicures, Cindy’s treat.

That very night, the nightmares started.

In her nightmare, Elisa had come home tired, from a seminar. Her mother had been complaining about watching Alexander for so many hours.

When she walked in, the room, no, the whole house was painted red. There were lighter red petals strewn all over the floor with white candles trailing to the bedroom.

She had grown instantly angry. Was Greg serious? There was no way they were having sex with Alex in the house.

Out of the room she heard deep moaning and Greg’s signature and uncreative, “I’m coming,” which always made her want to laugh.

When she walked in Cindy was straddling him like a Texas whore. They were climaxing in unison and that slut’s back arched unnaturally. Her head reached his ankles. Greg was oblivious to her origami talents. Cindy looked straight at her and Alex, and her face froze. He kept on moaning and saying, “It was never this good with El.”

“STOP!” Elisa had screamed. When she woke up, she had involuntarily slapped Greg.

“What the fuck, El?!”

“Oh my gosh!,” she had apologized profusely and ended with an apology blowjob, which they both pretended to enjoy.

She noticed his once athletic body was starting to grow soft; he was even starting to grow a potbelly, no doubt from his new desk job at the factory. He had graduated a few years ahead of her as an accountant, but the market was so bad he settled for a bookkeeping job.

Still, he wouldn’t ask her to marry him. She used too much teeth.

“Hey? Why are you so mad at me?” he had protested stopping abruptly.

Just then she had started choking on a hair and smiled, shaking her head, “I’m not mad,” but he was headed for the shower. She got up at 5a.m. and made him a fabulous lunch. Elisa could not speak English well, but she had learned every cooking trick from trailing after her grandmother’s long skirt. By six, she could make better tortillas than her mother. By eight, her aunts were asking her to help them make mole. She was somewhat a culinary prodigy, and would only need to see or hear a recipe one time to master it, and still she pursued a degree in higher education because she refused to be a stereotypical Mexican woman.

Using leftovers from a previous meal, that day she made him two chiles rellenos burritos because Greg didn’t like corn tortillas and Mexican rice without vegetables because he was more picky that her Alex. Just for fun she had thrown in some chocolate covered strawberries into a Tupperware container. She wrote him a note and ended it with, “I love you.”

The lights began to flicker and she wiped herself trying to only use two squares. Some pee lingered on her right hand and she cursed, “Where am I supposed to wash my hands?” She thought back to the nightmare. Could he be screwing Cindy? She wracked her brain, but thought it highly unlikely. He worked long hours and even though they never had sex anymore, he always seemed to want her. On Friday nights though, Greg would come early, 5p.m. and he would watch Alex, so she could study in the library until 9p.m.

Elisa shook her head. Alex, was unfortunately, be best cock blocker in the world. There was no way. Then there was that one time a few months back when her mother had complained that Greg had picked up Alex two hours late.

Greg had apologized saying he had to have the books ready for a Monday audit. He had explained how he had worked extra hard to generate reports and finish them meticulously so fast. Of course she had believed him, but the nightmares had been unsettling.

In them, sometimes Cindy would be screwing him, and with each repeat nightmare, they got more realistic. Greg and Cindy had been in her house having a glass of wine. They had met somehow at the Costco gas station. Pure coincidence, and she had been distraught. Cindy was often distraught.

Then, she had come over to talk. By the third nightmare rerun, they were naked in her bed, and Greg had pounded one out. Cindy hadn’t enjoyed it. They had both been instantly guilty. On the fourth night, the same thing had happened, except that Cindy changed the sheets to her favorite pink satin sheets.

Elisa sat up with a start, “The fucking pink satin sheets,” she said to no one. Then, she remembered that same night she had come home and the sheets had been changed. Greg’s excuse had been that Alex had an accident. All week, he had been strange, more reclusive and at the same time extra affectionate, which had confused her, and he had explained away with work stress.

*Work is getting harder El-. They’re bringing in new software, and I, I, may be out of a job*, he had said with real worry.

*Awe*, she had empathized hugging him and stroking his back, *I’ll be your sugar momma.* She remembered she had kissed him and tried herding him into the bedroom because Alex was taking nap in one of his signature rug naps in the living room, which could last an hour, but he had refused with some lame excuse.

“That motherfucker!” she cried to no one. The room was colder. There were no sheets or way of getting warm.

Next time she could make a phone call, s[[2]](#endnote-2)he was going to call Cindy and get the truth. She tried to focus all of her anger into Greg, even though she knew he was gone. He had been to busy with work and hadn’t believed the woman was stalking her.

She remembered something else, “Aye, como lloro la Cindy.” Her mother had told her Cindy had cried so much at Greg’s funeral, like *she* had been the wife. Some people actually went up to give her condolences.

A sharp cramp made her gasp, “Vile whore bag! What now?” She folded over remembering the cramps la bruja had given her a few weeks back. They had lasted so long Greg had taken her to the E.R., but the doctors found nothing wrong with her.

She felt a steady stream between her legs. She called toward the guard and tried appealing to the cameras, but no one came to help her.

“What the hell am I supposed to do?” she asked no one. Elisa got up slowly and sat on the toilet. The stain on her clothes wasn’t too bad, but it still sickened her. That precinct had them wear grey clothes instead of the stereotypical orange, but she hadn’t gone before the judge to be sentenced. She stared at the three squares of toilet paper and thought about all toilet paper she had wasted in the past. Greg had actually admonished her because their budget was always tight, and she had reminded him of the vinyl records in the basement that lined up two walls. No one was allowed there.

The toilet seat was getting increasingly uncomfortable. She would have to make a choice, so in the end, she wadded the net underwear that were like hospital underwear into a wad and went to lie down on the cold metal bunker. There was no way she was going to get any sleep.

The previous week she had been complaining when she was in the first holding cell with so many broken women. The smell had been too much for her, and she didn’t feel like talking to anyone. Some of them recognized her from the news, and had called her a baby killer. No one had done anything to her, and she was surprised that some of them completely avoided her. One woman in particular who was still wearing a log of necklaces had one of el ojo, the eye. El ojo was another myth Elisa had scorned. When someone with a strong gaze coveted the property of another or gave someone a *strong* look, the person being stared at would get sick. If not treated, the person could die. The stranger had held up a charm towards Elisa and had moved away as far as possible, which was not an easy feat, given how crowded the processing cell was.

The next day, she was practically swimming in blood. The morning guard was a different one.

“You doing OK in there?” it was an African American woman. She opened the door.

“I need a maxi pad and more toilet paper,” she said. Elisa knew it was too much to ask for a new uniform.

“Sorry,” said the woman, “Can’t help you there. Get as cleaned up as you can. Your attorney is coming early.”

Her heart leapt in her chest. Maybe her father had tapped into his savings account and hired a good lawyer for her. Perhaps her dissertation advisor had started a GoFund to liberate her; after all, she was innocent. Surely, he believed in her.

In a few hours, the sweaty corpulent lawyer, Mr. Stevens, was sifting through the evidence. He had graying plastered hair in an absurd comb over. His suit looked old and over mended. She lost absolute confidence in him when he said flat out, “Plea guilty.”

“What?” she had cried! “Do you want to hear what happened?”

“Your DNA was all over your boyfriend’s crime scene,” he said, “Your son is still missing and presumed dead, though he’s not why you’re here.”

“Of course my DNA was all over there. I found him!” Elisa was flabbergasted.

He rattled off other options, all of which were not acceptable to her.

“Fuck that she said. We’re done here,” she slammed the table which brought the guard to the door, “I don’t fucking need you. I hope my Dad didn’t pay a lot for you, incompetent jerk off.”

“We’re OK, Louise,” he told the guard.

“Your family didn’t hire me,” he said turning back to her, “I’m Cindy’s godfather. And I am telling you to plea guilty, so you don’t get executed. All of these judges are going up for reelection and will want to look tough, but if you admit your guilt, they’ll try to look fair. We’re not big on executions in Illinois.”

“You know what?” she said, “I am not guilty, and if they decide to give me the death penalty, I don’t care. If my son is dead, I want to be with him. Expedite this shit, so I do get the injection or whatever.”

He analyzed her while taking notes, “What about Gregory Holden?”

“What do you mean?”

He swabbed at his eve-sweating forehead, “You don’t want to be with him?”

“He doesn’t believe in God. Besides, that cheating scum bag is probably in hell,” she said not adding that he had probably been sleeping with his lovely goddaughter.

“Did you do it?” he asked, “I need to know. Cindy swears up and down you are innocent and that this bruja is real.”

Elisa sighed and explained the whole story to him. The day he died, she had been looking for the old woman. It was a Friday, and she had lied to Greg saying she was going to try to catch up on her studies. That was a total lie; all she wanted to do was find her boy.

“When I came home, the door was locked. I tried not to step in that mess, but his blood was everywhere. I called the cops right away,” she ended.

Mr. Stevens took a few notes and left.

When they went before the judge, she was still bleeding. Cindy had chosen a nice pink suit for her that her lawyer had brought. Unfortunately, she was still bleeding, and she was sure it was seeping. She blanched.

 “All rise!” said an uncharacteristically short white woman with a loud voice.

The blood running down her leg was irritating her beyond belief. She had never bled that much and part of her wondered if she was having miscarriage. To her surprise, Mr. Stevens was doing a fantastic job of pointing out any lack of evidence.

No murder weapon.

The security footage, which did not show her killing Greg.

“What?” she had asked? The security footage had been a point of contention, but it had emerged somehow. For a fat sweaty man, he knew the law. He was about to get her released and sent home, when the bleeding intensified.

The lights flickered, and she gripped his sweaty meaty palm.

She was coming for him, to give him some heart attack, right as she was about to go home. Even house arrest was preferred. The lights went out and she smelled orange blossoms again.

She whispered, “Alex? Bruja, I’m sorry.”

In the distance, she heard the judge issue a house arrest. The lawyer was right. There was too much circumstantial evidence and the footage showed someone killing Greg, but it was not her. The man had been large, and although parts of the film were blurry, he was far taller and fatter than she was. In fact, the footage showed a small child that was most likely Alexander.

The lights came back on and just then, she fainted.

When she woke up, both of her left leg and right are were handcuffed.

“Is this really necessary,” asked her anguished mother, “Look Mr. Lawyer, she’s waking up!”

“What happened?” Elisa asked and whimpered. The pain in her uterus was intense.

“I’m Dr. Cobarrubias,” he said in a thick accent, “We just did an ultrasound and you have a very large mass. It’s not a pregnancy. We will have to operate right away.”

She signed some papers clumsily and was taken to see the anesthesiologist.

“Aren’t they going to run more tests,” she mumbled, but the pain was getting more intense. The last thing she remembered was her mother praying over her and Mr. Stevens assuring her, “Don’t worry sweetheart. You’re going to be fine.”

With that she fainted again.

She woke up, with Dr. Cobarrubias hovering over her, “Elisa, how are you?”

He explained about the strange mass. He asked a few questions about how she was treated in prison and when the bleeding started. Elisa told him about the altercation she had with the guard and how the brute had hit her on the face with a baton.

“What about any other abuse?” he had asked concerned and looked to the nurse, “Give her another hour. No pain meds. You want her clear headed.”

She was taken to a room, and when she got there Cindy was waiting. Elisa glared at her, and Cindy smiled, “Oh my God! I was so worried.”

She noticed the woman to her right taking notes.

“Who’r’u?” Elisa asked groggily.

“Your lawyer called me. I’m Lieutenant Wang. Can you answer a few questions?”

Elisa told her the same story she told the good doctor and ended with a, “They had no fucking maxi-pads in the precinct.”

“Do you know what caused the bleeding?” Lieutenant Wang asked.

Cindy paled a little more. She was already sickly looking, and Elisa noticed she had lost quite a bit of weight. For Cindy who was already a stick, she was near skeletal.

“Uh, I guess I got my period, a really bad one,” she answered.

“OK,” she said Wang.

When she left, Cindy waited until they were alone, “It was la pinche bruja.” Cindy spoke in a rush, “Elisa, she put a ball of thorns and bees and orange blossoms in your hoo hoo!”

Elisa wanted to laugh because Cindy’s terminology was ever absurd, “My what you, skank?” Despite her anger towards Cindy and her screwing Greg, she laughed at her ridiculous use of women’s anatomy, which made the pain in her uterus worse.

Cindy also giggled, and Elisa stopped, “Did you sleep with him?”

Cindy gasped and wobbled a little. She held onto the bed railing.

Elisa went to grab her arm, but couldn’t sit up “Well? Tell me the truth Cindy! It was that night he came home late wasn’t it?”

Cindy’s mouth puckered, and she turned bright red as she shook her head no.

Elisa knew that look and that shake of the head. The lips were her tell.

“You fucking whorebag! I’m going to end you!” Elisa tried to get up, but snapped back down. The pain was radiating throughout her whole body.

“Mija!” Yelled her father as he entered with a pathetic cup of coffee, “Te vaz ha lastimar.”

“This motherless bitch slept with Greg! How many times?! HOW MANY!!! AND IN MY BED!” Elisa twisted to the right and breathed through the pain.

Her father stared at Cindy who was sobbing wretchedly, “I’m sorry! I didn’t mean it.” Between sobs she tried to explain.

“GET OUT!!!” cried Elisa which made her uterus throb even more and the bleeding begin again.

“Oh Elisa, please!” she cried, “I didn’t mean it!” She choked violently, “She’s after me, Elisa. She’s after me, too—“

Elisa wanted to shove Cindy’s face into the ground and stomp on her head, “I DON’T CARE! GET OUT YOU FUCKING SLUT! IT’S YOUR FAULT THEY’RE GONE!”

Shaking her head, Cindy left.

“Mija,” pleaded her father, “Please. She helped you. Her godfather helped you go into house arrest until the trial. My money, I haven very little. You see?”

“Oh, please! All you care about is money,” she sank back into her pillow and pushed the nurse button, “Pains’ getting worse.”

He said, “You need to calm down.”

“Who is after her,” he asked after she was still..

“La pinche bruja, ‘Apa. I know you all think I’m crazy, but that bitch is the reason Greg is dead, and she has Alex Papa. I know it. I dream about him, and she has him,” she said looking at her dad for a reaction.

He sighed and sank into a chair. “I believe you,” he said quietly.

“What? What did you say?” she asked bewildered.

“My daughter, you have to understand. Well, you have to understand that bad things happen to good people,” he said.

“What? You are offering me a fucking cliché? Greg is dead! That puta Cindy slept with him on my damn bed—“

Her father held up his hand, “I mean, bad things happened to my brother Toño.”

“Here we go,” she said resigned.

“No listen, you don’t know the whole story, but you have to promise not to hate me, my daughter. You are my *only* daughter, and we love you very much.” Just then her mom came in with some broth and 7-Up for her.

“No Oscar!” her mother pleaded, “Don’t tell her.”

He looked at her angrily, “Estas loca?! Que mas le va ha hacer? She can’t hurt her anymore than she has already. Look at our daughter!”

“Yeah mom, Cindy should be in jail. That bitch.”

“No,” said her father, “I don’t mean Cindy. I mean la bruja, Ana.”

“What?” she asked.

Her mother looked terrified, “Don’t mention her name.”

“You see,” continued her father, “Your Uncle Toño fell in love with one of them. They sad the family was from Europe, from a family of witches. Mija, they were all weird and strange things happened around them. Cows would die. Babies would get sick. I thought it was superstitious nonsense, but I believe it now. He fell in love with the most beautiful girl with blonde hair and grey eyes like Alex, and they went against the old woman’s wishes, Ana’s wishes. They ran off to the capital. But that romance lasted five days. On the fifth day, a horse stomped your uncles’ head in and almost killed his new bride, too. It would have if these soldiers hadn’t shot it. They had to shoot it thirteen times.”

“She did it!” said her mother, “She made the horse go crazy.” Her mother crossed herself clumsily spilling some of the broth.

“Ten months later,” he said pausing, “A baby girl was born. We couldn’t have kids, so you see.”

“What?” she asked dreading what he was about to say, “We couldn’t have babies you see. We tried and tried, and she came desperate. She said she wanted a better life for you.”

“Who? What?” A loud buzzing filled the room, and Elisa’s uterus began to ache again.

 Her mother started screaming and her father threw himself over Elisa. Suddenly, it stopped.

“Ya vez Viejo!” screamed her mother, “It’s her. She wants her back.” She cried uncontrollably, and a nurse made them leave.

“No wait,” she cried, “I need to know.”

Just then, the nurse went to get more support. Before she could protest, Elisa was removed from the room to get another ultrasound. She was whisked away into surgery.

When she woke the doctor was there once again. He checked her vitals and left. She slept for almost two days straight, not even aware of the nurses prodding and poking. On the third day, she was able to sit up, despite the dull pain.

“Well,” Dr. Cobarrubias, said with enthusiasm, “You will most likely have children again. You’re still so young.”

Elisa chuckled dryly, “You know I’m accused of murder? My son is missing.”

“No,” said the doctor, “I overheard your lawyer. The footage was on social media. It’s genuine. That is not you killing him. And the little boy, your little boy, is alive. We just need to find the man or man-creature.”

“What do you mean?” she asked.

Dr. Cobarrubias pulled out an i-Pad, and she watched with fascination as Greg was launched by a force into the living room. Then a man with horns appeared. He was unnaturally tall with long white hair. The horns were protruding from its forehead. It stared right at the security camera with those same black eyes.

“Holy fuck,” she said, “It’s her.”

“Who?” he asked, “You know this person? It’s obviously not a woman.”

But she had the same earrings. She was just enlarged, a grotesque She-goat with as stretched snout. The doctor saved her from watching the horrible parts and refused to budge. But he let her watch the end. There was Alexander. He had used the blood as paint, and he created a party of swirls over his books and grabbed his favorite, *Mommy Night Night*. He was laughing and so was the She-goat, Ana, or at least she thinks Ana was laughing. Her body shook in a grotesque spasm.

“That’s one hell of a mask, but see,” said the doctor pointing out the obvious. La bruja took him gently in her arms and kissed him on the forehead. Alex kissed her right back, just like he used to kiss his mommy, right on the chin.

Elisa wanted to vomit and cry at the same time, and she did vomit all over the side of the bed.

“I’m sorry,” he said setting the i-Pad aside, “You rest now.” He fiddled with her IV and called in housekeeping to clean up. Before long she was asleep.

When she woke up, she was in the orchard again. It was a sultry night with moths and random queen ants flying everywhere. Ana was sitting there with him on the dirt. There was a circle of dead animals all around them, and it sickened her to see her son holding what looked like a dead gopher.

“Mommy, lookey what I got!” he cried wanting to run to her, but she held him back with an invisible force, “Please Gamana. Please. I wanna show Mommy.”

Elisa’s heart broke over and over, “I said I was sorry bruja.”

The old woman snorted, “Pues, is a start.” She said. The old woman grinned and horns began to poke on her forehead, and her mouth began to extend itself.

“What more do you want?!” Elisa woke up with a start. She sat up, and she lay down just as fast.

At the foot of her bed was Cindy looking a sick green. Elisa hissed, “What the fuck are you doing here? Again?”

Cindy pleaded, “Elisa, please. I am so sorry, but I can’t take it anymore.” She looked around and eyed the window.

“Oh poor you,” said Elisa.

“No, no. I deserve what I get for Greg, for sleeping with him, for taking you to that fucking shop, but it’s not about me,” she took off her long shirt and showed Elisa her arms. They were gouged by claws. Cindy lifted her shirt and saw the wounds there.

“It doesn’t want me, though,” she said shaking, “Elisa, please. It’s not about me.”

Elisa was never going to forgive Cindy, but something in her voice softened her. Plus, she really needed to talk to someone, and Elisa only had one good friend. Besides, even though her parents believed her, they had betrayed her. They had *lied* to her for years.

“I saw it,” Elisa said choking up, “La Bruja showed me the whole thing right up to you changing the sheets. . . .”

Cindy cried again, “Oh, you’re going to be so mad at me. Please, I know. I’m a worthless fucker.” She started crying again, and blurted out, “I’m pregnant.”

Elisa stared at her and wouldn’t quite register what was said.

Cindy went on, “I found out pretty early on, and he wanted me to get an abortion, which I was going to. I was like a few weeks, but then, she killed him, but El. She marked me and the baby. I have to convince you to go with her, or you’re never gong to see Alex again, and I’m going to lose my baby.”

“The baby you didn’t want?” asked Elisa flabbergasted.

“It’s not the baby. It’s what she’ll *do* to it. I know stuff. You know what they do to babies. She won’t let me abort it. I tried like five times,” said Cindy. Just then a fresh gash appeared on her cheek as if to punish her for uttering the word. Cindy whimpered and started crying again.

For a moment, Elisa wanted to reach out to her.

“I’m not going with her,” said Elisa.

Cindy paused, “Of course not. We’re taking this bitch down and getting your boy back.” She smiled, and Elisa smiled back. Cindy neared, which made Elisa cringe. She went in for an unwanted hug and handed Elisa a secrete paper like she used to hand notes to her in high school. Before she disengaged, she whispered in her ear, “She can hear what you say. She is everywhere, but if you write in the dark, she can’t see that so well,” and pecked her on the cheek.

Elisa stiffened, but hid the paper under her right buttock.

She waited until it was dark to read the contents. She was not well enough to do so, but she went into the shower slowly, dragging the IV along. Once she almost dropped the paper, and other time a nurse saw her outside the door, but said nothing. It seemed to take forever when she got to the shower. When she tried walking over lip of the shower pain made her double over. She thought about her little Alex and made her heavy legs go over the border. She went to the far corner, holding her right arm extended to not tip over the IV. Running the water at a low stream, she used her body as a tent and opened the note and read it.

As ever, it was cowgirl plan put together by crazy Cindy. Her plans often read like Scooby Doo plans, and something would go wrong. It involved the help of good curanderas. The last part of the note, of course, relied heavily on Elisa’s part, Elisa who was recently operated on, twice.

She tore up the note and considered eating it, but tore it up into small pieces and threw it in the toilet.

She gave herself a warm spit bath, careful not to get her wound wet. Elisa wanted to wash her hair, but couldn’t maneuver. Still, the hot water was glorious. After being locked up in the precinct cell, she was happy to wash at least some parts of herself.

Cindy came back the next day with a huge box of chocolates, but Elisa wasn’t ready to forgive her.

“Leave them there,” she said pointing to a distant chair, “I’m not hungry.”

“You have to eat. You need your strengths,” said Cindy paling a little and then ran to the bathroom.

The loud retching made Elisa smile for the first time. She remembered what a terrible time she had with Alex and how many times Cindy had driven her to the hospital due to dehydration when Greg was busy at work. He usually came rushing hours later with different apologies for having to work so late.

Something in Elisa cracked, and she started crying for Greg. She had let the hatred of their cheating mask any sorrow she had over his loss. Even her mother had commented that Elisa hadn’t shed a single tear, and now, it sunk in. She would never see him again.

Cindy came out to offer her support, “Oh El!” They held hands like two sorority girls consoling each other over their broken hearts.

Elisa removed her hand, “So, you remember Stacy and Rita?”

That was their call signal from before. If they ever wanted to ditch, they talked about Stacy and Rita inviting them to a gathering at a certain day and hour.

“Can you go to their party?” asked Cindy.

“By this weekend, I should be able to walk. I think they are sending me home under house arrest, which makes no sense,” she paused, “Did you see the footage?”

“Yeah,” she said starting to cry again, “Godfather is doing his best to appeal to the judge. I don’t understand this court system. I think it’s an election year. I started a Go Fund Me account for your legal defense and an online petition to the governor, that conservative asshole.” She smiled triumphantly.

Elisa smiled again, “Huh, look at you getting all political and techie. I am walking around the floor today, until they have to pick my ass up and put me in a wheel chair. It’s like having a C-section. It hurts like a motherfucker after while, but it’s really important to see Stacy and Rita.”

“Ladies,” said the charming doctor, “You aren’t going anywhere. You need to rest.”

He went in and inspected her stitches, “You’re overdoing it. No more getting up without support. You have to get a nurse to help you. That incompetent nurse told me; she should have made you go to bed.”

Elisa really looked at him for the first time. He was handsome in his own way with brown curly hair and honey colored eyes. He was a little pudgy, but his height helped mask some of it. He was light-skinned like her. But, he had a glorious smile. Right now, he was giving her his serious doctor face.

*You’re an unconscionable asshole* *Elisa,* she judged herself, *Greg has only been dead a few weeks.*

She smiled at him weakly, “Sure doc.”

“Besides,” he said, “You may need to stay here as long as possible.”

“Why?” Cindy and Elisa asked at the same time.

“It looks like they are going to send you back to prison,” he answered.

“What?!” she exclaimed, “I thought they were putting me under house arrest. Fuck!”

“There are too many strange things with this case,” but he didn’t elaborate more because he was paged.

“Fuck it,” Elisa said and beckoned Cindy over. She got close enough, so Elisa could near her ear, “Stacy is going to see me tomorrow night. You get your girls ready. Visiting hours are over at 8p.m.”

Cindy’s lower lip quivered a little, “O.K. Narc up.” Cindy wanted to say more, but Elisa wasn’t going to give her absolution. Yet.

The rest of the day, Elisa complained about the pain in her uterus so much, the nurse brought her morphine and more pills. Elisa would pretend to take the pills and stash them. There was no point in being in pain during their heist. She had serious doubts the plan was going to work, but if she was terrified of what the She-Goat was doing to her son. Their affection still made her nauseous, and the way he called her, “Gama,” awful.

Elisa needed her own back-up plan. She thought about all of her research. Witch burnings had infuriated her when she studied them because angry men who were threatened by healers killed so many innocent women. Elisa had argued that it was genocide in her midterm essay and had gotten a low B. It never once occurred to her that there could be real witches. She thought back to every trial she studied, and all she could think about was water and fire. Had a real witch ever been trapped and burned? Ana would certainly not be easy to trick or entrap. She fell asleep doing intense memory work and wished she had her laptop and some decent WiFi.

The next morning, two women came to visit her.

Before she could say anything, one of them, put her finger to her mouth. Elisa watched fascinated as the older woman with the longest hair she had ever seen hobbled to the window and placed objects there. The other woman was mentally handicapped, at least her facial features indicated so and her body was stocky and short, but there was an intense sparkle in her eyes. She smiled ever so sweetly and went to Elisa and without permission took off her blanket and started rubbing an ointment over her wounds. Elisa tried to protest, but the girl was persistent. She then put a red necklace with a stone around Elisa’s neck. The symbol on it twinged a distant memory, but she wasn’t sure from what book or what slide.

The older woman nodded at her companion.

“My name is Flor,” the mongoloid woman said sweetly. Elisa immediately kicked herself for using a non-PC word, but tried to analyze if she was autistic, “That is Luz, my aunt. Cindy is my friend. Now, I’m your friend.” Flor hugged her awkwardly.

“Oh,” said Elisa getting a horrendous sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach. *This was the cavalry.*

 “Mmmm,” said Flor playfully, “You have the gift.”

 Elisa asked, “What?”

 “But,” said Flor frowning ending the hug, “You are angry. Angry, angry, angry.” Flor shook her finger in what Elisa assumed was a stern imitation of her mother.

 Luz chimed in, “You must not let anger defeat you. It’s what *she* wants.”

 She looked at Flor, “We have ten minutes.”

 Flor said, “She is strong and sees all. But we are good.”

 Elisa smiled. She liked Flor instantly and her companion Luz was focused. Elisa liked focus.

 “Put this on every hour,” said Luz giving her the jar, “And never take off that charm. There are few like it so have a care, girl.”

 Before leaving, Flor took a few strands of her hair.

 “Ouch!” said Elisa, rubbing the spot on the left side of her temple.

 Flor seemed to go into a trance and for a while her face seemed to grow more intelligent, “You will have to make a choice,” she said in a different voice that sound like a smokers’ voice, masking the sweet tones of her earlier speech, “Do not make it without love.” Flor returned and gave another awkward hug. She seemed oblivious to the transformation and walked away humming a cheerful tune.

 Elisa looked at Luz for an answer, but Luz left, unphased, with Flor trailing after her.

 She hid the ointment behind her pillow just as Dr. Cobarrubias came in with a stranger. His stiff walk and heavily starched shirt had detective written all over him. The good doctor looked tense.

 “This is Detective Anderson,” said Dr. Cobarrubias.

 She was waiting for him to question her again, but instead he only observed. Dr. Cobarrubias stepped toward looked at her face intently and winked.

 She wasn’t sure what to do, but when he pressed on her abdomen she whimpered and added a dramatic, “That hurts, real bad!”

 “I have to draw the curtain,” he told the officer and kept on inspecting her. When he assessed other parts of her, she did cry in earnest pain, and she began to bleed again. “I’m sorry, sorry. I’m done.”

 Dr. Cobarrubias opened the curtain and said, “Five days and that’s if she doesn’t get an infection.” As they were leaving, he gave her smile. That check-up had raised her pain levels once more, and she took a couple of pills from her growing pillow stash. It was 2p.m., and she would wake up by the evening. She rubbed the ointment on her wound one last time, and that helped dull the pain a bit, but the stream of blood flowed more.

When she woke up it was 7a.m., a new nurse was checking her.

“Hi, “ she said, “Looks like we have to get more tests. You’re flowing quite heavily.”

Elisa sat up and saw she was sitting in a mess of blood. She grew suddenly dizzy. As she sat up her ointment rolled from under the pillow and onto the floor.

“O.K.” said the nurse, “Lie back down.”

“I feel fine,” Elisa tried to lie.

The nurse gave her a quizzical look and had her transferred to another bed. The blood streaming down her legs smelled faintly of oranges.

“That fucking bitch,” she muttered.

The orderly asked, “What dear?” Suddenly he stopped, “Oh my.” He pushed her into the ultrasound room.

“What the fuck?” asked a cranky ultrasound tech. Elisa wanted to smile because her auburn hair was in disarray. She looked like she just gotten a nooner with her glasses askew.

Elisa snorted and then started crying, “Oh my God! I am so embarrassed.”

The tech grew queasy and had to step out.

“Amateur,” said the orderly playfully as the tech left the room in a rush. He gave Elisa a new robe and disposable meshy underwear, “I’m going to get a mop.”

Elisa looked down. She had trailed in so much blood, Elisa wondered where it came from. She tried taking her robe off, but nearly passed out. A sharp ringing in her ears made her sit awkwardly in a chair, “No, no, no *pendeja!* This is your chance.”

She willed herself to change and saw a sweatshirt on a desk. She peaked out the door, gripping the wall for support. No one was around. As fast as she could, she grabbed the sweatshirt and put it on. She grabbed another robe and tried to make a huge maxi pad. It was ridiculous, but it was now or never.

There were cameras here and there but before anyone could stop her, she made it to a stairwell. Luckily she only had to struggle down two flights of stairs, but each step was a herculean effort. By the time she reached the bottom floor, she couldn’t move without the wall.

“Fuck,” she said realizing she had no cell phone and worse, no pain pills, “Mother fuck!”

She stepped into the hallway. A janitor was rushing somewhere, probably to the second floor. In the distance, she saw the front entrance, and she hobbled out. Unsure of what time it was, she kept walking when she heard a familiar voice.

“El,” said Cindy, “What are you doing?”

Elisa crumpled into her arms, “Help me.” Cindy have pulled and dragged her to her car. Cindy looked around, but no one was looking for her. They were scot free, but just then, Dr. Cobarrubias came out with a security guard.

“Hey! Stop!”

“That pudgy fucker can run,” said Cindy pushing her legs into the car.

Elisa screamed, “Ouch, you whore-bag!!!”

Cindy ran around to the driver seat and fumbled for her keys. The doctor and the guard were just a hard away, and she dropped her keys.

Elisa locked the door. He tapped on the glass, “You need medical attention!”

After so much, Elisa started laughing; she lowered the window a crack still laughing, “I have to find my son. Nothing else matters.”

He looked at her and stopped banging the glass. The guard stood there impotently with a tazer in his right hand.

The doctor wrote something on a piece of paper and slipped it through the crack, as Cindy finally got the car started and raced away.

 “What is it?” asked Cindy.

 “His number she answered,” laughing again, “Oh that fucking hurts!”

 Cindy gave her an appreciative look, “You slut.”

Elisa laughed harder, but the sensation of being stabbed halted her.

Cindy blanched, “Jesus Cindy,” and pointed to the growing pool of blood.

“I’m not doing so good Cindy,” she whispered, “Let’s go see your girls.”

The girls were a tiangis, a replica of a Mexican market. Elisa hobbled bringing attention to herself. A little girl pointed to the streak of blood.

“I can’t take much more,” she told Cindy. A security guard took one look at them.

“She having a miscarriage?” he asked.

Elisa noticed the eye necklace to ward off the Evil Eye and so did Cindy.

“We’re seeing Flor. No one’s been able to fix her,” said Cindy.

He understood and nodded his head, “Hold on.” Within minutes, he brought a wheel chair and what seemed to be a gym towel. He put the towel on the chair and helped her into the seat. Elisa whimpered.

“Don’t worry miss,” he said, “Flor is a saint. A true saint. It’s her suffering that makes her legit.”

Elisa was in too much pain to ask what he meant because within minutes he was rushing her through the *tiangis.* Her stall was at the end of the market. It was a stall with a make shift room out of plastic sheet for privacy.

Flor looked at Elisa and smiled. She gave the guard a huge hug and a peck on the check, “I will light two candles for you, Rigo.”

“Awe,” he said, “Just one. That’s why you’re so broke.”

Flor chucked and punched him on the arm playfully. He punched her back and left back to his post, “Gonna get someone to clean this up.”

Flor looked down and grew startled, “Luz! Emergency Luz!” The other stall vendors tried not to stare, except for the one selling cowboy boots. He held the paper with Elisa’s picture on the front page. “Guilty? Crazy?” Elisa thought it was an odd headline and wanted to read the article, but the pain in her uterus was so intense, she thought she was giving birth.

Luz and Cindy took her into the plastic room. It took a while before they placed her on the masseuse bed. There was something poking her left buttock, and it wasn’t as stable as she would have liked.

Without asking, Luz commanded Cindy, “You stand there and help us pray.”

Cindy tried to follow the chant with her broken accent.

First, the bleeding subsided and Elisa felt a pop in her uterus.

Elisa sighed, “That is much better.”

“You’ve lost too much blood,” Said Luz, “We can’t go forward now.”

“No,” said Elisa, “We have to do this before it’s too late. She is possessing him or something. I can feel it.”

Flor looked at Cindy’s frail body, “She is stronger because of her.” Flor pointed at Cindy. Flor grabbed a rope made of cornhusks and tied it around Cindy’s body.

Cindy was disturbed, but knew better than to complain. Flor went around her three times chanting in a tongue neither one recognized.

“Tear it,” said Flor in that same strange throaty voice Elisa recognized.

She tried to tear that rope for a few minutes, and she huffed, “I can’t. It’s too strong.” Elisa stared fascinated, “Cindy, that rope is just dry palm.”

“Yeah, but it feels like wire,” she said.

“TEAR. IT!’ Commanded the Not-Flor voice. Cindy struggled and managed to make a small tear, but not quite all the way through. Flor then looked at Elisa, which terrified her. “You have to forgive her,” said the voice.

Elisa gave a begrudging look to Cindy. She thought long and hard. She thought about Greg and the life they once shared. She thought about the day her son was born and with that said, “I forgive you.”

Snap. The rope crumbled to the ground.

“She may come for you again,” said the voice to Cindy, “But you must be stronger. Guilt has no place in this war.” Flor returned almost instantly, “Good.” She punched Cindy on the arm. And added, “It’s a girl. You will be best friends.”

Cindy was taken aback because even though she had failed five times, she still wanted to have an abortion.

As if reading her mind, Flor shook her head, “Not your decision to make. We need her.”

Elisa looked at Luz.

“What?” asked the old woman, “You thought this fight was just about you?”

Elisa waited patiently, as Luz continued, “We have been fighting them, since their ships arrived.”

“What ships?” asked Cindy.

“La Nina, La Pinta, and La Santa Maria,” answered Elisa.

“Yes,” responded Flor, “We’re the good guys.” She laughed cheerfully and began to gather materials.

Luz worked on Elisa some more and got some large Kotex from somewhere. Without asking, she shoved a twig into Elisa’s mouth, “Chew.”

“Geez,” said Elisa but failed to complain after Luz glared at her. She chewed obediently. Her legs grew more steady. Luz gave her a pouch, “No more that two a day or else your boy will be motherless.”

Cindy left and came back with slut jeans and a red top. She also bought a pair of boots from the man with the newspaper. After giving him her last $50 he agreed not to call the cops. Cindy suspected no one wanted to cross Flor and Luz, but she hoped he was a man of his word. Just to seal the deal, the man had thrown in a free pair of bulky boot socks and had given Cindy his number, “Here guerita. Call me any time.” Cindy had batted her eyelashes and swished her tail as she walked back to Elisa.

“Bastard,” chimed in Flor, “is a bad word Tia.”

Elisa laughed at the story and Luz added, “That bastard is married.” Elisa was surprised the pain was so dulled.

“I’m ready,” she said definitively. Flor nodded in agreement. The two readied themselves and were set to go. Elisa couldn’t cast them as Scooby Doo, but didn’t want anyone to be the dog. She definitely felt like a Velma and Cindy was most-likely Daphne. Flor was Fred, the fun side of Fred, and Luz was an awkward Fred.

Off they went and all packed into Cindy’s car.

 Elisa felt a twinge of pain as she boarded the car again. Flor patted her arm, “Soon,” and smiled a wide goofy smile, “Remember, don’t be so mad.”

 Despite the growing needles in her uterus, Elisa smiled.

“Mother fucker!” cried Cindy, as a tortilla truck cut her off.

Luz began a rhythmic song and Flor accompanied.

“What’s going on?’ asked Elisa. A soft rain began to patter and Cindy gasped. It was tons of small eggs falling from the sky.

“What the fuck?” asked Cindy. Suddenly, the early evening grew darker.

Elisa looked out the window half-expecting birds to start flying. As on cue, something smashed the windshield making a webbed crack in the upper right. It was an animal Elisa had never seen before, a rodent with large ears. She thought she recognized it from a nature show she had watched with Alex. Another one splatted onto the roof of the car making them all scream.

“She knows we are coming,” said Luz.

“So much for the element of surprise,” said Elisa grimacing as a cramp radiated heat through her body. Flor held her hand, and her face transformed into the other woman. Elisa was still not used to that shift, and she yelped as the non-Flor howled in pain.

“She’s having a seizure,” cried Elisa.

Flor’s body shook so hard the car rocked. Elisa almost threw up as cockroaches emerged out of every opening in Flor’s body. They crawled all over the car, all the while Luz continued her rhythmic chant, and she stopped.

Cindy squealed as one dropped on her nose nearly making her crash again.

“Watch out Cindy!” said Elisa, and they swerved to miss a homeless man in a wheel chair.

“It’s too dark and these fucking roaches! Open the window and get them out!” she yelled.

Elisa soothed Flor, “Luz, she’s passed out.” Luz said nothing but continued her ancient tongue.

Flor’s eyes shot open, “What tickles?” she asked as a roach ran up her arm. “Oh,” Flor smiled and talked to the creatures who obediently ran out the open windows.

“Are you OK?” asked Elisa.

Flor shook her head and began to chant along with Luz. It was so dark they could barely see the other headlights.

“She’s going to kill us,” said Cindy holding back a sob.

A light began to emerge from the car. Elisa looked at Flor and gasped. There were two women sitting there. One was Flor. The other was an old crone with long hair like Luz. They overlapped each other like the refrigerator magnets she would buy Alex. The woman turned to look at Elisa while Flor stared forward; the woman smiled a warm smile.

The light grew illuminating the, car and it reached out into the world. It was the most beautiful thing Elisa had ever seen short of her newborn baby. Her stomach did a flip of excitement, and for the first time in years, she felt a true sense of peace.

Cindy was still cursing about the lack of visibility.

“Are you seeing this?” asked Elisa as the light grew, shining a path on the road, “My God, this is amazing!”

“I can’t see shit,” and just then the stars and moonlight appeared, jus tin time for Cindy to swerve once again exciting a cacophony of angry honking.

Elisa looked at Flor, but the light had dimmed, and the woman was gone, “You didn’t see that?”

Cindy looked back at Elisa through the mirror, “See what? That weird assed darkness? My life flashing before my ey—Learn to drive mother fucker!” She honked the pathetic horn on her small car that meeped.

“Ah,” said Luz irritably, “Keep driving, guera. Just keep driving.”

Elisa looked at her backseat companion. She was somehow diminished. She seemed to be asleep, breathing heavily, “Are you OK?”

Shaking her shoulder gently, Flor opened her eyes and smiled a large infectious smile, “Yep,” and without asking Flor, rubbed more ointment on Elisa’s abdomen, which was awkward with the seat belt. Elisa noted that her hand was shaking like the gentle flutter of a fledgling, and she swore Flor had new patches of gray hair.

“Go back to sleep,” commanded Luz giving Elisa a stern look, “We have a little bit of time.”

Elisa was amazed an how easily Flor knocked out, snoring loudly.

“Is she O.K.,” whispered Elisa to Luz.

Luz looked back at Elisa and said, “Keep rubbing the ointment. We don’t want you passing out.”

Cindy said, “She knows we’re coming. What’s the point?”

Luz snorted, “Of course she knows. She’s not stupid. We fight like hell, is what we do. Besides, she only knows you two are coming or did, until this pendja lit the way.”

“What?” asks Cindy.

“Never mind. You just get us there in one piece, blondie,” and added sarcastically, “You drive as good as my Jose used to, may he rest in peace.”

 Cindy hated being called out for being blond. Hated blonde jokes and was about to snap back, when Elisa said, “Hey Cindy, how many blondes does it take to change a tire?”

“Oh man, is this one of yours?” Cindy chuckled, “How many?”

“11. Ten to hold the car up, while the other one waves some idiot down to change it,” Elisa laughed again like she hadn’t in a long time.

Even Luz joined in, “Shut up hyenas, you’ll wake up Flor.”

“That one was actually pretty good.”

The rest of the trip they were quiet, and Elisa had time to think over the plan. She would have had more confidence if there were ten of them, but there weren’t, and now, Flor seemed to be struggling with her breathing. She closed her eyes and did something she hadn’t done since she was a little girl, she prayed to the Virgen Maria.

“Whatever you’re doing,” said Luz, “Keep doing it.”

Elisa prayed in earnest asking for help, then thinking better of it, and apologizing for all the wrong she had done. It was a jumbled prayer, but it was heartfelt, and Elisa didn’t feel alone anymore.

When she opened her eyes, Flor was holding her hand and handing her a Kleenex.

“You’re a good person,” Flor said sagely, “Everything else is lies.”

Elisa was startled, “Did you read my mind?”

Flor smiled and looked out the window, without answering.

They arrived to la bruja’s old shop.

“What if she has her coven?” asked Cindy in a panicked voice.

Luz pulled out a huge revolver from her bag, and smiled.

“Holy shit!’ said Cindy.

Flor looked at Elisa, took off her seatbelt, and gave her a powerful hug.

“Whatever you see in there,” said Luz, “Don’t stop doing what we told you to do.”

Elisa’s heart was in her throat and even though she really wanted to see Alex, her legs were lead. She willed her body forward, but nothing happened. She hadn’t been this terrified since she said yes at the altar. She thought about him, and that’s what it took to get her out of the car.

 She turned to Cindy before she walked into danger and said, “I forgive you. You take good care of that little bean.”

Cindy choked a cry, and said, “Don’t be stupid. You’re going to be the godmother, you dolt.”

“Whatever, slut,” she said, “I love you. I’m sorry things got so fucked up between us.”

Cindy cried in earnest this time, but before she could answer, Elisa walked away. On her way into the shop, Elisa thought about all the things she would do, when she found her little boy. She put her hand the door handle and asked the Virgen for help one more time. She pulled, but the door, and it was locked.

A voice startled her, “Esta cerrado.” It was typical drunk. He approached her, and she tensed up instantly.

“Uy,” he said, “Ni que estuvieras tan buena.”

Yeah, she thought, she wasn’t so hot anymore. We walked away, making a stop before Cindy, but she shook her head, “No.”

Elisa tried the door one more time, and nothing.

“Fuck,” she muttered, “So much for that.” She looked around on the sidewalk. A few yards away was a large enough rock. She took a deep breath and looked around. Except for the drunk, no one was around. Not even Chicago PD. She walked to the rock, and as she was reaching for a it, a black mass dropped right next to it.

Elisa shrieked like a little girl. It was the ugliest, largest crow she had ever seen. I cawed at her and was about to peck at her hand when a shot rang so loudly Elisa yelled. Luz blew its head clean off.

“Holy fuck!” she grabbed the rock and went for the door, “It’s serious! It’s serious, she kept saying.”

Elisa grabbed the rock and with sheer adrenaline smashed the glass. It cracked, “Fuck!” She smashed one more time and got made a large enough hole. She unlashed the lock and stepped in.

The store was empty. There were some scattered papers on the floor and a disgusting roach making its rounds. Defeated, Elisa wanted to cry, but then she remembered what Luz had told her, “You do what we came to do. Don’t let that bitch fool you. There is a doorway there.”

Elisa reached into her backpack which seemed to weigh a ton. The exertion was making her incisions hurt, and the pain in her uterus was slowly creeping back. She pulled out five candles and set them equidistant apart. In a Tupperware bowl was a strange blue and glittery dust. The glitter was Flor having fun, despite Luz’s seriousness when they ground the concoction in a metate. She sprinkled the dust onto the floor, and Elisa was astounded that she made a perfect circle.

“Fuck,” she said, “Maybe it’s in my blood after all.” She lit the candles slowly and looked around one more time. She had written the words on a paper bag, and they were difficult to read even with the candles. Sitting in the middle of the circle she squinted and began to recite.

“Puta!” said a familiar voice from nowhere, “Tu Español es caca!”

Elisa wanted to run, but she held fast. She chanted even louder, and the candles grew brighter. Suddenly, she was at the edge of the circle.

“I am going to tear your heart out!” said La Bruja.

Almost stopping, Elisa looked away. *That fucking bitch! I knew it.* La Bruja not only spoke English, she spoke it perfectly with a slight cockney accent. The floorboards began to groan, and she was pitched into an eternal darkness. She slammed into the ground one more time.

 She was winded, but got up faster than she thought possible. For a moment, she took in the beauty of the stars and the deep scent of orange blossoms. She loved that smell and remembered how wonderful her child hood had been with her dad, but a sharp kick to her uterus brought her back to reality.

Elisa reached for the bag that had fallen a few inches from her, but La Bruja stepped on her had hard with a hoof.

“You bitch,” she said, and struck at the old woman. Elisa cried. She was made of steel or was protected by an amazing force. Elisa held her hand whimpering. She was sure she had broken it.

“No Gama!” said her little son, “Please, Gama!”

La Bruja paused and smiled at the little boy, “Oh, sweetie. Don’t worry. I’m not going to hurt her.”

She stared at Elisa with those strange black eyes, “I’m not going to hurt you, if you behave.”

Elisa reached into her back pocket and pulled out a white paper napkin and flung the contents at the witch’s face.

She howled an unnatural howl that neither she nor Alex would ever forget. The witch scratched at her eyes and attacked aimlessly with an invisible force. One forceful blow hit Elisa right on the ribs. She heard an unnatural crack, but she kept going for the bag. She pulled out something and threw it at La Bruja. It was a bird’s next made out of wire. When it struck the witch’s feet, it unwound and bound her. The old woman bled and looked pathetic, but Elisa wasn’t fooled.

“Now what? You stupid whore,” said La Bruja, but it sound funny because she was speaking with a wire slanted across her mouth.

Elisa ran for her son and put ropes around his wrists and legs. She almost started crying when she saw how emaciated and dirty he was.

La Bruja bellowed, “LET GO OF HIM!” The old woman started chanting, and eerie howls began from every direction. She knew that sound and had loved it as a child, but when they started coming out of the grove, Elisa grabbed her son and ran.

“Hurry Flor!” she cried. They came at her, and she knew she was dead. One of them bit her leg, but she kicked it away. Another one nipped at Alex and just then witch said one word, and they stopped.

“What’s the point of running, you stupid cunt!?” she said calmly, “Wherever you go, I will find you.”

“What the fuck do you want?” she screamed, “What’s your price?”

 La Bruja chuckled, “You think this is about you? You stupid idiot. I don’t want a mongrel in the family. I want the boy. His blood is strong.” She paused for suspense, “I want his blood. For what, is none of your business.”

 Elisa screamed every obscenity she could think of, and just as quickly, La Bruja commanded the coyotes again. The inched slowly, their bodies shaking in anticipation. Elisa knew La Bruja was fucking with her one last time.

 Elisa looked at her son and kissed his face all over, “I love you, my son. I tried so hard to find you.”

 He smiled at her and held her tight, “Bad doggies.”

 Turning in a circle, she reached into the bag and pulled out the knife. She was supposed to plunge it into La Bruja. She looked at her son one last time, and held it tightly.

 “I’m sorry mijo,” and she would have done it, when a large owl appeared and started attacking the coyotes. That was her moment. She ran with her son in a fucked up warrior princess cry at the old woman.

 But the old woman wasn’t through. She called on hundreds of scorpions. Elisa ran through them, as some stung at her, but she reached the old woman and plunged the knife into her heart. The knife made it half way through when it broke.

 The scorpions shook off, just as one reached her left eye.

 She looked at Alex who seemed fine. But the old woman, despite the knife was cackling.

 “You stupid whore! You think this will kill me?” she paused dramatically, “I have outlived mountains.”

 “No,” answered Elisa, “I knew it wouldn’t kill you, but I hope it hurts like a mother fucker.” Elisa plunged the knife in further and twisted.

 This hurt La Bruja and she howled a heart wrenching howl, but Elisa didn’t care. She kicked La Bruja hard in the crotch with her painfully stung right foot.

 The old woman tore at the wire with unnatural strength, and Elisa hobbled away as fast as she could. Running was out of the question, and she was sure she was dying from all the poison. She stumbled and fell to ground bringing Alex with her. He cried hard, and she stared at the night sky with the a flurry of fur snowing all over the place.

 She looked towards Ana and then towards the light that was reaching the night sky. The non-Flor had crossed over and a pair of arms grabbed her and Alex.

 “You!” she screeched, “I should have known.”

 Flor said, “No more bad,” and stretched out her arms.

 Luz and Cindy pulled her back into Chicago, and as she left, in Flor’s light, she was sure she saw him. He smiled at her sadly.

 “Quickly,” Luz told Cindy. She was on the cold sidewalk, and Luz was putting something into her mouth.

 “Drink,” commanded Luz, “Or the sacrifice will be for nothing.”

 “He’s OK,” said Cindy, “Just scratched up.”

 “Mommy,” said Alex trying to go to her.

 Luz rubbed a hot ointment onto all the stings. How she knew where they were was a question Elisa wanted answered, but before she could asked Elisa vomited a sticky foulness. She vomited everywhere, even on poor Luz.

 “I’m sorry,” she said and wretched again so violently she thought her heart would come out. With every exertion, the pain on her skin fully registered, and she wanted to cry out loud, but she couldn’t between the vomiting.

 “Jesus Christ,” said Cindy holding back her own sickness.

 Alex said, “Oh, gross Mommy!”

 This made Elisa laugh, and just as suddenly Luz left her side.

 “Where are you going?” asked Cindy.

 “I have to try,” said Luz, “Please, you help me.” She beckoned Cindy to follow.

 “No,” said Elisa, “Don’t!” Cindy looked at Elisa and gave her a kiss on the cheek.

 “It’s my turn to be brave for us,” she said tweaking Alex’s nose. She walked unsteadily after Luz.

 Elisa tried to get up, but the coward in her would never let her back into that store. She held Alex tight. In the distance, she heard a siren. Some do gooder had called an ambulance. She was sure it was for her. Elisa looked at her son and got up with a lot of effort.

 “How are you?” she asked analyzing his whole body.

 “Good, Mommy!” he smiled, “Happy, my Mommy!”

 She held his hand tightly and led him to the car. She secured him in the back seat and drove off before the paramedics could get there. Elisa looked through the back mirror, as the ambulance shot by. Luz and Cindy didn’t come out.

\*

 It was 5a.m. the next day, and Elisa was still in encrusting pain. She stroked her son’s forehead and continued to pray. Flor had given her numerous wards, which she used. She stared at the six wrappers of bean burritos Alex had eaten. Even now, she couldn’t stop cursing that old hag. Elisa was furious as she held back a sob, but then, she remembered Flor’s warning.

 “I won’t let hate consume me,” she said to herself. She finally fell asleep in an uneasy dream. In it she caught glimpses of Flor battling La Bruja, but at the end, Flor had collapsed. La Bruja had vanished, though she wasn’t as imposing as before. She looked pathetic and old, and she simply disappeared.

 She woke up with a start and realized she had no way of reaching Cindy.

 “It’s better this way,” she thought to herself.

 Her son was awake and eating dry Cheerios. It was 10a.m. and Elisa watched the news. There was a report of a body found in Little Village. Elisa began to cry when she realized it was Flor; she cried and cried.

 Alex was so startled he started crying too and they held each other and entered into the depths of each others’ souls.

\*

 A few days later, Elisa was feeling a little better. She had procured a seat at a Goodwill and had all the snacks ready to go.

 “You like your new seat?” she asked Alex who was getting more color in his cheeks.

 “Yeah Mommy!”

 She looked around; she always looked around now. The heavy necklaces were around her neck and her son’s neck. She must look ridiculous. Tucking her short newly blonde hair behind her hat, she smiled at the boy.

 Elisa prayed for Cindy’s well being and thanked her. Cindy wasn’t a total idiot. She had put Alex’s birth certificate and her passport into the backpack. She was even smart enough to put unofficial transcripts in the bag. Where she got the money from she would never now, but there were almost $5,000 dollars in there, too. There was also a very long letter, which she did not have to read, but would read once they settled. She didn’t want to wonder how Cindy had the combination to the family safe. In the end, she didn’t have to know these answers anymore.

 When they neared the Canadian border, Elisa was ready to get more questions, but the woman had waved her through.

 Elisa looked into the horizon and kept vigilant for coyotes and crows.

 “Where we going Mommy?” he asked sweetly.

 Elisa smiled, “We’re going to get help. Mommy’s going to a new school to take care of you, always. To take care of us.”

 “Oh,” said Alex, not really understanding. He thought for a while, “Will my Gama be there?”

 Her heart pounded and then she calmed herself, “No. She’s going on a long, very long vacation, sweetie.”

 That seemed to satisfy him. Elisa looked down the lonely road and said a prayer of gratitude to La Virgen, something she did regularly now. She thought long and hard about her compatriots. Thought about Flor and what she sacrificed for them. She wanted to cry and mourn, but had not times. Instead, she said a prayer for Flor, for Luz, for Cindy, and even for Anna.

1. Ask about hold times and uniform colors from cop friends. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. How do calls work before the judge’s hearing? [↑](#endnote-ref-2)