

La llorona
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Cheguei à janela
Porque ouvi cantar.
É um cego e a guitarra
Que estão a chorar.
-Fernando Pessoa

At the weedy, bullet-ridden entrance of el pueblo's archway is a path carved into the earth by centuries of footsteps, hooves, wooden wheels. Burros idle at the cracking entrance wall, chewing long stems of grass, occasionally neighing. Under the curved, dusty shade of the crimson adobe bricks, awaits a darkened, wrinkled vieja. At her calloused knees lay moist, fragrant bouquets of rosas blancas fanned out upon a colorful rebozo. La vieja sees through the dust-filled path leading into the ranchos and mountain villages a young campesino descending toward the archway. Her shiny dark eyes notice a coffee sack at his side. He is not from her village. Buenos días, murmurs la vieja, as el campesino passes. Buenos días, he says.

Past the archway el campesino enters a maze of wooden boxes and woven baskets of frutas, verduras, carnes amassing in La Plaza. Braided women with bebés tied in their rebozos bargain. Others pat tortillas or stir large clay pots. They sing, hum, giggle, talk, qué bonito día.

Through the pathways of boxes and baskets passes a rickety viejo with a rickety wheelbarrow. San-dí-a, he chants repeatedly into the crescendoing chorus of cacophony. To his side run children, screaming, as they chase a little dog. ¡Vente perrito!, they yell.

El campesino stops to fill his coffee sack with papas, jitomates, aguacates, chiles, and pays la señora from his sweating pants. Gracias señor, says la señora. He then moves to a table of warm tortillas and a pot of stewing frijoles. He counts the corroded centavos in his calloused hand. Un taco por favor, he says to la señorita dressed in a dark blue headdress. Veinte centavos, replies la señorita. El campesino pinches two rusted coins and hands her el dinero. Gracias señor, she says, handing him a taco de frijoles on a small, clay plate. El campesino spoons some pico de gallo onto the taco, ah qué rico.

As he eats the children continue chasing el perrito, bumping into el campesino. Perdón señor, they laugh and run off, ¡córranle, córranle! He returns the plate, gracias señorita, and then moves toward La Sagrada Iglesia at the end of La Plaza. Primero la panza, says el campesino.

High clouds pass above the grey stones of La Sagrada Iglesia, casting a dark shadow that cools the scorched crimson earth. Pigeons sit on the celestial façade, rhythmically

cooing. El campesino looks up and moves under the enormous archway and large wooden door where Diosito inhabits. He bows his head, crosses himself, and then wonders if he should buy a candle at the Kiosco Sagrado before he enters to pray.

Within the medieval Iglesia echo murmurs of arpeggiated memories of el destino. El campesino lays his coffee sack at the entrance and peaks into the cool obscurity where he smells incense, and senses paz. Inside he sees many candles and bouquets of rosas blancas scattered among the altars. From many pews the faithful kneel to the golden altar of Santos y Cristo, pinching beads of rosaries, whispering prayers of paz en la vida, Señor. Through the aisle a viejita crawls on her knees towards Cristo. La sangre begins to stain the smooth stones as she continues on. Vaya con Diosito, whispers el campesino.

Emerging from the obscurity in a cape of black is Madre Elvira. She stands at el campesino's side, putting her hand on his back, staring into his soul with her profound, black eyes. Her hand, austere and wrinkled, rubs and warms his alma. Then a gentle, raspy voice echoes from the hood, Miguelito, mi hijito, ¿cómo estás? El campesino bows his head to Madre Elvira and crosses himself, bien, gracias, Madre Elvira. She asks him about his wife and son, his village, but receives only a reluctant reply of bien, bien, sí, sí. El campesino nods, remains in silence. He hears Madre Elvira saying something about water reflecting the face and the heart reflecting the man, la palabra de Diosito, mi hijito. He crosses himself again, kisses his thumb, saying, gracias, Madre Elvira, and grabbing his coffee sack. Vaya con Diosito, mi hijito, she says. Sí, Madre Elvira, says el campesino. He feels saved again.

Outside La Sagrada Iglesia el campesino ponders the remaining corroded pesos in his calloused palm. He walks past the Kiosco Sagrado and turns left down the street. His worn leather sandals echo on the polished and cracked cobblestones, where centuries of feet, hands, and hooves have etched their history into Pueblo Santa Cruz. He watches for the many holes within the stones. Past him trots a perrito, panting in thirst.

El campesino looks to the horizon of the many colorful businesses moving down the cobblestones. He tries to repeat the words of Madre Elvira as he contemplates the pine caskets standing outside of Funerales San Miguel, Ataúdes Finos y Económicos, Día y Noche. From inside the blackness el campesino can hear the chucking of an adze. Vaya con Diosito, he whispers. To the left of Ataúdes Finos reads La Cantina de los Remedios. El campesino crosses the street towards el destino.

All of the dozen wooden tables of the main floor are empty this late morning at La Cantina. Sitting alone on a creaking pine stool at the bar is el cantinero, reading the newspaper. He is wearing a light blue shirt with his panza emerging below. Qué mierda, he whispers to the newspaper, to no one's interest. At his back is a faded, torn pool table with many knife etchings of cruces and corazones. TE AMO, LOURDES, reads one of los corazones. But no one is playing this morning.

Behind the pool table sit dos viejitos on La Cantina's small wooden stage, playing chess, sipping cerveza, smoking occasionally. The dos viejitos are raggedly dressed men, with hand-carved oak canes hanging from their rickety chairs. Neither speaks, only a sporadic whisper of jaque, answered by a squint and a buzz of ummm. A dark, leathery hand shakes as it pulls a cigarette from his mouth, moving a faded, broken king on the board to safety. The old hand puts down the cigarette and raises a cerveza fría to his wrinkled lips, contemplating the next move he must make. Decisiones, decisiones, he says.

At the corner by the stage, near el baño, sits a grey blind man they call el ciego. He sits in his darkness, cerveza in hand, contemplating decisiones as well. At his side, on an Indian rug, sleeps a brown, three-legged perrito with a frayed rope around his neck, named cojito.

El cantinero takes off his reading glasses, puts them in his shirt pocket, and sits up in the pine stool. Buenos días, señor, he greets el campesino. He rises, ducks under the bar, and stands in front of his altar of many dusty, wooden shelves with bottles of various sizes, shapes, colors, names. Above the shelves hangs a wooden sign in knife etching which reads Los Remedios. Below the shelves hangs another, Un día sin tequila es un día sin amor. To the left of Los Remedios clings a framed and autographed poster of a bullfighter, with a bull's ear inside the glass. And to the right is a crucified Cristo, INRI it reads, who blesses the red cash register below his nailed, bleeding feet.

Dos cervezas, Pedrito, rasps a voice from the stage. El cantinero turns to the ice box and pulls from it two brown bottles and two mugs. He pops the caps with a homemade bottle opener made of a piece of block wood and nail, named La Llave. El cantinero pours the dos cervezas into the icy mugs, and takes them to the dos viejitos.

While el cantinero passes with the dos cervezas, el campesino puts his coffee sack under the stool, sits, and counts again his corroded pesos. Una cerveza, por favor, says el campesino. Un peso, por favor, replies el cantinero. El campesino pays, and el cantinero returns to the ice box. He pours la cerveza into an icy mug, aquí tiene, amigo. Gracias, cantinero, replies el campesino, ah qué rica.

A short, dark man enters La Cantina with a bundle of Indian rugs tied to his back. Buenos días, Pedrito, he greets el cantinero. He moves to the wall, crouches, and lays the rugs on the floor. Muy buenos, Indio, ¿a ver?, inquires el cantinero, raising his chin to the short man. Indio walks to the bar and pulls a wad of torn bills and corroded pesos from his ragged pockets. Many coins clank to the ground, which his leathery hands quickly recover. He puts them on the bar for el cantinero, who begins to count. Está bien, Indio, says el cantinero. Una fría, por favor, says Indio. El cantinero returns to the ice box for una cerveza, but not La Llave. He hands him la cerveza over the bar, aquí tiene. Indio takes la cerveza and sits near the stage to watch the chess match. He opens the bottle with his remaining back teeth, las muelas de juicio he calls them, and begins to drink, ah qué rica.

El campesino gazes away from Indio and sees the various SE VENDE rugs and other items on the walls. There are many town and village paintings, photographs of revolutionaries, actors and actresses, tarnished newspaper clippings, political cartoons, jugadores de fútbol, matadores. Above the stage, hanging crucified over the dos viejitos, is a guitarra. It is light brown, dusty, faded, slightly cracked. ¿Y eso?, he asks el cantinero, motioning to la guitarra with cerveza in hand.

El cantinero returns to the ice box. He takes a cerveza fría, opens it with La Llave, and pours it into an icy mug. He sips the foam, wipes his lips on his forearm, ah qué rica. Eso es La Llorona, answers el cantinero, ¿no la conoces? No, señor, responds el campesino. Bueno, ¿cómo te llamas? Miguel, señor. Soy Pedrito, mucho gusto, Miguelito...

La Llorona came here during the era of mi abuelito, Don Pedro, que en paz descansa. It was originally la guitarra of a mariachi from Pueblo Santa Cruz named Papi Rodríguez. It is recounted here that Papi won it over a game of cards from a mariachi band from La Ciudad. Papi soon began playing, eventually forming his own band with his eldest son Ramón. Los Rodríguez they were called, which had some success in Pueblo Santa Cruz.

When La Revolución began both Papi and Ramón were conscripted to fight for Los Federales by Alcalde Don Antonio Moreno. Papi and Ramón snuck away in the night before Los Federales arrived at their casa, telling no one of their escape, not even Señora Rodríguez. Before he left, Papi gave La Llorona to his youngest son, Rodrigo, wedging into her strings a small songbook with a message inside saying, *canta y no llores, mi hijito*, and a promise to return. Papi and Ramón never came back, labeled *desaparecidos*, though it is rumored that they reached El Norte.

Señora Rodríguez, the long-time maid of Don Antonio Moreno who helped her pay for her casa, told mi abuelito that, the day Papi left, Rodrigo played La Llorona everyday of his life, for hours upon hours, until it was hung on the wall here. It has never been played since, mi abuelito forbade it... ¿Conoces al famoso Rodrigo, Miguelito? ¿No?...

Rodrigo spent his entire youth singing in the choir of La Sagrada Iglesia. He possessed a divine voice, *voz de Diosito*, as Madre Elvira used to say, especially when he sang Ave María... Pedrito sips his cerveza, ah qué rica, and Miguel looks into his for his reflection...

Both Señora Rodríguez and Madre Elvira wanted Rodrigo to dedicate his life to La Sagrada Iglesia. With such a *voz de Diosito* he would always have a warm bed, food, and respect. But, most importantly, La Sagrada Iglesia would spare Rodrigo from La Revolución, which Señora Rodríguez believed had taken Papi and Ramón from her. So Rodrigo was probably ready to spend the rest of his life in La Sagrada Iglesia. But, like many great talents, he quickly became a fallen angel consumed by his desires. Or perhaps it was *el destino* that Diosito has in store for us all in this strange country of ours, a country far from God and close to Hell, but at least close to El Norte as well.

When Rodrigo was about 18 years old, one day, after a choir rehearsal in La Sagrada Iglesia, he saw a young girl named Ceci. She was sitting on a bench in La Plaza with some amigas, chatting, laughing. Mi abuelito said she was very beautiful, olive oil skin, dark curly hair, and lush green eyes. Dos esmeraldas, mi abuelito said of her eyes. Rodrigo was immediately enchanted. I think mi abuelito was too, though he never spoke of it because of abuelita.

On that day these tres señoritas came into La Cantina, perhaps to drink cerveza or just to visit, for there were few businesses back then in Pueblo Santa Cruz. Rodrigo, who did not go anywhere without Papi's guitarra, followed Ceci into La Cantina, and peeked in. He said, or pretended to say hola to mi abuelito, whom he perhaps vaguely knew, though he was not supposed to be in such places. Antros de mala muerte, Señora Rodríguez called them. But Rodrigo came in and introduced himself to Ceci, ordering cuatro cervezas.

Like many of La Cantina's customers during La Revolución, he had no dinero, or simply forgot to bring some... ¿no es así, Indio? ... But so reigned the philosophy of el amor

conquista todo. Mi abuelito, who knew Papi and Señora Rodríguez rather well, decided to serve him.

Mi abuelito said that that day Rodrigo seemed somewhat awkward, sipping his cerveza, saying little at first. One of las señoritas, Fernanda, actually liked him a lot. The other, Lourdes, was just along with them, and didn't really care to speak to this church boy. Though, ironically, it was Lourdes, noticing Papi's guitarra, who asked Rodrigo if he knew how to play. Rodrigo took a sip of his cerveza, and smiled. And then came el destino.

Out of her case emerged La Llorona, bright, polished, new strings. Bonita guitarra, mi abuelito said. Rodrigo tuned it like a virtuoso, ear at her umbilical to refine every note. Lourdes grew very impatient with all his perfectionism, ¿vas a cantar o qué?, she asked him.

Rodrigo began quietly, slowly arpeggiating La Llorona. And then his voice rang out, deep, velvety, melodic... Amorcito corazón, yo tengo sensación de un beso... Fernanda was instantly in love. Lourdes probably was too. And Ceci blushed and smiled, enchanting him with those dos esmeraldas. Of course, behind them were many secrets and desires Rodrigo would never comprehend.

Ceci's familia, Los San Juan, moved here during La Revolución after her dos hermanos were murdered. The youngest of los hermanos San Juan, Sebastián, was shot by a bandido who he caught stealing horses from their rancho. But the elder hermano, Carlos, had an interesting history with Ceci. After he too was shot, they left and moved to a small ranchito near Cementerio Santa Cruz. There, mi abuelito said that her papás were very mistrusting and protective, rarely leaving el ranchito, mostly shopping at el mercado or for misa at La Sagrada Iglesia. It was there she met Fernanda and Lourdes.

On the day of his first serenata to Ceci, Rodrigo sang for about a half hour. During that time people from La Plaza began passing by La Cantina, peaking in, entering to hear this young trovador. Of course, the inspired Rodrigo ordered a second round of cervezas, el amor conquista todo.

Realizing he had no dinero and not wanting to ask las señoritas to pay, he told them it was getting late and mamá would be worried. Las señoritas asked him when he would sing again. Rodrigo hesitated, lying as best he could, en dos días, aquí, he said. They all kissed him on the cheek, maybe out of custom, maybe out of lust, and said, hasta la próxima, mi amor. They left gossiping and laughing.

Rodrigo put La Llorona back in her case and approached mi abuelito in shame, checking his pants for any extra pesos that el espíritu santo may have left for him. No tengo dinero, he said to mi abuelito, lo siento. Mi abuelito initially felt like yelling at him and telling him never to come back. But Don Pedro was an intelligent and just cantinero, el cantinero de la gente, he was called. He took notice of the crowd that had gathered inside and outside La Cantina, and said, aquí, en dos días, a las siete, con la guitarra. Gracias a Diosito, Rodrigo said, shaking hands with mi abuelito. Muchas gracias, señor, mis sinceras disculpas, he reiterated, and left singing in the streets as he trotted along with La Llorona.

Two days later, after some minor publicity in the form of a paper glued on the door of La Cantina of, HOY EN VIVO, RODRIGO, the bar filled. Don Pedro put him at the back, on one of the bar stools since there was no stage back then...

¡Aquí!, cry hoarsely the dos viejitos, pointing to the corner of the bar where Indio sits. Sí, ahí, says el cantinero to el campesino. Otra fría, interrupts Indio, esa historia es buena, Pedrito. El cantinero pulls a cerveza fría from the ice box and puts it on the bar. Solamente tres más, he admonishes Indio, showing him three plump fingers. Claro, Pedrito, rasps Indio, opening the bottle with las muelas de juicio, and spinning the cap on the bar at the side of el campesino. Solamente tres más, parrots Indio to el ciego, who offers him a gruff chuckle. Qué mierda, whispers el cantinero...

The inaugural show of Rodrigo was the most successful day of La Cantina in Don Pedro's era. Even before the show began La Cantina was almost full. Ceci, Lourdes, and Fernanda sat right there, ahí, by the stage in sleek black and white dresses, knitted shawls, and shoes from La Ciudad. All the other tables were filled with various sinners and some santos of Pueblo Santa Cruz. The cerveza flowed and spilled. Mi abuelito had never seen such a large and diverse crowd.

Rodrigo entered in poncho and sombrero, La Llorona under his arm, and a confidence of el amor conquista todo. Applauses and whistles roared as he stood and bowed before the crowd. He handed his poncho and sombrero to mi abuelito, asking for a rag. He polished La Llorona, tuned her, and quietly prayed to el espíritu santo.

Just before he began, Ceci stared at him, blowing a kiss, whispering buena suerte, mi amor, from her painted red lips. Rodrigo's eyes lit up as he saw those dos esmeraldas. Mi abuelito knew it would be a good show.

Drinking, dancing, singing, crying ensued as the young trovador's voice poured into La Cantina. Mi abuelito said he had never seen anything like it in his life, not even La Sagrada Iglesia had brought so many souls together in harmony. The entire cantina sang with him, cried in joy, wept in sorrow, warming the cool night air with a chorus of passionate voices of sinners and santos, celebrando la vida, even if just for a few hours. It was a kind of magic.

So many people came that the cervezas eventually ran out, which created some animosity with Don Pedro. Just imagine a cantina with no cerveza. Mi abuelito immediately sent mi papá to tell Rodrigo to sing his last song and leave, and to find cerveza so there would not be a fight, or something worse, since la gente here do not take such sins lightly.

Rodrigo concluded with Cielito Lindo and incessantly bowed to an eruption of applause, Ro-dri-go, Ro-dri-go. Ceci, Fernanda, Lourdes blew kiss after kiss as he walked away from the stool, bowing, embracing La Llorona in triumph.

Outside, at the back of La Cantina where mi papá awaited him, mi abuelito went to Rodrigo, who glowed with elation. Muy bien, muchacho, mi abuelito told him, patting him on the shoulder and placing a bill of 50 pesos inside his sombrero. He then told him to come back next week, a las siete. Gracias, gracias, Rodrigo said hoarsely, in disbelief. Ahora ándale, mi abuelito told him. And Rodrigo ran home triumphantly with La Llorona... ¿Otra cerveza, Miguelito? ¿Sí?...

A week later Rodrigo filled La Cantina again, then again the next week. After a month Rodrigo was playing three nights a week, always full or nearly so. Interestingly, his

shows consisted of standard boleros, corridos, and mariachi that everyone knows and still sings, most of which he sang from Papi's songbook. But his voz de Diosito captivated, enchanted la gente, like no one before or since here in Pueblo Santa Cruz.

Since mi abuelito asked him to play many shows, perhaps out of necessity he began playing his own songs too. Mi abuelito watched him experimenting with many new songs before his shows, scribbling words and chords onto the blank pages of Papi's songbook. He wrote some songs about Pueblo Santa Cruz, about La Cantina, about mi abuelito ... ¿Conoces el corrido de Don Pedro? ¿Sí? Eso es Rodrigo, muchacho...

Los trovadores de Santa Cruz, who have sang here in La Cantina many times, say Rodrigo wrote about a dozen or so songs, most of which are still played in their shows, the only exception being La Llorona. These songs form a piece of the history of Pueblo Santa Cruz, a small chronicle of our gente.

Even Don Antonio Moreno came to hear Rodrigo. For a mayor to go to a popular cantina back then was, and still is, below their standards. In fact, on the day Don Antonio came, mi abuelito said Rodrigo sang a corrido he wrote praising Los Revolucionarios, which Don Antonio was not happy about and told mi abuelito that he was not to sing again. Mi abuelito smiled and told Don Antonio, sí, es una calunia, and then told Rodrigo to sing it twice at every future show. At the time that created some problems with mi abuelito, but today we laugh about it. Los trovadores still sing this song, not just to pay homage to Los Revolucionarios, but because it is one of Rodrigo's best corridos.

What's most important is that, when Rodrigo sang, he seemed to create a sense that life can be beautiful amid horrible times. The rich felt that order and progress would return. The poor felt that all the things in life that were beyond their reach would somehow be at their grasp. Mi abuelito understood this more than anyone perhaps, as he observed this young trovador achieve something special among our gente, without really knowing how or what he was doing. In truth, Rodrigo was probably just trying to charm those dos esmeraldas.

From the success at La Cantina mi abuelito had a stage built. He then bought a pool table, very expensive and a novelty for Pueblo Santa Cruz in that era. And then, what he always wanted, a legitimate cash register, shiny red, imported from La Ciudad. Many other businesses like La Cantina still used cigar boxes back then. But after mi abuelito got robbed once by some bandidos, during misa no less, he decided to buy a register and pistol. In fact, mi abuelito always had much faith in life, but unfortunately he learned that you need a little insurance too. Of course, he swore never to fire the pistol again, gracias a Diosito. That was a bad day at La Cantina, qué mierda.

Unfortunately, el destino arrived for mi abuelito, as it does for us all. You see Ceci stopped seeing Rodrigo at his shows. Of course, she came to a few more in the first month, but that was all. And some people saw Rodrigo walking to and from Rancho San Juan with La Llorona under his arm, sometimes singing, sometimes not. Señora Rodríguez saw them sitting together a few times in La Plaza as she went for food at el mercado. But, as it were, Ceci stopped looking at him with those dos esmeraldas. This eventually drove Rodrigo to despair, to el destino.

One night, after what would be his final show at La Cantina, Rodrigo ventured to Rancho San Juan with La Llorona. Inspired to give his best performance to his Amorcito

Corazón, Rodrigo and La Llorona sang out into the cold night with passion under her balcony. Ceci turned on her bedroom light for him, listened from above, contemplated, and then turned off the light.

Rodrigo cried her name into the darkness. He then laid La Llorona in the case and sang Ave Maria a capella to her, or maybe to Cielito Lindo. In fact, some residents that are still alive from that barrio claim to having heard la voz de Diosito on that fateful night.

While Rodrigo passionately sang, Ceci's bedroom light came back on. She and her papás stepped out onto the balcony and listened. Ceci was dressed in a beautiful, white nightgown, fit for a princess. Señor San Juan, who was more sympathetic to the young trovador, is said to have wept from his performance. But Señora San Juan walked away, enraged, and turned off Ceci's bedroom light, yelling at her to go to bed.

Rodrigo's voice again faded away into the darkness. He whimpered for a moment, and reached for La Llorona. After arpeggiating a few chords, he paused and said his last words to her, Ceci, esta es mi última canción. With her balcony door still open, Rodrigo sang his last song.

This last song, which has since been known as La Llorona, is rumored by los trovadores to have been improvised, and sang only once at Rancho San Juan. Others, including mi abuelito, say they may have heard it a few times in La Cantina, but never heard it used by that name. And some speculate that it may have been the only original song written by Papi Rodriguez that Rodrigo arranged. But no one knows how to play it, and has since remained a mystery... Un misterio, sí, affirm the dos viejitos, nodding in unison...

With Ceci's bedroom light still off, Rodrigo walked away, crying. Ceci then came downstairs and creaked open the black, iron door of Rancho San Juan, her head peaking out. She blew Rodrigo a kiss, whispering, buena suerte, mi amor, and closed the door. Ceci was simply a lush rose with too many thorns to pick, as mi abuelito said.

Rodrigo then walked back to La Cantina, despairing el destino. He entered, took La Llorona from the case and laid it on the bar, putting Papi's songbook in his pocket. He told mi abuelito to hang it on the wall and leave it there for when he returns, that he had somewhere to go and could not take it with him. ¿Por qué?, inquired mi abuelito. Porque este amor no tiene remedio, said Rodrigo. Así es el amor, mi hijito, mi abuelito told him, hoy hay besos, mañana no. He offered Rodrigo a cerveza. Tengo que ir, said Rodrigo graciously.

Before Rodrigo left, mi abuelito opened the register and offered him 500 pesos, just about all the dinero he had in the register that night. Por favor, una última canción, mi abuelito begged him. Rodrigo turned around and smiled, saying nothing. He picked up and embraced La Llorona one last time. He did not sing, but arpeggiated some chords, and then played a song called Lágrima. Mi abuelito knew then he would never sing again.

Rodrigo returned La Llorona and 400 pesos to mi abuelito, accepting only his usual weekly salary of 100 pesos. Mi abuelito tried to give him the rest, but Rodrigo graciously refused. He hugged mi abuelito, gracias por su tiempo, he said, and then walked away into the obscurity of night. Don Pedro held and marveled at the once faithful companion of Rodrigo, and hung it above the small stage as he requested. Perhaps to crucify, you could say.

The next day Señora Rodríguez came here in tears to see mi abuelito, seeking some news of her hijito who did not return home that night of el destino. Don Pedro told her what had happened and showed her La Llorona hanging on the wall. Es como Papi, said Señora Rodríguez with tears running down her cheeks.

The popular history of that day is that Ceci was madly in love with a rich, smooth-talking card player known as San Lázaro. He had met her at a cantina near their previous rancho. Carlos San Juan, at the orders of his mamá, had forbade their courtship and had vowed to kill San Lázaro if he were ever seen again with Ceci.

After San Lázaro took a beating from Carlos, it is speculated that he staged a massive fight at la cantina over a card game which Carlos was to play in. There, Carlos was shot in the back. Un accidente trágico, said the authorities of his death. But the cynical voices recount that Ceci had a hand in her hermano's death.

After el accidente trágico Los Señores San Juan sold their rancho and moved here, in part to get Ceci away from San Lázaro, in part because of La Revolución, which was very bad in their homeland.

Just some hours after Rodrigo's serenata, Ceci descended by a rope from her balcony and escaped from Rancho San Juan with San Lázaro on horseback. Los San Juan went immediately to see Don Antonio Moreno, who dispatched a cohort of Federales to find and bring them back. They first came here to La Cantina to find Rodrigo, and spoke with mi abuelito. They also questioned Fernanda and Lourdes, who gave them some key leads in their search.

Some two weeks later, Los Federales returned with two bullet-riddled bodies. Los San Juan had San Lázaro hanged in a tree by el cementerio with a wooden sign labeled BANDIDO hanging from his neck. Para los buitres, said Señora San Juan. Then Ceci was delivered to Don Miguel with the task of returning her bloodstained body back into a princess. But the dos esmeraldas would never again shine.

Few people went to La Sagrada Iglesia for Ceci's funeral. Dressed in white and wooden, she laid amidst rosas blancas before Los San Juan, Don Antonio Moreno and his family, Fernanda, Lourdes, and Señora Rodríguez. Mi abuelito went out of pity since he was part of this history, but sat in the back so not to be seen. He did not see Rodrigo there, though he sensed his presence somehow in the echoes of La Sagrada Iglesia. Dios sabrá, as he often used to say.

Even though people say Diosito is just, life can be very cruel, very far from God and very close to Hell... Así es...

Sipping the last of his cerveza, el campesino shakes his bowed head, as do the dos viejitos. Así es, one of them says softly in affirmation of el cantinero's wisdom, así es.

El campesino feels a little dizzy, and needs to go el baño. Con permiso, he says to el cantinero.

Caballeros has a double swinging door with a smell of centuries of stale cerveza and tobacco. Markings and drawings from knives and machetes elaborate the walls, along with advertisements from decades past. El campesino blinks and slightly wobbles in front of the

broken mirror, looking at his reflection, trying to remember the words of Madre Elvira, la palabra de Diosito. He exits the double doors and returns to the bar forum, watching the chess match resume, then watching el cantinero licking his thumb and turning the pages of the newspaper, qué mierda.

El campesino pauses in front of el cantinero and turns to stare at La Llorona, ¿la puedo ver? El cantinero, knowing his abuelito would provide a resounding no to such a question, feels it wouldn't hurt to break la tradición. Está bien, mi hijito, says el cantinero. He ambles to the stage and lifts the crucified guitarra from its corroded nails, handing her worn body and soul to el campesino. Mucho cuidado, says el cantinero, returning to the bar. Noticing the decades of dust resting over La Llorona, el campesino asks el cantinero for a rag.

La Llorona cries as the moist rag passes over her strings and frets. El campesino then clumsily paws at her untuned strings as he reminisces about Rodrigo and Ceci. The dos viejitos reminisce with him as well, looking up from their chessboard to see if el campesino can play La Llorona. But el ciego is not impressed, and neither is cojito, who raises his head from the Indian rug in inquiry. Necesitas practicar, mi hijito, rasps el ciego, to everyone's attention.

El ciego stands and ventures slowly to the bar. Cuidado ciego, cautions one of the dos viejitos. Walking hunchbacked, guided by the bar stools, he draws himself towards the cacophony. Ven cojito, he says, who limps over and sits, rhythmically thudding the wooden floor with his tail. A ver, mi hijito, says el ciego, asking for La Llorona with his wrinkled palms, ah qué rica.

His bony, calloused hands caress her dark wrinkled body, her neck, her strings. He puts his ear to her curves, listening to every note whisper from her sacred umbilical as she goes back in tune. Slowly, gently, el ciego chords and arpeggiates La Llorona, breathing into her new life, do mi sol, do mi sol. Ah, tantos años, tantas historias, he says. El ciego strums, then sings, La Llorona.