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Mañana

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Ken Krispin *Mañana*

There was a happy flurry of activity as members of the Romero household scurried to gather the equipment necessary for the installation of the new water tank. Children chased each other. Men discussed the best methods for hoisting the huge tank to the roof. Mothers warned their children to stay out of the way, eager for the task to begin and be completed. But it was no use. The seven plus Lucha, who was stronger than most of them, were unable to budge the tank more than a couple of feet up the outside wall of the house. Sweating, Lucha ordered them to get more help while she made something to drink. Everyone scrambled off, thankful for the opportunity to escape.

Lucha Romero was almost as round as she was tall. She was a *chapparita*. She wore a faded blue house dress with a soiled apron. Her circular face was framed by graying, wavy hair, but her large lips were the most noticeable feature. Deep crevices etched into the flesh betrayed her life of toil and suffering. She rarely smiled. Lucha had worked hard her entire life, always responsible for the care of others. Every day she was up before dawn to run her errands, picking up milk, *tortillas*, *bolillos*, *pandulce*, and meat, each obtained from a different place. Then she roused her family, cooked their breakfast, and rushed them off to work or school.

Their household consisted of Lucha and her husband, Facundo, their three married daughters and their families, and their three younger sons—in all, seventeen people to take care of. Housework was a large and frustrating task, but the water situation was most difficult. Mexico City's twenty million people use the day's supply by one p.m. In the morning, Lucha filled every pot with water, to be used sparingly throughout the day, only when necessary. The growth of the family necessitated the new water tank.

There should have been eight "men" to help: her husband, her three sons, her three sons-in-law, and a deacon from their church, Hermano Vasquez. Facundo was up at his usual time, but her sons were another matter. In fact, Lucha had to force them out of bed, this being Sunday and their only day to sleep in. She soon discovered that her son-in-law, Carlos, would not be able to help. He'd been out all night carousing, and was sacked out on his couch in a drunken stupor. "Good for nothing," Lucha muttered under her breath. What would they do now? She had wondered if eight would be enough to raise the tank. It was of considerable size and made of concrete. Now there were only seven. How would they get it up? There was no mechanical equipment, just rope and chain and raw manpower.

She mixed crushed papaya with water stashed in the refrigerator, but the glass pitcher cracked as she stirred, and their refreshment emptied out onto the floor.



There were ten of them when they gradually came back together. But where was her twelve-year-old, Ricardo? She had no doubt he had conveniently found something else to do, and she vowed to make him pay. But Ricardo showed up with another skinny youth fifteen minutes later. She took the opportunity to administer a lashing with her tongue. That was the last time any of them would dare to wander from their task.

Their next attempt was a little better, but far from enough. More help was needed, but now help was not so difficult to find. A small crowd had gathered, and there were suddenly engineering experts all over. Many macho men stepped forward, certain their aid would be the deciding factor in finishing the job.

Lucha had hoped it could be done without anyone noticing. People had been critical, declaring the Romeros were showing off. Some felt the tank would be too heavy for the roof. Some claimed they needed a special permit. Others worried about the new tank's effect on their water supply. Most were jealous, but too proud to admit it. But this was now a community project, as if success somehow represented all of them in their attempts to up grade themselves and make a better life. Many hands, backs, and shoulders were freely given, even by some of the loudest critics.

Compared to most, the Romeros seemed well off. People were packed into limited space, housed in shacks made from concrete, old sheets of metal or plastic, or even cardboard. A garbage heap and a waste dump were also in the vicinity, contributing to the odor. Stray dogs limped through the streets or looked down in trios and pairs from small rooftops. A rooster crowed nearby throughout the day. Plumbing, electricity, garbage pickup, mail delivery, gas and water supply, were all complicated and obstructed by the masses of people, the dirt roads.

The tank was halfway up the wall when a sharp wail sang out from underneath. The men carefully set the tank back down, then located the source of the noise, Hermano Vasquez who was in pain, unable to straighten up. Lucha had debated asking him to help. Now she knew it was too much for him. They helped him into the house and carefully placed him on the boys' bed while one of her daughters ran for the doctor.

Lucha was worried that God was punishing them. She had hoped God would forgive them for working on Sunday. There was no other choice, she'd reasoned. They'd been working night and day for months, just so they could afford the new tank. Sunday seemed the only alternative. Besides, they'd started early enough so they should have been able to make it to church. Lucha's days often ended well after midnight, on her knees in prayer that sometimes lasted over an hour. She would pour out her burdens to God, pleading for Him to have mercy on her children and their spouses, some very wayward, and to meet the substantial needs of her household. Her desire was for them all to lead a godly life, and to escape poverty and improve their earthly situations.

With Hermano Vasquez situated in the house, they set about raising the water tank for the third time. It was 11:30—church had already started. The sun beat down, but there was more help now. Several men and even a couple women

stood on the roof with ropes and chains, prepared to pull the tank up. Others were ready to heave from below. The goal seemed attainable.

United in spirit, they began to elevate the tank. Up, up it rose, higher, higher. It was two feet from the rooftop. People were yelling, adrenaline was high. The tank rose higher. Those on top readied themselves to grab and roll it. Those on the ground could no longer help. The weight was completely upon the seven on the roof. Groans betrayed the tremendous strain. Only a few inches to go. Lucha worried about the ropes. She clutched her daughter's hand, as if the added pressure could pull the tank the remainder of the way.

Speculations of the roof caving in, the ropes breaking, someone slipping, all of them being overcome by the strain. Who would have guessed that it would be the tank itself that would surrender?

The workers fell back. A shower of rock and powder fell. The fractured pieces lay in a heap on the ground. Very little was said. There were no tears. The crowd slowly dispersed. No one offered encouragement or criticism. They just quietly left. The family remained, but they too silently withdrew to attend to other business. Lucha stood alone, studying the pile of rubble before her.



After the others had slunk off to bed, she poured a dab of oil in the frying pan. When it sizzled and popped, she cracked an egg. Too hard—the yolk and white oozed through her callused hands, mingling together. "Ay!" she cried, hastily wiping up the gooey mess, searing a finger, which she put in her mouth, sucking as if to draw out poison.

She cooked an egg successfully. The fried smell of oil and egg awakened her appetite. She sliced her *bolillo*, crusty and stale, sawing vigorously with a dull knife. She smeared on some cold black beans, then added the egg, pressing both ends of the roll together. The chewy sandwich was attacked by sharp, vengeful teeth. She washed it down with a thick, warm drink, which coated and soothed the tightness in her throat. Succeeding bites were like gravel in her mouth. She had lost her appetite for food, as for all else.

She let the remnant drop into the garbage. Her dishes she sent clattering into the sink, leaving the greasy stains to be washed away mañana, when water would return and run out again by one o'clock.