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in this story
a little boy meets
life & death

ROBERT GRANAT

To Endure

Who speaks of conquering? To endure is everything.—Rilke.

I just come home from school when Anastasio die. "Queeeh!" he say, and was all.

Right away I go to the picture Mama cut from the calendar where Jesus is pulling open his chest for to show us his beautiful heart and I cross myself. Then I go tell everybody—Daddy, Franque (that is Francisco, my brother) and Arcelia (that is Arcelia, my sister). And we all begin to cry for the old man but really we was pretty happy. We like Anastasio OK but he take too long to die.

Anastasio was the uncle of my mother and he live with us since I can remember. But he been sick three months and he take all the kitchen for himself, because Mama didn't want for none of us to sleep in the room with Anastasio when he was sick, so Franque and me and Arcelia all got to sleep together in one bed in the other room with Daddy and Mama in another bed and Ubaldo in the basket. And one thing, I sure don't like to sleep with nobody else in the bed, especially Franque and Arcelia, and that was the real reason I was pretty happy when Anastasio die. He make too many people sleep in one place.

Mama and the other ladies put the wedding suit of Anastasio on him and we put him on the long bench Carlos Trujillo loan us and after supper everybody come to make the velorio and we cry and sing alabados and drink coffee and eat bizcochitos. Arcelia got to go to bed all by herself but I stay up all night, I think.

Robert Granat, a native of Havana, has taught in the rural schools of northern New Mexico. His first short story, "The Price of Candy," appeared in *NMQ* in 1955. He has since had stories published in *New World Writing*, *Liberation*, *Catholic Worker*, and in the *O. Henry Prize Stories* of 1958. He now lives in Albuquerque, spending part of his time as an artist; his paintings were shown in New York this year.

Next morning we didn't got to go to school on account Anastasio was dead. Carlos Trujillo and Daddy and Franque and me take the tarpaulin off the pickup and we make I guess you call it a tent right outside the window and we carry Anastasio on the bench and put him under so Mama can fix the kitchen and look out to see if Anastasio OK.

"He gonna be cold out here," Arcelia say. She don't know nothing; she only six.

"Está muerto," I tell her. "He's dead. He don't feel nothing."

Mama and Mrs. Trujillo and my Aunt Manuelita and Arcelia and Ubaldo was going to stay home and take care of everything because all the men—me and Franque and Daddy and Carlos Trujillo—got to take the pickup to Sandoval to buy a box to bury Anastasio with. Sandoval is the biggest town in Madera County, about a hundred miles from Piñoncito and I never been there but Franque been two times with Daddy. I help Franque kick the mud off the pickup and put in water . . . was cold, almost winter, and we let out the water every night so it don't freeze and bust the motor. I put on my clean levis, I was always saving for something like this, and I was happy I didn't have no school today and was going to Sandoval.

Then Arcelia—big cry-baby—start to cry she want to go with us, and she make me cry too because I didn't want no girls with us, especially Arcelia. But Mama say why not, and Daddy get mad and say "Shut your mouth or ain't nobody going to go." So Arcelia get in and she stick her tongue at me and I was going to hit her only everybody was there and I couldn't. So Daddy and Franque and Carlos Trujillo get inside and Franque drive. Arcelia and me ride in the back with the rope and the chains and the shovel and the boards for if we get stuck. She stand in one corner and me in the other one.

Is about forty-five miles to the black-top road the other side Mesa Quemada. The farther I ever go before was to Peña's Cash Store in Rio Seco where my cousin live. But Franque didn't stop. He keep right on going. The roads was pretty bad. The grader ain't been through and some places got pretty lot of mud. But we didn't get stuck. Franque, he's fifteen. He's a pretty good driver.

Then I fall asleep. I was trying not to but I couldn't help it. To sit all night with Anastasio make me too tired. And I was ashamed too, because I ain't no kid like Arcelia. I already have eleven years.

I feel Arcelia shake me. "Pendejo, pendejo, levántate!"

I shake my head fast. "'Onde 'stamos?" I say. "Where are we?"

"Sandoval, tonto!" she say.

"Don't call me no tonto, you monkey!" I say, that's chango in Mexican. But I was ashamed anyway to be sleeping when we got to Sandoval.

We was already at the funeral company. Daddy get out. "We going inside to buy the box for Anastasio. You want to come with us or wait out here?"

I want to come and see the funeral company, and Arcelia do too, but Daddy say no, she too little, she got to wait outside in the pickup.

"Varoz Brothers Mortuary" I say when I read the big sign they got there. I can read pretty good English, better than Franque and better than Daddy too. Inside was Mr. Varoz. I think he was going to be Americano but he was Spanish like us, only got Anglo clothes with a tie on. He talk in Mexican with Daddy and Carlos Trujillo and they tell him Anastasio die and they want a nice box to bury him with. So Mr. Varoz take us in the back where they keep the boxes. "Ah qué!" . . . how many they got there! Big ones, brown ones, black ones, all colors, shiny like a new car. They even got little white ones for little kids. They got enough boxes to put everybody in Piñoncito, I think.

"What kind you want?" say Mr. Varoz.

"Well, we want a pretty good one," say Daddy, "maybe the Welfare going to help pay."

Mr. Varoz pick a nice box, grey color like the pickup, only shiny with gold things to carry it with. I tell Franque maybe was too big for Anastasio but Franque say no, Anastasio going to fit good inside. Mr. Varoz call some other men—maybe they was his brothers—and everybody carry the box out and put it on the pickup. I help. Ah qué! was heavy, more heavy than Anastasio on Carlos Trujillo's bench.

"Arcelia, get out the way!" I say and we throw the box in back of the pickup. Franque and Carlos Trujillo tie it on with the rope.

"That rope going to hold OK?" say Mr. Varoz in English and he push it with his hands. "I guess it's OK if you take it easy."

"Está bien," Daddy say. My Daddy know only few words in English, maybe twenty.

Daddy and Carlos Trujillo got to buy some things and so we drive back to where the stores was. We all get inside the pickup because was not far. "Nice man, that Varoz," say Carlos Trujillo. Daddy say yes, only make him pay twenty dollars down-payment.

Franque park in front of a bar and he go in there for a drink with Daddy and Carlos Trujillo. Daddy give me fifty cents and say for me and Arcelia to buy something. I go in a store and get some change and

I keep thirty cents and give Arcelia twenty cents. That was fair. She only six and don't know what is money. For me I buy two comic books and two Milky Way. Milky Way only cost a nickel in Sandoval. Arcelia look at everything and don't know what she want, so I take her out the store. "OK, you ain't going to get nothing," I say, "and Daddy going to get mad we taking so long."

We was almost back at the pickup and then Arcelia start yelling. "That . . . eso quiero . . . I want that!"

I look and seen she was pointing her finger at something in the window of a store. Inside the window was shoes and stockings and ribbons and levis and things like that. "What you want?" I tell her. I was wishing Daddy let me go with him and not stay with Arcelia. She don't know nothing. "You make everything always bad," I tell her.

But she was yelling and everybody in the street was starting to look at me like I was hitting her.

"Qué quieres?" I say again, "What you want?"

"The dress," she say, "I want that dress!"

I look and seen what she want was a white dress like girls wear for First Communion.

"Arcelia—pendejo!—you think the man going to give you that dress for twenty cents?"

"Si, si, ese quiero, lo quiero!" she yell. So I take her inside the store so she will shut her mouth.

"How much cost the white dress in the window?" I say to the man. He was Americano.

"Three eighty-nine," he say, "you got the money?"

"See, tonta! Cost more than three dollars!" I say, but Arcelia keep crying so I pull her outside again, "Is not my fault," I tell the Americano. "She don't understand nothing."

Daddy and Carlos Trujillo and Franque was coming out of the bar. They smell like whisky. They look at Arcelia crying.

"What's the matter with Arcelia? You hit her?" Daddy say.

"No, I didn't do nothing. She want to buy that dress, cost three dollars." I was feeling mad and bad and was starting to cry too because I didn't do nothing bad.

"What dress?" say Carlos Trujillo.

"The white one in the window."

"It's a dress for First Communion."

"Arcelia's too little for that dress," Daddy say, "Vamos, is getting dark. Franque, you feel OK to drive?"

"Yah," say Franque and he open his mouth like when you tired. I know he was tired like me from the velorio, and Daddy let him drink whisky, too.

Arcelia and me get in the back of the pickup with the box of Anastasio. It make like a little wall for us, because was getting pretty cold. Arcelia was still crying in the corner and I feel bad too. Poor kid, she didn't know what is three dollars.

"Anyway, you still got twenty cents. I don't got nothing," I say to her. "Tomorrow you can buy two Milky Way at Mr. Bond." Mr. Bond cost ten cents for a Milky Way.

But Arcelia was still crying. Better for her to stay home.

"Here." I break one of my Milky Way in half and I give the biggest one to her. She didn't say nothing but she take it.

Hiii-jolá, was cold! I stand up and look at the road. Franque was going pretty fast. We pass a big trailer truck. I think almost he was going to hit it. "Take it easy, Franque, take it easy," I hear Carlos Trujillo say inside.

I sit down again. I seen Arcelia was sleeping under the blanket Mama give her to keep warm, behind the box of Anastasio. Was like a hole there where the wind can't come in. I make myself little and put my nose inside my shirt so I feel warm and I was ashamed because again I fall asleep.

Hijo, was terrible! When that happen was dark. I was sleeping so I didn't know what it was. But was terrible. Everything come in one minute. Daddy yell "Franque! Franque!" and then was a big noise and the pickup hit something and something hit me and then everything stop. I didn't know nothing till was finished. But was terrible, I tell you that much.

Then I hear Daddy yell in the front. "Tonto! Imbécil! Animal!" and I hear he was hitting Franque. Franque jump out with his hands on his head and making a noise like a dog when somebody kick him.

Then Daddy come out with Carlos Trujillo.

"Abrán! Arcelia! Qué pasó! You OK? You not hurt?"

"I'm OK, Daddy," I say. But then they turn on the flashlight and everybody see was sure terrible thing that happen. Was the box of Anastasio.

When the pickup hit, the rope break and the box come on us, and was sure big. Now I feel it. Was on my leg.

"Abrán! Where's Arcelia?"

"She was sleeping."

“Apúrense, quick, pull away the box!” Carlos Trujillo say. They pull it off my leg. I get up. It hurt, but not too bad. “I’m OK, Daddy,” I say.

But nobody listen to me. They was all looking at Arcelia. Carlos turn the light on her.

“Ay Dios! No! Arcelia! Arcelia! Hijita mia!” Daddy was saying. He try to wake her up.

“Don’t shake her, . . . that’s bad.” say Carlos Trujillo. Carlos is pretty smart. His mother is the *médica*, and she knows about sick people and babies. Poor Franque, he just stand there shaking and crying and like eating his lips.

“Maybe she just knock out, Daddy,” I say.

“Look, her mouth!” Daddy say.

“No, is just Milky Way,” I say.

Carlos wipe her mouth with his handkerchief. It was candy, except a little bit on the corner. That was blood, only not much, like when you cut your lip. Carlos pick up Arcelia. “May be bad,” he say, “we got to go back and see the doctor.”

Carlos tell Franque to go see how was the truck. But Franque seem like he can’t move so I go. I seen we run into a place where they cut out the hill to make the road. Not rock, just sand. The front of the pickup look pretty bad, but the tires was OK and the lights was still on.

The motor start OK and Carlos get the pickup back on the road and drive back to Sandoval. Daddy was holding Arcelia wrapped up in the blanket. I hear him talking to Arcelia but she didn’t say nothing to him. Franque and me ride in the back with the box of Anastasio, and we didn’t say nothing either.

Only got two doctors in Madera County and my teacher say it’s not enough for all those thousand people. The doctor’s house was full of people waiting when we get there. The lady who work for the doctor didn’t understand Mexican so good, so I tell her in English what happen with Franque and the pickup and the box of Anastasio. She look scared.

“Es malo? Qué tiene mi hijita?” Daddy say in Mexican.

“My Daddy want to know if it’s bad,” I tell the lady in English.

The lady say she don’t know, she not the nurse, only secretary, and the doctor is out on “emergency call” but he was coming right back.

I tell this to my Daddy but he didn’t understand what was an emergency call so he sit down with Arcelia and try to make her speak. Was funny. Was some ladies there sitting holding little babies like Ubaldo, and Daddy with his levis and black leather jacket was sitting holding

Arcelia. No, was terrible. Daddy was crying and I like it better when he is mad.

We wait and wait and the doctor was still on emergency call. Then Carlos Trujillo bend down and put his ear on Arcelia's chest and feel her neck.

"Está muerta, tu hijita," he say to Daddy, "your little girl is dead."

Carlos Trujillo was driving very slow and careful and it take a long time to get back to Piñoncito. But this time I didn't fall asleep. I wasn't tired. I was thinking.

Poor Franque, he was crying in back of the pickup with me. He tell me he was going to run away to the Army, but he was too young and Daddy need him to take care the sheep. Carlos Trujillo was sure nice to him. He tell Franque was not his fault. They let him drink whisky and he was tired from the velorio. It was wrong to let him drive.

And was sure nice what Carlos do for Arcelia too. He go back to the store and buy the white First Communion dress Arcelia want with his own three dollars.

And Mr. Varoz from the funeral company sure was nice too. He didn't believe it till he seen Arcelia. Then he give Daddy a big abrazo, that means like a kiss, and he tell us to wait in the front room. In a little while he bring Arcelia back in a little white box special for children. He make her look pretty, all clean and with her hair brushed and he put the white dress on her. Inside the box was soft like a sheep only more white and shiny. The dress was too big for her but Mr. Varoz fix it so she look like a fairy in the second-grade reader. And he didn't cost us nothing for it.

But when we get past Peña's Cash Store in Rio Seco I think only one thing. What was we going to tell Mama? And I think everybody was thinking that like me.

Mama was sitting with Ubaldo when we come in. She got her dress open and Ubaldo was sucking his milk. "It's late," she say and she go to put beans and coffee on the fire. Everybody stand there waiting.

"'Onde 'stá la Arcelia?" she say and I seen her eyes get big. Then Carlos Trujillo come and grab her tight and tell her. Mama make a terrible scream like a goat when you going to cut his neck. Worse than that. I was scared and I run outside to the pickup. I call to Franque but he was gone. I wait and I was shivering because was cold. I hear Mama crying worse than everybody together at the velorio for Anastasio. And I hear Ubaldo screaming too because he didn't get no more milk. Then everything was quiet.

Mama come to the door. "Abrán, hurry, eat your supper," she say and I come. I want to kiss Mama but I was scared. The beans was in the plates. Mama sit down in the corner under the picture of the Virgin next to the one of Jesus opening his chest to show us his beautiful heart. She was talking to the Virgin.

"Ay María Santísima . . . Madre Purísima de Dios . . . óyeme-óyeme . . . perdí mi hijita, mi hijita perdí . . . Ay . . . Ay . . . Ay . . . Ay . . . Ay . . . Ay . . ."

And underneath she hold Ubaldo up so he could suck his milk.

HOMAGE

I think of you and I think
 Of one of those Roman roads
 That last though towns are buried,
 Ports and granaries burn,
 Or fever lays child by father.
 Through my mind, with its vacillations,
 Its opposing north and south,
 There runs a single route
 Grasping the whole together:
 The chalklands of indifference,
 The terraced hills of olive,
 The evacuated towns
 I shall never live in again,
 The half-remembered cities
 I have dug out, stone by stone,
 With grazed, reluctant hands,
 And the capitals of belief
 Newbuilt on their old sites.
 Wherever I am, wherever
 My thought has need to travel,
 You are the road I take.
 Where you leave off, I hear
 The barbarian fracas break.

—ADRIENNE RICH