



Don Faggot: Fiction

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To Jorge Ferretis, whose writing taught us Mexican jotos to be brave.

Moss is the perennial tenant of 310 W. Alameda Street, between Alondra and Raymond, an industrial-park-turned-guesthouse between three tire shops, a cart with the best pupusas north of the Suchiate River—allegedly—because the lady who cooks them, makes them with love; and a vape shop that not too long ago diversified into the THC market and to this day still sells pirated adult films in the back. It is an unusually hot spring day. One can see the train tracks sizzle, they seem to expand in the heat. The former owner had the good sense to build an internal courtyard with a small pool (now full of dry leaves), in the hope that the area would gentrify before his kids turned into adults. This did not happen. The guesthouse is just a little too far, the neighbors a little too brown, the clientele a little too undesirable. So, they sold it at a loss. And the people they sold it to, sold it, and so on. It has always borne names with the hard J of Spanish, Jiménez, Juárez, Jara, but now has the name of a masculine flower, Jacinto's, the current owner's name, given to him by a feminine father, whose gentle disposition and proclivity for Hawaiian shirts Jacinto despised.

Out of room 17 comes the strange man who makes Jacinto uncomfortable. Don Fermín is middle-aged, dark-skinned, fat, hairy, and most of all, handsome. His ancestors had been violent colonial conquerors for, although his skin is dark, his eyes are an unexpected deep green that looks like thick honey in the evenings. His large clothes dry proudly on the railing on the second floor, overlooking the courtyard. More than one of Don Fermín's neighbors has looked at those great, wide denim jeans, and the crisp white polo shirts, and thought that Don Fermín must be a strong

lover, a horse of a man. More than one tenant has offered to wash Don Fermín's great trousers, just for the pleasure of feeling their immensity, with the excuse that Don Fermín lives alone, and has no one to look after him, and a man should not be seen scrubbing jeans anyway, for all to see. But Don Fermín always disappoints.

Now, Jacinto knows Don Fermín is a man of means, a fact he has shared with whomever is willing to hear. Jacinto knows that his business is to accept all kinds of tenants, with and without papers, fixed and loose incomes, and the less he asks, the better. But Don Fermín arrived years ago with an I.D. and a bank statement that did not match the humility of Jacinto's, its peeling paint, its dried pool. Jacinto knows Don Fermín could live in a better place, but he suspects Don Fermín stays for the children.

Plenty of children live in Jacinto's. Jacinto does not really mind, and he had learned the hard way that he would lose a significant number of long-term clients if he decided to mind. Most kids have parents who leave all day to work. Some kids have one parent who locks them in their room from the first bus run of the day until the last; these kids sometimes count the busses that go by, until the hours thin, and they get to see their parent again.

Most parents trust Don Fermín to take care of their kids. And, even when they don't, they are not going to pay a day-care service when Don Fermín watches them for free. Who can blame them? And Don Fermín loves every last one of them. He teaches them how to play hide and seek, thieves and policemen, tag, and to stay inside the courtyard. Don Fermín teaches them to do math with the license plates and reads them folk stories from the places where their ancestors lived: Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico. Don Fermín brings pupusas and candy for the kids locked up, pushes them through a cracked window or the gap under a door.

Jacinto sits in his office and looks up from his television from time to time. Jacinto watches Don Fermín and feels a nameless discomfort that crawls up and down his arms.

The parents thank Don Fermín with a hot meal, they offer to wash his car, do his laundry, scrub his enormous shoes. But Don Fermín declines, he wants nothing to do with the parents. On the weekends, when the parents stay with their children, Don Fermín disappears. And one such day, with the man gone, Jacinto invites some of his tenants for a beer, and he first calls Don Fermín by that name that had been on everyone's tongues, but no one had dared utter: Don Faggot. "Don Faggot," Jacinto says, laughing, "you know he sews his own jeans, right? He, she, whatever, you know? What business does a man of means have with kids not his own?" And the tenants laugh, and drink, and some, for the first time, worry.

The name catches like fire. Suddenly Don Faggot notices the tenants point at him and chuckle. But everything seems to be as normal, so Don Faggot calms his nerves and continues to play, teach simple arithmetic, read, and eat pupusas made with love by the lady and her cart.

Not long after, the single mother from room 22 (who has never been surer of her decision to lock up her 8-year-old girl all day long) leaves for work and forgets to blow out her candle to La Virgen de Guadalupe. She prays every morning that things will get better, that things will be better in this country, and asks for forgiveness for taking the girl from her father, but did she have a choice? How could she not, Lupita? And the candle is knocked over by some force— the little girl, or the vibrations from a truck passing by, who can say— and first burns the image of La Virgen, her green cloak quickly turning red and then black. The fire catches like a name.

There are only two adults in Jacinto's, Jacinto and Don Faggot. Jacinto is first to notice the smoke. He screams and points and runs to fill a bucket with water, but the water drips frustratingly,

as if it knew and was an accomplice of the fire. The children yell and gather in the yard. One of the older children frantically points at room 22 and screeches: “Lupita! Lupita está ahí adentro!” Without a second thought, Don Faggot runs up the stairs and smashes his colossal frame against the door. One, two, three times! He can feel the heat coming from inside and the smoke that escapes attacks his eyes. Don Faggot takes a step back and, with all his strength, he slams himself against the door, which comes apart at the hinges, as if a rocket had exploded. Don Faggot looks desperately for the girl. He finds her, fainted in the bathroom. He fights through the smoke, now thick like a wall, as he tries to find the exit he created. By the time he sees the daylight coming in, he is all flames, and with his last breath, he runs out, girl-in-arms, and faints just by the railing.

Don Faggot wakes up in the hospital, an unbearable pain takes hold of him. The pain is like a pool where he is drowning. He sleeps again.

The doctor rushes him into surgery. She is tending to the burns on his body when a nurse notices Don Faggot is bleeding from his crotch. A small steel rod is lodged in his scrotum, but if he will die, it will be from the burns, so the bleeding is stopped, the rod quickly forgotten, since the burns take priority.

Lupita lives. She is barely injured. Don Faggot is still at the hospital, but no one dares call him by that name.

He is Don Fermín.

He is the bravest man in Jacinto’s.

Perhaps the bravest man in all of L.A.

As wounds heal, the doctor notices black skin forming around the hole left by the steel rod. And to be perfectly honest, she feels a little jolt of excitement. Finally, she gets to perform the amputation she had always dreamed of. And it is not that she is perverse, but that she had been working with a team of researchers to develop artificial gonads. And, at last, here is her chance for a human trial.

Don Fermín has not been awake when the decision is made to castrate him. Since he has no next of kin, the doctor is allowed to decide, and she does not falter. As soon as it is done, she has her chance for her experimental reconstructive surgery. It is a success. The patient has not regained consciousness and yet, the artificial gonads react to stimulation, and are able to produce viable gametes, as expected from animal trials.

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When Don Fermín returns to Jacinto's, he is given a hero's welcome. Lupita embraces the man warmly. Don Fermín is at once the bravest man and a medical marvel. Lines of reporters from television stations gather outside room 17 to interview the Hero of Alameda Street. They do not even ask for Jacinto's permission to park in the courtyard. Actually, they ask Jacinto no questions at all. The nerve! They even interrupt Jacinto's shows to broadcast the face of his fruity, fat-cat, fucker of a tenant. And, Jacinto admits to himself, he is more than a little embarrassed over the peeled paint and the dried pool full of moss.

The weeks pass and the summer rages. The cameras and reporters disappear and, sooner than one would think, the name that burns like fire returns. Jacinto has his little campaign to reinstate Don Faggot's name, which he manages to do with a few beers and an unkept promise to refill the pool to combat summer's heat.

On one of those days when the pavement sizzles, Don Faggot is getting ready to leave for the weekend (who knows where?), when the alarms from one of the tire shops go off. A little mouse of a boy runs into Jacinto's, looking for refuge, and Don Faggot takes him in. Police cars only come to this neighborhood for one reason. And a young man, new to the force, eager to prove himself, arrives at Jacinto's alone on a motorcycle. They tell him on the radio to wait for backup, but the adrenaline of his first call rams into his heart. He is a peeled wire sparking.

Jacinto spares not a second to run to the officer, screaming from yards away, "You're looking for the little mouse! He is in room 17, right there!" —he points. "Don Faggot is hiding him!"

Officer sparking wire climbs up the stairs and knocks. He knocks again. The few tenants who were not already in the courtyard, gather to see the show. Officer sparking wire caresses the gun on his waist and knocks one more time. The door bursts open, and before the officer can react, his face is met by Don Faggot's gargantuan fist. As Officer sparking wire flies, the little mouse runs from behind Don Faggot, down the stairs, into the street, and before Jacinto can grab him, he is gone. As Officer sparking wire attempts to grab his gun, he feels his whole body lifted into the air, he thinks he must be dreaming when he gets that sense of falling, past the railing, and into the empty pool. The officer meets the moss in the bottom of the pool with a loud thud. Thankfully, he thinks, it's soft. The crowd cheers and laughs as the officer gets back on his motorcycle and rushes away. That's the crowd, except one. The one who immediately knows the police will come back.

The motorcycle returns with four police cars. The faint sound of a helicopter approaching follows. But Don Faggot is already waiting for them, sitting with his legs hanging into the empty

pool. Little Lupita waves at him, and he is still smiling when the embarrassed officer slams his head on the concrete and his blood spills into the pool.

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Don Fermín resolves to reinvent himself in prison. Why not? He has all the time in the world. He pumps iron in his new courtyard and sees his lean muscles pop as the months go by. He misses the children, of course. But he finds ways to fill his time. He reads more now than ever and, it is entirely possible, that he feels a sort of joy in that place, where all can happen that could not happen on the outside.

Don Fermín gets a few flashes from his old life. The little mouse he saved comes to visit. He brings news that he has a tiny mouse of a girlfriend, that he is back in high school, that he doesn't want to steal anymore. It is perhaps something like pride that Don Fermín feels for his young friend. Little mouse brings Don Fermín cigarettes, a little cash when he can. Little Mouse never misses a visiting day and tells Don Fermín that Jacinto finally filled the pool. Don Fermín is glad to bestow life advice on his tiny friend. He feels generous when he gifts his little mouse his car, so his young friend can take the girlfriend to the movies and ride along the Santa Mónica coast, all the way to Santa Bárbara. Don Fermín fantasizes they find a virgin beach and give themselves to each other. Don Fermín feels contented with his reverie, yet he is not one bit aroused by it.

Indeed, Don Fermín notices in this new stage of life, he is rarely aroused. He finds beauty in the bulging anatomies of his fellow inmates, but he is surprised by his lack of excitement, his general softness. It could not be the iciness of the concrete floors, could it? They seem to get much colder in here than in Jacinto's.

To Don Fermín's surprise, a few months in, as he walks to the visiting area, he finds that it is not his mouse of a son who is there to see him, but the doctor who performed his castration and reconstruction. She has a bizarre look in her eyes, and seems bleak, as though she sees right through him. Of course, in her mind, she gaily visits her experiment, her perfect specimen, but she will be damned if she betrays her professionalism, her perfection, in this place. She is pleased with her subject's clear signs of testosterone production (overproduction?). She looks at Don Fermín's hairy arms with satisfaction, at his growing muscles with indulgence. She inquires if he has been involved in courtyard fights? If he has been aggressive since the incident with the policeman? And she merrily makes notes; that is, until Don Fermín confesses his slumbering libido.

A crooked scowl takes over the doctor's face. But she figures, it must be the environment, right? How do they expect the miracle man to thrive in such a place? And she concludes, right then and there, that she must get him out.

The best thing from Don Fermín's old life returns to him once a month, when the pupusas lady he knew is allowed to come into the prison and sell her delectable pupusas to the inmates. More than one inmate is allowed a pinch of her bottom, a stolen caress, a flirtatious glance, or a dirty fantasy whispered in her ear. But it is Don Fermín who seems to catch her eye. She gives him pupusas bursting with beans and chicharrón. She grabs his forearms, unashamed of her favoritism.

Don Fermín remembers his conviction to be a different man and reciprocates. He gets close to her and when the guard looks away, kisses her neck, her ears. And although Don Fermín is not aroused, not in the way that the doctor wishes him to be, he enjoys her warmth, her brash desire, how she breaks the monotony.

It is again Spring when the doctor returns. Yet this Spring brings chilly air from the mountains. She is happy to see her human trial continue to build exquisite muscle, thick hair, but is again disappointed by his general lack of violent drive. Yet all is forgiven as soon as she hears of Don Fermín's secret affair with the pupusas lady. She is elated. And, more convinced now than ever, she tells Don Fermín the good news: arguing the need for him to be observed in a proper medical facility, the advances his body could lead to in medical research, his clean record, his value to the community, etc., etc., he has been granted an appeal.

Don Fermín, anxious that this unforeseen freedom will push him to his previous life, tells his little mouse of an adopted son to call the pupusas lady immediately, for he intends to marry her.

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It is an unusually cold summer in Santa Clarita when Don Fermín lays awake next to his sleeping wife. He gets up to close the window and looks at her reflection. She looks peaceful now, in this house without children, without the possibility of children; but a fire burns inside of his mind. In this quiet night, all he can think of is of that bastard, Jacinto, of the children he used to love and take care of, and of that name, Don Faggot.

Was it possible that Don Fermín misses the name? Does he long for the fires it burned, its accuracy, how powerful it made him feel, how afraid?

He looks at his wife again in the moonlight. She was never a beauty, but in this light, he feels repulsed by her. He hates her when he thinks how kindly she accepted his impotence. His anger makes him tremble, then panic.

He needs to catch his breath.

Don Faggot quietly walks down the stairs and grabs his car keys from the wicker bowl next to the front door. He pushes his car out of the driveway careful not to wake his wife. When he feels confident, he won't wake her, he gets in and turns the car on. He heads to Alameda, between Alondra and Raymond. He knows this city better than he knows himself, or what he will do when he arrives at his destination.

For a moment, he is angry that he cannot buy a gun.

He turns the windows down and lets the cold air hit his face as he drives down the 405, past Sherman Oaks, past the mountains, past Westwood, past Culver City, past Inglewood, left on the 105. He can see the colors of the sunrise now. Right on the 710.

Don Faggot parks his car in Jacinto's courtyard, his spot is empty, as if waiting for him.

He notices the pool where he had his head bashed in is now full of water.

He walks up to Jacinto's office by the courtyard and waits.

It starts with Don Faggot slamming his body against the office door. The tenants hear the noise and open their blinds. Those with a developed taste for gossip even open their doors; they sense a show starting that they cannot miss.

Don Faggot shatters the office door open, as if a rocket had exploded. A half-asleep Jacinto emerges from the little apartment connected to the office, shotgun in one hand, phone in the other. Jacinto surprisingly recognizes Don Faggot. Jacinto had suspected a burglar immediately. Don Faggot is leaner now, more muscular, but sure enough, it is him. Alarm turns to panic as Jacinto shouts: "I will call the police!" —while he lifts the shotgun. But it is too late.

Don Faggot easily wrestles the shotgun from Jacinto's hand and tosses it away. Same with the phone. And grabs Jacinto by the hair, pulling him into the courtyard. Jacinto screams and cries and suddenly thinks of his late father. Why does he think of his father now, that he fears to die?

Once in the center of the yard, where all the neighbors can see, Don Faggot pulls down Jacinto's pants and underwear. A hairy bottom emerges trembling with fear. "It is me, Don Faggot!" —he yells. "The Hero of Alameda Street!"

Don Faggot proceeds to spank the trembling man with his mammoth hands. Each blow is followed by a harrowing scream. "Please! Please stop!" the little man screams, turned to vermin, all tears and sweat.

And, all of a sudden, with the squirming man wrapped around his lap, Don Faggot feels a hardness arising. Don Faggot feels his brawny, determined, vigorous firmness!

Don Faggot bellows, pressing his towering manhood against his victim, "Am I a man?"

Jacinto whimpers, "Yes! Yes, you are a man!"

He is cured, at last! And he is, at last, the man he always dreamed of. Isn't he?