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It turned noon as David Alvarez raised the roof of the Crusher. With short little explosive sounds, the Rambler lying in the Crusher's bed released tension from its new shape, as if it tried to pop its bones back into its joints. The compressor topped up its pressure, and when the gauge showed right for a fast restart, David turned off the diesel.

He removed his earmuffs and hardhat, and the sound in the air flipped from deadness to singing quiet. At that moment, in the time between the crush and the removal of the metal block that had been a car, things felt preternaturally frozen. Then a woman cried out.

They had parked the Crusher in a byway beside the river road, on a tributary that fed down east into the Rio Grande. The little river carried only snowmelt just now, fast but thin, quick and not yet quiet as it would be in summer. Cottonwoods stood up shaggy and gray on all sides, the emigrants who had survived in a dry canyon by burrowing their feet into the river.

They'd lined the trucks up with safety cones laid out front and back. Mickey Johnstone acted as flagman for traffic that crawled up from the flats far below. The waiting cars had been sorted into the communal parking lot of a diner across the way, and the crew stacked their auto victims one by one onto the transport semi parked downhill.

The sun held that bright sharpness that cut through with no weight. The cold air bit at their ears and noses. Real spring waited for shade; the cottonwoods had just flashed out their first sign of leaves. Across a wooden bridge and under its own naked trees, an adobe settled into the ground. The cry had come from the house.

David and the others stared across the stream. They had all heard it. They all wondered what trouble a woman had. The closed windows and doors of the adobe said nothing.

With the Rambler onboard its transport, David broke his crew for lunch. He gave Frankie five dollars and asked for a burger from the diner. The men strode stiff legged across the road to their meal, left their boss at the Crusher. He opened a toolbox in the pickup and fished out a grease gun. With one eye on the adobe, he sidestepped around the Crusher, greased fittings that didn't need attention. He twitched his head, more than he had to, back at the house.

Like most houses on the river road, the adobe bore generational marks, but this one had been scarred by different families come and gone, from folks that had drifted in and then out. The core of the house stood square, with damaged plaster and a bad roof drain, a canaleja with its boards askew and seams opened. They had built a lean-to addition out of wood on the upriver side, and a second addition downriver, out of cinder block. Two vehicles stood in front - A Ram pickup, covered in dust but quite new, and a white Neon, showing its battered fenders and trunk to the road. The real king

of the house, a grey dish for satellite TV, poised on the roof pointing south.

Before David had worked all the way around the Crusher, the screen door of the adobe banged open and a man strolled out. He stood beneath the porch and stretched, then ambled into the light. Taller than six foot, solid-built and big across the shoulders. He scratched a beard, grey and brown, with a bit of curliness to it. His eyes lurked behind a beaky nose, concealed under a cap. The man strode to the truck through the sagging yard gate, opened his door and slid in. He slammed it behind him, and backed out with a spray of dust. Within a moment he disappeared down the road towards the Rio Grande.

While waiting for his crew David checked the fluids for the diesel and then unbuttoned the metal cover to an auxiliary pump that had broken down. His brain wouldn't leave him alone. Mierda, the feeling from that house. Just like before. A man should do something. No fix would make it right. To try?

Resolved, he turned from the pump and marched quick to the bridge, across it and the stream to the driveway of the house. He slowed past the dead flowers in their tubs on the porch. Keeping back two respectful steps from the door, he leaned forward and knocked. No sound from inside - he scuffed his boot on the sand that dusted the porch and then knocked again.

He barely heard a shuffle, like a whisper or a little prayer. Someone stood on the other side of the door, waited. He leaned forward and knocked, soft. The door crept open; a woman barely revealed, hiding in the gloom. David squinted to see her in the dark as he stood out on the bright porch. She held the door half open, with her shoulder and hip behind.

"Hello, I'm the foreman for the crew there. I know we've been making a lot of noise this morning. I hope it hasn't disturbed you."

She inched forward, and the door opened wider. She stood shorter than David's height, five and a half feet, and she was thin. He knew what she could see, a man in coveralls, with a balding, shaved head, big through the shoulders, with the paunch of a middle-aged workman. He pulled his neck in and ducked his head so he would appear less physical.

"I know it's noisy, and it will be for awhile more this afternoon. I hope we haven't been disturbing you." She had long dark hair that lay tangled on the right shoulder, pulled back around from the left side of her face.

She half-stepped forward and let the door open beside her. "No, it's no trouble. You haven't bothered us." He could see now that no one stood behind her. He had a chance.

"We don't often work right beside someone's house unless they are giving us a car to crush. I know we can cause some noise and some dust."

She replied with more of a hum or ahem than actual words. She lingered back in there, concealed by a dark room. David wanted a better view of her.

He knew he appeared bear-like to her, that his mustache hid his face. He wrinkled his forehead. "See, we're required by the Department to let people know who we are, in case there are any complaints or we haven't cleaned up or something. Let me leave you my card. It's got the number of our office on it." He fumbled in his coveralls pocket, came up with his wallet, dug out a business card.

She moved forward to the screen door and opened it a crack. He inched forward, card extended. She was white, not only Anglo, but also pale. Her hair, full and dark, looked unkempt but not dirty. Her

face, without a sign of makeup, drawn, emaciated, and her lips, sad thin lines turned down across her face.

She reached around the edge of the screen door and pinched the card between thin fingers and thumb. "Thank you." Even as she retreated back into the house and closed the screen, David could see her. Her hair swung back from the right side of her face. He glimpsed a cheek dark and bruised, and a new red highlight up around the eye. The door closed. The lock clicked.

The man in the truck, he must be left handed.

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Across the little bridge, he found his crew straggling back from lunch, smoking and laughing together as they crossed the blacktop. Frankie gave him his burger wrapped in paper, and forty-three cents in change. He also gave David a quizzical glance. "So, you were over at the house. Maybe you were visiting an abularia, no?"

"No, just saying hi."

"David," said Matt, "I wouldn't be messing around that house. In the diner they say que the man there, he is mucho malo."

"Why did they tell you?"

"We asked." The guys gazed down at the ground or away.

"Well, that mucho malo is a big man because he hits women. I didn't talk to him, but I saw her, gave her my card."

"Porqué you would give her your card. How did you get cards? You never gave us no card."

David ignored that. "It was just to get her to open the door, to see what was going on. I told her we were required to give out phone numbers if there was a complaint."

"Sí, like we would help the guys in Santa Fe bust our chops, by wrapping up complaints like presents. But what about the woman?"

"What about her?"

The men shuffled their feet, gazed down the road. Matt broke first. "But, in the diner, they did say that tipo, he does las luchas on her, and nobody will say nothing to him. They say it's not their business, but in the diner they all chur talk about the business in that house."

David stared levelly at Matt, then said, "Well, back to it. Achaques quire la muerte." Their white crew-member Mickey wrinkled his forehead, so David added, "Death needs no excuses - but we will if we don't get back to work."

By mid afternoon they had demolished all the cars and loaded them up on transport. The crew raked up the litter from their crushing. David stood, hands on his hips, watched the blank face of the adobe. After some consideration he said to Frankie, "I think I'll get some water to prime the broke pump. When you're done, get Mickey to load the tractor. I'll be back before you're finished. Then we'll all go down to the highway yard to park for the night." Lame excuse. Who needed water for a busted pump?

He trudged once again to the adobe's door and knocked. Again, she opened it, and again stood back in the shadow, the dark of that house. David said, "Hi. I was here earlier. I wonder if I could trouble you for a bucket of water? We need to start a pump, and I don't want to use water from the river because of the sand."

She let a silence hang between them. He knew that silence.

She nodded. She opened the screen door. "Ok. You'd better come in to get it." He scuffed his boots on the mat, and then followed her in, into the cuartito. The room owned sad furniture with round sags and depressions, conforming to where people had dumped their bodies down. A large, newish TV loomed in the corner, with speakers scattered around it. A swinging door sagged in the corner, led into the kitchen. She glanced back over her shoulder at him, and then shambled into the cocina through the louvered door. It banged behind her. Diffident, he trudged across the room, pulled the door back. He could smell old bacon grease.

She shuffled into the corner of the room, removed a mop from a bucket, then it at the sink. David stood back across the room from her, and said, "That's a bad bruise you've got."

The only sound in the room was the water rushing into the bucket. In a small voice, she said, "I walked into a door."

"The door walked into you twice, on two separate days."

She turned from the sink with the bucket bail in both hands. With a step forward she set it on the table between them. It sloshed water back and forth. She flashed her eyes up at him. "That wouldn't be for you to say, would it?"

"Listen, in these rincónes, there is only one thing you can do. Get out."

A long pause. She stared unflinching at him. Under the florescent lights, the mark on her face appeared much worse, green around the edges. "Assuming I had a reason to get out, where would I go? Where would we go?" He glanced around the dingy kitchen, with its tiny window and its drainer full of plastic dishes.

Now that he wasn't fixated on her, David could see children's toys shoveled into one corner of the room and kid cups on the table. "You can't go on like this forever. There must be some place."

"You'd better go," she said. She pointed at the bucket and water. "The kids will be back real soon. They might tell my husband that someone had been in the house." He hefted up the plastic pail of water. As he reached the front door, she said, "I need the bucket back."

He stood in the doorway. "Look, you don't know me, but you have my number now. If you need me to drive you somewhere." An empty gesture. Said for her, or him?

The crew was ready to go when he got back to the Crusher. He poured the water on the ground near a tire, out of sight of the adobe. Then he handed the bucket to Mickey. "Set this down on the porch of the casita over there. Then lead by taking the first semi down the canyon."

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