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“Heal me.”

Ramon sat in Josiah’s lap and relaxed as radiant hands enfolded his heart and his wound. As the glow intensified, a single bullet sprang from the wound and clattered on the ground. Ramon stood up, took off the blood-stained shirt, and walked out of the room.

“Gracias, Dias!

Mama Teresa exclaimed her gratitude with clasped hands as she followed Ramon to his room. Josiah picked up the slug and shirt from the floor and tossed them into the trashcan. He swept the floor, tidied up the backroom in which he lived now. The events of this night were not strange to him, especially since Ramon was known as the Bad Boy of the family. Being the oldest child, he felt he had to represent, to keep the family safe from the other gangs out there.

Josiah showed up at the restaurant two months ago, with five dollars in his pocket and an excitement at having found “El Patron”. He perused the specials and, though they were reasonably priced, could not find anything lower than six dollars. Moved by his disappointed face, and perhaps his lost stare as he sat on the curb nearby, Mama T invited him into the dining room and gave him a plate of food on the house.

While he ate, Mama T chatted with him to determine where he came from, who might be looking for him, and if he was as mentally challenged as he seemed. She discovered very little about him. Besides his name, he could not tell her much else. He insisted this was the place he was looking for and he was alone. Mama T informed her family that he would be staying with them in the small house behind the restaurant until she could find out where he belonged. Papa Mateo agreed.

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Juan became Josiah's guardian of sorts, keeping him calm when sirens and gunfire rang out, or when people tried to hassle him. Police frequented the neighborhood due to heavy drug and gang activity. The family could not and would not move. The children grew up here when it was a quieter mix of people of color, all experiencing the injustice of red lining together. Juan was the youngest of three, yet he could still remember the threat of punishment for being bad from all the elderly neighbors, who then called his mother before he arrived home to face hers.

The middle child Nita married and moved a few blocks away into a more affluent predominantly white neighborhood with less crime. She worked in the restaurant daily but kept her distance from Josiah. Though he seemed harmless, she still dealt with demons from molestations in her past. She made jewelry which fascinated Josiah. She gave him a necklace made with an ornate filigree crucifix.

After Josiah was satisfied with the cleanliness of his room, he replaced the broom in the corner and stood rubbing the crucifix while he waited for Juan to appear in the doorway. He always knew when Juan was coming. They looked at each other then sat down on the makeshift sofa bed to talk. Juan worried about his big brother's activities and was afraid he wouldn't be able to make it home next time he needed healing. Josiah shrugged. He didn't know or sense Ramon like he did with Juan. He could not heal Nita's wounds. He wanted to protect them but accepted his limitations.

On this night, gun fire was so fierce, the restaurant closed early for the safety of their patrons. Police sirens echoed through the neighborhood, but the shots continued. Mama T pleaded with her oldest son to stay home, to rest from his recent wound, and to let the police do their job to

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protect them. Ramon listened silently while he checked the bullets in his gun. She tried to block the door with her body but he lifted her slight frame out of the way. She clung to him, but he wrested away, and strode confidently out of the house.

Mateo shook his head in resignation. He did not like his son's stubbornness and cockiness, but he could not control a grown man. What was the use of getting upset when he would not listen to reason? Mateo gathered the rest of his family into the back room where Josiah slept. They decided to pray, for their own protection and for Ramon, until the noises ceased. They sat in the uneasy quiet, each in his own thoughts.

Josiah, troubled in his spirit, fiddled with the newspaper. He fixated on an advertisement for an old abandoned amusement park not too far away. The ad announced a car show last night. He nudged Juan incessantly until he looked at the paper. Juan shook his head no but Josiah jumped up and ran out the room with the paper. Juan followed and found him outside, stuffing a rubber toy cat into an old ratty backpack. He climbed on to a bike in the yard, Juan's old 10-speed. Juan shook his head no, tried to pull him off the bike, and back into the house.

Josiah pointed to the ad in the paper then mounted the bike again. He took off down the deserted road away from the sirens. Scared but worried, Juan grabbed his new bike and followed him. They rode at top speed toward the amusement park. Juan wanted to turn back, but he could not leave his friend alone. So, he followed.

They arrived at the old park, sweaty and winded. Josiah dropped the bike and stood staring into the darkness. All the lights were shot out, a handful of cars were riddled with bullet holes, and

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the air was thick with the smell of gunpowder. Juan trembled next to his friend, afraid to ask why they were there.

Josiah, with backpack firmly strapped on, marched up to the first row of cars and peered into each one. Juan, afraid to stand out there in the open alone, and terrified to enter the park, stumbled a few feet behind him. What if the shooter or shooters were still here? Juan realized by now that the shots in the neighborhood had been a decoy. The real shootout happened here at the miss-advertised car show.

The only cars left were those recently abandoned, except for one. This car still held its driver. The driver was slouched over the steering wheel as if looking for something. Josiah hurried to the car. Recognizing the figure, Juan pushed past him to yank the car door open. Together, they pulled Ramon's body onto the ground. Juan could hear the gurgling ragged breathing. Josiah felt his faint pulse slowing down.

“Heal him! Please!”

Josiah took the toy cat out of his backpack and lay it next to Ramon. Juan stared in disbelief at the scene before him. Josiah placed both hands on Ramon's abdomen and they began to glow then stopped, returning to normal. He shook his head at the failure.

“You have to do it! Try again!”

Juan grasped Josiah's hands and placed them on Ramon's chest. Tears streaming down his face, Josiah did try again but nothing happened. Juan shook Ramon's lifeless body, cursing him for

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leaving the house. Josiah's heart broke. He pushed Juan away and put his hands on Ramon's body once more. With all his might, he willed the young man well.

Josiah's hands began to heat up, a faint light shimmered in his fingers. He felt warmth in his chest, his body emitted a pale light. It grew brighter with each heartbeat. It became unbearable and Josiah shouted as a beam of light shot into Ramon's body. The young man gasped as air entered his restored lungs. His wounds healed as bullets fell from his torso. Juan threw his arms around his brother. He was alive!

Josiah crawled away with the toy cat in his burned hand, crawled behind another empty car. He hugged the toy as it melted onto the ground. Turning to thank him, Juan realized Josiah was missing. He caught a glimpse of something green behind the next car's wheel. Going to look, he found only the toy melted next to a shiny strand of metal. It was the crucifix Nita had given Josiah.

Juan knew Josiah was gone for good. He returned to his brother and helped him walk to the pair of bikes left just outside the park. He offered Ramon the new bike. Ramon shook his head no and mounted the old bike instead. Juan hopped onto his new bike and the brothers pedaled home.

Juan knew next time Ramon would stay home.