

## *Independence*

Emmanuel had never been to Los Angeles but he figured no place on Earth deserved the name more than his Mexico City. The sky was a drab gray and elsewhere in the city, he knew, the citizens of the real *ciudad d'angeles* were taunted by the sporadic rainfall. He massaged his throat as he gazed upwards towards *El Ángel*.

Traffic circled around him. Volkswagen Beetles, Toyota Camry, and various Ford models riding circles around this monument of Mexican Independence. He laughed, which made him cough. He spit his cough to the asphalt of the roundabout and turned back to the stretch of artsy planters delineating the way to the Angel of Independence. *The more things change, huh?* He thought to himself.

Back at his apartment, he delighted in coursing through his record selection. His favorite was an album self titled *Messiah Mia*, by a Mexican born rapper who found a deal of moderate success outside the L.A. system to the north. He grabbed her vinyl and tossed it onto the player.

*El Norte luchan*

*Una la batalla*

*Por la unidad,*

*Luchamos*

*Por la libertad*

*La Lucha*

*Por l'expresión.*

An anthem to the self-sufficiency of the Mexican people, Emmanuel had long wanted to see her in concert. A voice for this newest generation of Mexicans who thought the lyrics of *Himno Nacional Mexicano* centered too much on a strength the country no longer possessed. American interventions in Mexican affairs and the effect of an increasingly globalized economy

were antithetical to both Mexican independence and the existence of Messiah Mia. *If not her, then who?*

The refrigerator held a pitcher for water, three eggs, some cheese, and a variety of sauces to line the shelves of the door. He grabbed the pitcher, which came out with ease. There was a trickle of water left at the bottom. Upending the pitcher into his mouth, he swallowed the paltry refreshment readily then shoved beneath the sink and turned the handle for 'cold.'

The water came out, at first, as normal as ever but it quickly turned brown, then an almost sludge started to emanate from the faucet. Slowly, dripping like molasses, into the pitcher. Looking beneath the sink, he shook some pipes and whacked them a bit to see if it might fix the problem.

The sink began to vibrate as it started to sputter out watery sludge in bursts. On the counter above him, an empty Coca-Cola bottle vibrated off the table, crashing into several pieces onto the floor next to him. He stood up and turned the sink off.

"Fuck!" He held his hand over his eyes, his thumb caressed against his right temple while his middle finger pressed determinedly into his left. As he closed his eyes, he transitioned his hand to massage his throat again, then let himself drift back to the song.

*Traidores llevan  
distintivos rojo, blanco, y azul  
la forma de nuestra bandera  
en sus bravos.*

He opened his eyes and found himself at the convenience store just down the road. A cold wind flowed over his body, freezing him to his place before the refrigerator in the beverage section. He looked inside at the water selection. 'Smart Water,' 'Aquafina,' and worst of all, 'Dasani.' Words that had no meaning outside of board rooms to the north.

He started to cough again. A dizzy, profound cough that left him weaker with each wheeze.

“Hey — Hey!” The cashier was yelling at him. *Close the door.* He could put the words in his mind into his mouth. He knew was being wasteful. He coughed again. But he couldn't conceive of doing it. To hand over his cash to the man and walk away with a bottle of water? To hand over his independence, as so many before him had done, and be thankful to live another day in the thralls of profit?

Emmanuel coughed again and the cashier yelled out. *I could run. I could take it and run.* Would the cashier lose his job? Certainly not. *I'd get away and he could say he tried his best.* He coughed again and felt his weakness spread. Maybe he'd get caught if he ran, then what? Prison? For stealing water for his country? He'd need a great lawyer and, even then, better men have been beheaded for less.

The cold from the open refrigerator reached his knees. The cashier was en route to him, but still he stood silent.

Finally, he grabbed the neck of the 'Aquafina' bottle and brought it to his chest. All the while, the cashier behind him hurling all matter of phrases towards him.

“Lo siento,” Emmanuel offered. Then he ran.

“Hey!” The cashier retorted, then took off after him.

And all Emmanuel could think of was that song.