

Rain of Gold—Part I

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CHAPTER ONE

Dreaming, Lupe reached across the bed. Dreaming as she lay there, face down on the lumpy-hard straw mattress, she reached under warm smelling cotton covers, searching for her mother, but she didn't find her.

Opening her eyes, Lupe yawned and stretched, her long thick hair falling about her neck and shoulders in dark, rich curls. Her mother was sitting at the end of the bed, surrounded by long spears of silvery moonlight coming in through the cracks of their lean-to. A cock crowed in the distance, a coyote howled, and the dogs in the village began to bark.

Smiling, Lupe rubbed her sleep-swollen eyes and crawled across to her mother. Coming up behind her, Lupe put her arms around her mother, and snuggled close to her soft, plump body. Her mother, Doña Guadalupe, stopped braiding her long gray hair and turned about, taking her youngest child into her arms. Lupe was six years old, and she'd been sleeping with her mother ever since her father, Don Victor, had left them to look for work in the lowlands.

Then Lupe's three older sisters began to stir, too. Carlota, Lupe's eleven-year-old sister, was the first to come and get in bed with Lupe and their mother.

"Move over," said Carlota, snuggling in between Lupe and their mother. "You get to sleep all night long with Mama!"

"Quiet," said Doña Guadalupe calmly, "There's enough of me for all of you."

She hugged her two youngest daughters close to her heart, and then came Maria, who was thirteen, and Sophia, who was fifteen, and they, too, got into the little straw bed.

Outside, the cock crowed again, and the coyote continued howling in the distance. Lupe's brother Victoriano came inside the lean-to with his dog. He was ten and the only one allowed to sleep outside under the stars, because he was a boy.

"*Buenos días*," he said, not coming near the bed. Victoriano had been trying very hard to act like the man of the house ever since Don Victor had left them.

"*Buenos días*," said his mother and sisters.

And so the first miracle of the new day had been completed; Lupe and her family were awake and the world was still alive.

"All right," said Doña Guadalupe, "now we must all get to work."

Meeting her brother out front, Lupe quickly took the broom made from a bush with small yellow flowers called the Mexican-Broom, and she swept the hard-packed ground as her brother sprinkled it with water. They didn't have much time. He, the sun, was already making the eastern sky pale, and the Americans who lived up high on the barren slope across the canyon didn't tolerate anyone being late.

Lupe and her brother were just finishing when the first two miners arrived. One was tall and thin and his name was Flaco. The other was short and wide and his name was Manos because of his huge, thick hands. Flaco and Manos were both in their late twenties; they were two of the oldest men that the Americans still employed at the mine.

"*Buenos días*, Victoriano. And look at you, Lupe," said Flaco, touching her hair, "every day I swear that you grow more beautiful!"

Lupe blushed, saying nothing. And Victoriano stepped aside so the two miners could go inside.

“*Buenos dias*,” said Manos as he passed by Lupe and her brother.

Lupe nodded to Manos. She liked Manos better than she like Flaco. Manos never touched her or embarrassed her by saying how beautiful she was. Ever since Lupe could remember, men—perfect strangers—had been stopping her and touching her hair and telling her how beautiful she was. It angered her. She was no dog to stop and pet.

“*Buenos dias*,” said Lupe quietly to Manos.

Then, just as Lupe was going to follow the two miners inside to help serve them breakfast, there came the sun, *la cobija de los pobres*, the blanket of the poor.

Flaco and Manos put their hats back on and sat down at the first table under the *ramada* so they could look through the vines of the bougainvillea and keep watch on the sun’s progress. Lupe now went in to help her sister Carlota do the serving. Carlota and Lupe were the youngest, so Doña Guadalupe had them do the serving while she kept her older daughters in the kitchen. Maria and Sophia were just too ripe for the touching of men’s quick hands.

Bringing Flaco and Manos their hot cinnamon coffee, Carlota joked with the two men. But Lupe didn’t. She was too shy. For as long as Lupe could remember, her sisters and brother had made fun of her because she kept by her mother’s skirts, refusing to talk to anyone.

“Lupita,” her sisters would say, “some day you’re going to have to talk to people and let go of our mother’s skirts, you know.”

“No, I’m not,” she’d always say. “I’m going to stay by Mama’s side all my life!”

“Well, then, what will you do when you marry?” they’d tease her.

“My husband will come and stay with Mama and me or he can get out!”

For Lupe, her mother was everything. She was the perfect gift given to her by God.

Lupe was just going to go inside when the bellowing horn exploded. Lupe gripped her ears. Quickly, all the miners were up and out of the *ramada* as fast as they could move.

The sun was only two fists off the horizon when Lupe and her family finally sat down to eat their own breakfast. Outside, the dog barked and started growling. Victoriano got up and went out and glanced around. He could see nothing. But his little brown dog continued growling and looking up toward the cliff rocks on the western side of the box canyon.

What is it, boy?” asked Victoriano, petting his little brown dog. “Do you still smell the coyotes from last night?”

But then, suddenly, Victoriano felt it, too; here it was under his bare feet, the trembling of the earth. He could feel it before he heard it. His eyes went huge with fear, racing back inside the *ramada*.

“Mama, soldiers!” he screamed.

But his mother and sisters were already up and running, before the first sounds of the thundering horsemen even came echoing into their box canyon. Lupe felt her little heart wanting to burst. Ever since she could remember, her family had been running and hiding when soldiers came racing into their canyon.

Quickly, she grabbed all the food off her plate with her tortilla and fell chest-down to the earth along with her mother and sisters as the shooting began. Bullets were singing over their boulder as Lupe shoved the food into her mouth—chewing, swallowing, realizing that it would be a long time before she got to eat again. Then Lupe and her family were crawling, hearts

pounding against the earth, going under the chairs and tables as fast as they could so that they could get to the safety of the big boulder at the back of their lean-to.

Spitting out what she hadn't eaten, Lupe kept close to her mother, gripping the sun-warmed ground with her hands and pushing with her knees. The Revolution had started coming into their box canyon three months before Lupe was born. Bullets and death were a way of life for Lupe, but, still, she dreaded them as much as her goats dreaded the coyote's fangs.

Quickly, Lupe and her mother got behind the big boulder below the goat pens. Victoriano and Maria were already digging into the pile of manure behind the boulder.

"Hurry!" said their mother. "You're going to have to hide, too, Carlota."

"No, I'm still little!" said Carlota.

"Carlota! Do as I say! Even Lupe could be in danger!"

Wet, soggy, smelly manure was flying all around Lupe's face as her brother and sisters burrowed into the pile of chicken and goat waste. The last time soldiers had come through, even small girls not yet in their teens had been raped and beaten and taken away.

Suddenly, the screaming horsemen were in the canyon itself, circling above them on the main road. That meant that theirs would be one of the first homes to be struck, unless, of course the soldiers took over the gold mine first.

"Faster!" screamed their mother, digging herself, making room for Sophia, Maria and Carlota. Lupe couldn't help it; she began to puke. Egg and tortilla and salsa got all over her hands and face. Her mother's fear frightened her more than even the thundering sounds of the horsemen and the screaming shouts of men with their exploding rifles.

Down below in the main part of the village, the people were running in terror, hiding as quickly as they could while the monstrous sounds of the galloping horsemen shook the very earth.

Lupe and her family now had the pile of manure pulled out. Sophia and Maria crawled inside the crevice behind the boulder.

"Get in there, Carlota!" said Doña Guadalupe.

"But Mama," said Carlota, her face expressing pure repulsion, "that *caca* is all wet."

Having no more patience, Doña Guadalupe slapped Carlota, pushing her face-first down into the crevice. Maria and Sophia gripped their sister by the hair, pulling her in with them under the boulder.

Quickly, Lupe and Victoriano first tossed the straw over their sisters and then the wet, fresh manure. But Carlota kept shouting, trying to get out of the crevice until she got a wet piece of chicken shit in her mouth. She gasped and choked. Everyone, in spite of themselves, began to laugh.

Then, here came the horsemen, a hundred of them, leaping off the main road as they flew over the rock fences and lean-tos, racing down into the main part of the village. For the first time, Lupe couldn't hear the Americans' generators, the horsemen were screaming and shooting so loudly.

Hearing a terrible cry, Lupe looked up and saw the two big mother goats jumping at the fence and their babies crying in terror in the other pen. Lupe started to get to her feet so she could open the gate for her goats when two bullets came hissing over her head, splattering against the top of the big boulder.

Doña Guadalupe screamed, grabbing her youngest daughter and throwing her down on the ground.

Crying with fear, Lupe closed her eyes and crouched down between her mother and brother. She began to pray. But then she heard a terrible cry from her goats and she opened her eyes and saw that one mother goat had leaped on the fence with her big awkward body and her huge udder had caught on a picket post and ripped open like a paper bag.

Red blood and white milk and a piece of inner tissue splattered against the cedar fence as the mother goat kicked and screeched. But still she did not die. No, instead, she continued to live and suffer her entire predicament.

Lupe lay there screaming and crying until she could cry no more. She lay there, held down by her mother and brother as the horsemen turned the *ramada* inside out, knocking over their sheet-metal stove, setting the place on fire.

Then the horsemen passed on, sweeping down into the main part of the village. Lupe and her mother and brother got to their feet and saw that the big goat had kicked her last.

They hurried inside to get blankets and water to put out the fire as quickly as they could. And, as Lupe fought the fire and helped throw the flaming chairs and table outside, what she saw that hurt her most of all was the hard-packed earth, that she and her family had swept and watered for so many years to get it to look like polished tile, had been turned to rubble by the horses' hooves. She screamed, feeling invaded, trampled, raped, but no sounds came out.

It was noon. The shooting had ceased and the people were coming out of hiding. Victoriano and Old Man Benito were skinning out the dead mother goat.

"Lupe," said Doña Guadalupe, "I think it's safe now for you to go get fresh water."

"Yes," said Lupe.

Cautiously, she made her way down the steep hillside through the still smoldering huts to get water at the creek at the bottom of the canyon. Getting to the tall foliage alongside the bubbling brook, Lupe glanced all around before bending over to fill her clay pot. She felt nervous, tense, exhausted.

The main part of the village lay burning behind her and across the creek up the slope a few hundred feet, she could see the piles of yellow chalk-like waste from the mine and she could hear some of the soldiers further up the slope at the American enforcement laughing and joking, truly enjoying themselves.

Señor Jones, who ran the American mine, had prepared a feast for them. This was how the Americans always dealt with the soldiers who came shooting into their canyon. They fed the soldiers, made them welcome, and then calmed them down by promising them weapons from the United States.

(see questions on next page)

