

RAIN OF GOLD—PART II

Victor Villaseñor

The rainy season continued, but still, Lupe and her family worked the waste every day; they weren't finding as much gold as they'd hoped. They began to fear that they'd be trapped in the canyon for yet another whole year. And then the bandits would be sure to come again.

Late one afternoon, Lupe was with her mother down at Doña Manza's house, sitting on the terrace, when their mother spotted a shiny rock down in the plaza. It had just stopped raining, and they were drinking tea and eating wild roots to numb their hunger.

"Look," said Doña Guadalupe to Doña Manza, "see that rock in the middle of the plaza? Now that the sun has come out, it shines."

"My children and I were commenting on that same stone the other day," said Doña Manza. "Now that the roots have turned up the cobblestone, every time it rains, there seems to be a little color here and there, all over the plaza."

"So what are we waiting for?" said Doña Guadalupe. "Maybe it's gold!"

"Oh, no," said Doña Manza, laughing lightheartedly, "it's just water drying up. The Americans were wasteful, but not that wasteful," she added, laughing again.

"Well, I don't know," said Doña Guadalupe. "This plaza was one of the first places that the Americans built, and they had gold coming out of the ears back in those days.

"Lupe," she called, "get your brother and go down to the plaza and dig up that shiny rock for me."

"Yes," said Lupe, getting to her feet. She'd been reading a book with Manuelita.

"You go with her, too, Manuelita," said Doña Manza. "And take a shovel and a bar."

"Good," said Doña Guadalupe, "this way, if it is gold, we'll split it fifty-fifty."

Doña Manza laughed. "Oh, don't worry, *querida*. I'm only being courteous."

"Then you don't want half?" asked Doña Guadalupe, eyes full of mischief.

They both had a good laugh together as they watched their children go down to the plaza and start digging up the stone.

And then came a screaming shout.

"It's gold!" screamed Lupe. "Gold!"

The others were screaming, too, and the two old women were out of the chairs, racing down the steep steps to the plaza. And there it was, before their very eyes, shining up at them: a rock, the size of a burro's head, with a miracle of gold marbled into the side of the stone like a spider web—each strand of the web as big around as a child's finger.

In the next two days, they dug up the whole plaza, and they had so much gold that they couldn't process it fast enough.

Then it was the morning that they were to go out. They were all packed but Lupe just couldn't figure out how to protect her Colonel's card and her other treasures for the long journey. Finally, she called her brother aside.

"Look," she said, "I know how much of a hurry we're in, but could you please help me build a box to put my special treasures in?"

Seeing how anxious his sister was, Victoriano pulled some boards off their home and built a little box no bigger than two fists.

They were all ready to go when the old midwife came to get the milk goats that they'd given her. Ojos Puros and the Indians came to tell them goodbye and get whatever else there was left behind.

It became a time of wet eyes and big *abrazos*, then they were on their way—Maria, Esabel and their child, Lupe, Victoriano, and their parents. Don Victor was leading Don Tiburcio’s little white mule up the rocky trail to the main road when, suddenly, Doña Guadalupe yelled.

“No!” she said. “I can’t go!”

Lupe almost screamed with joy, not wanting to go, either.

“But what are you saying?” said Don Victor, taking off his straw hat and throwing it on the ground. “You’re sending me to damnation, woman! It was you who said we had to go before we lost all hope!” He began jumping up and down on his hat, crushing it.

“Yes, I know,” she said sadly. “But I just can’t leave. I need to take something with me to keep our canyon in my heart.”

“All right,” he said, trying to keep calm. “I can understand that. But what is it you want, my dear?” he asked through his teeth.

“The smell, the feel... my lilies!” said his wife. “My white mountain lilies!” And she put down her load. “Help me, quick! We’ll take my lilies! They smell of the canyon!”

“But we can’t take them!” shouted Don Victor, losing all patience. “Each of us is already packed with more than he can carry!”

“I’ll carry them for Mama,” said Victoriano.

“Me, too,” said Maria.

“I’ll dig them up for you,” said Lupe.

Don Victor shook his fist at the heavens. “Give me patience, dear God! And right now!”

The sun was five fists off the jagged horizon when they were ready to go once more. Don Victor was in the lead with the little white mule, and Esabel and Victoriano and Lupe were in the rear with their mother. Maria was in the middle and she had her child strapped to her back.

“Don’t look back ” said Don Victor as they came to the canyon’s mouth. “Please, I’m warning all of you, don’t, or you’ll be crying for the whole first day!”

But no one could help themselves.

“Careful, very careful,” said Don Victor to all of them “When we go on these cliffs Del Diablo, I want you all to stay close. There’s a lot of loose rock, and so pay attention so you don’t fall.”

Starting around the first bend, Lupe was truly amazed that Don Tiburcio and their father had made this trip so often without ever getting hurt. The trail was nothing but a crack in the rock, and the river was more than three thousand feet below them. At each bend, Don Victor told them to look out for the rock and that batch of loose gravel.

It was almost dark when the wind picked up. Lupe began to feel deep cramps in the middle of her stomach. Her head went dizzy and she struggled to keep up. But she was in such pain that she started falling behind. Coming around the last bend on the trail, a huge valley lay ahead.

“We made it,” said Don Victor, pushing back his hat proudly. “There’s a little *ranchería* up ahead by the river where we can sleep, and in the morning they’ll help us across on a raft. But we have to hurry if we want to get there before dark,” he added.

CHAPTER 15

After crossing the border, Lupe and her family contracted to work the cotton fields of Scottsdale, Arizona. Then, during the winter, they went to the town of Miami, just east of Scottsdale, where Victoriano and Esabel got work in the mines. Lupe and Carlota helped their

father gather firewood in the surrounding hills to sell in town, and their mother and Maria took in laundry for extra money.

One Sunday, during their second winter in Miami, Lupe and her family were coming home from church when Lupe saw a beautiful dress in a store window. It was pale orange, almost the color of peaches, and it had tiny white polka dots all over it and delicate white lace about the neck and arms. It was the most beautiful dress that Lupe had ever seen. But the price tag said ten dollars, so Lupe realized it was completely beyond her family's means. Even with all of them working, they made less than seven dollars in a week.

Two days later, Lupe got the shock of her life when she came home from gathering wood and found the very same dress lying on her bed.

"Oh, Mama!" she said. "Is it for me? Oh, you shouldn't have! We can't afford it!"

"You damned right, we can't!" yelled her father, putting down the load of firewood. "Jesus Christ, a man makes less than a dollar a day at the mines and that dress was marked for ten dollars!"

"They gave it to me for six," said the gray-haired old lady, "and it didn't cost you a cent. I used the last of our gold," she added proudly.

"The last of our gold?" screamed Don Victor. "Oh, my God! How could you, woman?"

"Easy," said Doña Guadalupe, refusing to be intimidated. "And I'd do it again. All our lives we work and work and for what...if we can't haw a little joy now and then? Now don't you dare spoil this for Lupe, or I'll brain you!"

"All right, all right!" said Don Victor. "Do as you wish! You've done it all your life anyway." And he got his hat, took the fifty cents that they'd gotten for selling the firewood, and went out. "Kids, I swear, we should've had pigs! At least you can eat them when they grow too big!"

The following Sunday, Lupe put on her new dress and they all went to church. After mass, they lit a candle for Sophia, and they were walking home when Carlota came running up with three young girls.

"Mama," she said, "I just met these girls from Sinaloa, and they want me to go to the movies with them! Everyone is going! It's a brand new movie!"

Doña Guadalupe could see Carlota's excitement. "All right," she said. "But Lupe and Victoriano will have to go with you, and you must obey your brother and sit together and then come straight home afterwards."

"Oh, thank you!" said Carlota. And she kissed her mother in a big hurry, then took off with her new friends.

Carlota always made friends wherever they went. But Lupe and Victoriano were still too shy to talk to strangers.

Lupe and her brother went up the rocky, dirt street behind Carlota and her girlfriends. Miami was a company controlled mining town, which supplied various forms of entertainment for the workers. The movie was called "The Silver Automobile." All the young people in town were excited about it. It was a series, and this was the third part. "The Silver Automobile was always full of beautiful cars and rich, gorgeous people.

