

Pedro

He was the kind of man who believed in sudden endings. That afternoon he had gone through his house tearing up the things that had taken him a lifetime to acquire - letters, photos, passports, insurance policies, slips with addresses and names and numbers. But had you asked him several hours later how he had spent his day, he would not remember, and then, because he realized that he didn't remember, he would rage. He did remember pushing his daughter and her friend down the corridor toward the front door, and his daughter screaming, "Enough, papi, enough." Peeking through the drawn venetian blinds he saw them getting into Ani's car, Ani's friend in the driver's seat. When he lost his wife, he lost his daughter.

Now he was sitting on a folding chair in his sister's backyard, under the grapefruit tree, beside the shed that he had built years earlier. He felt scattered, an assemblage of limbs and organs and needs and thoughts with no connection among themselves. He believed that he didn't remember things because they had happened to someone else. Each hour brought him a different self. He was perpetually meeting a stranger who was himself. The only link between selves was his name, but even that meant nothing anymore.

He had lost his watch weeks earlier but he knew it was late because his sister's house was dark and she didn't go to bed until two or three in the morning. He wasn't going to knock like those other nights. Even if she heard him, she might not open the door. He just wanted a place to spend the night, where he could collect himself. After Ani and her friend barged into his house, he no longer felt safe there.

From where he sat he could hear a radio in a neighbor's house. The voices were speaking Spanish, but he couldn't make out the words. One of his sister's cats walked across the yard and leapt onto the planter with the curled-up hose. His hands hurt. He clenched his fists several times. He had been a compact, muscular man, but the only part of his body that retained its strength was his hands. His fingers were as thick and calloused as they had always been and the wedding band squeezed his ring finger. The pressure reminded him of Ampa. He wished he had yielded to her more often. Guilt, regret, sorrow - those were constants in his life too. His word was *remordimiento*, remorse. After Ampa died he had found this word, not learned it but found it since he had known the word since he was a child, but he had never thought about it, never thought about any words really, until after Ampa's death.

The word struck him one day as he was walking back to his house from his mid-afternoon coffee. He was crossing Douglas Rd. right in front of the awning on Gilbert's Bakery, hurrying because he saw one car coming fast from a distance, and then the word hit him - hit him like the car he barely avoided—the word that summarized everything he had been feeling: the anger, the despair, the bitterness, the guilt, the waste. He began writing the word on scraps of paper which he kept around the house to make sure he didn't forget it. Ampa was gone but he had *remordimiento*, a more fitting legacy than her memory. In his sister's backyard, he takes a piece of paper from his shirt pocket. It's dark but he knows what it says. He crumples the paper until his hand starts hurting again.

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