



## **EXHIBIT #41**

**María Amparo Escandón**

I went to the Four-Wheeler Wreckage Museum to remind myself just how much of a widow I was. I still had twenty-four years to go before I could benefit from the senior discount, so I bought the regular priced ticket and went in. The place was air-conditioned, a must for any truck stop, restaurant, gas station —or museum for that matter— if they happened to be anywhere along that I-10 stretch between Las Cruces and El Paso.

I couldn't tell the make of the car in the first exhibit, it was so totaled. I thought I saw a bloody finger lying under the driver's seat. Maybe it was a cigarette butt. A bloody one, all right. Photos from the accident and a detailed description of how it happened and how it could have been avoided were posted on the wall behind the car, typed up without spelling errors, as expected from any respectable museum in the world. But I

hadn't gone to see all sixty-four exhibits. Only Alberto's. So I walked along the path through the wrecked cars looking for our Volvo as one would look for a particular cereal down the aisle in the grocery store. I found our car in "Exhibit #41." I recognized it by the red color.

"An added safety feature," Alberto had said at the dealership. Back then things were going well between us, or so I made myself think. "Other drivers can see us coming much better if our car is red," he said.

"So do cops," I said. "It's been researched. Red cars get pulled over more often than cars of other colors, and you've got enough tickets as it is, hon."

But Alberto didn't believe that my thoughts were all that important. He had too many of his own to deal with. His head was packed-full of big thoughts, the kind that leave no more room for anything else. Everything was big about Alberto. His head, his feet, his penis, his job, his thoughts. So we bought the red Volvo.

The framed newspaper clipping said all that had to be said. His name, then his age in parenthesis. Her name, then her age in parenthesis. I read the article twice. There was a lot more to be said, but it didn't have to be said. I felt something inside, not a pang. It was more like the pain of a bad root canal. According to the report, they were doing ninety-five when the car went off the road. It turned over seven times before it came to rest on its roof, like a cartoon of how upside down our life had become. Alberto's and mine. And Victoria's.

"So it's over?" I asked.

"It's been over for a long time," he said. "I should have let you know. I just didn't want to hurt you."

I thought of suicide, not that I'm the suicidal type. I just thought of it. Pills would be my choice. A gun was out of the question. I wouldn't be able to manage the after-life embarrassment, with the mess and what not. It would be awfully tasteless to leave all that blood and brains for someone else to clean up.

"How long has this been going on?"

"Three years."

"Is Lolita your child?"

"No. I missed her by five months."

"Lolita is our goddaughter."

"I know. But don't blame Victoria. It was my idea."

How would life be without me? Alberto and our two children living with Victoria and her three children. She would be raising my very own kids. Now even pills were out of the question. I had to stay around. Absolutely. But how could that happen if I felt dead already? I needed something to keep me going, some kind of motivation. Killing myself would only make me die again.

"Just leave," I said.

He left that morning. Didn't say good-bye to the kids. He'd come and visit some time soon, he said.

The display showed photos of Alberto and my comadre Victoria all crunched up in the car. No photos of them in any motel bed. No report of their secret moments together. I wondered who had cleaned up their mess. Whoever it was did a poor job, I might say. I could still see plenty of dark brown stains on the carpet and maybe a dab of brain matter smeared on the velour.

My compadre Ramón drove all the way to El Paso to identify the bodies. He and Victoria could have had a good life, had she wanted to. But she wanted to have what was mine. She wanted to be like me. If I cut my hair, she'd cut it too. If I let my curls go, so would she. I even ran a little test once and styled a lock down the side of my forehead. Sure enough, less than a week later, a lock hung down her forehead too.

Now every window was shattered, every part out of place. The Volvo was destroyed. Our life was destroyed. I would retrieve the car. I'd buy it back from the Four-Wheeler Wreckage Museum owner and have it towed to its final resting place, to the accident site in the middle of the desert, pointing in the same direction where Alberto and Victoria were heading. Who knows what ideas he had in mind for his life with my comadre. I walked around the car to see if there was anything salvageable, anything that might belong to me. I thought I saw a bloody finger lying under the driver's seat. But it was larger than a finger, much larger. Everything was big about Alberto. He sure had big thoughts in his head. His other head.

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