



## Two Strangers

NIGHT was coming to the Garden Juarez. The white glare of the day was gone, and the wind that blew in from the desert now did not blow dust and heat, but the smells of pepper trees and sage. It was the sundown hour when people moved in the streets without hats, and the skinny dogs come out of the doorways to play in the gutters. The day was over, and the time had come for dancing, for it was the time of the Festival of the Fish when all the people gave thanks for a fine crop of shark's liver, and danced in the streets under colored lanterns.

The young men and girls hurried in twos and threes to the Garden Juarez. Although it was still early they made haste, as if the laughter and gayety were being spent and none would be left for them. When the young people reached the Garden Juarez, however, their haste dropped from them, and they became casual and slow, staying in their tight little groups and watching each other from the corners of their eyes. As all young people everywhere they arrived early in order to see each other, and to let others see them. They stood before the melon stand and the candy stand and took great pains not to notice each other; the girls being very demure and the young men laughing loudly and combing their black hair. The young men stood about and spoke to their friends and secretly watched the girls parade by in their bright dresses. They were dressed alike, these young men, with the same horsehair belts and white cotton shirts and trousers. They wore sharply pointed shoes and smoked many black cigarets and stood with hunched shoulders, hands on hips. The hard sun-baked earth about them was littered with melon rinds, the shells of bejote nuts and the urchins who ran and shouted, "Pedola! Shoeshine!"

The music had not yet started, but the men of the orchestra were there with their saxophones and violins. Soon the music would begin, and the young men with the long black hair would swagger up to the girls and ask for the honor of the dance. They would do it in a very bold and easy fashion, flipping their cigaret butt at the last moment so letting the girl know that she was

being honored by the greatest lover in Sonora. Then the inner court would be a mass of white and color, and the older people would sit, drink their sweet beer and speak of rain and other festivals; of other years. . .

At the edge of the Garden Juarez there is a tired building that was once a hotel but which is now a derelict which houses derelicts. For a peso a night a man can rest. It is a place where one can still hear of the raw salt pork of the revolutionary prisons, of the salt mines on the peninsula, and the salty stories of the men who claim they know. It is the color of earth and there is no glass on the windows, only rolls of matting. Its walls are covered with old bills advertising the bullfights and beers of Sonora, and the hot summer winds tear off bits of the paper, and blow them down the dusty alleys. It is an old building, and its walls have watched three generations of lovers dance in the Garden Juarez.

In one of the rooms of the hotel there were two strangers who listened to the music through their open window. One of the men lay on a bed of woven leather strips, and the other stood at the window watching the young people dance under the colored lanterns. The man at the window was heavily built and burnt black by months of the Mexican sun, and he wore nothing but a pair of corduroy trousers. The left leg of the trousers was slit to the knee showing a white cast encasing his foot and lower leg. The man on the bed was naked, and his upper body was dark against the cotton sheet. His body shone with moisture, and the sheet was wet beneath him. He raised himself on his elbow and spoke to the man at the window.

"Are they getting pretty well under way?"

"Can't you tell? Listen to that damn music. Never saw nothing like the way these guys can milk a saxophone dry. They'll cry through them damn things all night."

"They've got to do that. They're competing with the fiddles. It's a point of honor they got to cry more than the fiddles or everyone will go home all teed off because they have heard some happy music."

The man at the window turned.

"Some guy said once that a Mexican has got to be sad to be happy. I think that's a crock. Why don't they just play something with a jump, and go home and dream about next year? A party's got to have a jump to make it good."

"Relax, Allen," said the man on the bed, "God help us, the party will start jumping soon enough. Take it easy."

"Well, it gets on my nerves," said Allen.

"This whole place gets on my nerves," said the man on the bed. "In a couple of days when I get squared away again, I'm going to take off out of here."

"Yeah? How you gonna take off out of here? Train, plane, or steamboat?"

"Don't be so damn wise. I'll hitch-hike."

"You'll hitch-hike. You're just gonna step out on some big highway in some big stream of traffic and get a ride all the way up to Nogales. You're gonna play hell."

He turned back to the window.

"Allen," the man on the bed said. Allen did not answer.

The man on the bed turned over on his side. His body was streaming with sweat and he sighed deeply.

"I got troubles and how. Feels like somebody is getting to me with a knife. I always hate a bellyache."

"You got no kicks," said Allen, "Wait three-four days. If this is amoebic dysentery we've picked up, you're gonna wish somebody had got to you with a knife."

"The hell you say," the man on the bed said. "What do you know about amoebic dysentery?"

"I knew a guy once picked up some down by Mazalon."

"What happened?"

"He died."

"Look, Allen, why don't you just take a real deep breath and bail out the window head first?"

"Take it easy, kid, take it easy. . ."

And the two strangers sat in the dim room and listened to the music. The little orchestra was playing "Mariaquita Lindo," and the song filled the room with a great loneliness. It was as if all the beauty of the world had focused out of the night upon the Garden Juarez; as if there were no joy at all but the two strangers sat at the edge of the circle in cold and darkness.

—John B. Madson, Jr., Sci. So.