

All the Petty Offenders

Tess Wheelwright

“Enrique de la Cruz Guerrero,” continued the deputy clerk of Honorable Glenda G. Gerald’s Magistrate Courtroom 3B.

“*Presente*,” mumbled Enrique de la Cruz.

“Present,” the clerk said, turning slightly to the Honorable Glenda G. Gerald, who nodded. “José Luis de Dios Martínez,” read the clerk.

“*Presente*,” said José Luis flatly.

“Present,” repeated the clerk to the Honorable Glenda G. “Juan Canche Fuentes,” read the clerk.

“*Presente*,” was Juan Canche.

“Present,” the clerk relayed to the Honorable Glenda, who nodded again—a gesture the deputy clerk couldn’t help but suspect wasn’t in part a lightly scolding affirmation that *mmm hmm*, as Her Honor had said she’d meant, the rules were the rules: The clerk had indeed to translate this cognate, along with each and every other syllable uttered in Magistrate Courtroom 3B, when it wasn’t ape’s work as when it was—against what the clerk had considered merely the slightest of protocol tweakings, recently proposed by herself and overruled by the Honorable Glenda, in the latter’s chambers after session, causing the clerk to have to fix her eyeballs on a stress ball on the judge’s desk till they throbbed a little from restrained rolling.

“Rodrigo Zacualpa León,” read the clerk.

“*Presente*.”

“Present. Julio Guzmán Ortiz.”

“*Presente*.”

“Present. Javier Tun Calderón.”

“*Presente!*”

“Present. Ricardo Aramburo del Río.” Et cetera, et cetera. Juan Armica Armiga. Diego Perrera Pérez. Et cetera. All were, as always, where else?, all present. Also Juan Carlos Camal was. And Salvador Cervantes Delgado.

You know what the deputy clerk had really wanted to be? A hair stylist. She wouldn't be, she'd known—her immigrant single Mami stylist hadn't slaved away as a stylist so that her one daughter could et cetera et cetera stylist. Still, the clerk felt she had a natural talent; she certainly had great hair; she subscribed to a certain logic that she should be where that was what mattered most. Or she could open a small travel agency, she'd at times thought: run trips down to spas in Jalisco where she supposedly still had some family. A lot of things, you know? She considered she'd met with a great many people with less upstairs than herself—and with lesser hair no less. When the T.A. she was seeing in her senior year of college offered her the paralegal gig in a little local office, which became, through a later lover, a clerking post in Tucson, which became, before long, twelve years and counting, clerking day in and day out in the humorless shadow of the most Honorable of Glendas, she'd said yes because she'd decided on nothing else yet. She still had not. All this to say that, as year after year she clerked, she clerked dogged by the sense that it hadn't really been her idea. What had, for that matter? Men in any case loved the deputy clerk, especially at first.

Francisco Sosa Martínez. Víctor Coyoc Perrera. The clerk wondered how change found other people, or it them. José Vega Toral. These things get laid out by chance, said her Mami. Pablo Ehuan. And if chance itself didn't find her? Fausto Zapata de Jesús. Shhh, just give it a chance, said her Mami. Molina Gómez Camal etcetera Raymundo Hoil Juárez.

After roll had been called it was time for justice to be served, or at least for the Pablos et cetera to shuffle forward in fated groups of five to the five awaiting mics like some battered quintet, except with shackles and belly chains, and each with his court-appointed lawyer looming behind and most often a head above him, to proffer a rueful pat on the angel wing or an inaudible consolation—and except with earphones through which the deputy clerk's voice was transmitted hung from their ears and under their chins like the stethoscopes of some unnerved and extremely alternative medical team, or of boys

too old to play doctor playing doctor and not enjoying it very much at all.

"You've been charged with the petty offense of illegal entry. If you plead guilty, your answers will help establish the facts of your guilt," the deputy clerk translated into their ears. A couple of the petty offenders tugged at their earpieces.

"Each of you has a right to a private trial," she translated.

A pock-cheeked defendant with a sunglasses tan and a stiff-looking U.S. Navy Seal t-shirt looked up at her questioning; the clerk gave an instinctive little shake of her head.

"I understand that each of you is a citizen of Mexico or Guatemala. If this is not true please stand, there is no one standing," she translated. "If any of you have legal authority to be in the country, please stand, there is no one standing. Mr. José Gómez Martínez, how do you plead to illegal entry?"

"*Culpable*," said José after a beat and a little prompt from his attorney, as they'd have gone over sometime between when they'd been first acquainted and this session, both events since lunch.

"Guilty," she translated for the judge.

"Mr. Juan Luis Contreras Fuentes, how do you plead to illegal entry?"

"*Culpable*," said Juan guiltily.

"Guilty," said the clerk blankly. "Mr. Iván Chuj Perrera, how do you plead to illegal entry?"

"*Culpable*," said Iván.

"Guilty. Mr. Alfonso Ruíz Marín, how do you plead to illegal entry?"

"Gweel-ty," said Alfonso, with the most tentative of superior smiles.

"*Culpable*," translated the clerk automatically.

"Excuse me?" said the Honorable Glenda to the deputy clerk.

"Excuse me?" she said to Alfonso Ruíz Marín.

"*Culpable*," Alfonso surrendered, dropping his deadened eyes. Honorable Glenda waited.

“Guilty,” sighed the clerk. “Mr. Carlos Viesca Álvarez, how do you plead to illegal entry?”

“*Culpable*,” Carlitos complied, lesson learned.

“Mr. Rodrigo Arias Higuera, how do you plead to illegal entry?”

“*Culpa*—”

“—Guilty,” the clerk accidentally—honestly!—interrupted, earning a scowl nonetheless from the Impregnable Glenda. Well, *sorry*, she shrugged. They continued, without further hiccup: Guerrero Suárez de la Cruz Chuj Galindo etcetera Hernández etcetera Silva. This part was over in less than an hour.

The previous convictions crowd always took a little longer but only a little.

“Judge, he’s proven he can stay away, he hasn’t before this entered the country since 1989, he’s a taxi driver in Michoacán,” one of the defenders tried listlessly. The Unemotional Glenda gave him six months.

“Mr. Domínguez del Toro is the sole provider for his mother and grandmother in Chiapas, which as you Your Honor know is a very depressed area of Mexico,” one of the rookies tried. That one got nine months from the Discretionary Glenda.

A third, especially diminutive offender with a previous and somewhat inconceivable citation for battery got 264 days. During that, he’d see at least a hundred of battery himself, the clerk had to suppose, from what the detention officer who was her lover and technically her fiancé, though it had been awhile since they talked about it, had said regarding what happened to batterers, not to mention little Mexicans, in lock-up.

After court the deputy clerk would have liked to have had a little TV time and maybe a clamato with a stick of celery in it, but the detention officer wanted to go to the Home Depot. He was pricing lumber for a deck or for a dog shed for a big dog he was apparently also pricing; in any case he was pricing lumber. He worked guarding the yard down at Lower Buckeye Jail. He liked what he thought

of as a certain compatibility of their two professions. “Maybe he’ll end up in there with me, never know,” he’d say, cheerfully, when the clerk told him of a day’s sentencings. The DO for his part stayed in a good mood about his job. He liked it. If you wanted to, he liked to say, you could leave LBJ a better man than when you went in. They had classes on fathering, classes on you name it; you had your meetings for whichever religion you could think of, Methodist, if you were Muslim, whatever, you had an hour you could go into the dayroom and do what you needed to do. As for himself, he wasn’t one of these badge-heavy guys who got off on laying into them. Better to let them sort it out themselves. Hell, you could chat to him on the yard if you wanted, same as if you were anyone, he didn’t have a problem. Course with the Mexicans it was harder. Even the ones who did speak a little English pretended not to to keep life simple. Do get them a translator and even if it’s two black eyes they’ll tell you anyway they fell in the shower, it’s always they fell in the shower.

They parked in the handicapped spot, which the DO called the government spot. Inside, the clerk suppressed yawns. The DO looked at hardware. “Give me a pound of tenpennies,” said the DO. Twice. “Translate,” said the DO to the deputy clerk, shaking his big red head. The deputy clerk ignored him. The employee was Pakistani or something, she judged; in a minute he went for the tenpennies. When they walked by the lumber shelves a Mexican guy scowled at the DO, or at her, or both, but the deputy clerk didn’t make much of it. When they turned the corner coming back, though, there he was again, and if he couldn’t’ve been said to’ve exactly lunged at the detention officer, he did step into him shoulder to shoulder, hard enough that you heard it.

“Jesus!” snarled the DO, and his fists were up, until the deputy clerk put her hand on his arm. “Fuckin’...” said the DO, glowering over the clerk’s fine hair.

“Let’s go,” said the deputy clerk wearily. “Sshh, let’s go.”

“Who the F?” fumed the DO, and he kept fuming, in the check out, out to the truck. “I don’t like it, let me go in and settle it.”

“Shh, let’s go for a cold one,” said the clerk. “Honey,” she added—without sweetness, she knew. Sometimes, not rarely, sweetness cost the deputy clerk more than she had.

“I *knew* I knew him, too,” muttered the detention officer. “He was in till last summer. What’d he say anyway?” he asked the clerk. The deputy clerk didn’t say anything. She looked out the window at the paved desert. When after a while she caught a look at the DO in the side mirror, she would’ve sworn for a second he was crying, then ruled he was only rubbing a dry eye and humming a little. The clerk watched him, sidelong. He scratched the inside of his nostril with a thumbnail. He lightly lifted the corner of his mustache with a little blow off a shelved lower lip. Once some darker thought seemed to drift onto his inner horizon, pulling his eyebrows toward each other and down at the bridge of his large nose briefly, and then seemed to pass along. And again the clerk looked to the desert, and was entered, surely and suddenly, like she’d swallowed it, by that old deputy clerk feeling that she’d been plunked at random down into the middle of her life, not to mention this Ford F-150, and that just as easily as she could and probably would become this DO’s wife with this feeling, she could slip from the Ford at the next red light, not look back, head to Mexico, on foot through the desert, against traffic.

“You work down at the jail, don’t you?” was what the guy in the lumber aisle had said. “Fucking tyrant son of a fucking bitch gringo.”

Albeliz Díez Flores was having a worse day than the clerk. She was walking, as she had for the past two, under the more-or-less cover of the mesquite trees of the Pima County desert, thinking every drone was one of these drones they’d been told about that tracked desert motion with infrared, and every new shadow one of their trucks with beds on scissor-lifts that could shoot up ten meters in the air on the spot. Only today, unlike the previous, her stomach was twisted and poisoned-feeling from the pieces of cactus she’d been given to lick when her sister had split one open with her nail file

after they’d given up on finding water. Albeliz had been sucking her lip from thirst and something like an enormous pimple had popped out below her nose and stung.

“It’s like coco,” her older sister said, in English, about cactus. It wasn’t. She’d been to L.A. seven years ago and told them this was lot easier than it was. “It’s very juicy,” she sniffed. She’d been lightly crying for approximately fifteen hours.

“It isn’t,” Albeliz had observed. Their third sister looked at Albeliz with a scolding little headshake. Well, it wasn’t.

“How well can they see me if they get me with their drone?” Albeliz asked the capped head in front of them.

“Not too well,” said their little *coyote* from Chiapas.

“Can they see my face? Can they see my hairstyle? Can they see my...” He wasn’t even any fun to tease. He was shy; he was too shy to look them in the eye except the third sister a little bit, who was the nicest; he was constantly looking all around them and seemed more scared than they were. It wasn’t a business for guys like him anymore, he’d told the third sister last night when the other two were ass to ass in sleeping bags, ears to the desert. The *narcos* run it now. They run you through their highway system underground; they have the money to be your uncle at the port of entry and the papers to prove it.

“If they saw the way we still do it they’d laugh,” he said, looking over at Albeliz and the oldest sister. “Or kill me,” he said. Eugenia, the youngest, shuddered a little. “But, that is, we’ll make it,” he said quickly. Albeliz didn’t feel too reassured by him. She thought often of the \$3,000 that had been the price of his dubious protection, for which she’d sold everything she’d owned. She’d even sold her little dog. For another thing he kept telling them “right over there,” and at night any lights they saw, was L.A., which must’ve been what he’d been told to say, but still.

“We’re not stupid,” Albeliz had said finally, and they hadn’t talked again, until now.

“No, you’re like a little green target,” said the skittish smuggler.

“You could be a cow.”

“How do they know I’m not a cow?” He kept quiet for a while and Albeliz thought maybe they weren’t talking again.

“I guess they figure if you’re going south-north and keep going south-north till you get to the Arivaca road you’re probably not a cow.”

When they heard an engine rev it was already close; they must have scared it up. A kid on a four-wheeler was racing at them, calling, “Don’t run, don’t run,” which their big sister sniffingly translated but only for Albeliz because the other two were running. Within the very same seconds that Albeliz realized this was Border Patrol—he was so young, his hair was flopping as he’d bounced up, he looked like Kevin Bacon, his Border Patrol suit looked like a Halloween costume—he’d snapped cuffs on her wrist and her chest was in the sand.

“Head down, please,” he said, at the same time a second agent sputtering in from the east added, in Spanish: “Don’t move is right! If you pick up your heads there’ll be problems.” This one laughed a little as he dismounted onto the sand. “I’m serious,” he said. “This guy’s a racist; he’ll make sure there are problems.” And he laughed again. The Kevin Bacon-looking one looked at the desert under his feet.

“You two traveling alone?” he asked.

“Yes,” said Albeliz.

The two officers stepped off a little and conferred in low voices: “Yeah, I got another one; he’s in the truck with Adams. He ran, we went down together.” The Mexican-American one nodded; he made a call through his radio and soon a truck pulled up and Albeliz and her sister were told to get in it.

“Thirsty?” asked the Mexican, enjoying, still, some joke all his own. Albeliz vowed she wouldn’t pull from the straw of his Big Gulp when it was hovered near her swollen lips, but then she did. She gulped and gulped. Her lips did it. Her tongue swished in the soda madly; her scraped throat pulled it down madly like Sprite was air.

Her eyes burned down on the cuffed wrists in her lap.

“Can you turn down the heat?” she asked once on their trip back toward the border.

“What?” the joker mimed from the passenger’s seat beyond the glass, his hand cupped around his big ear. Hot air shot at Albeliz through the vent overhead; she pressed the button to talk again but this time they didn’t turn around. Kevin Bacon avoided her eye in the rearview mirror. He looked, Albeliz felt, repentant; he looked accidental in this role as her antagonist, as if he would have done things differently, very differently, if he could’ve gone back to his youth—but first maybe he’d stay there a while, where it was simple, building with Legos on a rug, his lip between his neat tiny teeth in concentration, humming an improvised little shanty unawares. Albeliz sucked her lip thing; sweat ran under her sweatshirt down her sides.

When they got dropped off in Nogales, Sonora, they signed a voluntary return form and the *migra* left laughing. The guy who’d presumably gone down in the desert with Kevin Bacon took off limping down the highway. Two tall *norteños* standing next to an unmarked van said they were volunteers for a relief agency back on this side and that they were there to help. Albeliz couldn’t make her brain thread impressions into thoughts and got into their car after her sniffing sister. Before their drivers let them off in front of a cinderblock one-story—wands of extra rebar wobbling wretchedly in the wind from the top of its unfinished walls, rusting in the long wait for fatter, two-story times; a battered-looking bunch of men loitering at its mouth, sweating with their t-shirts in their back pockets, saying little, spitting in the dust—the volunteers asked Albeliz and her sister for money. Fuckers. If there be any love in the world at all, send Albeliz one non-fucker, just one. Without looking at Albeliz, her sister uncoiled a humid twenty-peso bill from the little roll she’d bound in her bun.

When they got inside the shelter, Albeliz’s sister stopped crying for a minute and then started again. A police officer, an oiled,

soft-fingered little fatty with a sneer at the corner of his butt-looking mouth, ushered them onto a bench. Albeliz loathed him very fiercely on the spot. She thought of the little dog she'd sold. Her sister had taken off her sneakers and was peeling her socks off her blisters, to which Albeliz's reaction was a vague shame. Albeliz felt her sister wishing to speak, but Albeliz kept her eyes directed away. The last six days were like a bag of broken glass; they were like photographs that had fallen disordered out of someone else's purse onto a sticky public floor. When she thought of the days in the desert she could see herself only from a distance, from above, perhaps from three meters up on a scissor lift, the brim of her baseball cap aimed at her sneakers. On the bus north between Agua Prieta and Nogales they'd been shown a grainy comedy about jailbirds and everybody'd laughed too hard.

The chubby little officer with the hair oil holding the tracks of his comb was working through the people on the bench one by one, bullying them if they were thinking of crossing, bullying them if they'd failed. "For women especially, there's no excuse good enough to leave your family," he schooled someone, meanwhile sizing up Albeliz and her sister from across the room. "The border bandits know all the hiding places for your money," he assured them, absently thrusting the two fingers of his right hand into an imaginary she-migrant's vagina. Albeliz's loathing jumped and doubled.

Mexican, crossing to the other side with the documents of someone else is a federal crime, a schoolroom-looking poster warned from the opposite wall. *Before going far away, think of those who stay behind*, a doctor's-office-looking counterpart appealed, showing a sad old man with his chin in his hand.

A timeworn, smeary woman with fake fallen tits and what looked like dried shit in her ponytail limped past the sisters toward the telephone.

"The *migra* hit my uncle," the officer's next subject charged.

"What, you think they want you to go home to Chiapas and tell your friends it was a picnic?" sneered the chub.

"I'm from Guerrero," said the kid.

"They got across but I didn't," said the old whore hoarsely into the phone. "Yeah, but I couldn't keep up." A kind of loony-looking older guy crouched down quickly next to Albeliz:

"You were out there? How many days to—"

"Get away from them, friend!" called the ass-mouthed officer, and the mad-eyed migrant smiled crookedly and stepped off. Another failed migrant with a long sad face and one arm and one flappy empty sleeve like a slack sail, who'd been in consultation with the officer when Albeliz and her sister first arrived, reappeared out of a back room expectantly. They'd put up half the money for his bus ticket back to Oaxaca if he promised to work hard and take care of his family and stop getting big ideas about what he didn't know anything about, he was told by the soft punisher on duty.

"I have like seven pesos," the guy whispered sadly, patting his pocket with his one hand.

"Alright, we'll put up the whole thing, and I never see you up here again," sighed the chub, as if the money would be his own. Albeliz understood now about his fine watch. She pictured her sister sniffing her sorry thanks for a bus ticket back to Hidalgo, sniffing sorry to their daddy, to her man that she forgave him, she forgave him, forget it. The ticket back to all that held out like a dog treat in those sausage fingers.

Albeliz went outside for air. Next to the migrant shelter was an abandoned-looking shop of which clients were unimaginable, posting a dozen faded signs disqualifying one from entry: no shirt, no shoes, dog, booze, foul language, no money, wrong money, sick, violent, lonely, hungry, failed, futureless, sorry. Inside stood a single old copy machine centered between stained limed-cement walls. On a cracked cement planter out front a teenage couple was kissing so deep it looked like they were eating each other, really chowing down on each other's faces, squeezing each other's other parts like they were saving them for later. Albeliz ignored them. *Fucking piece of shit shop, crappy crappy sick copy shop, go suck yourself you bad*

vibe shit shop, close, rot, thought Albeliz, feeling full in the chest of swarms of stinging winged beasts, feeling that the whole of her life had led to this, this moment, this awful wall, absurd tablet of prohibitions—and now what but to hurl herself into a headfirst tear at it; let her end be against the crumbly cement wall of the most god-damned shop on earth. She moved back next door and inside.

“How are you going to leave your family like that, *hombre*?” the officer was punishing, tireless.

“My family’s all in Maryland,” said his latest wretch through missing teeth. “I don’t know what I’m going to tell them.”

“Something!” said the cop, like he’d had a really good idea. He shuffled along. His next concern was a girl about Albeliz’s age who wouldn’t open her mouth to answer his questions. She was shaped like the Tasmanian Devil and had thick, thick, glorious hair held back over one ear by a gold barrette, matching gold hoops in her dainty ears, and dainty feet. Also a long scar along her throat like a shadow of her jawline.

“You’re going to tell me where you’re from, honey. You’re going to tell me where you think you were going,” the officer said. She looked straight ahead at the wall like a cow sleeping, lids half dropped, mouth set. The chub laughed and moved provisionally on. Albeliz slid over.

“Central American, right?” murmured Albeliz.

“Guatemala,” said the girl without turning her head.

“Can you sound like you’re from Veracruz?” The woman shook her head once as the guy turned back to them. Blood had dried black on her jeans at the crotch. By her far eye a little scar was raised like a BB buried.

“I won’t go back there,” she whispered to Albeliz flatly.

“Of course you won’t,” whispered Albeliz matter-of-factly, quickly, surely, as if the fate of this stranger had long been her business—and in that same second, Albeliz was suddenly sure of many other things—in that big lit-up showcase of a still, roomy second. She knew for one that she couldn’t go back to Hidalgo with nothing

to show and buy back her dog—not because of the shit she’d eaten to come this far, but for the shit this girl had eaten. When you’re low and you meet someone worse off than yourself it only makes it worse, the guilt an extra little rude fly buzzing unwelcome in and out of your eyes and nose, when you already smelled like shit to yourself. But when you’re really low, Albeliz now knew—when beside you the big sister who taught you to walk would suck off a cop, crying the whole time, for a ride back to where she’d only just escaped from, bruises still purplish—meeting someone more fucked than yourself is a lifeline. It’s all full of grace. The short term becomes the long term; it becomes the only term—as changing the luck of this beat-on, balky little stranger became all Albeliz could have said she was for.

When the girl cleared her throat Albeliz looked up to see a fifty-dollar bill peeking out the end of her sleeve, like a magician’s trick. Albeliz blushed and wracked her instincts. Redly, Albeliz raised a brow and rubbed together two fingers and a thumb for more. The corner of another bill was lined up with the first the next time Albeliz looked. She nodded.

“Hidalgo.” Albeliz was interrupted by her sister’s whimper to the officer. Their turn. Albeliz inched automatically away on her seat. She shook her head in warning but her sister pretended not to see.

“And now you wanna get back there and stay there, am I right, sweetheart?” prodded the agent. Her sister looked guiltily at Albeliz. Again Albeliz shook her head; again her sister looked away. She dropped her eyes and nodded. Albeliz’s heart whacked in her throat. Now or never.

“What about where I’m from?” Albeliz said quickly, standing up, stepping away from her sister—her voice wavering once, which she hid, she hoped, in a cough. She touched the Guatemalan’s shoulder. “Me and my cousin, that is,” she followed. The officer looked from her sister to Albeliz to the Guatemalan dubiously. Albeliz fixed him with her very top-drawer don’t-fuck-with-me,-don’t-even-begin-to-fuck-with-me face and held it. He lost his little smirk. Albeliz

held on. Albeliz's sister began to cry again but kept it muffled; if Albeliz saw her again she would thank her. The agent's eyes slid at last down Albeliz to the floor.

"You girls want a ticket home?" he asked quietly, finally. Albeliz handed her jacket to her accomplice, who folded it and zipped it into her backpack. The girl stood; Albeliz stood. Together, like they'd practiced, they nodded. "And where's that, then?" asked the officer, sighing.

Albeliz looked a last time at her sister and pulled her cap back out of her back pocket. She pulled it on from the back by the brim like a hood. She looked with shadowed eyes at the officer.

"Tijuana," she said.

Court started late because they were short chain. One warden had proposed sharing one between two offenders and his supervisor had seemed to consider it before the first warden laughed cruelly. The deputy clerk had slept badly. Coming up the stairs to Magistrate Courtroom 3B, she felt like she was pushing through sand. The names on her list crawled like little ticks on her page. Eugenia Diez Flores. Raul del Río de Dios. Carlos Jesús Perrera Guerrero Sánchez Ortíz.

"I've got to make a sudden trip to San Diego, sorry," she'd tell the superiors. "My Mami, my mother, isn't well."

"Ahem," would go the unrelenting Glenda.

What happened next just happened. It started to, and then it didn't stop.

"Javier Zacualpa Sánchez," roll-called the clerk.

"Juan José de Dios." She swallowed.

"Diego Delgado Gómez." She snuck a last look around.

"Javier Zacualpa Sánchez," she said quietly. She waited a beat; she fought a loony little smile. The Glenda only waited.

"Juan José de Dios," she whispered. The only raised eyebrows were from the cheap seats. If the clerk had dared she would have winked their way.

"Diego Delgado Gómez," she laughed. One of the attorneys looked briefly confused but when his colleagues didn't—one was unwrapping Trident; another was tucking a BlackBerry stylus into its little sheath—he sat back.

"Javier Zacualpa Sánchez," she enunciated. The ceiling fan beat slow revolutions overhead.

"Juan José de Dios!" the clerk near-yelled.

"Diego Delgado Gómez," she hooted. Five years from now she would find herself in San Diego still, maintaining a slate of regular customers at Albeliz's Beauty, where her boss was fair if not overly warm, the Central American cutting at the next chair a great chef of paches and tamales, and while the former clerk would still be able to number ninety-nine disappointments, probably, if pressed, still a whole lot less would make as little sense as now. She'd have a little daughter who often made her laugh, and who held herself as patiently as a little cow as her mother plaited her brilliant hair.

But first:

"Javier Zacualpa Sánchez," the clerk trumpeted. "Ahem, Juan José de Dios," she defied. "Diego Delgado Gómez," she cried. "Javier Zacualpa Sánchez!" She muffled hysterics. And on it went like that for the rest of the time the deputy clerk held that job.