

DAMN YANKEE

She had that very second taped up her final notice.

"Maggie, is that you?"

Marguerite spun around, backed up a step on the asphalt, away from lamppost, away from the voice. She needed to hide her fury in the dark. Behind her was Joan Nowicka from two doors down. Joan's solid slate of hair was neatly tied back. Angular office clothes peeked out from underneath a flour-stained Precious Moments apron.

"Is anything the matter?"

Marguerite had counted on a clean getaway. "No."

"Do you need any help?"

Marguerite tried to appear nonchalant and took a few steps forward, so she wouldn't see the poster properly.

"Putting lost notices up? Shadow got out again didn't he," said Joan.

Marguerite smiled. "Si. Yes! Again." She waved her arms as if she had searched.

"Cats can be quite a worry, can't they."

"As you people say - tell me about it." Shadow would be settling at her coworker Penny's house by now.

"Is Sean looking for him?" inquired Joan.

"Ha!" The laugh was involuntary. "Something like that. "At first it had been exotic or rather he had. Sean. Their meeting had been so simple, so random. Marguerite had been counting her money out ready for her next beer with Rosaria and Negin. A weekend trip along the coast with the girls, Time away from the bustle of Barcelona. They had only meant to take a quick respite from the sun before continuing their stroll along the docks. He had walked in. Despite the forgotten nature of the bar, it was a Hollywood cliché come to life. A figure bathed in the light. Aman in his uniform. A tall drink of an American. Then it sounded exotic, now it was an order at Starbucks. Sean's ship had hit port for refueling.

"Do you want me to get Frank? He can drive round too if you like," said Joan.

"No. No," Marguerite replied. She almost stammered with her nerves. Americans and their names. They are always so short and curt. Spanish names are vibrant. They live: they flow and run together. Marguerite Ana Penelope De Costa Zapatero-Kittleson thought Frank should be something derogatory.

"Let me call him." Joan started walking back up her driveway. "Frank! Get your butt out here, honey!" A shadow

moved in a window upstairs and a light flicked off.

Marguerite didn't want any fuss. She ran up besides Joan.

"Wait! *Por favor*, sorry, please," she said. Her grandmother had teased her when it had all begun. Sean was her 'Yankee Doodle Boy'. Her dreams of leaving the high towers of their neighborhoods, living in a place of space, and peace, where she would have green of her own rather than just Las Ramblas and the parks, somehow came together as she dated him. He was the dumb American - no understanding of geography! - but such freshness, such a "can do attitude", such perfect teeth.

"My little chick-a-dee," he had called her one night in her room. She had seen enough TV and movies to know it wasn't as clever as he thought.

"No, I am more than that, I am a bird - un halcón - help me fly!" He had clasped the bedsheet over his back and flapped the cotton as his wings, before they both dissolved into laughter and each other.

That was before the months between dates with only texts and Skype to keep them going, although they made do. That was before the immigration hassles: the medical tests, the interviews and the sudden giddy wedding. Before the two of them had set up home in the house that was in his father's name.

Joan's security light blazed on ignited by their movement. Marguerite felt Joan's eyes absorb her not really needing to imagine what she looked like, taking in her clumped stringy hair and some eye shadow cascading one cheek. Joan's hand gently touched her elbow

"Maggie, are you sure everything's alright?"

Marguerite could say something. She could explain herself and her situation to this gentle woman, this neighbor, who had always had a smile, always stopped to talk, always been kind, albeit in a superficial way. But she couldn't risk this American woman's touch. The sensation tainted her, drained her identity.

"*Sí*. Everything fine." Marguerite pulled away. That was before the car loans and credit card bills and the trips to Reno and Utah, which generated even more debt. That was before the nights he never came home. That was before the meaningless flowers. The weekends he went away "working". The lies. It was four years, two months and fifteen days away on a different continent.

"Really?" Joan folded her arms. She had to get rid of her.

"Joan?" Marguerite cast her eyes down. "Can I ask you something?"

"Of course. That's what neighbors are for."

"Your name - Nowicka. Is it Russian?"

Joan shook her head. "Polish."

"Are you Polish?"

"Of course, silly."

There was a small pause. Marguerite lent in to whisper.

"Are you sure?"

"I guess," Joan replied. "What do you mean?"

"Where are you from? Where were you a baby?"

"Originally? I'm from Redmond."

"Three towns over?"

"That's right? Why'd-"

"Were you parents Polish? Were they born there?"

Marguerite felt her hands circle as she said this; a mannerism she had long buried since she moved here.

"No. They're from Portland."

"Were they both Polish?"

"No. My mother was Armenian-Cherokee, thank you"

Marguerite tried not to smile at the other woman's face. Jean's pursed expression strained across her face; a mix of politeness, pleasure at being asked her history and utter confusion as to what this crazy Spanish lady was getting at.

"So, you been to Poland?"

"Never."

"Do you speak Polish?"

"No. What is this--"

"Do you follow any Polish traditions?" Marguerite met Joan's concerned gaze. There was another longer pause.

"Sure. I know we do. I have a couple of recipes."

"Wait." Joan sighed. Her brain was barely keeping pace with the questions. "I eat kielbasa."

"So how are you? In what way can you be? How can you claim to be Polish? You Americans. All the same! Claim to be someone from somewhere different when you know nothing! You have not experienced the places of which you speak. You have not kept the traditions you claim you have. You only know malls and explosive movies! Your genes are not from anywhere." Marguerite looked up. Joan was staring at her rage dumbfounded. "I must go."

Marguerite began to walk back down the drive, tearing up, at her situation, at the rage she felt.

"Hey! Marguerite!" Joan was yelling after her. "I'm not sure what's up with you but oh, crimini, listen, honey! Please, listen good! All my folks are a mix-mash from everywhere. I'm a piece of everything possible. Frank's mother was Canadian. But my husband is Polish. His grandparents came here from Krakow in the 20s. He got a low

level job at the bank that didn't pay squat. She made extra money sewing for people at home. They made ends meet. They made it work. Their only son, Frank's father, lost his life fighting in the Pacific. He wasn't just fighting the Japanese for America. He was fighting for Europe in his heart. He never saw Frank not even as a newborn. We have three kids. You know that. You've been over enough times when they visited - those barbecues for instance - drunk our wine, ate our food, toasted them even! Here's my point! For my husband, we're Polish. For my children, we're Polish. For my grandchildren, we're Polish. Anything else is damn disrespectful of our history, and those grandparent's lives. Understand me?" Joan seemed to Marguerite to have grown over a foot in height while talking. "Do you get it now, dear?"

Marguerite didn't know what to say.

At that moment, Frank opened the side door. Joan stepped back and placed her hand firmly on the screen door, silently ushering him back inside.

"Let me put it this way," Joan continued. "If you and Sean ever had kids, I'm not saying when or anything, but if you had kids wouldn't you tell them that they were Spanish every day?"

"Si. Of course." Marguerite nodded. "I understand." Guilt filled her. It was not this woman she was angry with, she thought. Maybe America had not been the problem. He had.

"I'm sorry." Marguerite called.

"I know," Joan replied. "See you around."

As Joan said it, Marguerite wished she would.

It was too late. Marguerite felt Joan's eyes on her back all the way to her front door. As she walked, she mentally projected all her "to do's". She must finish emptying the refrigerator. She had to be at the airport in an hour. Spain beckoned, cousin Rafael's in Seville. Sean wouldn't find her easily. He probably wouldn't try anyway.

As she tossed mayo, eggs and perishables into the trash, one shelf at a time, she let her mind wander ever further. It wouldn't be long. One flight away. She could sit outside a moonlit café in a crumbling backstreet, drinking coffee, talking with her friends who were now longer memories. And she would regale them with stories of the time she took flight away from them. She had been the bird of the family but instead of going south, she migrated east for a while and as she went a little further it took more than a season for her to get back. She laughed to her

thought, perhaps Sean had been a wind that had taken her off course.

As she took off her ring, leaving it on the kitchen counter, she crossed her fingers, quashed her doubts, telling herself that her heart was right that there she would find luck, and be able to call that place home once again. Getting into the taxi, she smiled at the lampposts, knowing what each of them held; her halcón had decorated her makeshift nest in that foreign land. She had plastered notices upon every telephone pole and lamppost on all the nearby cul-de-sacs; Spry, DeWitt and Ocean Drives. There was one outside every single house and condominium in Acadia Parkway. It had been simple, get the plain office paper solid that once posted ruffled against the surface below. Printed in the center of it was a grainy black and white photograph taken by her iPhone. Reproduction had not served the picture well but you could still make out the half-dressed man and his companion, their embrace, her padded bra, and his transgression. Around the image in bold magic marker was written:

NOT WANTED: LOST HUSBAND

*Responds to the name: Not-so-little-Johnny
although more appropriate is un gilipollas
integral*

Last seen: room 309, Comfort Inn, Bellevue.

*Wearing: a navy blue suit with a matching tie
given to him for his second wedding anniversary*

Has been known to discard his ring upon occasion.

This happens especially around blondes including:

Nancy, Development Manager; Danielle in

Accounting; Miriam (30 Spry) and, currently, his

cousin Peter's wife, Kim.