

## The Patron Saint of Luchadores

### Chapter 1

By: Joseph Rollins

“*Mijo*, time to come eat.” My mother’s kind words didn’t match her aggressive tone and booming voice.

“Alright ma,” I yelled back.

I turned to my cousin Victor, older than me by six days. “Come on, let’s go eat. Ma made posole.” She made posole every Sunday after mass.

“*Cabron*,” said Victor. “What are we going to do tonight?”

“I don’t know. We’ll find something.” I kicked a stone up the broken sidewalk as I headed to the back door. “We can go to the all-night boxing gym.”

“Man, fuck that,” Victor said. “Let’s hit up the liquor store for a twelve-pack, then go to Magnolia. Supposed to be some sort of band concert tonight.”

I graduated high school six months ago; Victor stopped going in the tenth grade. We still considered Magnolia High School our turf. The girls were only a year or two younger than us and easy to pick up with a little beer.

“Whatever,” I said.

Victor was in the mood to get laid. I didn’t care. I had gotten laid a bunch of times. It usually wasn’t worth the complications afterward. But Victor liked to fuck.

I looked up and found mom standing on the porch holding a wooden spoon, handle in her right hand, spoon end in the other.

“*Hola, tía,*” said Victor.

“Hi, *mijo,*” said mom. “How is your mom? I haven’t seen her all week.”

“She’s doing good,” said Victor.

“Well, come on in and have some posole. Make sure you take some home for your mom.”

“OK *tía,*” said Victor. “*Gracias.*”

“*De nada.*”

I kept quiet during the exchange and slipped past my mom and into the kitchen. My little sister was stirring the giant stainless-steel pot mom used to make posole. I grabbed a Styrofoam bowl off the counter and nudged Louisa out of the way.

“*Pinche cabron,*” she said, swatting me in the arm with her own wooden spoon. I faked injury, rubbing my shoulder while scanning the cluttered counter tops for a ladle.

My sister set down her weapon of choice and handed me a ladle. I snatched it from her hand and denied her the thank you she was waiting for.

I dug around in the pot and scooped up some broth. My soup was thin since I always avoided adding a pig’s knuckle to my bowl. I handed the ladle to Victor, who scooped two pig’s feet into his own bowl before adding a little broth to the top. I added a handful of cilantro and onion to my posole and went to find a place to sit.

The living room was crowded. Besides the usual extended family, mom invited two women from church and their kids. I wove unnoticed past the kitchen table and through the congested living room. I sat down on the front porch and began eating. Victor sat down beside me a moment later and went to work picking small bites of chewy meat off the bone.

When we finished, we walked our empty bowls back into the kitchen. Mom gave Victor a Styrofoam bowl of soup covered with foil for his mother.

“Tell Alejandra we missed her.”

“OK, *tía*.” Victor elbowed me in the ribs. I hated that.

“Hey, dad,” I said. My father looked up from his conversation. “Can I please borrow the car for a couple hours? I have to take Victor home, but we want to go out for a little while first.”

My dad stared at me for a long time. Eventually he dug the keys to the twenty-year-old Cadillac rusting away in the driveway from his jeans pocket.

“Fill it up with gas. There’s not a lot in there now. I want to have more than it has now when you bring it back.”

I dropped my eyes to the floor and took the keys: “*Gracias, papá*.”

“Be a good boy.”

“OK”

I pushed the screen door shut behind me and stepped onto the front porch. I didn’t mean to, but the flimsy wood frame slammed against the door jam.

“*Pinche cabron*,” shouted my dad from his seat in the living room. “Don’t break the door. I have to fix it every week.”

I rolled my eyes at Victor and he snickered. “Let’s go,” I said, dangling the keys to the Cadillac.

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Two hours later, Victor and me sat on the hood of my dad's Caddy finishing the twelve-pack. Victor burped and crushed his can and threw it into the bushes.

"Fucking little girls with their moms," he said.

The band concert at Magnolia High was a bust. Just like Victor said, nothing but barely-teenage girls with their moms.

"What do you want to do now?" I was tired and ready for bed, but I would have to lead Victor there.

"You're ready to go to sleep already, aren't you?"

"No, I don't know. Maybe. I got work in the morning."

Victor popped open the last beer. "Fuck work."

He swung his legs off the hood of the car and landed in the gutter. He kicked a Styrofoam soda cup from a gas station. The curb was sticky with the remains of spilled drinks, the white cement dyed a darker black than the asphalt. It had been months since it last rained.

Victor put his fingers through the chain link fence running the length of the sidewalk. He pushed his face against the metal grate and peered through. "We should steal that car."

"Fuck that, man; I don't want to steal a car," I said.

"Look at that Impala," Victor replied, pointing a finger through the fence. "I'll bet it's faster than your old man's Caddy."

"It doesn't even look like it runs," I said. "It's forty years old, got no paint, mirrors are broke off. It doesn't even have a back window."

"Forty-two," said Victor.

"What?"

“It’s forty-two years old.” I always forgot Victor knew cars, mostly because he never did anything constructive with the knowledge. “And it doesn’t need paint or glass to run.”

Victor hoisted himself up on the fence and vaulted over in one easy motion. I was impressed; he’d been practicing.

“Get the Caddy running,” he whispered. “I’ll be back out through the gate in a minute and we’ll race.”

I finished my beer in two swallows and slid in behind the wheel of the Caddy. I was buzzed but not drunk. Fine to drive.

I fired the Cadillac up. There was no way an old Impala could beat this car.

I heard the Impala roar to life moments before it shot through the chain link fence. Victor plowed through the gate, sending the lock and chain shooting across the street. He slammed the Impala off the curb without mercy and hooked left on the road. I dropped the Caddy in gear and peeled out behind him.

I caught up with Victor before we were a block away. The Caddy was way faster, and I proved it by pulling even with Victor. But Victor was serious about racing, and slid the Impala to the right, towards me. He didn’t care what happened to the car he was driving, but I cared very much if my dad’s Cadillac got smashed up.

I veered right to keep a few feet between us, but he leaned into me. I felt the white walls rub up against the curb and knew he won. I slowed down just enough to drop right behind Victor as he slid over to my lane. I pulled the wheel left to get around him on the other side, but Victor cut me off. I tried to swing right again but no luck.

I slowed down and dropped out of the race. I wasn't about to risk smashing up my dad's car. I honked twice and tapped the brakes to let Victor know what was up. He kept barreling forward like we were still racing.

"Holy shit," I muttered, coming to a stop. I think Victor was trying to slow down because the next intersection was usually busy. Instead he started fishtailing all over the place. The car hooked left and hopped up over the curb, trunk first. He somehow missed all the poles with the streetlights and stop lights and plowed the rear end of the Impala through a giant glass window.

I hit the gas on the Caddy and shot up to the Impala. Victor opened the driver's door and slid down to the ground. I put the car in park and ran to him, pulling him to his feet.

"Come on, you dumb ass, we have to get the fuck out of here." I got him to his feet and dragged him to the passenger side of the Cadillac, stuffing his half-conscience body inside. A single, thick line of blood ran from the top of Victor's head down, soaking the sleeve of his shirt. I dropped back behind the wheel and peeled out into the night.

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I often stayed out all night, so I didn't think my parents would really care if I didn't come home. After we left the scene of the crash, I drove to Victor's house a few miles away. I took the back streets and alleys and parking lots and drove very slow. I didn't want to attract any kind of attention.

When I got to Victor's house, I woke up his mom so she could help me get him patched up.

"What did you say happened to him?" she asked.

“We were drinking a few beers and he tripped off the curb and hit his head on the cement.”

“Uh-huh,” she said. I could tell Tia Alejandra didn’t really believe me, but that was the story I was sticking with; she couldn’t prove I was lying.

I slept on the floor of Victor’s room. I had slept there a thousand times over the years. I knew where the extra blankets and pillows were, so I just made up a place to sleep myself.

Victor was asleep almost instantly. He hadn’t said much at all since he crashed the Impala. I couldn’t tell if he had a concussion like they talk about at the boxing gym, or if he was just upset. Or maybe both.

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When I brought the Cadillac home the next morning, dad was still home. He usually got picked up early for work by his buddy; I was surprised to find him when I walked into the house. He was sitting in the living room when I came in. He looked angry.

“What happened last night,” he said in a quiet voice.

“I crashed at Victor’s,” I replied. “Sorry I didn’t call but it was late.” I knew he sometimes got upset at me for keeping the Cadillac out all night. He didn’t trust me to take care of his car.

“Crashed is the right word,” he said.

“*Que pasó?* What are you talking about?” The words stuck in the back of my throat.

“The cops came here this morning. Last night some idiot in a stolen Impala crashed through the window of the West Anaheim library. A second idiot pulled up in a Cadillac and

escaped with the first idiot.” Dad paused here for dramatic affect. “The cops have video of the whole thing. They saw the license plate on the Cadillac and they say it was mine. They asked where it was and I told them that you had the car last night.”

Dad paused again. He took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. “I didn’t mean to let them know it was you, but it’s too late now. I’m guessing the *pandejo* driving the Impala was Victor.” Dad looked up at me for confirmation. I didn’t deny the charges.

“I’m sorry,” I whispered. My eyes were locked on my feet; I couldn’t look him in the eye.

“Your mother is very upset. She was crying all morning.”

“Where is *mamá*?”

“I made her leave. She was too upset.” Dad sighed and put his metal framed glasses back on. “I called Tía Alejandra this morning after the cops left. She told me how you came in last night.”

“I’m sorry,” I said again, this time my voice a little louder.

“What were you thinking.” Dad roared to life, his anger sending shivers down my spine. He stood up from his chair. “Stealing a car, racing, crashing through a library window. We raised you better than that.”

I said nothing. Dad settled back down in his chair.

“*La policía* are looking for you. You can’t stay here.”

Again I said nothing.

“Tía Alejandra said you can stay with her. *La policía* aren’t looking for Victor.”

“Thank you.”

“Stupid, stupid thing to do,” dad said, again losing his cool. “You can’t go back to your job; you’ll probably have to get a new job with a fake ID like you don’t have papers or something. Like I used to. Like your mom still has to. Let me tell you, life in this country is much harder if you have to hide.” Dad drew in a deep breath and brought himself back down. “I don’t know if you can go to the community college next semester now like you were planning.”

I said nothing and just stood there. The weight of the silence in the room was enormous; I thought I would have to sit down or my legs would break.

“Pack a bag and go,” dad said. “Leave the Cadillac. I’m going to call Juan’s *chollo* friend Eduardo and sell it to him.”

I knew Eduardo bought cars from people in the neighborhood no questions asked. He swapped plates and sanded off the VIN, then drove them to Tijuana and wholesaled them to used car lots.

“You’ll only get a couple hundred dollars from Enrique,” I said. “The Caddy’s probably worth...”

“It’s worth three-thousand dollars,” dad said, not letting me finish. “You owe me the difference once I sell it to Enrique.” I knew dad would have a hard time getting two grand for the car if the cops weren’t looking for it. This was how dad was going to punish me - making me pay three thousand dollars for an old car I would never drive again.

“OK,” I said.

“Your mother wants you to take your San Cristóbal medal and wear it everywhere. It will keep you safe.” I was excused.

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