

"Diego's Closet"

by
Beth Black

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THE LEGEND OF "COLUMBUS'S EGG"

"Among the festivities organised in Columbus's honour by the court grandees on his return after his first voyage, there was a banquet offered by Cardinal Pedro González de Mendoza. The Admiral was the guest of honour and during the course of the meal one of the grandees said that if Columbus had not discovered the New World, there would have been many other talented men ready and able to do the very same thing. Then Columbus picked up an egg and asked if any of those present was capable of making it stand on end unsupported. No one was able to do it, but Columbus, by hitting the ends of the egg and flattening them, managed to make it stand on the table without falling over."

— Martin Fernández de Navarrete
Colección de Viajes y descubrimientos, Madrid, 1954

FADE IN:

EXT. CALIFORNIA DESERT DAY

The sun hammers down. WAVES OF HEAT writhe from the desert floor. In them, a mirage appears: FLICKERING STRANDS OF COLOR DANCE WITHIN THE UNDULATING AIR.

The vision clears and we see that the colors are actually PEOPLE ... fleeing for their lives.

Approaching, they break through the waves.

We see

A BOY with dark eyes, large and wise beyond his five years, sprinting in this heat. Young DIEGO is swept along by HIS PARENTS, TWIN SISTERS, TEENAGE BROTHER SYLVESTRE and a small band of IMMIGRANTS. MANUEL "PAPA" CORTEZ carries one twin, Syvestre carries the other and ISABEL "MAMA" CORTEZ holds Diego's hand.

They are all running.

MAMA CORTEZ
(in Spanish)

<Let's go! Hurry!>

SFX: A THUNDEROUS TRUCK chases them.

Groups of YUCCAS dot the landscape ...

The family circles around and darts behind a stand of yuccas. The TRUCK veers and gains on ANOTHER FAMILY, catching them. It SCREECHES TO A HALT.

Armed BORDER PATROL AGENTS fly out and round up their detainees.

THE LEAD AGENT breaks off from the commotion and stands frighteningly tall, looking around for more illegals.

The air holds still while he scans the desert with his binoculars.

He misses the small, terrified family laying flat against Mother Earth, hiding behind a MOUND OF DIRT and a YUCCA.

Diego clings to his mother's hand. He keeps his eyes open, wriggles around to peek from behind the mound..

And sees..

One of the captives, A YOUNG WOMAN, breaks free and runs sobbing from the border patrol. She is dragged back to the group kicking and screaming. The lead agent rejoins his team. He aims a large HANDGUN at the woman's temple. He cocks it.

Terrified, SHE GIVES UP HER FIGHT.

ECU on Diego's face, moving closer, focusing on his eyes. WE'RE ABOUT TO SEE HOW DIEGO SEES.

REVERSE SHOT: on the man, pointing the gun at the woman's head. Pull in closer to an ECU of her face. She becomes..

A PORTRAIT, AS A DEEPLY-TALENTED ARTIST WOULD PAINT IT. It renders her anguish palpable in brushstrokes so vivid, that we're struck..

FADE AND PULL BACK into reality..

Trembling, the woman closes her eyes. A lone tear rolls down her cheek. A decision is made: The gun tilts UP, away from her face.

The lead agent smirks, laughs, re-holsters his weapon, and they pile everyone into the truck. It sweeps by the crouching family, but miraculously.. ROARS AWAY.

SFX: Retreating TRUCK subsides. Peace returns to the desert.

All are gone but the family. Slowly, cautiously, they rise from their hiding spot. They are exhausted, frightened and angry.

SYLVESTRE

(in Spanish)

<I should have done something!>

MAMA
(in Spanish)
<There was nothing you could do.>

PAPA
(in Spanish)
<This is crazy. We made a mistake.>

Nudging his arm ...

MAMA
(in Spanish)
<We've come all this way. You know
our decision.>

She nods toward Diego.

Papa grudgingly agrees. There's no arguing with the mother
of a child in need.

Diego's family moves on. Ahead lies the shimmering mirage
of a BIG CITY.

FADE TO:

EST. LOS ANGELES DAY

INT. KINDERGARTEN CLASSROOM MORNING

A noisy room. Lots of KIDS. They all STAND INCHES TALLER
than Diego.

MRS. HAMILTON, the overtaxed teacher, pulls Diego along,
trying to find an empty spot in which to squeeze him.

MRS. HAMILTON
C'mon ... what's your name? Eh? I said,
what's your name? Cat got your tongue?

Apparently, all the chairs are filled. Diego doesn't reply
to her questions.

She stops, eyeing him.

MRS. HAMILTON (CONT'D)
 (in English and poor Spanish)
 You want Spanish, er, Español? Okay,
 ¿Qué es su nombre? Maybe...you can write
 it? Here, try this. We LOVE to write
 our names in PRETTY CRAYON, don't we?

She retrieves a PURPLE CRAYON from her pocket and hands it to him.

MRS. HAMILTON
 We'll practice writing your name today.

A CRASH. Two kids have knocked over an easel and are yelling about it.

MRS. HAMILTON
 Of course! Just what I needed!
 (calling)
 Wait! Don't move!

She releases her grip on Diego and hurries away. He sinks into a corner seat, ignored by the animated crowd of children. In his hand, that lone crayon itches to be used.

The boy investigates his surroundings. The floor is messy with papers dropped by other kids. He swoops down and rescues one.

DIEGO
 (whisper)
 D-I-E-G-O, Diego...

His crayon dances across the crumpled page as we ...

FADE TO:

INT. OFFICE/GETTY MUSEUM DAY

The sterile, artistically appointed OFFICE of DR. REAGAN SANDOVAL, Art Historian and curator of the museum. Reagan is the ultimate sophisticated art professional, down to her sleek, chic business suit.

Agitated, she keeps SNEEZING while on the phone..

REAGAN

I know parents are bringing more kids to the museum. But, we really could use the funds for something OTHER than a Kids' Corner. Really, I believe the money would be better spent on the adult visitors. Perhaps some modern -

It's useless. The guy on the other end of the line has more say.

REAGAN

Yes, of course. Okay, sure. I understand.

The call is over, but not the fuss. She doesn't like kids all that much, and she doesn't want to waste precious funds on them.

She rises, pulled out of her chair by sheer anger.

REAGAN

(calling)

Ruby! Come here, please! Bring those plans for that blasted Kids' Corner. The board wants it up and running in a week!

CUT TO:

RUBY MARTINEZ, Reagan's administrator ...

Mining the papers from her files, and grinning like the Cheshire Cat.

CUT TO:

Reagan, again. She doesn't have to see Ruby to know ...

REAGAN

And you can wipe that smile off your face. This museum can be so great - wonderful, in fact - without making it into a ... kiddie playground.

Reagan notices a VASE, FILLED WITH COLORFUL ROSES on a SIDE TABLE.

She GRABS the vase like it's full of snakes, and carries it out to Ruby ... depositing it on her desk. She SNEEZES twice, as soon as they're plopped down.

REAGAN (CONT'D)

Oh, and please take these away! You know I'm allergic.

Ruby wheels about and hands her the requested documents.

RUBY

The landscapers take so much pride in their results with the garden. They just wanted to share the joy with you ...

She SNEEZES again, three times, rapid fire.

RUBY

They're gone! They're gone!

FADE TO:

EXT. GETTY MUSEUM DAY

A yellow bus pulls into the museum's driveway. Spanish Folklorico music drifts from the insides, as the kids bounce in their seats.

Only Diego stares wide-eyed at splendor he's never witnessed before.

We hear Mrs. Hamilton and her aide screaming inside ...

MRS. HAMILTON AND AIDE (V.O.)

(in mixed Spanish and English)

<Please sit down!> Sit down!

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. GETTY MUSEUM DAY

The class bustles across the marble walkways.

INT. GETTY MUSEUM DAY

The lobby of this architectural masterpiece surrounds the group. Grabbing a MAP, Mrs. Hamilton reads and leads ...

MRS. HAMILTON

Okay, we need to get to the South Wing.
The photo exhibit on wildflowers. Yes,
that sounds good. Hurry!

She holds Diego's hand, but releases it to open a door. The eager children burst through the narrow opening, and Diego is pushed out through ANOTHER DOOR ... ALONE.

The door SLAMS SHUT, and he can't open it. He's TRAPPED ...

In a corridor.

SFX: BEHIND THE DOOR. The kids are moving away and their noise retreats.

He gazes down the corridor and discovers, to his joy ...

A RED CRAYON

Resting on the marble floor. Just sitting there, abandoned.

He snatches it and wanders on around a bend ...

INT. KIDS' CORNER/GETTY MUSEUM

Diego lifts his eyes from his rojo prize in time to discover ...

A VASE OF COLORFUL FLOWERS – so beautiful!

STRANGE CHILDREN sit at easels, drawing this joyous sight.

CHILD ONE

I wanna make it pink!

CHILD TWO

I wanna make it yellow!

MS. GREEN – THE SWEET, GREY-HAIRED DOCENT – awards budding artists with stickers reading:

CREATED AT THE GETTY

MS. GREEN

Wonderful! Very charming. What is it?
Oh, yes, I see the daisy, now.
Charming, indeed.

She spies quiet little Diego and ushers him to an EASEL. He finds ordinary crayons, stares up at her, disappointed.

The docent is busy, however, helping other children. He CREEPS UP to HER DESK and scavenges. On TOP, we see some REAL ART SUPPLIES. CHARCOAL, PASTELS, PAINTS...

Diego snatches a handful, loads them into a bowl fashioned from the front of his shirt. He one-arms a few more into the bowl, and slings it back to his easel.

There, he studies his subject and paper ... and goes to work.

CUT TO:

Mrs. Hamilton, counting heads, troubled ...

BACK TO:

INT. KIDS' CORNER/GETTY MUSEUM CONTINUING

The docent wanders past several easels, offering praise as often as possible. She bends toward Diego, almost seeing ...

But A BLOND BOY races over and catches her arm.

BLOND BOY

I need more paper, please.

Ms. GREEN

Y-yes, right away.

And she's gone.

Diego finishes his piece, and we see the BOTTOM CORNER, as he's signing his name in that red crayon in his careful block lettering.

Ms. Green resumes her praises, inching forward ... UNTIL SHE SEES DIEGO'S EASEL. SHE FREEZES.

Diego smiles up at her innocently.

All the poor woman can do is stare at what is obviously a revelation.

MS. GREEN

(glancing around)

You did this all by yourself? You did this? You -

And we finally see what she's admiring. The vase and flowers are ALIVE in the most gorgeous sketch any five year old ever drew. Each detail is expressed in a bold style similar to Van Gogh's.

The pack of stickers falls from her hand.

She's about to recover her composure, when -

Mrs. Hamilton rushes into the room, upset.

MRS. HAMILTON

Diego! What are you doing here! You've made us late getting back!

MS. GREEN

He's with you?

MRS. HAMILTON

Yes, of course. And he's been missing!

(to Diego)

How did you get here?

(giving up)

Oh, never mind. It's useless. He won't talk.

She seizes his arm, yanks him from the easel, and out of the Kids' Corner, yelling all the way ...

MRS. HAMILTON

DON'T EVER DO THAT AGAIN! DON'T EVER!

Left behind ... is the sketch. Ms. Green clasps it, and again, is confounded by its beauty.

ALL NOISE in the museum FADES as we admire this masterpiece, ourselves.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. GETTY MUSEUM PORTRAIT EXHIBITION ROOM DAY

Reagan passes a PORTRAIT OF CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS, as painted by Carlos Genicio. She pauses, for a moment, to eye it ...

REAGAN (V.O.)

So much in art seems to be about the act of discovery. I've always wanted to discover something big ... like Columbus did. Imagine how he felt, thinking he'd circumnavigated the globe. So, he wasn't in India, but he had made a huge discovery, all the same. To do that! (thinks again) Yeah, I know. Vanity!

She moves out of the room ...

REAGAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Yeah, well. It's not a problem. There are so many of us who are searching, now. No ... in my life, there have been only minor discoveries - and all three of them have been about me. One, I'd kill myself if I ever lost this job. Two, I love good art. And three, I hate kids ...

Time for the next scheduled stop.

INT. GETTY MUSEUM HALLWAY DAY

Reagan stands outside the new Kids' Corner, willing herself to enter. It's not working. Instead, she's IMAGINING ...

Herself, SCREAMING, with a HALF-DOZEN REALLY STICKY KIDS climbing all over her.

CUT BACK TO:

The Getty, sans all those noisy, leaping monsters ...

REAGAN

(under her breath)

Right. Well, I'll get this over in a hurry. I do hate some parts of my job, only SOME parts, but DEFINITELY some parts.

Girding herself, she marches in.

The place is empty ... and blessedly quiet.

The docent, Ms. Green, is busy cleaning up.

ON THE WALL, BEHIND HER, Diego's sketch holds court over all the other drawings of the day.

MS. GREEN

You missed them. I'm closing down. Sorry, Dr. Sandoval.

REAGAN

Yes, well. Has to close sometime, doesn't it? Okay, continue on with -

She spies THE SKETCH.

IT DAZZLES HER.

REAGAN

What's this? Some artist showing off in the kids' section? We could put up a sign, "kids only" if you want. It's pretty good. Tell me, who drew -

MS. GREEN

It wasn't an adult.

REAGAN

Well, of course it was. See those lines? That shading? No kid -

MS. GREEN

It was a kid.

(they exchange a look)

I swear.

REAGAN

So ... a kid. Say, college? (off her head
shake) Not high school. No way.

Ms. Green shakes her head. Removes the drawing from the
wall and hands it to her boss.

Points out Diego's block-letter signature.

MS. GREEN

A little kid.

Contact Beth to read more.