

# UC Merced

## The Vernal Pool

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La Caperusita Roja

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## La Caperusita Roja

On a bright, clear morning a mother woke her sweet angel from a deep slumber. “Despierta Bonita! Tienes que llegar con tu Nana Caty hoy,” Lourdes pulled the sheets off of Monserrat's bed.

Monserrat sat up and squinted at her mother in confusion, “Ma-”

“Que ‘Ma’ ni que nada, get up and get dressed mija. Meet me in the kitchen,” Lourdes said as she walked out of the room and down the hall in their earthen floor house.

Monserrat swung her legs off the edge of her bed and jumped off. Her bare feet hit the ground and kicked up a small puff of dirt. She wiggled her toes and hurried to get her clothes out of the dresser. After grabbing an old, purple and gold *Teleton* marketing shirt and jeans out of the dresser, she threw them on and rushed to the kitchen.

As she walked into the small cramped kitchen Monserrat asked, “Mami, a qué hora me voy a bolear?”

“No mija, you’re not shining shoes today. Tu Nana Caty no se siente bien and I want to make sure she eats. Can you take this *canasta*, go to the *tortilleria*, and take a *docena* to your Nana? Be on your way as soon as you can, antes de que se ponga muy caliente.” Lourdes said as she handed her the basket.

“Remember to say good morning to the vecinos and Marisela at the store. Smile and get going, you don’t want to be late.” Lourdes handed her 20 Mexican pesos. “Monse, No te quiero hablando con extraños.”

“Si mami, I’ll be careful. My Nana deserves everything,” Monse assured her as she put the coins in her front pocket. She turned around to face the white, steel front door and put on her shoes. Lourdes walked up next to Monse, made the sign of the cross on her, and gave her a kiss on the cheek.

The tortilleria was just three houses down from her own. In her six years of life, everything about the Tortilleria remained the same. Marisela was always the cashier, Doña Mari’s and Doña Coco’s hands were clapping away at the masa, and Nacho was always outside selling oranges. She could faintly hear a narcocorrido coming from the opposite side of the street down the unpaved path. As she walked over, she noticed 14 year old Nacho was not outside the store on his usual spot. It was a Wednesday morning and Monse knew he should have been there.

She yanked the heavy glass door and heard a chime. “Hola Marisela!” Monse exclaimed.

Marisela greeted her with a half-smile, “Buenos Dias Monse,” her usually warm, chocolate brown eyes were glossed over and dimmed.

“Where’s Nacho? Es miercoles,” Monse asked.

“No hija,” Marisela’s voice started to shake, “Se lo llevaron. El Lobo’s people knew how desperate Nacho was to help pay Don Alberto’s medical bill.”

“No,” Monse whispered to herself.

“Si hija, stay alert. El Lobo and his people are bad,” Marisela warned. “But I don’t want to worry you anymore, what can I get for you?”

“Ye-yeah, Can I have a dozen tortillas? I’m taking them to my Nana.”

“Be careful crossing the pueblo Monse,” She said handing her the seaming bag, “You can never be too careful.”

Monse nodded and made her way to the glass door. She turned around, thanked Marisela as she waved goodbye, and made her way out of the store. She placed the tortillas de harina into the basket and slowly made her way down the road.

Monse’s Nana lived on the outskirts of the pueblo, about a mile away from Monse’s house. As Monse made her way off the main road and into the edge of town, she saw a man walking in her direction. Monse naively waved at the man. She did not understand that you should not wave at a person from a different pueblo, especially if you do not know them. But she was not afraid.

“Buenos Dias, Mija,” the man looked down at Monse and gave a toothy smile.

“Buenos Días Señor,” Monse smiled back at him with the intention to keep walking.

“Where are you going so early? The sun is still hiding behind the clouds.” Asked the man, still looking down at Monse, “What’s in the basket?”

“Voy a la casa de mi Nana Caty. No se siente bien, so I’m bringing her tortillas and going to keep her company,” Monse informed him.

“Por donde vive tu Nana? Is it far?”

“No, it’s just down the road here and to the left. I’ll be fine. Gracias Señor, que tengo bonito dia,” Monse said before continuing on her way.

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The man thought to himself: "What a beautiful little soul. She would do anything to help anyone. Surely she'd be able to help us take over the pueblo. If we take her hostage and put a ransom on her, the pueblo will have no choice but to comply with our wishes." He smirked. "She must know Nacho, it'll be perfect."

So he pulled out the walkie talkie from his belt holder and communicated with the group that he's found a girl that could help them over take the city and mark it as their territory. El Moco, Leo, and Jando answered with over excited approval.

His walkie buzzed and a raspy voice exclaimed, "Agarrala Julian, ay voy."

With that he ran down the road, away from Monse, until he saw a black Cadillac with pitch dark glass pull up next to him. The window lowered and a chubby brown man ordered him to hop in. Once in the car, Julian turned his attention to the man, "Que te parece? Will the plan work?"

The man turned to Julian with disgust, "Never doubt me, if you know what's good for you. They didn't name me 'El Lobo' because I'm an idiot." He paused and took a deep breath. "Knock out the viejita and take the girl." With that they sped off to Nana Caty's house, making sure they took a longer route so they wouldn't be spotted.

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Monse could finally see her Nana's house down the road and was reminded of how excited she was to see her. She realized she should bring her Nana some flowers. So, she walked over to the bushes and greenery next to her. She got on her tippy toes and started to pick the girasoles closest to the ground. She was certain her Nana would love them.

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El Lobo and Julian left the car hidden down the road and ran up to Nana's house with their cuerno de chivo at their sides. Julian swiftly picked the lock and they made their way into the house. Looking in all the rooms as they made their way through the dusty, earthen floor house. They came up with a plan: that they were going to hit the old woman over the head with the end of their cuerno de chivo, El Lobo was going to wait in the car, and Julian would wait for Monse to get there.

"Quien?" An old lady yelled.

"Ya!" El Lobo said as he elbowed Julian in the chest, ran back out the door and down the road.

Julian barged in the bedroom with his rifle in the air. The old woman sat up and screamed with her hands in the air just as Julian hit her in the forehead above her ear. With a gasp and a thud, her body went limp and hit the bed. He tucked her in and positioned her on her side with her back to the door.

“This way she looks like she’s asleep from this angle,” he thought.

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Monse got to her Nana’s front yard. She was surprised to notice her Tata’s old baseball bat and mitt in the grass by the fence so she picked them up knowing they would make her Nana smile. The sunflowers and the baseball equipment would certainly keep her Nana happy and entertained. She made her way to the front door and knocked. With the single knock the door creaked open.

“Nana must have forgot to shut it,” she thought. “Pobrecita mi Nana.” She made her way through the front door and went into the kitchen and put her basket down along with the flowers in the old vase. She walked over into the hallway and noticed a boot imprint on the ground.

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Julian hears the front door creak open and places himself next to the bedroom door, waiting for Monse to make her way to greet her Nana Caty. He hears a loud bang and glass breaking in the kitchen. He runs out the door and down the hall and is met with a baseball bat to the face.

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Monse prepares herself and when she sees a figure rushing down the hall she swings with all her might. Woosh. Thud. The man’s body hits the floor and kicks up dirt.

Monse was breathing heavily, adrenaline rushing with the bat in hand. She looks down at the pointy, faintly yellow teeth scattered by his head.

“No te metas conmigo,” she murmurs. She was not afraid.