

Marcia

Clive F Sorrell

She was only eight years old.

Her black hair, grey with dust, hung down her back like an old mare's mane. The once white communion dress now matched the sickly pallor of her skin and young eyes that normally sparkled at fiesta time had been dulled by her father's death and the ensuing impoverishment.

Marcia shifted the wooden tray and winced as the halter rope scraped the blisters on her neck. The lights changed to red and she shuffled past the uncaring drivers offering her woeful wares. The tray contained her mother's bottles of herbal concoctions that claimed to cure warts and jam jars filled with sharpened pencils at ten centavos each. Her old transistor radio, a treasured gift from her father, was stridently playing *La Cucaracha*. Some drivers thought the music appropriate for they considered the child with hollow cheeks and sunken eyes a nuisance, a cockroach.

The ninth driver was the first to respond kindly as Marcia held up her wares. The darkly tinted window hummed and cool air flowed out to give her some respite from the searing sun. Marcia rose up on tiptoe but was unable to see the driver clearly. A hand bearing a livid scar appeared and it pointed to the withered flower pinned to her dress.

'You wear the Christmas Star, my child.' The gentle voice was filled with compassion as a one-hundred-peso banknote fluttered down onto her tray. 'You must celebrate *las posadas* in Santa Veracruz church tonight and bring your beautiful star to my nativity. As the dark window closed Marcia looked down and saw that her dying poinsettia had been reborn and was flaming red against the dazzling white purity of her dress.

'Feliz Navidad,' Marcia whispered in wonder as the car glided away.

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