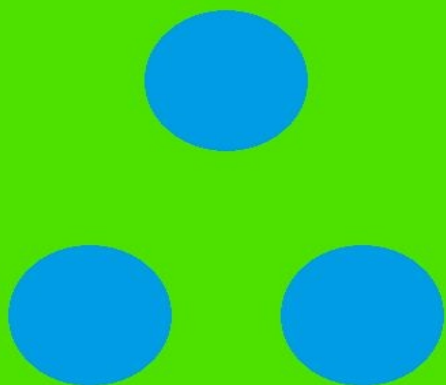


Mex

Laurence M. Janifer



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Talented William Logan, though he hails from Dodger territory, tells a quiet story from down near the Mexican border, where men are very close to ancestral memories and to the things which dwell in the shadows. Logan is one of the more interesting of the newer writers.

mex

by ... WILLIAM LOGAN

Perhaps it was just as well that I did not tell them what I was....

WHAT THEY called me, that was what started it. I'm as good an American as the next fellow, and maybe a little bit better than men like that, big men drinking in a bar who can't find anything better to do than to spit on a man and call him Mex. As if a Mexican is something to hide or to be ashamed of. We have our own heroes and our own strength and we don't have to bend down to men like that, or any other men. But when they called me that I saw red and called them names back.

"Mex kid," one of the men said, a big red-haired bully with his sleeves rolled back and muscles like ropes on the big hairy arms. "Snot-nosed little Mex brat."

I called him a name. He only laughed back at me and turned his back, waving a hand for the bartender. Maybe in a big city in the North it would be different and probably it would not: this toleration we hear about is no more good than an open fight, and there must be understanding instead. But here near the border, just on the American side of the border, a Mexican is called fair game, and a seventeen-year-old like me is less than nothing to them, to the white ones who go to the big bars.

I thought carefully about what to do, and finally when I had made my

mind up I went for him and tried to hit him. But other men held me back, and I was kicking and shouting with my legs off the ground. When I stopped they put me down, so I started for the big red-haired man again and they had to stop me again. The red-haired man was laughing all this time. I wanted to run, back to my own family in their little house, and yet running would have been wrong; I was too angry to run, so I stayed.

"My sister," I said. "My sister is a witch and I will get her to put a curse on you." I was very angry, you must understand this.

And of course they had no idea that my sister is a real witch, and her curses are real, and only last year Manuel Valdez had died from the effects of her curse. Of all people, sometimes I wish I were my sister most of all, to curse people and see them shrivel and sicken and choke and die.

"Go ahead, half-pint," one of the other men yelled. "Get your sister to put a curse on me. I bet she knows who I am; I been with every Mex girl this side of the border."

This made me see red; my sister is pure and must be pure, since she is a witch. And she is not like some of the others even aside from that. I have heard her talk about them and I know.

I called him a name and ran up to him and hit him; my fist against his solid side felt good, but some other men pulled me off again. Yet it was impossible to leave. This was wrong for me, and I had to make it right. "I shall get my father to fight you, since he is a giant ten feet tall."

The men laughed at me, not knowing, of course, that my father is a giant ten feet tall in truth, and my mother a sweet siren like those in the books, the old books, with spells in her eyes and a strange power. They did not know I was not a daydreaming child but a man who told

truth.

And they laughed; I grew angry again and told them many things, calling them names in Spanish, which they did not understand. That only made them laugh the more.

Finally I left; it was necessary for me to leave, since I was not wanted. But it was necessary, too, for me to make things right. Nights later they were dead for what they had said and done.

For I tell the truth always, and I had told them about my sister and my father and my mother. But one thing I had not told them.

I am sorry they could never know I was the winged thing that frightened and killed them, one by one....

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