A Nice Ghost

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Recommended Citation

Available at: http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/amaranthus/vol1990/iss1/11

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Like all other Latin American children I know, Carmen had been exposed to superstitious beliefs which are carried from generation to generation. She was always scared by the darkness of the night, and also of the water whenever her father told her to take a shower because it was cold. She looked so weak with her skinny body, her siblings thought she was feeble. Accordingly, they often pretended to be child kidnappers to scare her when she was playing with her friends or with her toys. She was always scared and always yelled for her mother's help.

She remembers all her fears and told me of her experiences. She said: One time I felt really scared. Oh boy! I thought I saw a ghost at night. I close my eyes and I can still see everything that happened. It was a night in August. My father was telling us a story, scary, but interesting as his stories always were. Then he had a new game for us to play, and he asked if we would like to join in. All of us raised our hands in order to be included in the new game.

He began to explain. There was a big yard behind our house that had a lot of fruit trees. It took about 4 or 5 minutes to walk from the back door of the house to the end of the yard. My father had hung a piece of white cloth on a branch of a mango tree that was planted at the end of the yard. He said that whoever could take the cloth back to the house would win the game, and he would offer the winner five lempiras.

With this amount of money my one brother could buy a gold plated pen that he had seen in the store across from the school or my other brother could buy a new album to collect the pictures of his favorite soccer players.

This prize was seductive. However, my siblings and I weren't that excited. We stayed quietly in the kitchen. We were scared because of the darkness outside, but especially because of the ghost story that we had just heard.

We often played there in the daytime, but we had never been out there at night. There was no light outside and the trees were so thick with leaves and branches that the moonlight couldn't come through. My sisters and I looked outside and started to encourage my older brother. "You should go first. You are a man, don't be a coward." He didn't want to go and we all said in unison, "You don't like girls and you're acting like one. You are a girl, you are a girl..."
He got very angry and after a moment said, "I am not scared and I am not a girl. Watch me." Immediately he opened the back door and ran into the darkness. One minute, two minutes and five minutes passed. He did not return. We thought he might have already gotten the cloth from the tree. Suddenly we heard noises as if someone was running out there and my brother appeared with gasping breath. He spoke harshly: "A Ghost! I...I saw a ghost! I was trying to take the white cloth, I...I saw the ghost walking on the main road. He...he is very tall with a small head and a big long neck. He...he doesn't have any arms at all."

My brother was trembling like a leaf and we had to cover him with a big blanket.

Everybody laughed at him. We thought he was so scared that he had lost his senses. My sisters asked my father for their turn; they wanted to go together, saying that they were only little girls. But the stinkers didn't want me with them because they thought I was a big girl. I wanted to go with them, but they said, "No, we don't want you with us. You can go alone." Then, slowly, they walked into the dark yard. Suddenly, a strong wind made a lot of fruit drop down from the trees. At the same time, a wandering cat cried, "Meow, Meow." Those horrifying sounds made my sisters shake with fear, and they flew back to the house.

By then I was sitting by my mother. Everything that had happened made me so scared. Therefore I pretended to be in a deep sleep so that I could escape this game. Unfortunately, my father knew what I was doing, and he woke me up. "Carmen, Carmen! Did you want to join the game? Come on now, it is your turn."

I said, "I'm sorry Daddy. I cannot make it. I am tired enough to fall asleep."

Mom felt sorry for me. She told him, "U-u-hm, she looks so tired now, let her sleep. It's not good for children to stay up so late."

Suddenly Martin, my brother, spoke up: "Eh Carmen! You're sleepy and tired? You are lying. You usually sleep late. I know you're lying. I know you're scared. Come Carmen, show us that you're not a coward. Let's go. I'll help you out. But if you don't go, you might not play any other game next time and I won't let you play soccer with me, and I'll tell my friends not to let you play with them either."

Being called a liar made me feel ashamed and uncomfortable. The prize also reappeared in my mind; I would be a winner, and I could buy a lot of candy and a kite that I had seen at the store. I opened the back door. The leaves murmuring on the trees and every little sound that I heard made my long hair stand on end. I took a deep breath and went on my way.

It was so dark that I hardly could see to me in daytime, but now in the darkness with many arms and frightened me. Th shaking with the wind; I was wet with sweat in the 100 degree weather, I felt cold. I giant's fingers were going to catch me, as fast as I could, but my feet were still and numbly.

Finally I saw the white cloth on a man to reach. I tried to figure out how to get stick to take it down. I was happy with somebody on the main road crying. I listened to scene in front of me startled me. I held my breathing. Oh! I was so scared.

Then my foot hit something and I felt I could see the ghost. He was running to die. My heart was pounding like a drum. Then I heard right?"

The voice was familiar to me. I recognized a neighbor. His little daughter held my hand. I suddenly understood about the little daughter on his shoulders. But we did not run and get out of danger. Then I heard, "right?"

I felt very confident and happy when I had seen was only the nice neighbor here this late because I would like to give the white cloth and asked him if he would cloth down from the tree and gave it to me.

I thanked him and waved good-by girl on his shoulders and looked at me on the main road.

I went back home with the white cloth of the nice ghost who helped me out.
It was so dark that I hardly could see. The banana trees were familiar to me in daytime, but now in the darkness they looked like big giants with many arms and frightened me. The branches of the fruit trees were shaking with the wind; I was wet with sweat, but at the same time, even in the 100 degree weather, I felt cold. I thought that all of a sudden a giant’s fingers were going to catch me. I wanted to run back to the house as fast as I could, but my feet were still walking ahead—though shakily and numbly.

Finally I saw the white cloth on a mango branch. It was hung too high to reach. I tried to figure out how to get it. I thought I had to find a long stick to take it down. I was happy with my idea, but then I heard somebody on the main road crying. I looked in that direction and the scene in front of me startled me. I held my breath and hid behind the plum tree.

A human-like shape was approaching on the road. It was the ghost, exactly as my brother had seen and described it. His small head was alternately shaking right and left and he cried like a child. At that moment I lost my spirit and knelt down. He had come to the border of the yard. I thought he had come to catch me. I got up and started to run to the house. I thought I was yelling for help, but the words did not come out of my mouth. Oh! I was so scared.

Then my foot hit something and I fell. Stars appeared in my head. I could see the ghost. He was running toward me. I thought I was going to die. My heart was pounding like a drum. I tried to get up so that I could run and get out of danger. Then I heard someone asking me, “Are you all right?”

The voice was familiar to me. I recognized that this was the next door neighbor. His little daughter held my hand and asked me to play with them. I suddenly understood about the ghost. My neighbor carried his daughter on his shoulders. But we did not see it because of the darkness and our fear!

I felt very confident and happy when I knew the ghost my brother and I had seen was only the nice neighbor. I told him, ”I’m fine now. I came here this late because I would like to get that thing.” I pointed at the white cloth and asked him if he would take it down for me. He took the cloth down from the tree and gave it to me!

I thanked him and waved good-bye to the little girl. He put his little girl on his shoulders and looked at me, shaking his head, and walked away on the main road.

I went back home with the white cloth in my hand and a good memory of the nice ghost who helped me out.