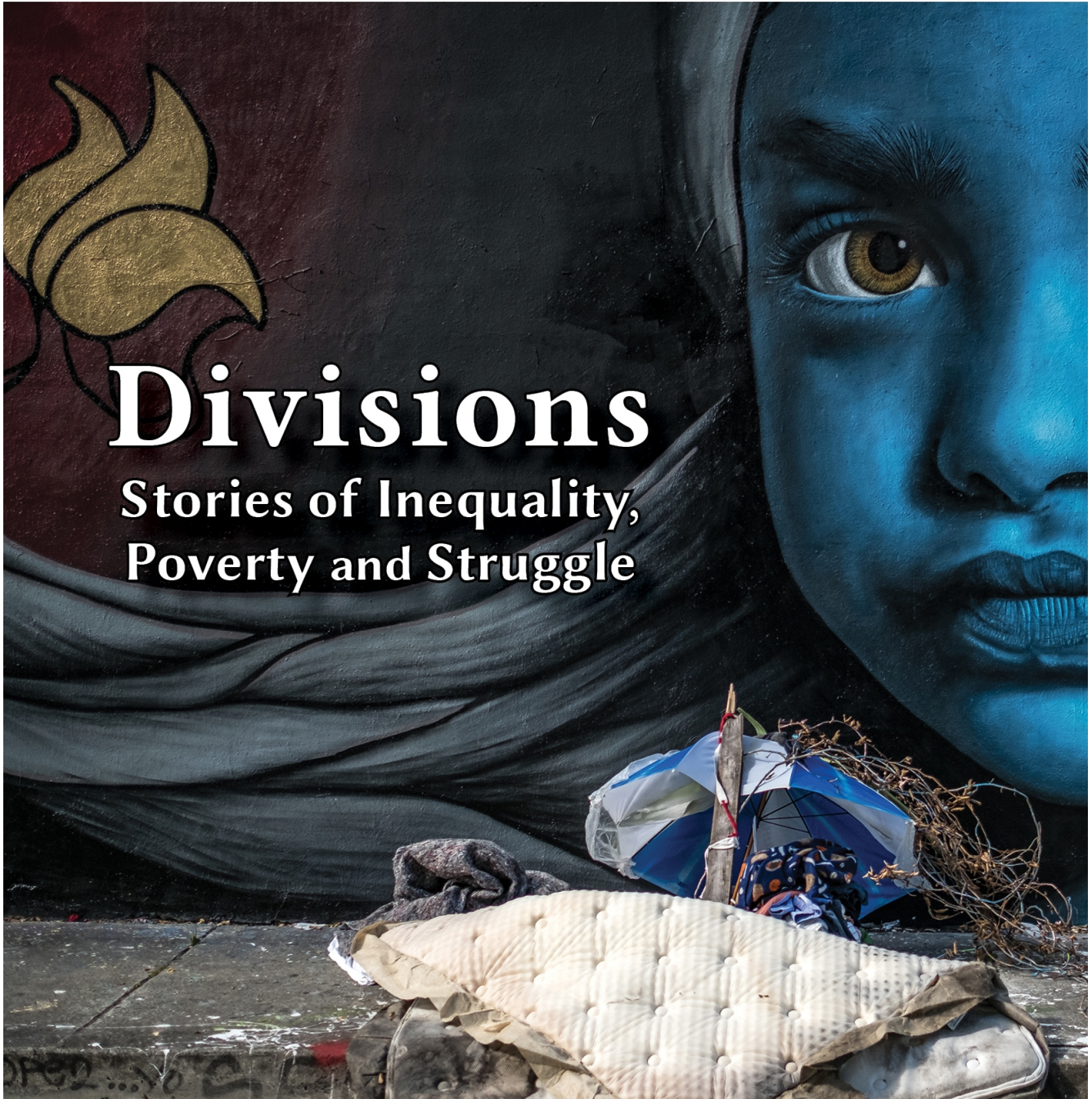


the Spring 2020
LONDON READER
Contemporary Voices in Creative Writing



Divisions
Stories of Inequality,
Poverty and Struggle

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Divisions

**Stories of Inequality,
Poverty and Struggle**

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The London Reader

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Morenci, Arizona – 1904

Fiction by
Guy Prevost

The London Reader's Foreword: Historic division and unequal treatment are at the root of much of America's inequality. "Morenci, Arizona – 1904", Guy Prevost's vivid short story, is based on true events in a small mining town with a segregated population on America's border frontier when children orphaned by the typhoid epidemic that swept through New York were sent west. It shows that what's happening today has roots running through the country's history, and as children at the U.S. border are apprehended today, Prevost's story reveals an unnerving echo in the past.

About the Author: Guy Prevost is a film and TV writer living in Los Angeles. He has worked as a development executive in the film industry, a college teacher, a fiction writer, and a flâneur. His short stories have appeared in SQ Mag as a prizewinner, the Non-Binary Review, the North Atlantic Review, and the Down & Out in Time & Space volume of the London Reader. His film writing credits include produced episodes of the TV dramas Walker, Texas Ranger, Dead Man's Gun, and the SyFy Channel hit Dinoshark. He has just finished co-writing Taxi Moto, a feature drama set in contemporary Port-au-Prince, Haiti that explores many of the same themes highlighted in this issue of the London Reader.

Morenci, Arizona – 1904

By Guy Prevost

MANY IN MORENCI wondered about the lineage of Margarita Chacon. Because of her fair skin, some thought she was *criollo*, of whole cloth Spanish descent, for indeed she lived in the Hispanic section on the far side of the mine and taught their children in a makeshift schoolhouse donated by the church. But others claimed to detect a subtle tint to her complexion—and these things were noticed in the border town—which led to the more obvious conclusion that she was *mestizo*, perhaps the daughter of Sonoran ranchers. Still, Margarita's high cheekbones and slightly hooked nose suggested a French background. One rumour claimed her to be the daughter of an Irish sea captain and a New Orleans madam; another had her living for a time with a Cherokee man in Las Cruces. Perhaps her nine-year-old son Joshue (and not Jose as he was sometimes called), who had soft bronze skin, was the fruit of that relationship. No one dared ask her directly, and she never volunteered any information, only fuelling speculation, especially among the wives of the Anglo managers who lived on the down slope part of the community. They had a lot of time to bother about such matters.

One thing was for sure: Margarita was well respected, even by the Anglo women, some declaring her a saint. In addition to her fluency in English and Spanish and work as a teacher, she and her husband Miguel were raising Joshue in an exemplary way. She kept her humble shanty in impeccable condition and supplemented her income by working two days a week as a maid in the home of Catherine Townsend, the wife of the company doctor.

Catherine did not participate in town gossip and was happy to have Margarita working for her. They enjoyed a cordial but still distant rela-

tionship—that was until the day Margarita gave her some startling news. It was early summer then.

Dressed in her black smock and white apron, Margarita was polishing the silver in the dining room of the Townsend house. The company had built this impressive Victorian just for the young couple as an inducement to Catherine's husband Jonathan to accept the doctor's job in this remote outpost.

Seated nearby, Catherine was addressing blue envelopes with a fine quill pen. She was seven months pregnant, her swollen belly just touching the bottom of the desk. The women could hear the distant clack of the freight cars rattling over the tracks from the copper mine.

"I wanted to ask you," said Catherine, "I'm giving a baby shower in a few weeks, on a Tuesday, and wonder if you could help out?"

"Of course. But I may have to cut back on my hours after that. I have some wonderful news."

Catherine looked up from her writing desk.

"I am going to adopt a child," said Margarita.

"That *is* wonderful. And how did this come about?"

Margarita smiled broadly. Catherine admired her beauty, even envied it, though people, especially Jonathan, had told Catherine that she was growing more beautiful with each day of her pregnancy. The women were both around the same age, nearing thirty.

"It is the grace of God," said Margarita, but without a trace of false piety. "That, and the kindness of the Father Mendin, and the Catholic Diocese in New York City. You know he's our new priest?"

Catherine had only seen the young priest from a distance. She and Jonathan of course attended the Lutheran church. She knew Mendin had arrived only some months ago from France, sent by the church to this foreign mission. Some had said that the poor fellow had expected, was even hoping for, the Wild West he read about in books, and had been somewhat disappointed to find Morenci relatively calm. Billy the Kid had in fact been shot to death only five years earlier one hundred miles away.

Still, the priest had settled into tending his new flock, primarily Mexicans (they were still called that no matter if they were born in Arizona), for they were the Catholics in town. And as for the pistol he had purchased to join the ranks of warrior priests in his imagined west, well it seemed there was little use for that.

"It's all happening because of Father Mendin and the church. Back in New York City... they've had a brutal winter. Many poor children were wandering the streets without homes, abandoned by their parents, or simply left on the church steps. The church has taken them in, but the orphanages are overflowing, and the city is no place for a child anyway."

"That is very sad," said Catherine. "But how does it all work?"

"There are many children in need, and the church has somehow raised money to send some of them away from the coast, and put them in good Catholic homes in the country where there is fresh air and clear skies. Father Mendin told me the Bishop in Tucson had contacted him to see if there was a place for the children here in Morenci. Many of my friends and neighbours are also taking in orphans."

Catherine was astonished and pleased.

"And will you be getting a boy or girl?" she asked.

"I want a girl, and so does Joshue. He wants a sister. He's so excited. Her name is Megan and she is five-years-old. They don't give you much information. But according to Father Mendin, she was left on the doorstep of the Foundling Society with a note from her mother who said she was starving and too poor to feed the child. She hoped God would have mercy and take care of the girl and perhaps someday they would be reunited."

"We are both *expecting* then," said Catherine. "We are like sisters. May I embrace you?" She held out her arms and Margarita came to her.



After work Margarita made the trek up the hill from the Anglo section. She carried a basket of fresh cookies that Catherine had given her. She saw the miners riding the last cars up from the pit, their faces covered in black soot, their boots clad in dirt and mud. They looked tired. She knew the workday had been shortened due to a new law passed in Phoenix, but this “benefit” had backfired as the company responded by reducing the wages and demanding more car loads of ore per hour. The miners had gone on strike several years ago—a terrible period when tensions had run high. The whole thing ended in disaster when a flash flood washed out their encampment by the mine entrance. The strike concluded in favour of the company, so the bad feelings continued.

The miners filed off in two directions as they climbed out of the cars and headed toward their respective neighbourhoods. The Mexican miners went south, to the upslope, while the Anglo miners made their way through the dusty main street to the residential area by the river.

Margarita was glad that Miguel didn’t have to go down in the mine. He worked at the smelter three hundred yards from the pit entrance, and though his wages were less than the Anglo workers who did the same job, they were still higher than those of the men in the pits. Each week Miguel sent back half of his income to his mother and father in Baja California. At least, that’s what he said. Margarita wondered whether there was another woman back there, and a child, but she didn’t bother him about it. He was good to Joshue, worked hard, and was handsome.

Margarita passed the company store and the cantina where some of the miners were already squandering their wages. She enjoyed the guitar music filtering out and wondered if Miguel was inside. But that was all right with her.

She approached the church, which was a very humble affair, a kind of adobe dome with a cross on top. Father Mendin had done his best to improve the look of the interior, overseeing the installation of a window and hiring a woodworker to carve a crucifix that reflected the passion of Christ’s life. On his arrival, he had been shocked by the crudeness of the

church because it was so spartan compared to the majestic cathedrals in his home country.

As was her habit, Margarita crossed herself and walked inside the church. It was empty. The sunlight slanted in through the window that Mendin had cut out of the south wall, spilling a lovely glow on the new crucifix. She was hoping to see the good father, but he was not there. Instead she lit two candles, saying a prayer for her new child and that of Catherine Townsend. She knew the woman had troubles of her own. She had already suffered the loss of two stillborn children.



Margarita left the church and turned south into the Mexican section. The dwellings, like hers, had tin roofs. Some had timber construction and others were crafted from hand-made adobe bricks. A neighbour, Elena Vargas, waved from her backyard as she collected laundry from the clothesline. Chickens squawked nearby, searching for buried seed. Elena was going to adopt a child as well. The excitement of this project was spreading like a prairie brushfire. There would be a whole new generation of children to teach, to raise, and to bring joy to the entire community. Some couples who had no children of their own were especially eager.

Finally Margarita turned down a dead end dirt lane to the little home she occupied with Miguel and Joshue. Miguel had built a porch jutting out from the adobe with a roof overhead so they could enjoy the porch under sun or rain. He'd waterproofed the roof with used clay tiles, a gift from the company manager, who was replacing his old one in the Anglo section.

It was particularly quiet as she approached. Normally Miguel would be home and he and Joshue might be working together out front. She looked in the window and saw Father Mendin playing checkers with her

son. Beside them was Mendin's dog Tiger, who went with him everywhere.

Father Mendin rose as she entered. With a weak chin and thin lips, he was a strange fit for a priest.

"I hope you don't mind."

"Of course not, father, we're honoured to have you here."

He spoke with a French accent. His Spanish was well practised, so he preferred conversing in English. He was dressed in his clerical robe, but a wide-brimmed rancher's hat was on the nearby table.

"I'd like to speak with you in private, if that's alright," said Mendin.

"Joshue, maybe you can go outside and play with Tiger for a while. Would that be okay?"

"Of course," said Father Mendin, as he handed Joshue a ball to attract the dog's attention.

Joshue smiled, grabbed the ball, and ran out the door. Tiger followed.

Medin looked on in admiration.

"Such a handsome boy. And smart too."

"He will be a good brother to the girl."

"Yes, I know. He spoke to me about nothing else while thrashing me at checkers. That's what I'm here to talk with you about."

She offered him something to eat but Mendin declined.

"As you know, our project has faced criticism. It's vital that the parents be good Catholics, abiding in Christ. That is absolutely essential to the Society in New York." The man seemed nervous, and this alarmed Margarita but she struggled to seem unruffled. "And certainly your qualifications in this matter are unquestionable, you know, with everything you do. I only wish that all your neighbours had your faith."

"Yes?" Margarita sat on a wooden bench. "Is there a problem?"

"It's not you, of course, but Miguel. I'd been going through the paperwork, and I never see him in church, and though he declares himself a Catholic, he's never once been a communicant."

"I'll make sure he comes next Sunday and the Sunday after that."

"Well, there's another thing. We need to show proof that you and Miguel, are... well, married in the Catholic church. I didn't see a marriage license in the church records."

Of course Margarita had thought of this. In fact she and Miguel were not husband and wife. They had just told people they were married back in Vera Cruz, before coming to Morenci. She had invented this story three years earlier, hoping no one would recall that she was here six months before Miguel, and in fact had met him here. The Mexicans in the town didn't care much about this kind of thing.

The priest looked at her gravely. Margarita wanted to supply her usual story, but to a priest, she was unable to lie. Instead she was silent.

Mendin rose from the bench and proceeded to the window. A sliver of moon was just rising over the mountain, which had turned dark and foreboding in the afternoon shadow.

"I've been giving the matter a lot of thought. I wouldn't see any problem if you were to be married *twice*, would you? A reconfirming of your vows, perhaps, would you and Miguel be willing?"

And Margarita saw the work of God's grace once again.



That evening over dinner, Catherine shared Margarita's news with her husband Jonathan and a company manager, Waverly, who had been sent out by the mining office in Kansas City.

"She's no relation to Augustin Chacon, I hope," said Waverly as the Townsend's everyday housekeeper served the soup.

"I'm not familiar," said Jonathan.

"Augustin Chacon, a notorious bandit. He marauded around the border for years, killing whites for the fun of it, and robbing them as an

afterthought. The Rangers finally captured him a few years ago and hanged him on the spot.”

“Now I remember. The same Rangers came to Morenci during the strike.”

“I don’t believe in bad blood,” said Catherine, “But I doubt Margarita could be related to such a terrible person. She is the embodiment of kindness. And now she has this wonderful news.”

“I’ve heard of the orphan trains,” said Waverly. “They were originally started by a man named Brace, a Protestant philanthropist back in Chicago. I hear the Catholics were up in arms—because Brace made sure the children went to Protestant homes, while most of these children are Irish or Italian Catholics. So, not to be outdone by the dreaded Protestants, the Catholics started the Foundling organisation for their own. It’s not only ‘good works’; sectarian rivalry is what drives all this.”

“Well, whoever and whatever, this can only be good for the children, no matter their faith,” said Catherine.

“Forgive me. I tend to be sceptical when it comes to religion. I agree. But speaking of children, how far along are you, Catherine?”

“Seven months.”

“And are you hoping for a boy or a girl?”

She clasped her husband’s hand. “We don’t care. Any child would be a blessing.”

Later, while Catherine was overseeing matters in the kitchen, Jonathan and Waverly shared a cigar on the veranda. The light was dying as the sky turned from a blazing orange to the deepest crimson.

“You certainly have amazing sunsets out here,” said Waverly. “But I’m not sure I could take it year round.”

“We’re adapting pretty well. And we are able to go back East once every year.”

“So you have no regrets about accepting this job? A man of your credentials, Harvard medical school... taking a job in the boonies?”

"I think it wears on Catherine. But when the child comes, it will be fine."

"I wish you the best with that." The two men knew what he meant. Catherine had lost two children already.

"The woman, Chacon, we were talking about earlier. Doesn't she live with Miguel Santana, the smelter?"

"Yes, I think so. Why?"

"No reason, really. He was a real firebrand during the strike. He's lucky to still have his job."

"They had some valid grievances if you ask me. I'm the one who treated the victims when the number three shaft collapsed last year. And for the company not to pay for medical care or expenses when they had to take time off..."

"Jonathan, always taking the side of the underdog."

"Well, let's agree to disagree."

"As always, but I have one other concern. This orphan plan, these children, coming out here to live. My guess is that they're all the offspring of Irish and European immigrants. Do you think it's a good idea that they be adopted by... illiterate Mexicans?"

"Well, for one thing, they're not all illiterate. And I'd never given it any thought."

Jonathan shrugged, surprised by Waverly's narrow-mindedness.



On the way back to his cottage that evening Father Mendin congratulated himself on the solution to the problem of Margarita Chacon's marital status. If anyone deserved to adopt a child, it was Margarita, and he was convinced that this little girl, Megan, would only be so lucky to have her as a mother. Though he had come to this part of the world for a taste of the adventure he had read about in the books of Owen Wister and dime

novelists, this scheme for the orphans inspired him and gave purpose to his ministry. He could see that the Mexicans, for some reason that was not entirely clear to him, were under the thumb of the Anglo community and of the company in particular. After all, why would the Mexican worker be paid half that of the Anglo? And the bitterness left by the strike, which had been catastrophic for the miners, had settled into the Mexican neighbourhood like a lingering fog for over three years.

But the prospect of the children arriving had lifted that fog—at least that's the way it felt to Father Mendin. He could recognize a buoyant sense of hope in the eyes of the miners as he went from each little shanty, cabin, or house to another, doing the appropriate investigation and making sure the moral and Catholic credentials of the prospective parents. There were twenty families in all who would be adopting, some who already had children, like Margarita, and others who were childless and for whom this was a special blessing. He visited each place three times for follow up visits and each time he noticed how the family had made little improvements in anticipation of the new arrivals. Ramon Santiago had built a whole new room on the side of his pine cabin where his new daughter would sleep. Mario Santana had completely cleaned up the patch of weeds beside his house and was planting sweet potatoes. Christina Mariega was busy sewing a new Sunday suit of blue cotton after learning the approximate height and weight of the young Irish boy who would be her son. And of course, whenever he arrived, Mendin noticed that the holy water and crucifix were prominently displayed in the prospective homes. Bishop Audin would be glad.

And even at church, Mendin observed a new sense of devotion and spirit. His congregants now sang the hymns, which had been translated into Spanish, with greater volume and enthusiasm. There was a definite twinkle in the eye of Benedetta Morega, who would be receiving twins. And even those who were not going to be new parents seemed to share in the good feeling, bestowing gifts to the prospective families, offering help and support.

Tiger followed behind Mendin, a mongrel mix of god-knows-what that had attached himself to the priest on his arrival. Frankly, and this was a sinful feeling Mendin admitted to himself, he preferred purebred dogs, like the Peisey-Nancroix Retriever he had grown up with. But soon he appreciated the dog's company. Tiger was perpetually skinny, no matter how much she ate, and he wondered if she was part greyhound. He knew they raced that breed in cities like Tucson and Phoenix. Tiger was so thin her ribs protruded through her short white coat, which made it appear that she was starving. Indeed when the dog first scratched on his cabin door and refused to be shooed away in spite of his persistent slamming of the door, Mendin finally took her in and fed her profusely. But even then she never seemed to put on weight. She was white except for a brindle swatch across her eyes and nose, which looked like a domino mask worn at a glamorous masquerade, but there was nothing glamorous about Tiger. She had upright ears that never seemed to point in the same direction. Mendin had grown to love her more than anyone—maybe even God. She slept faithfully by his bed. He sometimes woke in the middle of the night to see one of her ears sticking straight up, twitching mysteriously, as if she were listening to the music of the spheres.

By the time he was back in his cabin, night had fallen. The crickets hummed and chirped outside as Mendin fed Tiger some slops he'd collected from the butcher. He wanted to build a fire because it comforted him, but it was too warm for that. He lit the oil lamps and uncovered the meal that had been left for him by another one of his devoted congregants: tortillas and a chile verde. This was Adriana Vargas. He was filled with a love of his fellow men and women. This was something approaching God's grace, he thought to himself, something he struggled to achieve, feel, or experience, but was never sure, in spite of his herculean efforts at the seminary, if it would ever be granted him.

That notwithstanding, having digested the wonderful meal and walked with Tiger around the church grounds, he returned to the cabin to review the Epistles of Paul. He had made this his project for the sum-

mer. Settling into his rocking chair on the porch, he placed the oil lantern nearby and put on his spectacles. But then he succumbed to another temptation. He rose from the chair, went inside, and from a bookshelf removed *The Adventures of the Colorado Kid* by Edward Ellis.



Two months later Catherine's friend Miranda had asked her to go with her to the station to meet the train. Miranda was taking delivery of an automobile, an anniversary present that her husband, the company manager, had bought for her from the Panhard and Levassor Motor Company in Detroit. It was scheduled to be on the weekly train from St Louis. Miranda knew that Catherine was in a state, having just lost her third child during birth, and that she barely left her house for anything at all. Miranda thought this errand might lighten Catherine's mind, and besides, she wanted to show off the automobile as soon as possible. She thought they might actually drive it back into town if she could learn how to operate it, and her husband Freeland was busy at the mine and couldn't come to the station.

It was a pleasant day for the half-mile walk from the centre of town to the station. White billowy clouds gathered to the south, and that usually meant that, given the circle around the moon the previous evening, these clouds would turn to thunderheads by nightfall, and there would be a drenching summer rain, a welcome event for this dry season.

The women took their umbrellas just in case, and in their flounced skirts and wide brimmed hats, made their way down the gravel road to the station. Catherine was feeling better. She had shut herself in for two weeks and now it was time to recover. The breeze wafting through the canyon felt good on her skin, warmed by the sunlight. She and Jonathan had not decided on how to proceed from here when it came to children. Better to give some time to think things over.

The first thing the women noticed was how relatively deserted the main street was. It seemed people were elsewhere. Well, probably at the station to meet relatives.

As they approached the station, and there was still no train, Catherine saw a crowd had gathered, more than usual for this occasion. And she also saw that the crowd was largely Mexican, and that everyone seemed to be well dressed in their own style of finery. A mariachi band, which normally played at the cantina, was poised on the platform. Catherine saw Father Mendin, in his clerical black, at the head of the procession, trailed by his ubiquitous dog Tiger. A big banner spelling out BIENVENEDOS BAMBINOS was draped from the stationhouse roof.

“What on earth is happening?” said Miranda. “What are *they* up to?”

Catherine found her friend’s tone ugly but said nothing. She was drawing a blank until she spotted Margarita Chacon in the crowd, dressed today in a beautiful white dress and flanked by her son Joshue and husband Miguel. Joshue carried a bouquet of flowers, like a young man waiting for a woman he was courting. Catherine hadn’t seen Margarita since the loss of her son three weeks ago. She had told her not to bother with the housekeeping for a while. And now it came back to her. Margarita was there to meet her new child, her orphan come from New York. Her little girl.

Catherine swallowed with the pain of this realization. A pain, envy, she had rarely experienced with such intensity. Now the joyful faces of these people seemed to mock her. Catherine was blessed in many ways: she was from a fine Baltimore family; she wanted for nothing and had a handsome and loving husband. She had so much more than the mine workers’ families, but also so much less as she knew she would soon discover.

“It’s the orphan train,” she said to Miranda.

“The what?”

“Orphans from back east. The Mexican families are adopting them. Father Mendin put this all together, with the church.”

“Well, that is sweet.” And just then they could see the steam pouring out of the stack of the approaching engine. The crowd stirred and the mariachis began to play.



Miranda barked commands to the workers unloading her automobile from the train car that had arrived minutes before. Catherine loitered nearby, trying to be helpful, and telling Miranda how wonderful the contraption was. She'd never seen anything like it, all metal and silver with pipes and levers and shiny wire wheels. But Miranda's attention was drawn to the scene several cars away, where two nuns and a middle-aged man were shaking hands with Father Mendin as the train steamed and hissed. They talked animatedly and then signalled back to someone aboard, and then the children filed off the train.

The orphans were all dressed in blue uniforms, and the girls had white bonnets. One of the nuns told them to keep in line, and they obeyed as they lined up near the middle-aged man, who wore a long frock coat. He seemed to be in charge. Catherine was struck by the fresh beauty of the kids, some girls trailing ribbons in their locks poking from under their bonnets, red faced boys from age four to seven, shouting and clamouring after their long journey while the other nun told them to be quiet.

“My God, they're beautiful,” said Miranda who was suddenly behind her. “These are the Catholic orphans you told me about?”

Catherine nodded.

“I had no idea they'd be so... white. They could be *our* children! And they're going to be adopted by... this rabble?” She indicated the Mexican contingent.

Catherine was confused. The difference, the contrast, hadn't occurred to her. But now she saw it of course.

“Look at that one,” said Miranda, indicating a particularly innocent-faced girl of about five. “She’s an angel. And they will be her parents? It’s an outrage.”

“Mrs Broxton, I need you to sign!”

The railroad worker held up a clipboard regarding the automobile.

Miranda ignored him.

“We have to do something about this! We have to get back to town and—”

“Mrs Broxton...”

Miranda signed without looking at the document.

“We’ll get the automobile later. Come on, let’s go.” And she started toward town.

Catherine didn’t move. She was still entranced with the vision of the children, the excited look on the faces of the Mexicans, and Margarita Chacon searching the group trying to figure out which one was Megan.

“Catherine, come on, we’ve got to go.”



It started to rain later that evening just as some had predicted. Inside the cabin of Margarita Chacon, her new daughter, Megan O’Connor slept soundly in a newly constructed bed, exhausted by her long journey. Margarita had put the flowers Joshue had given his sister in a vase by the bed. Joshue himself sat nearby, staring with wonder at this amazing creature. Her buttery hair swept across the pillow. The light from the crackling fire bathed her in a warm glow. Miguel and Margarita sat by the dining table, letting Joshue have this time with his new relation.

The girl had been confused at first, but then intrigued. The troop of children had walked together to the church where Father Mendin made the final turnovers. Joshue stepped forward first from the new family and handed Megan the flowers. Many neighbours and well-wishers stood in

the front doorways or porches and watched her walk by with Margarita and her family, smiling and showing their delight. “Bienvenida!” some shouted. She liked the flowers Joshue had given her. She reached out and touched his dark skin that made his brilliant blue eyes even brighter.

Presently the girl’s eyes flickered open. She seemed disoriented, wondering, and then saw the flowers and Joshue.

“Hello, Jose,” she said.

“Joshue, not Jose,” he corrected. “Like Joshua.”

“Joshue” she struggled, but said it right. “And the walls came tumbling down!” She giggled.

“Are you hungry?”

The girl nodded. She had been so tired that she drifted off to sleep the moment they entered the cabin. Margarita already had a plate of warm stew ready and invited the girl over to the table. She rubbed her eyes, sat down, and smelled the stew. She seemed resistant at first and then took a taste and began to gobble up the rest.

Margarita again thanked God, fully believing in his grace. The sight of the child eating heartily filled her with satisfaction. Even the hard rain pelting the shutters, the chill of the outside, didn’t bother her. The blackness of the desert sometimes haunted her at night.

But now there was a sudden flare in the blackness. Outside the window, it seemed like firelight, a torch, first one then many parading toward the end of the lane. She heard men shouting, but could barely make out their distorted figures, like ghosts, through the slats in the shutters. She exchanged a worried glance with Miguel, who got up to take a closer look.

Miguel saw thirty men, armed, carrying torches, rifles, and clubs, and led by the company security officer, Fenwick. He knew Fenwick from the strike, and there was no love between them. Miguel turned back to Margarita and Joshue and made a gesture for them not to do anything. He opened the front door and stepped outside.

"Hand over the child," said Fenwick. "All the children must be returned. You're breaking the law. The others have surrendered their children peaceably, and I'm hoping you'll do the same."

"What law?"

"Do you think the town citizenry are going to stand by while a bunch of Mexican border rats steal these children? Mendin was out of line. This is the great state of Arizona, and we have our laws. He's being held at the hotel by the sheriff."

Miguel stared hard at the cold eyes of Fenwick. He saw among the posse some of the Anglo men he worked with as well as the managers of the west mine. He knew what this was about, and he knew there was no use in trying to resist. It would only end in disaster for his family, and probably for the child.

"One minute," he said and went back inside.

Like a wolf above her cub, Margarita stood over the girl. Joshue understood what was transpiring.

"We've got to give her back," said Miguel.

"No, this was sanctioned by the church. We did everything they asked. And look at this girl. Look what a treasure she is."

"They have armed men. The other children have already been turned over. They will go back to New York."

"That's not where they're going," shouted Margarita, thinking of Catherine. "This is the work of the Anglo women. And they've put the screws on their men. No *cojones*. They will take the children. They will adopt them for themselves."

"Even so, what can we do?"

"Time!" shouted Fenwick from outside.

"I know these men. They will hurt us anyway they can. They are thirty, we are two. They remember the strike, and so do I."

Miguel walked to the bed and gathered the girl's belongings. She had a small green sack with a crucifix, an extra pair of shoes, and a felt bear.

Miguel put the items in the sack, and then brought over the girl's coat and bonnet.

The girl looked up from her stew and seemed to immediately know what this meant. She was used to being obedient for the nuns. She took one last taste of the stew and then got up.

"No!" Margarita howled, clutching the child to her side. "She is ours now."

But she knew it was hopeless. Miguel gently prised her fingers away from the girl and helped her with the coat. Margarita fled to the other room and wept.

Moments later Joshue stared out the rain dropped window into the swirling firelight of the torches. He saw his would-have-been sister led away holding the hand of a strange man, carrying a torch. She had taken one of the flowers, which she still clutched in her other hand, and she turned back, waving at Joshue. He waved back as she disappeared into the darkness. He would remember this for the rest of his life.



At eight the next evening, Father Mendin looked out from the second floor of the Morenci Hotel to the vigilantes gathering in the street below. In the same room, the two nuns, and Swain, the representative of the Foundling Society in the frock coat, waited with the eight children who had not been immediately and summarily adopted by the wives of Anglo managers and workers. This had happened just as Margarita had predicted.

Emboldened by the company support of Fenwick, and the rising tide of their hatred, the crowd of men had a heated pot of tar and a bag of plucked feathers at the ready.

"Give us that black Roman son of a bitch."

"Slaver!"

“Child stealer.”

“Surrender the rest of the children.”

Mendin found it hard to believe he was the target of these insults. He thought of the revolver back in his cabin and would have retrieved it, given the chance. But he could see that was impossible. And how could this go so wrong? And how could God let it be so?

Now it was a matter of the remaining children. The nuns insisted they were the wards of the church, by the law of New York State, and that the Arizonans were no better than kidnappers. They would take them back to New York and sue for their companions later. The company representative, now holding forth to the nuns, said they were in Arizona territory now, under the law of Arizona, and that he and his men had every right to seize the children to prevent them from being given to Mexicans, non-US citizens, he said, who lived in appalling poverty and filth.

Mendin protested, “I checked every home and while they are not rich, these people are not poor.”

“What do you know? You’re not even American!”

There was a knock on the door, and the Sheriff entered carrying a rifle.

“I don’t like what’s happening out there. A territorial judge will arrive tomorrow to decide the matter, but I can’t guarantee your safety,” he said looking at Mendin. “I only have two deputies.”

Mendin again looked outside. He saw three men pick up something and dip it in the tar, then roll it around in a pile of pigeon feathers. It was Tiger. The dog had fled down the stairs in the chaos. The poor animal limped away, whimpering, barely able to see through her new coat of feathers. The crowd jeered. Mendin feared she would be trampled to death, even if she survived the tarring.

The men laughed, looking up at the hotel.

“Your dog first, you papist, but we have something more fun for you!” shouted another man as he threw a rope over the high branch of a nearby oak tree. The noose swung back and forth like a pendulum.

Mendin saw Tiger vanish into the crowd. He bolted for the door.

“I would not try that,” said the Sheriff, nodding to his deputy.

“No!” cried Mendin.

“I can’t let you go. It’s for your own good.” Mendin struggled but the deputy flung him to the floor. The hotel doors shook with the beating fists of the vigilantes as they called for Mendin’s life.



The next morning the Sheriff insisted on escorting Mendin and Swain out of town. It was the only way they would be safe, and it was part of a compromise with the company that they would never return. Mendin refused to leave without his dog but finally he was persuaded. Back in Phoenix the Archbishop suggested another parish, perhaps more peaceful, in San Francisco. But Mendin had lost his faith, and no longer believed in the grace of God.

Margarita stayed in the town and treated the newly adopted children of the Anglo parents like her own. Miguel grew tired of the job and even of Margarita. He went back south to his mother—or was it another woman? Margarita was never sure. But men could come and go. Joshue would be different. He would carry the torch for what was right. Margarita drew comfort from this belief. She encouraged him to study hard so he could become a lawyer. Perhaps he would fight in the courts against the same kind of intolerance and bigotry that had broken her heart. Perhaps in time, things could be better. She had to have hope.

The Foundling Society eventually brought suit in the courts of Arizona demanding the return of the children stolen from them by the Anglo citizens of Morenci. The judges ruled that the citizens were right in seizing and keeping the children to protect them from the influence of the Mexican immigrants.