

Beans and Bombs

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**George Watt Contest 2019
Pre-Collegiate Category**

*Dedicated to those who lost their lives in the Spanish Civil War and the families they
left behind*

37 Days

“I hate beans,” cried Inez.

“Hush, hija,” Mamá soothed.

“Don’t hate beans, Inez. ‘Cause beans certainly don’t hate you,” laughed Miguel, the clown of the family and second son.

Inez chucked some discarded beans at Miguel and stuck out her pretty, pink tongue at him.

“You guys need to keep working,” cried Martín, the oldest.

I laughed silently at them all and continued working.

Beans had always been important in our familia, along with tomatoes and peppers or whatever the crop of the season was. Our lives depended on our produce, which we sold at markets. However, our produce didn't just generate an income, but also memories. Some of my earliest memories included picking tomatoes with my brothers which led to an infamous food fight or weeding with Papá and listening to him humming or stringing onions with Mamá while she narrated what Spain was like when she was a child.

“Why do you hate beans?” Asked Papá, always the one willing to explain.

“They’re hard to pick, and they’re squishy and icky if they’ve gone bad,” Inez paused for a moment thinking then made a disgusted face, “And sometimes, little black bugs will crawl out of them onto your hands.”

“Yes, but the beans give your nourishment, they give our familia money” Papá tried to appease Inez, “We owe a lot to beans.”

Unlike my little sister, I had never been disgusted by beans. They were cute with all the little beans kept cozy in a pod. They were like their own little familia, safe and sound and secure. I smiled as I plucked a bean pod into my basket, just like our familia.

31 Days

When my brother turned ten, he was considered a man. It was a strange occurrence. I hadn’t noticed the gradual change in my brother. To me, it felt like Martín changed from boy to man overnight.

However, that wasn’t the case. If I had paid attention to the signs, I would have noticed changes—my brother’s voice, his responsibilities, the look in his eyes, the way he stood taller. My brother did not become a man overnight; I just did not notice the changes.

When my brother turned ten, he was allowed to go with Papá on Lunes. Lunes is a día sagrado in our familia. It is market day, where all our hard work finally pays off. Every Lunes, Papá and my older brothers go to market. Every Lunes, I go to school. But now I am ten and everything will change.

“Papá, can I go to the market with you?”

“I don’t think so, hija.”

“Why not? Yo tengo diez años.”

“Yes, but times are different.”

“How?”

He simply smiled. There were some things words could not express.

“Help me with the beans, hija.”

24 Days

“Papá,” I cried running to the garden.

As an astute parent, he instantly noticed the *trail of tears* streaming down my face. “What is it, hija?”

“At, at school—“ I bubbled incomprehensibly.

He held my face to his chest and his steady heartbeat calmed as his stroking hand soothed. After a moment or two, the tears came less violently.

“At school, a kid was making fun of me and our familia.”

“Oh, darling. That’s nothing to get upset at. Kids tease.”

“No, Raul was talking about how our familia and all farmers are wrong and how this man, Fraco-”

“Franco.”

“Yes, Franco wants to put us all in our places and if he has to kill us, so be it.”

Papá sighed, a deep, troubling sigh.

“Raul’s familia and ours simply have different opinions on the way our country is to be run.”

“But what about this Franco? Is he going to kill you?”

Papá smiled sadly, “No, hija. Franco is more of a symbol than a person. He is a radical man with crazy ideas and only has power, because people have begun to follow him. However, this will only be for a short while. People will soon wake up and realize their mistake. You have nothing to fear.”

“Okay, Papá,” I said, trusting without reason for concern.

“And as for this Raul fellow.” Papá leaned down and plucked a weed from the garden. “Some people are like weeds. They steal your happiness, just as a weed steals nutrients. You must throw weeds out of your garden, just as you must throw bad people out of your life.”

21 Days

I watched Papá curiously as he bent down spraying some kind of liquid on the pepper plants. It came in a funny brightly colored bottle. *Are they selling water like that now*, I wondered.

“What is that, Papá?” I asked.

He smiled. “This is called pesticide”

I made a face, “It sounds icky.”

He laughed. “For bugs, I suppose. That is its purpose, to kill bugs.”

I glanced at the bottle with newfound appreciation. Inez was not the only one who hated the little black bugs that feasted on the beans. “Spray the beans.”

“Not today.”

“Why not?”

“Because I want to test it, see if it actually works. That is why I am trying it on the peppers, our less valuable crop, first. If it works on them, then I will use it on the beans.”

15 Days

One of my daily chores was to help in the garden. Somedays I picked beans, somedays I weeded. Today, was one of the days I weeded.

Weeding was not usually a difficult task, as we typically plucked the weeds, as soon as they breached the surface. Today, however, there was one particular weed, which had gone unnoticed for far too long and grown rapidly in size and strength.

I tried with all my might to pull the vile menace from the ground, but it was not *enough*.

I landed on my *butt*,
with scrapes along my hands.

Not easily deterred, I tried again with the same *luck*.

Finally, after several times of the same outcome, tears of frustration began to accumulate in my *eyes*.

That’s the way it is *sometimes*.

6 Days

Life is so strange and unpredictable at times. I had asked Papá to go to the market a month ago and received a negative answer. Since then, I had tried multiple times to produce an affirmative. I tried pleading, bribery, any masterful technique I had acquired throughout the years. With a stern “no” each time, I had given up hope.

It was an ordinary day. I was breaking beans with Mamá and Inez, when she suddenly broke the silence with, “Next Lunes, you shall go with Papá and your hermanos to the market.”

Surprise sparked within me, but I kept my mouth clamped shut, fearful any exclamation would wake me from my dream.

“Can I go?” Asked Inez.

“No.”

She pleaded and pouted for some time, use to getting her way, but Mamá was resolute. For the first time, I had something Inez was envious of, when for years I had been the envious

one. Inez broke from tradition with hazel eyes in the midst of cocoa brown and a name that began with “I” in the midst of children with “M’s.”

4 Days

At school, I built a small birdhouse out of twigs and glue and popsicle sticks. I was very pleased with my work and showed it to all when I brought it home. I gleefully hung it from a tree outside.

Dark clouds rumbled in the distance and I scampered inside, happy birds could take refuge in my birdhouse during the storm. Rain violently plattered against my house and I was suddenly fearful of how my sticks and glue would brave the storm.

I waited impatiently by the door, shifting uneasily from foot to foot, waiting for the rain to stop, waiting to see if my creation survived.

My heart raced, my hands sweated. Finally, after an eternity, the rain stopped, and I dashed outside, carelessly splashing in puddles.

To my immense relief, the birdhouse had weathered the storm. I gleefully returned to the house, had dinner with my familia, and went to bed happy and contented.

3 Days

I awoke early the next morning, happy and well-rested. Mamá was in the process of cooking breakfast, so I decided to go exploring outside, before school and chores took possession of my day.

Outside, the earth was saturated. The shower before dinner was only the first wave. Soon after I had gone to bed, another stormcloud assaulted our home.

At that point, I was unconcerned by the weather. Water was good for the crops and though too much was bad, that was rarely a problem. Skipping around, wood caught my eye.

On the ground, lay some soggy popsicle sticks. Broken.

1 Day

Only one day till I was to attend the market with Papá. I had been in a flutter all day. I was sent to bed early that night, so as to wake early in the morning. I drifted asleep to child-like dreams and hope and wonder, but I was soon disturbed from slumber.

Urgent whispers in the night stirred me from sleep.

“Let us leave and go to France,” whispered Mamá.

“Not yet,” whispered Papá.

“Let us collect some money from the market before we go,” he reasoned. “It is Maria’s first time and she is excited. Besides, we do not know when we shall find work again in France. People always have a prejudice against foreigners.”

“Yes, that’s true and sensible, but the government has warned us not to go to the market. It is to be closed tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow is Lunes. The market shall not be closed. Let me take Martín and Miguel for one last time and Maria for the first time. Let me bring home some money to provide for mi familia. Please. Do not deny me this wish.”

Moments passed and then, “Very well. Let it be the last market for us all and then let us begone to France.”

12 Hours

The day had finally arrived. Lunes, market day. My first market. I was bouncing in my seat, as Papá pulled our old pickup truck onto the dirt road leading to town. We had around a two hour drive. In the back, we had boxes upon boxes of beans and a few boxes of onions.

The sun had not yet kissed the sky good morning and the dark soon eased my eagerness into sleep. *Go to sleep*, it whispered. *The day is not yet dawned and when it does, it will be one to remember. Sleep.*

When I opened my eyes again, the sun, just beginning to rise, greeted me. The clouds surrounding it were tinted lovely shades of pink and bright, bloody red. I pointed it out to my brother Miguel, who sat in the backseat with me.

He smiled at me. “You’ll see plenty of sunrises if you’re to be a regular with us now. Plenty of market days.”

The statement reminded me of Papá’s and Mamá’s conversation from last night. I sought Papá’s eyes in the rearview mirror and for the first time I noticed the bags and the crinkles and the graying hairs. He made no sign of Miguel’s statement being false or incorrect, so I kept my mouth shut, but let my mind wander.

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We eventually made it to Guernica, where the market was to be held. I remember being awed by the new sights, sounds, and smells. I remember feeling ecstatic and like I was in a dream. I remember eating tortillas with my brothers. I remember packing up the truck and getting ready to leave. I remember begging Papá for just a little while longer. I remember a siren going off. I remember Papá dragging me to a cellar.

I remember being more scared that I had ever felt in my life. I remember the pounding noise that consumed everything. I remember the burning smell that stung my nose. I remember the noise subsiding and the silence. I remember Papá leaving me and my brothers in that cellar. He did not return.

I don’t remember much else. I never saw Papá’s body, which I am grateful for. When I emerged from that cellar, however, I was greeted with many other bodies. I was also greeted with beans violently spilled from their body, just like our familia.

At the time, I didn’t know that the Spain I knew was gone.

I didn't know that Papá was dead.

I certainly didn't know that the Spanish Civil War would in later generations be written off and forgotten by the world. The war of the century —World War II— followed so closely afterwards. World War II had so many things the Spanish Civil War did not have —the major nations of the world; the most extreme and systematic genocide in human history, the Holocaust; and deadly scientific advancements, atomic bombs.

The Spanish Civil War may have been forgotten by the world at large, but not by me. Furthermore, the Spanish Civil War and World War II did have something in common — the Germans' terror bombing, strategic bombing on civilians.

At the time, I didn't know this, but I know now, and I have put my pen to paper. I let my voice fill these pages to tell my story, to promote change. I hope and pray that people read this, especially the younger generations who are not taught this in school, and they learn from the past to create a better future.

-Maria Santiago, bombing of Guernica Survivor