



La Zacatecana

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1/14/2019

Prologue

Woman of Spain you came to native shores
creating a life with our Conquistador.
In you there's purity we say amen.
Wanted for the beauty in thine own face,
you were the property of the world of men,
to procreate and to assure a name.
But woe to you if blemishes were seen,
Forever you would be then to him unclean.

Our Story

In the colonial years of Nueva España, long ago in the city of Santiago de Queretaro, during the reign of the Viceroy Felix Maria Calleja a newly married couple came to live in a stately home in one of the most elegant areas of the city. Later this home came to be known as the house of La Zacatecana after the mistress who took ownership. In the years to come this home would be

the scene of some of the most notable and sinister deeds in the history of this beautiful city. Even today it continues to fascinate and perplex the many visitors who are drawn to its doors.

The newlywed couple who took ownership of this home arrived from Zacatecas where they both originated. The husband, older by at least twenty-three years, was a rough man of business; dealing in the mining trade, a common occupation throughout most of the state of Queretaro. She was a beautiful young girl, barely seventeen years old, with exotic long black hair, dark eyes and the complexion of Venus. Her name was Aurelia Sanchez de Rodriguez and he was known as Don Vitupero Rodriguez Velazquez. They came to live in Queretaro with no children, nor family to fill their spacious home, a rarity in that era of Nueva España. He had left Zacatecas years earlier and had developed his business interest in Queretaro but never spoke of his family. The stories told of this union, by the gossiping comadres in the community, was that she had been an orphan and Don Vitupero had found it in his heart to rescue her from the convent before her beauty had gone to waste, a truly Christian gesture on his part.

As a very young girl Aurelia became part of the convent of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, a Franciscan complex in Zacatecas, never having known her parents. Aurelia's life in the convent lasted almost fourteen years and it was the only life she had ever known. She knew little of her family thanks to the efforts of her Madre Superiora or Mother Superior. She learned only that she was of pure Spanish blood, a much-desired attribute among society in that time of the viceroyalty. The elderly nuns with hesitation had explained how she and her mother had arrived at the convent upon the death of her father. He had been a young miner who had tried

to establish new mines in the violent regions of Zacatecas. He made plans to extract the silver out of the mountains not far from the capital city of Zacatecas, but he was ill prepared for the many bandits that continued to ravage the countryside. He was one of the unlucky adventurers who was caught in a hail of bullets, in a clash with bandits as he defended himself in the narrow passes north of the city. His lifeless body was found by friends of the family and brought back to his wife for burial. Aurelia's mother was now alone, with no family or male support and following many failed attempts to reach her family in Valencia Spain, she and her infant daughter made their way into the capital of Zacatecas to seek refuge with the sisters of the Convento de Maria de Guadalupe. In earlier days when their fortune was on the rise, she had made friends with the sisters at a time when her husband had been kind to the order and helped them with generous donations. She was accepted by the nuns as a *recogida* (a sheltered person) with the hope she would eventually find her family and leave with her infant daughter to join them. She settled peacefully in one of the larger rooms with her young child. Life in many convents could be very comfortable, where even nuns lived with an abundance of servants and slaves to assist in the management of daily living.

To understand the world of Aurelia and her mother, we must consider Iberian society as it existed in Nueva España. It was a challenging time for women of the elite for their position in society was greatly limited by Spanish social conventions, yet in some ways they were given rights more generous than in other European countries. Spain and subsequently Latin America were greatly influenced by Isabel I who occupied the throne at the time of the discovery of the

new world. She was a fanatic devotee of the Roman Catholic Faith and imposed a religious unity throughout her kingdom. Women in Spanish society were affected by a combination of this Roman Catholicism but also by the influence of Islam, which had ruled Spain for 700 yrs. Islam's ideal of the cloistered, sheltered woman continued to be a model for the Spanish elite regardless of where they lived. There existed a strong link between female virginity and honor which the Roman Catholic church supported.

In that time, influential Spanish writers such as Fray Martin de Cordoba, Juan Luis Vives and Juan de la Cerda all gave strong opinions in their writings on the nature of women. They agreed women were less intelligent, rational, and wise than men, as their nature was governed by the flesh rather than the spirit. Because of their intellectual inferiority and limited understanding of serious matters, they were incapable of treating matters of substance. As a result of this, women were admonished to keep silent on all matters of importance. Due to this understanding of women, society deemed it unnecessary to teach them to write, though reading instructions were allowed so that they might manage devotional literature.

Women were also believed to be morally fragile and prone to error; they were influenced by their fleshy nature, untethered by their carnal appetites and were unlikely to resist temptation and the influence of the devil. Women could be dangerous to themselves, their families and society at large if they could not be controlled or cloistered. The Counter Reformation determined the ideal situation for women was to keep them under control through enclosure; they must remain in their homes, convents, orphanages, recogimientos, prisons, or other institutions where they could be protected from their weaknesses.

The role of a man was to guide and control, a woman's role was to obey, whether through kinship, marriage, or by means of the church. A woman was defined by the relationship she had to a man or a religious institution. To be meaningful in society she was the daughter of a certain man, she became the wife of another man, or became a nun. For these reasons Aurelia's mother having no male relatives or family for support was forced to seek refuge in the convent. Even though she owned a home and had a substantial amount of money, living by herself as a respectable elite Spanish lady was not an option.

Those days of respite unfortunately did not last, illness ran rampant in the hot climate and epidemics decimated the local population. It was during a virulent episode that Aurelia's mother sickened quickly and within one week she was buried in the small cemetery of the convent. At the age of four years, Aurelia found herself alone and solely dependent on the goodwill of Madre Superiora and the other nuns of the convent. Aurelia would always remember the face of her mother from those days as her only connection to her family. Her mother's smile and beautiful warm blue eyes that greeted her with a tender love would endure in her memory forever.

After the death of her mother as the convent truly became her home, Aurelia participated faithfully in all the activities of a young novice, but she never felt the calling to dedicate herself fully to a life of prayer, meditation and worship. In moments of quiet solitude, as she lay in her nun's cell at night, her mind wandered into a dream world where she hoped to find a special someone to whom she could give herself freely and completely. In her dreams she envisioned

her departure from this place of prayer and endless devotion, to find a home and create a family with a man she loved. This was only a dream, for she knew in reality this would never happen on account of her unfortunate circumstances. She had been left alone without friends and family and to her knowledge had no dowry. She had no male support in the form of a father or brother to guide her and could see no way out of her predicament. She felt the convent closing in over her like a grave with its endless devotions and prayers. She resigned herself to this fate and knew the time would soon come when she would be asked to commit her life in perpetuity to Christ as his bride.

The convents in Nueva España filled multiple roles for society and in many cases, they became the surrogate family and facilitated alternative lifestyles for women. They also helped relieve society of the burden of sustaining a surplus of women from the Spanish elite. Not all girls of high society were able to marry, due to a variety of reasons, such as lack of finances in the family, lack of dowries, and even a lack of eligible bachelors of the right social background. By placing a young daughter in a convent, it additionally allowed an elite family to demonstrate their deeply religious nature and commitment to other members of their community.

To enter a convent as a novice, a girl was questioned about her religious vocation and also to ensure that free will guided her to that decision. A novice had to offer proof of purity of blood, age, and baptism; these girls were required to be white, devout, properly brought up, legitimate, racially pure and usually a virgin. However, not all of these were absolute, legitimacy could be overlooked and often was a means of sheltering a highborn illegitimate

young woman. Racial purity was an essential attribute. Rebellions had occurred in convents when women of mulato or mestizo background were proposed for membership. A family also had to provide the financial resources to support her in the convent. Fortunately, Aurelia's family had generously donated large sums of money to the convent and unbeknownst to her had even left money for a dowry.

One day, unexpectedly La Madre Superiora called Aurelia into her office. It was a rare occurrence for her to ask any of the novitiates into her sanctuary unless a decision was expected to be made about her vows; but she knew it was not yet time. As she entered the cavernous space, she immediately sensed the presence of an older man. He was at least 40 years of age or older, with a beard and elegantly trimmed mustache. He moved slowly about the room, with a limp using a cane and hesitatingly set his gaze on her. He seemed intent on absorbing every aspect of her closely from head to toe. He was dressed in a fine embroidered coat with silver buttons, which appeared modestly elegant, the kind worn by elite men of means. The colors were dark and typical of the Spanish style, indicating his continued modesty and reverence before God. On his head rested a beautiful cockade hat, and on his feet dark finely polished boots with silver buckles. He carried a black ebony cane with a large silver ball serving as a handle or even a weapon, considering its size. It was the largest piece of solid silver she had ever seen in her life. She later was to learn how silver had helped him create his living and fortune. She was puzzled to be in his presence, for novitiates were not introduced to unrelated men without the presence of family, as these were the rules of her order and the expected norms of Spanish colonial society. In Spanish society a woman's honor was tied to

private chastity and public conduct; a woman must always dress modestly, seek semi-seclusion or be seen in the company of female family of high repute. To be exposed to men outside of the family was a risk to the honor of the woman and her family.

She felt uncomfortable in this most unusual setting. Aurelia was befuddled and her mind went blank drifting to thoughts of forgotten infractions caused by her careless ways. Had she not more than once or twice been reprimanded for resting her gaze much too long on the gardener's young son? For this indiscretion she had suffered at the hand of Sister Carmelita, her supervisor. She did not strike her but assigned the most difficult and menial tasks normally given to servants or slaves to Aurelia for months. She became intimately connected with the bedside chamber pots used by the nuns to relieve themselves at night, and she spent hours collecting the trash from the kitchens every day. She accepted this patiently, but with only one regret; she did not have opportunity to exchange more than a shy greeting with Victor, the object of her misplaced gaze. With time she learned to accept her punishment, but most importantly she learned to be discreet. She would not suffer again for such a careless mistake. She would learn to be careful. Now alone with Mother Superior and this strange man she made a great effort and concentrated, keeping her gaze down and only cautiously looked at the man who would change her life.

At that moment Aurelia stood before Mother Superior, confused as to the reason for this meeting. As her face reddened with embarrassment, she looked meekly for any hint of what her fate would be. For a long, seemingly endless five minutes Mother Superior looked back and

forth at her and a ream of papers on her desk, saying nothing. The gentleman sat silently in the presence of Mother Superior demonstrating a reverential respect. This space of time seemed an eternity as her pulse raced awaiting the moment of revelation. The anxiety in her began to rise and she felt faint. At that last moment she was brought to reality by the stern voice of Mother Superior. "Querida Aurelia," she said with a stiffness in her voice. "Do you know this man?" "Do you know why you are here?" Her mind convulsed in a stream of thoughts crashing about her. She took a deep breath and blurted incoherently. "No Mother Superior, I do not." Mother Superior stared at her with coal dark eyes. "Aurelia, the will of God has ordained you to be chosen for a special purpose in life. We have long thought of your vocation, praying to God for an answer to your calling and this has been given to us today. Graciously your hand has been requested in marriage by Don Vitupero and we have accepted. He is of an illustrious family from Zacatecas, but now lives in the city of Santiago de Queretaro. We have discussed the marriage contract with him, and he is willing to accept the money left over from your family as dowry for your marriage. He is of Spanish blood and would be an ideal father of your children. We trust you will accept this proposal and do your duty as a good daughter. I need not remind you we are now acting as your guardians in the place of your father who is no longer with us and have only your goodwill in our heart." In those moments Aurelia understood something new about Mother Superior that had never occurred to her before. Over the years she had kept vital information from her about her family and especially the existence of a dowry. She wondered, if there had been no bridegroom, did they intend to keep this money? This was not unheard of as many convents were well run financial ventures and all efforts were made to safeguard finances. Money of that nature, once given was seldom

returned. Aurelia could only stand and stare at Mother Superior as she finished her proclamation. Her mind went blank and her body shook as the information overwhelmed her, leaving her senseless. She was left unprepared to give a response to such a life changing proposition and the words did not come easily. She could only shake her head slowly up and down assenting without really understanding what was proposed. Marriage was a topic that had never been discussed with her, she had no knowledge of what was required.

Marriage in the Iberian Peninsula and Nueva España was a legal, ritual, liturgical and sacramental matter governed by the rules of canon and civil law. It joined a man and a woman for the purposes of sexual intercourse, procreation and general cooperation. Marriage was used among the Spanish elite to create social, political and economic ties with special individuals and groups to ensure a family's survival. The important choice of a marriage partner could not be left to the whims of young girls. Marriage that was based on love had no place in Spanish society as it could result in undesirable unions between people of different races, social backgrounds, morality and economic positions. A family's strategy in marriage was to preserve its wealth and power. There were times, when to control the wealth, a family even chose to marry daughters to their own relatives. Church laws established specific rules for marriage. A man or woman could have only one spouse at a time and there were defined marriage partners. One could not marry one's father, godfather, or brother; first cousins were allowed to wed only with special dispensation, which happened often. Women had to be greater than twelve years of age and men greater than fourteen. Both had to freely choose the sacrament; this stipulation helped prevent women from being forced into marriages they opposed.

Women ideally were virgins and were referred to as doncellas or niñas indicating they were still pure virgin girls.

Marriage was a two-step process. The first step was the engagement which was a legally binding agreement through which a couple gave its “Word of marriage in the future.” A man who backed out of the engagement could be sued in court. It may be months or sometimes years before the actual marriage ceremony took place. The marriage had to be consummated to be valid and marriages could be annulled if this step was not taken. Sexual relations between a husband and a wife were vital for procreation. Both partners were expected to perform their debito matrimonial (conjugal duty) not necessarily for pleasure but to satisfy the biblical text “be fruitful and multiply.” Church authorities actually frowned on any pleasure during sex and cautioned against it.

A marriage was a reciprocal yet unequal relationship between a man and a woman. The man was expected to honor, protect, love, and provide for the wife while a woman’s obligation was to obey her husband. Marriage was also a partnership of conjugal economics. Assets were brought into a marriage consisting of three parts. The dowry was brought into the marriage by the wife, this property remained hers whether the marriage lasted or not. The dowry was a means by which a family could pass on their inheritance to their children and thus was an important part of Spanish family economics. Women who died childless had their dowries returned to the family. The second part was the property brought into the marriage by the husband. Most husbands were older and had an established business or position. The third

and final part was the property the couple earned during marriage. This asset was called the *financiales* and was owned by both equally.

Once women married, they essentially were transformed into legal wards of their husbands and required permission to manage any of their property. Married women were given significant rights over their property not commonly seen in other European countries. Both males and females could be legal heirs; the ability to inherit was dependent on legitimacy and the degree of relationship to the deceased, not the gender. If a woman was a closer relative she would be preferred over a man. All women regardless of their marital status, could inherit and own property. When a woman became a widow, she was entitled to half of the property belonging to the couple and the legal control over the lives and property of minor children.

Some wealthy families occasionally created entails, known as *mayorazgos*, reserving the whole estate for the eldest males similar to the laws of primogeniture in England. This allowed the wealth to stay intact but could affect the elite women in the family. The concept of a separate maternal and paternal lineage meant that the children took the last names of both their father and mother. And so, this explains why my full name is Alfonso Jose Lopez Perez, Lopez being the last name of my father and Perez being the last name of my mother.

It was not long before the couple were married and had moved to Queretaro leaving Zacatecas behind. Their journey took them south past Guanajuato, a beautiful colonial city and eventually into the region of Queretaro. Their house was not lavish like that of the *Marqués*, but it was stately and almost overwhelming for a couple with no children. There was room for a future

family if it was to come. It was typical of the casonas built by the wealthy in this prosperous colonial city in the heart of the Bajío of Mexico. The house was two stories tall and lay along one of the quiet streets of the city. It was located on the corner of the Plaza de Armas which was lined with trees and surrounded by beautiful buildings with gracious porticos. The fountain in the Plaza, dedicated by the Marques, erupted with cool clean water carried by the Spanish aqueduct originating from natural springs four miles away in the mountains nearby. This was a most desirable location in the best part of the city. The house typical of the time had a simple façade facing the street that featured windows lined with iron railings for security. There were fine sculptured finishes above all the windows, doors and the corners of the house. The main entrance was by two large doors which when open could allow horses and a carriage to pull directly into the central patio. The interior of the house was spacious with fountains along the outer walls of the patio. There were rooms on two levels all of which opened out to the central courtyard but were covered by either the walkway from the second floor or by generous overhangs that protected the inhabitants from the rain or the mid-day sun. The lower level of the house bustled with activity from the servants who worked diligently in the kitchen or with the never-ending house work. The upper floor was the living quarter that was comprised of bedrooms, sitting room and dining room. The master and mistress of the house each had their own bedroom joined by a sitting room. These rooms were beautifully decorated in the European style of the day with a free hand that never lacked for money. The bedrooms faced the street below and each had a small balcony with a finely detailed metal railing. There were balconies facing the south through which a rich warm sun helped enlighten the usually dark

rooms. There were no chairs on these as it was not considered proper for a woman to be seen in public even from this height.

After arrival to Queretaro, Don Vitupero made the necessary connections to expand his business. Soon there were small dinners held to entertain his new acquaintances. Over the next two years the beauty of his wife became a common topic of gossip among the society of the community, but they also questioned the lack of children. Most women her age, were expected to procreate and quickly have children scampering around the household. Some even suggested the marriage had not been consummated, a reason to question its legitimacy. In that time, it was common for an older man to acquire a young wife. Most women married at a young age, usually around seventeen years of age and husbands sought a wife only after establishing careers. For this reason, most tended to be at least eight years older than their wives. Because most marriages were based on economic reality and less on love, it took couples years to know each other and love if it developed, did so later with experience.

Don Vitupero travelled frequently on business endeavors and stayed away for long periods of time. He would often tell Aurelia how his travels took him into the mountains of the Sierra Gorda looking for new business. He would often be gone for one or two weeks never telling her of his expected whereabouts or expected date of return. Secrecy was very important in the mining trade. She was kept in her home away from all prying eyes as a good Spanish wife of the elite society. Without the benefit of male relatives, typical of that era, she lacked the freedom to leave her home unescorted. One must remember that in this era of polite Spanish

vice regal society, women of means seldom left their homes. It was said by the more conservative writers that a woman of polite society only left her home three times in her life; once for baptism, for her wedding and finally to be buried. In the eyes of society, honor was linked to social standing and virtue. To be honorable women should be discreet, pure, timid in their behavior and sexually beyond reproach. A woman's honor was best protected by her male relatives or the church.

When Don Vitupero was at home the couple would make a point of attending several of the churches in the town and leisurely stroll through the beautiful parks that attracted society on Sundays. The home itself would want for nothing; it had all the amenities one could care to have including a multitude of servants to do the bidding. Society found ways to make life bearable for these wealthy women as the homes became the center of social events hosted by the well to do. This was how the women of elite society were exposed to the events of the community and the outside world. They would have the opportunity to meet their husbands' business partners and friends.

Unfortunately, our young Zacatecana, as she began to be called, did not have those benefits to make her life more bearable. Her husband travelled so much that seldom was there an opportunity for the dinners and festivities that the other women enjoyed. Aurelia had no family at home to brighten her life or to give her support and had no children to keep her occupied. Most women of means had children to nurture often with their own mothers who

lived out their years with the family. This gave them focus in their lives and a “raison d’etre” in their domestic endeavors.

The only friends to help deal with this life of solitude were her servants. Amongst them was a groom, Joselito, who had come from the Sierra Gorda nearby. He lacked an education but was intelligent and willing to learn. In a short time, he caught the attention of his master who gave him more responsibilities and soon he became a groom. Joselito handled his master’s prize horses which he kept prepared for use whenever there was a need. His tasks soon took him inside the house so that eventually he became a great help to the wife especially when the husband was away. His demeanor was pleasant and the smile he always wore on his face endeared him to all in the home. He was taller than most and slender with a physique hardened by years of manual labor. With the trust assigned to him by his master he also acquired the green livery of the house, giving him the air of respectable importance. He was often the resource to be sought when something immediate had to be resolved. Joselito soon had many requests from his mistress which he handled graciously and eagerly. It was not easy to deny requests from such a beautiful woman with the wonderful smile who held the authority of her husband while he was away. It would not be long before a certain trust existed between the two.

Despite her solitary existence, Aurelia did eventually come to know many of her husband’s friends after their occasional visits for dinner and long evenings of business talk over brandy and cigars. Among the many guests there were the occasional young noble Spanish gentlemen who seemed more attentive to Aurelia than her husband felt necessary, but he saw no harm in

such innocent courtesy. He could only see the economic advantage by ingratiating himself to such friends from high society. It made him happy to know his friends complimented his choice of a beautiful engaging young woman as his marital companion.

Over the years, Don Vitupero's hospitality was sought by many men of society. Among these came a young man of means from a wealthy family whose good fortune resulted from the textile business they helped to create using the nearby rivers to power their mills. Don Rodrigo de Amoles was a man in his late twenties whose marital arrangements had come undone despite the efforts of his frustrated father. There had been hushed rumors indicating a romantic mishap while at a course of studies in Mexico City two years earlier. At that time, he had been promised to a young blond beauty of impeccable Spanish pedigree. Her family was of pure Spanish blood from minor nobility originating in the area of Valencia Spain who had come to Nueva España to serve under the Viceroy. Their faithful service resulted in rewards consisting of large tracts of land with the *fueros* guaranteeing the work of the native Indians inhabiting the property. Originally, they lived in a large hacienda but as their wealth and importance grew in the state of Queretaro, they chose to build a large mansion within the city limits. Don Rodrigo's father had always been in awe of this family and had been spurned due to his lack of pure Spanish blood. As Don Rodrigo's family wealth grew on the strength of the textile business, this distinction became relative and some of his entreaties had born fruit. An agreement had been reached paving the way to the union of these two distinguished families through the marriage of the young couple. All was well until an awful rumor reached Queretaro. The drawing rooms of Queretaro soon buzzed with salacious little tales told by

ladies behind hand crafted ivory hand fans suggesting, he had left a mestiza woman pregnant with child in the city. His father caught unawares felt assured this could only be one of those silly things common to young men still looking for adventure, which was unfortunate but forgivable. Young men of his social standing were expected to test the waters, demonstrating that among Spanish society there existed a double standard. Women were expected to be pure while men could be sexually adventurous. A man's adultery was acceptable and forgivable but that of a woman was not. Any suspicion of impropriety could result in catastrophic consequences within the family and in society. In this case, it was decided by both families to allow some time to allow such matters to be forgotten. There was no reason to begin such an illustrious union with a cloud of impropriety hanging over the events. The marriage was postponed but only temporarily.

Don Rodrigo soon became a frequent guest of Don Vitupero due to his affable wit and easy ways. He knew how to play the right strings and became a welcome presence for both Don Vitupero and Aurelia. He was a most gifted teller of tales who would entertain the couple for hours often keeping them past midnight. Aurelia enjoyed his presence for he was one of the few gentlemen who were her age and could understand her aspirations and dreams for the future. This relationship evolved to such a degree that Don Rodrigo often would find himself at their home unannounced. Don Vitupero, for some reason, was comfortable with this, as he began to see him as the son he never had. Over the next year he became a resource for Don Vitupero when he was forced to travel. He had learned to entrust his wife and holdings to him

in his absence while he was away. This understanding did not go unheeded by the comadres of the community whose idle gossip passed from one house to another like wildfire.

It came to pass one spring, that Don Vitupero was no longer seen with Aurelia attending church and enjoying walks in the park on Sunday afternoons. Five months went by and the community of gossips became curious, asking themselves questions about Vitupero's whereabouts. It is true that he had many concerns involving his mining business. These required long trips by horse into the Sierra Gorda nearby. It was not unusual for him to be away for a week or two, but no more. He was passionate about his wife whom he adored and did not like to leave her alone for long periods of time. Aurelia when questioned by acquaintances responded with the suggestion he had travelled to Zacatecas for business. For a time, this was the truth of the matter accepted by friends and neighbors. In the meantime, Don Rodrigo continued to be seen at her side. The months passed and new questions began to arise. Could he have left her? Was there a separation? Certainly not a divorce as this was unheard under Church Law. The church had always been against divorce and would look for ways to reconcile. No one new for certain and it was difficult to ask such a delicate question directly to Aurelia or to Don Rodrigo. The rumor mill began to work overtime and many stories of impropriety began to circulate within the community. In time, there were soft whispers possibly arising out of the household's servants, suggesting Don Vitupero had met a terrible fate, possibly at the hands of his beloved wife, but there was no proof and no Vitupero to support the claim.

Throughout this time, it appeared Aurelia continued to manage her household and had also taken on some of the tasks of directing the local business of Don Vitupero. It was not unusual to expect some of the women of social standing to run the business of their husbands if they were away for a long period of time. It was accepted as long as this did not take place in public. All activity must occur in the home or by the means of intermediaries. At that time most households had multiple servants to keep the home but of all the staff Aurelia had made great use of Joselito. He was young, smart and quick to learn. Over the years he had become a valuable member of the household to which she would often turn to in case of need. He began taking on the task of passing on her requests to business associates and customers regarding orders, bills that were due and new suggestions for business.

A year later in the month of April, locally known as the month of the Aurora for it welcomed spring in all its colors, the neighbors were greeted on a Sunday with a spectacle that still is recalled today. In the Plaza of the Tamboras close to their home, as you climb the steep Calle de Independencia, the body of Aurelia was found by country peasants while taking their flocks to market. Her limp body had been tied to the fountain and multiple stab wounds could be seen perforating her night clothes. A pool of blood oozed from below her and had drained into the nearby gutter. The scene was ghastly. A report was soon sent to the authorities and the parish priest, both of whom quickly descended on the scene. Her body was wrapped and taken to her home where it was laid to rest on her bed below the image of the Virgen de Guadalupe. Her servants were questioned for days by representatives of the Alcalde of Queretaro. The investigation was hampered by the absence of Don Vitupero whose whereabouts were still

unknown. Aurelia had not given any indication of where he could be found and continued to insist up until the time of her death, he had gone to see business clients and family. In all the time of his absence she had shown no alarm to suggest there might have been an accident, a common occurrence in the Sierra of Queretaro. This had puzzled many, for an absence of one year seemed as such a long time. In any case, there were no known family members nor contact to which to direct an inquiry. Unfortunately, Aurelia was a woman living alone with no family and now no husband to encourage a more formal investigation. From the description given at the time, it appeared the servants had all gone to sleep as usual and none had been aware of any commotion in the house that night. Unfortunately, most of the servants lived in a small building in the rear of the property. The usual precautions had been taken to lock the front wooden doors of the house. They awoke to begin their regular chores and found nothing amiss until the maid attempted to awaken her mistress, finding instead an empty room. A careful investigation of her room failed to disclose signs of a struggle but there were signs of entry into her bedroom window which faced a balcony overlying the street. In the commotion that followed after her death, many of the household servants disappeared, presumably having returned to their villages. It was the conclusion of the authorities that the killers had ascended through the balcony and abducted her from her home in the darkness of the night. It was unclear where the actual crime had occurred. Had she had been left at the plaza as a means of confusing the authorities or as a statement or warning? The facts were sketchy and just too many unanswered questions remained. There were some who suggested a personal vendetta on the family or Don Vitupero, but the perpetrator had been extremely skilled in hiding their tracks. The Alcalde felt surely there had been more than one criminal involved, for how could

the body had been taken out so quietly and efficiently in the night. For some time, the authorities continued to investigate but frankly their efforts were short lived in part due to the lack of family or male members who could arouse the interest of the municipal authorities. Solitary women living by themselves with no family were not on a priority list in Spanish colonial society. The investigation soon died a slow death and the records were put away and soon forgotten.

It was several years later that a Father Antonio Caro on his death bed related a tale that added some clarification to the happenings of that night. On the night of the disappearance, at about 10 p.m., he had been taken from his house by a group of masked men who asked him to see a gravely ill woman in need of last rites. He was frightened but they explained that if he did as he was instructed no harm would befall him. They also insisted on his silence in this awkward matter and advised that if he broke his word they knew where to find him. His eyes were covered, and he was taken by coach in a roundabout way for nearly an hour; to a darkly lit home he did not recognize as it was far from his parish on the edge of the city. He was taken to an upper room where he saw a young woman lying in her bed unconscious. He offered rites and he was quietly taken from the home and returned from whence he came, unharmed but confused. Throughout the encounter he saw no face but remained utterly petrified and never again spoke of such a matter until the last few hours of his life, in anticipation of his death.

Fifty years later, a Licenciado Francisco Veraza purchased this same property which had remained empty for years. It had suffered great deterioration from the elements and lack of

care. He saw great potential in this vibrant area of the city and decided to restore it to its original splendor. As his workers progressed through the stages of work he had requested, they entered the lower levels which he had hoped to use for his wine cellar. While repairing the foundation, workers encountered an area of loose stones and began the task of removing these. It became apparent soon, that underneath this unstable floor rested the remains of two bodies that by now were desiccated but still had the remnants of their clothing and jewelry about them. Veraza immediately called the authorities who began an analysis of the findings. Some of the more senior officers soon were reminded of the terrible occurrence that had taken place in this home many years earlier. Laying at the bottom of the rubble was what appeared to be a man of forty-five years of age dressed in a fine embroidered coat with silver buttons and wearing a large silver ring. Laying on top of him was the body of a younger male with the green livery of the house of Don Vitupero. Both had suffered a blunt head wound presumably resulting in their demise. Laying on top of both, easily in view, was a black ebony cane with a large blood-stained silver handle that authorities suspected as the weapon used in their deaths. The identification of the victims became clear as the new findings were compared with the history of fifty years earlier. The alcalde concluded this was the long-lost Don Vitupero and most likely Joselito the loyal servant who had disappeared at the time of the death of Aurelia.

Today, the legend commonly told in the community and to tourists is that Aurelia had used Joselito, her lover, as an accomplice to end the life of her husband and later used Don Vitupero's walking stick to end Joselito's life. She is remembered as the incarnation of evil, who killed her husband for greed and then went on to kill her accomplice and possible lover,

Joselito, to hide her crime. What remains undeciphered is who brutally ended Aurelia's life? Who were the criminals who entered her room, killed her and then left her as a warning on the Plaza de Tambores? If one is to believe the now popular legend, is it possible that Aurelia would have had the strength and skill to kill both men, place them in the pit and cover it so that it laid unnoticed for over fifty years? What ever happened to Don Rodrigo? There were no records of his interview? This was a man with money, influence and intimate relations with the couple. He had developed a long-standing relationship with Aurelia that might have easily been an affair. He could have assisted in this criminal venture on his own or as an accomplice with Aurelia? Had he been spurned by this woman he most likely loved? Is it possible that colonial society's view of women as weak, susceptible to evil and easily swayed by the devil might have influenced the investigations and conclusions of authorities? The answers have eluded interested parties and will likely remain so at the House of the Zacatecana. Today the house has become a museum and is used for tours emphasizing the lurid details of this most unfortunate household and family.

The life of this house has continued to evolve even after this gruesome occurrence. Of additional interest worthy of its own story, is the fact that at the end of the Second Mexican Empire the remains of the Emperor Maximilian of Hapsburg and his two Generals Miramon and Mejia were embalmed in the same room occupied by Aurelia at the time of her death at the foot of the painting of Our Lady of Guadalupe, reinforcing the morbid history of this grand old house.

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