

Hensli RAHN SOLÓRZANO**La Guaira 1989**

The Wonder Twins, my dad and Uncle Calixto, pulled one of their *quietos*. Going behind the backs of the rest of the clan, they bought a watch store called Lil' Venice in the middle of Caribe boulevard. There were two stages to the heist. Number one, insuring the store for big bucks with the insurance company where my uncle was a broker; and number two, self-robbery. The first one went off without a hitch: they declared loads of merchandise they didn't have, an inventory of Sony products that were really Coby, and so on and so forth. The second phase was more of a work of inspiration. During a full-moon night, they pried open the security door. Destroyed the shelves, smashed the register with a sledgehammer, and scattered broken glass with their feet, making a trail to the little washroom at the back. The Coby watches disappeared, and the Twins left a dog turd on the counter as a little touch of madness. This only to show the authorities—a female officer from the Policía Metropolitana, shades, curly hair, who filled out a report on the crime the following morning—that criminals had, literally, shat on justice. "Fetid crew of robbers terrorizes Lil' Venice," headlined *Litoral*.

The epilogue to the job was just a simple *I'm here to collect*. The Wonder Twins exited the insurance company elegantly dressed, laughing their asses off, and with Uncle Calixto keeping the cheque tucked in the shirt pocket against his heart. That was the spot against which a woman pressed the barrel of her .38 Colt just across the street and in broad daylight. They were again facing that curly haired cop, only this time she was wearing the hot pants of a civilian. What can we do for you? my *tío* said, testicles at his throat like a bow tie. You left a footprint, you fags. Calixto had worn no-name loafers. Fuck, my Adidas, Dad spat out. You mean your *Fake-didas*, said the cop. I saw a shit stain in the tiny washroom at the back: the five lines of the logo. The Twins grew pale. Chill, I wiped it off. I'm the only one who knows what's up. The cop put the gun back in her purse and went inside the bank with them. She made them cash the motherload. Don't dick around, she told my uncle every time he moved the wrong way. Then they stepped outside on the sidewalk like three old friends, kissing each other goodbye. She pocketed the wad of cash and disappeared in a roaring cloud of black smoke, waving goodbye from her Yamaha bike with no license plates.

Motherfucking whore, wept Dad. He undid a couple buttons of his shirt and squeezed his rosary. How the fuck am I gonna bring a single loaf of bread to the house now? Calm down, said Calixto. He showed him the inner pocket of his blazer, where he'd kept a tiny share of the lost bounty. Didn't give her *all* of it. But I should give you shit-all for being such a stupid fuck. My dad sniffed back his boogers, shrugged his shoulders. How can you be so dumb, you douchebag? While handing my dad some cash, Calixto let him have it: I've told you twenty-thousand times already, *chico*, fake stuff is more expensive in the end. Single and old, Calixto hated with all his guts everything money couldn't buy. My father was on that list since he, unlike *tío*, had a heart. Even his worst fuck-ups had the secret purpose of making us—my mom, my brother, and me—happy. God bless him wherever he may be. Really needing the money in those grim times, my dad counted his cut. With it, he'd do some real grocery shopping—the last time we'd see as much food in our house—and lose the rest betting on the horses. But he didn't know that back then. All he had in his chest was a rosary of gratitude because at least *algo* had remained from that charade.

Now, that woman is *carne muerta*, said Calixto, while flipping through his red address book. Both brothers had bad attitude to spare, given they were friends with plenty of former *guerrilleros*—cats trained in Romania, in China. People who sliced people's throats and would then have the gall to resurface the following morning in disguise somewhere in the Middle East. Cells that would hang dogs from lampposts in order to spread *the message*. That old Mercenary University of South America—. However, my dad and uncle never had to go that far. From the very beginning, the Wonder Twins' thing was only to become Pimps of the System. For them, holdups were little acts of justice like those of Machera, Robin Hood of the Andes. But in the end, life stopped finding their little pranks funny. So this time it was going to be different. *Aló, Tío Tigre?* Calixto spoke in code with a contact through a payphone. My dad left him alone while he talked. He didn't pursue the matter again and went back to his business. Several days later, an obituary appeared in the newspaper. On the back page of *Litoral*, you could see a deflated mane of curly hair all smothered in black sauce and a pair of cheap Raysol shades to its side, intact.

Translated from the Spanish by Daniel Narváez