Antojos

An old woman emerged at last from a shack behind the cabana, buttoning up a torn housedress, and followed closely by a little boy, who kept ducking behind her whenever Yolanda smiled at him. Asking his name just drove him further into the folds of the old woman’s skirt.

“You must excuse him, Doña,” she apologized. “He’s not used to being among people.” But Yolanda knew the old woman meant not the people in the village, but the people with money who drove through Altamira to the beaches on the coast. “Your name,” the old woman repeated, as if Yolanda hadn’t asked him in Spanish. The little boy mumbled at the ground. “Speak up!” the old woman scolded, but her voice betrayed pride when she spoke up for him. “This little know-nothing is Jose Duarte Sanchez y Mella Garcia.”

Yolanda laughed. Not only were those a lot of names for such a little boy, but they certainly were momentous: the surnames of the three liberators of the country!

“Can I serve the Doña in any way?” the woman asked. Yolanda gave the tree line beyond the woman’s shack a glance. “You think you might have some guavas around?”

The old woman’s face scrunched up. “Guavas?” she murmured and thought to herself a second. “Why, they’re all around, Doña. But I can’t say as I’ve seen any.”

“With your permission—” Jose Duarte had joined a group of little boys who had come out of nowhere and were milling around the car, boasting how many automobiles they had ridden in. At Yolanda’s mention of the guavas, he sprung forward, pointing across the road towards the summit of the western hills. “I know where there’s a whole grove of them.” Behind him, his little companions nodded.

“Go on, then!” His grandmother stamped her foot as if she were scatting a little animal. “Get the Doña some.”

A few boys dashed across the road and disappeared up a steep path on the hillside, but before Jose could follow, Yolanda called him back. She wanted to go along too. The little boy looked towards his grandmother, unsure of what to think. The old woman shook her head. The Doña would get hot, her nice clothes would get all dirty. Jose would get the Doña as many guavas as she was wanting.

“But they taste so much better when you’ve picked them yourself,” Yolanda’s voice had an edge, for suddenly, it was as if the woman had turned into the long arm of her family, keeping her away from seeing her country on her own.

\(^1\) pear-shaped fruit