

Lupita Mañana

A movie poster for the film 'Lupita Mañana'. The scene is set in a dark, confined space, possibly a tunnel or a mine. A woman, Lupita, is in the foreground, crouching and looking upwards with a determined expression. She is wearing a dark jacket and holding a lit match in her right hand. Her left hand is raised, with fingers spread. Behind her, a man in a suit and tie is also looking upwards. A bright beam of light from the left illuminates the scene, creating a dramatic contrast. In the bottom left corner, there is a small, dark object that looks like a rat or a mouse. The overall mood is one of suspense and hope.

Will tomorrow
really be better?

PATRICIA BEATTY

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Pressing herself flat against the rear wall of Señor Aguilar's hotel near the Avenida Ruiz, Lupita Torres bided her time. When she heard the doors of the big green *yanqui* car shut and the tourist start the engine, she slid forward, scraping her back on the rough white stucco. Sucking in her breath, Lupita nervously fingered the skirt of her faded cotton dress. Would the doorman shout at her not to hang around the elegant hotel?

Quickly Lupita stuck her head out and gave the front of the hotel a sweeping glance with her dark eyes. A sudden gust of hot September wind blew a lock of her long, black hair forward. She pulled it back, muttering in Spanish.

A second glance told her that the front entrance of the three-story Mexican hotel was deserted. *Bueno!* No one would catch her. The thin-legged thirteen-year-old moved swiftly around the side of the building to the iron steps that led to the higher floors. Her brown limbs flashing in the sunshine, Lupita ran up the steps past the first and

second floors. Her hand twisted the knob of the third-floor door, and she slipped inside and stood in the middle of the long, gold-carpeted hallway.

¡Sí! Yes, there was her mother's cleaning cart down the corridor to the left. What a good job Mamá had as chambermaid in Señor Aguilar's hotel! Working here was much better than working in a bad-smelling fish cannery down on the bay of Ensenada.

Lupita moved warily toward the cart, noticing the mound of dirty sheets and used towels in the canvas hamper on one side and the array of neatly folded clean linen, bottles, and cans of cleanser below. Mamá probably was inside the room by the cart, number 310, changing the bed. She would be happy to see Lupita, who had just finished an errand in the neighborhood. Perhaps Mamá would permit her to help lift the big mattress and tuck the white sheet under it or polish the mirror in the glittering bathroom. How the tourists must delight in the gleam of metal and porcelain! What joy they must take in the wide, velvet-covered bed, the brick walls, and the heavy blue-green draperies Señor Aguilar provided for them.

"Mamá, it's Lupita Mañana," Lupita called out very softly, as she slipped inside and half closed the door behind her. Her mother was not in the bedroom. She must be in the bathroom, perhaps scrubbing the pink tub. Lupita called out again and walked over the shaggy royal-blue carpeting to open the bathroom door.

But her mother was not there either. Where was she then? Down the hall at the maid's closet, of course, getting more supplies. Lupita sighed. That's where she must go to find her even at the risk of discovery.

Perhaps a tourist might come out of a room and catch

her in the hall as had happened just last week. The sudden appearance of the *yanqui* in swimming trunks had frightened Lupita into statuelike stiffness. The tall, bald man, white as fish flesh, flicked a glance at her out of his queer, pale eyes, but he said nothing. After he looked at her, he continued on his way downstairs to the swimming pool Señor Aguilar maintained for his guests. The sea was too salty for them, said Mamá, when Lupita asked her about the man. Mamá laughed when Lupita described how fast he walked on his stiltlike legs and how jerky his movements were.

Lupita sucked in some air for courage and went out past the bed to the open door. There she looked out and listened. Sí, there was some noise from the linen closet, small sounds of someone moving around. Mamá!

Lupita went out into the hall, blessing the deep-pile carpet that covered the sound of her footsteps, and ran noiselessly to the maid's closet.

"Eh?" the woman there cried out softly, turning around. "Who is it?"

Lupita gaped at her. This woman was not her mother but Josefa, another chambermaid, the one who tended to the first floor. Plump, wrinkled Josefa looked at Lupita, who leaned against the wall. "Sí, it is Carmela's daughter, the one they call Lupita Mañana." She nodded as she put her hands into the deep pockets of the yellow-cotton coat all the hotel employees had to wear. "Is it true that you are called Lupita Mañana because when your father does not catch as many fish as he wants, you always say, 'Tomorrow, *mañana*, you will catch more, *Papá?*' "

"Sí, that is what I say. Where is my mother?"

"Ah, she has gone home. Señor Aguilar sent her home

Crossing over the border is a dangerous business . . .

. . . But Lupita must cross from Mexico to America. After her father dies in a fishing boat accident in the seas near their small Mexican village, Lupita's family is left in poverty. Lupita and her big brother, Salvador, must smuggle themselves into the United States to earn money to support their mother and young siblings.

America is not the land of opportunity they had hoped. A new language, hard labor, and the constant threat of *la migra*—the immigration police—make every day difficult. But for feisty Lupita, there is always hope for a better mañana—tomorrow.

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