

Mujeres Matadas

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“Hey, Viejo. Ready for some rock and roll?” said the girl. She was standing right next to me at the bar, paying for her beer, but she was so small I had to look down.

“Rock and roll!?” I said. “I thought this was a Neil Diamond tribute!”

She smiled and said, “Have fun” as she walked back to the stage, back to her guitar. She was Mexican, probably from Juárez. Her accent was strong.

Her amp was plugged in, and she was testing her guitar with some rock riffs, “Iron Man” by Black Sabbath, “Wish You Were Here” by Pink Floyd.

The fat drummer was warming up too, pounding out some beats, and in spite of his large mass, he was fast, his arms blurring as he pounded those drums. Two skinny boys were on guitar and bass, and that was the band, two guitars, a bass, and a drum set.

The way I liked it. That was all you needed to play rock and roll, any rock and roll, death metal, heavy metal, black, gothic, whatever kind of rock, just four instruments and vocals. One of the skinny boys set his guitar on a stand and grabbed the microphone and said, “One, two three.”

The girl came in on the guitar, a death metal beat, fffoo fffoo fffoo fffoo, and then the drums came in and the bass, and it was loud, and it was good, and the boy claspng the microphone started singing into the cup of his hands, and like a lot of death metal voices, his was raspy and loud, indistinguishable from other voices of death, just another instrument like the guitar, loud, distorted. Who could tell what he was saying? Together the guitar and the voice were like roars, and it got to me.

I liked it.

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Kids started running into the mosh pit, and they ran around in circles, young, plump and skinny kids, running in both directions.

And when I say kids, I mean, in their twenties. Kids to me.

They ran so fast, around and around, as if frenzied by the music, and as they passed each other in opposite directions, they brushed against each other, almost slamming into each other, but not quite. It wasn't violent like other mosh pits I had witnessed (and participated in), but cute, like children playing in a field. And this was El Paso in 2010, so almost all the kids in the club were Mexican, Latino, Chicano, whatever term it was they used to indicate themselves. I had lived the last thirty years in LA, where Mexicans were everywhere, but here it was different, if only because white people on this border city were more than the minority, they were rare. There were a lot of light-skinned people in El Paso, blondes with blue eyes and freckles on their cheeks, but they were more likely to speak Spanish than English, and even if some of them may have felt themselves superior to indios, they were still Mexicans.

I walked closer to the stage, because I wanted to get a closer look at the band. The girl was "in the zone," as they say, her eyes closed as her fingers slid up and down the width of the neck, playing one, two, three —one, two, three and then subverting it with a hard one and a hard one and a hard one, two, three again.

The boy on vocals put the mike on the stand and picked up his guitar. He took over the rhythm that the girl was playing, and she started on lead. Her fingers fluttered fast, like locusts over rows of wheat fields, and people yelled and whistled. I couldn't help it. I whistled. She was that good.

I must have been standing there for a while, my body moving to the music while my mind wandered into a labyrinth of memories and thought, and suddenly the music was over.

The boy told everyone their CDs were for sale, and then the bar manager came on stage and said the next band would be called "Dead Gabriel."

I went to the bar to order another drink. On stage, the girl was rolling up her chord. The fat drummer was carrying his stuff off stage, like a little boy taking his toys home. I gulped down my whiskey and ordered another one and gulped that down too.

Finally I was feeling a little happy drunk, energetic drunk. I wanted to hear more music, more intensity. I didn't want to let my mind enter my mother's house, the dark windows, the dusty floors, or the wooden shack in the back, where the only light came from when the doors were pulled open and the sun shot in and shone on the piles of junk, stuff my mother hoarded over fifty years. A bike from my youth covered in dust and cobwebs hung on the wall. My mother was a hoarder, and I wondered how long I

would have to stay in El Paso before I was able to get rid of all the stuff, sell the house and go back home to my wife and dogs?

“So what did you think, old man?” She was standing there at the bar. I could barely hear her because of the music they played between bands, loud death metal en español.

Machete en mano

Y sangre india

“Sounded like a bunch of noise to me,” I said.

She laughed and pointed at me and squinted her eyes. “You’re a liar. You liked it very much, I think.”

“Seriously. You play well,” I said. “You were great.”

The boy brought her a beer. She took a drink.

She looked at me, then walked over to me. She had dark green eyes.

“Can I sit here?” she asked about the bar stool next to me.

“Yeah, of course,” I said. I even backed up my stool to give her a bit more room.

She climbed up the stool and straddled it like it was horse. Her cheeks were thin, sunken in, like you could imagine the shape of her skull. She took a drink of beer. Looked at the label, interested in everything. She had long fingers with rings on almost all of them. “You like this kind of music?” she asked, indicating the song on the speakers.

I recognized the band, a death metal group from Mexico.

“Brujería’s all right.” I said.

She raised her eyebrows, as if she were impressed with my knowledge.

“Do you know what they are singing?” she asked.

“Matanda güeros.”

“¡Qué chulo!” she said, surprised. “You know the music even!”

“Not bad for an old, man, huh? What’s your name?” I asked.

She took a cocktail napkin, wrote something on it, and slid it over to me. It said Mari(a).

“How do you pronounce it?” I asked.

She shrugged her shoulders. “You tell me, Viejo.”

She looked at me as if she wanted to tell me something but was unsure, but then she said it, leaning in a bit. “Look, I just want you to know that I’m just being friendly, okay? I wouldn’t get the wrong idea, you know? I’m not into old men.”

I nodded, held up my right hand, showing her my gold band.

She took a drink of her beer, looked at me, and she said, “You remind me of my uncle. That’s all.”

“Who’s your uncle?”

“He’s dead.”

“Sorry.”

“Júarez,” she said, as if that explained it all.

The drummer came by and stood in front of Mari(a)’s stool. She introduced him as Beto. Then a few of their friends came by, and now a bunch of them were chattering and laughing, me in the middle of them like a chaperone.

She said, “Hey, guys. This is my uncle. He came to see me play.”

Everyone referred to her as Mari and to me as “sir.”

Beto asked me what I thought of the music.

“Prefiero rancheras,” I said. “Vicente, música así.”

Mari(a) was the only one who laughed at my joke, and she punched me on the arm, and with all her rings it kind of hurt.

Dead Gabriel was the best band of the night. From Austin, the lead singer was a Black kid with so much energy he ran around the stage in short bursts, his voice pure rage. He had a 1970s style afro, like Billy Preston, the round of it blurring as he moved his head. His voice vibrated on the walls, the floors, on my arms, and in their best song of the night, I realized what made him so good was that it was his voice, death metal style, but with clarity and precision.

Let the dead

Bury their dead!

Let the dead

Bury their dead!

As if pulled by their force, Mari(a) and some of the kids and I got up off our stools and walked closer to the stage, so we could look up at them, sway with them, raise our fists with them. We even started to jump up and down. Every now and then Mari(a) and I looked at each other and mouthed, “Fuck!”

Jesus said

Fuck the dead

Let the dead. . .

And then they were done.

We stood there.

“Wow,” she said. “They were good.”

We walked back to the bar and I bought us both another drink.

“So why do you like death so much?” she asked. “We don’t see too many. . .”

“Old people? How old do you think I am?”

“Fifty,” she said.

“On the nose,” I said. “And you, María?”

“Twenty-two,” she said. “So what do you like about death?”

I thought about it, looking for a canned response in the shelves of my memory, but I remembered that I had never been able to find an answer. One time my wife walked in on me when I was working on my computer in my office at home, the death metal blasted so loud I didn't hear her come in. I thought she was at work, and when I looked up and saw her standing in the doorway, the sunlight shooting in, she looked down on me as if she had caught me masturbating. I turned down the music.

“Is everything all right?” I asked, standing up.

“Why do you like that crap?” she asked.

I wasn't able to answer her. I said, “I just like it.”

“But why?” asked Mari(a). “Why do you like it?”

“It's evil,” I said.

“That's why you like it?”

“I mean, I'm not into Satan or anything like that.” I took a drink of my whisky. “Sometimes you need to feel it.”

“So, do you want to see something really evil?”

“What do you mean?” I asked, looking at her as if horns were about to sprout from her head.

“Do you like Black?”

“Black metal? Like Gongoroth?”

“Darker. Real evil. I could show you some bands.”

I laughed, wondering what she thought would be evil. I had been in town for a few weeks, and I had seen almost every metal show that I could. What could she show me? And as I watched her face look at me as if she held a secret, I remembered how young she was, how much she hadn't yet experienced.

I looked around the club at all the kids. “They try to be dark around here,” I said. “In the mosh pit they run around in circles high-fiving each other as they pass, like kids playing ‘Ring Around the Rosies.’ No one ever gets hurt.”

“Is that what you want to see?”

“No, that's not the point. It's just such a friendly release of energy, like a mosh pit in heaven. In California, I've seen mosh pits where. . . people let go. Their rage.”

“Well, anyway, I'm not talking about El Paso.” She straightened up. “I'm talking about Juárez. There's some underground clubs.”

“Júarez? I thought the clubs were dying over there. That’s what I read. Many of the businesses are moving to El Paso, you know. Restaurants. Nightclubs. There all moving here.”

“I said underground.”

“In Juárez?” I wasn’t sure if I believed her.

“I’m talking hardcore Black, tío. Negro Metal. Maybe you would not be able to handle it,” she said, her accent so strong she sounded like a foreign actress, like Penelope Cruz, even though she wasn’t a Spaniard, but a middle class Mexican. “It will not be so comfortable as here.”

“I don’t know. I’ve seen some petty evil things in my life. Maybe some of them you would not be able to handle.”

“Okay, tell me,” she said.

“I used to live in Mexico City.”

“So please tell me your dark adventures in el DF.”

An image popped into my head, a murdered woman in an alley, behind some garbage cans, stray dogs sniffing around her body, but then I remembered that the image wasn’t something I had seen in real life, but in a book I had read when I lived for a year in Mexico City.

“Do you want to go or not? I’ll take you there.”

“Isn’t Juárez a bit dangerous right now?” I asked.

“What isn’t dangerous?” she said. She took a drink from her beer bottle. “All these guys in the band I play with. They won’t go. They’re too scared.”

“But you’re not?”

“It’s my home. I will never be afraid to go home. The place I’m talking about is like a guerrilla movement. They set up in some abandoned building. They play, and then they move on.”

“You’re making this up,” I said.

“Trust me. And it’s safe. You can take me. I don’t have a car.”

“You want me to drive in Juárez?”

“There’s one on Friday. Wanna go?”

“I don’t want to drive,” I said.

“Don’t be such a gringo. You’ll be fine.”

“Even the US government warns citizens not to go to Mexico, especially Juárez. It’s the murder capital of the world.”

“Oh, so you are very sure that you do whatever the US government tells you to do?”

“No, that’s not it.”

“Do you want to go or not?”

“I don’t want to drive. I got California plates. I’ll get carjacked.”

“You know who’s playing at this event? Las Mujeres Matadas.”

“The murdered women?”

“They are an all-girl, Black-metal group.”

“That’s... That’s unusual.”

“They’ll give you nightmares.”

I took a sip of whiskey, and I was drunk by now, and had it been Friday, I would have said, Sure, let’s go. Instead I said, “I’ll think about it.”

“You can pick me up at eight pm.”

“Where do you live?”

“By UTEP.”

“Are you a student?”

She nodded, and suddenly I felt that all this was innocent after all, that she was bluffing, that if anything, I reminded her of her uncle and that reminded her of Juárez, her amor por Juárez, and she just wanted to imagine going into the city, going back home. She was just a bourgeois kid.

“Gee, I haven’t asked this in a long time,” I said. “What’s your major?”

“Philosophy,” she said.

“Figures,” I said.

She handed me a piece of paper with handwriting on it, and at first glance, I didn’t recognize an order to the letters and numbers, not even the symbols, as if it were written in some ancient language, some secret code —and my heart skipped a beat. But then my eyes adjusted, and I saw that it was her address written on a cocktail napkin, “2199 Prospect. #3. 79902.”

And a little note that said, “8 PM.”

When Mari and I drove into Juárez on Friday evening, there was still sun enough to see what the drug wars had done. It looked pretty much the same to me, pharmacies and liquor stores and restaurants, the only difference being the army trucks full of young Indian soldiers carrying automatic rifles. They were patrolling the streets, parked on busy intersections, short Indian boys holding rifles, boys too young for facial hair.

It wasn’t until we entered deeper into the city, away from the border, that I saw how different the city had become during wartime. On intersection light poles, on the

sides of buildings, on stone fences, there were posters and fliers with the pictures of young girls, posted by their families, ladies who were doing all they could to get their girls back, Lupita Pérez Montes, Esmeralda Monreal, Nancy Muñoz, Ayúdanos buscarlas.

I was afraid to be in Juárez in my car in the impending night, but somehow having Mari(a) next to me in the passenger's seat made me feel safer, maybe because she wasn't afraid.

Much of the businesses were boarded up, weeds growing out of the cement in the parking lots, and many buildings had been demolished and stood in piles of rubble like bombs had gone off.

"Fucking sad, you know?" she said, looking at piles of rubble on a corner, a building that used to be a mini mall. "I used to fucking shop there, man," she said, shaking her head as if she couldn't believe it. We drove onto a narrow street lined with dentist offices and tailor shops and discount stores, then a few larger stores full of people going in and out. We passed by a storefront with big display windows onto the street, and inside, behind a barrier of sandbags, was a soldier, pointing his rifle at the street, at us.

We passed the Hotel Juárez, a corner building with a façade of turquoise-colored tile, like it might have been pretty fancy a long time before. Maybe when I was a teenager, sneaking in and out of Juárez with my friends, that hotel was luxurious, maybe it had a ballroom with gilded walls and a chandelier.

But then there were parts of the city that seemed so normal: a park with a bunch of people hanging out, teenagers melting into each other's bodies, kids playing in the open air, vendors pushing carts of paletas and snow cones, just like any other city.

"You know what really fucking pisses me off?" she asked. "Turn here."

I turned where she asked me to, and we drove down an abandoned road with nothing on the side but dry land and rock. A housing development appeared up ahead, one of those suburban tracks with an entrance and a sign, like Agrestic in Weeds. It was a new development, the houses modern with two stories and the garages pushed up front. Each house had a small yard and big double doors.

But the homes were empty. If they weren't boarded up, they were abandoned, the windows busted out, doors knocked in. Some of the houses had debris all over the front yard. Some of them had spray paint across the garage doors, ¡Sálvanos! and other more profane expressions.

"Stop," she said, and I braked in front of a house that wasn't boarded up but that had signage all over warning about keeping away. Signs were everywhere: spray

painted on the walls, posted on stakes in the yard, written on the door. Keep out! Go away!

It hadn't worked. The place looked pillaged.

"That's my house," she said. "Or was."

"What happened?" I asked.

Over thirty years ago, when I was in high school, I used to cross into Juárez at night, a bunch of us kids ready to party and lose our minds, and we were so skinny and light with youth that we floated across the bridge like naughty angels and stumbled back like the happy dead. We did dollar tequila shots and drank bottles of beer, and sometimes we paid ten bucks to get into a club that had a deejay and a barra libre, and we drank so much beer and sweet, blended drinks that our bellies burst and we barfed just to make more room.

Drunk and together with our crazy friends, a bunch of us would skip our way down Avenida Juárez to a taco place and stuff our mouths and tummies with greasy meat and cheese wrapped in a stack of corn tortillas as we drank cans of cold Tecate. Street kids came to our table begging for money and food, and we bought them bottles of Fanta and gave them quarters. We were only teenagers, years away from the legal right to drink on the other side of the bridge, but in Juárez, we felt like adults.

The city was our playground, a nighttime labyrinth of possibilities, and because we were full of hormones, we used our freedom to make-out in public, feel each other up at the clubs, at dark tables or in underground hallways that led to the bathrooms. Some of us had sex in the bathroom stalls, and when it was over, we did lines on the backs of the toilets.

This was when Juárez was safe, or so we believed.

Turns out that it was never safe.

But we were safe, or we felt like it.

Even when we passed by Juárez police on our drunken-boat walk back to the bridge, back to our side of the border, as the cops looked at us, sometimes shaking their heads at us, we continued to laugh and talk loudly, sometimes yelling so loud at each other it was like we wanted everyone to hear us, wanting others to witness our youth.

Some of the girls with us walked back in short skirts and high heels, and the men standing idle on the corners watched them as they bent over to take off their shoes, carrying them by the straps, walking barefoot across the concrete screaming, Woo!!!

But that was then, when Juárez seemed safe.

Or safer.

There were always stories our parents told us in order to warn us about the dangers of getting drunk in Juárez, which is how the fact of the murdered women first came to our attention. There were stories, rumors, about a girl missing, a girl walking home from the factory, a girl from Michoacán, from Sinaloa, Vera Cruz, Quintana Roo, and then there were sporadic articles in the El Paso Times, the bodies of girls on the sides of barren hills, dead girls found only because their young hands were spotted sticking out of garbage heaps, as if trying to grab on to something, or an ankle would be coming out of a mound of dirt and rock, girls barely approaching puberty, their bodies mutilated, all of the parts being uncovered little by little, until we saw the whole horror of it, the numbers adding up, the murdered women, the murdered girls, the authorities pretending there was no problem or like they were doing something about a small problem at most.

And now there were the drug wars. Now Juárez had the dubious distinction of being the Murder Capital of the World, and women and girls were still disappearing, a lot of them, 16, 17 year-old girls.

Since the drug wars, whenever I came back to El Paso to see my mother for some matter of her estate or health care, I avoided Juárez. Driving on Friday night with Mari was my first time here since I was thirty years old. I remember I was right out of law school, my first year working with a firm in LA, the job I always dreamed of having. I was staying for a few days with my mom and my dad, who was still alive then, and I was helping him with some paper work, the company he worked at for forty years trying to deny his retirement. I filed papers. I studied documents. One night I walked across the Santa Fe Bridge and into downtown Juárez. I drank some beers at the Kentucky Club, which was full that night with a mixture of Juárezenses and El Paso people. After a few beers, I wandered through Boys' Town, where I slipped into a place called Pigalle. I sat at a table by myself and watched the women at other tables surrounded by men and bottles of beer, the ladies laughing and controlling the hands of all the men groping them, like octopus women. I wasn't married then, and I must have been looking for something, because when a plump Indian-looking girl walked in, with big lips and wearing a ridiculously small outfit, I stared at her. She knew I was looking at her, and she looked at me, smiled and winked. I rose from my table.

Juárez.

Now I was driving around with a girl I had just met, and I went wherever she told me to go, and as it got dark, I got a little afraid. We found ourselves driving down a two-lane road out of the city. Nothing lined the road. We could see some lights in the distance, buildings somewhere far off, and in the distance, sirens wailed. We could see

the El Paso star burning on the black mountain, but all else was dark, and we could only see what the headlights lit up in front of us, the white lines coming at us.

Mari said, "Here, you want this?"

She held two red pills in the palm of her hand.

"What is it?" I asked.

"What do you think?"

She told me to pull up to a cluster of buildings, which looked abandoned, surrounded by a chain-link fence. The gate to the parking lot had been torn off and was lying flat.

"Here?" I asked. "This is it? You said there'd be a concert."

The buildings reminded me of those old insane asylums in the country, where they used to give electric shock treatments.

I took the pills from her palm, but she said, "Only one. The other one's for me."

I threw it in my mouth and swallowed, and she handed me a bottle of water.

"Give it about 20 minutes," she said. "Come on."

When we drove onto the side of the building, we saw there were a bunch of cars parked there.

"I told you. These shows are like a guerrilla movement. They set up in some abandoned building. They play, and then they move on."

We got out of the car and heard pounding coming from inside the building, which used to be a factory. The double metal doors were closed shut, and on it there was written ¡Peligro! No Ingresar, and I could feel the bass pulsing from the other side, as if it might blow the doors off.

There was a man at the door in a dark suit and tie who looked like a secret service agent. He even had a wire in his ear. When he saw us coming, he stood before the door, and when we got there, Mari opened her palm and held a red poker chip. The security man nodded, and he turned to open the doors.

He grabbed both door handles with his big fists, and he pulled hard with a single jerk.

We watched the doors fly open like the wings of an angel, revealing a nighttime sky scattered with stars, and there was a moon as big as the sun.

The force of the music seemed to lift us to the middle of the floor, surrounded by hundreds of young people, boys with long hair, girls with black makeup. The stage was empty, expect for some people setting up for the next band. People were standing around, drinking, yelling into each other's ears. The music was blasting from the speakers, and a few boys were in the mosh pit, forcefully banging against each other.

The song playing sounded like industrial noise, a repetitive whip

Frrrrrom.

Frrrrrom.

“This place used to be one of the biggest maquiladoras in Juárez,” Mari yelled into my ear. “A lot of the murdered women worked here in this very spot.”

“It’s huge,” I said, looking around. It seemed the size of an indoor skating rink, high ceilings, with metal beams running across it. In the middle of the floor, separating the room, there was a counter, where maybe there used to be machinery for an assembly line. Now the Juárez kids were standing on it, drinking, moving to the beat.

“This is the last place some of the girls saw before they were murdered,” she said.

Frrrrrom

Frrrrrom

“And the company bus,” she continued, “picked them up right outside, but they dropped them off downtown. And they walked home alone.”

I looked up and saw that part of the ceiling was falling in a giant chunk, and outside the moon was falling from space onto the floor, and I covered my head as if that would protect me from the debris all over my shoulders.

“It’s kicking in, isn’t it?” she asked.

“Maybe.”

“I’ll be right back,” she said.

“Where are you going?” I said not wanting to be left alone, but she vanished into the blur of bodies, and I had what must have been a vision: Lights came up and the music stopped and I saw the factory in full production, the whack of the machines, the buzzing of the saws, the women standing on the assembly line. Two European men in suits stood in an open door and watched one of the girls who worked walking into the bathroom.

Frrrrrom

The music stopped and the voices rose around me like dark vines.

I don’t remember how long I walked around that dead factory, in and out of the past and present. I don’t know how many groups played that night. I remember lights, I remember the moon shattering on the floor, and I remember a mosh pit where shirtless young men rushed into each other, a fist, a head butt, and I remember that they carried more than a few boys out on stretchers, and I remember the announcer walking on stage, the lights blasting from behind him, and he introduced the next group, Juárez natives, “Las Mujeres Matadas.”

The crowd exploded when they walked on stage, five young women, some of them wearing outfits like factory girls, dirty smocks, white lab coats spattered with blood, and a few of them wore Catholic schoolgirl skirts that were ripped and soiled and bloody. All their faces had make up, as if they were zombies, white face, blood dripping from their eyes. And then they started their music and it was so hard and fast that I jumped up and down on my feet, and I'm not even sure at what point it occurred to me that the guitar player was Mari. She was wearing the Catholic school girl skirt, but she didn't look sexy, didn't try to, she looked dead, murdered, angry as hell.

She had on skeleton make up, a cross between Black metal style and the calaveras of the Day of the Dead, and she had a Frida Kahlo style scarf on her head.

Odio por Juárez
Pa' esos hombres
es odio por Juárez

Mari stepped forward and played lead, those fingers running back and forth like the legs of tiny people, the notes so fast and intense it felt like fleeing from the light of a nightmare you can't remember, the crowd growing in frenzy the quicker her fingers moved, and all the other girls were watching her guitar scream pain, and anger and it opened something in me and I walked in.

I don't remember what I did in there, but the landscape was pulsing with rage. I saw faces, bodies piled, lights glaring, shovels and picks, rocks and dirt and a kid's bicycle covered in sand. I saw my mother's body shriveled up under the covers, her eyes closed.

The band kept playing. I don't know what really happened or if it was the drug or if it's my memory now that I try and recall that night in Juárez, my perceptions of reality filtered by ego and past experience. I don't remember what I did while the Mujeres Matadas screamed for justice, for love of Juárez, I only know that I must have been inside that place for a while. And I remembered another song they played.

It was a black metal version of a Talking Heads song, "Life during Wartime."
This ain't no party
This ain't no disco
And I ain't fucking around.
Then they were done with it.

Mari became Mari again. She was out of breath, her chest moving up and down, but she was happy, not laughing and smiling, but fulfilled, as if the clouds broke open and the sun blasted her in warmth. She held her guitar like a rifle, and then she looked above the silhouette of heads that was the crowd, the lights shining in her eyes. She

didn't look for me, didn't want to know what I thought of her performance. It wasn't about me. I had just met her the night before, and she asked me to take her to this concert, and I realized I was probably just a ride, a way to get here from the other side, someone she felt safe with. In fact, after it was all over and the lights came on and people left, I would look for her but wouldn't find her. The security men in dark suits would tell me to leave, and I would drive back to the border alone that night, figuring she must have left with some of her friends. But for now she was on stage shrouded in sweat and applause. She turned around and looked at the other *Mujeres Matadas*, all of them sweaty and done with it, too, all of them carrying instruments like weapons after the battle.

As the crowd whistled and yelled for them to play another song, as the motion around them blurred into a dull-colored background, the women looked at each other, the light in their eyes holding them together like a star.