

The front doors will not open. I pull on both of them with all my might and still, they will not budge. Peering through the windows, I see a small reception area with two beat-up wooden chairs, a small end table with magazines scattered about haphazardly, another door that must lead into the interior of the building. The reception area is deserted. There is a wide window beside the door, paned in frosted glass, pulled completely closed. I can see bits of color and shape moving beyond the glass like a kaleidoscope.

I glance frantically from side to side and find a small, tan intercom box with a button and a speaker. I push the button and the box brays at me.

And then nothing happens. I glance over my shoulder at the cars moving out on the street. If I run out to the street and throw myself down on the pavement, would someone stop for me or would they just flatten me like so much road kill and drive on? I push the buzzer again.

“Si?”

“I need help,” I say desperately into the speaker, trying to speak clearly enough to be understood. Nothing

“You have to push the button,” the heavily-accented voice says to me.

“I am in trouble and I need help very badly.”

“Que? Who is it that you wish to speak to?” It is a woman’s voice, only vaguely interested in what I have to say.

“Ayudeme. Ayudeme,” I say, taxing my high school Spanish to its limits. No answer.

“Someone is trying to kill me. Men with guns are chasing me. I need assistance. I am in danger. Peligro. Peligro,” I shout into the box.

Nothing.

“Un momento, por favor.” Squawk.

There are no bushes, no trees, no cover of any sort. I am the only human visible as far as I can see. I stand out like a burning match in a dark room. I hear a car horn on the road behind me, an angry driver. The horn sounds again. I glance over my shoulder. An impatient line of cars has formed behind a black sedan which is blocking traffic out on the street. The black vehicle begins to move slowly again.

“Si, can I help you?” the speaker barks, a man’s voice this time. Finally, I think, someone who speaks English.

“Yes, please help me,” I say. “I am in trouble. I work at Channel 10 television and there are men with guns who are trying to shoot me. I need you to let me in the door right now, so that I can call the police.”

“El policia? Estan el policia?”

“No, I am not the police, I need the police. Necesito el policia.”

“You are in danger?”

“I am,” I say emphatically. The black sedan, a Mercedes drifts off the street into the driveway. It is moving toward me.

The frosted glass in the reception area slides open a few feet and I see a man’s face. I wave. The face is looking at me dubiously. What must I look like, I think? I am soaked through, my pants are stained with dirt and slime. Both my pants and shirt are torn, the edges of the fabric stained with blood. Will he take pity on me?

I glance over my shoulder. Another, larger black vehicle has turned into the driveway. I hear a car door slam, the screech of brakes.

The door buzzes and I turn to grasp at the handle frantically. I pull and the door will not open. I release the handle and straining against every instinct, I pull the door

more gently. The door moves. I rush inside. As I enter, I glance to my left and see dark forms crossing the lawn, moving quickly toward me.

I run toward the reception window. I put a hand to my cheek pantomiming a phone receiver pressed to my face. "Call the police," I shout. "El policia, quickly, quickly." In the enclosed waiting area, I am suddenly aware of how bad I smell. I try the wooden door that leads into the interior of the building. It is locked. It is a flimsy door, I think. I could easily kick it down.

The small, dark man I have been speaking to reaches out to slide the frosted glass window closed. He is speaking to me in rapid Spanish, not making any sense. I catch the sliding window, before he can close it.

I jump up on an end table and step through the open window. I slam the semi-opaque glass closed behind me. Three women are sitting at a folding table, looking at me, complete panic in their eyes. They are too afraid to move. On the table in front of the women there are a line of black desk phones. I pick up the nearest one and push zero.

"Operator."

"Yes, this is an emergency. Connect me with the police please."

I hear a squawk from what must be the other intercom station. It is somewhere behind me in the room. Wildly staccato Spanish pours from the speaker, animal howls, curses, threats of the worst sort. The three women jump from their chairs and run from the room, screaming as they run.

"What city, please?"

"I'm sorry, what?" I scream into the phone, polite to the very end.

"What city or municipal police force do you wish to speak to?"

"I don't know. Opa-Locka, I guess."

"I'll connect you sir."

One ring, two rings.

The crack of a gun, breaking glass, more gunfire. I drop the phone and run from the room, around a tall partition. I find myself running through a moving wall of shirts and jackets and dresses. There are twenty Latin men and women moving clothes on wire hangers. Motorized racks are moving garments around the room, a veritable roller coaster of clothing; jackets, suit coats, guayaberas, spiraling high into the air, negotiating sharp turns, plunging precipitously back to earth. The smell of hot plastic singes my nose. My first instinct is to hide and I run, using the billowing plastic bags as camouflage.

Women scream as I approach and cower from me. I want to tell them that I am not the bad person, I am the one who's being victimized, but I see myself through their eyes. To them I am bloody, smelly, disgusting. At the back of the dry cleaning plant, there are stacks of brown cardboard boxes on pallets, barrels of chemicals stacked precariously on top of one another. I run down an aisle and duck into the recess between two tall stacks of boxes, looking for something to mask my presence. I find nothing.

Surely these people will protect me from the gunmen. They'll point to the back door and tell the men that I've run outside. They will extend their palms upward in confusion, even though they are frightened. They will do the right thing.

A man's face appears in the aisle. He does not have a gun. I know instinctively that he works here. He jerks an arm abruptly to the side with his thumb extended. "Get out of here," he says to me. I look at him questioningly.

Then I realize the fault in my logic. No one will do the right thing with a gun pointed at their head. They will all turn and point to the back of the room and hope it is not them who gets shot. "Get out you fool," the man says to me in broken English. I look in the direction his gesture has directed me. I see a crimson exit sign mounted over a gray doorway. It is a door to the outside that can not be seen from the rest of the room.

“Gracias,” I say and run for the door. Thank God, I think, someone had the compassion to help me when I needed it most. I will return and thank this man, I think as I run. I will highlight him on my newscast, this man who put his own personal safety second in order to help another human being in a time of great need. I hear women screaming out in the center of the room. They are coming for me. I am nearly to the door. And they will not see me leave.

I am out the door, into the blinding light of day. The sun is warm and good. I am safe and it is light again, a light that goes dark again as I fall to the ground.