

DAVID BOWLES

La Mecánica

Since she was only four, Papá would perch her on a side panel, and she would peer into the complex guts of the engine as he bent his head beneath the hood and thrust his hands like a doctor into the pipes and wires.

Since her brothers were grown, it wasn't long before he started barking orders at her, ready to strike if she brought the wrong tool. Still, he was surprised six years later to hear that quiet voice mutter "así no" beside him.

"What did you say?" She pointed at the pulleys. "You're threading the belt wrong, Papá." "¡Huerca igualada! Get inside and help your mother make tortillas!" A shove to punctuate. But through the kitchen window, she watched as he pulled the belt free and redid the work.

Little by little he began to call her outside whenever vexed by a mechanical conundrum. "What do you think?" he'd ask, and her eyes would unfailingly diagnose the problem. He set her to work, finally, taking engines apart, rebuilding them with such finesse they seemed new.

Men, however, are driven by inscrutable motors. Diabetes and then renal failure claimed Papá. She was a teen, and no one would bring work. No men wanted the scrawny tomboy at their shops, touching their cars with her nimble fingers. She had been saving money, though. It was time.



It took her three tries to cross the border. Sent back twice before she found willing allies in Lopezville who rented her a little room. Came a day when their car broke down and they despaired at the probable cost. She asked to take a look, unpacked her precious tools, and fixed it for free.

Word spread. The work began to trickle in. A car every two weeks, then one a week, then more. She bought a little quarter-acre lot, put a battered mobile home on it. Soon there was enough to erect a laminate roof for shade, and her business boomed. *La mecánica*, folk called her in a mix of humor and awe.

Bush expanded amnesty in 1990. Her many clients were now contacts. She got together the documentation needed, became a permanent resident. Finally returned to visit her mother, to whom she'd been sending generous remesas, driving a nearly new sports car she'd souped-up. Friends and neighbors, once dubious, became obsequious.

At her father's grave, she knelt and laid a gleaming wrench in lieu of flowers. "Hey, Papá," she muttered. "Next week construction begins on my shop. No more shade-trees. Going to realize your dream at last. What do you think of your tomboy now?" There was no answer, of course — just the smell of grease and the curves of her waiting wheels.

