



Source: Ed O'Loughlin, 'Still a long, dangerous journey 2000 years on', *Sydney Morning Herald* online, 24/12/05.

Tags: [child/parent](#), [death](#), [fortune](#), [husband/wife](#)

Writer/s: [Miriam Taylor Gomez](#)

© 2008 Barbara Campbell and the writer/s

When Dona Larita gave birth to Virgilio, a squalling bundle of fatty tissue, on the day set aside for the coming of the Saviour, she had no idea that she was giving birth to a viper who would end his days on his belly. As Virgilio grew in body, so too his ambition for money, power and women. Virgilio's small town beginnings drove him to aspirations and lusts best portrayed in cheap novels.

To the onlooker, the family appeared to be normal enough, praying together in church on Sundays. To the close observer, however, there was something amiss, as if each member were somehow wrapped in ice and stacked upon separate shelves. His mother was small of stature and stern of face, her thick fingers clasping rosary beads given by her mother on her wedding day, and her eyes looking to an unknown place. His father, straight and tall as a ballet dancer, used his long fine fingers to conduct his orchestra. Blancita, his sister, twirled her days away with dreams of chivalry. Her end was simple, in a prison, clasping her baby girl to her chest, her heart broken by the injustices heaped on her by her brother, Virgilio. The other boy, German sat high in the trees reading, always reading novels from other countries, whether or not he could understand the language. His end was simple, sun-drenched in a hammock in Havana Cuba, exiled there by the houndings of his brother.

Virgilio's smiling prominent teeth made his broad face light up and his eyes glisten with a deceptive welcome. He had the perfect face for any number of professions where the expression belies the sentiment. Virgilio chose medicine and specialized in paediatrics, perhaps in honour of his own birthday, the same as Jesus. The Baby Jesus was after all his mother's favourite adoration.

His colleagues had in their student days joked that the only way to meet women as a doctor was to become a paediatrician. With his mother's thick hands, he had joked, he would never get a lover. His square body looked reassuring in a pinstriped suite and his fingers were the kind which children find easy to hold onto.

What he lacked in his profession was a wife, and as he had few resources of his own, he needed a wife with money. Even more, a wife whose love for him would blind her to his meanderings, and one whose hips would bear him children to compliment his reputation as a brilliant doctor. He found Marguerita Cruzada. The name alone brought lineage to Spanish royalty.

Marguerita was sixteen years old when they were introduced. She had already been disappointed in love twice. Hernando Grazialas had courted her since her fourteenth birthday, a man of culture and old family wealth. Alas, he had died some weeks before their formal engagement, of appendicitis. Jose Herrera was an honest boy with the face of an angel, but alas his Jewish mother had denied them the pleasure of continuing their courtship.

As the pain in her heart diminished, Virgilio's voice worked its influence on Marguerita. She was the only child of Eva and Enrique. Enrique wore moustaches finely tipped with wax, and a fine thin cigar upon his lower lip, tapping it occasionally with a kid-gloved hand. He liked the drink a little too much for Eva's liking, and his eye wandered to other women once too often. Whether she asked him to leave or he left for his Caucan woman, no-one knows. But Eva was relieved he had gone and never regretted his loss. She didn't need him since her wealth was independent of a husband and now that she had her own daughter, she needed him less.

Virgilio shone in his medical career and alongside him, the elegant and demure Marguerita who proudly bore him many children.

Virgilio's day of birth plagued him. As a child, he never received presents because it was Christmas. One gift for both. Nothing good ever happened on his birthdays. Nothing.

The house he owned in El Lago burnt down on his birthday, taking with it all his medals of honour for his medical career. His ridiculous mother-in-law, Eva, had discovered him in bed with a dark-skinned young woman on his birthday, and made such a noise about it. Two of his sons, his greatest disappointments, both similar to him in temperament, were born on his birthday. It was his birthday when he pushed his sister into a police van under arrest for living outside the home without his consent. His conscience tweaked a little remembering it had been his birthday when he had shot and killed a thief who had entered his leafy property, and then buried the body in the cow fields below. His favourite Rottweiler, Kurt, had been kicked to death by a horse on his birthday. Marguerita left him moments after helping him to cut the birthday cake with the children, putting down the knife and picking up a suitcase hidden behind the door. His beloved mother died on his birthday.

He cursed Baby Jesus and the day they were both born.

The worst was yet to come, to befall Virgilio on his birthday. On that day when the world around him celebrated, eating and drinking, unwrapping gifts and passing pleasantries with people one would never look at twice throughout the year, Virgilio had before him two options for the day. He could visit his many children and grandchildren who awaited him in Usaquen. He could accept the invitation of his latest amor whose body throbbed with lust and greed only equal to his. Before he could make a decision, he was presented with the third and final way. This day would see Virgilio, in his 90th year, crawling on his knees, over steaming sheets of concrete, minutes after the worst earthquake in the history of the continent.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Miriam Taylor Gomez.*