

SHE WORE A YELLOW RIBBON

by Brian Day

Humid air blasted alkali dust into Jared's face, as he climbed the hill toward the cemetery. Sand mixed with the dust to increase the sting. Atmosphere and lighting did not match the definition of afternoon. Black storm clouds boiled across the Mexican sky, shutting out nearly all hope of sunlight. Night would have begun at noon, except for a white-gray light that trickled through fault breaks in the smothering cloud blanket. A hurricane was whirling in from its spawning grounds in the Gulf to tear its way up through the funnel of Mexico.

No moisture had struck the ground in Guanajuato as yet, but the storm had waylaid Jared here just the same. The bridges had already been washed out between Guanajuato and Mexico City. Enricho, the antiquities smuggler waiting for Jared in Mexico City, would have to tuck his newest acquisitions back into whatever rabbit hole he hid them in. His Aztec and Mayan treasures had lain hidden in the ground for centuries. A few more days wouldn't make any difference in their value.

Perhaps Jared would hang around Mexico City a few extra days after the floodwaters subsided. Who could tell what wonders might wash out due to this latest storm? With a little

legwork, and the odd peso slipped into a bony, brown, peasant hand here and there, Jared might be able to eliminate the need for Enricho entirely on some of the best buys. In the mean time, he would sit out the storm here in Guanajuato.

Raymond had been right about the beautiful manicured nature of the town. Jared appreciated its colonial charm, even as it braced for the coming storm. He would poke through some of the shops this evening to see what he might turn up. Usually, by the time an artifact made its way from the field to a shop, even in a little town such as Guanajuato, the price had inflated so much that Jared could no longer make the profit that he was accustomed to. But he would look anyway. Sometimes locals noticed strange Gringos wandering in and out of the curiosity shops. Well-informed natives had taken Jared aside in the past, with a tug at a sleeve and a tip of their hat. Some of his most profitable purchases had been made when these local guides had led him to some secluded farmhouse or back street hovel. The starving waifs within were more than willing to sell greatgradmama's tapestry for the price of a potato or two. Jared smiled to himself, remembering the codex fragments that he had bought two years ago from a withered old beggar-woman on the outskirts of Zagategas.

She had looked to be a hundred years old, but she had a child with her - a little girl of maybe seven or eight years.

The child had tuberculosis bad and would not live to see another Christmas - any fool could see that. Jared certainly was not a fool. He had spotted immediately the Mayan codices hanging on the crumbling adobe walls, in the candlelight of the beggar-woman's hut. Forgetting momentarily the stench of the filthy dwelling, he could smell the crisp green bills that the stinking rich collector from New York City would pay him with. No wonder these people died like rats from TB and a hundred other diseases, when they chose to live in such squalor. Anybody ought to be able to find a broom, a vessel of water, and some rags to scrub the place out with - no matter how poor they were. That girl could have been swatting a few of those flies buzzing around, while she wasn't doing anything else.

The gimpy worm of a man who had guided Jared to the beggar-woman's dwelling had meant for Jared to buy a pottery bowl with a jaguar design in its glaze. Busloads of these ceramic bowls had already crossed the border into the States. Every coffee table from Pasadena to Baton Rouge had one perched on a corner. All had been legitimately imported, nice and clean. No profit in that kind of thing.

"What does she want for the pot?" Jared had asked.

The worm scratched his game leg and eyeballed the sickly girl. He spoke to the woman in Spanish and she replied with a

voice like cornhusks in the wind, "Mi hija est'a muy enferma. El docter es costoso."

"She needs medicine for her little girl," informed the worm.

The woman spoke softly to the little girl, who immediately wrapped her twiggish arms around her cracker box chest and began to cough. Jared glanced out the hovel door to hide an expression of disgust. If they were going to con him, they should at least try to be a little more subtle about it. He would soon see who would con whom.

"How much is the medicine to cure this poor innocent child?" he asked the worm.

"200 pesos, Senior," answered the worm, without consulting the woman.

"I have only seventy pesos with me tonight and I am leaving town first thing tomorrow morning, after the wire services open. I must contact my father in DeMoines to send me money for my train fare to get home," Jared lied like a spider spinning silk.

The worm spoke to the woman again. The sickly girl coughed and wiped her mouth on her shirtfront. The woman went to the girl and put her arm around the child's quacking shoulders.

"Ciento cincuenta pesos," she said without looking away from the little girl.

"175 pesos," the worm said in English.

"No, all I have is 75 pesos," Jared said, playing the stupid tourist, "Not 175."

The worm smiled, "You said 70 pesos, Senior."

The girl began to cough uncontrollably, clutching her knees to her chest in a constant spasm. Her mother rocked the girl in her arms, calling softly, "Martina, Martina." The worm wrung his hat brim in his hands and looked pleadingly at Jared.

Jared rubbed his face and hoped that his cheeks looked red. Mastering his most grievous expression, he stammered, "Okay, okay, I'll skip my dinner tonight. I've got one hundred pesos and that's all! She can have that. But she must throw those old Indian pictures she has got pinned up on her wall into the deal as well. Mom loves that kind of stuff and Dad won't mind me wasting his money so much, if it makes Mom happy."

The worm relayed the offer to the old woman. She rose to her feet without a word, while the girl continued to hack away on the dirt floor. Jared winched secretly when she tugged the priceless codices loose from the wall, rolled them up carelessly, and handed them to the worm. As if she were passing on the Holy Grail, the woman lifted the worthless jaguar bowl tenderly from its place of display on the rickety table and presented it to Jared. Jared took the bowl and dipped his head slightly, saying, "Gracias! Gracias!" The mother returned to the child, who now wheezed prostrate on her side upon the floor.

The worm tugged at Jared's elbow, "We should go now, Senior. The child is very ill. Such things can travel to others if they linger too long - even to generous Gringo gentlemen."

Jared had made thousands on the codices. He had separated the images into six different fragments and brokered them to six different wealthy patrons. Each deal had been a secret transaction for clean untraceable cash. Jared kept the jaguar bowl on the corner of his desk for an ashtray and as a reminder of the best buy he had ever made - so far.

Guanajuato's famous cemetery with its curiosities beckoned all travelers when they visited the region - whether they had arrived there of their own free will or not. Jared found himself with time on his hands. Violent weather might confine him to his hotel room or the nearest cantina all day tomorrow. He had decided to see the mummy catacombs today. The ornate iron gate of the cemetery sang its own two-note funeral dirge as it swung to and fro in the gusty wind. Close inside the stone wall of the cemetery, a couple of plots to the right, two men pecked away at the sun-baked soil of a raised grave with shovels. Their backs were toward the gate. They cursed in Spanish with low voices as they worked. Placing his steps carefully to avoid being heard, Jared crept up behind the

diggers. He leaned forward so that his head came just behind and between the two. He said, "Hey!"

"Aiye! Aiye!" shouted the shorter man on the right and jumped behind the head stone, brandishing his shovel. The taller man on the left went from a stooped digging position to a full sprint in the blink of an eye. Upon hearing Jared's hysterical laughter, he turned from his position halfway across the graveyard to see what ghoul had risen from the grave to snatch him. Jared leaned on the man's abandoned shovel, incapacitated with glee.

The tall man stalked back and snatched his shovel away from Jared's grasp. "Who are you and what is your business here?" he demanded in Spanish.

"Take it easy," Jared said, "I don't speak much Spanish. Can either of you speak any English?"

"Si," the tall man answered, regaining a little of his composure, "a little. What do you want?"

"Get rid of him," the shorter man said in Spanish from behind the headstone. "We must dig this one up before the heavy rains begin and she is buried much too deep. Her people promised to pay forever and then promptly died away themselves. We should have saved their stinking carcasses and shoved them all into this great cavern that we will have to dig to bring this one up. Get rid of him quickly."

"What do you want here, Senior?" the tall man asked again.

"I came to see the mummies," Jared explained.

"Ah the mummies! Always the mummies!" snarled the short man, still in Spanish. "Send the damned foreigner down the hole with the dried up ones, so we can get back to digging up a new leather doll for the Gringo tourists to gawk at."

"I should not send him down there alone. He might slip upon the stairs or damage one of the bodies," protested the tall man in Spanish.

"He can do no harm to the residents down there and it would serve him justly if he fell on the stairs. We could stick him in this big hole we are making, in revenge for scaring ten years of life from us. Send him down there and get back to work."

Grabbing Jared by the arm, the little man pointed across the cemetery toward an ancient knarled oak tree. Near its roots, a wooden door stood propped open, above a circular shaft leading down into the ground. "Go visit your friends and leave us to our work. See if they will jump for you when you sneak up on them!" he shouted angrily into Jared's face in Spanish.

Grasping Jared's other hand, the taller man pulled him away from the graveside and his angry partner. "Come," he said, "I will show you the stairs."

The blustering wind intensified, as Jared and the gravedigger made their way across the maze of haphazard burial

monuments and raised plots toward the rickety wooden door. The bottom corner of the door was sandwiched between an ornate iron cross jabbed into the ground and a loaf sized broken block of marble. But the relentless wind had loosened the cross in its socket and pried the block away from the door. Smaller branches of the oak clashed against each other violently in the gathering wind to create a deafening racket above the two men. The tall gravedigger grasped the scrapwood door by its top edge and beckoned for Jared to come closer.

"Please hold this door Senior, while I make the prop more secure," he shouted.

Jared obliged his request. Picking up the marble block in both hands, the tall Mexican struck the top of the cross three strong blows, driving it more solidly into the earth. With the third blow, the block split in two. The larger piece landed on the Mexican's toe.

"Godammit!" the man cursed and hopped away on his uninjured foot.

"Marcos! Dejede perder el tiempo con que Gringo enganosa y obtenga sobre aqui," the sort man bellowed from his excavation, "La lluvia vendr'a pronto."

"Si, si," Marcos shouted back. Pointing down the dark circular shaft that the door was meant to cover, he directed, "The dry ones are down there. Go and see all you want. They

are through the glass doors when you reach the bottom of the stairs. Be careful on the old stairs. They are very worn."

"Are there any lights down there?" asked Jared.

"Si, there is a lantern and matches by the door. Some light comes in through high windows. You will see as much as you want if you wait a moment or two. Now I must hurry back to Paulo, or he will get angry." The gravedigger turned to leave.

Jared caught him by the arm. "Please replace the stone at the base of the door," he requested.

"Si, si," Marcos agreed, slamming the bigger fragment down on the inside edge of the door and adding the smaller piece on top of it. He hurried back across the cemetery then, leaving Jared alone on his quest for the dead.

Jared climbed down the spiral stone staircase into the darkness. The vault did not smell musty like his grandmother's cellar. It had no smell at all, but rather robbed the nostrils of moisture progressively with each new intake of air. Some daylight trickled down the shaft to penetrate the gloom, enough so that Jared could make out grounds-keeping tools of various shapes leaning against the walls of the catacomb entryway. A rake and hoe protruded from a neat pile of white sticks gleaming faintly in a far corner.

"Bones," Jared realized to himself.

He spotted the outline of the lantern where it rested on top of an overturned wheelbarrow. The barrow had no wheel between its shafts.

"Even the wheelbarrow is dead," Jared mumbled to himself.

His eyes grew accustomed to the dim light rapidly. Multipaned glass doors stood closed at the opposite end of the entryway.

"Nuts! I'll bet Marcos Mudhead forgot that the doors are locked," Jared grumbled.

He wove his way through the tools to the glass doors and pulled at the large brass handles. One door creaked open on its dry rusty hinges.

"It's open," Jared sighed with relief, "Miracles will never cease."

Pulling the door open, he stepped inside to the long hallway. He could already make out the shapes hanging at their assigned stations on the walls at either side. The light was stronger here, entering the long hallway from small windows near the ceiling. Jared wondered why the windows were not visible from the ground above. He decided that they must be concealed in some fashion by the surrounding gravestones. Before closing the door, he looked back at the lantern on the dead wheelbarrow. The entryway was much darker than the catacomb hallway in which he now stood. He decided that he would enjoy the gloomy

atmosphere of the unlighted hall of the dead first, before finding the matches to light the lantern.

His eyes adjusted to the gloom quickly, the irises dilating to match the wide-open maws of the corpses hanging from the shadowed walls. Jared stepped closer to the nearest mummy for a better view. Once upon a time, some slender young woman might have inhabited this husk of a body suspended from wire before him now. Something resembling a discarded party gown hung entangled from the jutting hooks and angles of the human remains. Road-killed animals displayed more evidence of species than this distortion in the pale blue frock. Black hair hung from the small skull like burnt hay. Eyes, nose, and cheeks were all wadded back behind the rigid, brittle howl of the lips. A full set of sparkling, clean, white teeth jutted out toward Jared, like a barrier fence around a mineshaft. No evidence of a tongue could be discerned in the black cavern of the throat.

"Ah, at last I've found you," Jared said to the mummy princess, "My dream girl. Young, slim, and pretty - and no tongue."

A shriek, accompanied by a chorus of soft moans, filled the silent catacomb. Wind, gusting violently outside, was forcing its way through cracks around the tiny windows above and giving voice to the dead. Jared realized this; a split second after

his reflexes had forced him to leap back from his mockery of the mummy princess.

"Please forgive my insolence, My Lady," he said with a bow. Noticing her shriveled feet were bare, with some evidence of heavy callusing still remaining on the bottoms of the dried flippers, he quickly added, "Not really a princess, but only a pauper wench anyway."

Turning to survey the rest of the hall's inhabitants, Jared spied a great dark hulk bound to the wall several stalls down from the princess. He shoved his hands into his pockets and strolled cockily down toward the hulk in the black suit. This mummy's mouth was strangely shut tight. Its eyes still gleamed like two black beans from the bottoms of their sunken sockets. Jared had to stoop to see this detail because the carcass wore a black fedora hat pulled down low on its forehead. The man must have been quite immense in life. Even now in his freeze-dried form, he took up a great deal of space. Other mummies hung suspended from their mounting wires with little stress, but this character slumped against the bottom of the wall, a bamboo cane looped over the crook of one arm. The wind continued to increase its velocity outside, as did the intensity of the moaning choir inside.

"Everyone else is singing in here, My Good Man. Now why are you so close-mouthed?" Jared asked the hapless mummy.

Pulling a pencil stub from his pocket, Jared bent in closely, face to face with the dark hulk. Using the eraser end of the pencil stub to push up one corner of the dead man's lip, he asked, "Hiding some gold choppers perhaps, Old Boy?"

Thunder rumbled the windows in answer and lightning glow flickered about the hall to illuminate Jared's orthodontic examination. Nothing but clenched brown gums grimaced back at him from behind the tightly drawn lips.

"No money in this wallet," he observed, returning the pencil to his pocket.

Rain tapped its fingers tentatively against the windowpanes above. Finished with his shake down of the old-man mummy's mouth, Jared moved on down the long rows of dehydrated lives pinioned to the earthen walls. No guard was present to prevent him from groping a pocket on some poor wretch here or uncurling a furred ear over there in search of the overlooked earring. But the relatives and gravediggers had been much too thorough in the past and no valuables could be squeezed from the discarded brown-paper-bag people.

Finally, Jared stood before the mummy of what had apparently been a little girl of perhaps nine or ten years old. He guessed this by her height, dress, and long dark hair. A yellow satin ribbon bound her glossy, deep walnut-colored hair back from her parchment face neatly. In truth, the face

retained much of its recognizable countenance, even after the drying effect of the earth. Perhaps due to the lack of extra flesh in a child's face (especially in the faces of some of these malnourished Mexican children) little contortion of the girl's features had occurred. The hide had only shrunken and tightened on the delicate little skull. Her eyes remained closed, her lips only slightly parted, her chin tilted down in submission to her fate.

"A perfect shrunken head," Jared thought to himself. He fingered the jackknife in his pocket idly. "She must be fairly fresh. In a couple of years she'll curl up at the edges and be just as ugly as the rest of them," he thought.

Crash! Something slammed to the ground with brutal force beyond the glass doors at the top of the spiral stairway. The noise startled Jared back to reality. He had better be on his way back to the hotel soon while some daylight still strained its way through the edges of the hurricane. A great blast of wind must have already knocked the hatchway door loose from its haphazard bracing. He had seen enough of these Mexican preserves - not even a decent souvenir among the lot. It was time to go. He took one last look at the solemn little girl suspended in front of him.

"Who am I kidding?" he said to himself. "Your little face would spoil like a Florida Jack-O-Lantern if I tried to sneak

you out of here. You will have to remain here with the rest of the uglies." On a whim, he patted her fine, kid-glove cheek with one hand gently - while slipping the yellow ribbon from her silken locks with the other. Her head seemed to sink lower onto her birch bark chest without the ribbon in her hair. The hair cascaded down freely now, to nearly cover her face. In the deepening darkness, Jared observed droplets of water falling from the overhanging ceiling to collect on the scalp of the child mummy. Slowly, a trickle of water formed, coursed down the girl's forehead, and dripped from her long eyelashes. Guilt nearly gripped him for a moment, but the thought of attempting to retie the ribbon around that mess of nasty wet hair and flesh hardened Jared's heart immediately. Stuffing the ribbon into his shirt pocket, he walked toward the glass doors.

Dampness began to make its way down through countless minute fissures in the catacomb walls. It seeped in around the long-neglected windows. A mist began to form low on the catacomb floor. It swirled around Jared's feet like the ghosts of long lost pets, as he hurried toward the glass doors. He heard the splash of water and felt its chill dampness oozing in over the tops of his loafers, when he stepped into an unseen puddle. He reached the doors and gave one a gentle push to exit. The door gave back an unexpected stiff resistance, opening only a few inches. Jared put his shoulder against the

wood frame and shoved. The door shuddered open grudgingly and Jared stepped through to find himself standing in four inches of water.

"The damn thing must have swollen shut. Amazing how fast that happened," he muttered. "Oh well, I'm out now," he chuckled as he strode up the stairs.

Without slackening his pace in anticipation of any resistance, he raised his hand to brush the flimsy hatchway door aside on his way out. The scrapwood door did not budge an inch. Jared had a split second to register surprise before the crown of his head struck something extremely hard and immobile. The blow tumbled him backward down the stairs, into the fowl darkness of the entryway below.

Senseless from the blow and the fall, he rolled, then crawled around in the mists and puddles of the catacomb hallway aimlessly. Eventually, he ceased his crawling to sit in a pool of dim light, clutching his skinned knees with one arm, and rubbing the new goose egg on top of his head with the other hand. Mist swirled to eye level, obscuring his view in the fading light. Something slithered along his right foot and hooked around his ankle. With a violent tug, he was on his face, before he might clutch at the hook or spring free. Jared twisted around against the slow, dragging force. In a panic, he grasped the unseen hook and pried it loose from his ankle, just

as a brilliant electric-pink blast of lightning brought the interior of the catacomb into full view. Jared held the hooked end of a bamboo cane. The black hulk in the fedora hat held the other, his toothless maw agape in a hideous smile. Thunder plunged the long tomb into darkness again. Jared's pathetic scream knuckled under against the thunder's earth-shaking rumble. He crab-walked away from the darkness where the hulk could last be seen. Another flash of lightning revealed the black hulk still firmly attached to the wall, but writhing slowly against his bonds.

The thunder became relentless, sometimes distant, sometimes practically in the hall with Jared and the dead. Forks of lightning stabbed the interior with an uneven glare every second or two. Jared could not believe his horrified eyes. Forms wiggled and twisted in their wire harnesses on the walls, as moisture trickled and dripped onto them from the walls and ceilings above. Some portions of the hideous forms seemed to be rehydrating. Grotesque swollen lumps of flesh hung juxtaposed in the same body, next to withered leather stretched tight over black bone. When the thunder boomed more distantly, Jared could make out the sound of ancient joints cracking and, most horrifying of all, the gurgling choking sound of voices trying to speak.

"Fire!" Jared's brain shrieked, for the ancient comfort of man. He crawled frantically down the center of the hallway toward the glass doors of the entryway. If he could find the lantern and matches, he could somehow hold the corpses at bay. Already, the sound of rusty wires snapping free, followed by gurgled cries of victory, intermixed with the din in the catacomb. So far, none of the fiends seemed to have broken completely free from the walls, but Jared spent little time gazing around the tomb space in the intermittent light. He struggled to his feet to cover the last few steps to the entryway. He reached the doorway and placed his hand to the frame. On the far side of the doors, a match flared. Jared slumped to the floor in relief, oblivious of the large pool of water that had gathered there. Marcos or the shorter gravedigger must have returned to make certain that he had left the catacombs.

Match met lantern wick and Jared found himself staring into the grinning skulls of three skeletons. The skeletons guarded the doors like sentinels, each brandishing a hoe, rake, or scythe for a weapon. A great crowd of dissimilated bones and skulls swam through the air behind in a hellish dance. The skeleton guards stomped a rhythmic dance to the sound of the thunder. Jared slammed his shoulder against the door in desperate terror, figuring he had a better chance against the brittle skeletons than he would have against the rapidly

reanimating muscle behind him. The doors did not budge, swollen shut completely now by the puddles of water gathered at their base. Jared kicked his heel through one of the lower panes of glass. A soldier skeleton slashed his ankle with a hoe immediately. Jared screamed in pain and jerked his injured foot back. Crawling a few paces back from the doors, he examined the deep wound, while the skeletons looked on and laughed silently. Had the wound been made with the scythe, he would have been crippled. Jared cast a frenzied gaze around the hall with the next flash of lightning. None of the mummies had freed itself from its wire bonds completely yet. Perhaps the mummies could not reach him if their wire bonds held through the night. The skeletons seemed to be contained by the jammed glass doors.

Jared closed his eyes tight and covered his ears with his hands. This nightmare couldn't be real. It must be a result of the bump on his head, something that hatched from the goose egg. This hallucination would fade soon. At least, he was certain, the horror would end with the morning light.

Something feathery trailed across Jared's left wrist. He pulled away and looked toward the touch with the next lightning flash. To his horror, he could see root-like feelers growing from many of the appendages of the mummies. Much as mold grows on an old bread crust, one of these feelers spread almost imperceptibly, next to him. Other webs of the mold feelers

seemed to be spreading across the mausoleum floor - directly toward him.

Jared crept backward toward the glass doors again. Glass shattered behind him, as the skeleton bearing the hoe smashed out several of the panes in one door. Skeleton parts began to swirl through the openings and reassemble in the catacomb hallway, as the skeleton soldiers demolished the doors. In absolute terror, Jared crawled in the only direction he had not tried yet - toward the corner of the tomb where the little girl hung. Perhaps her bonds were stronger because she had been wired fast to the wall most recently. She was also small and not very strong. Perhaps he stood a chance with her.

Several of the soggy mummies had nearly freed themselves from their imprisonments by pulling upon the floor with their mold roots. As they pulled themselves apart in their struggles to get to Jared, a stench of newly rotting flesh filled the air. Two of the skeleton soldiers wriggled through the shattered glass doors and stood at attention with a hoe and a rack. The third soldier handed his scythe through to a tall skeleton that had just reassembled itself inside the hall. This new skeleton joined formation with the first two. The trio advanced toward Jared in a slow determined march, their weapons at ready. Jared backed away, screaming, "No! No! This is impossible! This isn't..."

A strong young hand snared him by the throat from behind, stifling his final shriek. Rooty fingers twisted him around to face the darkness in the corner. One great blast of lightning provided illumination for his final vision - the little girl peering impassively into his face as she squeezed her fingers tightly closed around his throat.

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Marcos approached the cemetery with great trepidation. It had been four days since he had last been there. The hurricane had raged so strongly for two days that everyone had remained indoors. On the two days that followed, Marcos had worked with the rest of the men of Guanajuato to clear the rubble from the damaged buildings. Five people had been killed in the terrible storm and several others injured. Now he would have to face the devastation that the storm had wrecked upon his place of livelihood.

The storm had sprung the cemetery gates wide open. One gate hung by its lower hinge only. The other lay flat on the ground, completely wrenched free. Stones and markers were tilted and scattered everywhere. Even a thorough search of the parish records would not reveal precisely where all of the grave markers properly belonged. Marcos stopped at the edge of a

small muddy pond. It filled the excavation that Paulo and he had started on the day of the storm. Paulo would probably decide to push the soil back into the hole as the water subsided, rather than deal with the ghastly remains waiting beneath the muck in the bottom of the grave.

The catacomb and the mummies within would be another matter. Paulo and he would have to sort out which bodies could be salvaged for display again and which bodies must be discarded. Bones would have to be hauled to the surface and dried in the sun. God only knew what damage had been done to the structure itself. At least now there would be room for more bodies to be stored in the future. Paulo and he had dreaded the task of digging an extension to the display hallway, to provide room for new inhabitants. Now, they had an entirely different problem to dread.

One great limb of the cemetery oak had split away from the trunk, in the violence of Hurricane Martina. The limb had fallen across the hatchway to the catacombs. Suddenly, Marcos remembered the Gringo who had entered the crypt before the storm. He hoped the Gringo had possessed enough sense to get the hell out of there - before the limb had fallen. Marcos rushed to the entrance of the crypt. When he reached a point where he could look over the top of the massive limb, Marcos nearly jumped out of his own skin. Something brown moved there

on the remains of the hatchway. With another stride and to his great relief, Marcos could see that it was only a little girl playing there on the splintered remains of the door.

"Get home, you silly little waif!" he snarled, in a voice he had learned from Paulo. "This is no place for a child to be. Get out of here or I will take you down below to stay."

"The poor little girl looked up at him with primal horror in her eyes. She leaped to her feet and ran, as though Hell itself yawned beneath her. Marcos chuckled to himself for the first time since before the storm had struck. "There will be new life in the world again today; as there is on all other days," he reminded himself. It was a saying that he often told himself when his work in the land of the dead became too depressing. He watched the little girl bound off through the sunlit fields, a yellow ribbon in her hair.

The End