

Mi Lupita

George Webster

INT. HECTOR AND MARIA'S APARTMENT - DAY

HECTOR (Mexican-American, mid-60s, blue-collar) helps his wife MARIA (Mexican-American, mid-60s) get ready for the day. Their one-bedroom apartment is modest and cluttered but comfortable.

In a bathroom with old-fashioned colored tiles, Hector bathes Maria gently, rinsing her thin hair, then towels her off.

While Maria, wrapped in towels, sits with a vacant expression on their queen bed, Hector lays out a dress with a paisley floral pattern and a white cardigan.

Once dressed, he seats her in front of a dresser with a mirror and does her hair. Maria seems unaware of what happening. Hector blow-dries her hair and styles it, then clips on a pair of earrings.

Finally, Hector helps Maria up and guides her to their front door.

INT. CLINIC - WAITING ROOM - DAY

Hector sits with Maria in a modern, fluorescent-lit waiting room.

Hector scans the room nervously. Maria stares vacantly into space. Hector takes Maria's limp hand. She doesn't respond, but she doesn't pull away.

Looking at Maria, Hector begins to hum the tune of "Mi Lupita" by Antonio Aguilar. Some warmth enters Maria's eyes and the ghost of a smile appears on her face. She looks towards him and squeezes his hand.

DR. OFILI (late-30s, no-nonsense) enters. She's wearing a crisp white jacket over business attire.

DR. OFILI

Hector? I'm Dr. Ofili. We spoke on the phone.

Hector lets go of Maria's hand and rises to shake Dr. Ofili's.

HECTOR

Hello. Yes, I remember.

DR. OFILI

And this must be Maria.

They both turn to Maria, who doesn't respond at the sound of her name.

DR. OFILI

(to Maria)

Hi Maria. I'm going to help take care of you. Would you like to come to my office so we can chat?

Maria looks back at her with empty eyes. Hector grips her arm and helps her to rise. Dr. Ofili takes her other arm and together they shuffle towards the door where Dr. Ofili entered.

As they approach the door, it becomes clear that they won't all fit at once. Dr. Ofili helps Maria through while Hector lets go and follows behind.

INT. CLINIC - DR. OFILI'S OFFICE - DAY

Dr. Ofili helps Maria into a chair, and Hector takes the one next to her. Dr. Ofili circles her desk to sit opposite Hector. Her office is brightly lit and modern. Her glass desk is clean and organized, but behind her are filing cabinets and shelves piled with files and paperwork.

DR. OFILI

So, did your primary care doctor tell you much about our study?

HECTOR

He said it could help. He said maybe she could get better.

DR. OFILI

Well that's the goal, yes. Our stem cell treatment is designed to help Maria regrow the neurons that have been damaged by dementia.

HECTOR

So it'll help her remember.

DR. OFILI

(nodding)

If the treatment is successful, her memory will improve, among other things. We've seen some very promising results in animal trials.

HECTOR  
But she's not an animal.

DR. OFILI  
Yes, but this is the first time we're testing it on humans. This is called a Phase One trial.

HECTOR  
You don't know if it'll work?

DR. OFILI  
No. We have a lot of good evidence, but nothing is absolute, and there are always risks in clinical trials. That's why we've invited patients with advanced disease.

They both look at Maria, sitting hunched over with an unfocused gaze.

HECTOR  
Will it hurt her?

DR. OFILI  
The procedure is very minor. We'll do it intravenously, so it's not much more than getting an injection.

HECTOR  
I want to keep her at home.

DR. OFILI  
That should be fine. We only have a few beds here. You can bring her in for observation and testing.

Hector pauses.

HECTOR  
What if it doesn't work?

DR. OFILI  
I have no guarantees for you, Hector. It's a big decision, and it's ultimately up to you, but I think this is Maria's best chance.

Hector looks back at Maria. She's staring at nothing in particular. He looks back to Dr. Ofili and nods.

HECTOR

Ok.

Dr. Ofili reaches behind her for some paperwork and places it on the desk.

DR. OFILI

Excellent. We're going to take great care of Maria. We'll do the procedure today, and you can take her home after a few hours.

INT. HECTOR AND MARIA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Hector is finishing up feeding Maria in their living room. It's warmly lit, lived-in and inviting. Maria is in a faded armchair, while Hector is on a small portable stool.

Hector wipes Maria's face, then grabs the bowl, spoon, and stool, and carries them into the kitchen. He gathers up a pile of clean laundry from the dryer. As he walks across the living room to the bedroom, Maria's chair is noticeably empty in the background.

Hector gets to the bedroom door before he seems to realize what he saw. He freezes, drops the laundry, and hurries back to the living room.

HECTOR

Mari? Mi amor?

Maria is revealed facing the wall. She's tracing the lines of the wallpaper pattern with her fingers. Hector waits for a moment, watching her.

HECTOR

We got that after the radiator upstairs leaked and there was a huge rust stain. Remember?

Maria looks at him and turns back to the wall. She pats it with her hand and turns to survey some items on a side table, as if investigating. Hector watches her, slowly cracking a smile.

INT. HECTOR AND MARIA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT: Maria feeds herself while Hector sits by her on his stool.

EXT. HECTOR AND MARIA'S FIRE ESCAPE - DAY: Maria sits on the fire escape looking around while Hector tends to some plants in pots and boxes.

INT. HECTOR AND MARIA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT: Maria laughs at something on the television. Hector beams.

EXT. PARK - DAY: Hector and Maria go for a walk. Maria walks unsupported.

INT. HECTOR AND MARIA'S APARTMENT - DAY: Maria completes a jigsaw puzzle.

INT. HECTOR AND MARIA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Hector finishes an errand in the kitchen and goes into the living room. Maria is dozing in her armchair. He goes to her side.

HECTOR  
Bathtime, mi amor.

He takes hold of her arm to help her up. Maria pulls her arm away lightly and stands up without help. She follows Hector as he heads to the bathroom, but stops short as she sees where he's going. Hector turns back, and they look at each other, puzzled.

HECTOR  
Mari? Are you ok?

Hector walks the short distance back to Maria and tries to gently guide her to the bathroom. She takes a few more steps, but squirms, shaking his hands off her shoulders.

Hector ones again puts his hands on her back, trying to guide her to the bathroom. She turns and pushes him away, affronted. Hector stares at her, utterly bewildered.

HECTOR  
Mi amor, you need a bath.

Maria lets him guide her a few more steps, but again resists when they get to the bathroom door. He goes to undo the top button of her blouse. Maria yelps and slaps him. Hector steps back, stunned.

HECTOR  
Mari--

As he takes a step forward, Maria shrieks, bolts into the bathroom, and slams the door. Hector tries the handle, but it's locked. Hector stares at the door. He seems to have no idea what to do. Through the door, there comes the faint sound of Maria whimpering. Hector backs away from the door.

INT. CLINIC - DAY

Hector and Dr. Ofili stand at an observation window, viewing Maria while she goes through some psychological testing with a nurse. Hector is watching Maria. Dr. Ofili is making notes in a chart.

HECTOR

It's like she doesn't know me anymore.

Dr. Ofili starts, as if she hadn't noticed Hector. She looks from him to Maria.

DR. OFILI

Dementia is a horrible disease, isn't it?

HECTOR

No-- I mean, yes. But that's not it. She knew me. She knew me before she started this.

DR. OFILI

You think the treatment is causing memory loss?

HECTOR

I don't know. I just know she's different.

DR. OFILI

Hector, your wife's brain has been ravaged by disease. We're seeing some very promising results in her testing.

Dr. Ofili gestures to Maria, visible through the window in the other room. Maria is performing a simple drawing task, smiling at the nurse.

DR. OFILI (CONT'D)

Do you see how she seems more engaged?

HECTOR

Yes, but--

DR. OFILI

Well that's what we're seeing in her testing. Her short term memory is better, she's able to follow instructions, she pays attention. These are all good things, Hector.

HECTOR

But what if it's not her?

DR. OFILI

What?

HECTOR

It's like it's not her. It's someone else.

Dr. Ofili pauses. She eyes Hector with increased concern.

DR. OFILI

Hector, I know this must be hard for you. Sometimes recovery doesn't look the way we expect it to.

HECTOR

But she's supposed to get better. I want to get her back the way she was.

DR. OFILI

We're still early on in Maria's treatment. Just try to give it some time, ok? It can take some time to adjust to a new normal.

HECTOR

But... ok. Some more time.

Dr. Ofili gives him a comforting pat on the shoulder and turns back to her notes. Through the window, Maria's eyes meet Hector's. She looks away immediately, as if caught staring at a stranger. Hector frowns.

EXT. HECTOR AND MARIA'S CAR - DAY

Hector and Maria walk towards their car in the parking lot of the clinic. Hector opens the passenger side door for Maria. Maria opens the door behind it and gets in the backseat. Hector stands for a moment, then closes the door and walks around, getting into the driver's seat.

They begin driving.

After a moment, Hector reaches down by the door and fetches out a CD case. It says Antonio Aguilar on it in blue font, with the title "A Diez Años de Su Adios".

Hector looks at Maria in the rear-view mirror for a moment, then puts it into the CD player.



Mi Lupita begins to play. It's recognizably the same song he's hummed to her in the past. Hector stares at Maria through the rear-view mirror.

After a few moments, Maria seems confused. She looks at the speakers. She shakes herself slightly, as if to come to her senses.

She looks out the window, but her eyes are drawn back to the speakers. She begins to tear up, and looks at Hector. Then she begins to scream.

Hector flinches in fright. He hurriedly turns off the music, but Maria is still screaming.

HECTOR

Calm down! Mi amor! It's ok.

Maria screams in terror. She opens her door while they're still moving. She begins to lean out the door but she's still buckled in. Hector yells and leans back and grabs her clothes, trying to yank her back inside. He veers off the road and into a telephone pole.

Hector gets out of the car. He's dazed but unhurt. Maria is still screaming in the backseat, trying to undo her seatbelt.

A number of bystanders approach the scene. Some are calling the police, others are recording. Hector stands there, dumbfounded. Distant sirens mingle with Maria's screams.

INT. CLINIC - PATIENT ROOM - DAY

Hector sits in a chair against the wall. He has the same dumbfounded look. Maria is in a bed, asleep. Dr. Ofili is standing by her bedside.

DR. OFILI

We have her sedated for now. Are you feeling all right, Hector?

HECTOR

What happened?

DR. OFILI

It's hard to say at the moment.

HECTOR

Try.

DR. OFILI

Well, we'll have to look into it, but my best guess is that Maria had a deep response to the song, but didn't know why. Her brain was unable to reconcile the conflicting signals, and went into fight-or-flight mode.

Hector doesn't say anything. He looks away from Dr. Ofili and stares at Maria. It's an uncomfortable silence.

DR. OFILI

...As I said, we'd like to look into it. I think it's best if Maria stays with us for a while, for closer observation.

Hector still doesn't say anything. He's still looking at Maria.

DR. OFILI

Hector? I said we'd like to admit Maria. Would that be ok?

Hector finally looks back at her, and nods.

DR. OFILI

Ok. I think that's the right choice. I'll go get the paperwork.

Dr. Ofili heads to the door. She pauses for a moment, as if she wants to say more, but then she turns and leaves.

Hector looks back to Maria. She's asleep. He stands up and walks over to her bedside. He leans down and kisses her forehead.

Hector gently pulls the pillow from behind her head. He begins to hum "Mi Lupita" softly, and presses the pillow down over Maria's face.

Maria moves her arms faintly, but can't mount much of a struggle. She is weak and sedated. Hector hums the whole time. He begins to tear up.

Eventually, Maria stops struggling. After a beat, Hector lifts the pillow. He tucks it back behind her head, then straightens her hair.

He looks at her for a moment, then walks to the door and leaves.