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	Avalanche	II.637

Tijuana Maid

I first came across when I was 22. It was 6 months since I came to Tijuana from my village. There was little work and my sister had friends who were working as maids in San Diego, and she was sure it would be easy to arrange--I would leave Rosita and Juanito with her and she would help me find out

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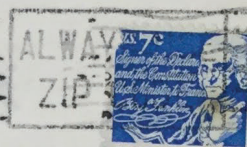
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martha rosler
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martha rosler

Willoughby Sharp
Avalanche
93 Grand Street
New York, New York 10013

say that the city wanted to have a bus to the border for 25¢, but Greyhound got the court to stop them. If I went across every day I could be with my kids at night, but the ones who do that are always tired--working for the patrona all day and caring for their families at night. But anyway, the men said I could only get a job living in with a family. It would pay less but at least I wouldn't have to pass the border, with its inspectors, every day. They are unpredictable, like jaguars; they let you pass every day, every week, and then all of a sudden they take your card away.

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Había bastante que hacer, con tres chamacos muy cochinos, la casa grande, y muchas fiestas con bastante de limpiar después. La señora trataba de hablarme en español pero su acento estaba tan mal que apenas podía entenderle. El señor casi me no hablaba, nomás para preguntarme de cuándo iba a hacer chile con carne, que no es un platillo mexicano, o para preguntarme cuándo iba a hacerles unos tamales. Me hacía la mal entendía. No me daban ganas de hacer tamales. No esperaba cocinar tanto, pero no iba a durar se me quejaba. Entonces hacía tacos. No sabía que me disgustaba más, si cocinar las comidas americanas tan aburridas que les gustaban, o los tacos una vez a la semana. Mi hermana me platicó de una muchacha de nuestro pueblo que fué llevada a Laguna Beach por una pareja para cuidar sus niños, pero pasaba todo el día limpiando y cocinando. La tenían cocinando platillos mexicanos bastante picantes para sus amigos, luego la sacaban para que los amigos la vieran. Estaba muy joven, sola y no podía hablar inglés. Ella se suicidó--claro, se mató.

Bueno, mis patrones me dejaban comer lo que yo quería después que ellos acaban, iyo nunca había comido tanta carne en mi vida! Hacía \$30 por semana de los cuales la mitad iba a los hombres, mi cuarto era chico y mal aluzado, pero tenía trabajo, y comía a tiempo.

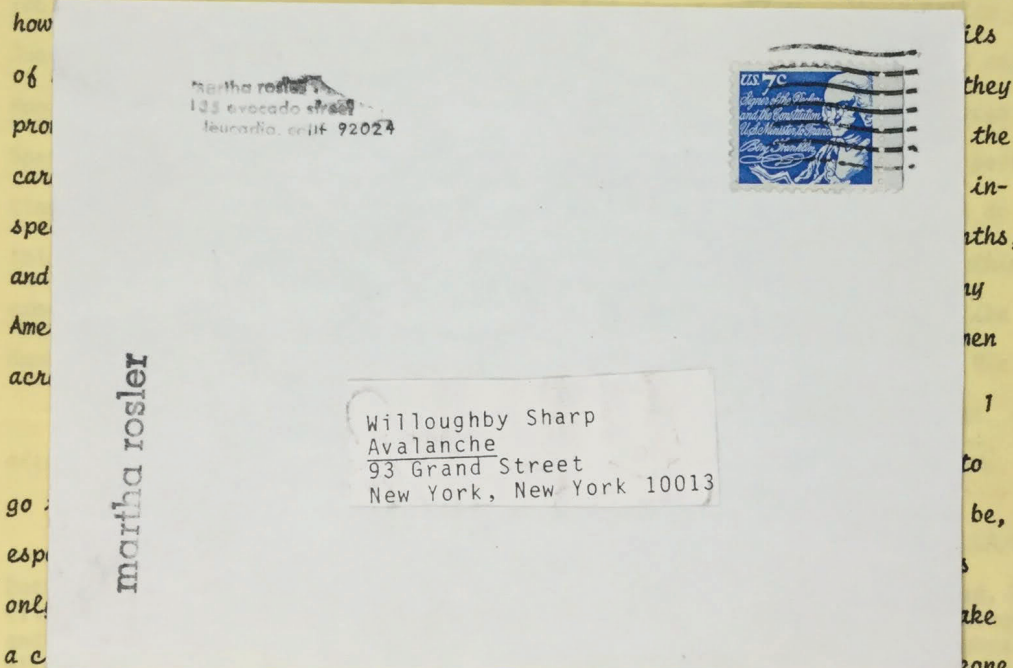
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ho Hicimos un trato y acabé de pagarles a los hombres. Era
of verano y los niños estaban en el campo y la patrona se fué de
pr visita por unos días. Estaba leyendo en mi cuarto una noche
ca cuando tocó el patrón en la puerta. Le dije que esperara porque
sp tenía que vestirme pero de todos modos entró y se recargó sobre
an mí. Traté de escapar, me agarró fuerte y peleamos. Estaba tratando de besarme y me tiró a la cama. Rompió mi ropa interior. Empezó a forzarme pero me zafé y corrí al baño y cerré la puerta con candado. Insistía casi tumbando la puerta y yo comencé a llorar. Aún después de que acabó tenía miedo de abrir la puerta pensando que él podría estar escondido en cualquier parte en el cuarto. Sabía que no tenía esperanza de ayuda con la polecía porque yo era ilegal y porque este tipo de gente tiene plata suficiente para zafarse. Finalmente oí la puerta de enfrente cerrar, el carro prendió y se fué. Salí corriendo a mi cuarto. Recogí todas mi cosas y me fuí. Tome un camión al centro de San Diego y me pasé la noche esperando el camión a la frontera.

Después de este incidente he conocido a 4 mujeres que han sido violadas por sus patrones, una de ellas salió embarazada. Después de todo tuve suerte.

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1

I was terrified--I was sure I'd be caught, and I was also very afraid to go to a foreign country. I knew only a few words of English. How lonely I'd be, especially without my kids! Many women cross every day with the mica, a pass only for shopping. They take the Greyhound to downtown San Diego and then take a city bus to work. The Greyhound is very expensive, almost \$1. I heard someone say that the city wanted to have a bus to the border for 25¢, but Greyhound got the court to stop them. If I went across every day I could be with my kids at night, but the ones who do that are always tired--working for the patrona all day and caring for their families at night. But anyway, the men said I could only get a job living in with a family. It would pay less but at least I wouldn't have to pass the border, with its inspectors, every day. They are unpredictable, like jaguars; they let you pass every day, every week, and then all of a sudden they take your card away.

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The men got me a job with a very rich family, the boss was a business executive. The patrona was kind, really. She showed me how things worked in her house and helped me with English. She said she expected that I would only stay about 8 months with her, long enough to learn English and how to dress and do my hair, so I could get an office job. I was so surprised! I was just thanking God to have a job. They expected me to work 7 days a week, but when I told them about Rosita and Juanito they gave me a day and a half off. The woman gave me a book to study called Home Maid Spanish Cook Book. The book said "Our aim is not to teach the Mexican or Spanish speaking maid how to make her own native dishes. She can do that to perfection and without our help. We want to have her help Y O U in the kitchen. To do things Y O U R way." The book has drawings of an American kitchen with everything named in Spanish. This book also gives recipes for typical American foods, like Hamburger Sandwiches, Hot Dogs, Tuna Casserole, Steak, Meat Loaf, and Apple Pie.

It tells how to make things for the bosses' parties, like Caviar Crackers, and also how to make drinks. My bosses' favorites were Martinis and Old Fashioneds. 3

PEANUT BUTTER & JELLY SANDWICH

Butter 2 slices of bread. Spread one slice generously with peanut butter and top with a layer of jelly. Cover with remaining slice of bread; cut in half. Serve with a large glass of milk, for a hearty lunch.

EMPAREDADO DE JALEA Y MANTEQUILLA DE CACAHUATE

Unte de mantequilla 2 rebanadas de pan. Unte generosamente una rebanada con mantequilla de cacahuete y luego con la jalea. Cubrala con la otra rebanada de pan y corte a la mitad (diagonal). Sirva con un vaso grande de leche.

The book has a list of phrases in English and Spanish, like:

Sweep the kitchen floor.
scrub
wax and polish

Barra el piso de la cocina.
Estregue
encere y saque brillo

We like breakfast served at -----.
Have you ever shopped in a super-market?

Nos gusto que nos sirva el desayuno a las -----.
Ha ido usted al super-mercado?

etcetera, etcetera, and it has a phrase that I heard often:

Will you cook a Mexican dinner for us sometime?
Nos cocina una comida mexicana para nosotros alguna vez?

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There was a lot to do with three kids messy like pigs, the huge house, and many parties to clean up after. The senora tried to speak to me in Spanish, but her accent was so bad that I could hardly understand her. The senor hardly spoke to me at all, except to ask me when I was going to make chile con carne, which isn't a Mexican dish, or to ask me when I was going to make them some tamales. I'd pretend I didn't understand. I didn't want to make tamales for them. I didn't expect to do so much cooking, but I would not last if I complained. So I made tacos. I don't know which I disliked more, cooking the boring American foods they loved or the tacos once a week. My sister told me about a girl from our village who was taken to Laguna Beach by a couple to care for their children, but all day they had her cooking and cleaning. They had her cook very spicy Mexican dishes for their friends, and then they would bring her out to show to the guests. She was very young and alone and couldn't speak English. She committed suicide--she killed herself.

Well, my patrones let me eat what I wanted when they were done, and I never ate so much meat in my life! I made \$30 a week, half of it went to the men, my room was tiny and badly lit, but I had work, and I was eating regularly.

5

We settled into a routine and I finished paying the men. It was spring and the kids were in camp and the patrona went on a visit for a few days. I was reading in my room one night when the patron knocked on the door. I told him to wait because I had to get dressed but he came in anyway and leaned over me. I tried to escape, he grabbed me and we struggled. He was trying to kiss me and shove me onto the bed. He ripped my underwear. He began to force me but I pulled away and ran to the bathroom and locked the door. He pounded, almost breaking the door and I began to cry. Even after he stopped I was afraid to open the door thinking he could be hidden somewhere in the room. I knew I had no hope of help from the police because I was illegal and because that type of guy has enough money to get himself off. Finally I heard the front door close, the car start up and drive away. I ran to my room. I gathered all my things and ran off. I took a bus downtown and spent the night waiting for the bus to the border.

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Since that incident I have met four women who were raped by their bosses, one of them was made pregnant. So I was lucky after all.

6

After a while I went back to San Diego with my mica. This time I knew to look in the newspaper to find a job. I got one with a professor and his wife in La Jolla. They paid me only \$25 a week but the house was smaller and there were only 2 kids, who spent all their time before the TV. There were many statues and paintings and beautiful rugs and much to dust and vacuum. They had a lot of old pottery and statues made by the Indians of Mexico. The food was better, they appreciated my Mexican food, and so I didn't mind cooking so much. All these gringos want to eat the food of the poor. The wife smiled at me a lot, but she spoke to me as though I were a child or very stupid. They also had all the "Spanish Maid" books.

These people were very bad about paying me. Once they got 5 weeks behind and when I asked them to pay they said they couldn't because they had a lot of bills. I got angry and told them I was going to call the police, which was ridiculous because they got angry and said they were going to call immigration. I was terrified and left the job.

7

My next job was also in La Jolla, with a doctor and his family, for \$55 a week! I had to cook all the meals, take care of the kids, do all the cleaning, and stay 7 days a week, so I couldn't see my kids. I spent so much money calling them on the phone! After almost a year I heard of a Mr. So-and-so who would pay \$35 a week for someone to live there 5 days a week. He hired 2 of us and made an arrangement where we bought all the food with our salaries, we fed and cleaned up after him and his friends, and he let us take other jobs during the day. I met some awfully mean people that way. I don't know which are worse, the ones who are real demanding or the kind ones who think they are giving you charity. By then I had a reputation for making good Mexican food for parties, so I did that as well as cleaning for people.

But 6 weeks ago the senor came into our room while we were undressing and started getting fresh, so we left and moved to a cheap hotel downtown. I make \$100 a week cooking and cleaning for different people, 6 days a week. That's a lot of money,

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but I work very hard. And I'm independent.

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Stuffed Chili Peppers with Sauce for a party

30 green chilis	tomato sauce
3 pounds of cream cheese	6 pounds of tomatoes
1 pound of yellow cheese	1 pound of raisins
1 dozen eggs, separated	½ pound of almonds, blanched
1 cup of raisins	3 cloves of garlic
flour	2 ounces of ginger
oil for frying	1 ounce of dried, ground chilis
1 onion, chopped	1 pound of sugar
8 cups of tomato sauce	1 quart of vinegar
oregano, salt and pepper	salt

Broil the peppers over the fire until the skin blisters. Wrap them in a cloth for 10 minutes, then peel them. Slit one side, remove seeds and veins. Leave the stems. Stuff them with cheese and raisins. Beat the egg whites until they are thick. Add the yolks and beat again until they are fluffy. Add the salt. Dredge the chilis and dip them in the egg. Fry them until they are golden. Fry the onion and add the tomato sauce you have prepared earlier. Add the oregano and the salt and pepper. Cook over a low flame for 5 minutes.

(To make the tomato sauce, cut up the tomatoes, add a little water, cook for ½ hour. Put through a sieve. Grind the raisins, nuts, garlic, ginger, and chilis. Add to the tomatoes. Add sugar, vinegar, salt. Cook until thick.) 9

There is a woman in La Jolla who tried to organize the maids, cooks, and gardeners, the legal ones, because even they make less than \$2 an hour without any job security. If they get sick or their bosses go on vacation there is no work. I have even gone to some of their meetings, and it was there that I found out various things. I learned that the inspectores no longer pay \$50 for information about illegals and that they do not care about the women, only the men. Some of them have illegal maids themselves. But even so, we all know that for each one of us there are hundreds of hungry and desperate people in Mexico who would gladly take our jobs for half the pay. Especially now, with such hard times. I was one of them.

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Now that I'm independent I could have spent more time with my kids but two weeks ago my big fear was realized because they took away my mica. They took 20 or 30 away from us while I was there, all at once, without asking any questions. They said we would get them back after they were checked, but almost never are they returned and now they are hard to get. I missed work for days, and finally I paid \$50 to those men with cars. This time they passed a bunch of us, one at a time, from one man to the other along the border. There were so many snakes that I thought I'd get bitten before I made it across.

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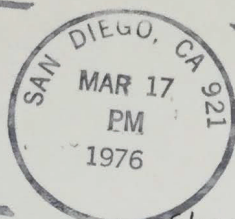
Now I'm looking for a job with a family that will let me bring my kids. I know I'll make less, but it's worth it. I have a friend who is marrying a gringo she does not love, but he wants a good Mexican wife and cook, and he will adopt her daughter. I would rather live in Mexico but there is no work by which I can support myself and my kids. If I get a job in the U.S. where I can keep my kids I won't have to face the border troubles. It is true I will still have the other things to worry about, like other people's messes, or the senoras who ask me, sometimes in English and sometimes in Spanish, am I going to cook them a Mexican dinner? Or like their husbands, who don't ask but who wish to get from me something else.

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martha rosler
r.f.d. 168-z
del mar, calif. 92014



Willoughby Sharp
Liza Béar
Avalanche

93 Grand St
New York, NY 10013

martha rosler

