

The day was going to be a hot one. Veronica could already feel the heat rising from the paving stones in the tiny veranda beside her house. She liked to sit in this sunny location early in the morning before she got ready to go to her job at the law-office in town. The house where Veronica lived was just outside the town of Satillo, in the Mexican Province of Sierra Leon. By April, the daily peak temperatures in this high desert region were steadily above the 90 degrees mark of the thermometer hanging on the adobe wall in a shady corner of the garden. Even this early in Spring, the cheerful blossoms on the Impatiens in the garden beds already made a rainbow border for the veranda. Veronica noticed that the little flower beds looked really good this morning, completely free of the weeds that usually came up and mingled with the flowers at this time of the year. She did not remember having weeded the beds recently. Perhaps Hernando had done this before he left for his job across the border in the oil fields of Galveston, in Texas.

Thinking of Hernando made Veronica sigh, and a thoughtful frown hooded her face for a moment. Today was the young couple's first wedding anniversary. They had been married for exactly one year this morning. But, they would not be together to celebrate this joyous day. Hernando was a chemical engineer. The only jobs that were available for engineering graduates in his area were in the big petroleum refineries that dotted the coast line of South Texas. So, when the opportunity of a job had presented itself the previous month, the couple had decided that it was the only thing to do. It meant they would only see each other every three months or four months, when Hernando would be able to get enough time off to make the trip home to Satillo. And Veronica understood that this was unavoidable, given the scarcity of jobs. But she thought that Hernando would have at least done something to mark this day, their first wedding anniversary, even if he couldn't be here in person. However, so far this week, no special letter, or small gift, or even a telephone call had arrived to let Veronica know that her young husband was thinking of her. And this made her very sad, indeed.



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About a half -hour later, as Veronica was putting the key into the ignition of her car for the drive into the city, she noticed that the brand new Chevy Nova, a wedding present from her parents, the bright yellow paint of the new car glistened in the morning sun. It looked really good! Usually, by this point in April, the pollen from the long-needle pine trees in that arid region of Mexico completely covered everyone's car with a green, filmy jacket. There must have been a freak rain shower the night before which had washed off the pollen from the car. Strange, Veronica thought. She didn't remember hearing anything like a thunder shower the previous night. She must have been sleeping particularly deeply.

At her desk during the day, Veronica worked on the various legal briefs and correspondence that her bosses gave her. Her job as a para-legal meant that she was responsible for much of the correspondence that flowed between the lawyers in her firm and their clients. But even as Veronica worked, she kept one eye on her office door. She half expected to see a florist bursting through the door with some flowers from her husband. Oh, she knew that flowers were dreadfully expensive, and the young couple was on a tight budget. And even though it would have been wasteful for Hernando to spend that kind of money, Veronica nevertheless hoped that he would have done *something* to remember her on this special day. But, no flowers arrived.

There was another surprise though. After lunch, when Veronica came back to her desk she found a cupcake with a single candle in it, and a note which had been signed by all of the office staff wishing her "Happy Anniversary!" This really surprised her, since she didn't remember telling any of them about what today was. She must have mentioned it to one of her colleagues and forgotten.

That evening, after fixing a solitary meal for herself in the little kitchen of the house in Satillo, Veronica poured herself a small glass of the dry red wine that was produced in that region, and she wandered out onto the tiny patio. The fire-flies had begun to rise from the tall grass at the end of the yard where the insects spent the hot Spring days.

These creatures came out at this time of early evening and began their frolick in the yard, twinkling like out-of-season Christmas lights. Now Veronica was desperately sad. She and Hernando would usually share a glass of wine together here on the veranda after dinner to conclude their day. A few tears like little snails began to crawl down her cheeks. Veronica missed Hernando so much!

She noticed that a wine glass was there on the table at which she and her young husband normally sat after dinner to take in the evening smells and sounds, while they enjoyed a glass of wine together and talked softly of the events of the day. Veronica thought she must have placed the glass there the evening before and forgotten it. At this point Veronica was terribly hurt that Hernando hadn't done anything to remember their special day.

Late that night, when Veronica sadly and tiredly crawled into bed, as she reached to adjust her pillow, her hand touched the edge of something. She pulled out a huge, pink card from under the pillow where it had been hidden. On it, in Hernando's hand-writing was written, "To my Beloved." Excitedly, Veronica tore open the envelope in which the card was placed. On the front of the card were some red, yellow, and green butterflies, and when she opened the card, here's what she read inside:

My beloved. I am writing this to you before I have to leave you, so that you will have some testament of my love for you when I cannot be there with you. I am giving this into the care of your brother, since as you know I trust him to be faithful to my instructions.

By now, you will have received from me all the evidences of my love for you that I have organized. I arranged for the neighbors' son from across the street to weed the garden beds. I know how special it is for you to have your morning coffee on our Veranda, so I made sure that the flower beds would be especially beautiful for you on this glorious day. I also had the young man wash your car for you last night. Your parents were so kind to give this to us as our wedding present, and I wanted to make sure you knew how much their kindness means to me, particularly today of all days. You may wonder how your colleagues came to find out about the date of our anniversary. I confess that it was me. I called your boss, and asked if they might do something special for you today since I could not be here. I also had the young man from across the street mow the yard while you were at work today. The freshly mown grass makes it easier to see the fire-flies at night, and I know how they make you smile. I also asked your sister, Celita to come to our house this afternoon and place a wine glass on the veranda table before she hid this card, so that you would think of me as you sat in our special place this evening.

I'm so sorry that I cannot be with you in person, beloved. But all these things I have arranged, just for you in order to surround you with proofs of my love for you, until the day when we can finally be together. Until that day, never stop believing in my great love for you.

As the woman read these last words, she bowed her head. How incredible, she thought, that I could go through an entire day without seeing all the things that he has done, just for me, to prove just how much he loves me.

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen. JWB+, 04-03-16



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