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## The Missing Man

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# The Missing Man

Julio walked the wall he had just made. It was cinder block. A grey and light looking wall. It was his custom to walk his walls when he was done. That isn't to say that he was balancing on his wall. That would be stupid and might ruin the job. He just walked up and down next to it a couple of times to make sure he hadn't missed a spot. There had been a space in one wall that he'd built on the top floor of a small building. How he didn't notice the opening was a mystery to his boss. Julio didn't wonder why the opening was there, he knew he was capable of this kind of incompetence. That is why he walked his wall his light looking cinder block wall; to make sure he hadn't skipped an opening.

There was no hole this time but that didn't mean he hadn't left one. Julio had a hard time seeing his mistakes. When he missed the spot on the top floor of that small building his boss thought that it must have been difficult for Julio to create a space in his walls. But Julio was ready for the complaint. He replied "But sir. Do you not have anything missing? It would be strange to me if you did not."

His walking the walls he had just made was a small concession to his foreman who expected him to be more than himself. He kept this understanding clearly in his head while he walked.

When he was done walking his wall and was sure that his foreman would have no complaints, he looked to see what time it was. His silver watch tucked in his pocket, couldn't tell him. He pulled it out anyway, even though it had been some time since it had worked, and watched the low afternoon sun reflect off the watch face and onto his wall. All that told him was that it was hot.

"Hey Julio," his foreman yelled. "It's four forty-five. You got some time left." Julio was sure he was done for the day, but made busy until his boss was sure of it too.

"Okay Julio. You can go. No holes in your wall today?"

"No. No holes." Julio was ready to leave. And he did.

Julio walked, a different walk, home. He walked, slow and comfortable, down the street a few blocks. He was not in the city but in a neighborhood. Clean but not nice houses passed on either side of him. Actually, he passed them. He didn't wonder about them, and he didn't care who lived in them. He wasn't even curious about a boy who walked up to him on his walk and asked, "Where you goin'?" Julio didn't break his stride. He just said, "Home," and kept walking. It wasn't until he came to the end of the neighborhood, where he saw a stone mason putting rock up against a wall a light cinder block wall, that he quit his stride.

"Excuse me sir." Julio said. "What are you doing?"

The stone mason turned. Julio saw the red tendons in the mason's neck flare as he turned from a crouch to see who was asking him the question.

"What are you doing sir?" Julio repeated.

Julio waited some time for the mason to understand his simple question. He answered, "Putting a stone facing on this wall. "

"It looks heavy," Julio said to the mason.

"I suppose you'd rather I just left these blocks showing. "

"That could be nice, " Julio said. Julio then turned to go. He knew the mason had to cover up the cinder blocks and he didn't like to argue.

"Hey you," the mason called after him. "You retarded or something?"

"No," Julio said.

"Where the hell you goin? You don't look like you're from around here, " the mason said .

"Home. " Julio confessed for what he hoped would be the last time.

It was only a mile outside of town, Julio's house. He was already more than half way there when he passed the mason and left the neat neighborhood. What was left of his trip home he spent walking through a field organized into neat piles of disguardred concrete chunks, and twisted, used construction steel. He could see the edge of the houses he'd just left behind, and just ahead he saw the woods that edged the field of scraps.

It was hard to see Julio's house from anywhere beyond ten feet, unless you were in the air. He had built his home in a recession in the middle of the field. Nothing grew in or around the recession. The field was covered with long dry weeds, but in Julio's crater, nothing grew.

He came to the edge and looked in. He saw his house. He smiled as he noticed that, just like the day before, his house seemed different. It filled him with pride.

Julio had built his house out of the same cinder blocks that he loved at work. He had collected them from scraps left in the field. He used broken ones, and ones that had too much cement on them, and every now and then a block from work that looked like a perfect fit. He also borrowed little mortar for stability .

Like Julio's walls at work, he had often left spaces in his home. With these walls, however, he had done it methodically. For every block that he placed, he left an opening. The walls of his house looked like standing checker boards.

Julio stepped through the doorway. It contained the door which was the only solid portion of his house's design. His house was as unique inside as out, except that the evening and morning light patterned light across his walls. It kept him from pinning up even a calendar inside. calendar might disrupt his light's design.

He was guilty of putting up a sheet on occasion though. It screened the light from one side and altered the pattern on the opposite wall. He thought this was cheating though and he didn't do it often.

It was as he had left it this morning, save that everything he loved about it, the light designs, and where he chose to sit, had changed. So Julio picked a spot on his floor and looked around him. "It 's good to be home," he said.

And the sun patterned light on his face as the spring breeze brushed across his lap.

*Tom Ream*