



VOLUME I

SHORT STORIES

OF

LOVE, HOPE,

AND

LAUGHTER

CARLOS SALINAS

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*Short Stories of Love, Hope,
and Laughter
Volume I*

Written by
Carlos Salinas

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To my loving family, especially my wife, Claudia, whose love and support made this book possible. To my mom, who always encouraged me to write and to chase my dreams. To all of my awesome friends: Jessica, Lisa, Veronica, Gloria, Joe, Bruce, and many more, thanks for reading my work and cheering me on. Not to mention the writing supplies! This book would not have been possible without all of you. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Foreword

I hope you enjoy these short stories and mark your favorites for re-reading. My aim in writing these stories was not only to entertain but to make the reader think. It is a wonderful human experience to read words written by someone else and be able to connect on the experience created by them. Feel free to reach out to me through any of the social media links located at the beginning and end of this eBook. I always love hearing from readers because without you we wouldn't be much! Also, please consider leaving a book review on Amazon, Goodreads, Smashwords or any other place from which it was purchased. It really helps we independent authors! Thank you kindly and I'll see you on page one.

Carlos Salinas

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About the Author: Carlos Salinas

Got the Flow: The Hip-Hop Diary of a Young Rapper (An Excerpt) Written and Illustrated
by Carlos Salinas

The Girl at the Bakery Shop

The cars hustled by on the narrow streets in Latin America. It was truly amazing for the observer to see how cars could move so efficiently, coming within a finger's width of touching another car, but not doing so. Even more impressive, it was raining.

He waited patiently for the cars to move and, while keeping an eye on the other streets feeding into that one, finally crossed the street.

He had almost everything he needed; all the major necessities for living were in his heavy bags already.

He now stood directly in front of the bakery; the sweet smell of the pies and cookies made his already growling stomach roar even louder. This was the last stop before he would get home and make something to eat.

As he entered the bakery, he noticed there was no one at the register. The smell was even more alluring inside! The sweet cherry tarts were whispering sweet things from behind the glass door and the cinnamon rolls were batting their eyes at him!

Finally, a girl came out from the back door and greeted him with a kind smile, "What can I get for you?"

"How much are those?" he asked pointing to small vanilla cakes in a glass display case on the counter. He was surprised by the low price. "Let me have three, please. And those?" he pointed to square cakes with an amber-colored jelly on top.

"The apple squares?"

"Yes," he smiled. Again he was surprised at the bargain.

As he set his bags on the ground to get his money, he couldn't help noticing that she kept staring at the apple square cakes. He was not a wealthy young man, but there was no hesitation.

"Could I invite you to share an apple square with me?" he asked.

"Oh! No, thank you," she blushed shyly.

"Please? Don't be shy!"

"Oh, no, I couldn't," she avoided his eyes.

"Well, then, for later," he smiled as he took an apple square out from the bag and placed it in front of her on the counter.

She looked down and smiled. "Thank you."

He nodded with kind eyes, picked up his bags, and was out of the bakery. With that apple square, he did not simply feed her for that one day—but fed her love for people for the rest of her life.

What These Old Eyes Saw

As I sat there feeling the warm vapor from the coffee caressing my face, I saw them walk in. They could not have been older than seventeen and were utterly oblivious to the world around them. They quietly sat down in a booth near my table as I took a bite of my cake and watched them. They laughed and laughed. His eyes danced with hers in graceful steps, to a melody only they could hear. His lips kept kissing her hand caringly as he whispered something in her ear, making her giggle.

They murmured things back and forth to each other, interrupted only by their laughter. Their tenderness with each other was something people much older than they could only hope to have someday. It's funny how we think that puppy love is an immature thing; maybe we all already know how to love but forget when we get our hearts broken. Some of us learn to love again with the right person, but perhaps too many of us never find that person that could help us learn how to love again.

I keenly observed them from my table for no other reason than sheer astonishment. How could two young people know how to love each other with such deep love? It was visible through only the smallest gestures, the smallest of words whispered in the softest of voices, the mildest of caresses given in stolen moments.

It started raining outside, as if the skies had conspired with the two young hearts. They didn't stay very long; they got up and walked to the door. Before stepping out, he covered her with his jacket, then walked beside her in the rain, still smiling.

I had to record what I had just seen. Searching my person, I found a piece of paper in my pocket; a list of some sort. I took out my pen and began writing:

As I sat there feeling the warm vapor...

Gold or Aluminum?

The man walked into the jewelry store. His eyes strolled over the vast collection of rings. There were some that caught his eye; he had enough money for any ring he chose.

"May I see that one?" he asked the attendant, pointing to a gold ring with 3 diamonds encrusted in the center. "It's beautiful—I'll take it." The size also fit well. He paid and left with his purchase.

Another man walked in and his eyes gleamed over the large collection of precious metals. His eyes were fixed upon one in particular. He had enough money for any one that he wanted, much more money than the first man. He motioned to the attendant to take it out for closer observation. With a surprised look, the attendant took out the ring and walked over to help another customer.

"I want this one. It's perfect," the man said after a few minutes.

"Very well, Sir. What size?"

"Six, thank you."

“Very well, Sir, aluminum in size six. It will be ready in two days.”

Even though it may be attainable, not every person wishes for the same things in life.

A Fable: The Ant, the Bee, the Firefly, and the Worm

One day, the lowly worm invited his friends to eat with him. Among his friends were an ant, a bee, and a firefly.

After their meal, there began a discussion of who was the most important based on their abilities.

“I am the most organized and my army can move things many times its size and weight,” said the ant.

“I am the most important, for I make honey, the sweetest of all things, and I can deliver a fierce sting,” said the bee.

“I can light up the way myself on the darkest of nights; therefore, I am the most important!” exclaimed the firefly.

The lowly worm remained silent throughout all of this.

He finally spoke, “And I am the wisest of all because I have friends that can do all of these things.”

My Father and Me

I remember being nine years old and walking through the forest by our house with my dad. It was filled with mystery and seemed to go on forever. It was always an adventure! I always felt safe because I knew my dad was there if I faced any real danger.

“Why is grass green, dad?” I remember asking.

“Because it has something called chlorophyll. It helps plants make their own food.”

“Like we make sandwiches?”

“Ha-ha, kind of like that,” he rubbed my head.

I came across a dead bird and was very curious as to why it died and why ants were crawling all over it.

“What happened to him?” I asked.

“His life ended.”

“Why?”

“Because every living thing’s life has to end sometime.” My father was very calm talking about an entirely new idea to me.

“Us too?” I asked in a fearful tone.

“Everyone, Son; you *and* me, that’s life. But don’t worry, it won’t happen for a long time.” He smiled and hugged me.

I felt an ugly, empty feeling in the pit of my stomach. My dad was my hero and I had just learned that he would one day leave me. How was a child supposed to react to that?

I remember asking him questions about everything: why birds flew instead of ran, who named the animals, why were trees so tall and why they lived longer than us, why fish couldn’t talk, and why some animals died when others lived. I guess I was already thinking life’s most meaningful questions in a kid’s innocent ways.

My father answered all of my questions with noble patience and explained that each animal had a role in the world and they just knew what to do.

“So they just know?” I asked.

“That’s right; just like you knew how to cry when you were little, and just how mom knew what to do to make you stop crying.”

“I love Mom.”

“I love Mom, too.”

I thought for a bit, just staring at the grass and the river. I saw a flower growing by the river bank and it reminded me of a girl at school that always wore a flower in her hair. “What about girls?”

He chuckled, “What about them?”

“Why are they here?” Looking back now I realize what a silly boy I was, ha-ha.

“Ha-ha, one day you will see why, but what makes you ask?”

“There’s a girl that always wears a flower in her hair at school. She’s very ... ”

“ ... Pretty?” he asked. My father had figured me out.

“Yes,” I said kicking rocks into the river, avoiding his eyes.

“So she’s pretty special, huh?” he asked kicking bigger rocks into the river with me.

“I guess,” I responded, trying to sound indifferent. “How do you let a girl know that she’s pretty?”

My father thought for some time and kicked a few more rocks into the river. He finally spoke,

“How would you show Mom?”

“Buy her flowers?”

“You can do that ... or you can just pick ‘em,” he smiled as he answered.

I understood. Now, as a grown man, I can see all that my father taught me. I would not be the man—the husband and father—I am now if it had not been for him. The other day my son asked me what we would do together that day, to which I replied, “I know a forest that is filled with mystery and it seems to go on forever.”

Small Price to Pay

The young boy had always bought his friend things: food, candy, drinks, and more things. He

eventually started to realize how much he gave and how little, if any, he got back. And it wasn't that the other boy *couldn't* offer anything, as everyone can give *something*. This bothered him so much that he finally brought it up in a conversation with his grandfather.

"Grandpa, what do you do when you give and give and give and the person doesn't do anything for you in return?"

The grandfather sat in deep thought for a few seconds. "How much do you think you have spent on this person?"

"Not much, really."

"Then consider it a small price to pay to discover what kind of person he really is."

Fable: The Brightly-Colored Frog and the Snake

Resting by the lake, the brightly-colored frog was approached by a snake.

"Are you poisonous?" asked the snake.

The frog, thinking quickly and fearing for his life, hurriedly replied, "Yes! Of course!"

The snake, wondering if the frog may have lied, decided against eating it. He knew there were more non-poisonous frogs and fish on the other side of the lake.

When the snake had gone, the frog relaxed and continued resting by the lake. A hummingbird, having seen all this, asked the frog, "Are you truly poisonous?"

Seeing no harm in a hummingbird, the frog confided, "No, I am not, but if I had been honest I would be dead."

The Old Fisherman

The fisherman loaded his small boat and set out into the restless sea; the sun would be rising any minute. His silver hair would be glistening in the morning's first rays.

The other fishermen, who were fishing in groups, pointed and laughed when they saw the old man's small boat being tossed around by the powerful tides.

They continued to mock him as he prepared his simple bait: shrimp. He carefully baited his hook and dropped his line into the sea.

"You're not going to catch anything with that!" they jeered.

"If you catch anything, it may be bigger than your boat!" said another.

The old man quietly went about his work and within minutes had a fish. It was not huge, but it was the first catch of the day.

"That is all you will catch today, old man!" the other fisherman laughed at the size of the fish.

He caught five more fish than another six. The other fishermen were stunned by the amount of fish the old man had caught. The small boat, now full of fish, was being weighed down much more than before.

As his tiny boat neared the dock, he looked back at the other fishermen, who were watching him keenly, and smiled.

The Old Man and Death

Death approached the old man in his bed one night. He awoke just as Death was entering the room.

“Hello, Death.”

“Hello, Walter. You seem very calm to see me.”

“I am calm, I was expecting you.”

“Really, now? You are not the least bit worried that I’m here to take you?”

“No ... ”

“And why is that?”

“Because all you can take is my body. I know my good deeds will live on through the memories of those that love me. So in a way, I am immortal.” He smiled, got out of his bed, and walked towards the door.

Big Hands, Small Hands

The funeral had been three months ago and David still felt as if his world had just ended. Nothing made sense or mattered anymore; school had become a long, boring lecture in a language he didn’t understand, his friends were just bothersome, and everything he cared about before seemed pointless.

His grandfather approached him one evening when he was staring blankly out of the window.

“I know you miss your mom; I miss my daughter. I want you to know that life goes on, and you can be happy again.”

David’s eyes watered with both grief and fury. *Why would I feel happy again? I lost the most important person in my life. And why isn’t Grandpa sadder than he is?* The guilt from the thought of smiling, regardless of how long after the funeral it was, was a terrible weight to carry, especially on the shoulders of a 10-year-old boy.

“I have an idea of what may help ease your pain,” his grandfather said as he sat at the piano. David had seen him tuning it earlier that week. “The soothing sound and feeling of playing will help distract your mind and soothe your heart.”

David did not want to be disrespectful, as his mother always told him to mind his manners. He sat next to his grandfather on the bench, watching as the old man's fingers danced effortlessly over the keys.

After a short demonstration, the grandfather asked him to imitate his finger movements. David grew frustrated after failing for the fifth time.

"I can't—I can't!" David cried helplessly.

"Sure you can, just keep trying."

"I don't want to. My hands are too small; you can do it because you have big hands!"

The grandfather sat there looking at the keys and thinking about David's frustration. "You know, a few years ago I had a little girl who wanted to learn piano but always complained that her hands were too small. After hours and hours of practice, she was finally able to do that little thing I just showed you. If she can, you can, too," he smiled.

Frustrated, David shot up from the piano bench and ran out to ride his bike down the street. He left in such a hurry and pedaled so fast that the driver had no time to react and swerve out of the way. The small car collided with David's bike and sent the small boy flying for several feet.

II

The bright white light pierced David's eyes when he awoke. He heard beeping, plastic objects being moved around, and people speaking indistinctly. Finally, a nurse walked over to him and looked down on him.

"You're going to be fine, but you gave us quite a scare," she spoke softly and in a sweet tone.

"What happened?" David only remembered the piano lesson and being on his bike.

"You had an accident on your bike, but you will be fine. Just a small fracture in your ulna, but it will heal very quickly because you are so young. You'll be playing baseball in no time."

"I don't play baseball."

"Well, what do you do?"

"I don't really like sports. My grandfather wants me to learn piano."

"I love playing the piano; it's very calming," she spoke as she checked his injured arm. "A long time ago, I had a great teacher for piano; he's the reason I can play well. He never gave up on me even though I always told him that I couldn't play because my hands were too small."

Between Death and Life

Chapter I

"He's gone! No! I can't believe he's gone!" I wailed as I clutched my husband's chest.

My William's body still had a temperature that matched that of a warm bath, but nowhere near that of a living person. My son and I looked into each other's tearful eyes and held one another. I couldn't believe it was actually happening.

Soft whimpers came from both of us as we watched the doctors do their work.

"Clear!" *Jolt!* "Clear!" *Jolt!*

"Clear!" *Jolt!* "Clear!" *Jolt!*

"Clear!" *Jolt!* "Clear!" *Jolt!*

My son Michael jumped out of his skin every time, with his curly brown hair swaying in front of his glum face. I wish he hadn't seen it.

With an apologetic look, the lead doctor looked at me and said, "I'm sorry." His stare was endless. I felt my heart sink into my stomach and my son had become numb to my increasingly tight grasp.

He always took care of us, I thought. He always brought in wood from the forest to make a fire and keep us warm. Yeah, we had electric heating, but his fire was from the heart and made the house feel like a home. He loved us more than anyone else ever could. I remember once asking him to get me coffee from the market after he had been working all day on his feet. It wasn't easy being a lumberjack. With a big smile, he cloaked himself with his jacket, which had not even been taken completely off, smiled and kissed me as he said, "I'll be back." I hope I was good to him. Every time he brought back his catch from a fishing trip, I would cook it that same day just the way he liked it. His pipe had always been cleaned and tobacco was never hard to find. I laid out the news section of the newspaper, his favorite, across his favorite corner of the couch. Now he was gone. Who would take care of us the way he had?

The doctors hurriedly collected the useless equipment that failed to save my William.

"Please take your time, Ma'am," the young nurse said to me in a sweet voice. I could tell she didn't know what expression to show; she simply hid her face.

The doctors collected everything in such a calm manner; they didn't seem to care that a man's—my husband's life—had been lost a few moments ago. What nerve—but I had to be strong, for my son. I felt my arm rise with the deep heaves of his chest and shoulders as he mourned his father.

Who would teach him to hunt? Who would teach him how to love—actually, he knew how to love. He learned by watching his father.

The room shrank as the doctors left. The floor now seemed to reflect all the light of the world and made it difficult to keep my eyes open.

"Our Father, thou art in heaven ..." I began the prayer, while my son clasped my William's left hand—I his right. No priest could have made it as meaningful as we had.

Chapter II

"Clear!" *Jolt!* "Clear!" *Jolt!*

"Clear!" *Jolt!* "Clear!" *Jolt!*

"Clear!" *Jolt!* "Clear!" *Jolt!*

That's what I remember first. My father had been lying there without moving for such a long time. I was scared. He looked so peaceful: his glasses nestled on his nose, eyes softly closed; it looked as if he were sleeping. The violent spasms of his body caused by the defibrillator's shocks brought me back to reality—my father was dead.

My mother held me close as I tried to pray inside my head. I was too embarrassed to pray in front of everyone, especially the doctors. I felt somehow that they would not like someone praying for help other than theirs. *We're saving your father, kid, not God*, is what I thought they would think. *Our father, thwart in heaven, how low be thy name, thy king dumb come, on earth ...*

I hoped God would listen to me and forgive me for not knowing the prayer fully by heart. I remember seeing my mother's eyes, swollen with tears, stay connected to my father's. She was looking for any movement—any sign of life.

When the doctor said "I'm sorry" I felt the air leave my body; no matter how hard I sucked, no air would come into my lungs. I felt numbness. My weight seemed to have tripled and it made my knees buckle—I couldn't support my own body anymore.

I have to be strong for her, I thought to myself. My mother's pleas for her husband could be seen in her eyes. They pleaded with death to allow her one more day with my father. I still can't get that picture out of my head. She was in so much pain.

The doctors and nurses helped clean up around the body. Some smiled at me, but I don't remember if I smiled back—I don't care if I did or not. They all avoided looking at us in the eyes, to avoid the awkwardness, and out of respect. They were kind, very kind, but we were not concerned with kindness at that time. *Why did my father die? Who took him from me? The God I just prayed to? I was thankful that I at least got to know my father. Some boys never know their father. I did.*

Chapter III

It never gets easier. I lost another patient today; an older gentleman with a wife and young son. *Why the hell couldn't I help him? As long as I have been doing this ...* It doesn't get any easier with time, let me tell you. We tried everything, the defibrillator was the last resort, and it didn't change a damn thing. I remember everything so clearly.

"Dr. Thomas! You have a patient that just came in—seems like a heart attack—he is in unit 8," one of my nurses informed me.

I couldn't move fast enough; I ignored all other insignificant requests that doctors get when hospital staff sees them: coffee preferences, phone calls, family calls, etc.

Running into the small unit where the patient was being held, I darted toward him to check the vitals—no heartbeat. His name was William Kind. Mrs. Kind and the boy kept their eyes fixed on me. I could tell they were holding their breath.

My team, consisting of 3 nurses and myself, tried our best to help the man. Cardio resuscitation—nothing. Defibrillator—nothing.

"Clear!" *Jolt!* "Clear!" *Jolt!*

“Clear!” *Jolt!* “Clear!” *Jolt!*

“Clear!” *Jolt!* “Clear!” *Jolt!*

I could tell the family realized what was going on; I felt so helpless. The wife, now a widow, was clutching onto the boy’s shoulders tightly, the powerful heaves of his sobs were matched by the strength of her grasp.

With a twisted face of failure, I looked at the family and squeezed out a painful “I’m sorry”. My arms stretched out almost robotically to hug the family but medical training protocol stopped me halfway, making it look like an uncoordinated reach for the defibrillator.

Sobbing sounds were all that came from the mourners. My heart sank a little deeper; it never gets easier.

Chapter IV

It was a day like any other. It didn’t feel quite the same, though, I could tell. Nothing had changed, but something was different.

Keff! Keff! Keff! The familiar sound of my axe tearing into a wolf tree was a soothing sound. The forest provided so much for my family and I—food, shelter—I built our home with its trees—and energy. *I won’t take more than what I need*, I always told myself.

Cheep! Cheep! The birds were serenading my labor from their nests. *I hope none of them lived in this tree! If they did, I’m truly sorry, little fellas*, I thought.

I gathered the large pieces of wood to take for burning under my arm. The rest of the tree would be collected with Michael’s help, after all a boy should learn everything he can from his father. I don’t remember making it home.

I awoke, at least partially, inside a room where I could hear commotion, along with lots of beeps and clicks.

“Nurse, defib!” I thought I heard someone say.

I could see my own body lying on the bed with my dear wife and son staring from a few feet away. They were embracing each other; a picture of a loving family—but without me.

Sweetheart! I can see you! I love you! I thought I said, but there was no reaction from anyone in the room. The nurses huddled close to the doctor to follow his every direction precisely.

Darling! Can you hear me? What happened to me? I will be alright because I love you. Thank you both for being here. I want you to know, if this is it for me, I love you both and I will see you again.

“Clear!” *Jolt!* “Clear!” *Jolt!*

“Clear!” *Jolt!* “Clear!” *Jolt!*

“Clear!” *Jolt!* “Clear!” *Jolt!*

When the Rain Came

The little boy and the little girl stopped playing. The rain had come. While other little boys and girls ran and hid under their blankets or in bed with their parents, these two ran to the door and opened it just enough to watch the rain hit the walkway outside their home. They could feel the mist sprinkle on their faces and hear every crack of thunder. Playtime was fun, but it was time to watch the rain.

A Case of Delusion

I remember walking into the hospital like any other day for treatment of a patient that suffered from delusions. My daughter had come with me, since she was working on her doctorate in psychiatry. I thought it would be appropriate for her to visit along with me.

I had been telling her about the unfortunate case of Mr. Fels, who thought himself to be a psychiatrist. He was in an incredible state of delusion and believed that he had patients come see him when *he was* the patient.

The receptionist shook her head at me as I walked in with my daughter by my side. She must've been new and not known who I was. Or it may have been my English accent that took her by surprise.

I didn't have any time to waste; my patients needed my attention urgently. I excused myself from my daughter and met with my first patient who was waiting for me outside my office.

“Good morning, doctor.”

A sigh was let out. “Good morning, shall we get started?”

II

I wasn't sure if my father was getting better. All of my studies in psychiatry could not have prepared me for handling the delusions from which he was suffering. In fact, that is what I was doing my dissertation on: delusions.

My father was a curious one. He thought himself a psychiatrist. He walked around as if he were a doctor at the hospital where he received treatment. He always spoke with an English accent when he treated his “patients”.

A Pile of Dirt

“You said you would help me move this heap of dirt!”

“I said I would help you move a *pile* of dirt; not a heap.”

“Same thing!”

“No, clearly it is not.”

“Well, fine, then!”

The man walked over and created another mound of dirt from the first one, so it was divided into two. “Now will you help me?”

“Only with one of those piles.”

The Neighbor's Lawn

On a sunny Sunday morning, the man looked at his neighbor's fertile, dark, green lawn and then at his own; it was only dead grass and arid soil. As he watered it he muttered to himself, "I wish mine were as lush as his; I would gladly cut it every Sunday."

The neighbor, while cutting his grass, glanced over to his neighbor's dead lawn and thought to himself, "I wish I had a drier lawn so I wouldn't have to cut it every Sunday."

The Merchant and His Son

The merchant set up his clay bowls and plates neatly on his wooden stand as the sun was rising over the hills surrounding the small village. His son helped him quietly and diligently.

The marketplace was soon filled with many people buying many things. People passed by and looked upon the clay bowls and plates; some picked them up and studied their fine craftsmanship.

One bearded man picked up a bowl and felt the smooth, rounded edges with his fingers and set it back down. He asked the price and frowned when he heard it. It was midday, and the merchant had still not sold anything.

The son hesitated to ask his father anything that might be disrespectful, but he was curious as to why his father did not mind not selling anything.

“Why are people not buying anything?” he finally asked.

“It seems not many need a plate or bowl.”

“But why not lower the-”

“If people need it, they will buy.”

After eating, they returned to work. The merchant had seen the bearded man look at other merchants' bowls and plates and then make his way around back to his bowls and plates. The

merchant could only assume it was because of the quality of his product and not the price. The bearded man asked for the price one more time, picked up a pair of bowls, paid, and walked home.

A Conversation with a Bird

I saw a bird perched up high on a branch looking in every direction. I asked where it had been.

"All over this place," it replied.

"That must be wonderful."

"It is! Why don't you do the same? I see you have those giant, metal birds that take you to faraway places."

"I would love to, but it's not possible."

"I would assume some thought it impossible for humans to fly in the first place."

With this, the bird dove into the air and soared away.

The Pirate

Beautiful islands sprawled throughout the Caribbean and other faraway seas. The pirate had now amassed so much wealth that there was no need to continue. The pirate knew this day would come; he couldn't pillage and plunder vast, new seas forever but he never thought that his last day would come so soon.

He had already had his eye on his replacement as captain of the ship; a strapping young lad named William.

As he walked the ship, he introduced the new captain to the crew and made sure he knew the ship well.

William took the ship around the world on many adventures. He fought many pirates and discovered new treasures. Upon his return visited the old captain.

"There is still much to discover," he told the old captain, whose heart still belonged to the sea.

"Aye!" shouted the captain as he stepped aboard and the adventure began anew.

The Dinner Party

Antoinette and Carlo had fallen in love the moment they had met. They had a special, pure kind of love that could not be measured nor destroyed. Then the war came, Carlo was shipped off to a

faraway country, and months later he was presumed dead.

Antoinette mourned Carlo for many years and kept all of their pictures and mementos stored away in a box in the attic. She could never truly forget him nor stop loving him, but she eventually remarried and had a small family. A newborn baby girl, Emily, and a three-year-old boy named Tom. Her husband, Franklin, was a successful businessman and provided a very comfortable life for her and their children. With his many business contacts came many dinner party invitations. There was one particular party that stood out above all the others. It was just another cold December day when Antoinette and her husband would be joining his business associate, Mr. Jacob Stiles, for a dinner party in his home. The children would be staying with her mother for the evening.

“Good evening, Mr. Stiles,” Antoinette greeted him with a warm embrace and her husband followed with a firm handshake.

“I’m very glad you could join us, please, come inside, and I will introduce you to the other guests.” Among the guests were doctors, lawyers, a sheriff, other public officials, as well as some friends of theirs from upstate. There was, however, a man that struck Antoinette. His presence captured her attention and she could not stray too far away from him. He looked strangely familiar, and she stuck close to his conversation with other guests to listen in for a clue as to why she felt this way.

“After the attack, no one thought we would make it ... only three of us survived out of twenty men ... but I had nearly died. The doctor told me that I was suffering from amnesia because of the damage to my brain due to the explosions. He also said that I would not remember many things, including the attack. I only know what I’m telling you because of the other soldiers that survived. They told me what had happened after I recovered. They said that the head trauma had changed my facial expressions and even my voice, ha-ha. They swore that I sounded like a different man. After that, well here I am, Uncle Sam brought me back, I found a job, and got back to civilian life.”

Antoinette’s breath escaped her. *It was Carlo!* She thought to herself. He *had* changed; she hadn’t noticed him at the dinner table, but he had her full attention now. *Was he still the same man that I fell in love with so many years ago?* She wondered privately.

“Honey” ... Carlo turned his head ... “it’s getting late, let’s pick up the kids and go home,” she whispered in Franklin’s ear.

The First Date

She waited anxiously to be picked up. She looked down at her old dress, neatly pressed for the occasion. She smelled of sweet perfume and looked very excited and nervous at the same time; she really liked him, and it would be their first date.

He showed up right on time and came around to open the car door for her. She blushed, smiled, and hopped in the car.

“You look beautiful,” he told her as she entered his car.

Arriving at the restaurant, he took her hand in his, and she felt like the most important person in the entire world. They exchanged flirtatious glances throughout their meal, spoke of happy memories, and laughed well into the night.

“And what shall we do to celebrate your birthday next week?”

“Oh, anything would be fine as long as we do it together,” she smiled and squeezed his hand. She would be sixty-eight; he had just turned seventy-one.

The Golden Toys

There was once a little princess whose toys were made of solid gold. Some were little figurines and some were too heavy to play with. Being a princess was a terribly lonely thing. When she asked for other kids to play with, the king arranged for a small group of the kingdom's children to play with her and her toys.

The children could not believe their eyes! They played with everything; the figurines and even the ones that were too heavy to play with. The little princess's choice, however, was a little rag doll brought by one of the little girls who was invited to play. To the little princess, it was perfectly exquisite; her hair was made of coarse straw, her purple dress was made of an old cotton rag, and her eyes were two small stones sewn on.

Hats

The man walked around and did good deeds all day. When he got home, he hung his white hat on the hat stand.

The next day, a man walked around and did evil deeds all day. When he got home, he hung his black hat on his hat stand ... next to his white hat.

The Student and the Master on Knowledge and Love

And the student asked the master, “Which is more important to a human, love or wisdom?”

The master then asked the student, “Which is more important to a bird, the right or left wing?”

The Student and the Master on Wisdom

And the student asked, "How did you get so wise?"

The master replied, "I didn't get any wiser; I've just become more fully awake."

The Student and the Master on Heartbreak

When speaking of love the heartbroken student said bitterly, "You can't drown if you vow to never swim again."

To which the master replied, "You will also never choke if you never eat."

The Student and the Master on Giving

"I feel that I'm missing something in my life," said the student.

"Then give," said the master.

The Student and the Master on Expectations

"This isn't what I expected," said the student.

"Therein lies the problem," replied the master.

One More Cup of Coffee

I remember the conversations with my mother over endless cups of coffee. Conversations about what the future held and how one person could make the world a better place. Conversations about what scared me the most and what made me most happy.

She always had her coffee with one spoon of coffee and two of sugar.

“More coffee?” I asked. That always meant more conversation. More exchange.

She always wore a beautiful summer dress with flowers on it when the weather was warm outside.

“What am I going to do without you, Ma?” I would ask her.

“Oh, you’re not going to lose me for a long time,” she would say, smiling. She was beautiful.

II

I felt sick all over. Nothing made sense except this agonizing heartache. Nothing made me feel better and the time finally came for the funeral.

We were all there. In black. She had told me this day would come.

I finally got some sleep.

III

I could see her sitting there at the table, as I walked up from behind her. Her flowered summer dress was flowing in the most perfect way I had ever seen.

“Shall I pour the coffee?”

The River Dragon

There was once a river dragon that guarded the sacred Mountain of Paradise. The little people that lived there had no way of crossing it without the threat of being eaten by the river dragon. The little people had many legends and stories about what lay over that mountaintop: rivers of honey, fertile lands to grow food, and never-ending beautiful weather. Others told tales of gold mines and endless riches.

One day a little old man was brave enough to get close to the river's edge, as no other little person ever had.

When the river dragon saw this, he was very curious and amused by the bravery of the little old man.

"It is the first time anyone had dared come so close to the water's edge ... and to me," said the river dragon.

"What's on the other side?" the little old man asked, showing no fear.

"Let's do this," began the river dragon, "if you can solve this riddle, I will let you cross unharmed and that way you see for yourself."

The little old man nodded his head.

"I weigh almost nothing but can bring about heavy things; I can be above and beneath you at the same time, and I can change shape and color, what am I?"

The little old man thought long and hard.

Finally, he answered, "A cloud?"

The river dragon smiled and let him cross to the other side unharmed, as he had promised.

When the little old man got to the other side, he could not believe what he saw. He also couldn't believe what he didn't see; there were no rivers of honey, fertile lands, nor beautiful weather; there weren't any gold mines nor endless riches. The little old man couldn't believe it! What would he tell everyone when he returned? And why didn't the river dragon tell everyone the truth he had known for so long?

When he returned to his village, the other little people gathered around him and asked him about his journey and what the other side of the mountain held.

"Is it as beautiful as they say it is?"

"Were there rivers of honey?"

"Was it paradise?"

These were their questions. The little old man saw the hope and wishfulness in their eyes and the question of honesty weighed heavily on his conscience.

The little old man thought long and hard about how to respond. He glanced back at the river, and he could see the river dragon looking, almost smiling, at him. He realized what the river dragon had done and felt grateful.

"It is just like that," answered the little old man and smiled.

The Kind Man and His Money

After he had counted his money, the kind man kept just enough to care for himself and divided the rest among the people he loved. Upon seeing this, his disappointed friend spoke to him, "You clearly do not understand the value of money!" The kind man smiled and responded, "You clearly do not understand the value of people."

The Golden Cage

I saw that the caged songbird had everything she needed; food, water, and shelter. Still, I saw a sad look on her face, and she had not sung for a very long time.

"Why do you not sing anymore? You have quite a comfortable life in your cage."

With tearful eyes, she looked at me and said, "A golden cage is *still* a cage."



About the Author: Carlos Salinas

From carlossalinaswriting.com:

“My purpose for writing is to spread a positive, hopeful, inspirational, motivational, and insightful message through words; in stories, quotes, and rhymes. At times when looking for new books, I couldn't find the books with the messages that seemed so important to me: about love, knowledge, truth, perspective, and clear thinking. I remembered reading somewhere that if you can't find the book you're looking for, you should write it. So I did.”

Carlos Salinas' other published works include: *The Little Book of Big Quotes Vol. I*, *The Poems Vol. I*, and *Got the Flow: The Hip-Hop Diary of a Young Rapper*.

This collection of short stories is the fourth book published by Carlos Salinas. His other books include: *The Little Book of Big Quotes Vol. I*, *The Poems Vol. I*, and *Got the Flow: The Hip-Hop Diary of a Young Rapper*. He currently resides in San Antonio, T.X.

You can find Carlos' bibliography, excerpts, and contact info at www.carlossalinaswriting.com

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**Got the Flow:
The Hip-Hop Diary of a Young Rapper**

(An Excerpt)

**Written and Illustrated by
Carlos Salinas**

“They’re not *all* thugs!” I countered Mrs. Hass one day. I was getting mad.

“Sure they are. They just rap about drugs, violence, and have no respect for women.”

“Which rappers are you referring to in particular?” I asked knowing a few she might say.

“All of them! I’ve never heard an intelligent rap, much less an intelligent rapper. They call it rap because it’s Ridiculous Attempts at Poetry. R-A-P.”

I thought long and hard about someone that didn’t rap about those negative things. I couldn’t think of one rapper that didn’t mention those things or at least implied them in their songs. It was a sad truth; not because they were rapping about it, but because their lives were drowned in those things.

“They’re just rapping about their reality; that’s what they know. Mr. Salas says that a good writer writes about what he knows.”

“Whatever Mr. Salas does in his class is his business,” she shot back.

“It’s not his fault you’re too stupid to understand rap music.”

Mrs. Hass turned around with her eyes opened wide. “*What* did you just say to me?” she scowled.

“I didn’t stutter.” I knew I was in trouble.

“That’s what I thought you said. You can’t go around insulting people that are smarter and older than you.”

“Just cause you’re older than me doesn’t necessarily make you smarter, Ma’am,” I stated in my most matter-of-factly, respectful tone.

“You need to respect your elders and teachers, Troy Jones.”

“Respect is earned and cannot be demanded from someone, *Mrs. Linda Hass*.”

With that, she quickly walked to her desk, phoned the principal, and asked that I be removed from her class because of “a severely inappropriate classroom disruption”.

Within a minute, the hall monitor, a middle-aged, brawny man stood at the door of the classroom and waved me over to him. He didn’t know me but knew that by waving to the entire class, he would get the guilty student. I stood up, grabbed my bag, and started walking toward him.

As I stepped out of the classroom, I said, “Have a nice day, Mrs. Hass,” and walked out.