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Calle Panadero

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

CALLE PANADERO

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in

CREATIVE WRITING

by

Giselda D. Aguiar

2015

To: Dean Michael R. Heithaus
College of Arts and Sciences

This thesis, written by Giselda D. Aguiar, and entitled Calle Panadero, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

John Dufresne

Bruce Harvey

Lynne Barrett, Major Professor

Date of Defense: November 2, 2015

The thesis of Giselda D. Aguiar is approved.

Dean Michael R. Heithaus
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Florida International University, 2015

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

CALLE PANADERO

by

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Florida International University, 2015

Miami, Florida

Professor Lynne Barrett, Major Professor

This collection of nine short stories follows Adelia Villalobos and Isidoro Belmonte, two Cuban Americans solving crimes in present-day South Florida. The former best friends have grown apart during college, but when Adelia is drawn into a murder case, the outcome leads Isidoro to return home and the pair to found the unlicensed detective agency, Calle Panadero (Spanish for Baker Street). Their cases explore the underside of many facets of the community, including bigamy, fraud, and criminal organizations. Along the way, they deal with love, death, and family obligations, and arrive at a new understanding of how their destinies are linked.

Influenced by Agatha Christie and Jennine Capó Crucet, CALLE PANADERO revolves around protagonists living in a predominantly Hispanic community and the ties that bind them to it and each other. Although each story is a separate narrative, together they depict Adelia and Isidoro's changing relationship and their individual growth.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
Open Murder.....	1
Scuffle in the Domino Hall.....	28
Pumpkin Eater.....	48
Missing in Hialeah.....	75
Death on Elysian Key.....	104
At Maple Oakley's.....	158
The Mysterious Request.....	197
Baiting Luck.....	241
Illegal Venture.....	288

Open Murder

A cascade of iced water told Adelia something was wrong. She would later describe the sound to police as a torrent of hard water, culminating with the crash of the large empty plastic cooler echoing throughout the first floor. The commotion came from near the laundry room. It took less than ten minutes for police to arrive. By then, the ice was almost gone, and the water it left behind had reached the corpse.

The day had started with Adelia bumping into Isidoro at La Viudita bakery-restaurant. She had rushed into the bakery portion, a wooden lattice partition separating the two parts. The open house was going to be an utter disaster without the food, according to her boss and uncle, Tío Guille.

It was Saturday morning, hot and humid, two words synonymous with South Florida, but the bakery was a world apart. Inside, warm smells accosted Adelia: newly brewed *coladas* and *café con leches*, and freshly baked Cuban breads, croquettes, hand-sized crackers, empanadas, a host of pastries, and all other deliciousness. But she hoped not to stay long. She had a mission to pick up her uncle's order of party-sized snacks for the open house he was holding in Miami. He hadn't told her of this errand until she'd been halfway there. She'd had to double back. The showing had started at ten and it was now—Adelia checked her wristwatch—already 10:15.

She went straight to the red ticket dispenser and yanked one out. Without looking at her number, she approached a woman behind the counter.

“Pick-up order for Guillermo Villalobos,” Adelia said.

“Wait your turn, miss,” the lady said before turning to the number display above.

“Number thirty-three!”

This was when Adelia noticed there were five other people waiting. She looked down at her ticket. Thirty-eight. The tiny bell over the entrance chimed.

“Adelia?”

A young man her age stepped inside the bakery. Brown loafers, khaki cargo pants, and a white, rolled-up long-sleeve *guayabera* shirt: the typical attire of Isidoro, Adelia’s best friend since the fifth grade when she saved him from a trio of bullies.

He took off his sunglasses as he walked over. “What are you doing here?”

They greeted each other with a kiss on the cheek.

“I still live in Hialeah,” she said. “What are you doing here?”

“Came down last night. Spring break is next week, and my parents want to visit me. See the Liberty Bell and whatnot. My uncle’s family can’t go: my cousins’ break isn’t until the 14th.”

“And your *abuela*?”

“Number thirty-four!” the bakery employee said.

“Nah, she hates planes, but for graduation in May she’s going.” Isidoro took a ticket from the dispenser. “I’ll be, after all, her first grandchild to graduate from college. Hey, why don’t you come up next week? I’m sure my dad can get you a plane ticket.”

“Oh.”

Isidoro’s family was upper middle class, white collar. Their money, or “wealth,” as Adelia called it, always made her, coming from a blue-collar family barely reaching middle class, feel awkward.

“I can’t,” she said. “My spring break doesn’t start until the 14th, too.”

“Oh.”

They remained silent until the next number was called.

“Want to have breakfast at my grandma’s?” Isidoro asked. “I’m here to pick up toasted bread and coffee.”

“Sorry, can’t. I’m helping *mi tío* with an open house. He’s freaking out that he doesn’t have *los pastelitos*.”

“What, to bribe potential buyers?”

“Probably.”

They started talking about life after college. So far, Adelia had no plans except to continue working at her uncle’s real estate agency. She wanted to get a job at a newspaper and put her degree to use. Isidoro, as always, snorted at the idea of her having majored in journalism. Two law schools, one at his soon-to-be alma mater in Pennsylvania and the other in South Florida, had accepted him. He still hadn’t decided.

“I don’t know if I should come back,” he said. “PA has been my home for four years. I have friends there and know most of the law professors already. Something would have to change for me to stay here.”

Adelia stared up at him. Over the last four years she had noticed him becoming paler and his hair turn from blond to almost brown. His Miami dialect was nonexistent. The fluorescent, unnatural lights of the bakery made his copper eyes green. This wasn’t him. He looked and sounded like a gringo. He hadn’t even used Spanglish, calling *tostadas* toasted bread and *café* coffee. He had failed to call his grandmother Abuela, her proper title, the one he’d always used before. Adelia didn’t know what was going on in his life or he in hers. They saw each other occasionally when he came to visit family, and they communicated when they remembered to e-mail each other. She hesitated to call

him “best friend” anymore. They’d once been like brother and sister. Maybe they’d fallen to the status of acquaintances.

“You need some sun,” Adelia said.

“Thirty-eight!” said the employee.

“That’s me.”

With her three trays of food, Adelia bade *adiós* to Isidoro, who waved goodbye just as his number was called.

When Adelia reached the open house 45 minutes later, thanks to her GPS sending her to the wrong place, her uncle’s mood was considerably fouler than usual.

“About time,” Tío Guille said as a way of greeting.

He placed the three trays on the larger of two plastic tables in the pastel green foyer. There was already a circular dish with a spread of crackers and an assortment of cheeses. In the center of the dish sat a few green grapes. She saw a stack of Tío Guille’s business cards, some pamphlets about the agency, copies of the floor plan, a clipboard, and about two dozen pens. The smaller table had portable coffee and hot tea makers with cups, lids, wooden stirrers, different kinds of sugar, and powdered creamer. Underneath the larger table was a blue cooler.

“If you would’ve told me yesterday or earlier this morning you needed me to—”

“Look, we only have four people here.” Tío Guille picked up the clipboard.

“You’re blaming the lack of food?”

“Of course.”

“Tío, they wouldn’t have known the food situation unless they walked in, so the food is not to blame for there being only a few people looking at the house.”

“None of them have made an offer.”

“Maybe it’s because you’re here with the food instead of with them.”

“Man the front.” He gave her the clipboard. “Make sure people don’t come in for just the food, and have them sign and give their contact info. I’m going to hunt these prospects down upstairs.”

She looked down at the clipboard. It was a sign-in sheet with four names: Mr. and Mrs. Applebaum, Molly Towner, and Jorge Hernan.

Adelia stood dutifully by the tables with a view of the double front doors. No one new came in. She didn’t see anyone old come by either. So she pulled out and opened the large cooler. It was full of melting ice and mini water bottles. She closed the lid and sat on it. Hopefully her uncle would walk by the tables again so she could run to her car and get a book.

After ten minutes, indiscernible whispers were the only things that came to her. From her vantage point, Adelia saw the rooms on either side of the foyer were devoid of furniture. She hadn’t been to this two-story house before to explore it. She liked empty homes, to roam around in them, imagining what she would place where. A new start. Adelia placed the clipboard back on the table and grabbed a floor plan. The front page showed the first floor, an open plan design.