

Revolvers in Church

by Barbara O. Westphal

Don Juan felt in his pocket and smiled grimly. He ran his fingers lightly over the outside. There must be no telltale bulge. No one must guess there was a revolver hidden there.

He stepped in to the church and took a seat on the front bench on the left-hand side. He had brought that revolver to church every week for years. He didn't want to hurt anyone, but if Don Pedro should try to give him trouble . . .

Don Pedro was sitting on the back bench, far over on the right-hand side. Always it was that way. They situated themselves as far from each other as they possibly could and still be in the same church!

Don Juan never spoke to Don Pedro, and Don Pedro never spoke to Don Juan. Yet they wanted to be in the same church, and they were friendly enough with the other people who attended.

This morning Don Pedro had watched Don Juan walk down the aisle and take his seat at the front. A sneer curled his lips, and he patted his pocket reassuringly. He didn't want to hurt anyone, but if Don Juan should try to give him trouble . . .

Then it was time for the sermon. The minister opened the big Bible on the pulpit and read in Spanish from Mark 11:25: "Whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses."

Don Juan's heart was hard and heavy. He could never forgive.

"But if you do not forgive," continued the voice of the minister, "neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses" (verse 26).

If he didn't forgive Don Pedro—why, he could never be forgiven himself!

What a terrible thought! No forgiveness for his sins. No hope of heaven. He bowed his head and struggled with the evil angels at his side. Then he prayed, and the good angels came and gave him victory.

He raised his head and stood up. He walked to the table at the front of the church.

All eyes were upon him. The minister stopped, and the church became deathly quiet.

Tears were streaming down Don Juan's face, and he could not control his voice. "For years," he stammered at last, "for years I have hated Don Pedro. For

years Don Pedro has hated me.”

He removed his dark glasses and pointed to one of his eyes. It was sightless.

“Do you see this blind eye?” he asked. “Don Pedro tore it out when we fought together long ago. I never forgave him. All these years I have known that Don Pedro has been carrying a revolver hidden in his pocket. I have carried one too.”

He pulled the revolver from his pocket and laid it on the embroidered cloth on the table.

The silence in the church was disturbed by the sound of shuffling feet in the back. Don Pedro was hurrying down the aisle. “Today I forgive my enemy,” he announced, and the two men threw their arms around each other.

Then there was a second revolver lying on the table, and the men were calling each other by the beautiful Spanish name *hermano*, which means “brother.”