He walked down the street, a street of sunlight,
A street of little people who lived their little lives
As best they could with justice and with God
And raised their children to love God and all things good.
He walked down the street, a gringo, in a Spanish world.
He was of average height, but here the average stopped.
He was big, he was big everywhere.
His face was too pretty, too regular, and he had white flashing teeth.
And he was clean... and if you could make him smile
The sunlight was not as bright.
In the day it was not a bad street; but at night.....
It was a street of death..... soon his death.
He cared too much... he seemed unafraid, but he cared
About Miguel, Carmelita, Juan, Elomora.... he cared
And there were things that happened and they had a legend
In this modern world of no heroes and called him
A name after a river after a big thing after a dream....
They called him El Grande, the big one.
The gun fighters were gone, the crooks came,
And he came too, not as big as the name.
But a fury when the chips were down.....
It was morning and he walked down the street
So clean in a dirty world.
A child ran out of a building and flung herself in his arms.
"Pappa," she said Pappa.
He held her for a moment close, let her down,
And gave her a lollipop.
"Papá," she said and held out her arms. He held her aloft and his laughter rang out. Her little arms clung to his neck.
She touched his big, white teeth,
White against the flush that stained his white skin.
Like a bird, a little dark brown girl made sounds
As she rushed to the street,
As all mothers do.
He gave her the child and she cuddled her,
As all mothers do.
"El Grande," she said, "it is too bad you do not take a woman.

I am a woman and there is a sad sorrow in my heart
For you who have no woman.
I do not believe these lies they say that,
That you do not like us.
I see your eyes and there are tears that do not flow,
And you walk and you walk in the black night
And they try to rob you,
And you fight alone,
And nobody helps, and you fight and you fight
For us if we need you.
You walk down the bad street, a man alone,
With no woman to cry for you.
Am I not a woman to cry for a man?"
"Yes, little one," he said, but hear me:
I made a promise and I always keep my word;
I made a promise about a thing that says,
el grande

'in sickness and in health, for richer,
for poorer, for better or for worse,
Until death do us part,' it went something like that." She looked at his face
And her own was wet.
"Who forgot," she whispered,
"Who forgot the pretty words?"
"Nobody forgot," he answered, "nobody forgot...."
"If nobody wants you," she said slowly,
"If nobody wants you...."
He touched her dark shining hair gently.
"We'll see." Then it will be you.
He walked down the shadowed street
And the child called, "Papa Sito."
The girl said softly, "If nobody wants you, El Grande,
If nobody wants you...."
el grande

It was not so late tonight as El Grande walked the street
And guitars sounded to his stride
And he threw his head back and looked at the stars
As bright as his loved one's eyes.
He was a little careless on the street of death
And it was not like him to be so off-guard.
Suddenly violence again hurled itself at him
And he tightened his powerful hands but it was a girl,
Slender, frightened, and crying.
She whispered, "Are you El Grande?"
The man answered, "I wish I deserved the name.
Why? Why do you ask?"
She pointed up the street at shadows walking slowly forward.
"I am sixteen years of age and a virgin
And I am to be married tomorrow at the altar rail.
I would like to be tomorrow what I am today.
They broke into our home and hurt everybody.
Two had knives and one had a gun.
I was desperate and I was looking for El Grande.
I guess he would have to be a lot bigger than you
To be so brave."
He put his arm around her shoulder.
"I'll see what I can do."
She looked up and he smiled a little
And there were big white teeth and a dimple
That somehow did not belong on a powerful man.
"You are El Grande!" she said through her tears.
el grande

"Which one has the gun?" he asked.
"The big one; he's taller than you."

"Now, listen to me. I can't take the three, armed.
I'll drop the tall one and then you run to the police.
I'll lay the trouble."

She looked up at him and the street lamp showed his face clearly.

"El Grande," she said there is a little silver on the side of your head.

Everybody speaks only of your hard fists and your smile
That makes you look like a little boy.
Are you old like a father, El Grande?"
"Yes, little one."
"Are you afraid, El Grande like other people?"
"Yes, little blabbermouth. Now, you do what I said."
She looked at him. There was no smile
And she sensed the quiet power of the man
As he stood there and the three closed in.
The tall one put his hand gangster style inside his left shoulder
As he said, "I'm taking the girl."

El Grandes left hit low and hard and his right
Dropped him to the cobblestones.
He shouted to the girl, "Run!"

The two with the knives closed in and El Grande
Threw one against the wall,
His back turned as a knife raised.
"Drop the knife muchacha or I'll kill you
el grande
The girl's voice rang out.
She stood there with the big one's gun
In a hand that was steady.
The last of the three dropped the knife and left.
"Why did you not hit him, El Grande, why, why?"
"He was all alone;" the man said, and...."
"And what?" the girl demanded.
"And you were standing there so lovely in the moonlight and...."
"And what?"
"And nothing little pretty bride."
"El Grande," the girl asked, "Are you a little loco?"
"Much loco."
He walked the girl home.
There were people about the house
And she stopped before she got there.
"May I kiss you for your daughter?" she asked.
She reached up and put her little arms around his neck
And kissed his cheek.
"How did you know?" he asked.
"Because you need one, El Grande."
el grande

He walked down the dark street of evil blossoms
And he was tired, so tired
And all he wanted to do was to go home
And give his wife the few dollars he had made.
He was tired and he wanted no trouble tonight;
But there was a small set of shadows approaching
And he knew it meant the same old thing.
They meant to take Diane's bread and Michael's milk.
He whirled and faced backwards and they were there too.
He stood in a corner his back to the wall to face them.
For some obscure reason a trumpet sounded in his blood
As they circled him and he was a little brave.
"Go and get a few more," he said, "you'll need them!"
A voice rang out in the quiet street, "Muchachas!"
A big man came through the gang.
"It's El Grande;" he said, "Have you no manners?
Let him pass."

The way opened and he tried to stand tall as he walked;
But he knew that one of them could have pushed him over with his hand.

He walked down the corridor of violence
And the fever cleared his mind for a moment
Telling him he was in a foreign land
Far from each sweet think he loved.
He somehow made it to his room
Where he lay down like a sick dog
Until the fever went
Or he did.
el grande
The wedding over and the throng gone
The old priest left the vestry to its fine vestments
And passed into the church where all had left but one
Bowed low before the statue of the Blessed Virgin,
Asleep the priest thought, but for
An anguished face.
The old priest passed slowly down the aisle
And into the bright sunshine.
He would wait with the patience of the old.
From the cool shadow of the church El Grande came,
Erect, sure-footed, and he walked to where the priest waited.
The priest thought, "He stands bravely."
"Your blessing, Father," the man said and knelt.
The aged servant of God made sad music with his hands.
The benediction finished he touched the man's head gently
And the man arose, tall beside the small priest.
"Can you not go home, my son?"
The man shook his head.
"In my city a thing happened
And there are many stories and only one is true.
Any story but the one I tell would lock me in a tomb."
"Does anyone believe you?"
"One woman and a few small children
Under a lonely roof."
The priest asked... "Are you not afraid of these streets,
Of the dark, the waiting knives; are you not afraid?"
"Are you not afraid of the devil?"
el grande

The man asked slowly and turned away.
"Via con Dios," the priest said sadly.

The old priest entered the church again,
Walked down the long shadowed aisle to the altar
Where he knelt at the rail, his head in light
Like a halo from a beam of sun slanting inward.
"Dearest God" he prayed, "hear my plea.
This man, this El Grande, there are silver streaks in his hair.
This strong body you gave him will one day age.
He is a good man. He wept in the church silently,
But I saw the tears and agony on his face.
He fights against great numbers, pistolas, knives
For the weak, a young girl's virtue.
If he did not do this thing they want him for,
Send him across the el Grande.
For such a man some woman weeps and children too;
Send him home, dearest God in all the heavens!"
And then the old priest asked,
"Have I ever asked you for a sign?
Have I ever asked you for faith or anything
For myself?
Now it is time for me to die and I am ready;
But before I go, please hear me......
If he is innocent as I feel please send him home alive!"
The old priest felt a power go through him,
An ecstasy.
He crossed himself, "In nomine patrie..."
He walked the aisle, not so dark, to the door.
A man stood there, deep-chested.
The priest said to himself, "He still stands bravely."
The man said, "I came back to say goodbye.
Will you pray for me?"
The old priest said, "Yes, my son, I will pray for you."
Tired, at last, he sat on a bench and leaned his head
Gratefully against the olive tree
And watched the man walk away.
"He walks bravely," he thought.

He closed his eyes.
He would sleep for a moment in the hot shade of the olive tree.

Michael Sargoy

"Where is home, my son?"
Home is where hearts beat
And people say, "They may war at
And they may obey when
And they may walk at this end,
It's home."

el grande