

**The Factory: The Story About the Man Without
Fingers**

LAURA P. CABALLERO

**Translation by;
Joannes W. M. Groenewege**

© LAURA P. CABALLERO

LA FÁBRICA, LA LEYENDA DEL HOMBRE SIN DEDOS

Impreso en España

Reservados todos los derechos. Salvo excepción prevista por la ley, no se permite la reproducción total o parcial de esta obra, ni su incorporación a un sistema informático, ni su transmisión en cualquier forma o por cualquier medio (electrónico, mecánico, fotocopia, grabación u otros) sin autorización previa y por escrito de los titulares del copyright. La infracción de dichos derechos conlleva sanciones legales y puede constituir un delito contra la propiedad intelectual.

Diríjase a CEDRO (Centro Español de Derechos Reprográficos) si necesita fotocopiar o escanear algún fragmento de esta obra (www.conlicencia.com; 91 702 19 70 / 93 272 04 47).

1.

He was sure he heard a tiny scream. He was passing by the entrance of a street that he knew had no exit and there wasn't a single rusty, poorly lit streetlamp that would light up to see what was happening at the end of it.

Martin threw away the cigarette he was smoking and stopped as he put his hands in his pockets. "You haven't lost anything there," he thought. He stood still and alert at the entrance to the street. His hearing was good, very good. He had realized that since he was twelve years old after he had abandoned his adoptive family and joined one of the city's street gangs. Years of beatings by his adoptive father had made him a tough, smart boy and it didn't take long for him to adapt.

Everyone immediately realized his ability to sense the presence of others and his ability to pick up sounds that others overlooked, so he was used to "cry wolf" when assaults were committed on the houses of the wealthy living in the luxurious suburbs.

"Go on, Martin," he said to himself. However, he walked down the street slowly and quietly as he listened to the woman's moans and pleas getting closer and closer.

His eyes had been adapting to the darkness and now he could see that a tall man, with a wide back covered by a ragged black sweatshirt, was holding a girl against the wall.

Martin understood, at once, that the guy was trying to rape her. He reached him, stealthily positioning himself a few inches away, and tapped him lightly on the shoulder.

The clouds moved pushed by the light breeze of the night at the moment that the guy turned around and exposed a bright full moon, absolutely white and clear in the sky.

The silver light allowed Martin to see the girl's frightened face. She looked about twenty years old and her dark eyes stuck into Martin's and it seemed to him that her fear was not only due to the abuse to which she was about to be subjected.

That second of distraction was enough for the guy to stick the knife he used to threaten the girl in Martin's liver.

They held each other for a few seconds. A hot puncture went through Martin's hip and belly, but even though he knew he had the steel inside his body, he was not afraid.

The guy released him by pushing him lightly to extract the edge of the razor. The girl had fallen to the ground, her back glued to the brick wall.

Martin and the tattered sweatshirt looked at each other face to face, in the whitish moonlight. Martin's face was pale and the guy smiled with perfect white teeth. That was strange, it was not at all common in that neighborhood, especially among criminals.

Martin raised his eyebrows in astonishment and the other thought that it was the stupor caused by Martin being close to death.

The girl began to cry with great whimpers, as if she could also sense death and the knowledge that her own salvation had been cut short forever.

The guy turned to look at her. When he turned his gaze back to Martin, he received his clenched fist in one of his cheeks. Martin's hands took his head by its ears and pulled him away from the girl.

She stuck a little more to the wall.

Martin advanced towards the guy, who was trying to stand up. One of his hands touched the knife wound and he looked at the blood dripping down his fingers.

—You're dead, you bastard," said the other as he looked at him.

Martin smiled a little.

—That's not how I feel.

He hit him violently on the head with his military boot, without letting him get up. Martin approached him again, who was still crawling on the ground. He stood on his back and hooked his hair as he lifted his face towards the sky. Drops of blood from Martin's wounded body spilled on the black sweatshirt.

The boy's mind was filled with images of his family life. His father and a wet towel. His father and a belt. His father and a plastic bag.

He thought how easy it would be for him to hold that guy's head and twist his neck. The girl had gotten up and was advancing toward him. Martin, without looking at her, extended one arm backwards with an open hand signaling her to stop.

He let go of the guy's hair and his face hit the asphalt of the road. He took a few steps away from him and put his hand back on the wound.

The girl walked towards him with her face flooded with fear and surprise. Words barely came out.

—You have to go to a hospital. You should have been dead a long time ago.

2.

Her mother opened the door of the room and lifted the blinds. It was raining.

Angélica would swear that the previous night had been clear, that she had seen a full, silvery and radiant moon, emanating white light, at the very moment when she had made the opposite gesture to her mother's and pulled down the blind.

She didn't remember what she had dreamed about, but she knew it had been something violent, some kind of nightmare. The sensation with which she had awakened was distressing, but still she had stayed in bed, wrapped in the soft flannel sheets that smelled of softener.

Her mother approached and sat on the edge of the bed. —Angélica, it's late — her tone was bordering on surprise — What's the matter with you? Aren't you feeling well?

She was a responsible girl. Perhaps too much so. Her parents had adopted her when she was only three years old and had told her when she was nine. She had accepted it without problems, now it seemed to her that she had not managed to assimilate it at the moment and that she had simply been integrating it as something normal like the passing of the years.

She only had memories of that life, that city, that house and those parents. So, she assimilated everything as her own in a natural way.

—I'm fine, she replied. I haven't slept well, that's all.

—You've had a lot of nightmares lately.

Angélica put the sheets aside. Her mother kissed her on the forehead and got up from the edge of the bed.

—There's not much left for the winter break. You'll have a few weeks to recover, I think you're being influenced by the stress of the exams of the trimester.

Angélica nodded. Her parents had always supported her unconditionally. Her upbringing had been somewhat liberal. She wasn't sure if this was due to the fact that she had never given them reasons to do it any other way or it was because they really thought that you should follow your own rules and develop your personality freely.

The fact is that she remembered that she had always been a cautious and responsible child. Her introverted nature had brought her both advantages and disadvantages. In the classes she had always stood out for her good behaviour and excellent results, and with her friends she had not had any great problems although she knew that she avoided certain parties and events that she might have liked to enjoy but that, due to her personality, she preferred to let pass.

She was overwhelmed to be among many people. About a year ago that sensation had been increasing and she had begun to read psychology books. She began to suspect that she might suffer from some kind of agoraphobia or social phobia and was worried that it would get worse and worse. To that had been added the more frequent nightmares, more and more distressing, but always abstract. A dark cloud was the only thing she remembered when she woke up.

Sometimes, when she found herself in the locker room after physical education class, the sound of her classmates screaming and laughing, the smell of her skin, of their fluids, the whole set of buzz and hormonal odor stirred her and made her heart start beating in her chest until it seemed to want to come out through her mouth.

She had already skipped the last two classes. Her mother was right. She was looking forward to winter break. She really wanted to rest and spend a few days away from everything and everyone.

Her father had already gone to work and her mother already had breakfast. She heated a cup of coffee in the microwave, poured a couple of tablespoons of sugar and had a long drink.

—I thought today would be a good day, —she commented, looking at her mother.

—It's been raining all night. But they expect good weather during the vacations, even heat.

Angélica approached the calendar hanging on the wall. It had been a full moon night.

She took the pen she kept in one of the drawers on the table and marked that day. She noticed and realized that each and every morning that she had risen with that distressing sensation had been full moon nights.

Her mother looked behind her. She was aware of the nightmares she suffered from time to time.

—About once a month, right?

Angélica nodded.

—Does it coincide with your period?

—No.

Her mother shrugged.

—It could be pure coincidence. It might even be a suggestion. The mind is very strange. It's like your father's, able to wake up every day just before the alarm goes off.

Angélica picked up her books and left home. The stop where she waited every morning for the bus to go to school was only fifty yards away. She pressed the scarf against her mouth, it was very cold. It was hard to imagine that the holidays would be hot.

She saw the bus turn and came a little closer to the edge of the sidewalk. A few drops of rain fell, but she didn't take her folding umbrella out of her bag.

A skinny boy came towards her at a hasty pace and stopped close by her side. His hair was very black, short and stiff.

Angélica pressed the scarf against her lips again. They were dry and cracked by the cold. The bus stopped and opened its doors. She climbed the steps and brought her ticket closer to the reading machine. Then she walked to the seats next to the exit door.

The boy paid with money and advanced to sit one seat behind her in the opposite corridor.

Angélica noticed the boy's gaze on her. Without thinking she turned and their glances crossed. The boy's eyes were dark and bright. No, it couldn't be. Angélica looked straight ahead again and felt ashamed. She

shouldn't have looked at him. That idiot wanted to make her feel uncomfortable and he was achieving it. She knew that he was still watching her, she knew that she had seen the glow of those eyes somewhere else before.

When she got to her stop and got up, the boy did the same. Angélica hurried off the bus. She didn't want to be seen nervous, but she needed to get rid of that look. She hurried through the schoolyard door and into the main building. That sensation would only disappear when the boy stopped looking at her.

3.

At the end of the corridor the girl blushed and stuttered in front of a microphone of a national television network camera. Her hands gestured nervously, excessively, as she tried to explain to them how it had happened and, above all, she tried to convey the strange sensation of seeing a boy with a leaky liver fighting with a guy who was twice as tall and who, right now, was still alive and who had saved her.

Martin rang the bell of the nurse on duty and when she came the boy asked her to bring him water.

—No water, nothing at all until the doctor says so, —she replied dryly. It was the third time the boy had asked her for water and she answered the same thing.

—What's going on outside?

The nurse looked at him without smiling and without a hint of astonishment.

—It's the television. They're coming for you.

Before he could ask her any more questions, the nurse left the room. "How unfriendly" thought Martin as he watched her close the door behind her.

He licked his lips dry. Was the television network there for him? He had been wandering since he was twelve and had turned seventeen. He knew that the wound was deadly, that, as the girl had told him, he should not be alive any longer.

Innately he brought his right hand to the wound which now had a bulging bandage. He felt nothing when he pressed. He only had a horrible thirst.

He was still a minor. He thought of the possibility of being forced to return to the home of his adoptive parents. That did make him feel something. The rage at the thought of that man made his heart beat faster. Maybe it wouldn't hurt to come back now. Now that he was no longer a twelve—year—old.

The door opened and the doctor who had carried out his operation greeted him with a slight nod to which Martin responded in the same way. He liked that man. He was a quiet, discreet guy, and he smelled good. Martin was surprised at the thought. Lately he noticed a lot of smells, and although he had never been a very peaceful person, he had increasing violent instincts.

Perhaps the repeated beatings and being frequently locked up by his father had a lot to do with it.

—How do you feel?

The doctor stood at the foot of the raised bed.

—I'm fine, I feel perfect just... I just have an unbearable thirst.

The doctor approached the bedside and pressed the button used to notify the nurse. When she opened the door, he ordered her to bring a bottle of water.

—Martin, not a single relative of yours has shown up. No one lives at that address you gave me, and the number you gave me does not belong to any active phoneline.

The nurse came back with the water bottle and a plastic cup. The doctor filled it and handed it to Martin. He drank it in one gulp and handed it again towards the doctor who refilled it again and then closed the bottle and left it on the bedside table. When Martin offered the glass again, he took it out of his hand.

—Let's go little by little.

—I feel fine, —he protested. That thirst burned his throat.

—Nobody showed up asking for you. The phone number doesn't exist, are you going to tell me the truth?

Martin shook his head. He knew his destiny was a new adoptive family or welfare. He had a little less than a year left until he came of age. Maybe they could give him some sort of temporary guardian to go to or something like that.

—I've been living on the streets since I was twelve, —he said at last. My... adoptive father didn't treat me very well.

He shrugged trying to appear indifferent.

The doctor folded his arms and swung a little on his feet.

—You've been living alone for five years...

—Yes.

His eyes shone and the doctor thought he was going to cry. He nodded at the water bottle and Martin threw himself at it. He did away with the glass and drank directly from the bottle. The scarce liter that was left disappeared in seconds.

I'm going to be honest with you. There are some national television journalists out there who want to talk to you. The news of your... heroism and above all of the miracle of your recovery has spread like wildfire. It's not something I like too much, but your situation is complicated. If... if you're on TV, your adoptive family may see you and decide to introduce themselves.

Martin began to shake his head. The doctor raised one hand.

—It wouldn't be the worst option. If someone showed up, you would avoid a social institution.

—I prefer that.

The doctor put one hand to his mouth and squeezed the ends of his lips between his thumb and forefinger.

—But if someone showed up, and since you're seventeen years old, I could convince him or her to approve your emancipation. They'd have to get you a job, but it's possible. Martin couldn't believe what was happening. That man, without knowing him at all, was helping him. That was something totally new to him and the feelings he had were contradictory.

—It's a possibility you should think about.

Martin shook his head quickly.

—I have nothing to think about.

—Do you want me to bring them in?

Martin quickly reviewed his possibilities and then tried to smile at the man.

—Go ahead, he said, as he swallowed saliva and squeezed again that wound which could really be the beginning not of death, but of a new life.

