

THE SARAPE

By Greg Larson/illustrated by Dick Brown

And he shall turn the heart
of the fathers to the children,
and the heart of the
children to their fathers
(Malachi 4:6).

Daddy!"
The tremulous little voice in
the quiet darkness was followed
by muffled sobs.
"Daaaddy!"
This time the plea was louder
and more fearful.

Footsteps hurried down the hall toward the
voice. Then, *click*, the bedroom filled with
light. Stevie's dad stood squinting in the door-
way, his hair awry. "Stevie, what's wrong?
Did you have a bad dream?"

Stevie nodded.

Dad sat on the bed and smoothed the boy's
hair, then gently wiped away the tears.

"You're OK now, Son."

"I dreamed"—Stevie tried to stop sobbing
and catch his breath—"that you and Mom"—he
sniffed—"were gone and that. . . I'd never see
you again!" Stevie looked up into his dad's
brown eyes. "I was all alone."

Dad wrapped his strong arms around Stevie
in a loving hug. "You know, Stevie, there
used to be another little boy very much like
you. Once he, too, was afraid that he was all
alone. Do you want to hear about him?"

Stevie nodded.



Carlos was just about your size when his parents sent him to Mexico to stay with his grandmother. Carlos's family was moving to a different part of Colorado, and Carlos's father told him that as soon as they had found a new house and moved into it, they would send for him.

Carlos's Uncle Pablo drove him to Mexico. They traveled over hot, dusty roads and through deserts and mountains. Finally, in one little village next to the mountains, his uncle smiled at Carlos and said, "We're here."

As they pulled up in front of a tiny white adobe house, chickens scattered in every direction, flapping their wings and squawking at the car and its passengers.

An old lady came out of the house. She had dark brown skin and white hair. Carlos's uncle threw his arms around her and kissed her cheek.

"Carlos," his uncle said, "do you remember your grandmother?"

"Bienvenido (welcome), Carlos." The woman smiled at him.

Carlos just stood there. He hadn't been with his grandmother since he was a baby, and he didn't remember her at all. Finally he looked up at his uncle. "Uncle Pablo, I don't want to be here!" Carlos whispered, even though he knew his grandmother couldn't understand English.

"Now, Carlos, remember that you agreed to give it a try here. It's just for a little while," Uncle Pablo said. "Here, see if you're strong enough to carry this into the house." Pablo took the old, battered suitcase out of the car and handed it to Carlos.

Carlos dropped the suitcase just inside the door. He walked through both rooms of the house. The wooden furniture looked strange to him, as did the pictures with beads hanging from them on the walls. In the middle of the larger room stood a tall, wooden machine with rows of yarn going up and down; on the floor around it lay several balls of colorful yarn.

Carlos walked out the back door and into the cooking shed, where black pots and pans hung on the wall and firewood was piled in the corner. He saw that his uncle and grandmother were still talking, and he decided that somehow he'd think of a way to get his uncle to take him back to Colorado.

Carlos went through the backyard to the other side of the house. He saw some boys playing in the street and walked closer to watch them. Suddenly a dog ran up and started barking at him. The boys stopped playing, and one of them called the dog. They all yelled a greeting to Carlos, but he couldn't understand them. They called again, and when he still didn't respond, they started to laugh.



Carlos turned and ran away from them. *I can't help it if I don't understand Spanish!* he thought.

Carlos ran through the village and didn't stop until he'd climbed a small hill. From the top of the hill he could see his grandmother's house. "Oh no!" he agonized. "Uncle Pablo's car is gone!"

The sinking sun had turned the faraway clouds into a red, orange, and pink sunset before Carlos returned to his grandmother's house. She was busy making dinner in the cooking shed. When she looked up and saw Carlos, she put down the bowl she was holding and grasped his shoulders. "Carlos!" she cried, then went on excitedly in Spanish. Carlos didn't understand her words, but he understood that she had been worried about him and that he wasn't to wander off again without telling her. *Grown-ups are all alike in every language,* Carlos decided.

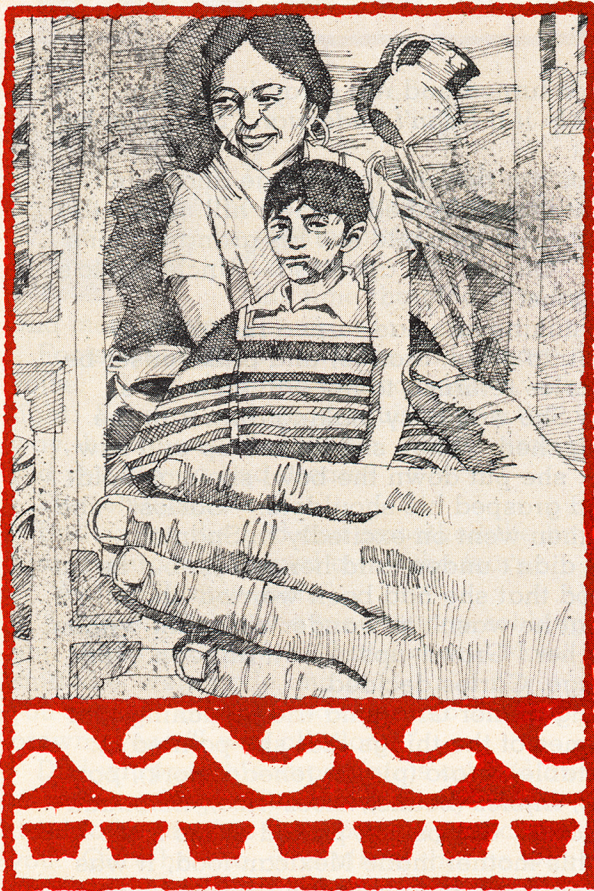
During dinner Grandma tried teaching him the names of the things that she pointed to: *mesa* (table), *plato* (plate), *tenedor* (fork), *pan* (bread), *frijoles* (beans), *arroz* (rice), *limonada* (lemonade). Carlos just picked at his food. When his mother made Mexican food, it was always a treat, but now all he wanted was a hamburger with catsup and mustard and pickles.

After dinner Grandma worked at her loom by the dim light of a kerosene lamp, weaving fabric from the colorful yarns. As she worked, she sang softly and looked up every few minutes to smile at Carlos. Carlos sat on the floor watching his grandmother, wishing that she had a television set.

Grandma let Carlos sleep in the only bed in the house. She covered him with a sheet, let down the mosquito netting, then tucked its edges under the mattress. "Buenas noches (good night), Carlos." She went into the other room and put out the lamp.

Darkness closed in on Carlos. Crickets chirped nearby. He turned over and looked out the window at a bright star and wondered if that same star was shining down on his parents. All day he had fought tears, but he couldn't stop them anymore. Soon he was sobbing out of control.

Grandma lighted the kerosene lamp again and came into the room. Lifting the mosquito netting and sitting on the bed next to Carlos, she pulled him up into her arms. "Carlos, Carlos." She put her soft cheek against his forehead and gently rocked back and forth, humming softly.



"I want my dad . . . and my mom," Carlos sobbed.

Grandma got up, took his hand, and led him to a wooden chest in the other room. From the chest she took brightly colored fabric and soft-colored dresses and placed them aside. Then she took out what looked like a small, woven blanket with broad stripes of green, red, white, and orange. One of the corners was slightly burned. She held it out for Carlos to take. "Sarape (serape)," she said.

Then the old woman brought out something wrapped in white lace. She took off the lace, revealing a book. Smiling at Carlos, she opened the book so that he could see it. Black and white photographs filled each page. She turned the pages slowly, smiling at pictures of a bride and a groom and babies. Pointing to a picture of a young boy, she said, "Tu papi (your daddy)."

Carlos looked closely at the picture. It was like looking at himself. It was his father, standing with the same sarape over his shoulder. Also in the picture was a beautiful young woman with her arm around him.

Carlos ran his fingers over the coarse fabric of the sarape. His father's fingers had probably felt this fabric the same way when they were the same size as Carlos's were now.

He looked up from the picture at his grandmother. She wore her white hair pulled back in a bun—the same way it was in the picture—only then her hair had been black. She's still pretty, Carlos decided.

As he looked at his grandmother, she smiled, but a tear ran down her cheek too. Suddenly Carlos understood that she loved his father as much as he did and that she was as lonely for him as he was.

"Grandma," Carlos said simply, putting his arms around her.

Tears came to both their eyes, but this time they were tears of joy.

When Grandma had tucked Carlos back into bed, she placed the sarape on the end of the bed.

"Thank you, Grandma," Carlos said, smiling up at her. "Everything is going to be good, I can tell."

Grandma smiled at Carlos, then bent down and gently kissed him good night. "Te quiero mucho (I love you a lot), Carlos."

Stevie snuggled down under the covers.

Dad gently brushed Stevie's hair to the side of his face, then left the room. Soon he was back—with a brightly colored sarape that was slightly burned in one corner. He spread the sarape over Stevie. "Te quiero mucho, Stevie."