

martlet magazine

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university of victoria



He is called Veinte-Ocho (Twenty eight) in his country of Puerto Rico because that has always been his number. He has run through other nicknames in his career, El Loco (the crazy man), Culo Rojo (the red ass), El Intelligente (the genius), but Veinte-Ocho is the one that remains. The great pitcher runs three miles on the beach every morning even though he has not been in the major leagues for years and is forty two years old.

He has a twelve year old son who allegedly ran off with a chorus girl three times his age.

Once he attacked Joe Adcock on his way to first base.

He still pitches in the Puerto Rican Leagues and some batters say he has never thrown better. After the games he lights up long cigars and sits around hotel patios under strings of lights in the warm Caribbean evenings, sipping rum, telling stories about himself, helping create the legend. He guards it closely, expands it carefully, prunes and weeds it, does not let it get out of hand and prefers all stories told about him to be true ones.

When he pitches in Santurce it is the social event of the week and more tickets are sold than seats are available. If he pitches well the crowd screams wildly, chanting "Ese es, tu papa, ese es, tu papa" which means "This is your father, this is your father." When he pitches poorly the crowd screams with equal enthusiasm, "Vieja, vieja, vieja" (Old woman, old woman, old woman).

While he was pitching in San Juan a huge man hung over the railing yelling at him each inning when he returned to the dugout, calling into question Veinte-Ocho's ancestry and reminding him he was no longer good enough to play in the United States. The man, his teammates informed him, was called El Toro de Santurce and was a hired hood and ex professional boxer.

Veinte-Ocho smiled at him but the verbal assaults continued.

In the final inning Veinte-Ocho loudly announced to the man, "I will meet you after the game."

His teammates were upset by the challenge, they were familiar with the man's reputation, they knew stories of people he had thrown off balconies, of men he had mauled for a small fee or no fee at all. They made plans to sneak Veinte-Ocho out of the park and told him the man always carried a gun.

Veinte-Ocho assured them he would meet the man and would not let himself be smuggled out of the park.

When the game was over and he had showered, he left quickly for a far corner of the empty parking lot which ran alongside some tropical growth, some spare naked light bulbs hanging at odd spots throughout the gravel lot.

El Toro was waiting there with three bodyguards. The players from both teams gathered around the clubhouse door with young autograph seekers, silently holding each other and crossing themselves, afraid to speak or help. His teammates hoped he would talk his way out of it, perhaps walk up to them and smile his unnerving smile and they would disappear.

Veinte-Ocho stopped ten feet in front of the four men. Not a word was spoken though the men at the clubhouse wondered what was being said. After moments of silence El Toro began talking.

Veinte-Ocho reached into his back pocket, pulled out a baseball, and threw it point blank into the man's chest as hard as he could.

The man crumpled to the ground and his friends quickly gathered over him.

Veinte-Ocho turned his back and slowly walked back to the clubhouse where his teammates waited for him, leaping joyously around him, shaking his hand, slapping him on the back talking and shouting again. Both teams escorted him to the waiting taxis which were lined up waiting for the players.

He acknowledged his friends' enthusiasm with great distance, making only a brief and half-hearted attempt at his famous smile.

"It is simply leverage," he told them.

The line of green taxis returned the happy players to the hotel where both teams were staying.

In August during a pennant race in the high minor leagues in the United States, he was arrested on a morals charge. He openly admitted guilt to the charges brought against him - showing obscene films to an usherette in his apartment. She was only fourteen.

"I thought she was older," he said in court, "she told me she was nineteen."

The parents of all the usherettes who worked at the stadium were distraught and publicly made a statement about the case. Among other things they requested that he be released permanently from the Tidewater Tides baseball team and banned forever from playing in Norfolk where the team was located.

With the exception of a fine, the sentence was suspended and Veinte-Ocho was forced to return to Puerto Rico.

"Vieja! Vieja!" the parents shouted.

When he arrived at the San Juan airport a small crowd was waiting to greet him as he stepped off the plane. He appeared at the top step of the ramp and raised both arms in the air, then curled his right arm and pointed to his muscular bicep, smiling.

"Ese es, tu papa, ese es, tu papa!" they chanted.

They had read accounts of his arrest in the paper and knew of the sex

movies and young girls.

It was a well known fact in their country that Veinte-Ocho liked sex movies and young girls.

He was sitting in a hotel restaurant in San Juan, smoking a cigar, talking rapidly to three men at his table. They were asking him for some advice on a business matter about which he knew nothing.

The dining room was filled with rich Puerto Rican businessmen, and tourists. Veinte-Ocho reached over and flipped his ashes in one of several potted palms sitting around the room.

A man who looked like all the other businessmen rose and crossed the room to Veinte-Ocho's table. He was wearing dark glasses, a dark sport coat with white pants, and white shoes.

"Veinte-Ocho?" he asked.

"Yes."



the old woman

"I want to tell you how disgraceful are the actions of your son. He has made a fool out of you and you should take actions with him. His public behavior is embarrassing."

"What has he done?" Veinte-Ocho asked, thinking at once that his son was involved in a major scandal known to everyone but him, something perverted or revolutionary.

"He is living with a woman three times his age."

"Is that all?" Veinte-Ocho asked.

"Isn't that enough?"

"Get away from me."

"I only felt it my duty to tell you," the businessman said.

"Get away from me before I kill you."

He flipped another ash in the potted palm, and his friends reached over to calm him.

The businessman took comfort in Veinte-Ocho's composure and said, "One more thing, and I'm not the only one who feels this way --" he paused to gather the strength necessary for his final declaration, "-- you throw like an old woman."

The man returned to his table and Veinte-Ocho asked his friends if they knew who the man was.

"I don't know him," one of them said, "I saw him arrive in a brown Cadillac."

Veinte-Ocho shrugged and continued giving his advice.

Weeks later he saw the brown Cadillac in the hotel parking lot late at night.

He went to his room and returned with a baseball bat.

"Vieja! Viega!" he said, and beat the new car with the bat until it was dented beyond repair, smashing in all the windows so that piles of broken glass covered the upholstery like jewels.

A parking lot attendant ran over to see what the commotion was, but upon recognizing the man with the bat he stopped short and said, "Ahh, Veinte-Ocho, you played very well yesterday."

When the car was battered to a helpless pile of brown dents he placed the bat (which had his signature on it) on the seat of the car amidst the broken glass.

He told the attendant to tell the police that an old woman did it.



is your father

by ronald shelton

Weeks later Veinte-Ocho came into some money, looked up the businessman, and handed him a check for two thousand dollars.

"This is for the car," he said.

The man folded the cheque and placed it in his pocket.

"Well, are you going to thank me?" Veinte-Ocho asked.

"No, you should have paid me long ago."

Veinte-Ocho ripped open the man's pocket and tore the cheque to shreds.

In a darkened room on the penthouse floor of the Santurce Hotel, Veinte-Ocho sat back in a soft chair while his son set up a movie screen.

I hold my fastball like this," he demonstrated, "it is a matter of leverage."

"Women I hold like this.

"Cigars like this.

"Cocktail glasses like this."

On the movie screen two women came out from behind a curtain and began undressing each other.

"Dos viejas," he said.

At irregular intervals Veinte-Ocho drove into the mountains and hiked into the jungle to fee El Feo, the animal much feared by natives of the inland villages and not believed in by the city dwellers. El Feo has the body of a man and the head of a duck, and lives in the rivers and trees of the Puerto Rican jungles.

"El Feo," Veinte-Ocho called.

"Yes," the creature was swimming in a pool, "ahh, it is good to see you."

"I have a problem."

"How can I help you?"

"My son has run off with a chorus girl three times his age. My arm does not feel good and I must pitch tomorrow. They are calling me vieja again."

El Feo floated on his back around the pool, flipped on his belly and swam through the water as if practicing a stroke.

"Is that all?"

"Yes, isn't that enough?"

"Well, perhaps for one visit, but those are not serious things."

"How can I get my son back?"

"Invite him for a visit and be friendly with him, show some concern for what he is doing, and do things together."

El Feo snapped at a dragonfly darting in front of him, capturing the insect in his beak, holding it a minute to get a better grip with his bill, then swallowed it in a quick gulp.

"And my arm?"

"Cut off the head of a live chicken and sprinkle the blood around home plate before the game. You will perform well and they will not call you an old woman."

Greatly relieved to hear this advice, Veinte-Ocho thanked El Feo and returned out of the thick growth to his car, and drove back to his hotel.

On the way he stopped at a farm and bought a live chicken.

He is pitching well and the crowds are chanting that he is their father. Veinte-Ocho is preparing plans for a large wedding party for his son who has announced he will marry the chorus girl.

"My son," he said, gathering the boy in his arms before the wedding, "you have done well. She is a beautiful woman and will make you a good wife. Remember one thing I tell you, for this is your father speaking and I have never led you wrong, have I?"

The boy shook his head and though he knew what his father was going to say he still looked interested, for he would not insult his father on this day.

"Everything is a matter of leverage," the father said.

The boy thanked him as if it were the first time he had heard it, returned the hug and went off to find his bride.

Veinte-Ocho picked an orange from the huge centerpiece display of fruit and flowers on the lace draped wedding table, and turned it in his hand as if he were throwing his screwball, slowly went through a pitching motion until he felt satisfied, then placed the orange back on the centerpiece.

The arriving wedding guests broke out in their chant when they saw him, "Ese es, tu papa, ese es, tu papa!"

The man whose car he battered beyond recognition was at the wedding. The man whose chest had been crushed was there with his three bodyguards, each with a present for the groom. Some members of his team and opposing teams were there, men who had feared his fastball a thousand times.

I am mellowing he thought as he held his glass aloft, I am turning soft and useless. I have become too dependent on the man with a duck's head. Last time I looked for him he was not to be found, and he did not even leave word where I could reach him. I can still run on the beach, but my head is soft like an old woman.

"Ese es, tu papa, ese es, tu papa!"

Perhaps if I cut off the head of a live chicken and sprinkled the blood around the wedding cake.

Either I am crushing someone or they are giving my son a present.

I am an old woman or I am their father.

I am an old woman and I am their father.

I am an old woman who strikes them out.

Confounded and triumphant in his tuxedo, Veinte-Ocho went into the crowd and began shaking hands.

martlet magazine

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lexia

1

I have been abandoned,
I have nowhere to go.
I have received February letters
in August from Spanish girls,
the memory of them lingering, instilled
in the first three or four welcome words.
They await judgement in prison, I don't know why.
(I never knew, I said,
I never knew they cared this much.)
I haven't a visa, I haven't any money.
This season brings only words for poems:
it brings no joy, nor money,
nor rich women.
The aging absence of my aristocracy
and governess humiliates me,
grieves me like a death.
I am so sad to see myself,
I am so sad to know myself.
I shall walk like a haunted one
along unfamiliar Pacific beaches,
my belongings on my tired back---
my tracks not here, but south of France.
It seems I have broken an unspoken code---
I have confided my secrets to the living.
They say I must pay now without mercy,
without later, burning regrets.
I now name nameless and forget them;
the morning dew alert on my face,
my eyes greenly asleep:

2

Now that you have left
with all the counts and countesses
It seems pointless writing.
You will not see this
nor anything else
unless I become famous
and my photograph appears
in Continental newspapers,
or if I write and mimic pseudo songs
to radioset listeners
and you buy some future editions of mine
(and see this.)
But then,
you always maintained that fame
cannot be claimed to be
a person, nor lover, nor destiny.
We all live our lives to the end
to see if our rumored fates are true.
My future age will be the eldest member
of a bridge bridging nothing
with flattened verse queerly demanded
by no one at all.
the ashen forests like white dreams
crumbling under the touch
of my earthen hands.
Everyone has left like the sky passing by,
but I remain contemplating ghosts

3

Let me return to my feeling,
to my thought
It hides inside the shapes of me.
It silences. It silences.
An immense silence severs me steadfastly,
as it enormously procures seriously
small stale fisthulls.
Fires seeing it thirst
with its dry
feel like stars whispering
their neuter sex
behind the shape of light
A pendulum swings
(This way That, This way That)

martin kava

tom gore