



At 8:30 a.m. the summer had sunk the city into stifling humidity and dirt. Samuel Manrique helped set out the baskets of peaches and bananas in front of the store. The corner street sign read, "9th Avenue and 35th Street." His father, in a fruit-stained apron, arranged the grapes and cherries in the outdoor stand. He anxiously eyed the white-collar workers who were walking from the 42nd Street bus terminal to the big trucking corporation. The truck drivers spat contemptuously as they thought of them in the air conditioned offices five stories above. A group of massive drivers walked from the loading platform across the street to Gorge Manrique's stand.

"Eh Sammy," they called to the twelve year old boy, "dontcha gonna tell your pop the fruit's gonna rot today? Throw me a sweet peach, hokay?"

Sam tossed it as the driver flipped a dime to his father. Mr. Manrique turned to a heavy Spanish woman. Samuel took this opportunity to duck down the street. He banged on the window that said, "Italian Ices, rainbow flavors." Joey Rojas opened it to greet him with a waft of stale fish-air.

"I have to work until 8:00 tonight. Get the guys and bring them up to the roof at 9:00," he yelled and ran back to the stand.

By 9:00 the street had cooled. Old men and women sat on their stoops in lawn chairs, kitchen chairs, and stools watching the street lights change from green to yellow to red. They conversed in Spanish more than English. One by one, five boys entered the nearly condemned apartment building, climbed eight flights of stairs and opened the heavy door to the roof. They all sat around the broken and grimy windows of the skylight. Although the stars and

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sky stretched bounteously above, the sounds of the subways and buses below imprisoned their minds. The boys sat in silence awaiting the important decision from their leader, Samuel. The decision came.

"Old man Verdes is the one," he hissed between his teeth.

Approval shone on the other young dirty faces. They became immediately involved in the excitement of planning and revising plans until they all agreed. Then they nervously descended the eight flights. They laughed a lot.

Ten minutes later Mr. Verdes looked up from his bedroom chair to see his apartment door swing open. Six figures threw something inside and then ducked out of sight. The old man gasped at the flash of light, the loud explosion and the thick black smoke that filled the outer room. He continued to stare at the ruined mess helplessly until a neighbor finally took him out.

The boys scattered and met again later on their roof.

"That makes our fourth victim," said Samuel proudly. But inside he was not proud.

"Is this the last?" little Joey Rojas dared ask. "Why are we doin' this anyway."

The question had never occurred to Samuel. He only knew that this act of violence and cruelty was the only thing that permitted him to ignore his own poverty and surroundings. An older world had given him a crude existence, and he wanted to destroy those who were materially secure. So the boy blew up living rooms as if he were liquidating his own misery. He was not alone in his feelings, for five of his friends eagerly helped him. But none of them could answer the question, "Why?" with anything but a "why not."