

**“Goose Bumps”  
by Linda Stamps**

Umberto leaned back in the rusty folding chair as he tossed bits of empanada to the flock of geese. They squawked and honked. The gander trumpeted his approval as his harem fed.

He called them by name, Lorca, Lydia, Sophia. To El Greco, the gander, he tipped his cap and called, “Hombre.” Sitting in the warm Mediterranean sun, he closed his eyes and listened to their low, satisfied clucking. He knew them by the sounds they made.

“Hey Hombre, which one will please you today? Maybe they’ve had enough of you, my friend. Then what will you do?” The gander waddled around the flock stretching his long neck skyward.

Umberto nodded off for a few minutes when the sound of voices jarred him. Javier and his compadres rounded the village square cussing, spitting, marking territory like so many pissing dogs.

“Hey you,” Javier called out. “Which one is mine? I’m hungry.” Umberto ignored him. The flock preened.

The old man closed his eyes, turned his face to the afternoon sun, and swatted a fly buzzing around his ear. Just as he made peace with the pest, he felt a sharp pain in the back of his head. He opened his eyes. He turned to see Javier and the boys throwing rocks at the geese. The flock hissed. Umberto jumped to his feet. Javier stood still, the others scattered.

“What will you do now, viejo?”

“What is wrong with you, boy? Leave us in peace, can’t you?”

Javier spit. He strutted toward the old man. Umberto felt the heat pulsing off the young man's body.

“What do you want?” Umberto said, his voice tightening.

“To show you who is the boss,” Javier snarled.

Umberto shook his head, returned to the folding chair, sat down. Javier stomped over to the greybeard and shoved him. The chair collapsed. Umberto hit the ground. The geese erupted. They hissed, squawked, and ran in circles. The boy turned. El Greco leapt onto his head and beat him with his massive wings. Javier grabbed the gander by the neck. El Greco snapped at his face. He fell to his knees under the full weight of the goose. Umberto watched the short-lived battle. He stood and called to El Greco. The gander hopped off. Javier jumped to his feet, turned, and ran.

Umberto brushed the dust from his clothes, picked up the chair, and sat down. He reached into his pocket for the remaining bits of empanada and tossed them to the geese. El Greco flapped his wings and waddled across the lot. Umberto tipped his cap. “Gracias, amigo.” The gander fed.