

María Juana's Gift

A Novel by T. Lloyd Winetsky

Jake Friend, the son of a Hollywood stage actor, falls for a fellow bilingual teacher, Tina Linn, who was born in Equatorial Guinea, the only Spanish-speaking country in Africa.

Jake and Tina marry and move to a small town on the Arizona-Mexico border around the time of the U.S. Bicentennial celebration. After two miscarriages, Tina is pregnant; they decide to have the baby in the local hospital.

After their daughter is born, a hospital custodian, María, alerts the Friends that the child is ill, though the medical staff disagrees.

To what extremes can Jake and Tina push the "system" to get their daughter the attention she needs? In this scene, Jake has just interrupted the Bicentennial parade to speak to the doctor:

...the band's practice medley was now on *Yankee Doodle Dandy*, so Jake and the doctor had to keep yelling.

"I'm not here for the parade, doctor; you know I've been trying to reach you. I'd like you to come with me to the hospital." He pointed back. "I'm parked just over there."

"What? I don't think so, Mister Friend." His smile vanished for only a moment.

"My daughter, doctor, she -- "

"Listen, she's in good hands. Now please leave me to enjoy my Sunday," Serna said, not as loud. He turned away and put on his hat, assuming the matter was finished.

"*You* listen," Jake shouted just as the bandmaster signaled for immediate silence, "our baby's sick!" Those within twenty yards of the Corvette stopped prattling to gawp at Jake and the doctor.

"Jesus, man, shut up," Serna said under his breath through a toothy grin, looking around as if Jake were not there...

María Juana's Gift explores "preventable human medical error," which some believe has long been the "dirty little secret" of U.S. health care. Sub-themes in *Gift* are conflicts related to Mexican immigration, and apathy in our educational system.