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The digital magazine  
of ENMU's  
communication  
department

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# HOUNDBYTES

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## Performance Studies and the Holidays

This month HoundBytes turns its attention towards the new interim chair of the communication department, Leonard Madrid, and the subject of performance studies. HoundBytes conducts an interview with Mr. Madrid covering his playwriting experience, communication influence, thoughts on performance studies, and much more. HoundBytes writers explore performance in the upcoming presidential elections and social media. Finally, HoundBytes gets into a holiday mood with articles related to Halloween and Thanksgiving.

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## Interview with Leonard Madrid

Interviewed By Julian Gagnon

1. Please tell our readers more about your background. You are an ENMU alumni?

I grew up in Portales. Three generations of my family, including my brothers and myself, attained our first degrees from ENMU. My cousin Michael was just featured in the Alumni magazine. My mom earned a degree in Sociology from ENMU and my Dad received a degree in Spanish.

I received my first degree from ENMU in the Theatre department. I then moved to Albuquerque and received a degree in Lighting and Scenic Design from the University of New Mexico. I also received an MFA in Playwriting there.

After that, I helped start a small ensemble theatre company in Albuquerque where I have worked ever since. I taught at Red Rocks Community College in Denver, Colorado, the University of New Mexico, and Central New Mexico Community College before returning to ENMU as faculty.

My play "Cebollas" recently had its world premiere at the Denver Center for Performing Arts. My play "Prima's Guide to Funerals" received a world premiere at Creede Repertory Theatre in the summer. "Cebollas" is currently being performed at the Santa Fe Playhouse.

2. How did you get your start, both as a play writer and communication scholar?

I was lucky to be raised by parents who had a deep appreciation for the arts. When my dad was at ENMU in the 1970s he took a workshop from the famous Chicano theatre, Teatro Campesino. After that, both of my parents encouraged us to get into theatre. While I was at ENMU, I took a playwriting class.

3. What are some of your influences in theatre and communication? I've read that you're interested in "Latino Theatre, Magical Realism, Chicano Theatre, or Brown Theatre." Could you explain a little about what that means?

I would say that my influences in theatre are Chicano and Latinx theatre artists. Luis Valdez, Jose Rivera, Luis Alfaro, Cherrie Moraga, and Karen Zacarias are some of my favorite playwrights. I am also deeply influenced by two of New Mexico's greatest writers, Denise Chavez and Rudolfo Anaya.

My life as a theatre artist has been dedicated to supporting the regional voice. I think southwestern playwrights are deeply underrepresented even in our own region. The culture of the Southwest is unique and beautiful, it deserves to be seen on our stages. I think it is important to tell our stories in whatever medium we feel is best.

4. This month's edition of HoundBytes includes articles focused on performance studies. How would you define performance? Why are performance studies important?

Performance is as important as language. It uses context and norms to communicate a story to other people. My definition of performance is about two core actions of communication, coding and decoding. How do we present something in a way that is processed by a perceived audience? We perform different versions of ourselves at work than we perform at home. Our professors perform knowledge. Even the architecture of the university is a performance for people driving by.

In theatre classes, we break it down to A+B for C. A is a person or group. B is a script or modality. C is a perceived audience. A is the theatre company that uses B, the script, to perform for C, the audience. A football team would be A. Their plays would be their script. They perform for two audiences, the other team and the people in the stands.

5. You're listed on the ENMU website as a professor of both communication and theater. How do the two departments approach performance differently?

I am a professor of theatre who is working in the Communication department for a year or so. I am fairly intrigued by how the two disciplines overlap. Many of the courses could be different versions of theatre courses. Both have technical sides. I think, however, that both departments are dedicated to storytelling. It is just the mode and the goal of the storytelling. In communication, the performance of self is far more important, because your individual knowledge and integrity is part of your performance. In theatre, the goal is to perform fiction as a different person.

6. I wrote an article for this edition of HoundBytes about the connections between this year's presidential election and performance studies. Do you believe there is a legitimate relationship between the two? Do any examples come to mind?

I think politics is a very clear example of performance. It has a costume. Even the color of a politician's suit or tie can become an issue. Everything is rehearsed and scripted. The candidates have to look, behave, and say the words that their perceived audience needs to see them as viable.

7. With the passing of Dr. Dobson, you have assumed the role of interim chair in the communication department. What should students know about this transition? Does it affect students?

8. What do you see in the future for the ENMU communication department?

The outlook for the Communication department is bright. We continue to keep our eyes on the horizon for new things. I am personally excited by the new discipline in Sport's Broadcasting.

9. What's the play schedule for this semester? How much are the tickets? Where can they be purchased?

The Department of Theatre and Digital Film Making has two productions per semester. Our second production for the Fall semester will be Romeo and Juliet.

The performances are Thursday Nov 14th through Saturday Nov 16th at 7pm and Sunday Nov 17th at 2pm. Tickets are \$10 for the general public, \$7 for Senior Citizens and Active Duty military. Free for ENMU students with ID and current activities sticker. For more information, call (575) 562-2711

10. What advice would you give undergraduate or graduate students in communication that are interested in performance studies?

Once you start to look at the world through the lens of performance, it is like that moment in "The Wizard of Oz" where things are suddenly in color. It can be overwhelming. It can also be fun.

# Ambrosita

By Leonard Madrid



*\* Click on the image to view Ambrosita. Youtube Chandler-Gilbert Community College.*

# Politics is/as Performance

By Julian Gagnon

It's November and time for another presidential election. Both sides of the aisle stress the importance of this election and claim their opponent represents an immoral and existential threat. As communication students it is important to examine the connections between politics and performance theory. Politicians are best viewed as actors on stage, a play watched by billions across the world. I am an online student currently living in Cambodia and working in China. I can tell you that without a doubt, the world is watching this election. Students in both Cambodia and China discuss the campaign and presidential debates. This show has gone global.

## Defining Performance

Gluhovic et. al. (2021) defined performance as a repeated or rehearsed “showing of the doing.” Performance was characterized by a transactional process between the performer and audience/spectator. Mediating actors were involved in the transactional performance, whether that be a chorus or media technologies. Performance was contrasted with performing as an action and verb. Theatricality and performativity were often associated with performance. While it usually carried a negative connotation of inauthenticity, theatricality was an embodied process that “unfolds through scripts...and gestural patterns and codifications, through repetitions, rehearsals, and re-performance” (Gluhovic et. al., 2021). On the other hand, performativity deals with the effects and unfolding of performances. If theatricality is about repetition and rehearsal, performativity is about spontaneity, unpredictability, and the actions within the performance.

## A Brief History of Performance Studies in Communication

We in performance studies are not marked by an easiness, a laid-back, one-size-fits-all method, theory or practice. Rather we are difficult. Difficult to define. Difficult to compartmentalize. (Carver, 2013)



I do not consider myself to be an expert in performance theory, but I have had an introduction to the field. As an undergraduate student at the University of North Texas I took performance of literature in the communication department. One core principle that I have always remembered was the belief that we perform in our everyday lives. As a speech and debate teacher for over two decades I had to explain this idea many times. The way that I acted as a teacher was a performance of a version of myself that was different from how I acted around friends or family. Yet, the field of performance studies is much more than a focus on performance in everyday life.

In their review of trends in performance studies in communication (PSC) over the past thirty years, Simmons and Brisini (2020) described PSC as an archipelago concerned with many smaller subjects that are closely related to each other. Examination of articles published in two PSC journals over time revealed that the origin of performance studies was interpretation of literature.

Of the 110 original articles published in the first decade of [*Literature in Performance: A Journal of Literary and Performing Art/Text and Performance Quarterly*], every article (save for one) is obviously about a literary work or literary figure, the adaptation and/or performance of literature (or folklore, or personal narrative), or the application/revision of literary criticism to the field of interpretation. (Simmons & Brisini, 2020, p.11)

With the poststructuralist turn from the traditional focus on authorship, interpretation, and text, to the performer, PSC moved away from its previous center in literature.

The second island in the PSC archipelago was feminism(s). The poststructuralist turn away from interpretation of literature was also a turn towards feminist scholarship. Simmons and Brisini (2020) argued that one of the seminal feminist works in the field of PSC

complicated the notion of feminism (providing an argument for intersectional feminisms, offered specific discussion of performance as a feminist undertaking wherein the authors urge readers to see ‘gender identity as multiply constructed and enacted through performance,’ and discussed the perils and pleasures of the ‘shifting ground’ of performance research in a feminist vein. (p. 13)

Intersectional feminism applied performance to other forms of marginalized identity like queerness, disability, race, among others. Feminist PSC foregrounded questions about how women shaped performance and how performance shaped women.

The third island in the PSC archipelago was queerness. Like the turn in PSC to poststructuralism birthed feminist studies in PSC, connections between gender and performance led to similar questions about the relationship between queerness and performance. Queerness engaged in intersectional approaches towards identity, but also examined “bodily desire” and “embodied practices.” Although queer studies are now commonplace in communication, that was not always the case. Simmons and Brisini (2020) calculated that

the first ten years of queer scholarship in TPQ (1992–2002) comprised roughly 10% of the articles, book reviews, and performance scripts published (33/361 published contributions). During the period of 2002–2018, that number rose to roughly 14% (72/510 published contributions). (16)

Many queer performance studies shared the methodological approach of autobiography, autoethnography, or auto-archaeology. Queer performance studies sometimes detailed interconnections with other marginalized groups and facets of identity like race and disability.

The fourth island in the PSC archipelago was multi/cultural performance. There were over 100 articles published related to this theme in the journals studied. Multicultural and cross-cultural performances were often examined, including American Indian, Critical Whiteness, Asian American, Black/African/African American, and Latinx/o/a performances (Simmons & Brisini, 2020). Special topics related to culture were also commonplace, such as food, body/hair politics, and citizenship. A subset of essays within the broader category of culture “employed critical, close, and performative readings and analyses of multi/cultural texts, such as films, plays, books stories, and music” (Simmons & Brisini, 2020).

The fifth island in the PSC archipelago was the media in/as performance. “No less than 50 essays published in the journal explicitly address technological mediation as a primary focus” (Simmons & Brisini, 2020). These publications examined the relationship between performance and different technological media. “Text and performance are media-dependent, in that they necessarily require a communication channel, such as ‘the human voice,’ ‘the printed word,’ or one that is ‘electronic’” (Simmons & Brisini, 2020). With advances in technology, multimedia performances became a popular subject.

The final island in the PSC archipelago was the personal turn. Different from the previous islands, the personal turn was a methodological pivot inward. “The reality that performance was an embodied process, and that interpretation was a means wherein permeable boundaries were established between performer, character, and text, clearly set the stage for a turn toward the personal” (Simmons & Brisini, 2020). This method was used to study performances in everyday life, identity categories like gender, race, ethnicity, able-bodiedness, and performance outside of universities. Writing itself came to be seen as a performance.

## **Politics and Performance Studies in Communication**

From political plays to politicians performing rituals like voting, politics and performance have been related to each other for centuries. PSC examined numerous ways that politics performs, such as rituals within government, symbolic political acts, the use of political rhetoric inside and outside of government, the importance of acting skills, narratives and storytelling, and comparisons between theater and elections (Gluhovic et. al., 2021). Performance also has a long history of political content. The oldest written play in existence, *The Persian* by Aeschylus, was primarily political. Given that performance extended beyond plays, PSC explored

a broad spectrum of cultural behaviors that include theater, dance, folklore, popular entertainment, performance art, protest, cultural ritual, and the performance of self in everyday life. (Gluhovic et. al., 2021)

Gluhovic et. al. (2021) emphasized that politics and performance are “co-constitutive.” Politics influenced performance and performance shaped politics. Their relationship did not flow in one direction. Gluhovic et. al. (2021) noted the location of politics was both that *politics is performance*, and *politics as performance*.

When a performance *is political* this defamiliarization originates from its actors or authors; when the performance is viewed *as political* it is through the hermeneutics of politics and performance scholarship that the hidden politics become transparent.” (Gluhovic et. al., 2021, 15)

*Politics is performance* referenced acts that were intended as performance, whereas *politics as performance* involved theatricality and performativity, actions in out everyday life that might be unintentionally performative.

In a case study of political performance, Chou et. al. (2016) examined “elections as theater.” They provided many examples of the performative aspects of politics including the overall importance of a candidate’s performance and debates. Presidential elections are known for their dramatic twists and turns. October surprises.

Theatrical tropes cannot be ignored in an age where political appearances are staged as performances ‘mediated by camera angles and on-line producers who create a set of narrative trajectories’ (Chou et. al., 2016).

Elections are performance. Oratory and speaking skills are critical on the campaign trail. More than that, elections and theater share commonalities like characters, scene settings, and a plot. Chou et. al. (2016) called for more consideration of the “sights, sounds and other sensations” that surround political performances. Citizens would benefit from learning the skills of performance and how to be a “good watcher.”



\*Click on the image to view “The Many Accents of Kamala Harris” from TheDC Shorts Youtube

There were a few recent performative moments from both presidential candidates that are worth recognition. While many have criticized Kamala Harris for a change in her accent based on where she spoke (Colton, 2024), communication studies might consider this proof of the communication accommodation theory, where speakers regularly converge their speaking style with their audience's style. Regardless of communication accommodation theory, this example demonstrated that accents and dialectics are one element of political performances.

Then there is Trump. After more than decade filming *The Celebrity Apprentice*, Trump was already a skilled performer. Trump's recent work at McDonalds was accused of being staged (Rahman, 2024). However, because it was likely staged, voters should interpret the act through the lens of performance.



(Photo credit: John Mills, New York Times, 2024)

Over the many years that I have researched different debate topics, a few quotations have really stood out to me. One of my favorites came from the French cultural theorist Paul Virilio in his book *The Information Bomb* (2000). At one point he compared U.S. presidents to supermodels. He began the section with a famous quotation from St. Thomas More: "Politics is a theatre often played



out on a scaffold.” He traced the historical role and importance of speech, and the modern dominance of image. Virilio (2000) argued that one requirement of American presidents is now attractiveness. Thus, presidents become supermodels that were trained to say everything about a political topic in 90 seconds for the campaign, but who later went on to say nothing about the same issues after the election.

Apart from a visually correct physical appearance, these characters have understood that in a rapidly globalizing world there is no longer...either Right or Left...these things literally no longer have any meaning. All that remains is the great audiovisual dilemma, the conflict between the soft (the word) and the hard (the image). (Virilio, 2000)

With the instantaneous transmission of audiovisual news that crosses boundaries, the whole world watches as the presidential drama unfolds. Candidates lean into their roles, like method actors of presidential characters.

This article is not an attempt to sway your votes towards a particular candidate. It is my belief that as actors performing in a political drama, both Trump and Harris are guilty of intentionally exaggerating the threat that the other poses. Fear has always been a powerful motive for action. Rather than interpreting their speeches literally, it is best for citizens to understand them as part of a larger performance in the spectacle that is the presidential election.

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# Time Changes

## Performance in Social Media

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By Naomi Vargas

In today's hyper-connected world, the concept of privacy has transformed dramatically. Many individuals seem to have forgotten what it means to keep parts of their lives private, opting instead to share nearly every moment online. Social media has become a platform for chronicling our lives in real time, turning ordinary experiences into public spectacles. While this can create a sense of community, it also raises questions about the authenticity of our interactions and the value we place on personal moments.

Take, for instance, a friend of mine who posts her life in meticulous detail. From every meal she prepares to selfies on her way to work, her feed feels more like a never-ending reality show than a genuine reflection of her life. I can't help but feel a twinge of sadness when I see her sharing even the most mundane aspects, including family disputes. This begs the question: is she truly happy, or is she compensating for something deeper?

It's possible that her constant sharing is a way to seek validation or to connect with others. In a world where "likes" and comments can serve as a barometer of self-worth, it's easy to understand why someone might feel compelled to showcase their life so extensively. Yet, I wonder if there's a risk of living for the approval of an audience rather than for oneself. The constant need for affirmation can overshadow the simple joys of life, reducing meaningful experiences to mere content for social media.

Reflecting on this, I remember a time when families gathered not for a photo op but for genuine connection. Meals were shared with laughter and conversation, not just as a backdrop for a perfectly curated post. There was a mystery to our lives, a sense of intimacy that seems to have faded in the age of oversharing. The art of living quietly, of savoring private moments, is being lost to a culture that prizes visibility over authenticity.

While I, too, occasionally succumb to the urge to share, I find myself deleting posts out of overthinking and a desire to maintain some boundaries. It's a delicate balance between wanting to connect and needing to preserve a sense of self that isn't constantly on display.

As I consider the future, I can't help but worry about what our children and grandchildren will experience. Will they know the joy of private moments, or will their lives be as public as a reality show? The beauty of life lies in its mysteries, and it's essential to protect that. Perhaps it's time to reclaim our privacy, celebrating life's moments without feeling the need to broadcast them to the world.

# Believe It or Not

Lonnie Zamora had seen a lot during his years as a police officer in Socorro, New Mexico, but nothing prepared him for the terror he would face one quiet evening in April 1964. This account is based on real events—an experience that would haunt him for the rest of his life.

By Naomi Vargas

It started with a routine call about a speeding vehicle near the outskirts of town. But as he followed the dust trail, a blinding flash lit up the horizon. Lonnie thought it might be an explosion, maybe a crashed car, so he turned off the road and sped toward the light. What he found left him shaken to his core.

There, nestled among the desert shrubs, stood a gleaming, oval-shaped craft, metallic and eerily silent. Lonnie slowed his cruiser, gripping the wheel as he took in the sight. The object sat on slender legs, and strange red symbols marked its surface. A low hum filled the air, vibrating through his bones in a way that felt alien, unnatural. He could feel it more than hear it, like a frequency meant for something other than human senses.



Then he saw them—two small figures moving around the craft. They were only three or four feet tall, their bodies covered in shimmering, silvery suits that caught the fading light. Lonnie froze, unable to reach for his radio, his heart pounding as he watched the beings. Their heads turned in unison, dark, empty eyes locking onto him from across the desert.

One of the figures raised an elongated arm, and suddenly, the hum intensified. An unbearable pressure built in Lonnie's head, as though something was clawing into his mind. He was flooded with strange, fragmented images—distant stars, unknown landscapes, and an overwhelming sense of something waiting in the darkness. It was as if the creatures were implanting visions, glimpses of places far beyond Earth.



Just as he thought he could bear no more, the craft emitted a brilliant blue light. With a powerful whoosh, it lifted off the ground, ascending into the sky and vanishing with a bone-rattling roar. Lonnie fell to his knees, gasping for breath, his mind reeling from the encounter.

Later, he would report the incident, but few believed him. Yet this story, based on his real experience, would ripple through the town, leaving many to wonder what truly happened that night in the Socorro desert—and whether the beings he encountered might someday return.

# Beware

Of lechuzas! Witches turn owl who patrol the skies

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By Naomi Vargas

In a small town outside of Chihuahua Mexico, the locals speak of strange and mysterious occurrences that happen when the clock strikes past 10 p.m. One of the most chilling tales is that of a young man named Javier, who one night rode his horse down a quiet, dusty path toward the mountains. He had heard the stories of balls of fire that floated in the darkness—lechuzas, they said, witches that roamed the skies. That night, just as the hour approached midnight, Javier saw it: a glowing ball of fire hovering in the distance. Curiosity got the best of him, and he spurred his horse, riding toward it. But as he neared, the ball of fire disappeared into the night as if it had never been there.



Shaken but intrigued, Javier continued to the nearby town. By the lake, where the women of the village often washed clothes, he saw a beautiful young girl. She was radiant, her long black hair shimmering under the moonlight as she bent down to collect water. Javier had seen her before, always fetching water from the lake to wash her clothes. Her home was by a small forest near the mountain, and every time he followed her, those same eerie balls of fire seemed to hover around her property, vanishing just as quickly as they appeared.

For weeks, he watched her from afar, enchanted by her beauty. But something about her presence—about the fireballs that appeared wherever she went—left him feeling uneasy. Finally, one day, he mustered up the courage to approach her as she fetched water from the lake. “Would you like to go to the dance with me?” he asked, his heart pounding in his chest. She smiled softly and agreed, under one condition: she had to be home before 10 p.m.

On the night of the dance, Javier rode his horse to her home. The house was small, almost forgotten, nestled near the edge of the forest. No lights shone from within, and when she opened the door just a crack to step outside, he noticed there was no one else there. She looked more beautiful than ever, dressed in a simple white gown, her skin glowing in the pale moonlight.

They danced and laughed together, but as the night drew on, she began to grow anxious. “I need to be home,” she whispered. Javier glanced at the clock—9:50 p.m. He hurriedly escorted her back to his horse and raced down the dark path toward her home. The girl grew more distressed as the minutes passed. “Faster!” she urged, her voice trembling. Javier whipped the reins, pushing his horse to its limit, but something about the night felt heavy and dark.

As they approached her house, just before 10 p.m., she jumped off the horse, running toward the door without so much as a goodbye. The door slammed shut behind her, and Javier was left in the silence of the night. But before he could turn away, a sharp pain shot through his face. He touched his cheek, feeling fresh scratches. Looking down, he saw claw marks running down the sides of his horse.

Shocked and terrified, Javier fled back to town, but the memory of the beautiful girl haunted him. The next day, when he returned to her home, it was as if no one had lived there in years. The house stood abandoned, overgrown with weeds and surrounded by silence. The balls of fire that had once flickered near her home were nowhere to be found, but the claw marks on his horse remained.

Legend has it that the girl was not what she seemed. Some say she was a lechuza, a witch in disguise, who lured men in with her beauty before revealing her true form. To this day, locals warn travelers to stay away from the forest near the mountain, especially after dark, for fear of encountering the balls of fire—and the witches who ride the night.

## La Llorona at Oasis

### The Legend of La Llorona

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By Naomi Vargas

It was a cool, foggy October evening in Oasis Park. The air was still, and the usual hum of the city felt far away, muffled by the mist that crept through the trees. A group of friends, searching for some Halloween thrills, decided to venture down to the pond at the center of the park, a place that had long been rumored to be haunted.

As they neared the water's edge, a strange chill settled over them, and the unmistakable sound of weeping echoed through the air. At first, they thought it was just the wind, but the sobbing grew louder, more heart-wrenching. They froze, hearts pounding. From the fog emerged the silhouette of a woman draped in a tattered, white gown. Her long, dark hair cascaded down her back, and her face was hidden in her hands as she cried out, "Mis hijos, mis hijos..."

One of the friends gasped—could it be La Llorona, the ghostly woman who wanders the earth searching for her lost children? The legend had always sent chills down their spines, and now it felt terrifyingly real. The air thickened, and an uneasy silence fell over them, broken only by her mournful cries.



Suddenly, she lifted her head. Her hollow, black eyes locked onto them. Without warning, she let out an ear-piercing scream that seemed to rattle the very ground beneath them. The group ran, terror coursing through their veins, but the wails followed them, growing louder and more desperate as if the spirit was right behind them.

As they stumbled through the fog, they recalled the stories they'd heard in Portales, NM, where legends of La Llorona were passed down like family heirlooms. The old town, with its adobe buildings and quiet streets, held its own mysteries, but nothing compared to the haunting presence they now faced. The friends dashed past the familiar playground, where laughter usually filled the air, now replaced by their gasps of fear.

When they finally made it to safety, breathless and shaken, they looked back. The pond was calm once again, the mist swirling silently over its surface. But from that night on, they swore they could still hear La Llorona's cry in the distance whenever the fog rolled in at Oasis Park. The experience left them with an unspoken rule never be at Oasis past midnight. It became a haunting reminder of their encounter, intertwining their lives with the legend and forever changing how they viewed the chill of an October evening.

## Ruidoso and Bigfoot

In the quiet town of Ruidoso, New Mexico, nestled among the Lincoln National Forest, a local legend sent chills down the spines of everyone who dared whisper it. The legend of Bigfoot was known to the townsfolk, a creature said to roam the mountains, only descending to the town on nights when the moon was veiled by thick clouds. Most shrugged it off as myth—until one chilly October evening.

By Naomi Vargas

Sarah had come to Ruidoso to get away, to breathe the fresh mountain air and enjoy a few quiet nights in a cabin she'd rented on the outskirts of town. It was the perfect escape—until strange things began to happen.

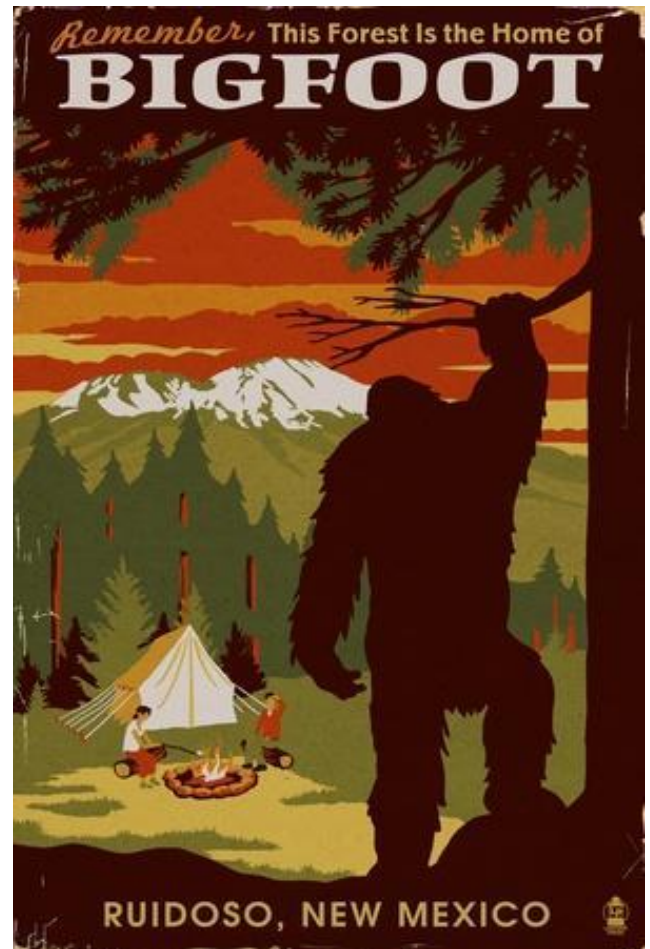
The first night was unsettling. Around midnight, Sarah heard a low, deep howl echoing from the mountain. It was unlike anything she'd ever heard before, a mix of a growl and a scream. She thought it was a coyote or perhaps a wolf, but something about the sound felt wrong, almost... human.

The next day, she mentioned it to the cabin's caretaker, an older man with a hardened face and wary eyes. He shook his head and warned her, "You'd best lock your doors tonight. Bigfoot doesn't like strangers."

Amused but intrigued, Sarah did a quick search on her phone and found countless reports of Bigfoot sightings near Ruidoso, descriptions of a massive, shadowy figure with glowing red eyes, seen at the edge of the forest. As she read, the clouds gathered, darkening the sky, and she realized the moon would be hidden that night.

As darkness fell, Sarah locked her doors and windows, though she couldn't shake the feeling of being watched. Around midnight, the familiar growl-scream sound returned, closer this time, vibrating through the walls of her cabin. Her heart pounded as she grabbed her flashlight and peered out the window.

There, at the edge of her clearing, stood a towering figure, covered in thick, matted fur. Its eyes glowed an unnatural red, cutting through the dark like hot coals. It took a step forward, then another, each movement deliberate and calculated, as though it knew she was watching.



Sarah stumbled back, heart racing, as the creature let out a low growl that rattled her very bones. It turned and lumbered back into the forest, vanishing into the shadows just as quickly as it had appeared.

The next morning, the caretaker found her things packed and her cabin empty. Only a note remained, scrawled in trembling handwriting: “He’s real. And he’s watching.”



## Shall We Dance

They say the land between Elida and Portales holds more than dust and forgotten tumbleweeds. Locals whisper about the old dance hall that once stood there, a place where music echoed through the night and men in pressed shirts vied for the attention of pretty women. Among those stories, one stands out—one that chills the bones of anyone who hears it.

By Naomi Vargas

Years ago, when the dance hall was in its prime, there was talk of a mysterious young woman. She was beautiful—so beautiful, in fact, that every man who laid eyes on her wanted to dance with her. Dressed in a flowing white dress, she'd glide into the hall silently, her dark hair cascading over her shoulders, her eyes gleaming under the dim lights. No one knew where she came from or where she went when the night was over. But the men didn't care; they just wanted to dance with her, to hold her close as the music filled the air.



One evening, as the music played and couples swayed to the rhythm, a bold young man worked up the courage to ask her for a dance. He wasn't the first to try that night, but for reasons unknown, she agreed. As they danced, something changed. Witnesses say she moved faster, her steps lighter, until it seemed like they were floating. Then, without warning, the man was lifted off the ground, spinning wildly in her grasp.



Those who were there that night claim that as he reached the height of the dance, he looked into her eyes and saw something terrifying—something not human. In a flash, the woman released him, and he came crashing to the floor. When the crowd rushed to his aid, the mysterious woman was gone. But she hadn't run out the door—she had flown, disappearing into the night sky, leaving nothing but whispers and fear in her wake.

The dance hall is long gone now, torn down and forgotten, but the legend remains. To this day, old storytellers from Portales claim that on certain moonlit nights, you can still see her—floating above the empty fields, her dress glowing like a phantom in the wind. They say she still roams the space between Elida and Portales, waiting for her next dance partner, and if you're ever unlucky enough to meet her, you might just be lifted into the air before she lets you fall.

So, if you find yourself driving those desolate roads late at night, keep your eyes on the horizon. Because you never know—she might be out there, waiting.