Abuelo did his share of damage to our family before he
died, but nothing as twisted as what he did to the neighbor,
an elderly man who kept taking Abuelo’s parking spot. I
knew he was in for it when he answered Abuelo’s complaint
with a dismissive “You don’t own it. It belongs to whoever
parks there first!”

That night Abuelo slashed the old man’s tires. Since we
lived in a low-income housing project, the run-down car was
doomed to sit there, useless and abandoned. By the end of
the week, the old man, a retiree like Abuelo, walked every-
where, his elderly wife in tow, both of them hauling groceries
on foot.

The old lady eventually collapsed from who knows what.
The ambulance came to pick her up though it never brought
her back. By this time the car had a warning sticker on the
windshield—it would be towed by the end of the week.
Abuelo, flaunting his own wheels, drove in and out of the
projects with glee, passing the old man as he made his slow
trek to the hospital, which was, mercifully, not far from where
we lived.

And then one day, coming home from school, I noticed
the old man had pulled up his own chair to sit outside our
apartment. When I walked up to open the door, he said in a
disoriented tone, “It’s all gone now. Everything’s gone.”
The run-down car on Abuelo’s parking spot had vanished. A few days later so did the old man. When a different elderly couple moved in next door, my body stiffened if I happened to look out the window as they drove past, looking for a place to park.