

THE SERPENTINE AX

Skirmishes from The Second Conquest

Chapter 1 Birds of Prey

"A hundred, right?" Dee pushed the envelope across the table to Javier "La Rana" Gutierrez who picked up the envelope, quickly counted the bills inside, then reached under the dirty grey sofa, pulled out a grimy brown paper bag twisted shut, and casually pushed it across the table.

"There it is..." Rana nodded toward the bag and pulled a half smoked joint out of his Pendleton shirt pocket. Javier's name on the street was La Rana, The Frog, because his whole head, face and neck was shrouded with a shocking camouflage of savage red pimples. He lit a match and sucked deeply on a burning roach as it glowed brightly and popped with the few seeds Rana missed when he had cleaned the marijuana.

"Fuckin' seeds..." Rana held the acrid smoke deep in his lungs and talked from the shallow of his throat to not lose any of the high in the smoke. "I guess I missed a few, eh...You wanna hit, Man?"

Dee shook his head, touched the bag and asked, "Can I look at it?"

"Fuckin' ay, Mano...it's yours now...you do whatever you fuckin' want with it, you know..." Rana suddenly let the contained smoke burst out of his lungs and then inhaled slowly again. "You don't want any of this shit, Ese? "

Dee shook his head again, opened the bag and carefully pulled out the handgun. Rana knew instantly from the way the kid cautiously touched it that Dee had never handled a gun before.

"Ain't you ever handled a piece before, Kid? What the hell you goin' to do with that anyway?"

"What kind of gun is it, Rana?"

"Shit, where you been, Asshole? Ain't you ever seen a .38 before?"

"Sure, I seen .38's before...it's just that, that I haven't...well..."

"Fuckin' ay, man, wha duh yuh wanna .38 for? Are you planning on smokin' someone, or fuckin' what?"

"I just wanted to have a gun, you know..." Dee fingered the gun, spun the cylinder tentatively, caressed the wooden grips, touched the trigger carefully, then held it up clumsily in his right hand to sight along the top of the barrel.

"It's heavy, isn't it, Rana...Is it loaded?"

"Shit! Can't you see there's no fuckin' bullets in it? Here, gimme the fuckin' *cnete*..." Rana reached out, took the gun authoritatively, and explained the details to his unexpected but eager-to-learn protégé.

"You wanted something for a hundred, right? So, I could only get you a .38 Special, a Taurus, not the best brand, but a good fuckin' gun, my man, a good piece..."

Rana rose to the teaching occasion by pulling out a handful of .38 hollow points from his shirt pocket.

"Look here..." Rana showed Dee how to push the knurled button to allow the cylinder to swing open. He quickly flipped open the cylinder and began sliding home six cartridges. With a flick of his wrist Rana closed the cylinder and handed the gun to Dee.

"Now it's loaded, motherfucker...Take it..."

"How do I take off the safety, Rana?"

"Oh, shit! Man... there is no safety on a .38, *Baboso*...you just aim it, pull the fuckin' trigger, and that's it, eh? Boom-boom..."

"So, it's loaded now...I mean, it'll shoot if I pull the trigger, you know, that is, if I wanted to shoot it...?"

"Fuck, yes, but don't aim that at me, eh? You happy now, kid?"

"Yeah, it's great, Rana, thanks for getting it...I'll just take it out in the bag, is that OK? My friend, Jorge, is waiting for me outside...he drove me over here, he told me about you, about the guns, you know?"

"Yeah, kid, come back when you want another piece, maybe a 9, a double deuce, deuce and a half or even one of them new 40s...I can get you whatever you want, eh? Oh...I forgot to ask if you or your friend outside wanna buy some bud or maybe some blow, eh, Holmes? I got it now, as much as you want...? No? ...all right...no fuckin' problem, eh...Later, kid...don't shoot yourself, *Baboso*...ha-ha..."

Rana took another hit, stuck his money in his busy shirt pocket, and walked to the door to make sure it was just Dee and Jorge outside. Rana watched Dee quickly get in Jorge's Crown Victoria.

"Thanks, Rana..." Dee yelled out the open window.

"*Orale*, Kid, anytime, eh?"

Jorge had been waiting for Dee and listening to the new Darkroom Familia CD, "Gang Stories." He turned up the volume when he saw Rana checking them out, and as the pounding bass poured out the open windows, Jorge toggled on the Crown Victoria's hydraulics so the front of the long low emerald green four-door shuddered, twitched, and bounced up about a foot and a half off the ground.

"Nice ride, motherfuckers!" Rana called out. He was surprised that a stupid wannabe like Dee was riding with someone who had such a class set of wheels.

Jorge pulled slowly into the street, selected another cut on the CD, turned to Dee and nodded toward the bag with, "Le' see it, man..."

Weeks earlier Dee and Jorge had shaken down the fuckin' Mexican guy who pushed that stupid popsicle handcart around the neighborhood ringing that fuckin' bell all the time. They got fifteen the first time, twenty something the next time. Jorge told him he had a knife and he'd use it.

The stupid baboso just handed over his wallet, no sweat. Dee took the money and tossed back the wallet to the trembling guy. *Two times, what a sucker!*

Then Dee had started removing a few ones and fives from his mother's purse every other day or so.

She was busy, cooking, "Christina" or "Laura in America" on the tube, changing the baby, gossiping on the phone, just a couple dollars so she wouldn't notice.

After all, she was his mother and all...It wouldn't be right to take more. Anyway, he got about twenty from her in the last three weeks or so.

And of course, the fifty dollar bill his uncle, Tino, gave him on his birthday last month. Uncle Tino had been 14 P/V, *Catorce por vida*, *Ese*, a third generation Norteño gang member for as long as there was life and family and the *chica*. Tino's grandfather, Guadalupe, was a bad ass Los Angeles pachuco in the 40s. By the time Guadalupe 's fourth son, Miguel, was old enough to look for women and work, Little Mikey had become a lieutenant in one of the gangs that sprang up in the Los Angeles Maravilla housing projects. His future with the Maravilla homeboys though was sunk unexpectedly along with the Arizona at Pearl Harbor.

As military personnel and the accompanying patriotic fervor swelled in the Los Angeles and San Diego area during the second war, so did the commonly held suspicion that Hispanic youths and gangbangers were not contributing adequately to the war effort. During the ensuing Zootsuit Riots of '43 Little Mikey stuck an 18-year-old *gabacho* private in the guts with his switchblade. The dead kid's buddies somehow IDd Little Mikey, and when his father heard that the cops were looking for his little Miguelito, Guadalupe personally drove his son north to Salinas to stay with one of his compadres from the old days.

Guadalupe returned to LA three days later, but Little Mikey never did. A stacked brunette riding a palomino in The Salinas Colmo del Rodeo parade roped and tied Little Mikey's punk heart, and before he could wake up to realize that love was a new turf for him, he had proposed, she had accepted, and Tino's oldest brother had been conceived. Little Mikey discovered a new kind of manhood in marriage and fatherhood. He became adept at riding his new pony, and each year's parade would find Mikey with a new son or daughter in his muscular tattooed arms.

Tino himself was born in '48, the last of four sons and one daughter, and he followed the ways of his father, Little Mikey, when he too succumbed to the dark-haired allure of a creamy, white-skinned *gabacha*, and then immediately spent a cold five-year honeymoon in San Quentin for capping a Sureño who had had the stones to show up and mouth off at his wedding reception. When Tino got out, he made up for lost time by siring his own cute little brood of gangsters and spreading the new religion he had picked up in prison, the Nuestra Familia, who had quickly become the sworn enemies of another prison gang, The Mexican Mafia. Both Tino and his younger brother, Esteban, Dee's father, now split from Dee's mother and absent from their house, spent most of their waking hours coping with the irreparable consequences their allegiance to the Norteños caused in their families. Their bravado, machismo and pride presented a powerful and indisputable façade to their chaotic, violent and destructive lives.

Uncle Tino had stuffed the fifty-dollar bill in Dee's shirt pocket with, "Happy Birthday, *Mi Hijo*, don't spend this on anything I wouldn't spend it on, eh? Ha-ha!" He slapped his nephew on the back several times and reminisced warmly about his time in San Quentin for murder. Dee didn't want his uncle Tino to know he was going to buy a piece, so he made up some bullshit about getting his first tattoo, then asked his *tio* to take off his shirt so he could inspect the tats Tino had gotten in and out of the *bote*.

Dee couldn't wait any longer for a gun, so he had gotten Rana's name from Jorge, his primo carnal, who got it from his compadre, Everardo, another Norteño *veterano*. Dee called Rana, told him he had a hundred, get whatever you can. Rana asked him who the fuck gave him his name and who the fuck said he was dealing heat anyway. Dee said Everardo sent him, that he was his *primo carnal's compadre*. Rana said in that case it would be OK, but who the fuck are you anyway? Dee said he was a junior at El Dorado High, lived on 7th Avenue by Gardner Street, parents worked at the salad

packaging plant in town, uncle is Tino, you know him? Oh, yeah? Sure, I know my homeboy for years, him and me been down for each other *por vida*, drank my first 40 with fuckin' Tino... Dee asked when, Rana said, OK, tonight, *Ese*, after "*Balcon de Veronica*," but not before, eh...

Now that Dee was safe in Jorge's car, he took the .38 out of the bag and handed it to his homeboy.

"This'll get you some fuckin' respect, *Ese*," Jorge gave his approval after he hefted the piece and checked to see that it was loaded.

"Yeah, Jorge, Rana threw in the bullets too."

"You got hollow points in this, my man," explained Jorge, "small hole going in, big hole coming out...do a lot of fuckin' damage with these, Dee..."

Jorge handed the pistol back to Dee, put on Big Pun's new CD, "Veeeah Baby," cranked up the volume to the max, and settled back to enjoy the ride with his homie. He signaled, turned right slowly by McDonalds onto Del Monte, pumped up the rear hydraulics so the Crown Victoria floated high above the pavement like some strange slow-moving green reptile on the prowl, and he slowly nodded his head to the idea that popped suddenly into his head.

"Hey, *Ese*, le's go flash your piece, eh...find that fuckin' popsicle asshole and scare the shit out of 'im, eh?"

"OK, Jorge," Dee agreed, "maybe he'll drop his money when he sees this and just run away, that fuckin' idiot!"

The two boys cruised slowly through their run-down neighborhood, past weathered sixty-year-old boarded up houses and countless two- and three-story apartment buildings with their oil stained parking lots, past abandoned and broken-down cars with faded tow-away notices on their

windshields and phalanxes of overflowing garbage cans and dumpsters, and past the two remaining mom and pop markets in the barrio.

Jorge and Dee and the other Norteños hung out at the New Horizon market on the north side of Del Monte, and a block down the street the Little Tampico market attracted the newcomers, the immigrants, and the Sureños. One block was too little a buffer zone between the two gangs, and on a regular basis taggers would mark the walls of their rival's market. Jorge and the other Norteños would use the cover of darkness to leave their red spray paint tags.

n/s x4 rifa giggles

The Sureños would come along the next day, realize that they had been dissed by those fuckin' Norteños, cross out the threat of "North/side fourteen rules, by Giggles," add their opinion that Norteños were rats and whores, then leave their own blue tag to show who really owns their turf.

s/s x3 rifamos

"South/side, thirteen, Sureños, we rule," was the new challenge for the moment. Nobody had yet been smoked at either market, although both locales had their share of armed robberies. Just mainly fistfights or stabbings or rip-offs. The graffiti was no big thing though the city would come along every month or so and order the store owners to paint over the tagging. Almost every large public wall space in the barrio was layered with numerous rectangular patches of beiges and off-whites where someone had rolled paint over someone's territorial warning.

Jorge slowed when they passed the New Horizon to check the graffiti bulletin board for new insults.

"Hey! *Watchale!* Check it out!" Jorge slowed then stopped in the middle of the street when he noticed a new tag from the Sureños. "Look there, Dee...those motherfuckers have the balls to..."

Dee slowly deciphered the tag out loud, "'Sureños -rule-forever-one-eighty-seven-Norteños-Paletas'...shit, Jorge, do you see that...'kill Norteños'...signed 'Popsicles'..."

"Fuck, yes, I see that, Holmes...I think we should drive around to see if we can find your friend and mine, that *pinche* popsicle salesman, and let 'im see your piece there, show 'im what flavor your popsicle comes in, eh? Ha-ha-ha-ha...Wha du yuh say, Homeboy? Are you down for it, eh?"

Jorge was twenty-two. He had been unable to graduate from El Dorado four years ago, no big deal, half the students who started high school never finished. They split to Mexico, married the first girl they screwed, got a job at Wall Mart, took a bullet. He had cut class so frequently, done so little classwork, and been suspended so often, that he lacked almost half the credits necessary to graduate.

Fuck it anyway, Jorge had thought, *who needs a fucking high school diploma anyway? Not me, that's for fuckin' sure, eh?* He was an expert on the juvenile justice system after three sabbaticals in Juvenile Hall for breaking and entering, and since he was supposed to appear in court the following week for a recent probation violation, he was pissed off and unwilling to kick it in Juvie again.

It took Jorge fifteen minutes of prowling to locate one of four independent Mexican popsicle salesmen plodding along the broken sidewalks of his daily route. Jorge and Dee shadowed him slowly so he wouldn't notice them, and after a minute or two Jorge nodded toward the paper bag and then to Dee.

"I'm not going to shoot him, Jorge..." Dee protested.

"Shit, no, Idiot...just flash the piece at him, make him think we're going to cap him, just scare him, that's all, Homeboy..."

Jorge slowly pulled up alongside the poor unsuspecting Indio and called out the window across Dee, "Hey, *Pendejo!* Fuck you and your people!" The short man froze for a second or two without even turning his head to the left to look at Jorge, then he started pushing his cart faster along the sidewalk, ding-a-ling, ding-a-ling, faster and faster, ding-a-ling-a-ling-a-ling, as Jorge continued flanking him with the Crown Victoria.

"*No quiero problemas, Señor, no tengo dinero, Señor ...*" the frightened man turned his head and called to the open window of the car.

"Fuckin' Ay, you don't want any problems, Motherfucker, and you're right..." Jorge continued shouting, "Pretty soon you won't have any money either...Show 'im the heat, Dee, show 'im the color of your *paleta*..."

Dee nervously stuck the .38 out the window with one hand and pointed it at the popsicle cart. He noticed the decals plastered on the side of the cart, brightly colored pictures and the prices of each popsicle and ice cream confection you could buy from the *paletero*. Dee recalled how his favorite was the Mexican chocolate or sweet rice popsicles, or on an especially hot day, the *limón* popsicles were the best... His father, Esteban, was still home in those days... when Dee was little, and everyone was happy... Esteban would give Dee a quarter...walk over to the popsicle man with him... ask what flavors he had...Dee would listen...hold his dad's hand...help him take the popsicles back to his mother...they were so sweet...

"Shoot his fuckin' cart, Dee," Jorge shouted, "shoot the cart, pull the fuckin' trigger, Homie...scare the motherfuckin' *paletero*, eh!"

Dee heard Jorge through a bitter-sweet fog of reminiscence. He suddenly felt the melancholy of knowing that those days of his happy childhood were gone, just like his father was gone...*What happened to those times?...What happened to make my father leave me and my mother?...Where is he now?...Why doesn't he call me or come to see me, give me a quarter?...My mother never smiles or talks with me like she used to... Where did all those good things go?*

Dee stared momentarily into the emptiness of his heart and life. He started to probe into the dimensionless space where he knew but dreaded the pain that lurked there in some kind of cold storage, like the popsicles in the cart there on the sidewalk. An icy hand grasped his heart, and a frost of anguish floated up into Dee's chest. His heart thawed suddenly, and embarrassing tears melted and welled up in his throat... he tried to stop the unfamiliar flood, but he couldn't...

I can't cry now... Fuck!... What'll Jorge think if I start to cry...?

Dee squeezed his lips together to stop the tears from starting, and at the same time he inadvertently touched the trigger of the wobbling .38 not knowing that the previous owner of the pistol had filed and reworked the firing mechanism so that it would shoot with the slightest pressure on the trigger. As he struggled to stop his emotions from flooding him, his senseless finger squeezed the cold trigger, the gun exploded, and the first bullet punctured a hole in the side of the popsicle cart. The grey slug shattered inside the refrigerated box and lead fragments tumbled wildly first through a box of pineapple, and watermelon, then strawberry popsicles. By the time the lead fragments had blasted their way out the other side of the popsicle cart and into the shins of the popsicle man, the unexpected roar of the gunpowder and violent recoil of the heavy pistol had shocked Dee's sensibilities, and he reacted galvanically by squeezing the trigger a second time. By the time he looked up into the world disintegrating in front of him, the Crown Victoria had already passed the *paletero*, now writhing and screaming on the ground, and Dee saw clearly that his second

bullet had inadvertently struck some kid waiting in front of the popsicle cart, a kid now curled up motionlessly on the sidewalk in a pool of blood.

"Let's get the fuck outta here, Homeboy!" Jorge didn't look back as he accelerated wildly spinning the tires and sending burning rubber smoke into the now quiet scene.

"You fuckin' smoked that kid, motherfucker...what were you thinking, Dee?" Jorge continued as he sped down the street. "You're fucked now, Dee, really fucked..." Dee sat stone-faced as the Crown Victoria lurched around one corner after another. Neither he nor Jorge acknowledged the sound of the sirens fading into the distance behind them.

"I gotta get you outta town, Homeboy..." Jorge decided out loud. "I gotta *carnal* in Gonzalez and you'll be safe in his place until we decide what to do, eh? See that lot up there...yeah, there... wipe off your prints and throw that fuckin' gun over there in the grass... hurry up, motherfucker..."

Dee looked down at the piece now resting in his lap. He still held the warm .38 in his hand, his new toy, his badge of honor among his Homies. He had just spent a hundred to get it, and it was hard for him to get that money, ripping off his mother and that stupid *paletero*...And what would uncle Tino say when he found out he had thrown away a perfectly good .38 into some abandoned lot...?

"I...I... just got the gun, Jorge...it's *my* gun... It was an accident... just an accident..."

Chapter 2 Late to the Party

The purpose that quickened Ana into believing that she was a woman had recently replaced cigarettes and was now her new turn on. Monday morning after Dee and Jorge had shot the *paletero* and the kid, the pretty 16-year-old was sashaying and teetering in oversize black stiletto heels past the portables where she feigned disregard for the boys she hoped were craning their puny necks to check out the pneumatic pumping of her tight blue faux leopard skin pedal pushers.

Ana had been coming to school with her new friend, Maricela, for two weeks now, and it was no biggie for her to be late too.

Who cares anyway, she reassured herself. *My parents don't know, and I get my work in*, she thought, as she jabbed Maricela in the ribs after hearing that Maricela 's boyfriend, Mario, had literally begged her to put out in the back of his parents' Expedition on the way back from the mall last night, and that he actually got teary eyed, "No, he didn't, really?" when she turned him down.

"What's he think you are anyway, a slut or something...?" Ana commiserated with her friend. "You know I heard that he was doing Angelica, yes, Angie... she thinks she's so cool, can you believe it, before her parents found out and sent her over to Edison."

It took the two fifteen-year old girls from 8:06 to 8:13 to amble apparently without a purpose from the main building of El Dorado High School back to their mutual destination, one of the thirty-five rectangular portable classrooms, in this case, B-31, where most of the twenty-five students who should already have been sitting in their desks and beginning to focus on algebra, were instead milling around the ramp leading up to the door of the plywood building as they waited for the teacher to show up.

"Oh, good," Maricela was relieved as she continued, "Lopez is not here yet... we're cool, Ana... "

Ana pulled out her pearlescent clamshell compact and checked her bangs and eye shadow in the mirror as Maricela veered over to a tall serious looking boy straining quietly under a huge backpack. She positioned herself sufficiently close to him with the certainty that he could smell her perfume and sense dully that there was something good here he would want if he had any sense.

"Hey, Ricky," Maricela opened up as she looked into the bewildered boy's eyes. "You got the homework from last night?" she propositioned, knowing that he would have no choice but to come through again with last night's practice algebra problems.

Poor Ricky was vulnerable against Maricela 's adolescent mastery of psychological manipulation, and, foreshadowing the pathetic nature of his erotic future, he struggled obligingly to take off his backpack, unzipped the main compartment and pulled out the binder that contained the thirty points of homework that half the class would soon admit they forgot to do, the same homework that Maricela needed now to bring up her low "F" to what she hoped could be transformed somehow into a passing grade. The futility of her alchemical expectation paralleled her attempts to win a position on the cheerleading squad where she had been hoping against hope to pick up some status and respect among her girlfriends. She needed a passing grade to be allowed to try out, and she was unusually concerned that she wouldn't be able to change "F" to "C" in time for the noontime try-outs at lunch.

"Thanks, Ricky," she cooed so that only he would hear, "I'll copy it when Garcia is taking role, and I'll hand yours in when I hand in mine, OK?"

Charlie Palmerin stood back from the window and watched the tragi-comical scene play out across from him.

It was 8:10, first period would be underway soon at El Dorado High School, and Charlie relished having a first-period preparation period this semester. It turned out that one of the biggest disadvantages to the block schedule El Dorado had adopted three years ago was that teachers got a prep period only one semester.

Second period Charlie would be explaining the short essay his students would be writing, "So now you've had a chance to see the movie about how the conquistador, Cabeza de Vaca, was shipwrecked in 1527 off of what is now Florida and then wandered across the land bordering the Gulf of Mexico and then finally into Mexico before returning to Spain ten years later, so I'm going to invite you to consider the similarities between him and his adventures in a new country and you and your present adventure in Salinas. We already discussed the similarities between 'Bless Me, Ultima' and Cabeza de Vaca... remember the themes of 'Bless Me, Ultima'..."

Charlie clicked the right arrow on the computer keyboard and the picture of Rodolfo Anaya on the large screen TV in the corner of the room gave way to a modular diagram of the themes of "Bless Me, Ultima."

"Remember which of these themes showed up in 'Cabeza de Vaca?'" Charlie asked then waited with raised eyebrows and a humorously expectant look on his face. As a few students timidly called out "power," "magic," and the other themes, Charlie pointed to the appropriate theme on the screen and nodded his head vigorously.

"Yes," he affirmed after all the themes had been iterated and pointed out, "all these themes are alive in both stories. I invite you to remember that Cabeza de Vaca wrote of his adventures in what is now Florida, Mississippi, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and Mexico around the 1530s, and Rodolfo Anaya wrote of his... that is, Antonio Marez' adventures, in New Mexico in the second half of the 1900s. And now I ask each of you to consider that you have inherited this challenge and

responsibility to travel through a new physical and spiritual territory, a new world you don't yet understand fully, a new life where nothing is familiar and most things are difficult. So... you're going to be writing a short two paragraph essay... "

Moans, groans, understated and clearly articulated incredulity and disgust percolated up from what were seconds ago mostly lethargic states of consciousness as students less respectful of classroom decorum called out, "No, not another essay," or simply, "Oh, no... "

"Yes, indeed," Charlie continued even more enthusiastically, "yes, you will have the special challenge of finding a reflection of yourself in Cabeza de Vaca and his adventure because you, all of us here now in this room, are in both real and symbolic ways the ancestors of Alvar Cabeza de Vaca, who was Spanish and became Indian, who was born and died in the old world and yet lived many productive and powerful years in the new world. So, you are the new and the old too; most of you or your parents are from Mexico, the old new world, as are my parents, and yet we are here in the United States, the new new world, about as different from Mexico as this English class is different from Mr. Mazuca's P.E. class, wouldn't you say?"

"This is boring, Mr. Palmerin," a barely pretty girl of fifteen with bleached blond hair replied from the second desk in the middle row, directly in front of Charlie.

"Of course, it's boring, Angelica," Charley replied to corroborate her ignorance and short attention span. "You haven't even started yet... wait till you get started thinking about yourself and your life... you won't be able to stop... OK, OK, Angelica," Charlie walked over to Angelica's desk as he continued, "you can write more than two paragraphs if you like, don't let me stop what I think will be your uncontrolled but understandable enthusiasm to know and express yourself more than you do now... "

The class laughed, appreciating dimly again how Mr. Palmerin accepted without anger Angelica's ignorant and rude comment and turned it into more personal and clear directions about what would be happening and what she could expect to gain from writing the two-paragraph essay.

This was by no means the first time nor would it be the last that Charlie's students exhibited apparently proudly not only their disinterest and apathy but also their unconscious myopia about how education can give young adults not only a clearer view of the road they have been traveling but also the way ahead. After both of Charlie's classes had viewed scenes from the movie of Cabeza de Vaca's adventures; then read two sections of his "The Relation" where he describes how he learned to heal and revive people using a mixture of Catholicism, indigenous healing methods, and his own personal power; and then finally after everyone discussed how similar de Vaca was to the main character in Anaya's "Bless Me, Ultima"; several students from both ends of the spectrum of aptitude and motivation to learn interjected to query Charlie.

"Why would Cabeza de Vaca sail across the ocean anyway just to find some new land? Wasn't he cool in Spain?" David finally probed appropriately with his characteristic grin.

"Well, David," Charlie turned to his favorite nemesis in class and returned the question, "think for a moment... why your parents or grandparents came to California?"

"Of course, David, I know you don't know, it's not a simple question," Charlie replied with unconscious verbal aikido. "That's why I'm asking you to think about it for a moment." Charlie cocked his head, leaned back, relaxed his stance and looked David in the eyes while he waited quietly for him to shift from feigned stupidity and cool to an internal search of his parents' and grandparents' faces and what he might remember about where they lived before and why they might have come to Salinas, California. As he waited, Charlie watched David glance at Mari in the next row

for subtle reassurance, and he tried to peer beyond the surface of David's public struggle to come up with an answer witty enough to make the girls laugh and adequately intelligent to back Palmerin off.

Now David tells me his mother is in jail, Charlie mused as he waited for David to say something... I wonder if he'll ever tell me why, no, I'd rather not know... and no father in his life... that's why he's been in court already... I don't remember if he told me why, I don't think so. David says he's not going to marry... what's her name... Jessica, that's it, not going to even though she just had their baby, says he wants to have several women at the same time, gonna support the baby, of course, Mr. Palmerin, of course, I'm going to be a good dad, you know I didn't have a father, so I'm going to be a good father to the baby... that's why I was absent so much last month, at the hospital with Jessica, you know...

"Well, Mr. Palmerin," David began to answer, "I think my grandfather, my mom's dad that is, came to California to work."

"Where did he come from, David, and do you know when he came?"

"My mom's family is from Mexico, Colima, most of them are still there I think, but I'm not sure when my grandfather came here, before I was born, for sure."

"He came here to work?" Charlie probed. "What did he do for work?"

"Come on, Mr. Palmerin... the fields, of course, you know that"

"Well, why didn't he just stay in Mexico and work in the fields there, David?"

"Jeez, Mr. Palmerin, I don't know. I wasn't there, and I never even met him or talked with him."

"Yeah, I understand, David. Take a guess, OK? Why do you think people struggle to come here from Mexico now?"

"Uh... I guess to get more money, have more chance to do more in their life, buy a new Accord, have CD's, all that... "

Everyone laughed at the cutting accuracy of David's answer.

"That's exactly right, David... "

"What questions or comments do you have about this?" Charlie addressed the entire class hoping the ad hoc message about not interfering with everyone's right to participate and learn in class would stick with some students. As he waited a few moments for students to contribute, he realized that he would never change the students' increasingly amoral attitudes about life and people –families had let the media and advertisers be in charge of that, but he could try to put their attitudes in the correct context to improve the chances that these kids could assimilate constructively into society.

"OK, " Charlie backed up to address the class, "Thank you for your ideas, David. Ok, David said that people come from Mexico to get better work and opportunities and more money and more things, is that right, David?"

"That's it, Mr. Palmerin."

"Well, that's not the reason why Cabeza de Vaca came to North America." Charlie waited for the effect of his uncharacteristically negative response to elicit some response from the class. When no one said anything, he said, "Put your head together with another person around you and make a list of five possible reasons why Cabeza de Vaca would have come to North America besides looking for better work." Charlie began to pass out one of his characteristic three by five pieces of scratch paper to every other student and continued with the instructions. "Just take five minutes to come up with five possible or, better yet, probable reasons why de Vaca went to all that trouble and

expense to come to North America, and the person with the most number of pencils and pens in his or her possession at the moment please write your pair's five reasons on the paper. You have five precious minutes to put yourself into de Vaca's mind, please... Oh, yes, of course, I'm going to collect the papers, Isela... two points for each reason, that's ten points, thank you. Yes, I'll be collecting the papers when you're finished. Please, go ahead. Call me if you need any help, toll free, no charge for the call—one, eight-hundred, why-did-he-go?"

Charlie finished handing out the little papers, and after walking up and down each aisle to make sure everyone had a partner and was focusing on coming up with five reasons, he wiped off a section of the front white board to prepare for the students to list their best two reasons. When he returned to walk among his students, several raised their hands to call him over to reassure themselves.

"I can't think of anything, Mr. Palmerin."

"Just start talking and an idea will appear, Yesenia."

"But I don't have any idea, Mr. Palmerin."

"But what idea do you have, Yesenia?"

"This is stupid, Mr. Palmerin."

"That's because you're just looking at me, Gaby."

"Well, what are we supposed to write, Mr. Palmerin?"

"What do you think you have to write, Gaby?"

Struggle, focus; frustration, refocus; inertia, encouragement. *This is teaching*, Charlie remembered again, *not to catch them when they are wrong, but to help them be right.*

After five minutes Charlie had each pair of students send up the person who was not the recorder to add to the list on the white board what the pair considered to be their two best reasons for Cabeza de Vaca coming to North America. Charlie stood back and watched the young men and women for whom during the previous few months he had developed a deep compassion and regard struggle to get their ideas on the board and negotiate the challenge of who would be writing on the list and who would be waiting their turn. As each person wrote their group's best two ideas, the others would criticize not only the quality of the ideas but also the writing and the process of getting everything up on the board in an orderly fashion.

"We had that idea too... that's not a good idea... you copied us... I can't read that... it's my turn now, I've been waiting longer than you have... that's stupid... this is not a serious idea... how dumb... you shouldn't write so small on the board because no one can read it... "

Charlie wondered often whether the students always trying to catch each other being wrong was either an expression of humanity's primitive urge to compete for resources and dominance, in this case for Charlie's attention, approval and high grade; if it was the effect of his students' lower socio-economic environment; or more probably, that one factor was continually being exacerbated by the other.

The students gradually finished adding their ideas to the list on the board, and after they had all returned to their desks to admire their ideas and start to gossip, Charlie called for the students' attention, and when everyone was finally looking and listening to him, he said, "What other good ideas would you like to see on the list?" Immediately Martha strode up to the board to write in capital letters at the bottom of the list, "CURIOSITY." Martha always sat in the back of the class. She was small and strong in a masculine way, friendly and cordial with everyone, possessed by a beauty focused several years into her future where her intense concentration would undoubtedly

combine with her natural intelligence to burn brightly and either attract or alienate people. "You're very astute about human nature, Martha," Charlie made sure he reinforced the thinking behind her contribution, "Thank you for writing it on the board for us to consider."

On the board had appeared a list of many ideas about why de Vaca came to North America, obviously not two from each pair because that would be thirty, but about fifteen to twenty, printed, in cursive, with flourishes, some slanted, and some barely legible.

Look For Money or Gold

To be famous

Find Indians

to teach the catholic religion

nothing to do in spain

the king sent him

to be the first there

to take the land and live there

to look for a girl friend

to teach the indians english

He wanted to invent new things for people in the new country.

He was a gangster in Spain and the king punished him by sending him out on a boat with a bunch of other gangsters.

to party all the time

draw pitures of the new people and places

He went to build houses and cities for the Indians.

he was going to write his book

CURIOSITY

Had Cabeza de Vaca himself been in Mr. Palmerin's class, he would have added to the list

- colonize the lands around the Gulf of Mexico for Spain
- find gold or silver and take it back to Spain
- develop the area for agriculture, cattle grazing and mining
- find a sea Gulf passage to China to sell Spanish goods
- fortify a port in the Gulf area to control that passage
- take care of and look after service to the King, Carlos V
- spread Catholicism to the indigenous inhabitants there
- make sure the indigenous people are not mistreated

As Charlie was finishing pointing out how the dominance and limitations of the Catholic church drove both Cabeza de Vaca and young Antonio in "Bless Me, Ultima" to expand their own personal understanding of the world and humanity, the classroom door had opened, and a perky girl quietly entered and was standing next to the teacher. Charlie finished his sentence, then turned to the girl to find out whether a counselor was calling a student out for some kind of registration adjustment, a parent was waiting for their son or daughter to come to the main office ASAP, one of the three vice-principals was summoning a miscreant for disciplinary punishment, the principal was delivering a sealed notice about a threat or emergency situation, or more likely a few students had to leave early to sell doughnuts at the nutrition break.

"Good morning," Charlie greeted the meek, business-like girl. "What can I do for you?"

Without speaking, the girl thrust the small goldenrod colored paper at Charlie. A note from Mr. Rivera, the counselor everyone called "Mr. Coffee" to allude unkindly but accurately to the reason he was so frequently not in his office, was asking Mr. Palmerin to send Ronald, Beatriz, Erika and Pedro to his office for preregistration for next year. Charlie thanked the still waiting messenger, looked up to locate the four counselees and walked over to deliver the dreaded passes. Students disliked being called out to see their counselors; it usually meant trouble with credits or class changes. Charlie quickly placed the corresponding call slip on each student's desk including unsuspecting Ronald who was sleeping soundly face down on folded arms at his desk.

Charlie knew he didn't have to awaken Ronald; the students who now were guffawing and calling out to the sleeping boy would bring him back from his alternate reality. Ronald bolted upright, looked around, then asked Mr. Palmerin, "I gotta go now?"

"Yes, Ronald," Charlie answered kindly, "Mr. Rivera needs to see you. You can go with Pedro, Beatriz and Erika. OK?"

As the four students noisily picked up backpacks, books, notebooks and themselves and headed out the door, Charlie silently reminded himself that public school was much more than an educational opportunity for mind and body. It was also a complex machine than had to be finely tuned to run smoothly, and it often did run well. Master schedules, class loads, individual student credits, teacher availability and absences, extracurricular activities, tracking and following up on student absences and tardies, clubs and activities, preparing students for several state and federal level benchmark tests throughout the year, then the preparation for noontime clubs and activities all needed to mesh together in a six hour day, and all contended with classroom instruction and learning for dominance of the school day.

Charlie remembered talking with Ronald the week before about sleeping in class. "Well, you know, Mr. Palmerin," Ronald had started to apologize, "I'm sorry to fall asleep in your class... the class's not boring, it's just that, well, my mom doesn't come home from work till about ten-thirty, so I wait up for her, you know... I cook some dinner for us when she gets home, and... well, she tells me about work... she works in a hospital, in the hospital laundry, and she's real tired when she gets home, so before she eats, when I'm making dinner for us, she takes a shower, then we eat and talk a little."

"How long has she worked at the hospital, Ronald," Charlie probed with a safe question.

"She started working there when my dad left, I guess about a year ago... she just had to work because... well, she needed to work, and I... well, I take care of things at home because she's gone pretty much all day, so I get food for my two sisters when they come home from school, I help them with their homework when I'm doing mine... and I try to help with, you know, stuff like cleaning and the laundry and going to the store on my way home from school, stuff like that... anyway, Mr. Palmerin, I'm really tired after my mom and I eat, you know we usually watch a little TV then we go to bed, so sometimes I just can't stay awake in school, it's not your class, I like your class, it's interesting and all, but I just need to sleep, you know... ?"

"Sure, I understand," Charlie patted the boy on the shoulder, "You have a lot of responsibility for your sisters and mom, don't you? I have a lot of respect for you, Ronald, doing all that for your family. I understand how difficult it must be for you... "

Charlie returned his attention to the focus of the class after overseeing the four students walk out the door and thinking of Ronald's struggle to balance the demands of school and his family. It was a perfect time to break since it would be counterproductive to try to galvanize the class's attention after the group work, the note taking, and the interruption.

"Sorry about the interruption, Everyone... welcome to public school..." he addressed the class, "Let's take a little stretch break. After we stand up and move our bones a little, we'll read the first *curandero* article in your packet... go ahead and flap your wings, but don't fly off."

Chapter 3 Gatecrashers

I guess it's Cabeza de Vaca, he remembered back a couple years how it started. I was taken by that movie, the austere story line, of course, the silence and rich visuals, the power of his transformation, how his being shipwrecked and stranded those years among the native peoples around the Gulf of Mexico, how that changed him from being one of the typical Conquistadors on a mission from Carlos V to find gold, a passage to China for Spanish products, a Spanish outpost there in Florida to protect the passage that Captain Pánfilo de Narváez and the others were supposed to find... how all that changed him into a protector, a healer, a defender of the native people's way of life, their right to live, and not be Spanish, not be Catholic... what a drastic change for a hardened soldier... all because he adapted... well, he had no choice, of course... to the native cultures... learned their languages, understood their customs, ate their foods, wore their clothes, struggled to survive in a new place... De Vaca's success and survival, Charlie considered as he returned to his own mental agenda, was an outcome of de Vaca's adjusting, his acculturating to the native ways... the native peoples didn't willingly adjust to his.

As most teachers in the weekly staff meeting stared glassy-eyed at the agenda item on their outlines, and the few anti-administration saboteurs read newspapers or graded papers, Charlie set out in front of his mind's eye again the puzzle pieces he had been carrying with him for the past weeks. When he was occupied with work at school or at home, the pieces of disparate understanding he had been gathering would lurk haphazardly around the perimeter of his awareness. But whenever he had the chance to defocus from his busy schedule, Charlie would set himself to mentally realigning these strategic perspectives as he had last left them so they touched, as it were, tentatively again, intermingled in some slightly new and dimensionless mental balance, unable yet to be unfolded with words, but charged with a potential Charlie had already recognized would clarify his doubts and any decisions he would be making about his future as a teacher.

Charlie was struggling to consider what would have happened if the recent wave of immigrants from Mexico that had inundated California and the many other states in the last five years or so had behaved like Cabeza de Vaca.

How would things have been different, he asked himself rhetorically, like in this high school, or this city, if each and every recent arrival, visitor, immigrant or new resident would have done what Vaca did, would have acted like they were stranded here, would have assumed that they had no way to get back where they came from, that they had to figure out the puzzle of how people live, work, think, learn and survive here, that they had to learn the language as soon as possible to be able to communicate, that they had to start acting like the people here so they could fit in?

Charlie really couldn't remember the very first time his parents drove down the two days from LA to Mexico to stay the summer with his grandparents in Uriangato. Grandpa Prudencio Villagosa Palmerin was born at the close of The Revolution in El Tigre, a little ranch isolated in the hills behind Uriangato, and during those same perilous times Grandma Carmen Urquide Quintero lived her first fourteen years of life without a boyfriend two kilometers to the south in a neighboring *pueblito*, La Concepción.

Prudencio's family made what everyone considered was a good living in those chaotic days of reorganizing the country by lugging five or six *cuarterones* of dried *maiz* in the early dawn while the sky was still dark to the only *molino* in town. Prudencio's mother, Enriqueta, would wait the twenty minutes or so for the corn to be ground and chat with the other women of the town in line about old Pancho Zavala's not-so-secret and evidently miraculous infidelities with Gabriela, the dim-witted only daughter of his blind neighbor, Cosme Belmonte; or they would exchange the latest word or iteration about Reginaldo and Soledad Tejeda's first son who had ridden off during the night to join the revolutionarios, or Sabas and Aurelia Arreguín's two boys who had been killed by the revolutionarios, the when, where, how, and who said so; or the waiting women would whisper over

which comadre had hinted, and was it really true, that after Fulgencio and Azucena Bedoya's third daughter, Xochitl, had let her boyfriend, Cutberto, kidnap her from her own room when everyone was asleep and carry her over his shoulder to his own parents' house, and afterwards she crawled back home early the next morning crying and begging to be let in and whimpering that he had kicked her out obviously because she was not a virgin like only he thought, that she was throwing up every morning now, and, yes, it's probably the morning sickness, and what will Fulgencio and Azucena do. After waiting longer than necessary for Agustín Colunga to grind her corn but long enough to hear all the new gossip and review yesterday's, Enriqueta would throw her grey rebozo around her neck and face, heft the basket full of corn meal onto her shoulder, and walk the few blocks along the dirt road to her house on Avenida Hidalgo.

People swore that Enriqueta and her husband, Damian's, tortillas and *atole* were the best, but what they didn't know about was the water. The land Damian's father had built their house on had been blessed with an *ojo de agua* at the foot of an old avocado tree, a natural artesian spring, and for as long as Damian and his father could recall, it had burbled secretly with the clearest, sweetest, most delicious water anyone would imagine into the brick and concrete tank Damian's father had constructed before he had been born. The water flowed continuously from the deepest aquifers except when earthquakes were strong, and it was with this water alone that they cooked family meals, washed their clothes, drank when thirsty, fed the lazy pigs, and made the best *atole* and masa for corn tortillas in all of Uriangato.

Enriqueta and Damian would make tortillas from the corn masa, add some lime to the masa and cook up *atole*, and then feed the dry leftover masa after the *atole* was boiled to the fifteen or so pigs they kept in the back of the house, and when the pigs were ready, they would sell them to the local butcher, their compadre, Alipio Jimenez, to transform into carnitas, sweet juicy carnitas boiled

in lard and orange juice and no one knew what else in Alipio's ancient copper kettle. The three Palmerin sons, including Prudencio and his brothers, Alejandro and Manuel, fed and cared for the pigs, and the four daughters, Carmen, Isabel, Evangelina and Guadalupe would manage the wooden *prensas* and black steel *comales* to make the tortillas and at the same time trade off the interminable vigil over the *atole* stirring it so it wouldn't burn.

Then, every day after the stacks of dozens of still warm tortillas were placed in small round baskets lined with colorfully embroidered white cotton napkins, Carmen, the oldest, and her mother would make the rounds of their early morning customers.

“Ay, Señora Cardosa, how are you this morning, did you hear those horrible drunkards singing last night after the three bells, I think it was Vicente Guerrero and those reprobate friends of his, yes, his poor wife, she'll be a widow soon, don't you think...Oh, and by the way, would you like two or three dozen tortillas?”

It took Carmen and her mother three sometimes four hours to cover the five or six blocks of knocking, waiting, chatting, listening and nodding, agreeing, counting tortillas, making change, chatting again, and then taking courteous leave of each of their thirty or so customers.

Atole customers would begin knocking quietly on the lime green steel Dutch door of Enriqueta and Damian Palmerin's house about five o'clock in the morning. With smiles and *pásale por favor*, please come in, one of the girls would take the buyer's container, disappear into the back of the long, narrow brick house, back into the heart of the house, the dark and inviting kitchen, where she would scoop the steaming hot, sweet creamy white corn milk out of an enormous grey steel pot with a huge ladle into the clay bowl or pot, aluminum pitcher, or glass jar or bottle, wipe it clean from drips and spills, then return quickly to the front *sala* while simultaneously estimating how many *centavos* it would be today.

As luck or fortune would have it, Enriqueta and Damian had taken their entire family to the village of La Concepción for the town's annual fair during the week of December 8 in honor of the Catholic high feast day of The Immaculate Conception of The Blessed Virgin Mary. Actually, nearly the entire town of El Tigre trudged every day through the rows of corn fields of the small valley to the other side of the mountain for one of the many fairs in the area during the winter season. El Tigre had its own fair during the week of June 24 in honor of Saint John the Baptist, but that had been six months earlier. The El Tigre church had been constructed by Fray Domingo de Esqueda sometime during the early 1700s around a natural spring that local Chichimeco Jonaz natives had used for centuries as a cure for various ailments. The church sagaciously used the miraculous nature of the waters to connect native beliefs with Catholic theology by using the water to baptize converts to Catholicism. It was obvious that the church would be blessed with the name of the most famous baptizer in history.

It was on one of their sojourns to the fair that Enriqueta and Damian's son, Prudencio, then sixteen, spied fourteen-year-old Carmen Urquide Quintero in one of the many little stands set up along the sides of the dirt and gravel main street. The Quintero family provided the shivering people of La Concepción with wool outer garments such as *gabanes*, *rebozos*, shawls and the like. Carmen's three brothers tended and sheared the family's herd of sheep in the low foothills outside of town, and Carmen's parents, Valentín and Faviola, tended to the dying, spinning, weaving, loom making and daily sales out of the front room of their house. Carmen's older sister, Maria de los Santos, was always appointed to man the family booth at the fair because she was the prettiest of the two daughters, and the family thought correctly that she herself would attract enough attention that people would notice the fine workmanship and coloration of the garments they offered for sale while they were appreciating her physical attributes.

But Maria de los Santos had not come home from the fair the night before, and in spite of the fact that they were worried out of their minds and feared the worst, namely, that Anastasio Canalizo, the tall, thin, handsome bastard son of the local shoemaker, whom Valentine and Faviola had suspected for some time was her boyfriend, had enticed her to leave the sheep, the family, and the merchandise in the booth and come weave a different kind of warmth with him, in spite of the family crisis; Maria de los Santos's distraught mother remembered business first, and told Carmen to fill in for her *desgraciada* sister at the booth that afternoon, and to not talk excessively with people, especially boys, who don't quickly show an interest in the Quintero line of wool products. Valentine and Faviola were concerned less that Carmen would find a boyfriend at the family booth than she would know how to hold the line if someone wanted to bargain lower than their cost.

Something about little Carmen's eyes caught Prudencio's attention and drew him away from the balloons and darts, from the mysterious cotton candy machine, from shooting targets with BB guns, from strawberries and cream, from the little merry-go-round with its chipped and faded wooden ponies, and from the house of mirrors, his usual favorite. Young Prudencio kept dragging his family back to the area close to the Quintero family booth where he could catch another glimpse of Carmen. It was the fourth time he swung around to pass by Carmen that she looked up suddenly from her cross-stitching and startled herself and Prudencio by looking directly into his eyes and holding his gaze for what to him felt like a forever he had never imagined could be so long. Faviola jerked his arm and pulled him over to the churro booth where the others were already holding the long, hot, cinnamon and sugar covered deep fried confections and waiting for them to cool down sufficiently to bite into them. Prudencio couldn't understand why this time he didn't relish the freshly-made churros as keenly he had done hundreds of times before. He looked back towards the Quintero family booth and was shocked to meet Carmen's gaze again. He quickly turned back to his family's chatter and enjoyment, and he understood that something had changed in him, as if he were

the churro that had been boiled in hot oil then dredged in sugar and cinnamon, no longer soft, wet dough but a crisp and delicious thing of wonder and delight.

Within two years Valentín and Faviola had met Enriqueta and her husband, Damian; they had accepted the request for Carmen's hand and everything that was connected to it in marriage to Prudencio; and they provided chaperones for Carmen and Prudencio's weekly meeting at the Quintero home where the *prometidos* would talk in the *sala* then walk the few blocks to the town square where they would join the other *novios* in walking clockwise as slowly as possible around the fountain and bandstand until the bored chaperones insisted that they return home. Prudencio's proud parents scraped and saved to buy Carmen's wedding dress, shoes, wedding cake, corsage, bouquet, gratuities to the priest and altar boys, and floral decorations for the reception at the Salon Barragán; and the Quintero family paid for the carnations, roses and cala lilies in the church, four hours of music from two *conjuntos*, Mariachi Berroy and Banda Miramón, and enough turkey mole, rice, beans, salsa, tortillas, cold bubbly apple *sidral* and champagne, brandy, Coca-cola, and mineral water to feed four-hundred sisters and brothers, aunts and uncles, nieces and nephews, cousins and second cousins, grandchildren, numerous comadres and compadres from previous other baptisms and weddings, friends and neighbors, and the inevitable uninvited and unknown drop-in's.

Both Prudencio and his new bride were too exhausted from the wedding, the reception and the preparations to go anywhere or do anything expected of them that night. At one in the morning they finally stumbled into the tin-roof covered bedroom Prudencio's parents had prepared for them at the rear of the house, and they both fell in bed fully clothed without so much as a Good-night, I love you, That was great, or I have a headache. It would be two days later in the afternoon, after Prudencio's mother had set and then cleared the midday meal of *caldo de carpa*, that the muffled laughter, moaning, groaning, and unusually loud shrieks that emanated from the back of the house

brought smiles to the faces of the adults who nodded their heads and put off the children's questions as to why *tio* Prudencio and *tia* Carmen were making that kind of racket.

The ongoing racket produced five children over the next seven years, and then, although the noise continued unabated for as long as anyone could remember, the babies stopped arriving. Some said humorously that Prudencio should have practiced his aim at the fair more with the BB gun when he had his chance, others said more cruelly that he had forgotten how to stand at attention whether he could aim a BB gun or not, and most said that God will give, less mouths to feed anyway.

After the second child, Mariano, Charlie's father, was born in '37, the happy couple turned their backs on the *ojo de agua* and its lucrative water, and moved into a small row house in Uriangato and set up their life with new *prensas* turning out daily hundreds of tortillas with the Palmerin name and reputation and with ground corn always steaming and bubbling over the hot stove. Carmen eventually began to buy wool from her family, and she set up her own dying and spinning from which she would weave and sell one or two *gabanes* or *rebozos* a month. Every little bit helped.

What Charlie could remember very clearly as a little boy was his grandmother and grandfather's big stall in the huge market there in Uriangato where he spent hours every day during the summer vacation with his mother and father, aunts and uncles and nephews and nieces. Every week Charlie's aging grandfather would drive his decrepit Ford step side pickup south to Mexico City where in the early morning he would venture into the numerous unnamed and often lawless back alleys to make the rounds of wholesalers who always had something a little special for him. He would load up his sweaters, dresses, *ponchos*, *rebozos*, *gabanes* and blankets and return to Uriangato in the afternoon.

On the way home in the afternoon he would head up out of the world's largest city onto the new freeway, through the ancient capital of Querétero, on to Celaya where he would stop to pick up cajeta, the sweet caramelized goat's milk spread that Charlie still loved to put on bolillo or French bread, north past the wide fields where so many of Francisco "Pancho" Villa's men had died during the revolution in the hail of Alvaro Obregon's machine guns. From there he would steer past ancient volcanic mountains on his right to drop down into five-hundred-year-old Yuriria situated next to its then pristine lake full of whitefish, carp and catfish. Charlie's grandfather would stop at the market there, walk up the wide steps to the main market, haggle over a bucket of whatever still barely live fish from the lake they had left from the morning, and then make the last twenty-minute stretch past acres of mesquite trees, and finally home late in the evening.

Charlie remembered frequently greeting his grandfather when he arrived. He would help him unload the bundles from the pickup, listen to his stories about Mexico City, ask him about where he would buy the goods for their little stall, probe further about what the back alleys are really like, You really carry a gun in the pickup, Grandpa? and wait for his grandfather to invite his father and maybe Charlie to accompany him on the next trip. Charlie's mother and grandmother would always wait for the arrival of their men. Charlie could never understand how women had this sense about when their husbands would be arriving.

"Heat up the milk, Carlito," *Abuelita* Carmen would tell Carlos, "your father and grandfather will be here soon. Don't let the chocolate burn, eh? I'll get the bolillo and set the table for us."

Sure enough, little Carlos would wonder, *Papi and abuelito Prudencio would show up right when the hot chocolate milk was ready and Momi and grandma had the bread rolls set out on the big glass plate just perfectly.* Charlie's father would take two or three characteristically shaped jars of cajeta out of a brown paper bag and set them on the table.

"Which one would you like to open first, my son?" Charlie's father would ask with a smile on his face. Charlie would only point, and his father would act like it was so-o-o difficult to open the lid, but then he would give it to grandfather Prudencio who with a burst of mock strength would unscrew the top to reveal the luscious caramelly cajeta. Charlie's father would laugh and pull off a big piece of bolillo and spoon the cajeta on it and hand it to little Carlos.

"Mmmm," Carlitos would say, "this is *my rico*, Momi, very delicious... tell us what happened on your trip, Papi."

Chapter 4 Veracruz Encounter

Friday afternoon after the boring faculty meeting, Charlie turned right from the school gate onto Williams Road, and when he came up to speed in the slow lane, he thumbed his home number into the phone keypad and waited to hear Anita answer. Two lowered Accord LX's zoomed up behind Charlie from out of nowhere, and right before it looked like they were going to slam into the back of his car, they veered abruptly left into the fast lane, and sped by at twice the speed limit. In each car Charlie saw two small mushroom-cut male heads barely able to see out their windshields, and then as the identical bright chrome spinner hubcaps disappeared ahead, he heard his wife's soft voice coming out of his phone.

What a difference, he thought, *between these idiots who don't know how to drive and my wife.*

"Hi, Honey, it's me," Charlie said as he slowed to a stop at the light, "I'm just leaving the faculty meeting, and I should be home in about ten minutes."

As he started telling Anita that he loved her, the windows on his car began reverberating with *ranchera* music pumping full blast out the open windows of a new bright red Ford 150, the *de rigueur* starter pickup in Salinas, booming threateningly next to him. Charlie tried to hear what Anita said, but the throbbing twelve string and accordion pulse of two chord Norteña polka music overwhelmed his ability to hear and think, so he shouted into the phone hoping she would hear his final message, "I'll be home soon... I can't hear you at all. Love you." Charlie pushed the red End button on the phone and shut down his senses until the light mercifully dropped from red down to green. Proud of his musical and mechanical status symbols and with no regard for those around him, the arrogant driver pulled away slowly, oblivious to the commotion he had caused.

"What an asshole!" Charlie spit out disgustedly.

No wonder gringos think my people are low class, he thought.

He looked ahead to see the driver's large Tejano cowboy hat silhouetted in the back window of the 150 pulling ahead of him. *That guy, Charlie considered, is probably some guy from Guanajuato or Michoacan, my fatherland, up here working, maybe illegal, maybe not, left his faithful wife back home to take care of the kids... Now he's got a new macho pickup and music from his pueblito, and... Me vale madre!... I'm free to be me, no ol' lady telling me this and that... I do what I want now! Soy cabrón! I'm bad ass!*

Charlie guided himself carefully with wonder and awe through the spectacle of his daily ten minute route home, past a creeping disorder of cars parked diagonally on front lawns, by phalanxes of overflowing garbage cans and unused recycling bins, through the epidemic of garage sales where fat women and their fatter daughters idly wait all day for the inevitable someone to stop and sniff around their middens of castoff leftovers, and very cautiously through neighborhoods where unattended toddlers and yelling children dart out suddenly into the street from between old Toyotas and new Durangos parked jutting unconsciously into traffic a foot and a half from the curb. When he finally did arrive home, Charlie put away his briefcase and student papers for reading early the next morning, changed his shoes and then went down stairs.

Anita was holding out a steaming cup of strong coffee for her man, and Charlie wasn't sure at the moment if he was more interested in the French Roast or the intriguing creature proffering it. Charlie had met Anita in 1993 at an Amway regional convention in Veracruz for up-and-coming Mexican distributors. He had been invited by one of Mexico's high-ranking Emeralds originally from Uriangato's Siamese twin city, Moroleón, to the multimedia spectacular organized there at the Hotel Colonial to recruit new members and support established members.

Charlie spotted Anita at one of the small, exclusive, by-invitation-only meetings with the charismatic husband and wife team who had developed their own powerful and effective training

system for marketing Amway products. Charlie was in the reception line waiting to shake hands with the legendary Tim and Francine Dolan when the person behind him in line bumped him hard enough to push Charlie into the person ahead. The person he bumped, Anita, turned around upset, thinking that Charlie was taking advantage of the anonymous proximity and opportunity to help himself to a casual feel.

"Oh, excuse me, Señor," a huge man laced with two camera cases, a backpack and a travel bag overflowing with glossy product brochures apologized before Charlie could open his own mouth to excuse himself to the woman now scowling back at him.

Charlie was not only embarrassed by the awkward situation, but he was also startled by the upset woman's radiant aura. Although her eyes flashed indignation, the dark warmth of caramel skin and mahogany fragrance of woman filtered through her long thick black hair and subdued the flash of irritation enfolding the momentary wave of passion with a comforting and embracing swell of calm and knowing, some kind of spiritual reservoir that Charlie sensed in an instant he would very much like to understand and absorb more closely.

"*Perdón*, please excuse me..." Charlie managed to utter, "there's not much space to move in this line. I'm sorry if I've offended you. Please accept my apology..." Charlie extended his hand and inhaled deeply to savor the sensual molecules of femaleness that emanated invisibly but very tangibly from her body. "My name is Carlos Palmerin... I'm from Guanajuato, Uriangato that is..."

"*Está bien*... that's all right," Anita's soft low voice enhanced Charlie's delight as he wondered how such a petite creature could have a voice so curiously incongruous with her appearance.

"Everyone is so excited," she purred, "pushing and shoving... this is crazy in here, isn't it?"

"Are you here with an Emerald from Mexico?" Charlie asked the obvious hoping to guide the conversation into positive territory.

"*Claro que sí*, of course," Anita relaxed her shoulders and began to smile, "I'm with a group from here, Veracruz, and we've been waiting to meet the Dolans for months..." She hesitated a moment before she took the next step. "My name is Anita, Anita Villareal... *Mucho gusto*, I'm pleased to meet you... Carlos, is it?"

She would later accept his invitation to have coffee that evening at the little hotel restaurant on the Plaza de Arma. The next day in the late afternoon after interminable meeting Anita took Charlie to a little restaurant at the end of a washed-out dirt road on the edge of town. The taxi driver hesitated, but when Charlie countered with a fifty peso bill, the driver grudgingly began estimating the depth of the water-worn ruts in the street and comparing his measurements to the height of his VW bug from the road, and after some consultation and augmentation of the fare (paid in advance), Charlie and Anita bounced, bumped and scraped their way two kilometers to the tiny village of Mandinga. Anita pointed, the driver stopped to let them off, and they both plodded up several huge concrete steps onto a large deck overlooking a natural estuarine lake covered with lilies, tules, and hundreds of wild birds and fowl.

Several other couples occupied the deck in white plastic tables and chairs, and near the brick archway framing the view of the water, three musicians were tuning the strings of their instruments and chatting with the dancer who was adjusting her mantilla in anticipation of beginning their presentation. A balding waiter rushed over to greet Anita and Charlie, enthusiastically seated them with two oversized red velvet menus and returned quickly with an icy pitcher of freshly squeezed and not too sweet *limonada* made with mineral water. Anita and Charlie toasted Mexico, Amway, the tropical heat that made the *limonada* so refreshing, and then commented about the lush surroundings and smells coming from the kitchen while they perused the extensive menu and discussed their possible choices.

Both Charlie and Anita looked up when the comically short musician introduced the first *Son Jarocho* as he hammered out a staccato rapid-fire prelude on his small four-string *guitarra de son*. He smiled and nodded his head knowingly as he attacked the strings with the strange cow horn pick, and the effortless intensity which he repeated the introduction over and over intensified everyone's anticipation for the other musicians to join in. Several men in the dining room lifted their beer bottles and whooped encouragement as the second player began plucking a parallel melody line with the lush tones of his big-bottomed beautifully inlaid wooden harp. After the harpist and the guitarist pleased the crowd with their display of ascending and descending dual melody lines that accelerated and slowed, and then swelled again, a nod of their heads invited the *jarana* player to join in with the sonorous harmony of multi-string chords strummed with his explosive *rasgueados* and fast arpeggios.

Anita and Charlie put down their menus to watch the interplay of smiles, nods and glances the two musicians used to communicate not only with each other, to signal when a certain player would enter for a solo verse or to initiate a key change, or to express their own mutual enjoyment in the playing; but also to respond to listeners' cries of appreciation of the musicians' expertise and style or the particular son they chose to play.

"When's the dancer going to start?" Charlie leaned over to whisper in Anita's ear. As he did, he was caught off guard by the sweet dark scent of Anita's warm body. *So, Anita smells like this because of pheromones, eh...* he quietly thought to himself... *I like how this woman smells.*

"Watch her eyes, Charlie," Anita whispered back, "isn't she beautiful?"

"... and the dancer is beautiful too, Anita..." Charlie agreed suggestively, letting the intentional twist of his response intensify the excitement of the moment they shared.

Anita smiled and reached out to place her hand gently on Charlie's. The proud dancer cocked her head, arched her back, and lifted the hem of her white lace skirt to show off how she

started the amazingly quick heel and toe steps of the *zapateado* footwork. As the music drew the young woman into the rhythms of the slow and deliberate *son*, she would billow out the sides of her dress alternately to the front and the back, smile enigmatically and twist her body seductively all the while tap-tap-tapping the wooden platform with her heels in counterpoint to the rhythm of the strings.

Diners would call out names of *sones* they wanted to here, "Hey... La Bamba... What about El Cascabel... Do you know La Guacamaya... Come on and do El Colas again... Let's see you do La Iguana, eh?"

The waiter arrived to take their order, and Charlie took the opportunity to order a Pacifico for Anita and a Negra Modelo for himself, "*Bien Fria*, eh!... real cold!" Four beers packed in ice arrived in a sweating galvanized bucket accompanied by a half coconut shell filled with *limón* halves, a small salt shaker, and a blistering roasted chile de arbol salsa guaranteed to burn coming and going paired off with a basket of quarter pieces of corn tortillas fried crisp and hot.

By the time Anita and Charlie had toasted the musicians and dancer with their second beers, the food arrived. They pushed the bottles and plates to one side of the little table to make way for their feast. First, the waiter placed before them seafood cocktails overflowing with whole prawns, scallops, mussels, clams and octopus along with sliced avocados and jicama with heavenly soft homemade tortillas. Ten minutes later he brought soft-shell clam soup, then fresh water lobster grilled in butter with cloves, cumin, and chile (Anita giggled and blushed when the waiter comically warned Charlie that the spice combination was considered an aphrodisiac). Finally, the waiter delivered a huge whole *huachinango* red snapper deep fried crisp and savory in luscious tasting lard and drenched with lemon.

"There couldn't be any better time or place to share this great food," Charlie complimented his smiling companion, "with such a wonderful woman like you, Anita... I hope we can come here again sometime soon."

The Amway conference would be ending the next day, and both Charlie and Anita would return to their separate lives. Charlie would wisely ask for her phone number and permission to call, and she would write her home number on the back of a business card and hand it to him with an encouraging smile. It would be three years after they walked along the *malecón* by the bay that evening that they would join forces again under far different circumstances. It would be Mexico, it would be NAFTA and the lesser known Gulf of Mexico Accord, and it would be coffee, organic coffee grown in the shade under the forest canopy in Huatusco, the coffee growing region south of Jalapa in Veracruz. And it would be not only pheromones but also money, pesos and dollars, that would attract and keep Charlie in the field of Anita's intelligence and sensuality.

At the present moment though, eight years after they had eaten and enjoyed the *música jarocho* that afternoon in Veracruz and strolled hand in hand by the bay, Charlie was taking an actual cup of coffee from the flesh and blood Anita in front of him now, putting it down to hug her, and blurting out, "I've been thinking, Honey, you know... public school just doesn't serve anymore the noble purpose for which it was instituted so many years ago."

"Oh," Anita tousled Charlie's hair affectionately, "you just had a hard day, that's all... "

"Well, that may be true," Charlie reached over to pat the familiar compact double curve that swelled out below her proud back, "but I got a story to tell you... "

"Well, tell me then... " Anita sat down at the table next to Charlie, took a sip of her coffee and waited.

Charlie started to explain how he had been talking with Kim Little, the French teacher at school who had these two boys and one girl in her French 3 class who were suspended from school for three days because they had zeroed the hard drives of several PC's in the school Reading Academy lab.

"So, Kim tells me," Charlie continued, "that she decided to exclude them from the field trip she had been planning... it was a trip to San Francisco to see Moliere's "Don Juan"... because she felt that, if they could go so far as to intentionally erase those reading lab hard drives, then there's no telling what they might do when they're less supervised in San Francisco..."

"Well, of course..." Anita immediately corroborated the logic in the teacher's decision, "I'd do the same thing, so... what happened?"

"Well," Charlie shook his head as he recounted what he had heard, "Kathy, the principal, okayed Kim's decision, no problem, but evidently, the parents of these three kids found out, and they got together and went to the district office and found someone who would listen to their sob story, you know, 'Oh, my poor baby! They're discriminating against us... abusing my child's rights...' Anyway, this administrator, I wish I knew who it was, this person who's supposed to be supporting teachers called Kathy and told her that Kim couldn't do that because..."

"What?" interrupted Anita, "You mean to say that those three students get to go on the field trip now?"

"Not only that," Charlie took a slug of coffee, shook his head in disbelief and continued, "but the worst part is... now Kim's authority has been totally undermined... Do you think she'll have any kind of authority base now to manage her classroom and teach those three students or the other students who'll find out what happened? No way... That overpaid paper pusher of an administrator

did the worst possible thing not supporting the teacher... just because they couldn't handle the pressure from the whining parents... "

"And they probably weren't smart enough," added Anita, "to realize the damage they did to the teachers and the school, eh?"

"Yeah, permanent damage," Charlie agreed, "and the parents and all of society look to us teachers more and more now to take over their parenting responsibilities because the mothers and fathers... if there is a father, at all... are not home any more, or they're not there to help with homework, or they're poor and there's no place for the kids to do their homework, or they don't understand the notices and report cards sent home from school because they're not translated, or there's no one to make breakfast or dinner or a snack for their kids, or they just throw up their hands 'cause they can't control whether their kids arrive late or bring their materials to class, or their kid's a drug baby and needs extra attention... "

"Do all this extra stuff, you teachers," Anita mimicked the administrators, "and we expect you to do this extra parenting stuff too along with your regular teaching and testing responsibilities, and, you know what? When push comes to shove, we'll back the parents all the time because we don't want to offend them or be accused of insensitivity or, worst of all, racism, so all you teachers are on your own, stuck with those thirty or more students inside your outdated classroom... oh, and how dare you ask for a cost of living raise? We administrators here in the head office surely wouldn't want to teach students like that, because that's your job... good luck, suckers."

"God, Honey," Charlie winced then leaned over to kiss Anita on the cheek, "do you have to be so ruthless? I really feel like I am the sucker now... "

"Why don't you just quit, Honey... " Anita suggested playfully.

"You mean teaching," Charlie proposed, "or just complaining about what's happening?"

"Maybe both," Anita chuckled as she rubbed his back.

"Hey! don't tempt me, Honey...No... if I quit teaching now," Charlie dropped the humor and became serious, "and go on welfare like so many other people seem to be doing well on," Charlie paused and looked Anita in the eyes, "then you'd have to quit your masters, and that wouldn't be good for you or your father, would it?"

Chapter 5 The Coffee Masters

For fifty years León Gutierrez de Ferrer Villareal had picked ripe red berries from the bushy Arabica coffee plants his father, Crispin, and grandfather, Epifanio, had harvested as far back as anyone could remember clearly enough to tell their children about. León also tended to the old orange and lemon, mango, banana, avocado, zapote and guayaba trees scattered around his family's four and a half hectares of land. He would personally supervise the weekly harvest of several hundred pounds of each fruit and then the biweekly deliveries to the markets around the *Parque Nacional* where vacationing Mexican families and harried Huatusco city executives and workers would pick up fruit for their desserts and *agua fresca*.

It was the coffee though, not the orchards, that troubled him. León 's oldest friend and compadre, Enrique Espinola, had come to Rancho Villareal late that muggy morning in 1995 with a business proposition that León had been quietly hoping for the last few difficult years he would never have to consider.

"Eh, Compadre... I help you clear your land," Enrique proposed to his old friend, "and you put in these new plants, eh, like the ones I put in... you know, Catua and Mundo Novo and... and... Colombiana... like I showed you last month... and, Compadre... with your land and my capital for fertilizer and pesticide and water, eh... we put in more plants, forget about the shade and all, produce more beans in less time, *ya te digo*, I'm telling you, this is the way... more plants, more coffee, more pesos for us, *me entiendes?* you understand, Compadre? They'll buy whatever we can produce, and it's better to produce more, "*Qué no?* Isn't that so?"

"We've had some hard years, that's true," León replied as he refilled Enrique's glass with *limonada*, "but just because the markets have been bad the past four years doesn't mean we have to

act like crazy men, "Me entiendes, Compadre?" León sipped his ice cold *limonada* slowly while he considered what to say next. "The market has always come back, so we keep our plants under the shade, eh?... pick our coffee and hope for the best... We still have the orchards too... You know, last week I spent a few days over in Gutierrez Zamora to look at their vanilla operations, and I'm thinking of putting in half a hectare or so, for a cushion when coffee is bad.."

"Don't be crazy, Leó," Enrique leaned forward, put his hands on the large mahogany table and looked firmly across at his old friend. "You have to consider the new way of doing things, more markets for Mexican coffee, world markets, Compadre... *los estados unidos*, Compadre, the *Trato de Libre Comercio*, those gringos in the north drink coffee all day to keep their asses working so much. Better that they drink more of our coffee from Veracruz, eh, than from Colombia or... "

"Ahhh... " León had leaned back in his woven palm chair and stretched his arms behind his head to interrupt his friend, "you'll just have to excuse me, my old friend, but I suggest that you perhaps are the one who could consider the new way of doing things. Don't you know what they're doing over there in Jalisco and Colima in... in... Manantlán and also in Chiapas? I heard about this in Gutierrez Zamora last week from Don Arizpe who has vanilla over there... he says *el gobierno* is trying to protect the land, you know, Compadre, the forests and the plants, like our coffee, eh, amigo, all those plants that grow under the shade of the forest, and also the animals and birds that live in the tops of those forests."

"Eh, so?" León 's compadre, Enrique, looked quizzically at his old friend, wondering how the government's plans might affect his own.

"Well, my old friend," León continued, "they want to do this by encouraging us to keep growing the coffee the old way, in the shade of the forest, not like you want to do, under the sun with bags of fertilizer and pesticide from *el norte* and plastic pipes to bring in the water from the

rivers. They say that the old way, the way I still grow my coffee, Amigo, is the only way to preserve the forests and still allow us a way to make a life and keep the coffee and the land pure and sweet... with no poison in either the coffee or the land like they have in *el norte*... "Me entiendes? Understand?"

León paused to check his friend's reaction. Enrique was scratching his beard as he let the significance of what León had said reform the new context for what he had been planning to do. He smoothed his moustache a few moments with his fingers and then asked about the obvious.

"This is all very good, Compadre, this idea of protecting our mother earth and forests and the birds and animals. But what are we to do to care for our families if we can't sell enough coffee to pay our bills? We have scraped and scratched four or five years now with very bad coffee markets, and you and I have lost much, "Qué no? Isn't that so? Like you, I have my orchards and my *milpas* with corn I can sell in the mercado or eat if I need to, but these are modern times, as you know, Compadre, things cost money, more money than our orchards can supply. We have to produce more coffee to get more dollars from the north, and my way, the new faster growing coffees, clearing the land and putting in the more productive coffees is the answer. With your way, excuse me for saying this, Compadre, but with your way, you will be left behind like those pitiful *indios* you pay so poorly to pick your coffee and orchards. How can we make more dollars with the old way that produces fewer beans than with the new bushes that give us more consistent and high-quality beans, in less time? Either way we have to wait four or five years for our plants to make the coffee berry... What?... Oh, No, no more *limonada*, thank you... I have to be going, I've already stayed too long... Excuse me again for saying so, my old friend," Enrique apologized as he stood up to thank León for the hospitality and shook his hand to leave, "but this is the problem I still see with your plan."

Later that afternoon during the *merienda* of chicken *consommé*, that he and his wife typically shared together on the veranda, León wasn't surprised when Porfiria mentioned that he seemed distracted and, well... inattentive. When she asked pointedly if there was something wrong, León knew he had to make a decision about the coffee and then take action. Porfiria listened to her husband as they finished their soup, and after Lupita, the servant girl, removed the dishes and left a small plate with four pieces of tamarindo and coconut candy, a relieved Porfiria folded her napkin and blessed León 's plan with a kiss on his cheek.

That evening León Gutierrez de Ferrer Villareal waited impatiently in booth number three of *Teléfonos Loly* off the central plaza in Huatusco while the dull-witted teenage daughter of Ramón "El Chueco" Sarmiento was getting him connected to a good line to California. Sweat ran down his temples as he rehearsed what he would say about the family business, the coffee markets, what Enrique wanted him to do, the government plans, the forest and the shade, what he wanted her...

"Señor Villareal," El Chueco's daughter startled him as her tinny voice buzzed out of his ear piece, "I'll connect you now with California... go ahead please."

"Papi... is that you?" the woman's voice warmed Don León Villareal as he absorbed the distant presence of his daughter for a moment before he responded. "*Mi Hija* ... my daughter... Ay, Anita it's so good to hear your voice... it's been too long since we've talked, eh?"

"How are you, Papi?... and Momi? Are you both OK?"

"Oh, don't worry about us," León reassured his first daughter, "your mother and I are like old friends, or old enemies, I'm not sure which... but we're fine, fine... And you, how are you doing with your studies at... at... "

"Monterey Institute of International Studies, Papi... and I'm doing fine, really... I'll be graduating later this year around September... and guess what? I'm speaking English now... well, with everyone... with people around here... of course, with gringos... writing too... and taking some classes about the *Trato de Libre Comercio*... uh huh, they call it NAFTA here... ay... at the University here... UC Monterey Bay... yes, there's a beautiful bay here where I live... with clean beaches, an embarcadero with restaurants like at home... you would like the fishing here... salmon, crab, shrimp... lots of tourists on the weekend... no, not as hot as home in Veracruz... it only rains in the winter sometimes... in December or January... "

El Chueco's daughter came on the line to interrupt with, "Three minutes, *Señor Villareal*... " and León took the cue to ask Anita, "Eh, *Hija* ... Did you receive the letter I sent you about the coffee?"

"Of course, I did, Papi, I got it last week... " Anita could hear her father sighing with relief as she continued. "I'm looking into the coffee situation country by country, in Mexico, and more especially in Veracruz, Papi, and I think you're doing right ...yes... you know, keeping the coffee under the trees, in the shade, I mean, not cutting down the forest and doing like Don Enrique has done... that's right...as far as I can tell his way is the wrong way..."

"Well, *Hija*, Enrique is right that he has more plants producing more beans and that means more dollars. What about us? What'll we do to keep up, I mean, the orchards bring in so much, but it's not enough, "*Me entiendes*, Anita?"

"Don't worry, Papi... people here in the United States are drinking more and more coffee...yes, lots of coffee, and more and more people are looking for organic coffee, like ours, without the pesticides and herbicides Don Enrique is using. They have the same problem here with their crops...oh, they grow broccoli, carrots, strawberries, artichokes, and lettuce especially...so they

use lots of pesticides and herbicides to get two or sometimes three harvests each year... yes, two or three, and they produce vegetables that are all the same size and quality because that's what people have been accustomed to, that's what they say people want... "

"Eh, there you are, Anita," Leon interrupted, "Everyone wants perfect lettuce, and everyone wants perfect coffee beans too, all the same color and size... so... "

"Not everyone, Papi... more and more people are looking to buy organic produce, including coffee, and you can get it several places here in Monterey, and you can buy it on the Internet too, Papi, have it delivered to your door, Mexican coffee guaranteed grown in the forest shade without chemicals... they have this new commission, the Mexican... Mexican Shade-Grown Coffee Commission... for... Environmental Cooperation, that's it, I think... organic coffee from Veracruz, Papi... yes... so why don't we do two things... Well...First, put in more plants under the trees... can you put more in the orchards?... Good, do that... yes, the Typica and Bourbons, not the varieties Enrique is putting in... those plants produce only for ten to fifteen years... does Enrique know that, Papi? We still have the same plants, don't we... the ones your father put in... after how many years now?... More than forty, right? So, Papi, put in as many as you can put in, but in the shade, eh? Then... I don't know if you heard about this, Papi... "

"Six minutes, Señor Villa... " El Chueco's daughter interrupted again, and León barked not to disrupt their call again, that he was talking with his daughter who knows how to speak English, that he would pay the *pinche* long distance charges as soon as they were finished talking, and yes, he had the pesos with him, cash money, *Cállate!* be quiet, girl!

"I'm sorry, Anita," León apologized thinking that his daughter might have misunderstood and been offended that he told her to shut up, "It's that girl of El Chueco's... you remember her... *Que necia!* What a fool she is... Now... what were you saying? Oh, yes, that I should put in more

Typica and Bourbon bushes under the shade, perhaps in the orchards, yes, a good idea... like all the rest of the plants. *Está bien*, fine, we can do that... Now, what's the other idea you had, daughter?"

"Papi, I heard at the university that there's going to be a meeting I think we should be at... in May of this year, yes... that's month after next, and it's going to be in Mexico... Campeche... no, not in Veracruz... and they'll be inviting government and business people from all the states around the Gulf of... yes, both Mexico and the United States invited... well, I understand it's to organize all these states bordering the Gulf of Mexico so that they can cooperate and work together to establish business relationships that hopefully will produce first some proposals and then projects... yes, Mexican states and U.S. states together, Papi... anyway... projects to develop business coordinated with the two governments, business projects that will produce economic development of those Gulf states, but a development that will not pollute the environment or use up the natural resources... "

"Are you thinking, *Hija*," León 's voice perked up as he continued, "that we can establish some kind of support or assistance for our way of growing coffee at this meeting, maybe find some new markets too? ... where is it going to be... oh, yes, Campeche."

"Yes, Papi," Anita went on enthusiastically, "from the information I got on the Internet and the university here I understand that each Mexican Gulf state will have a U.S. partner state... yes, that's right, and Veracruz is paired with Alabama... uh huh, it's in the southern US... and they're forming working groups there at the meeting, and Veracruz will focus on Health, Ecology and the Environment, exactly what we're worried about with our coffee, you know, producing high quality beans without chemicals that harm the workers and the people who drink the coffee, that are harmful to the earth and the water, and also without cutting down the forests where the animals and birds live... *Sí*, Papi, I think we're in the right place at the right time ... we have to go to this conference, Papi, we have to go... "

"Let me talk with my old compadre, Ponciano Vidrales, yes, I think he's still alive over in Campeche," León began planning out loud, "He has contacts in the *municipio* there, and I'll get us into that conference... can you fly down, *Hija*?... Good, good, yes, I will get us information or registered or whatever we need. You let me know when you are going to arrive, as soon as possible, I hope, you know it's been too long since you've been home, your mother misses you so much... but, soon enough, eh... "

"I will send you all the information I have, Papi," concurred Anita, "so we both can start reading up on developments in shade-grown organic coffee and what they're calling 'sustainable development,' OK?"

"*Perfecto*, Anita...I'm so glad I called you, *Hija*," León was now suddenly sitting in the dark after El Chueco's daughter without warning had suddenly switched off all the lights and was standing conspicuously in the shadow of the doorway filing her fingernails waiting to close up *Teléfonos Loly* for the night. "I'll call you again in a week or two... but not from this *chingadera*... anyway... love to you, my *Hija*, see you soon, eh?"

"I love you, see you soon, love to Momi too... and Papi... plant more shade coffee, eh?"

Chapter 6 Motecuhzoma Speaks

Charlie was not planting coffee bushes in the shade, but he was preparing to plant the seeds of understanding in the cognitive ground of his students' minds. They were going to be planning and then writing an imaginative interview with an historical character they would be choosing from the ones Charlie would suggest. Heroes, cultural, sports and political figures from both sides of the border, both contemporary and historical; and pop culture figures such as singers, actors, and TV stars. Charlie's list had been up on the wall for a couple weeks for students to peruse and begin to come to a decision about what person they would interview. Each day a student or two would come up to him and suggest another name, and Charlie would add the person to the end of the already formidable list.

Charlie would always model for his students a thorough example of what it was that he was asking them to do, with both hard copies of his example and then his personal presentation to the class according to the grade rubrics he and/or the class had established and discussed beforehand. Charlie had chosen Motecuhzoma II for his example because he knew most of his students had little understanding about the fall of the Aztec empire and because he thought all of them should know more about such an important Mexican historical event. They themselves were the product of the subjugation of the indigenous Aztec-Mejicas and the subsequent fluorescence of the Spanish-Mejica blended Mestizos.

As one of those Mestizos Charlie himself was also fascinated by the uncomfortable similarities between the conquest and fall of the great Aztec empire in the first quarter of the 1500s, and what he could now see five hundred years later in the first quarter of the second millennium as the looming and similarly startling subversion and collapse of the American culture. Charlie wanted his students to choose someone and make clear in their interview how that person and their work

influenced history significantly, either for good or for bad. Motecuhzoma was that kind of person for Charlie, and he wanted his enthusiasm and passion for understanding the connections between historical events and the present to shine in his example for his students. Charlie indicated the Interviewer's and Motecuhzoma's respective locations in the room, told them that he would play both the imaginary Interviewer and Motecuhzoma by taking their respective positions, waited for silence in his classroom, then began to read the transcript he had written.

Interviewer: Thank you very much for allowing us here to speak with you this afternoon. Do you prefer that we call you Prince, or Emperor or *Señor* ...?

Motecuhzoma: When you address me, refer to me as Emperor Motecuhzoma. I am the son... called "Brave Lord" by my father, of the seventh emperor of all the Aztec-Mejicas, Axayacatl... who was named, "Face of Water," and he ruled Tenochtitlán from 1470 to 1481. I am the great grandson of the first Motecuhzoma, Ilhuicamina, "Arrow Maker of the Sky." He ruled for twenty-eight years before my father became emperor. I am now the Grand Emperor of all Aztec Mejicas, of all 250,000 inhabitants in this our great capital of Tenochtitlán, and of our eminent allies in the illustrious cities of Tlacopan and Texcoco.

Interviewer: Let me ask you, Emperor Motecuhzoma, if you will permit me, why are you being kept in custody here in the Royal House? I have been trying for days to gain access to you to hear your own story of what happened in the past months, and it was just this morning that I was allowed an audience with you. Do you have any idea about who has the power and authority to incarcerate you if you are emperor? Did you commit some crime, or is this some political maneuver of your enemies?

Motecuhzoma: I am deeply troubled by recent events, and in particular by what is apparently my incarceration in my own Royal Palace. I am prevented from receiving any information

about my subjects; about Yacotzin, my wife; and about Ixtlilxochitl, Cohaumacotzin, and Tecocoltzin, my three brothers. My royal messengers never return here with responses to my messages, and I am afraid they have been killed. Of course, worst of all, no one will inform me as to the status or whereabouts of the six-hundred Sons of the Sun, especially their leader, the one they call Hernán Cortés. It is because of him, I think now, that everything has shifted for the worse.

(At this point in the interview, Emperor Motecuhzoma appeared troubled as he got up and began pacing back and forth agitatedly. After a moment he sat down again and continued.)

Motecuhzoma: Do not record what I am telling you now in confidence, but I no longer believe he is our prince Quetzalcóatl. I believe that he is not the one from the East for whom we have been waiting, not the one our ancient King Nezahualpilli foretold would return from across the waters. This Hernán Cortés is not the one, but worse yet is that I do not know with certainty who he is, and neither do my wizards, or my shamans or my advisors.

Interviewer: That is surprising to so many of us... May I respectfully ask why you let him come all the way from the beaches of La Antigua without trying to stop him? Didn't you have an idea of who he was and why he was here? I mean... Veracruz... that is, La Antigua... is over three hundred of our kilometers from here, isn't it, Emperor Motecuhzoma... you had time to do something, didn't you? Please excuse me for asking such painful questions, but we would like to know your opinion about what transpired recently to precipitate this takeover by the ones you call Sons of the Sun, especially this, this Cortés, and the apparent rebellion by your own people against you.

Motecuhzoma: Yes... it is true... I have let my people down, betrayed them it appears. And all the while, I believed, we all believed... or perhaps we wanted to believe, I do not know... I thought that Cortéz was the one we had been waiting for ... but I have told you this already. Let me tell you now what I think led up to these dire events in which we find ourselves now. Allow me to explain what really occurred so that you and your people will understand how we, the mighty Aztec-Mejicas, allowed ourselves to be taken over, killed by the thousands in our own city—the sacred navel of the moon—since we first arrived here over three hundred years ago from Aztlán to the north, and made to carry out the perverse will of these strange men from the East... all because...it is so clear to me now... all because we thought they were the gods returning home, Quetzalcóatl coming back to his people, as our stories and books and rituals had promised... Listen carefully, all you who hear these words of Motecuhzoma, and learn from the rise and fall of the mighty Aztec-Mejicas. I say now that this will happen again, and I tell you that this will happen to you in your time.

"Ok, guys," Charlie returned to his teacher persona to address the class, "that's it. You all get the idea?"

"Oh, no... " groaned most of the class, "Don't stop now, Mr. Palmerin... Tell us what's next," some cried out, "What did Motecuhzoma say happened, Mr. Palmerin?" others called out.

"Hey, I only did this," Charlie smiled knowing that he had hooked the students, "to show you how to make your interview exciting, that you should choose someone you like or want to know more about so it will be interesting... "

"No, no-o-o, Mr. Palmerin," a chorus of voices called out in protest, "we want you to finish your interview first...We understand it more when you read it like this... Yeah, we want to know

what happened with Motecuhzoma... Come on, Mr. Palmerin... then we can do our interviews...
Finish your story first, Mr. Palmerin... please... "

Charlie relished the moment of compassionate power to motivate people through personal example. He paused a moment to smile and look through his notes as if he wasn't sure he had anything else to say. He did, of course; he had written the entire interview in order to work out his own thinking about what had been on his mind these last few months, and when he finished recreating the interview for his students, he would distribute copies to everyone. The interview was his way to make some sense and try to understand what he saw as the deterioration of life in the West, the increasing disintegration of the productive economic and cultural life that had energized the state and country for scores of years. Somehow life was being subverted by the substitution of vapid and excessive consumption, parochial delusions of intelligence and superiority, and a contemptuous ignorance and disregard of other cognitive and cultural perspectives on life.

"OK... OK... " Charlie repeated the magic words and the class applauded spontaneously as they began to quiet down with, "Shhh, let him continue... be quiet, he's going to continue... "

"All right," Charlie started in, "so before we continue, I invite you just for a moment to discuss with the person next to you what happened in the interview, and how it ended?" Charlie walked around while eager students raced to tell their neighbor what they remembered from the Motecuhzoma interview. Charlie would be called over to different pairs of students to clarify certain points.

Where was Motecuhzoma?

Why was he prisoner?

How could someone interview him back five hundred years ago?

How did they record the interview?

Did you make all of this up, Mr. Palmerin?

Where did Cortéz come from?

Was Motecuhzoma a Mexican?

What part of Mexico was Motecuhzoma from?

Did they kill him?

Who killed him?

How did Cortéz get power over Motecuhzoma if Motecuhzoma was the emperor?

How did Cortéz know that Motecuhzoma was in that big city?

If they killed Motecuhzoma, what happened to the Aztecs after that?

Did Cortéz stay in Mexico and marry a Mexican woman?

How long did it take to write your interview?

After five minutes of animated discussion and probing into the facts and supposition of the story, Charlie thanked the class for their ideas and participation, and began with, "The rest of this interview will answer most of your questions, but it will form more questions in your mind too.

Write down those questions, and you'll be set when we use them later...Ready?"

Motecuhzoma: When I first received messages from Cempoala, on the shore of the sunrise, informing me of strange creatures who had arrived on our shores, I thought immediately that they were the Sons of the Sun, Quetzalcóatl, returning to reclaim his throne that I and my father and those before us had been holding for him. I had my artisans prepare gifts

suitable for a god and my envoys delivered them to him. I gave them throat bands and chains and bracelets of thick gold filled with rich emeralds, feather fans of burnished gold, a serpent mask inlaid with turquoise, a breast plate covered with green quetzal feathers, a shield decorated with gold and mother-of-pearl and quetzal feathers, earrings with gold bells, a large collar adorned with the finest snail shells and set with mirrors and little gold bells and a little pair of sandals, head dresses of quetzal feathers with gold and mother-of-pearl, a serpent wand inlaid with turquoise and mirrors and little bells, a golden diadem, a golden shield with quetzal feathers around the rim, Quetzalcóatl's own diadem made of jaguar skin and pheasant feathers adorned with a large green jade with turquoise, his round turquoise earrings hung with curved pendants of shell and gold, his collar with a gold disc in the center, his cloak with red borders, and finally little gold bells for his feet. There were also signs, omens, powerful indications that the fulfillment of the prophesy was imminent. There were two omens of fire in the sky. I saw them myself... a flaming pyramid that burned overhead for a full year... it looked like a giant ear of corn bleeding fire in the night sky. Then three comets suddenly began to stream over our heads from the sunset sea to the sunrise sea, and the burning stars shot out showers of sparks like red-hot coals. My people were terrified when these omens appeared, and our magicians and shamans could not interpret these signs, so we cut the hearts from many Eagle Men to satisfy Huitzilopochtli, the Giver of Life. We sacrificed many captured warriors and slaves this way and offered their precious eagle-cactus fruit to the gods.

Interviewer: I've heard about your custom, Emperor Motecuhzoma, of cutting out the hearts of living victims, but I never understood why such a gruesome practice could satisfy... what was his name?... yes, Huitzilopochtli... how all those human sacrifices could feed your god, Huitzilopochtli, and how that could help somehow with the fire and comets in the sky?

Motecuhzoma: Those who are not of our immediate Aztec-Mejica family do not understand our religious practices, so I will explain. When even a wise man is standing atop this highest pyramid looking down at the people living and working below, it is impossible for him to see clearly what those people are actually doing, where they were moments before, where they are going next, why they do what they do at any one moment, and even more difficult, what they are thinking and feeling. So too your people who look back at mine cannot see why we do what we do. Neither do I understand why the Sons of the Sun and their priests carry magic staffs of two crossed sticks with a man impaled across those sticks. The people say it is magic from their god; perhaps they also sacrifice victims to their god, I do not know, although this man on their magic staffs does not have his chest cut opened or his heart removed. On the other hand, we cut out our enemy captives' hearts to feed our god, Huitzilopochtli, so that he will not die. It is recorded that the great counselor to the Emperors before me, Tlacaelel, instructed us to build... (Motecuhzoma walked to a window and pointed to a giant pyramid temple in the distance) ... to build that temple there, we call it Tlacateccan, House of Authority, in honor of Huitzilopochtli, and that we should war against our enemies to the south and against our neighbors where the sun sets, in Tlaxcala. It is from those wars that we bring captives and slaves to sacrifice, and it is their hearts and blood that feed our god. I understand it is difficult for your people to understand our people's customs, especially now that the Sons of the Sun and their priests begin to gather and burn our sacred books and destroy our schools.

Interviewer: Yes, only a few examples of your people's books survived the unwarranted destruction by the same ones you call the Sons of the Sun. I think forty or so codices remain into the second millennium in libraries far north in my land and even farther across the sea where the sun sets. Other people after you, though, your descendants and theirs, will

remember the Nahuatl tongue, they will retell your story, Emperor Motecuhzoma, be assured of that. Were there more signs or omens after the fires and comets in the sky?

Motecuhzoma: Your words give me hope in this time of destruction and confusion. I am desperate to understand what is happening... But, yes, there were other indications that led us to believe that the strange men who arrived in La Antigua were Quetzalcóatl returned to claim his throne. Two of our major temples burned, that temple of Huitzilopochtli I showed you previously caught fire and burned down with no apparent reason, and when the people threw water on the burning beams and columns, incredibly the flames grew larger. As we were rebuilding it, the temple of Xiuhtecuhtli, built of straw, was struck with the fire from the sky although there was no thunder, and it too burned to the ground. Both of these strange occurrences were recorded as evil omens, and the people have remembered this, they have not forgotten it.

Interviewer: These omens occurred before the arrival of the ones you call Sons of the Sun?

Motecuhzoma: Yes, they started some ten years before their arrival. There was also another strange event. This lake that now surrounds us, Lake Texcoco, began suddenly to boil like it was bubbling over a cooking fire although there was no wind and the water was not hot. The waters boiled and foamed up to a great height and washed against half the houses in Tenochtitlan, and the houses collapsed and many were washed away into that same boiling water.

Interviewer: Do you think possibly that it was some sort of underground volcanic activity that caused it? I know there is a great chain of volcanoes that stretches across all of your empire.

Motecuhzoma: I have no way of knowing, nor did our seers and magicians understand. But, yes, there are many sacred volcanoes around us - the chain of the Seven Luminarias to the north and... come to the window and see ... (Motecuhzoma led the Interviewer to a window from which he pointed)... there is Popocatepetl and its twin, Iztaccihuatl, to the south and (then to another opening in the wall where he indicated) ... Nauchampateptl and Citlaltepētēl to the west. Is it possible that these volcanoes belch fire from below like they do from their peaks?

Interviewer: Yes, we now know they do, and I think that is what caused this great lake surrounding your town to appear to boil. Was this the last omen, Emperor Motecuhzoma?

Motecuhzoma: No... no... there were others... For many nights people heard a woman's voice crying out, "My children, we must flee far away from this city," and at other times they heard the unseen woman cry, "Oh, my children, where can I hide you?" And then, something unbelievable... men were brought to me, here where you stand, and these men... it was as if they were two men merged into one body, squeezed into one man... even I who saw these... these men-creatures... I cannot describe what they actually were. And other men were brought to me, men with two heads on one body... As soon as we had seen these frightening creatures, they... they vanished, became invisible, disappeared from our sight... I still do not understand it... We all took this to be a sure sign that the end of the world was coming, and that some other kind of creatures were going to inhabit the earth in our place. Now I know we were correct... the Sons of the Sun...

Interviewer: I understand more now why you thought Hernan Cortéz and his men... they are only men, Emperor Motecuhzoma, only men... why you thought they were gods, Quetzalcóatl returned from the East, instead of soldiers from Spain looking to...

Motecuhzoma: Where is this Spain of which you speak? Do you know why these Sons of the... these men are here? Is the one they call their leader, Hernan Cortéz... is just he a god? And the ones in brown robes, the ones who carry the large magic staffs, are they gods? These are questions for which I must have answers... my people clamor and rise up shouting that I am no longer Emperor, that these... these men are now the rulers of the Aztecs...

Interviewer: You must understand something, Emperor Motecuhzoma... Your nomadic people, the Aztecs, arrived here in this central plateau, as you know very well, three hundred years ago. Your people struggled to find a home, didn't they, and you were rebuffed by the great cities of Culhuacan to the north and Azcapotzalco to the northeast; but you fought, were defeated many times and eventually found your way onto this island where your ancestors built their few huts and altar to Huitzilopochtli.

Motecuhzoma: This is what my people did, under the direction and guidance of our great emperor, Tenoch, it is true. And we built this greatest of all cities you now see before you, the largest city in our world, protected by the sacred waters of Lake Texcoco which surround us. We built causeways to the mainland, temples and pyramids for our gods, houses for the people, towers and fortresses... People from everywhere come here now bringing their foods to buy and sell each day, corn, masa, tortilla, many colors of fruit from the cactus and the cactus itself, quail and turkeys and other birds, fish from the lake, gold, silver, richly colored feathers, flowers and squash blossoms of all kind, herbs and spices, cocoa, peyote, tobacco, bark paper, gourds, rope, woods, and also slaves and sacrificial victims, in canoes and on foot, over 250,000 people here, to the main temple and its schools, to the giant marketplace of Tlatelolco, to my palace here, to the palace of Axayacatl who ruled before my time, to the gardens and the zoos where we have collected animals and plants from everywhere. I am

Emperor of many millions of people from ocean to ocean, well-educated nobles and their families descended from our city's first Toltec king, Amcamapichtli; ordinary citizens trained in agriculture, warfare, the arts and commerce; wise men, our scholars who continue to study the traditions of our Toltec progenitors; slaves who work our lands and produce the food we eat; and our allies in many city-states, in Texcoco, Tlacopan, Coyoacan, Cuitlahuac, Xochimilco, Chalco, Tlahuicas, and Cempoala... (Motecuhzoma stopped and slowly walked to the window to look out across the city. He was silent some time before the Interviewer finally spoke.)

Interviewer: You have accomplished so much in a short time, and I commend and honor you for that. There are others though who have accomplished similar wonders and built comparable great cities, others like the Spanish, Hernan Cortéz' people. In the same way that the Aztec peoples came down into this beautiful valley from the north to establish your culture and way of life, and in the same way you fought and killed those who were already here to make way for your people... this now is what Hernan Cortéz and his men, they are called Conquistadors, this is now what these warriors from Spain are doing. With your warriors' obsidian clubs, spear throwers, bows and arrows, lances and blowguns and your people's indomitable will you conquered the scattered Mejica tribes and unified them into your empire. And now, Great Motecuhzoma, Hernan Cortéz and his soldiers, with their boats that crossed the ocean, with the sharpest fine Toledo steel swords, with guns and harquebuses that belch fire and steel balls that kill, with horses and dogs, with armor of steel, and with the Spanish will to rule they also say their god gave them... they have come here, to Tenochtitlan, to plant their culture and their way of life, and it is you, Motecuhzoma, Great Emperor of all Aztec-Mejicas, it is you who now will make way for them. You invited them

to enter Tenochtitlan, and now your people are already fleeing the city. Your way of life is doomed. The Aztecs... are defeated.

Motecuhzoma: Then the last omen was right... that bird they trapped by the edge of the lake... it had a round diadem set in its head, like a mirror with a hole in the center ..When they brought it to me we saw how marvelous and unique it was... and in that mirror I saw the heavens and the stars in the constellation of the bull and of the archer... and I felt it was something ominous... but when I called my magicians and shamans to show them, I looked into the mirror again and I saw... Yes! it was true what I saw... now I know how real it was... I saw in that strange mirror set in the bird's head... a distant plain with people moving across it, spread out in ranks and moving toward me in great haste... and they were warring against each other and they rode on... on those creatures the Sons of the Su... no... the soldiers from ... from... Spain... the creatures that they ride on... I saw them making war against us, and I didn't recognize it then, and when I called for the magicians to look and see what I saw, everything had vanished, and they saw nothing... It has been foretold, and now it is coming to pass... I invited them in, I welcomed Cortéz as our God, ... and now he is here as the destroyer... in just two years, conquered by the ones I myself invited into our kingdom... We are lost!... The Aztecs are defeated...

Charlie looked up from the script he had been reading then inhaled and sighed deeply as the full spectrum of emotions from the tragic events he had just brought to life flooded through him. His shoulders and neck tingled with a neural sparkle that had been charged within him for the past few minutes. He refocused back into the classroom where half the class was sitting entranced by the apparent presence of Motecuhzoma and his tragic circumstances. The other half of the class was sleeping, tuned out, *in a place neither contemporary nor historical, a temporary but all-too-easy oblivion without*

challenge or tragedy, Charlie quickly thought to himself, *and without victory or defeat either*, he added as he welcomed thirty-two young men and women back to school reality with, "OK... it's time for you Aztec-Mejicas to stand up, stretch your bones... wake up! Cortéz and his Conquistadors are here, and they're after you... escape while you can... "

Chapter 7 A Flight of Herons

Cold water, can't climb up this muddy bank, slipping... Oh, God! They're coming... Warriors everywhere... that one screaming... "Warriors of Tlatelolco!... now is the time! ... Who are these barbarians?... Let them come!"... attacking us... can't climb out of lake... no... clubbing us... those terrible clubs... must climb out with everything ... no, no... not me... Oh, God, don't club me...

Where... am I... alive... where... Standing up, yes, up, I'm up... who are those... those are not... the Aztecs have them prisoners too... Cortéz' allies... the ones helping him... from Tlaxcala, Acolhuacan... Chalco, and... I'm walking, no! don't club me... and Xochimilco... where are we going... Oh, God! I'm wounded... I'm bleeding... can't go on... tired... weak... Can't stand... holding me up... someone in this line... Spaniards and Indios... Oh, one of our... Gracias, Señor ... "Donde estamos, este lugar... no sabe? Look around... canals... buildings... a pyramid... "No... not on top of the pyramid!... they're going to kill us there... in line to have our hearts cut out!... "Let me go! Let me go! I'm not one of them ... I'm not trying to kill you... I'm not with Cortéz ... I'm Charlie Palmerin... I'm from... " Oh, God, no... they just... screaming... alive... they cut out his heart... God! cut off his head... Oh! No, jamming his head on spears... throwing his body over the side... No!... grabbing me, pushing me... next... "No, you can't kill me... class starts at eight... no substitute... you can't cut out my heart... belongs to Anita... don't pull my head... break my... No! you can't!... Aniiiiii!...

"Charlie! Charlie!" Anita had turned over when she heard him calling her name, and she was now shaking Charlie in the dark. "Are you OK? You're having a nightmare or something... "

"Oh, God, Honey... I was dreaming... the Aztecs were... were cutting out my heart... I was there... captured with all the other Spanish and Indios ... the Aztec warriors captured us as we... we were trying to crawl out of the water... we kept slipping... they clubbed us... made us march to that pyramid... some kind of temple... they killed everyone there... cut out their hearts... while they were

alive... cut off their heads... stuck them on spears... their bodies tumbling... breaking up over the side of the pyramid... "

"You've been putting too much time into that thing you were writing" Anita kissed Charlie on the cheek and pulled up the covers ready to go back to sleep, "... what was it you were writing?"

"Oh, that interview," Charlie started to return to consciousness, "... an interview with Motecuhzoma... I made it up to model the kind of interview I want my students to do this week... I guess it became too real or something... sorry to wake you up, Honey... Good night... see you tomorrow, unless they come back for me again... "

Anita chuckled, reached over and patted Charlie's shoulder, "Sweet dreams, Honey." Charlie lay back, shut his eyes and let the hypnogogic twilight descend peacefully upon him. He reassured himself silently as his mind enumerated the indisputable facts of his life he hoped would comfort him into a more restful sleep.

I am Charlie Palmerin. I am a teacher. I live in California. This is Anita here, my wife whom I love with all my heart. Our families come from Aztec-Mejica peoples, from Guanajuato, from... Veracruz... we came... down... from the... north ...a long time ago...where there are... herons... so many herons rising around me... white herons... everywhere... standing in shallow water... huge mesa there... flying... I am flying... the herons... flying with herons... over... canyon... down into that canyon... people there... below those cliffs... gigantic red cliffs... those houses protected under cliffs... my people down there... swooping down... all the herons swooping down ... thousands of wings flapping ...touching down ...touching...and... God! I'm sinking... where is... quicksand... sinking!... Someone!... I'm sinking into...Help me!

"Charlie! Wake up!" Anita was elbowing Charlie in the back, "You're dreaming again."

"Whu...? Oh!... dreaming?... again?... Anita! I was sinking into... I... I saw these herons... huge flocks of herons... in the water... surrounding a big mesa... and then... I was flying with the herons... flying into a beautiful canyon... and there were people... somehow I knew they were my people living there under this gigantic cliff wall that sheltered their houses, and when... when the herons... when I came down close to the ground to land, I was suddenly in quicksand, sinking and yelling... then you woke me up... "

Anita reached over to pull Charlie around to face her. "Are you... sure... they were herons?" she asked oddly.

"Sure, I'm sure... blue, long-necks, legs, wings... they were blue herons."

"... and there was water around there with a high mesa?" Anita pushed for Charlie's assurance that what she suspected was so.

"Like I said, then I was flying up over to... "

"To a canyon with a high cliff," Anita finished what Charlie was going to repeat, "and people living at the base of the cliffs... and you were slipping into quicksand?"

"I felt like I was going down, and I couldn't get out, and I was calling for someone to help me... "

Anita sat up, propped herself against the headboard and leaned back before she spoke again. "Charlie... " she began in a puzzled tone of voice, "do you know what your dream is, I mean... do you recognize what happened in your dream or... or the places you visited in your dream?"

"No," Charlie shook his head groggily, "do you?"

"Yes, I think I do," Anita hesitated as she answered, "but I'm afraid... well, not afraid, but ... I feel really strange to tell you, you know, after your other dream, that is... You want me to tell you what I think?"

"Did I ever ask you not to tell me what you think?"

"Well, if you hadn't been doing all this research and writing about the Aztecs and the fall of Tenochtitlan for your classes, I wouldn't make anything of your dreams," Anita hesitated and caressed Charlie's face, "but I think you've connected with more than just the historical facts of what happened to those people then..."

"What are you talking about, Honey?" Charlie grinned as he turned on the lamp by the bed, "Am I channeling our ancestors' spirits or something...?"

"Well... all I know is that your first dream about being prisoner and killed by the Aztecs could have come from your research for your interview, right? You are an impressionable guy... "

"Yeah, I might have been influenced... you know, when I read the interview for my classes, I felt some kind of deep emotion, some kind of strength or intensity as if what I was relating by those words I wrote was familiar to me, as if I knew it from some kind of personal experience... is that crazy or what?"

"Maybe... I don't think so... I don't know... " Anita shook her head in disbelief, "but what I do know is that your second dream, the herons, the water, the high mesa, and... and then the high cliffs protecting the people living below, and the quicksand on the ground... that's all real... Charlie, your dream took you back to Aztlán, back to the real Aztlán ... did you know that?"

"Come on, Anita..." Charlie replied skeptically, "Everybody talks about Aztlán, you know... *la raza* coming back to power to reclaim their homeland of Aztlán from the Conquistador gringos who conquered them and took their land... sure, I know about Aztlán, but it's BS, you know that... "

"It's not, Charlie," Anita's voice quieted as she continued, "in the last few years they've researched different ethno-historic writings and correlated the specific descriptions of the Nahuatlaca people's comings and goings with the geographic details of the area in question, and they've actually located the places where the original eight Nahuatlaca tribes first lived and where they relocated on their journey down to Mexico and eventually to Tenochtitlan where you picked up their story... "

"How do you know about all this, Honey," Charlie smiled at Anita as he waited intrigued for an explanation, "and why haven't I heard about it?"

"You know, I've been doing research about coffee for my father's business in Veracruz...?"

"Yeah, you told me about him wanting you to help develop markets for his organic... uh... shade grown coffee, yeah... and that you were going to participate in some kind of trade group... "

"That's right... the Gulf States Accord... yes, and so I've been researching the historical development of Mexican trade relationships and the traditional trade routes used in the Americas during recorded history, and... well, one thing led to the other, and I found myself reading about Cabeza de Vaca... yes, your friend, de Vaca... and his trying to find a trade route to China for Spanish goods but getting shipwrecked instead... yep, you turned me on to him before, so I went back and read about how the indigenous peoples led him and his three companions from Florida across Texas, Alabama and into Mexico by way of some of the ancient trade routes that those same indigenous peoples had used for centuries."

"Cabeza de Vaca, eh?" Charlie tousled Anita's hair and teased her, "... and you said I was foolish to be reading his journals so much... "

"All right, you win, you win... " Anita grinned sheepishly, "but listen... de Vaca passed through the same territory in the 1530s that the original eight Nahuatlaca tribes passed through when they started coming down from Aztlán in 1064... and you already know about when they arrived and founded Tenochtitlan in 1325."

"So, what's the connection between the trade routes and the eight tribes," Charlie tried to get back to the dream still fresh in his mind, "... what's their name... Nahuatlaca, yeah, the Nahuatlacas coming down from Aztlán and eventually into Mexico and my dream about flying with herons?"

"Oh, yes... your dream... " Anita turned on her bedside light, shifted her position and settled in to tell her husband about the herons. "I'll get out the actual documents I printed to show you tomorrow, OK... but let me just tell you the basics about your dream and Aztlán ... In the state of Utah the Colorado and San Juan Rivers intersect in the Lake Powell area, and right there, surrounded by those waters is this huge mesa... like an island... and we do know that Aztlán was surrounded by water... and the name 'Aztlán' means 'in the middle of the herons,' so... the first part of your dream was in Aztlán ... water surrounding a big mesa and flying herons... you traveled somehow back in time to Aztlán ... and you didn't know about this before?"

"This is the first I heard about this, Honey," Charlie eagerly replied, "What else?"

"Well, the surviving ethno-historic sources say that the people left Aztlán in 1064 and began to migrate south to a place called Colhuacan. The topoglyph for that place shows a hill bending forward at the top, and the name 'Colhuacan' can mean that, but it can also mean 'place where the ancestors live.' So, there's lots of places south of Utah where there are cliffs with ruins below, but in the early 1990s they discovered that only one could be the actual Colhuacan."

"OK, how did they know for sure?"

"Your friend, Motecuhzoma...? Well, his namesake, Motecuhzoma I, wanted to know about his family history and the history of the Aztecs, so he sent... "

"Hey, how come he didn't know anything about where the Aztec-Mejicas came from?"

"Well, the Emperor who preceded Motecuhzoma I destroyed all the historical documents because he thought it was better that the people didn't know about their past, so Motecuhzoma I sent an expedition with sixty of his most powerful magicians north to find where the Aztecs came from, to find the original eight tribes of the original Aztec-Mejicas and return to Tenochtitlan to rewrite Aztec history books that Emperor Itzcoatl before him had destroyed.... anyway, the account of that trek mentions houses at the foot of the cliffs and also getting stuck in quicksand at the base of the cliffs at Colhuacan."

"Wait a minute... what you're talking about is part of my dream, isn't it...? The quicksand at the base of these cliffs where there are people living, is that it? So where is there a place like that... my God! I think I'm time traveling or something...?"

"There's only one place like that, Charlie," Anita continued authoritatively, "Canyon de Chelly in eastern Arizona, right below, south-east of where they think Aztlán was. That's where you also went in your dream... and in Canyon de Chelly is a famous cliff dwelling called The White House, one of the most spectacular ruins in all the area... and that's evidently where the people stopped and located themselves during their three-hundred-year migration south. It's a perfect place, protected, water, fertile land for crops, south facing, easy to defend... "

"If that place was so great," Charlie interjected with the obvious question, "why did they eventually leave and end up in Tenochtitlan, do they know?"

"From what I understand so far, some of the peoples... you know that there were eight different tribes that lived around the area of Aztlán that made up the people we now call the Nahuatlacas...? Well, some of them decided to stay, and you know who they are?"

"Of course, I don't know who they are... some group of indigenous people who still... "

Charlie paused a moment and blurted out, "You don't mean the Hopi people, do you? They're still there, and their customs and culture go way back... Is it them?"

"That's right, and the evidence that it's them is really interesting. First, both 'Cholhua' and 'Hopi' mean 'ancestor,' and 'Hopi' is the modern name for their ancient name, Moki, which is the name of a canyon in that area where there are ruins and pre-Colombian human remains. Second, there are Hopi legends about a mythical snake hero, Tiyo, and his father living on a mountain close to where the Colorado and San Juan rivers come together... that's Aztlán, remember, Charlie?" Anita raised her dark eyebrows and paused. "Well, Tiyo takes a trip down the river to see what's there, and he meets Spider Woman who guides him into the underworld where he learns all the songs, prayers, dances and other ceremonies that the present-day Hopi snake-antelope clans still use. How about that?"

"So the present-day Hopi are really the remnants of those original Nahuatlaca peoples, the ones who stayed in... where was it...? Yeah, in Colhuacan... but why did the rest of them leave and keep going?"

"There was a major volcanic eruption in that area around 1060... the Sunset Crater is still there... and it caused really strong earthquakes all around the area... About thirty volcanic cone craters appeared and erupted continuously over a period of four years, and they kept erupting actively for another two-hundred years. That would make anyone get out, don't you think?"

"That must have affected their crops and water too, huh? I guess any big volcanic eruption disrupts the water, earth, insects, plants... contaminates everything with the ash falling down all the time...kind of like Mount Saint Helens ... Montserrat... what was the other one in the Philippines...? Pinatubo... yeah, Mount Pinatubo... "

"Yes, that's right... just like in those cases where the people had to flee for their lives or be killed by the pyroclastic flows and falling ash... That's probably why they continued south to the third place where they stayed for nine years... they called it Chicomotzoc or Seven Caves or Canyons."

"So, they found that actual location too?"

"Well, they found a location that could very well have been their third long term residence..." Anita sighed, slapped her pillow, slid back down under the bed covers and let her head plop on her pillow... "but they're not sure though...let's talk more about this in the morning, OK...I'll give you my notes and you can read about it for yourself, all right?... Oh...if you have another dream, Honey, just go with it... I'm sure you'll arrive back here safe in California, and I'll be here waiting for you like I always am, eh? G'night, Honey..."

Chapter 8 The Eagles Return

Anita was right, as usual. The documents and notes she had accumulated in her research on coffee and then on ancient and contemporary trade routes used by North American indigenous and mestizo peoples revealed everything to Charlie. It took him several days to read and absorb the results of Anita's research, and then finally see the larger picture she had spoken about. Between the Continental Divide and the Rio Grande River in western New Mexico is one of many multi-cave pre-Colombian sites around the area. The Nahuatlaca progenitors of the Aztecs could very well have stopped there at those Gila Cliff Dwellings to make their home for several more years before they pushed farther south. They were eight different groups or tribes of people we now call the Aztec-Mejica—the People of the Willows, The Stone Wall People, The People of the Winding Plants, the Fishnet people, the People of Jadeite, The Dog Suckers, the People of the Flower Fields, and the Ancestral People.

It wasn't as if those original bands of Nahuatlaca people knew when they fled Aztlán that Colhuacan would be their home for such a short time. Neither did they leave their Hopi kin behind in Colhuacan with the idea of making their permanent residence in the cliffs and caves farther south. Once they left Aztlán, the people were on their way, always moving, forward for almost 270 years, following a coherent, unified vision we modern humans can no longer put our pluralistic cultural fingers on.

Charlie realized though that astute twenty-first century moderns could point to something parallel. First, follow the grandchildren of the grandchildren of many generations of the Aztec-Mejicas who finally arrived in the upland central valley in 1325 where they unified most of the surrounding tribes and built their capital and enclave, Tenochtitlan. Later, witness their mestizo descendants mixed from those mighty native peoples and the powerful foreign Spanish

Conquistadors who abandoned their search for gold when they found something more precious and beautiful in the exotic beauty of Mejica women. Then, behold millions of contemporary Mestizo-Mejicanos scrape, lug, wrestle and leverage Mexico City into a palimpsest of the world's largest and tangled metropolis.

Charlie watched in his mind as three generations of Mexicans turn around reluctantly and surge north to flee the continuing victimization, unemployment, violence, pollution and degradation of their environment, exclusion from sociopolitical processes, and accompanying neuroses. Look at them as today they leave their native Guanajuato, Michoacan and now Chiapas and Oaxaca to seek jobs in meat-packing and landscaping, the televised three bedroom two bath standard in El Norte, as they give up the dry and rainy seasons for the aquifers of credit that are ever-fruitful, and as they watch the omniscient screen for signs and notices of what next to do because they no longer look to the constellated messages in the sky.

Charles pointed his finger at Cortéz first. He brought with him the Spanish hacienda system that took hold in West-central Mexico, the Bajío of Zamora, once the kingdom of the mighty Purépecha native peoples. With him came the institutions and ideology of the Catholic Church which weakened and replaced local neighborhood and community organizations. Together the Church and the hacienda system set up Guanajuato, Michoacan and Zamora for rapid capitalist development and agricultural modernization.

At the same time Charlie considered that, by 1620, thanks again to Cortéz' unintended influence, ninety-five percent of the native peoples had been killed by repeated epidemics of malaria, smallpox, typhoid, measles, tuberculosis, and yellow fever. The remaining one million or so native people who remained concentrated themselves in missions and towns where they were weakened further or killed by malnutrition, exploitation and slavery.

He concluded that one seemed to notice one-fifth of all the gold and silver taken from the mines in Michoacan, Guanajuato, Querétero, and Zacatecas being claimed and shipped back to the Spanish kings, and the Mexican mines themselves seized from the native peoples by Spaniard noblemen who quickly became the wealthiest men in Mexico. Although native peoples were not supposed to work in the mines, thousands of native men and women were enslaved, bought and sold in lots of fifty to one hundred for three to five pesos apiece, thirty to fifty times cheaper than black slaves who worked as overseers of the mines for aristocratic Spanish owners at home in their haciendas. Other native peoples would work on the henequen, sugar cane, coffee and cacao haciendas on a sharecropper or debt peonage basis that imposed a new socioeconomic system in the towns and haciendas and increasingly undermined the indigenous people's way of life.

Charlie read about how, after Mexico's defeat in the Mexican-American war, president Benito Juarez, from indigenous people himself, built government schools and railroads that further destabilized the old socio-economic structures. The next president, Porfirio Díaz, accelerated modernization with huge concessions to foreign interests, especially the United States, for the construction of more mines, railroads to and from the north to service the mines, and telephone and electric development to network and communicate mine and train traffic through the largely unconnected Mexican countryside. Díaz also allowed hacienda owners to seize lands from native peoples if they could not prove title to the land. Thousands of these displaced, disenfranchised Mestizos and native peoples found work in the mines, the railroads and in related industries. It was the construction and utilization of this railroad system to the north that eventually allowed and encouraged the first mass movement of large parts of the Mexican population displaced and impoverished during the Porfiriato and the subsequent revolution.

Charlie reflected on how The Mexican Revolution brought civil disorder, banditry, looting of farms and the destruction of crops. Much of the hacienda system had been destroyed, and the government-led redistribution of land taken from haciendas and the Church in the form of communal grants or ejidos was slow in returning control to peasants and workers. The total population of Mexico dropped by one million, and the first major flight north to the border and beyond intensified. United States domestic mobilization for the war increased in 1915 and the need for workers in the railroads, steel mills, meat packing and food processing companies increased.

Charlie was fascinated to learn from Anita's notes that the passage of the Immigration Act of 1917 restricted European immigration and contract labor and also instituted a head tax and literacy test. At the request of agricultural, railroad, mining and construction industries, the U.S. Secretary of Labor utilized a loophole in the law to exempt Mexican workers from these restrictions. This first so-called bracero program was largely uncontrolled, undocumented, unmonitored, and the Mexican government attempted unsuccessfully to institute contract regulations to protect the workers who flowed north seeking stable jobs.

Charlie could understand that after the conclusion of the war, U.S. employers wanted to maintain their supply of low paid Mexican workers, and that the demand for more unskilled Mexican workers would continue. The reticence of returning soldiers to take on unskilled and low status maintenance or agricultural work, the continuing Mexican economic instability after the revolution, and the U.S. cultural and economic boom in the 1920s enticed more and more Mexican workers to steady employment in the States. Immigration legislation in 1921 and 1924 further tightened the borders with a ten-dollar U.S. visa requirement and the establishment of the Border Patrol to monitor the U.S.- Mexico frontier. Coyotes flourished as agriculture and railroads continued to draw legal and undocumented workers across the border.

During the Depression of 1929 and 1930, when hundreds of thousands of workers lost their jobs, the least skilled Mexican workers were let go first. Charlie never knew that many not-so-poor Mexicans returned to Mexico with cars and furniture or by rail transportation from the border to the interior provided free by the Mexican government. Those more destitute either struggled back eventually across the border or were caught in immigration sweeps and repatriated. Mexican aliens were pictured by federal and local government and politicians as being responsible for the massive unemployment and the high costs associated with unemployment relief. Estimates indicate that between fifty and seventy-five thousand Mexican immigrants were repatriated from California with little government monitoring, thirty-five thousand from Los Angeles County alone.

On the other hand, in Michigan, for example, local Mexican-American sociopolitical organizations encouraged Mexican immigrants to return to their Mexican homes voluntarily by providing subsidized transportation to the border and within Mexico. The Mexican government even promised to facilitate their return by providing land, tools and other help. The supervision and support from both sides of the border made repatriation a less burdensome process although most of the four-hundred thousand Mexican immigrants repatriated between 1929 and 1937 returned under extremely difficult circumstances.

Charlie followed the direction of his research to 1934 when Lazaro Cárdenas became president of Mexico and initiated the most extensive Mexican land redistribution along with the expropriation of foreign oil interests, but by 1940 the impossibility of redistributing land to all the landless peasants became evident. Cárdenas' successor, Avila Camacho, decided that industrialization was the answer to Mexico's woes. Charlie remembered that he had heard these names as a little boy when his grandparents talked about the problems in Mexico. During World War II the extreme poverty of the West-central region of Mexico, the surplus of displaced workers,

and the network of railroads already in place persuaded Camacho to identify this West-central region of Mexico as the largest and best area for recruitment of braceros to work U.S. fields and trains while the U.S. men were overseas.

All you had to do was say good-bye to your family, your wife, your children and your compadres and comadres, stick your papers in your pocket with some pesos, and haul yourself as close as you could get to the National Stadium in Mexico City (or farther north in Irapuato or Querétaro) where the labor contractors were waiting to process you. You had to be a resident (however temporary) of the town where you were applying, and you couldn't be a highly skilled worker necessary to the local economy. Tip the labor inspectors for the scarce but required selection card to enter the stadium, have your papers reviewed for discrepancies, your tired body checked for ailments and TB, your hands inspected for the requisite telltale callouses, get your papers stamped to pass through the border, sign your contract, and then in two days the train would deposit you along with thousands of other men at the U.S. inspection station at the border. Hurry up, wait, strip, bend over, stick out your arm and get stuck for blood, hurry up, wait some more, get deloused with DDT powder, give more blood, get dressed, wait, grab a white bread sandwich and Coke, hurry up or you'll miss the train, ¡*Vamos pa' trabajar!* Let's go work!

Charlie couldn't imagine how five to eight *Ferrocarriles Nacionales de México* trains a month struggled against delays of traffic and mismanagement to transfer anywhere from five to eight-thousand Mexican men to one of three border distribution towns. Although first-class coaches were initially negotiated, reserved and paid for, many riders put up with overcrowded conditions or even riding in box cars. From the border town of El Paso workers would leave for the middle and southwestern states; from Nogales they would be carted to the western and northwestern states; and from Laredo the men would ride to employment in the East and Northeast. Charlie already knew

that his father, Mariano, had been one of these men, and it saddened him to read about the harsh details that his father's stories had omitted.

Out of El Paso the Southern Pacific Railroad employed over seventy thousand Mexicans and deposited years of carloads of immigrants in Santa Barbara, San Bernardino, Sacramento, the fertile San Joaquin Valley, Los Angeles, Portland, Salt Lake City, Tucson and the Rio Grande area. The Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroads established their yard and maintenance facility in San Bernardino in the 1880s, and their tracks spread from El Paso up into Kansas and into the industrial Midwest and East to the steel plants. The Santa Fe Railway itself dispersed almost two-thousand braceros into Illinois, Missouri, Oklahoma, New Mexico and California. Many rode the Northern Pacific and the Great Northern Pacific up to Washington and Oregon to pick hops, apples and plant tomatoes and work in Utah sugar beet fields and processing plants. Other Mexican immigrants found their way on Central Pacific rails to Omaha to work in the meat packing plants, and many workers rode the New York Central to eventually stay and work in the automobile plants in Detroit.

The trains fanned out across the forty-eight states, and with them hundreds of thousands of Mexican men in their twenties and thirties, men like Charlie's father, unsuspecting men whose lives would irrevocably transform and whose families would invariably disintegrate on an interminable journey that would appear to be an ordeal, a voluntary enslavement, an economic exile in a foreign land, an unhappy diaspora in the turf of The Conquerors. That would be true. Yet it would also not be untrue, Charlie soon realized, that it was those same Mexican men who worked and rode the rails far into the unknown north who would be retracing and reopening routes back into their nearly forgotten ancestral homelands where a thousand years earlier the same Nahuatlaca forebears of these new bracero scouts ventured south literally step-by-step into the new unknown to find and forge a better life for their own women and children. Charlie read in the papers how they still

followed footprints across the deserts and mountains to find life and death in the oasis across the border.

No one knows the names and stories of the almost one-hundred and twenty-thousand workers who spread out into agriculture-intensive states beginning in the early forties. No one bothers to read their quiet obituaries that appear daily in hundreds of newspapers in the states where they made their second and final homes. Old pictures of young men, Spanish names and surnames, born in Guanajuato or Michoacan or Jalisco or a hundred other cities and towns unknown to English speakers, died in such and such a California or Arizona hospital or in the home of a son or daughter, left behind other sons or daughters or wives on both sides of the border. Some returned to be buried in Mexico; most are forgotten in some anonymous U.S. cemetery. Some rest perhaps in sight of that water surrounding those high mesas, close to the herons that still fly south; some sleep forever near those high cliffs and quicksand that shelter ancestral dwellings; and some remain forever by those innumerable caves where their ancient Nahuatlaca fathers and mothers arrived, lived, procreated, died and were also buried.

The eagles return eventually to Aztlán.

After a thousand years they return.

Chapter 9 Everyone Makes Mistakes

"Hello? *Bueno? Se encuentra la Señora o el Señor Ramírez?* Is Mrs. or Mr. Ramirez there? Yes, this is Mr. Palmerin from El Dorado High School calling...Ay... Alejandro's teacher...Thank you..."

Charlie heard muffled talking on the other end of the line..."Yes, his teacher...I don't know...he wants to talk with him...where is that boy? Just go find him, hurry...the *maestro* is waiting..."

A minute passed while Charlie waited patiently and itemized mentally what he would say. Intelligent kid, able to ask articulate questions, polite with me, rarely absent... always the positive things first, then the negative...excessive and abusive profanity with the other boys, talked with him several times, he agrees to cooperate but doesn't stop, physically aggressive with other students, doesn't stop, finished less than half his work, failing the class, will have to repeat class in summer school, late fourteen times...

"Yes, Hello...Mrs. Ramirez? Yes, this is Mr. Palmerin, I'm Alex' English teacher from El Do..."

"Wha'did he do now? He in trouble again?" Alex' angry mother interrupted as if she had repeated this script before.

"I just wanted to call, Mrs. Ramirez...to ask you for your help...you know... Alex is an intelligent boy, very energetic, articu...he can say very clearly what he means, he's always polite with me, you know, he has a lot of abilities that he could develop..."

"Wha'd he do now? He hit someone? That idiot kid! I told him I'd whip him again if he got into trouble at school, but he don' listen to me...You know his father don' live here anymore, it's just me and my three daughters and Alex..."

"It must be difficult to take care of your children by your..."

"Alex don' listen to no one, 'specially me...and he don' help his sisters either, just goes out with his friends, comes home all hours of the night, tells me to iron his pants and shirts every morning, make 'im breakfast an' all...he's a bad kid, Mr...wus' your name again?"

"Palmerin, Mrs. Ramirez, Charlie Palmerin...I'm an English tea..."

"You Mexican, Mr... Palmerin?"

"I was born in Los Angeles, Mrs. Ramirez, and my mother and father were both born in Guanajuato..."

Of course, Charlie couldn't tell Mrs. Ramirez the rest of the story. Grandpa Prudencio and Grandma Carmen continued savoring the ongoing racket they made of their provincial life together in the rolling hills of Uriangato until Prudencio yelped out his last cry of joy while watching Grandma's eyes flutter and roll back. She never told anyone how she was laughing and then crying as she pushed Prudencio over and extricated herself from under his warm but now still body. She held out in the too somber and quiet house for three lonely years until she too rolled her now vacant brown eyes back during the night for the final time.

Most thought she died after hearing that her first son, Corporal Octavio Palmerin, had been killed in Korea in 1952. Son number three, Francisco, took off North to wander through California. Carmen got a scribbled postcard from Frankie saying that he was settling down in San Fernando Valley where he had found work upholstering hot rods and customized cars. Grandma Carmen never knew he was eventually shot a few years later in the Valley's *Sol Trece* barrio in a dispute over a heroin deal gone bad. Luciano fled eventually to Mexico City after the responsibility and burden of caring for his parents became too much for him. Rumors had begun to circulate about Luciano and

an older homosexual gentleman in town, and since the rumors were true about the *maricones* he hung out with, and he didn't want his aging parents to be scandalized and shamed by their third so—then the only able-bodied man in the house—he fled to the anonymous shelter of neurotic excess and scarcity that Mexico City provided social outcasts and curiosities like him.

Prudencio and Carmen's last born, their only daughter, Angelica, stepped in to take Luciano's place in caring for her frail mother and father. When Prudencio passed in '51, she was relieved to have more time with her mother, but when the fire that Prudencio had always kindled in her was extinguished with his death, Carmen became melancholy, uncharacteristically quiet and uncommunicative, and in her last year she began walking the halls and patios of the house mumbling to herself, perhaps to Prudencio, no one ever listened closely enough to know, but mumble she did. Even though Angelica tried her best to live up to her name and care for her mother, no one could ameliorate Carmen's sadness or pull her back from the dementia that disintegrated her life. Like her mother Angelica too felt happiness and grief when she found Carmen that morning in 1954 with her eyes rolled back in her head. None of the neighbors said a critical word when Carmen closed the doors and windows of the family house and never opened them again. Those who see her today wending her way slowly through the cool marble archways and alleys of town say that she buys candles, chiles, beans and tortillas, and that she covers her face with her rebozo, perhaps to cover her grief, keep out the world, or prevent the curious young men from discovering the radiant beauty that finally only Charlie's father, Mariano, knew and could recall.

Mariano was the second son of Prudencio and Carmen, the last child to be born in Prudencio's father's house, the only surviving son worth mentioning really, not counting their *joto* son, Luciano, of course, who in '91 called his only surviving brother to tell him he was dying of AIDS. Mariano flew down from LA to visit him once in Mexico, but he was too weak to really visit

with his only brother. He had been very hot and promiscuous in Mexico years before anyone knew the real threat of AIDS all the time that Mariano was working in the North as a bracero, and after several of Luciano's moneyed lovers had died of the disease they shared with him along with not a few pesos, he discovered that he had become infected too. He had checked himself into Hospital Angeles de Pedregal and was waiting for the end. Mariano said his dry-eyed good-byes to a brother he barely knew, took the bus down to Uriangato to visit his recluse sister, and then flew out of Morelia back to his home and family in California.

Mariano had listened since his boyhood to the clickety-clackety-clickety-clack of the freight and passenger trains of the Mexican Central Railroad passing north every Tuesday morning towards Morelia and eventually too far off El Paso in the United States, and south every Friday evening back to the train yard in Mexico City. The tracks passed close enough to Prudencio and Carmen's house that everyone in the neighborhood used the plaintive whooo-whooping to remind them of the difference between morning and evening. Mariano would hear the whistle, run to the old grandmother clock on the entry table of the *sala*, and verify that the train was reasonably on time. If the hour was between nine and eleven in the morning or between seven and nine in the evening, the train was running on time, and Mariano was content. Mariano was often content, but he had never been as content as the day he realized he could actually get on the train in Morelia and ride it as far north as El Paso could possibly be, and even farther, he was certain. His father, Prudencio, had just died; his sister, Angelica, was taking care of his mother; it was time for him to find his way; the tracks would lead him.

It was surely by the providence of God that Don Leopoldo Vásquez Calderon, the mayor of Uriangato, was one of Prudencio's oldest compadres from the time after the revolution. The mayor, Prudencio and Mariano had shot pigeons and quail together in the hills behind town for years before

Prudencio had started to slow down and finally decline the weekly hunts with initial excuses about a bad batch of corn that was just delivered, the newfangled mechanized tortilla presses not working, a large rush order of tortillas for three wedding receptions on the same day, and finally his legs hurting, or being short of breath, or recurring pain in his chest and shoulder. When only Don Leopoldo and Mariano would go out and return with a bag full of fat birds, Angelica would follow her mother's recipe and prepare enough quail and pigeons in *chile negro* for everyone who dropped in to verify and then compliment the fragrant smell that filled the surrounding houses.

As they were cleaning their guns after one of their last hunting forays following Prudencio's death, Mariano casually mentioned to Don Leopoldo that he would like to go north to seek his fortune, and that he thought that having one of the Mexican government allotted certificates to participate in the Bracero Program in the U.S. might be the best way to accomplish that. Young Mariano knew that the mayors of each *municipio* had the responsibility and power to distribute these sought-after certificates according to the quota the federal government had set. Furthermore, he remembered that before his father's last words of, "You have been a good son, Mariano, make sure your sister cares for your mother..." Prudencio had disclosed to him that Don Leopoldo owed him a favor from those several times in '46 and '47 when Prudencio had affirmed that, yes, of course Leopoldo had been with him hunting, where else do you think he could have been, and who else could have shot those birds with my poor eyesight and bad aim, when in reality the mayor had been in Uriangato's neighboring town, Moroleón, in room 14 of Hotel Plaza Moroleón trying to keep Maria de Jesusita Ledezma, the recent widow of Don Leopoldo's former political rival, Don Sacramento Echevarria, from giggling too much and singing bawdy *corridos* from the revolution instead of staying focused on the amorous business at hand given the limited time and circumstances provided them.

The mayor finished swabbing out the barrel of his Winchester 410, peered through it to verify its condition, nodded, then matter-of-factly replied to his hunting partner that it would be his pleasure to help his old compadre's son, May his soul rest in peace, eh, and that he owed Prudencio many favors anyway, too many to elaborate at the moment, and he hoped he could honor his departed compadre's memory and his personal obligations to him by obtaining one of the government certificates for Mariano.

Within the week Mariano had boarded the northbound Tuesday train in Morelia and was heading, not to El Paso as he had always imagined, but to his destination in Empalme, near Guaymas, on the coast of Sonora, where the Mexican government had restationed its recruitment center four years before in 1947. Mariano had heard rumors that once he got there, the government was forcing bracero candidates to work in the cotton to develop the area around Guaymas—twenty-two days or two-thousand kilos—before they could go on to Nogales and then after that, well, only God and the labor contractors knew. Mariano didn't know that he was one of one-hundred and ninety-two thousand braceros to cross the border in '51, nor did he realize that more than four-hundred thousand of his countrymen in the U.S. illegally would be apprehended. He wasn't thinking of anyone else but himself, and he barely had enough time to do that.

After the first train trip in his life Mariano found himself in Oxnard having signed on to pick strawberries, oranges and avocados, but instead of returning to Uriangato at the end of his six month contract, he and several of his paisanos took a lurching Greyhound and bolted up to the Salinas Valley to work in the tomatoes and lettuce, then north into the San Joaquin Valley to Lodi for the Tokay and Thompson seedless grape harvests, and on to Sacramento for more tomatoes, melons and watermelons, and even up to Washington for apples and hops. He couldn't remember when he had been where years later when Charlie asked him about it. Nevertheless, Mariano

remembered and would always tell his son how one of the big Santa Paula walnut producers for whom he hired on as full-time foreman helped him get a green card. It was in Santa Paula that Mariano met Charlie's mother, Rosalinda, and it was only because several years later his walnut *patrón* co-signed a mortgage for Mariano's first house there that he and Rosalinda started to make babies.

Charlie remembered his father always being there for him. Sometimes Mariano had to go out late at night or in the early morning to handle some emergency in the walnut orchards or at the dryers, especially during the harvest in August, but usually he was home for breakfast and dinner, and he was around the house on weekends too. Charlie's mother, Rosalinda, was always home to cook real food, especially chile rellenos and fried chicken, make lunches for Charlie's brother and sister to take to school, help with homework, iron shirts and Levis, vacuum and mop, all the things that Charlie never realized were so necessary to making a house into a home until he left home, started living on his own and suddenly realized that enjoyment of life depended on preparation and maintenance, a lesson he would carry into his career as a teacher.

No wonder Charlie's mother could cook and clean so well: Mariano first saw her through the Order Here window of a Santa Paula *taquería*. Between the time he placed his order for Number 24, one chile relleno, one beef taco and one cheese enchilada with rice and beans with extra salsa picada and a large horchata, and the time he heard his number called over the speaker, he had decided to ask the dark-haired twenty-year old for her name and phone number. Unfortunately, when he went to retrieve his order at the Pick-Up Here window, a different girl, thin, hawk-nosed, and with squinty eyes, cross-examined Mariano for his number then thrust the two white bags out the pick-up window.

Mariano thanked the wrong girl to whom he had nothing to be grateful, stepped back to consider the situation, and after weighing his options, looked up at the menu again, settled quickly

on large fries, got back into the end of the Order Here line again, waited sheepishly with his Number 24 getting cold in his clammy hands, stepped up to the window when his turn came, placed his pretextual order with the right girl again, then after she gave him his receipt with another number, Mariano asked if the name on her identification pin was indeed such a beautifully true description as Rosalinda, and when she nodded, he made a joke about her handing out numbers all day, and would she mind giving him her number from the phone book seeing as she had already given him two other numbers from the Order Here window.

Rosalinda closed the cash register drawer after giving Mariano his change, peered out the Order Here window to catch a better look at him, and after a moment or two when she was apparently satisfied, she surprised Mariano with her, "Next please." A tall, hungry-looking gringo with his thumbs hooked in his black leather belt shuffled forward expecting Mariano to move column left march to the Pick-Up Here window, but in his momentary surprise Mariano had not moved left, and when the gringo moved ahead to his rightful place at the Order Here window, he bumped into a further confounded Mariano who was not hearing the gringo tell him to move along you stupid beaner but was wondering if he would have to order something else to be able to talk to Rosalinda again, and if he did have to place another diversionary order, what would he order, and how would he be able to eat all that food.

The gringo tapped Mariano on the shoulder and told him to move over after asking him if all beaners were deaf. Mariano grasped the fact that he was impeding traffic in the Order Here line, quickly moved to the left, then turned around to apologize to the gringo who now was stooping down with his head halfway through the Order Here window and grinning a little too close to Rosalinda for Mariano's liking. Mariano asked the gringo to get his *pinche gabacho* head out of the window and to leave the girl alone, the gringo turned his head and asked for verification that

Mariano really had the balls to say that to him, and when Mariano responded in the fucking-yes-I-do affirmative, the gringo stood up suddenly, hit the top of his head on the top of the open Order Here window, stood full-up clutching the back of his head, looked at the blood on his hand, asked Mariano if he had seen what he just did, didn't wait for Mariano's response but instead swung wildly at him first with a low left then with a higher right. Mario didn't wait for his order of fries to be called, threw his two Number 24 order bags at the gringo's head, turned around and without looking back, ran as fast as he could across the street into the local mom and pop Mexican neighborhood store that no right-thinking gringo living in the '50s would enter without either a larger Mexican friend by his side or a working command of street Spanish.

Mariano looked out the window panting and waiting to see if the gringo was stupid enough to follow him. The gringo looked around, started across the street, looked around again, stopped before he came to the sidewalk, realized that if he continued, there would not be even one square foot of concrete he could call his own turf, threw the finger accompanied by, "Fuck you, you fuckin' asshole Mexican!" at the little storefront and Mariano inside, turned around and stormed back to the taquería where he got into his step-side pickup, and fishtailed out of the parking lot, leaving acrid silver blue smoke and gaping taquería customers in the Order Here and Pick-Up Here lines shaking their heads and asking each other why gringos were so crazy.

The crazy gringo wasn't in line at the taquería the next day, but Rosalinda was there at the Order Here window, and Mariano got the anticipated second number from her that evening. He invested God-knows-how-much of his salary in cycles of Numbers 1 through 32 over a period of several months building his gustatory and romantic investment portfolio with her. A single man has to eat after all, and Mariano thought he would create a better impression over time if he ordered broadly from the menu as if he had well-bred tastes in food. It didn't matter to Mariano or to

Rosalinda evidently that Numbers 1 through 32 were all variations of taco and enchilada plates with the only items that could be considered cosmopolitan being numbers 33 and 34, namely, *Caldo de Siete Mares*, soup with 7 different kinds of seafood, and *Coctél de Camarón*, shrimp cocktail. Mariano considered anything more expensive than two-fifty cosmopolitan, and he would be ordering 33 and 34 soon enough all right; he was just waiting for Rosalinda to accept his persistent weekly invitation for dinner on her day off. When she finally did accept his dinner offer, they would eat at the taquería, of course. Mariano wanted her to feel comfortable, at ease in her own element, and he would order Number 33 for himself and 34 for her.

Rosalinda continued working at the taquería for the next few years, from the Order Here and Pick-Up Here windows to daytime manager in a year and a half. She was good with people, disputes and change; five years of waiting on truckers and tourists lost on LA freeways had taught her. When she did get angry on those special occasions when someone in line acted up, or the Order Here or Pick-Up Here girls were late or didn't phone because their boyfriends kept them in bed, she was able to summon a tone of voice and aura of authority that everyone, including Mariano, knew would result in immediate humiliating consequences if the mischief-maker didn't shape up.

Mariano liked a strong woman, particularly if she was going to be the mother of his children. He appreciated Rosalinda even more after they had been married and childless for a year, and his incipient worries finally vanished about who would be to blame for the shameful discrepancy between the frequency and vigor of first their passionate love-making and then their twice-daily prescribed intercourse and the expected outcome of their hopes and efforts. Rosalinda surprised them both when she announced euphorically that someone in the family had finally had been successful, that she felt it was a boy, and that she wanted Mariano to agree to name him after her father, Carlos Urquiza Igartía.

Rosalinda hadn't seen her father, mother, sisters or brothers for five years after having run away from her family home in Ensenada over a misunderstanding first with the son, then the entire extended clan of the police chief, Tomás Cumplido Pardo, and finally with her own family. Fifteen-year old Rosalinda had claimed publicly and truthfully that the police chief's son, Dagoberto, had tried to rape her "in an unnatural way" on the way home from two Vicente Fernandez movies and taquitos the night before. She didn't want to be put in an additional awkward position of having to answer the questions of how she knew that Dagoberto's fumbling and unsuccessful attempts to enter by the back door was unnatural, and if such an entrance was unnatural, what was natural, and how did a fifteen-year-old supposed virgin know so much about entrances and exits anyway? It wasn't as if she had never given her willing consent to everything else leading up to but not including the natural way; she just didn't want to have to implicate anyone else besides Dagoberto, especially Beto Gamboa, with whom she had acquiesced to her first and only real make-out session in his uncle's T Bird parked in back of the *panadería* while waiting for the next batch of *conchas* to come out of the oven and cool.

Beto was a curly-haired boy popular with the girls because he knew how to make any girl feel beautiful and important by asking her about how she felt about school, growing up, God, destiny, death, and then listening to her answers while looking deep into her trembling eyes. Beto went around telling his friends he had popped Rosalinda's cherry in the bakery parking lot, and that her screaming was proof that she loved it. It wasn't true, of course, neither the popping nor the screaming, but it was exactly the same story he told after every make-out session he had with every other girl over the age of fourteen in the neighborhood. No one believed him, Oh, yeah, you know Beto, Mister Charm, that's all, and only Rosalinda and her older married sister, Veronica, knew they were just *hechando pegue*, and making out was OK... Of course, I never unbuttoned my blouse or anything like that, I would never go all the way, you know that.

Her father and mother were already slapping Rosalinda around, yelling at her, You slut, how could you let him rape you, you got the front of your dress all muddy and torn up, we told you a million times not to go out with boys like that, especially Don Pardo's boy, how could you be so stupid, father's hard *cocos* on the head, mother slapping her some more across the face, what kind of daughter are you, what'll people think about us. Much easier for a frightened fifteen-year-old girl to take the Primera Plus across the border at Mexicali and not return to *cocos*, Dagoberto, and disgrace.

Aunt *Encarnación* Velasco took Rosalinda into her little casita in El Centro, called her brother, Carlos, in Ensenada to tell him what a *pinche cabrón* he was to hit an innocent little girl like Rosalinda, and that, Yes, she was safe, that she was still a virgin, and that she could stay as long as she wanted with *Tía Encarnación*. Rosalinda stayed two years in El Centro waitressing in a truck stop along Highway 8, and salting away enough to strike out on her own and venture farther north where over a period of the next year she waited on truckers and tourists along Highway 10 in Indio, then in Beaumont, Redlands, West Covina, then up Highway 5 to Glendale, then by accident west over to Santa Paula where she discovered she wasn't going north to Bakersfield like she thought she was. It was in Santa Paula that Mariano found Rosalinda at the Order Here window of Tacos Gutierrez seven months after she had asked the truck driver from Arkansas to please let her off here, this wasn't the way to Bakersfield.

After trying to talk on the phone with Mrs. Ramirez, Charlie was spent. Ignorance everywhere, he realized as he flopped into his office chair and slipped into an uncharacteristically melancholy reverie, not like the excitement to learn I used to feel from my students, not like the joy to live more by learning something new that you need to fit as soon as possible into your personal puzzle of curiosity and cognitive dissonance. There's no curiosity anymore in young people, not any more...only the need to have more objects of desire to surround these empty children, artificial

children, deaden their emptiness and loneliness, protect fragile kids from the stupidity and pain, hypnotize the boys and girls with one-second image changes so they don't have to concentrate too hard, charm the foolish into thinking they are something of value and integrity when they are only hollow shells of what they could be but can't even imagine, delude the souls of the lost into buying whatever you offer them that is pastel, gold, fast, powerful, macho, expensive, sexual, plastic, crazy, navels and butt cracks, electronic, email, instant messaging, communicating nothing of value or significance.

Charlie shook his head and remembered the last words he had spoken to his class as Motecuhzoma, "We are lost. The Aztecs are lost." Except now it's the United States...the US is lost... Our mistake now, Charlie ran through the analogy that had plagued him, the mantra that had barely calmed him for the past few troubled months.

The Aztecs expected Quetzalcóatl to return from across the sea, and with Motecuhzoma's over-eager and ill-informed welcome and coronation of Cortéz and his men as Quetzalcóatl, he had doomed the Aztecs, their magnificent civilization and culture, and all of Mexico for the next five-hundred years.

We North Americans, Charlie shook his head slowly as he pondered, assume that everyone has the same values, and with the bounty of the 1950s Golden Age extended to newcomers by beneficent Yuppies, the U.S. now invites ignorance, avarice, overconsumption and violence to enter and supplant their magnificent civilization and culture for generations into the future.

There it is, Charlie hung his head as he came to the end of his thoughts, the eagles have come home, or whatever you want to say about it, like it or not, politically correct or not, painful or not...

"Charlie..." Anita's voice suddenly brightened the low light of Charlie's office as she knocked quietly then moved to his chair and put her hand on his neck, "finished with your parent calls yet?"

You know you've been up here almost forty-five minutes already...Are you calling one of those romance or psychic hot lines, my dear?"

Charlie looked up past the high cheekbones and into the shining eyes of his Aztec empress, and the five-hundred years of historical sorrow he had been feeling in his own Aztec-Mejica guts brightened instantly into the light of the moment that Anita sparked with her love and devotion.

"Thank you for your love, *Querida*, Anita, my dear..." Charlie smiled, turned around and reached up to put his arms around this warm mystery of woman who had entered his sanctuary of dark solitude. "I don't know what to do about all this...I'm exhausted emotionally...I feel like...oppressed all around by...by negative energy... dark forces I can't control... There's fewer and fewer real teachers, less and less time to really teach... every day more and more ignorance and darkness and violence coming into the classrooms...I feel like it's hopeless...hopeless... I just can't keep teaching like everything was great and all the students were learning and all the parents interested and supportive instead of the system disintegrating and everyone bleeding invisibly before our very eyes.... administrators pushing everyone on and measuring everything as if doing more of the same with more intensity will improve things... it's neurotic, and it's making students and teachers crazy too...I can't keep doing this anymore..."

"You've been feeling this way for some time, haven't you, Honey?" Anita pulled up the other office chair and sat opposite Charlie. "I didn't know you were so depressed..."

"I'm not depressed, Honey, just...I don't know... call it a pre-mid-life crisis, or whatever you want...The thing is, everything I believed in before I became a teacher and even when I was a new teacher, you know, during my first five or so years of teaching, all of that is out the window now, all the ideas I had about everyone wanting to learn, and using my expertise and training as a teacher and my own excitement about learning, all that is only worth the salary the district pays me now...Don't

get me wrong, I appreciate the little money and security it gives us, we can have a life that's pretty good and positive, but that's all I get from teaching these days...I've told you all this before, haven't I?"

"Tell me again, Honey," Anita stroked Charlie's knees as she sat across from him and looked into his eyes.

"You can only give from your heart and spirit for so long when no one is accepting or even recognizing your daily gift... I'm no Mother Teresa, no Saint Francis who can keep giving and loving in the continuing face of darkness and resistance, you know, even for money...Teaching is not like being a secretary or garbage man or cashier...anyone can do that without having to give their spirit and heart every minute and everyday...I feel like I'm casting my pearls before swine now, not literally, of course, but the metaphor applies...most of these kids are not interested and don't even understand about learning, for its own sake, or for the benefits they can have in life from knowing about more things, or even for having the stupid high school diploma or even a college or university degree... they actively resist the whole process... most of the students aren't even slightly aware of the opportunities available to them each day to hook into the excitement of learning, the enhanced understanding of the world where they struggle each day"

"You have to show them, Charlie, show them your spirit and heart."

"I can't help but show them every day, Honey, and it doesn't make any difference, they still tune out, don't come, don't do even their basic work, don't shut up when I'm talking...I'm just tired of teaching, and like I said, I'm not a saint, not a machine... and the new teachers don't even know about anticipatory sets, or meaning and good negative and positive examples, or the two kinds of practice, or any of the basic technology of teaching, just that they can be friends and relate with the kids, big deal, I mean, so what...I just can't give any more, and I can't show up there and go through

the motions of teaching without giving my heart and spirit, and I don't have any heart and spirit to give the students any more....there's none left hardly for you or me even...I feel like I can't even make it to the end of the school year, only a couple of months, like I've got nothing left to give..."

Anita said nothing as she listened to Charlie's last words trail off into the history of his office, but instead continued listening to the silence and quiet that was always there underneath the problems and conflicts and talk. She patted Charlie on the knee, nodded her head, imagined their life changing, felt the twinge of sorrow to be leaving something good behind, strike out in her mind and heart for new territories where she and her man could...could...make another life... of course...a better life...

Chapter 10 Yerba Buena Mirror

"It sure sounds to me like you're depressed..." Anita spoke quietly.

"No-o-o...I'm functioning very well on a daily basis," Charlie countered happily, "you know...get up, make breakfast...while you're still in bed, Da-a-a-r-r-ling...go to work, pay the bills, do the other chores, both domestic and amorous... no-o-o, it's a pleasure, you know that... I still have a good sense of humor, as I hope you can appreciate, I'm certainly not destructive or self-destructive...I'm not a drain to others...uh... you would tell me if I was, wouldn't you, Honey?"

"I'd be the first to tell you, Charlie, but the only thing I notice is that you talk about not having energy to continue, that you are thinking about quitting teaching..."

"Well, I have to talk about what I'm feeling, you know how I am...but the one thing I always remember about what Don Juan told Carlos Castaneda was that..."

"Who is Don Juan...?" Anita interrupted.

"Don Juan? Carlos Castaneda?" Charlie returned the inquiry with a surprised look. "You mean you never read any of Carlos Castaneda's books?"

Anita shook her head and raised her eyebrows with a smile. Charlie knew she wanted to hear about another one of his eclectic interests.

"Well, in the late 60s and early 70s," Charlie started to explain as briefly as he could the multi-layered history of his own cognitive and more recently physical involvement in the teachings of Don Juan Matus, "these books started appearing apparently from nowhere about a Mexican Yaqui Indian teacher and written by an anthropologist who eventually became Don Juan's apprentice, and who only relatively recently revealed the fact that he and three women were in fact

Don Juan's final apprentices in a lineage of brujos, sorcerers...a lineage that goes back hundreds of years, I guess back into Pre-Colombian times, back when sorcery and power was more immanent and accessible than now... Anyway, my brother, Trini, sent me one of Castaneda's early books, and I read it, was interested then in the fact that Don Juan was a Mexican sorcerer, and started studying Castaneda's other books and absorbing the ideas of Don Juan... the one thing I distinctly remember from Don Juan's teachings is that... he said that a person, a warrior, a man of power, has to take care of his energy at all times because that's all he has...his energy...that's all anyone has to shield him, energize him, enable him to face the awesome and terrifying world as a human being."

"Hey... we're going back to the time when Cabeza de Vaca arrived in the New World, eh?" Anita recognized the connection between the natural power and humanity that transformed de Vaca from a soldier to a man of understanding, and the teachings of this contemporary Mejica sorcerer, brujo, curandero, witch, whatever you wanted to call him.

"I guess de Vaca found that same Don Juan power and how to utilize it..." Charlie nodded slowly as Anita continued. "Probably that's what enabled him to cure people, bring people back from the dead, understand that all people shared a common humanity, survive...and that's what Don Juan is about...? Am I making the right connections here, Charlie?"

"Yeah, I think so, Honey... all this is connected in ways our dualistic minds have no way of grasping... they're not only cause and effect connections, and ... they're not just accidental connections...I think it's enough to just say that de Vaca, Pre-Colombian personal power, Don Juan, Carlos Castaneda and the other three women sorcerers, the people like me who are starting to understand the Pre-Colombian conceptual world, and all the other stuff I've been immersed in, you know, Motecuhzoma, Aztlán, the Aztecs, the rise and fall of Tenochtitlan, the current migrations North from Mexico, the shifts in political and cultural power that these migrations are causing... all

these things are connected, Honey...historical causes and effects, connected as manifestations of a cycle...a growth and decline of humanity and in particular the decline of the U.S. cultural life...and...well, dimensions of a great reality whose nature is limited to us by the feeble mechanisms we use to sense that reality."

"Whoa there, Charlie..." Anita stepped back, took a deep breath. "How...in a couple minutes of talking... did we get from you not being depressed to ...what was it...our limitations in sensing reality?"

Charlie smiled and continued. "Right now, Anita...as we're talking right now, I'm understanding more what Don Juan said about how a man of power has to face the profound sadness of life and just laugh...not because life's funny, you know, cute or strange or unusual, but because you know you're going to die, and death is waiting for you right over your shoulder...so you face death with a smile, laugh, because you taunt death with your intent to live, the power of your will to marshal all your energy to perceive as much as you can, to live as completely as you can...Don Juan talked about intent and impeccability a lot...and I know now that it's not depression or anything so simple that's affecting me..."

"OK...then what is it?" Anita had never heard Charlie discuss anything so apparently unconnected with their life together as he now was. She had understood easily enough his interest in Motecuhzoma, the Aztecs, Tenochtitlán ...after all, that was her heritage too, and she appreciated and came to relish the new understandings she and Charlie had developed about the evolution of their people, the Mejicas, from Aztlán to Tenochtitlán to Mexico and now back north to the United States... Even Cabeza de Vaca seemed alien at first, just another conquistador despoiler of a Mexico before Cortéz that she could only read about, maybe sense those times when she had lingered under the shade canopy in Veracruz on her father's hacienda. Then later as she read more about trade-

induced migrations and the cultural pressures that those movements within North America created, she quickly grasped the significance of the Spaniard who had absorbed the ancient ways of the indigenous people and later became a respected healer and man of knowledge, *like Don Juan, I guess*, she thought to herself again.

"If you're not depressed," Anita iterated her question, "then why are you suddenly talking about Don Juan and intent and... impeccability? What's that mean?"

Charlie stood up quickly and looked out the window of his office. The second-floor room overlooked the many townhouses in their neighborhood, one-story two bedrooms, two-story three bedrooms, and a few larger remodeled houses that all had been built in the early 70s, middle-class houses, occupied by families with children, mostly owners, but more and more renters lately. But it was dark now, night, after the dinner hour. He had made his calls to parents whose child had broken some class rule, the last one, Alex' mother. In an enormous instant Charlie felt the sadness that Alex' mother must feel in her lonely moments, her failure to make a lasting and productive relationship with her husband and children, her inability to manage her son's anger and rebellion, her complicity in the tragedy.

Charlie recalled how after class last month Mari had waited for everyone else to leave before she came up to him to say matter-of-factly that David's baby had died in his arms two days after it was born, umbilical cord wrapped around its little unsuspecting neck, and that's why David hadn't been coming to school, that he and his girlfriend and her parents were struggling even to talk with each other, that David was planning to move to Hollister and get a job to support his girlfriend, and that, no, they probably wouldn't be getting married, and yes, she would say Hello and take Mr. Palmerin's best wishes and prayers to Big D.

Then Charlie suddenly remembered everyone's astonishment at school about Sanson's death last Tuesday, another drive-by, found him very dead next to one of those sidewalk popsicle vendors, both'd been shot with a .38, Sanson in the stomach, paletero in the legs, popsicle wagon in the side with major internal damage. No witnesses coming forward, no clues, no... Sanson wasn't in any gangs, not a wannabe either. They're collecting money at school to send his fourteen-year-old corpse back to his dumbfounded parents in Nicaragua...

“Ay! How lucky we are that our son made his way across so many dangerous borders to find his way into America... We have such a good boy! Sanson had big eyes, liked to make people laugh with his gentle goofiness, innocent laughter...”

He was in my ESL 1 class three or four years ago, Charlie could barely recollect, I liked him, he was a good boy, but now he doesn't need the English he acquired in my class...

"Look, you can see Saturn over there..." Charlie finally blurted out oddly as he peered out the window at a large yellowish light in the western sky. The chill of the planetary enormity sucked Charlie deeper into the pain and heartache of the moment. *Motecubzoma... in the interview... when he was looking out the window of his palace... he felt this same grief for his people... for himself...* Charlie lowered his head slightly as he reviewed the anonymous and forgotten faces of what had to be hundreds of students who had passed through his class, gradebook and mind, not the few A's who had gone on to college and universities or jobs, but the F's who were stuck, paralyzed, constricted by abuse, neglect, fear, by life, by learning, by bullies and punks, by loneliness, violence and ignorance...the ones who could have been, should have been, but who knows where now or if...

Charlie turned around from Saturn and his internal window. He looked at Anita and wondered if she felt, could feel, the kind of grief and sadness that now was illuminating him with a strange dark reflection of life.

"There's so much suffering," Charlie looked directly at Anita as he spoke, "right under the thin surface of daily life, and I've spend the last several years immersed in it, ignoring it really, trying to teach some reading and writing and thinking skills to whomever is sent to my room, trying to get it up every day to be excited about learning, about literature, about the search for understanding and meaning in words and sentences, stuff that's meaningless to so many students and people these days, and all I can feel now is that the excitement and eagerness to learn and understand I thought was happening in this class was just buzzing around inside me, my ideas, my little reality...It's just all dropped away now...all I can see and feel now is the sadness, the tragedy, the loss, the waste, emptiness... darkness and ignorance everywhere...OK, not everywhere, but it feels like that, Anita... it feels like it's surrounding everything, and it's concentrated so clearly in public school, in that myopic classroom that's the focus of so many of society's unrealistic and unexamined ideals and hopes..."

"So...Don Juan?" Anita raised her eyebrows.

"Yes... Don Juan... Face the suffering and tragedy of life with the intent to live, and at the same time step back or out of it... yes, out of it... see the ludicrousness and foolishness and stupidity of it all, laugh at everything, not to denigrate life but to honor it, to acknowledge that it is and that it will end, perhaps it's already ended, Anita, I don't know... Amen. That's it...end of sermon. Let's go downstairs and bother the kids, Honey... I'll go cut some *yerba buena* for tea, OK?"

Always yerba buena tea when he's stressed out... he made it when we went to Veracruz to ask Popi for my hand... Momi gave him a hard time with her not knowing his family and all that...poor Charlie, so kind and accommodating... I told him to expect the worse with those two... he was patient...five days it was...so uncomfortable waiting for them to allow me to bring Charlie to meet them... poor guy had to wait in the hotel alone most of the time except for when I could sneak away to meet him for lunch or dinner or just a word or two...all the time him ordering yerba buena tea to calm his nerves... now he's stressed out or depressed or whatever it is, midlife crisis...what'd he call

it...pre-mid-life crisis...hub... he's always done the right thing...selling Amway on marketing Mexican organic coffee...Popi so excited when they contracted with him for his yearly harvest...helped out his business and Charlie and I can have our own angle to sell the coffee through our lines of distributors and to our own customers...I wonder now if I should be worried about him cracking or disappearing or leaving suddenly...I never knew him to do anything stupid like that...

"Would you start the water, Honey?" Charlie called to Anita as he disappeared out the back door to grab a handful of fresh spearmint for their tea.

"It's going on, Charlie..." Anita called back to a Charlie already out the door and out of earshot. She leaned on the stove as she turned the gas up full and watched the water begin to absorb heat from the blue and orange flame hissing under the two-quart saucepan.

You can take only so much, even someone like Charlie who's together and strong...everyone has their limit...job stress, family, marriage, children...your stage in life...the classroom's like this saucepan... just like teaching high school with the stresses increasing weekly...everyone in the same room heating up with the fire of classwork, homework, due dates, lesson planning, appropriate behaviors, classroom discipline, adolescent developmental problems, administrative and parental pressures, paperwork...

Anita noticed tiny bubbles appearing on the bottom of the saucepan that was already protesting with intermittent buzzes and creaks as stainless steel and aluminum molecules that had been rolled and pressed into exactly thickened sheet metal then bent and welded into geometrically perfect utilitarian form contended with each other as they absorbed more and more heat from the gas flame and began to vibrate against each other and expand and contract on top of the black iron gas burner grate.

Charlie came in, rinsed off the small bunch of shiny dark green mint leaves, pulled off the good leaves and tossed them in the hissing water. He put his arm around Anita's waist and asked the requisite procedural question, "You put the sugar in yet, Honey?"

Anita hadn't put the sugar in because she had instead apparently let herself dissolve painlessly into the small world of universal solvent now coming to a slow boil under her introspective watch, but she had awaited the sugar query out of thoughtless habit, and her, "No, not yet," didn't interfere with her noticing the medium sized bubbles percolating intermittently up from the busy bottom of the saucepan. The hollow globulets found their inevitable way quickly to the now troubled greenish-brown surface of the water, just like Charlie's complaints had been surfacing daily about the state of affairs in his class, in school, with his students, with the world, with his lack of energy to continue, wanting to quit yet not knowing how or what to do...sometimes like the larger bubbles now popping explosively within the confines of the saucepan and convulsing the darkening upper layer of the insignificant world of boiling water, hot tea, liquid solace, sweet comfort...

Without speaking both Charlie and Anita watched the boiling water evolve imperceptively from ordinary tap water littered with some leaves to traditional and healing *yerba buena* tea. Their impromptu vigil was suffused with a surprisingly humble and unspoken hope that the difficulty of Charlie's predicament would dissolve along with the three spoonfuls of granulated sugar he now tossed and stirred in. Together Charlie and Anita felt the slight modulations of each other's hands and arms expressing eloquent and familiar love touches on each other's bodies as they shared the simplest but most prolonged of intentions of waiting for the pot to boil. Finally, without speaking each one let the melancholy surface tension of their own silently shared temporal bubble of awareness simultaneously pop and disappear into countless cool particulates of invisible history and yearning.

"Anyone want tea?" Charlie called into the living room knowing that Hugo and Elvia would give their usual, "No thanks..." and "Yes please..."

Chapter 11 One of Those Modern Women

Anita was an only child ever since her older brother, Antonio, had been bitten by a snake and died the following day. For the thirteen short years that his only son had lived, a proud León Gutierrez de Ferrer Villareal had been starting the process of handing over the privilege, responsibility and daily management of the Rancho Villareal to an eager Antonio. That Tuesday afternoon when one of the workers came galloping into the compound before the end of the workday, León knew there was another problem, some minor injury to a field hand, permission for a worker to shoot a bird or monkey to take home for his family's dinner, a question about the timing of picking the ripening coffee berries, one of the many decisions he had to make during the day. It was only when he heard his son's name being yelled out along with the name of the snake that had bitten him, and then saw his head man, Luis Arizmendi, galloping in with a body he immediately recognized as Antonio's draped over the saddle, that León Gutierrez de Ferrer Villareal realized that this was his problem, not theirs.

Luis was agitated and repeating, "*¡Víbora!...víbora!...snake...snake...*," as he dismounted and helped the servants carry Antonio up onto the veranda and lay him out on one of the benches in the shade, but he quickly calmed down as he began to recount to his *patrón* what Antonio had told him before he began salivating heavily and mumbling incoherently as he slipped quickly into unconsciousness. Luis reported that young Antonio had been riding through the banana orchards, and he had appeared suddenly then stopped to help the workers heft the last heavy and cumbersome bunches of green bananas onto the flatbed truck. His father had often told Antonio that it was no shame to get down from your horse and work hard with the *peones*. He told Antonio that only through knowing first-hand how your laborers toil and sweat for you can you understand their

suffering, and only when they know you understand their suffering on your behalf will they work their hardest for you.

León Gutierrez de Ferrer Villareal knew that workers often get bitten by spiders, scorpions or snakes, that they conceal themselves deep inside the bunches of bananas and then get shaken out when the workers move the bunches around. But on Rancho Villareal usually no one dies. The workers' experienced and educated eyes can distinguish the telltale colors and shapes of the venomous spiders, scorpions and snakes so they could casually avoid direct strikes from the defensive and sometimes aggressive animals. But Antonio was a mere thirteen years old...

"...He had no experience, *Patrón*, he didn't know about jostling the bananas so the dangerous creatures show themselves, Señor Villareal, we saw him dismount and run over to help us, he's a good boy, *Patrón*, but we didn't think to tell him to watch out for the *víboras* in the fruit, and right before we finished with the last four or five bunches, ¡Ay, *Patrón!* Antonito cried out that he'd been bitten by something, and... Raulillo was next to him, ¡Ay!... and there was the *víbora* crawling out of the fruit onto the ground, so he cut off the serpent's head with his machete, ¡*pinche víbora!*"

It was later determined to be no one's legal fault that Sebastián Traenkner, the local unofficial *médico* who had lived the last thirty-two of his forty-seven years drunk on his family's rancho eight kilometers to the south of Rancho Villareal, had overlooked reordering the appropriate anti-venom for the Eyelash Viper after two workers over on Felipe del Socorro Escalante's ranch were bitten and thankfully given enough anti-venom to survive and be eternally grateful to Doctor Traenkner. Everyone considered the irony of a doctor being disabled by drink either scandalous or humorous. Before his only son had died because of the doctor's ineptitude and oversight, León Gutierrez de Ferrer Villareal had sided unofficially with those around the area who laughed and shrugged their shoulders in minimal acceptance and appreciation of Doctor Traenkner's endurance

under trying conditions that most of the farmers in the area privately acknowledged would have crushed and defeated any man like they would flatten and grind a scorpion under their boot.

After all, being the son of a missionary couple from Texas who had arrived unannounced in the mountain valley forty-nine years ago to follow in the determined footsteps of the friars who accompanied Cortéz into the very same Veracruz by spreading their myopic ontology about who created the forests, rivers, animals and peoples was challenging enough for any kid relocated into the Mexican jungle under what Sebastian very quickly considered to be false intellectual pretenses. What made Sebastian's new life even less palatable, certainly more odious, was the insidious fact of life that his mother, Dora, totally ignored his father, Damian's, regular visits to an ever-widening circle of native women in the area that after several years of Dora's smoldering resentment and denial resulted in his father's gradual wasting away and succumbing of what Sebastián eventually diagnosed correctly as syphilis. No one ever spoke about the fruits of Damian's evangelical work in the fields of the Lord, no bastard children ever showed up claiming to be Sebastián's half-brother, and no one sought treatment for the lust that ate away both the flesh and the spirit of Sebastian's father.

Damian returned supposedly to the Lord when Sebastián was sixteen, and Dora continued her inarticulate inward exile away from the oppressive heat, the relentless bugs, the nameless brown women, from the Word of God, from her anger and guilt, and from her loving husband. Sebastián tended to the exigencies of his demented mother's physical temple; probed for unambiguous answers in medical journals and psychiatric textbooks; avoided the contagion of any further knowledge of women; and lubricated the scrapings and screechings of his emotional gears, pinions and sprockets with his own proprietary brand of pineapple homebrew. People recall that he laughingly called whatever he was drinking "my spirits," and Don León Gutierrez de Ferrer Villareal could recall several happy times lifting a cool beer with Sebastián in the *Cantina de las Tres Frutas* in

Huatusco. Often his drunken toasts alluded unkindly to the spirits that had haunted his father, and in the same breath the Spirit about which Damian had so fervently and hypocritically preached.

But those memories of more halcyon days couldn't prevent León from contesting in the logical arena of his mind the appropriateness of killing that son-of-a-bitch Sebastián for not having procured the anti-venom that would have saved his own son, Antonio's, precious life. León didn't know whether Sebastián or he was the luckier of the two after his head man, Luis, leaned over close to his boss's ear and wondered aloud in hushed tones what the chances were for a viper to kill someone... "I'm only imagining now, *Patrón*, if a viper happened to be inside someone's house, would it seek out that person and strike to kill if that person was in the house but not threatening the snake, what do you think, *Patrón*?"

Eight days after he shrugged his shoulders and replied to his head man's hypothetical situation with, "Well, Luis, I would certainly be interested to find out, wouldn't you?" León was neither disappointed nor discouraged when Luis appended his evening report on the number of kilos of coffee berries picked that day with, "Oh, and by the way, *Patrón*, evidently a viper does not always strike to kill a person inside their own house, sometimes they do not strike at all...interesting, eh, Señor Villareal?"

After León spotted Sebastián walking out of Huatusco 's plumbing supply the following Monday, he resolved that he would do nothing further to interfere with a fate that had already been successful at mistaking Sebastián for Job. He wouldn't take the simmering hate any further, but he would turn the grief of losing his only son, Antonio, into a hope that his daughter, Anita, could fulfill his desire to pass on his land, the family rancho and all his other holdings to the next generation of his family.

León and Porfiria had already decided to send their first and only daughter to the University of Veracruz in Jalapa nine years before Antonio was born. Anita would return home from the museums, symphonies, and culture of the capital to the bucolic rural life on the rancho during the Christmas, Easter and summer breaks, then return for another year of academic training and city life. Before Antonio's birth they had hoped that Anita would bring honor and heavenly influence to the family by becoming a nun in one of the quiet neighboring convents or perhaps a teacher in Huatusco ; León never once considered that Anita could inherit such a...such a man's responsibility as the rancho, the fields, the workers, no, never once even thought of little Anita doing such a thing.

But now, after Antonio's death, there appeared to be no alternative, and..."Well, times are different," Porfiria never ignored the opportunity to remind León, "Anita could do as good a job as any man, eh?"... maybe better now that she was ready to receive her bachelor's degree. Yes, she was graduating a top student in her major of History and Philosophy which satisfied her proud parents and with a minor in Agronomy and Economics of which she never spoke with her parents (to satisfy her own desire to prove herself to them), and..."Well, why not ask her, My Dear Porfiria," León surprised his wife one evening, "Why not ask if she is interested someday in taking over the ranch, the orchards and the coffee? If I can be a modern man and consider a woman equal to a man, she can be one of those modern women...what do you think she'll say, My Dear?"

"He can't be dead..." Anita dropped the suddenly unimportant brown paper bag containing a pound of uncooked frozen shrimp with tails on, a two-dozen stack of corn tortillas, half a gallon of 2% fat milk, two half gallons of no-pulp calcium-enriched not-from-concentrate orange juice, a bunch of fragrant cilantro, a plastic bag with three big handfuls of small green chiles, another plastic bag containing beautiful snapping-fresh string beans, enough boneless pork chops for dinner for four that night, a half-gallon of Chocolate Chip Cookie Dough ice cream for desert and a small box

of Pepsid AC. The top-heavy bag slumped on its side and spilled its guts on the table where Anita had dropped it. The two half-gallons of OJ tumbled out and knocked over the vase full of Anita's favorite cala lilies that Charlie had put out a half hour before. He watched the water spill out across the table and start to dribble through the cracks between the leaves of the table onto the yellow-flecked white linoleum of the floor. *I wonder if she'll start crying once it hits her...*

"Yes, I'm afraid he is, Anita...sit down, sit down..." Charlie pushed aside the defeated paper bag and the ingredients for that night's dinner and helped Anita sit down in one of the chairs at the kitchen table... *when was the last time she talked with him...?*

"Porfiria called about five minutes ago when you were out..." Charlie gently touched Anita's silky black hair and began stroking her head like as a boy he used to pet his puppies. *I really thought my father would die first...his diabetes and all...*

"What happened, Charlie...what'd Momi say?" Charlie pulled out another chair next to his wife, sat down and recounted what he had heard long-distance from Huatusco. As he spoke, the mysterious part of his brain that could ask and answer questions while it simultaneously maneuvered and synchronized mouth, tongue, jaw, lips and face to produce language that so easily articulated alternate ideas that emanated from that same brain began asking practical questions that Charlie knew would be answered soon enough. *Is she going to want to fly down by herself? How long is she going to stay there? Would Porfiria be better off here with us? Would we able to adjust to her being here all the time? What's going to happen to her parents' rancho? What's going to happen to Anita? What about me and the kids...?*

Hugo and Elvia had heard the clamor from the next room, come into the kitchen to see what was happening and immediately asked about the archipelago of groceries stranded in the pooling water still dribbling off the table. Charlie told them what had happened and asked them to listen as he told their mother what he knew about the situation.

"Well...Porfiria said she found your father on the front veranda in his favorite chair. She said she had left him there after their afternoon *merienda*, that she told him she had to attend to some correspondence, that he seemed all right, looked OK...he said he was going to look over some documents on the veranda, but when she came back after about forty-five minutes, he was still sitting in that funny palm chair that he likes so much, but...but he was gone...his folder had fallen on the porch next to several pictures he evidently had been looking at... he was just gone, she said."

Anita put her arms around Charlie's neck and pulled him over to her. She pulled Charlie tightly, and in her mind's eye she recalled her father's dark face, the even darker handlebar moustache he kept waxed and twisted up at the ends, the unruly hairs of his bushy eyebrows, the grey felt hat he wore outside the house that covered his graying hair, the scar on the left side of his face that he tried to conceal with long sideburns and that Porfiria had revealed to Anita long ago he had acquired in a knife fight as a young boy, the deep-set brown almost black eyes that shined with eagerness when he spoke with you, the way she had seen him starting to slump and walk more unsurely when she last saw him during their visit about the coffee and Amway last year, his gruff voice with the workers and how it softened slightly when he talked with her or Porfiria, the way he smelled of tobacco, coffee, dirt and sweat, the way he would stroke her hair like Charlie was.

Anita's strength and poise finally collapsed like a second grocery bag in Charlie's arms, and her tears and sobs followed tumbling out onto Charlie's shirt and pants and into his heart where he waited patiently for everything in this woman's heart to gush out, flow out, empty out, and where he dared not actually touch how he would feel when one of his own parents, Mariano or Rosalinda, would find the other slumped over somewhere too familiar and sudden. At least they won't be as far off as León and Porfiria, way down in Mexico, an hour from Veracruz, Porfiria alone now with her

husband's cold body and her memories cooling to room temperature. All she has is the phone to talk with Anita and me...

"I told Porfiria you would be right home," Charlie interrupted Anita's silent sobbing after a few moments, "and she said she would wait about an hour at the phone before she went back to the rancho. Why don't you call your mother, Anita? It's not that late down there...just call her now...she needs to talk with you, and you should talk with her."

Anita sniffed, wiped her nose and nodded, so Charlie stood up and led her, Elvia and Hugo over to the sofa where he sat them down next to each other. He brought the phone over to the end table, dialed the number and waited for the electrons to move somehow from Salinas, California to *Teléfonos Loly* in Huatusco, Veracruz. When he heard the ringing that signaled their arrival at the other end, Charlie waited for someone to answer, and when he recognized the tinny voice of El Chueco's daughter, he asked for Señor a Villareal and waited.

"...Bueno?...Eh? Porfiria? Sí?...Charlie aquí...Ya llegó Anita...?. Si quiere hablar con Ud....nos ponemos en contacto luego luego, OK? Te quiero mucho..." Charlie passed the phone to Anita, put his arms around Elvia and Hugo and settled down to listen to his wife's questions and the uh-huh's, eh's, and sí's that followed as her mother told her about her father's passing.

Charlie listened, and he thought about *how painful death was for people, most of the time for those who die, of course, and maybe more for those left behind who have to figure out what move to make next now that the game has been interrupted by a player dropping out unexpectedly. It's just not fair to drop out without warning all the other players...with birth you have some warning to get ready, and then...there's a new player, but you're more or less ready...both of those events are so painful, stressful, difficult, and then everything's so different afterwards, better I guess in a different way with a new child or no more suffering...gotta go through the pain... leaving the womb, the earthly life, no choice about it... I wonder if that's what's happening to me, feeling that I have to leave teaching, and it's painful*

and difficult like some kind of death or birth, however you want to look at it...maybe I should think about it that way, something I can't avoid, something I have to push through to some other side I don't know about, where it is, how it is, if it's safe at all... At least if I look at it this way, it'll be a positive thing, not something abnormal or weird...

Charlie tuned back into Anita's conversation and stopped thinking for a moment about his own professional and existential plight. Certain phrases from the unilateral current of Anita's dialogue made Charlie listen more closely in order to determine to the best of his ability and as soon as possible what would be the immediate and practical consequences of León 's death. He knew there would be a funeral, they probably would fly down to attend, arrangements would have to be made, school, work, all that. What about Rancho Villareal, the coffee, the other orchards...? *I know León was grooming Anita to take over the rancho someday...maybe that day is now...I wonder if she realizes what's happening, that Porfiria will want her to come down, stay there, run the place...after all, that's what she's been studying at Monterey Bay, that Master's is going to come in handy to take over the reins of the...but...what about...about us, the kids... me?*

Charlie sat up and stared at Anita who was still intent on gleaning every nuance of information and emotion from the telephone receiver she held tightly in her left hand. Charlie realized suddenly, as if he had been wandering around inside the passages of a mental maze that he himself had been constructing as he simultaneously bumped blindly along groping the walls to find the opening, that the confusion, complication, and restrictions of his mental maze had all just dematerialized, and the way out had just suddenly appeared to his mind's eye as if it had been hiding, lurking around some pivotal existential corner, waiting to reveal itself when the time and circumstances were appropriate. *We're all going to move to Huatusco ... all of us. We're gonna try to grow coffee, and only God knows what else is going to happen, but we're going...*

Charlie smiled contentedly now as he gazed at Anita. She was dividing her limited telephone time between slowly articulating out loud travel plans with her mother so that Charlie could hear, then making eye contact with Charlie, raising her eyebrows, and either nodding or shaking her head to ask for his approval or disapproval. Charlie would nod, shake his head, grimace, shrug, smile, nod, and finally after ten minutes of impromptu pantomime and hurried scribbling on the front of that morning's newspaper, they agreed that, provided they could get a ticket, Anita would fly down to Huatusco the next day and stay as long as she needed. She would call as soon as funeral arrangements were made so Charlie and the kids could make plans. Done.

That evening they tried in vain to find a ticket from all the reputable travel agents in town, and in desperation they called the only remaining travel agency over in the other side of town, in the "*barrio encuerado*" they called it. Of course, they had tickets to Mexico, Veracruz? Certainly, one-way, four-eighty-three plus airport taxes... *tu sabes, pues...* OK, OK, we'll take it, highway robbery, but Anita's gotta go...

They packed up Anita into one suitcase and one carry-on and fell emptied into their beds. Call Anita's professors tomorrow, tell them what happened, arrange for her being gone. Then tomorrow night to San Jose for the nine-twenty flight to Mexico City, transfer to Veracruz, catch the bus to Huatusco, wait there in the bus station for Porfiria to show up in the oldest running Ford 150 in the southern hemisphere to take Anita the seven and a half kilometers to Rancho Villareal, the place of her birth.

Charlie laid on his back listening to Anita breathing peacefully next to him. He liked to lay on his back and think before giving in to the fetal position which would transport him into dreamland within ten minutes. He was pondering again how death and birth were so similar in that the pain which made them such odious events was the fortuitous passageway into another better life

so obscure and yet anticipated so much. *That's what's happening to me, wanting to leave teaching, knowing how bad it'll look when I just up and quit... like divorce too, terminating something once good so that one or both people can go on differently but in a more healthy way...or surgery to remove a cancerous growth so that you'll live again but with a scar...or chemotherapy that makes you so nauseous and lose your hair but that kills the tumor...and how horrible it is to vomit up something that shouldn't be inside you but you have to get it out or it will do you harm...and... the old orchards they pull up because they're no longer productive and they just go in and plant new young trees that soon start producing a healthy crop real soon...I remember when I changed jobs, just quit because I needed to work with the public more, it was painful when I wasn't working for a few weeks, but when I finally found this job, I was happy...or fleeing a volcanic eruption or some other natural disaster, leaving your home behind in order to save your skin...like abandoning a sinking ship, leaving everything you have to go down with the ship because your life is more important...or going to the trouble of moving out of a house because it's too small for you, and then the stress of looking for one that suits you more, and the happiness when you finally move into the better house...migrating to ... another country... to find ...work and leaving...*

Charlie didn't have a chance to turn on his side and drift off into sleep. While still on his back, word-thoughts about migrating and working and leaving for Veracruz marched in linguistic order, and he was beginning to let go of the thinking, whole ideas instantly excised from the parade of conceptualization until the Main Street of Charlie's awareness was empty, deep sleep swept clean of verbal debris, unsullied now by prefixes and suffixes, vowels and consonants, phones and phonemes. This was the same insightful boulevard along which a few weeks before he had been seized, taken prisoner and killed by Aztec warriors on top of a blood splattered pyramid, the same cognitive route of vicarious herons as he flew with them to accompany his Mejica ancestors from Aztlán on their way south to Tenochtitlan, precisely where he now was acknowledging wordlessly the exquisite fitting together of all the existential pieces of his, Anita's, their children's and Porfiria's

lives, and León 's death too, into a potential that the analogical prowess of his mind would already be willing and doing into a time, a place and a purpose that was only now perfect and real.

Chapter 12 Ants

Charlie shifted his position and leaned back against the car. Methodically he moved his head first to the left then to the right noticing how a small tree in front of him could block out the bright glare from the low afternoon sun. He readjusted his positioning a little to the right, leaned back against the car again, checked that his face was now in the tree's shadow, and satisfied that he could tolerate waiting more comfortably this way, he rolled his sleeves down and buttoned the cuffs of his white shirt. The afternoon wind that usually swept across the rise where the school was located wasn't cold, but it wasn't particularly comfortable either.

Where is that tow truck anyway...? It's gotta be at least a half hour since I called...They said thirty minutes or less...They either forgot or got mixed up with the address...

Charlie looked at his watch and verified that, yes, he had called about thirty-five minutes ago...*I'll wait another five minutes or so, then I'll call back to see what's happening. Maybe they just got held up or something...*

Charlie'd gone to an after-school parent-teacher meeting at Hugo and Elvia's school, and when he came out and tried to start the Honda, all he got was that dreadful sounding CLICK-CLICK. O...K... the lights work...the radio's loud...must be the starter or the...what is it? ...solenoid or whatever it's called...Charlie had called Triple A, then the kids at home, and then he had settled back against the car to wait on the sidewalk.

Ragged greyish-white clouds brushed across the washed-out blue of the sky, and the light from the low afternoon sun suddenly felt like Fall to Charlie. He looked south past the school playground and over the rooftops of south Salinas to the low Gabilan mountain range at the edge of town. The mountains form the south side of the long wide Salinas Valley, and in the afternoon they

block the descending sun and quickly take on the purplish-black color of a good two-day old bruise. A small single-engine plane buzzed low across the horizon towards the airport, some ag exec home after a business trip probably.

The shouts and cries of Mr. Okamura's all-girl volleyball team called Charlie back from the distant panorama to the present scene. Over on the blacktop about forty gangly fifth and sixth grade girls flanked the volleyball net nearest the school building. Mr. O, as everyone called him, was standing next to one of the poles calling out encouragement, tweedling his whistle to signal the next serve, and holding together with the commitment and willpower of his caring and well-prepared heart a motley assortment of girls. Some would enthusiastically serve the ball by wildly belting it high to the side and out of bounds. Others fearfully tapped the frustrated ball a few feeble feet into the air so that it fell at their own feet. Very few girls could whack the grateful ball into play and actually start an enthusiastic rally. Whenever a girl was able to serve the ball across the net to the other side, invariably the same two or three clueless girls would immediately kill the play by letting the ball hit the pavement at their feet or by blindly whacking the ball backwards or sideways or anywhere but back to the other team. Mr. O would continue good-naturedly to encourage his pupils with, "Good try, Marilue...that's 3-0 now..." or "Remember girls, you have to call it, but then you have to go and hit the ball...OK, that's 2-0...TWEEET!"

Charlie smiled as he watched the volleyball practice, the trying, the nervousness and mistakes, the excitement and embarrassment, the encouragement and understanding. No one saw Mr. O arrive at five-thirty every morning to prepare the rich learning environment of his classroom, and only Agapito, the janitor, said good-bye to Mr. O when he would leave around five or six in the afternoon. Everyone wanted to be in Mr. O's class.

The sun glared in Charlie's eyes again, and he readjusted himself and settled into a more comfortable, shaded position against the car. There were few pitiful and forlorn trees scattered along the sidewalk in front of the school, and they were all listing to the east from the constant buffeting of the afternoon winds. Some were misshapen from emergency pruning after a heavy kid swung on a limb and broke off major and minor limbs. Charlie looked up at the leaves to try to identify the one in front of him.

Mmmmm... looks like... what is it...? Ginko...that's it...strange seeing a ginko tree out here exposed and beat up by the elements... always thought they should be in some kind of enclosed garden or something..

Charlie ran his eyes up and down the trunk of the tree several times looking at the patterns in the bark. It looked like the skin of an alligator, rough, bumpy, cracked and scaly with linear patches or scars paralleling the sides like small valleys or highway systems. Running up along these contiguous networks of smooth bark was a line of ants proceeding up the tree towards a destination evidently higher in the fan-shaped leaves of the *Ginko biloba*. Charlie leaned forward slightly to see the individual ants more clearly. He noticed how orderly the ants were, rushing along like commuters in their appropriate lane, ten minutes to get there, hope there's no slowdowns, no accidents, don't want to be late. Every now and then an ant would slow down, stop momentarily and toss its head to one side or the other presumably to check for its exit or to verify that it hadn't already sped past its job site.

The ants continued their group ascent of the *Ginko* apparently oblivious to Charlie's watchful and curious eyes. It wasn't immediately clear; in fact, it was difficult to determine exactly where the ants came from. Charlie stooped down to inspect the lower part of the tree trunk to find a hole, a gash, a fissure, some place, the ants' house or home or burrow, or whatever it would be more appropriately called, where they came from, where they were supposed to be when they weren't

rushing up this tree to their destination, the place they would hopefully rush back down to when they finished whatever it was they were busily doing now in the leafy crown of the tree. The base of the tree was either too darkly shaded to see clearly, or Charlie just wasn't looking in the right places, but there seemed to be no evident aperture where the ants exited onto the surface of the tree, nothing on the tree itself, and nothing in the ground around the roots. The ants seemed to appear from an illogical nowhere.

Charlie stood up and stretched, looked at his watch, sighed, and realized he should call the tow service again. He looked hopefully down the street for some kind of shiny mammoth diesel truck to barrel into view. He waited another minute, then pulled the phone out of his shirt pocket, redialed the last number, explained his predicament to the patient disburser, then hung up and waited what she apologetically assured him would be five minutes or less.

Charlie shook his arms, inhaled and exhaled twice, rotated his shoulders a few times to relax and return to the world of waiting. He focused again on the ants. They were still hurrying single file up the long smooth rift that snaked up the reptiloid epidermis of the tree.

Strange how I'm in both of these different worlds at the same time...ant inspector, a god observing these simple creatures carrying out their insignificant routines under my all-knowing eye...and yet here I am stuck, stupid car, technological marvel of advanced civilization, stupid car won't start because one part has one piece that's broken somewhere that I don't know about, so I gotta wait for some guy to put his sandwich down, look at a work order that's been sitting in front of him for half an hour, and haul himself one mile from Market Street over here so he can take me and this car back home... and me, I don't know anything about how to fix whatever is wrong...who's the stupid one...the insignificant one...?

Thoughts about where the ants came from, where they were going, where the tow truck was and when it would arrive commingled indistinguishably below the surface of Charlie's awareness

with images of Anita's face, that her warm body and spirit was physically exiled in Veracruz, that he missed her terribly, all the countless tasks he would have to take care of before he and Hugo and Elvia could join her there...

It was difficult, not just a temporary parting or pause in the rhythm of their marriage, but more like some kind of death, unknown on the other side, inaccessible from this side except by electronic or written word. Three weeks ago Charlie had driven the four of them to the San Jose airport early enough to get Anita and her suitcase and carry-on settled and past the boarding gate for the nine-twenty flight to Veracruz. Small talk about Hugo's upcoming school trip to Sacramento and Gold Country, Elvia's birthday later that month, and Charlie's ideas about how long it would take to sell their house barely smoothed the delicate covering of their awareness during the forty-five-minute drive to the airport. Not even the usually reassuring effects of their chitchat about each one's daily goings-on could diminish the three dimensional heartache they felt themselves enduring in slow motion as the car arrived and got parked, people removed themselves from the car and doors were locked, the trunk was opened and luggage removed, and four people walked zombie-like to the ticket counter where they joined other chuckling automatons in a line. Anita's luggage disappeared on a conveyer belt, and a family was pulled by the time on a clock quietly struggling and stupefied to Gate C-4 where two children and two adults had already foreseen days before the angst and the incomprehensibility, the distance and the tears when the kisses and warm body and heart of a mother and wife flew off up up up and away.

It was only fifteen minutes after Charlie and the kids had been on the freeway returning home that Hugo broke the empty silence with the question everyone was reticent to articulate.

"Dad...are we really going to move to Grandma's house in Huatusco this summer?"

Charlie couldn't just tell his son and daughter what he had slowly come to realize, that this was not the beginning of something new, that this was only the next step in a timeless progression of innumerable events that began...well, that only began in each person's mind, but that reached back before the Nahuatlacas in Aztlán picked themselves up and moved on, before the people could even imagine another place but here.

"Well, my boy..." Charlie started in, "your mom and I have been talking about this for some time now...you know, Grandpa Leon getting old, the possibility of us having to take care of him and your grandma, your mom studying about world coffee markets and maybe working with her family to sell more organic coffee, me maybe quitting my job...all that..."

"Are you going to teach school when we get there, Dad?"

Charlie didn't know what to say. He thought a moment before he decided not to answer.

Who knows what I'm going to do now? Nothing is ever really finished, ever really left behind...I don't know if I even want to teach any more...maybe I'll have to teach though...English probably...just to make a living...we'll see how the coffee goes...but in spite of that, this is it, we're moving, I'm quitting my job, and we're going to make a go of the coffee...

Hugo's questions were predictable, easy to answer with facts, opinions, other questions, some reasonable uncertainties. It was finally Elvia's question not-so-secretly lurking behind the bulwark of Charlie's mental certitude that eased the three of them and released their thinking.

"What if something happened, Daddy... and we couldn't leave and go live with Mommy and Grandma?"

"Well, Honey," Charlie began to give the reasoned part of his answer first, "no one ever knows what's going to happen...you know, we have a pretty secure and safe life here, but Grandpa

died, Grandma needs your mom to help her through this difficult time and with the coffee plantation, you know, and we need to be with Mom because we are a family and we need to be together, need each other...you know what I mean?"

Hugo was listening intently, then he added, "So we have to go?"

"That's an important question, Hugo...You want me to give you just a simple yes or no answer, or do you want the real truth?"

"Uh...whu duh yuh mean, Dad?" Hugo scrunched his eyebrow as he asked for an explanation.

"Well, what I mean is...things happen in life, like your grandpa dying...and often they're things that make our lives better, like when I bumped into your mother in a line in Veracruz, and we go along with those changes happily, but other times the things that happen are painful, inconvenient, or not what we would ever choose, like your grandpa's death and your mother having to go down and help her own mother..."

"Yeah, we understand that, Dad..." Hugo interrupted.

"OK...so the important thing for you to remember is that we have little control over these kinds of events in our lives, the good and the bad events, but we do have control over how we respond to these events, how we act in our lives, follow up and continue after these things happen."

"You mean what we do?" Elvia affirmed simply.

"Yes, what we do, but more importantly, how we do what we do. Let me explain...Something bad happens, OK... Are you just going to let yourself be pushed around here and there by that event, you know, be like a victim in the situation... 'Oh, poor me, this happened, and I can't do anything about it...' No way! The best thing to do is to experience the event, accept

and consider what happened, what caused it, and where you are now, and then... make a decision, you make a decision about how to respond, how to act, how to move ahead. The powerful thing to do is to make an intelligent decision, and then move ahead with your life with no regrets about what could have been and no recriminations...no...finger pointing against anyone or life or God...Sometimes it's someone's fault, and sometimes it's no one's fault, but once bad things happen, it's time to pick up the pieces and move on, to struggle to keep moving ahead with life in a new way..."

"But it's difficult, Dad," Elvia finally said, "leaving our friends, our school, everything...you know...?"

"Yes, it is, Honey, it's difficult for everyone, but do you think that's a good reason to park it someplace and give up?"

"No..." Hugo answered the obvious, "that would be stupid...you'd just stay there forever..."

"Fortunately, Hugo, we're a family, and we can support each other, kind of carry each other's sadness and pain, make it easier for each of us to continue in a different way...but together..."

The clanking rumble of a diesel motor dragged Charlie's awareness back to his waiting, and when he turned around to look over his shoulder, he saw the bright yellow tow truck pulling up behind the Honda. He made small talk with the driver who was quickly adjusting the tow yoke under the back wheels of the sedan and prepared to lift the back of the car off the ground and get underway. "You must be busy today, No, oh, that's interesting, do you know everyone who's talking on your two-way radio, yeah, have you gotten to meet them all, ah, well maybe someday in the future, yes, turn right here, at the end of the cul-de-sac, you don't need the card?...Thanks for your help... yeah, you too..."

Later that evening Charlie got off the phone after arranging a time with Don Epifanio, the mechanic he'd heard several of his neighbors talk about as being reliable and not too pricey, to come over and take a look and see if it really was the starter or solenoid. As he put down the receiver, Charlie was surprised to notice the ants suddenly scurrying back into his mind.

How could they keep climbing up that ginko tree and not come down? After all, I watched their single-file, one-way commute up that tree for ten or fifteen minutes, and I never saw any ants on a round-trip return to their mystery home somewhere at the base of the tree. Where do they all go...?

Charlie chuckled to himself as he opened the refrigerator and poked his head deeper into the open refrigerator and rummaged back through the milk and juice cartons looking for the bread and eggs he wanted to use for French toast for three in the morning.

Maybe it's true with ants too...you can't go home again...Maybe they just keep moving on and never go...Nah... They have to go back to their homes or nests or wherever it is they go...I wonder how they do that...?

"We're rea-dy!" Elvia called from upstairs. Charlie extricated his head and arm from the cramped bowels of the refrigerator and started up the stairs. His left foot touched the fourth step, and he felt again the familiar and satisfying realization. Providing Elvia and Hugo with kitchen, bedtime, homework, and other family routines and rituals feeds and nourishes their inner homes so that when they leave home someday, they will be carrying those reference points deeply rooted within their hearts and spirits, so they will never have to come back, back to Salinas, by that time only a husk of the place they once knew, just dear memories by that time.

They already have their home within, already are connected mysteriously within each one of themselves with the truths of this family that they were born into, practiced, absorbed... That's reality for them now, everything they take for granted, the basis of their strength and purpose for the many brave accomplishments of their individual lives

that will be revealed and proclaimed in every action and feeling they experience ...after Anita and I are gone... and only they and their internal family home remains...

"You guys ready to be tucked in?" Charlie called as he walked down the short hall to his children's rooms. Tucked in, the nightly ritual of good-bye for a while, sleep tight, don't let the bed bugs bite, if they do, take a shoe, give 'em a whack, and that'll do, caresses, kisses, see you in the morning, glad you're my son, you're a great daughter, we're having French toast for breakfast, yeah, I think we can go to the library tomorrow after school for another insect book, of course I'll pick you up after volleyball practice, right three-forty-five, love you babe, sleep well, see you tomorrow...love you too...

"Dad...?" Hugo called Charlie back to his bedside, and in the dark asked his father the simplest of questions that people ever ask, but that is never answered to anyone's deepest satisfaction. "Dad...is Mom thinking of us? You know, is she like thinking about us in our rooms even though she can't tuck us in and say good night...?"

Charlie inhaled deeply to breathe the precious spirit of his son into his heart, grateful that there was such a thing as family, quietly humbled at the success of their love's intentions. "You must be feeling Mom now...Of course she's thinking of us...we're thinking of her right now because she's thinking of us now...that's another way we're connected with each other, Hugo... we feel each other wherever we are, and those feeling connections can support us in difficult times, like now...you know what I mean?"

"Sure, Dad...it makes it easier to go to bed without her here with us...'cause we know she's...well, kind of with us in a different way...Can...can we call her tomorrow, Dad?"

"Of course... we'll call her when we get home after school, OK?"

"G'night Dad," Hugo sealed the deal then added, "G'night Mom..."

"Night, Dad," Elvia called out from her dark room. "I love you..."

"G'night, you guys...G'night, Honey..." Charlie called out hopefully into the darkness.

Chapter 13 Parts

Neighbors invariably answered, "Don Epifanio," when someone would inquire about a good mechanic. Everyone said he had a feeling for cars, motors, a way with mechanical things, what his work was worth. He appeared the following evening around dusk.

"Dad..." Elvia called nervously into the kitchen, "there's some man standing at the front door..."

Charlie put down the dishtowel and hurried past Hugo and Elvia to see if it was Don Epifanio.

"*Buenas tardes*, Señor Palmerin," a tall thin man in dark blue coveralls offered politely through the screen door, "I am Epifanio Mogote, at your service. Is that the car in your driveway?"

"Oh, yes, Señor ...?" Charlie had never before heard the man's last name.

"Mo-góte, Epifanio Mogote..." he bowed slightly and then smiled, "Please call me Epifanio if you would like."

"Thank you, Yes...*Pásale*, Epifanio, Please come in," Charlie pushed open the screen door and stood aside to wait for the unassuming gentleman to come in.

"No, thank you," he bowed again, "thank you... I prefer to start working as soon as possible. May I have the keys?"

Charlie followed Epifanio out to the street where the Honda Accord was still parked exactly as the tow truck driver had lowered it and left it the day before. As they walked the short distance to the car, Charlie noticed Epifanio's crisply ironed overalls, frayed and faded to light blue at the pockets and cuffs, ragged where they brushed the tops of his highly polished black oxfords. Charlie

could see that his black hair had just been trimmed on the back of his neck. He was sixty-ish, thin. The sharpened end of a yellow pencil protruded from his right rear pocket, and as he neared the car, he quickly folded then stuffed into his left rear pocket a piece of paper he had been fiddling with.

"This is a fine car," Epifanio mumbled as he touched the roof of the car with his thumb and forefinger, "a good car, good car..." He turned around and looked at Charlie, "May I start it...eh, that is, try to start it?" He looked down at the keys still in Charlie's hand.

"Oh, yes...I'm sorry..." Charlie handed the keys to Epifanio and at the same time quickly dissected the man's face, the pencil thin moustache that paralleled and stopped at the ends of his upper lip, a prominent nose, slightly hooked but not obtrusively so, high cheekbones that visually buttressed and supported his penetrating and deeply set dark brown eyes, and a tall forehead interrupted by a deep scar, apparently from a former time, that slashed conspicuously from the center of his right eyebrow where it left a thin white gash diagonally across the light brown skin of his forehead up to the center of his hairline. The man's hair was cut short, parted on the left, and neatly combed to either side of the part. Charlie watched him walk around to the driver's side of the Accord, unlock the door and get in. He moved gingerly, and he favored his right leg with a barely perceptible limp. He tried to crank the motor and was successful in provoking the car to produce the same CLICK-CLICK-CLICK sound as before.

Epifanio got out nodding his head and repeating, "Yesss...it's the starter all right...it's the starter..." Epifanio looked at the headlights, nodded again, stuck his head in the car and pulled the hood release, then went around to raise and prop up the hood.

"You think it's the starter, Don Epifanio?"

"Certainly is," his voice trailed off as he nodded as his upper torso disappeared into the motor compartment. "Your lights are bright when the engine is off...turn it over for me, OK?"

Charlie got in the car and turned the ignition key several times.

"Yeah, again," Don Epifanio called to Charlie. "Yeah, that's it all right. When you turn it over, the lights get really dim, and the battery cables get hot. Bad starter... What would you like to do about it?"

"Well...is it something you could fix, I mean could you put in a new starter or fix this one...I mean, if you could I would really appreciate it. Let me know how much you would need in advance for the parts and your labor...that'd be no problem..."

It took Charlie and Don Epifanio five minutes to make the arrangements—new starter, three or four hours, tomorrow night probably, parts plus twenty dollars an hour labor. Charlie stopped at the edge of the garden to cut some long stalks of lemon grass and twist off a few basil leaves as the two men walked into Charlie's house for some hot tea.

"Where'd you learn about cars, Don Epifanio?" Charlie inquired politely as he cut the herbs into the pot of water he had put on to boil.

"I don't know for sure," he bent over to inhale the fresh smell of the herbs beginning to permeate the air. "I've always had a way with metal things, you know, machines, motors, tools...You know my name, Mogote...? It's an Otomí word that means a place of metals...They say my family has always been involved with metal, you know, one way or another, back to before Cortéz arrived, that's right, as far back as then."

"Is that right?" Charlie added the sugar, got the cups, and called to Hugo and Elvia to see if they wanted tea. "Where is your family from, Don Epifanio?"

"We are from Hidalgo, Señor Palmerin, from the Valley of Mezquital, the town of Tenango de Doria to be exact," Don Epifanio clasped his hands together and nodded his head rhythmically as

he proudly reviewed his heritage, "where my people...the Sierra Otomí, that is...have lived since, well since the time before the Spanish came. There are other people who live in the neighboring valleys there, the Nahua, the Tepehua, the Totonac, for example, and they have lived there some time, but my people go back six-thousand years...yes, they do...they were among the first people to cultivate the traditional foods, corn, beans and squash. My grandfather, Anastacio, was man of power, a *curandero*, as was his last son, my father, Ignacio. I also am his last son, and it has always been some source of amusement for my father that I have this ability with engines, motors, cars, metal objects, you know, while they have this way with the good and bad life forces that move people? Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha..."

Charlie chuckled a moment along with Don Epifanio, then he opened the cupboard to take out four cups for tea.

"Is your father still in Mexico?"

"Yes...he is, we buried him next to Anastacio on our land, behind the house where my family has lived back before the time of my grandfather...yes, he is still in Mexico, in the land he loved all his life..."

Don Epifanio sipped his tea and waited to gauge Charlie's interest before he continued. He thought he had already said too much. He was glad he hadn't yet told Señor Palmerin how his father was recently shot to death in an ongoing dispute with those mestizo cattle ranchers who time and time again would run their herds to graze onto his family's farm land before they finally decided to eliminate another ignorant *indio* who was in the way of their economic well-being and advancement. He was glad he didn't have to explain in such a short time the long, long history of how the Otomí and other indigenous peoples had their harmonious way of life disrupted and ultimately destroyed by the Conquistadores and those who followed. First there was the invasion of sheep in the 1500s, then

the goats and cattle in the 1600s, and then in the 1700s the maguey plantations for the Spaniards' pulque, and finally the near total deforestation of the sacred mountains for the mines, firewood, lime and charcoal production.

The coyotes, deer, field mice, bobcats, hares, moles, rabbits, skunks, wolves, squirrels, and weasels diminished in size and number. Owls, crows, ducks, eagles, sparrow hawks and llaner falcons were harder to hunt and find, along with the crickets, fish, lizards, lobsters, locusts, maguey grubs, snakes, toads and frogs. He was glad not to have to remember how his people were amazed and then saddened to see the endless fields of their food, the maize, beans, squash, chile, tomato, amaranth and sage yield to the Spaniards' orchards of pears, peaches, nectarines, apples, quince, pomegranate, orange, lime, date, fig, walnuts and roses, and to the wheat fields they planted to the north and the barley fields they sowed to the south. Yes, in those few moments of waiting and remembering, Epifanio was glad he didn't have to recount all of this to Señor Palmerin.

"My grandfather, Prudencio," Charlie interrupted Don Epifanio's reverie, "is buried in Guanajuato, Uriangato...oh, you know it...yes, a lot of clothes are sold there...and my father, Mariano, is still living in Santa Paula near...you know that too? You've been around, Don Epifanio. When did you arrive in Salinas?"

"You know, Señor Palmerin," Don Epifanio looked strangely at Charlie as he adjusted the vector of the conversation, "you look very much like my own son, Horacio, yes, very much, and the same age, I must say...Did your father come to California with the braceros?"

"Why, yes... he did, did you?"

"You probably know that story, then, eh? Has your father told you about those times, Señor Palmerin, those good times and bad times...?"

"Yes, he has, he told me all about it, and I've told my own children about their grandfather Mariano, and how he struggled to get here and provide opportunities for me, and how now I'm doing the same for them."

"Good, good...we must tell our children about those who came before us, very important, isn't it?" Don Epifanio drank the last of his tea. "Thank you for the tea, Señor Palmerin, I will call you in the next day or so to arrange a time to get your car running, OK? The evening would be better, wouldn't it? By the way, when will you all be leaving?"

"Leaving?" Charlie didn't understand the context of the old man's question. "I'll be here all week..."

"I mean, when will you be leaving for Mexico... Veracruz, isn't it?" Don Epifanio had walked to the front door, turned around and raised his eyebrows as he waited again for Charlie to answer.

"How did you know we are going to Veracruz? Did someone tell you about our plans?"

Don Epifanio smiled as he explained. "When I came in your house, I sensed that something, someone... was missing, a woman, your wife, your children's mother, and when I paid more attention to that woman's absence, or perhaps it was her presence, I saw in my mind's eye green mountains and rivers and a bay or a port and I... I recognized it was Veracruz. Is she there now?"

"Yes... she is...in... Huatusco ..." Charlie suddenly felt like he needed to sit down and tell Don Epifanio everything that had happened, all the parts of their complicated lives that had so abruptly and bitter-sweetly come together in the death of Anita's father, how much they all ached missing Anita, how Charlie couldn't really talk with Anita about all this now with her gone and all...

I feel alone.. on my own... Anita's father dead her gone... now a reason and way to leave... but guilty now... selling-out... abandoning my people... the raza... young and old arriving here in Aztlán ... me trained to educate... now

wanting to leave teaching... with my people... their limited expectations for education... for their minds... what am I doing?... something's not right, not feeling good, frustrated, afraid, disgusted, disillusioned, tired... stop, give up...must talk more with Don Epifanio...

Charlie jerked his attention back to the moment and to the man he sensed was holding some answer or key for him, something simple, easy to understand, but sequestered, protected, hidden for the moment.

"Huatusco ... yes...excuse me...her father died suddenly a few weeks ago, and... she's been staying with her mother to help out and kind of take over some of the family responsibilities, you know...we'll be joining her this summer, just as soon as school is out. I'll be quitting my teaching job and..."

Don Epifanio reached behind him and pulled out the piece of folded silvery beige paper Charlie had seen him stuff in his back pocket before. He held it out for Charlie to take.

"Here is a new cup for you," the man said enigmatically. "Take it, *Señor* Palmerin...you must open it, see that it is empty, and then you must find a way to fill it...Do you understand?"

Charlie took the small thing that had been folded from some kind of rough paper he had never seen before. Don Epifanio nodded towards the cup, and Charlie realized that he was supposed to open it like he had already been told.

"You notice that it's empty?" The mysterious mechanic asked rhetorically.

Charlie inserted two fingers between the folded paper and opened the cup into its small rectangular shape. He nodded and looked back at Don Epifanio.

"You must fill it, *Señor* Palmerin. When you go to Veracruz, you must find something new to put in your family's cup. I'll be putting a new starter in your car so it will start, in the same way

you will be figuring out what it is that you will be putting in the real cup, not this little paper cup, you know..."

"How do you know all this, Don Epifanio, about Anita, Veracruz, about us leaving?" Charlie opened the front door and held it as he stared at the unassuming automobile mechanic.

"Parts, Señor Palmerin...everything is a part of something bigger and more difficult to understand, and at the same time everything is composed of easier to understand smaller parts. I understand parts; I'm a mechanic."

Don Epifanio smiled, turned and walked out of the house toward the sidewalk. As he stepped out onto the sidewalk and began to walk out of sight, he twisted his head, looked quickly at Charlie and called out, "Oh, I forgot to tell you, Señor Palmerin, the coffee's already in the cup. I'll call you when I get the parts for the Honda. *Buenas noches.*"

Charlie continued staring at the space where Don Epifanio had just been standing when he declared the coffee was already in the cup. Charlie's right hand continued dumbly holding the small simple paper object, and then his attention shifted instantly from contemplating the phantom presence at the sidewalk to his actual fingers feeling the rough surface of the paper, the interlocking folds and pleats where Don Epifanio had taken the sheet of flattened fibers, doubled and creased the coarse fiber-flecked papyrus with the purposeful intentions of his thumbs and forefingers, and created a three-dimensional yet dimensionless space within the cup where Charlie would somehow pour something of himself, of his family, fill the void inside the cup with life, with presence, with future.

Chapter 14 A Cup of Anita

Next day Alicia materialized without fanfare forty-five minutes late and sheepishly slinked to her desk as the battered metal classroom door slammed its exclamation mark on her helpless and pallid arrival.

Those hapless students in the class who were fatally challenged and blissfully incapable of focusing their eyes and ears on anything for more than the duration of an inhalation or an exhalation immediately looked away from Charlie, relieved and grateful not to have to look and listen and think any more about the ideas that Charlie was offering them. They stared snickering at their tardy classmate until she finally settled herself nonplused with her two scared hands arranged on top of her desk as she clutched her makeup bag.

Charlie finished the interrupted sentence about how it was his opinion that the increasing stabilization of Mexican immigrants across the United States could now be looked upon as a diaspora since the power of employment and economic health in the US tends to militate against Mexican families returning to their homeland. He greeted the tall, sickly girl with a sincere, "Good morning, Alicia, nice to see you today," and in his heart's mind he wondered again why the poor two-dimensional thing even bothered to show up to school. After all, she had completed exactly zero point eight percent of her class work, had been absent fifteen days out of fifty, and was late beyond the point of presence once or twice a week.

Charlie didn't ask, didn't want to hear her story. *I'm sorry*, he couldn't bear to hear himself say to her, *but I just don't want to listen to another my father's in jail, my mother's pregnant and in the hospital, I'm living with my uncle, and my boyfriend is crazy jealous of my uncle and wants to kill him, and when my uncle's drunk and my boyfriend's hanging with his homies I have to walk four miles to school and no one makes breakfast for me so*

I have to eat whatever's leftover from last night's dinner if I'm lucky enough to find anything among the dirty dishes and pots and pans left on the table or the sink.

"So if any people find themselves separated from their homeland like many modern Mexicans do now," Charlie ground his mental gears into first again as he continued linking the ideas of diaspora, returning to one's homeland, and the borders in between; but the terribly surprising congruence between the personal tragedies and disasters that Alicia embodied just six feet from Charlie and the overwhelming inexorability of the social and demographic changes that undermined the stability, functioning and survival of families locally and worldwide suddenly arrested Charlie's attention, and he missed the mental shift into second.

"...they want to...they feel like they...there it goes...sorry, guys, my brain just turned off, I'm sure you can all empathize with me..." he added sarcastically knowing that only Theresa and David would be faintly aware of the verbal jab let alone understand that Charlie was referring not to them but to the other mentally homeless occupying the other thirty-three desks.

Charlie cleared his mental throat and started in with, "So that is the question of the day," and he repeated it, "What would you do if you were stranded in another country and you couldn't get back to your own country? Explain if you feel immigrants in the United States are in a diaspora or if they are assimilated completely into the country's way of life." "Then he repeated the usual instructions for the ten minute free write so those who's attention was still milling around the fleshless periphery of Alicia's tiny world could reorient themselves back into the sedulous position behind the usual carrot. "Please don't forget to write the date because later we'll be going back to compare your writing and style and ideas and that's one point, write the question because writing the question causes you to start thinking about your opinion and that's two points, then write no more

than a half a page of your opinion or feelings that's another two, and the total is five points a day. Call me if you don't understand the question or you need some help...One-eight-hundred-diaspora."

Charlie moved the whiteboard and tripod to the center of the room as most students flipped open their notebooks and started copying the question. Charlie went to the homework drop box to collect its meager contents, then stood aside to quickly check to see if those who did the homework used the semi-colon correctly or not so he would know if he could move on from using the semi-colon to connect two complete sentences to teaching how the colon was used differently to connect two complete sentences. He had gotten to the eighth hopeful paper when Mrs. Gonzales, one of the grim, never-smiling campus supervisors-turned bounty hunter whose arrival invariably signaled the arrest and confinement of a student for flagrant absence or tardiness, pulled open the door and rushed in waving a referral she pulled hastily out of a sheaf of many. Without warning she called out shrilly, "Crespo...Alicia Crespo? She here?"

God! thought Charlie, *she just got here... she's actually writing the question of the day on a borrowed piece of paper over there, and now they're calling her out for some kind of detention, conference, punishment, anywhere but here where she's safe, welcomed, with friends and companions...Now she'll be wrested out of here, where supposedly she belongs, and she won't be able to finish her question, listen to chapter seventeen when Antonio confronts Tenorio, won't know about the study questions, and won't see the first George Lucas interview. Great! Just great!*

"Yes, Mrs. Gonzales, she is..." Charlie answered robot-like, looked at Alicia and raised his eyebrows empathetically as the acquiescent girl got up with her makeup bag and walked to the door. "Come back as soon as you can, Alicia," Charlie said as he watched her premature departure, then added, "Don't forget to read the rest of chapter 17..." but she was already gone, out the door.

As Charlie watched Alicia disappear, he instinctively reached for his clipboard where for the last month or two he had been jotting down his instructional resolutions for the next year as he had

realized the adjustments or changes he wanted to make the class better for everyone. As his fingers slipped behind the brown Masonite and lifted it from the surface of the table so that he could double-check to make sure he had noted his decision not to refer habitually late students next year, Charlie remembered suddenly that he would not be there next year, so there would be no need to make any changes.

The clipboard was six inches above the surface of the table when his fingers mutely iterated his realization by slowly putting the clipboard back down to where it instantly became a useless and outdated historical document, about as useful as an old love letter marking a pause in a dusty book, a shopping list from last month stuck in an old checkbook ledger, or a recipe for tofu cheesecake that will never be read. *No need to think about or plan any changes to improve things now. This is the last time I will be here, this is my last October...* Charlie looked over at the date written on the whiteboard... *my last October 12... this class is as good as it will ever be with me as the teacher...* Charlie looked out over his thirty or so clients who were diligently struggling with pencils and pens to put cognitive fingers on appropriate words from their rudimentary adolescent thesauri to express and extend onto lined notebook paper the ruthlessly linear nature of ideas that would somehow express and communicate whatever latent or developed opinions they had already formed or hadn't had any reason to construct because no one had ever inquired.

It wasn't until later that afternoon when he had arrived home, done triage on the mail, pulled out the second letter from Anita and read it, that Charlie could let go of the ambivalent bittersweet taste in his mind, his increasing guilt at leaving these students to other less competent and compassionate teachers, and his relief and joy at leaving the darkness behind. An Autumn-like sadness deepened the quality of each encounter and experience with Charlie's formerly familiar students, colleagues and places that day, much like the low sun in the Fall sky lengthens every

shadow and adds a reflective or centripetal hue to the afternoon light that changes nothing of the structure of reality but that adds another transparent dimension, a worked and polished glaze, or perhaps just the opposite, a stripping away of the thought layer, the removal of language.

Charlie unfolded the letter from Anita and wished he was touching the warm silk of Anita's legs and hips in the same way he was opening and revealing her dark questions and answers written on the creased paper she had sent him. Charlie needed Anita. He hated sleeping alone, and he could easily see and smell on his fingers a quickening return to their hidden cave with his woman, to them only alone, to the smoky and inarticulate conflagrations from which they had drawn magic, figures, maps on the inner walls of their erotic burrow. It was those nocturnal hibernations of man snuggling into woman that fed Charlie, not like satisfying the regular grumblings of his empty stomach but more like swimming through glistening centuries of ions of warm water in hidden Mayan cenotes.

My Dear Charlie, Hugo and Elvia,

It seems like it has been forever since I left the three of you. The past month I have been either very busy or very bored. I'm so sorry you couldn't make it down in time for my dear father's funeral. Hundreds of people from town and the surrounding villages came to his funeral, his old friends and business associates. We buried him next to my brother, Antonio, in the family plot by the church. There's a place for Momi and for me there too.

I miss you all very much. It seems like another world here, and although I was born and grew up here, it seems like it's not my home anymore. I have been helping Momi a lot with legalities, business contracts, León's will, etc. The plantation continues to run smoothly as the men who work for Papi have been with him so long, it's as if they run the place, they know so much, and they handle everything.

The high school here is connected by Internet to Veracruz High School. They have some kind of tech training they share, and they're networked to seven or eight schools in the area including the capital. I think Hugo and Elvia will do well in school here. They're already bilingual, something that everyone says is important around here, but that

they don't do too well with in the schools. Most of the English teachers can't speak English very well, just copy this, translate this Spanish into English. I think Charlie can find a teaching job here if he wants, ha-ha! Maybe Hugo and Elvia will do better if we home school them, we'll see, OK? Write me and tell me what you think about this.

I didn't know how bad it had gotten for Papi and the other coffee growers around here during the early '90s. I knew that coffee prices on the international market went down between '89 and '94, but Papi didn't tell me how bad it had affected him. He and to a larger extent many of the other growers around the Huatusco area couldn't cover their expenses during that time, so many of them, including Papi, abandoned large parts of their plantations, especially the growers who had converted to the intensive and expensive to maintain sun grown varieties. Momi tells me that many of León 's compadres and business associates went out of business and had to sell their land, some had to come north to the states to make it. She said Papi was lucky that he had other crops and orchards to rely upon during those hard times. I guess he was getting old because evidently he never got those neglected portions of his coffee into full production again.

We really haven't had a chance to talk at length about what we are going to do when the three of you arrive here later this year, but I see that we can reestablish those parts of Papi's coffee that hasn't been kept up, you know, pruned, picked, and weeded. The market is good now for organic coffee, and we could make a go of it there. Several groups are working in this area of Mexico, including Huatusco, to organize the smaller growers and develop local microcredit programs so large groups of families can start to build savings and create a base for credit so that they can develop other businesses that are more diversified and stable while at the same time they can market their coffee as a group too. This seems to be happening across the developing world now, and we could be instrumental in assisting the smaller coffee growers around the area in this. Others groups are developing health care facilities for the smaller coffee growing families, basic education, sanitation, and coffee drying practices that use less water to reduce the organic waste from coffee production that usually flows into the nearby rivers. This is exciting and a good idea, I think.

I heard of some groups of women who have developed their own independent credit cooperatives to assist the development of home-based businesses like bakeries, small restaurants and sewing collectives. Some women I talked with tell me they have individual savings in the collective, they lend money for members' small businesses, but they also use the funds for income generating activities during the year like Day of the Dead bake sales, lunch sales of tamales or atole or other foods, or buying school supplies in bulk and then selling them back to families at low cost. I heard talk of starting a bed and breakfast in Coatepec, and one collective is planning on buying a minivan to start a taxi service! Isn't this a great idea? I would like to get more involved in this as soon as we all get more settled. This is something we could assist with and develop using our organizational and teaching skills, and at the same time we could be helping our people work toward increasing sustainability and agroecology, as they call it in the articles you sent me, especially empowering people, diversity, adjusting to local environments, conserving resources, maximizing long-term benefits, and managing whole systems. Thank you, by the way, for feeding me information via the mail. Momi doesn't have a computer or phone service here, so I have to use the local school when I want to find the stuff you tell me about on the net. Don't forget to bring down our computers, even the old ones in the closet. There is a real need here for computers with Internet access but also basic skills training like keyboarding, word processing, page layout and graphic skills, etc. Oh, Charlie? What about teaching these things, maybe starting our own small school? Just asking, Honey...

Well, Momi's calling me from the kitchen to come and help her with supper, so I have to be going now. I miss you all very very much. Miss your hugs, kisses, all of you. Keep writing me letters about what you're doing, school and all that. I hope all the chores about moving are progressing well. Charlie, you have a big responsibility to move us. Maybe I should come up there during the summer to help out...what do you say to that?

Remember that I love and miss you all,

Anita

p.s. Forgot to tell you...I've been having dreams about my brother, Antonio, I think I told you about him being killed by a snake bite...I don't know if it's just old memories of being here, or listening to Momi's stories about

him, or what. I thought I'd feel my father's spirit more...Mami says she's not having any dreams though, so maybe Antonio has been waiting all this time for me to come back home so he could visit with me again. More later. Love you all, and I hope you're all just remembering me, not dreaming about me.

Charlie read and reread Anita's letter, until he could silently summarize it in his mind.

"Letter from Mom!" Charlie cried out when Hugo and Elvia walked in from school.

"Read it, read it, Dad!" both begged Charlie knowing that that had been their ritual with the last several letters, first Charlie, then each one privately. Today it would be Elvia's turn. When both had kneaded the crinkly letter, inspected every word, gone back to see if they had missed any word or idea or emotion, then squeezed every love drop out of the two pages, they both excitedly began to pester Charlie about Anita's suggestion to come back in the summer to help out with the move to Huatusco, then about whether they would really have to go to school in Huatusco, or if Charlie could homeschool them, and what were they going to do if there is no Internet access there...

There was no one to share Charlie's rumbling questions, doubts and fears about Anita's suggestions for revitalizing the coffee plantation, Charlie's potential for teaching, homeschooling the kids, Anita's desire to work with the credit cooperatives. Hugo and Elvia had their own fears, hopes, doubts, and Charlie couldn't yet expect them to counsel him about the major plans and decisions looming in the near future.

After he had tucked them in and closed shop for the night, Charlie mindlessly began taking off his clothes, shoes and socks first, shirt next, pants and finally underwear. He reached for his pajamas on his dresser and knocked something off onto the floor. Charlie grunted as he stooped down and looked for whatever it was that had fallen off the top of the dresser. He squatted down, grunted exasperatedly again, rummaged around with his hand and finally located under the edge of the bed the small paper cup that Don Epifanio had presented him two nights ago.

"The cup..." Charlie announced as if introducing it to a silent audience. He had put it on the dresser the night the neighborhood mechanic had given it to him, and in the ongoing schedules and routines of the ensuing two days, dirty pants and socks, shoes, kids' school books, coins, a pocket knife and used cups had quietly accumulated as they do and buried the folded gesture of Don Epifanio's magic.

Chapter 15 A Little Spin

More than half a century later as he would be writing another list, the skeleton of an itinerary that frustrated him in its brevity surely but not in the seamless resuscitation of familiar places and feelings he began to relive as he slowly printed out each individual name—Anita, Hugo, Elvia and then each of *their* five children, and then retraced their many stops and destinations with the finger of his heart; as he wrote that list, his last, Charlie recalled vividly this particular moment now, a small bite of time's buffet that seemed so peculiar to him at the moment but that within the year would have been regurgitated in his mind and then seasoned retrospectively and more palatably swallowed with the knowledge that this was the continuing gift of the mechanic's work.

He felt foolish to be itemizing things he could put in the cup...not the paper cup, of course...the other cup, whatever that meant...there was no other cup... Cup of life, cup of coffee, we can't forget that cup, can we? But seriously, another cup? What about... this house, or Porfiria's house? The houses contain something like a cup does...my teaching job, Charlie jotted those down on the clean side of the recycled goldenrod paper, holds a lot, money, satisfaction, accomplishment, compassion, support...

"Yeah, yeah..." Charlie mumbled out loud as he continued recording the ideas that splashed into his mental cup from the pot of understanding that the mechanic had somehow programmed to switch on. Elvia and Hugo, he scribbled on the paper, they go in the cup too, and they hold so much of the future, more I guess than Anita or I because they'll either stay in Mexico or come back to the States, and they'll determine their own personal futures, the future of the Palmerin family, the futures of Mexico and The States...Charlie looked over the list he had after a few minutes of thinking and writing...This list too... he wrote, "this list," goes into the cup of my awareness, my planning, my... imagining I guess... inventing... seeing...looking into the future is more like it... He let

the understanding continue to overflow the cup of what he could think about at any one instant...

"reordering the list," Charlie added, then "prioritizing," and immediately after that, "choosing," then finally, "do something with list."

Charlie tapped the rubber of the pencil on the paper, lifted his head and shoulders, and let his body's neural switches charge and discharge. He opened his conative arms to the electrical impulses from every experience, memory and understanding all rushing gratefully from their hiding places in the secret fields and flesh of Charlie's body upward to another wordless gathering in his parietal lobe. Neurotransmitters tingled ionically like scintillating concatenations of fingertips tapping a trillion silver sequences, positive-negative-positive-negative-positive-negative, like senseless vowels and consonants clustered and accumulate as meaning behind the Ouija magic of the point of the pencil now idling in Charlie's right hand.

It occurred to Charlie that if he folded up this impromptu list that appeared at the moment to be finished and slid it into Don Epifanio's paper cup alongside of Anita's letter, it wouldn't make much sense then to reply to someone who had inquired about the contents of that cup that it was a cup of paper, a cup of letter or even a cup of Anita... or a cup of list, or even a cup of words, but that it would make all the sense in his surprisingly new world to say that it was a cup of life, his life, their life, the same life really...Charlie obeyed the final four words on the list and did what he had just imagined doing. He got up from his office chair, walked into the bedroom where the paper cup was...yes... still where he had left it on his dresser after saving it from the floor, picked it up and quickly inserted the golden list he had just folded up into the cup next to Anita's letter. There...

Charlie was lightened and relieved by the strangely satisfying irony of having focused so much attention on the stupid little paper cup with its all so precious contents now...a letter from his wife and then a list about what to put in that same cup, and then having put that list in the cup

instead of what the list said should be put in the cup...*Come on, Palmerin! Get a life! This is crazy... should just get the car fixed... forget about this cup voodoo stuff... four days now anyway since Don Epifanio was here and left me this thing.*

Without thinking Charlie picked up the phone and called the strange mechanic to find out where the hell the new starter was.

"Hello...Don Epifanio? Yes, hello, this is Charlie Palmerin...sure, I'm fine...they're fine too...Uh, excuse me for being so impatient, but I was wondering if you'd been able to get the new starter for my Honda? I know you're busy, but I was just calling to check in with you..."

"Well, Mr. Palmerin," the mechanic's voice slowed imperceptibly as he continued, "I've been waiting for you to call me and tell me whether you found anything to put in the cup I gave you..."

"You were waiting for me to call you...?" Charlie blurted back.

"Yes... I figured you would either call me to tell me you'd found things to put in the cup...or you'd call me in exasperation to ask me where the starter was...So now, will you be home tomorrow evening so I can come over and get your car up and running for you, Mr. Palmerin?"

"Uh...sure, tomorrow evening's great, if it's OK with you, Don Epifanio, yes, thank you...and... uh, by the way...I did find something to put in the cup..."

"Good, good," Don Epifanio replied, "show me tomorrow when I come over, but please don't show me the cup. I know what that looks like. Good night, Mr. Palmerin."

Charlie mulled over the phone call for some time; he wasn't sure how he felt at the unexpected way it ended. It wasn't the mechanic's contradictory good night request that startled Charlie so much as Don Epifanio's increasing presence like some squatter homesteading the inner pasture of Charlie's life. It was as if Charlie had been ambling through that beautiful alluvial

grassland, and without realizing it he had walked into an unexpected shallow depression where he quickly began to discern fractal irregularities and concentric circles of gold, yellow, white and purple flowers and plants surrounding a center where he found himself eventually standing by a small moraine of smooth small rocks deposited, packed down and now exposed in the cooling mud and cracking micro-firmament of a vernal pool.

In many actual yet arcane ways Don Epifanio was very much like the appearing and disappearing act of the vernal pools that punctuate ancient alluvial formations and volcanic mud flows along the central and coastal valleys of California. For hundreds of thousands of years such ephemeral basins have repeatedly filled up over these impermeable geologic layers and then evaporated several times during each rainy season, and only the plants and animals that have adapted to this cycle of wetting and drying survive over time.

Freshwater invertebrates, crustaceans, amphibians, and plants sprout and emerge underwater in the winter rains, and they attract flocks of migratory and non-migratory birds that arrive, nest and feed around the ponds. Other plants suited for the dryer periphery of the pool flower in the spring and attract native bees that nest and pollinate the many varieties of flowers blooming there. Insects and crustaceans produce eggs and cysts, and plants produce seeds that are buried and protected by the mud at the bottom of the drying pools. Winter rains in turn activate the diverse genetic banks of seeds, cysts and eggs within hundreds of distinct pools, and the cycle is repeated in the circular universe of each pool year after year.

Native peoples dug up the emerging green plant roots in late winter, and they collected the dry plant seeds to supplement their diets. They also hunted birds that arrived at the pools, and they used the pools for initiation ceremonies for young girls. Ranchers eventually grazed their cattle at the pools within their ranches, and many vernal pools were ringed in, isolated and forgotten within

sprawling military bases. Contemporary educators, phylogenists, and ecologists now bring others who want only understanding from the interdependent web of life that flourishes and is so easily observed and appreciated in the vernal pools.

Charlie was struggling and trying to survive psychologically a few more months within the amorphous perimeter of the vast city. Anonymous homes, businesses, and microclimates of named and unnamed neighborhoods contended and somehow coexisted with the two-hundred-thousand-fold untelevised contest for work, space and security. Numerous species, subspecies and communities of human and other beings inhabiting the upper, middle, lower, and natural class niches of existence in his Central Coast valley town continued to form a complex and increasingly out-of-balance web of tradition, commerce, altruism, ignorance, and depredation. In a hundred years increasingly minor parts of this multivalent web had become able to imagine as their collective mind a teleology that had started to shape a history of seasons into a brief but evanescent future for itself. The vernal pools were a nostalgic and rapidly disappearing vestige of this primordial consciousness, as was Don Epifanio, the mechanic.

Charlie had stumbled upon the mechanic apparently by accident just as he had been walked metaphorically into the desiccated alluvial depression of that vernal pool. What if, because of some literary vicissitude, he had walked right by that analogous vernal pool and never noticed it? Charlie glanced back at the coiled beige cord still swinging below the motionless phone as he continued thinking about the mechanic's intentions in his life.

What if my car hadn't broken down, if I hadn't asked Dave for a recommendation, if it had been another neighbor who didn't know Don Epifanio, if I hadn't called him, if he had not been disposed to pick up the phone, if he had not picked up the phone and I would have decided not to call back, if the mechanic couldn't have found the house in the dark...?

"There's no way, Mr. Palmerin," the mechanic finally pulled his head out of the engine compartment of the Honda the following evening and explained after Charlie finally got around to asking what he had been wondering earlier that afternoon, "for anyone to know the answers to those "what if's? A person can live out only one alternative, right, so why worry about what would have happened if we walked into an alternative that we chose freely? You had a choice, different alternatives, you made your choice, and that's it, life moves ahead as it is supposed to. Those other alternatives don't exist anymore, Mr. Palmerin, and because they don't exist anymore, there are no answers to theoretical questions about their potential. That would be empty and anxiety-causing speculation, wouldn't it? One of the dangerous tendencies of an untrained mind, isn't that so? The important thing is that I've almost got your starter in and ready to go...Hand me that large crescent wrench please...the twelve incher in the bottom of tool chest..."

When he was finished, the mechanic put his tools back in their red carrying chest, and then he wiped the hood and fenders of Charlie's car where there were smudges of grease and handprints. After he rubbed his hands with grease remover then dried them with one of his rags, he started Charlie's car, got out and looked across the roof of the Honda, smiling broadly, then surprised Charlie with an odd request.

"May I take you for a little spin, Mr. Palmerin? It won't take long... you can tell your children that we'll be back in fifteen minutes or so..."

It wasn't the result of any momentary reflection about whether he had time for a ride with the old man who had just fixed his car, a common enough occurrence to ratify the success of a mechanic's surgical intervention, nor was it whether or not the children would be safe in his absence, because they had already established precautionary Dad's-not-home-for-a-while routines; no, it wasn't because of any time constraints or his children's best interests that upon hearing Don

Epifanio's innocent invitation, Charlie's nervous system fired off a queasy warning in the pit of his empty stomach that sucked the warmth from his arms and torso to fuel his body's alarm.

In the unremitting instant it took Charlie to realize that within a few seconds he would have to respond yes or no to the mechanic's offer and at the same time decide how he was going to deal with the riot spreading out from his burning guts back into arms and legs that were starting to tremble and out onto a face Charlie was certain had lost its light brown color and incinerated suddenly into ash; in that instant upon which he would glance back years later to establish it as the simple vows of his ad hoc novitiate with the strange mechanic, Charlie feared not so much what would happen to him on the test run of the now-purring Honda, but the incontestable fact that he had no choice in the absurdly simple matter of going or not going on the test drive with Don Epifanio.

If it had not been for the indisputable truth that his Honda had started because of the mechanic, Charlie would have prevaricated politely with a family related pretext, simply asked for Don Epifanio's parts and labor, and then written out a check with his thanks. But the mechanic was standing there on the other side of the car waiting for Charlie's answer, back over there in the Valley of Mezquital, in Tenango de Doria, Don Epifanio Mogote squatting there over a thick slurry of slow-boiled *jonote* bark, pounding and grinding the soft fibers on the stone metate, gathering the mass of stringy bark with his short dark fingers, pushing the glistening clump back over the metate with a cylindrical piece of black-flecked volcanic stone, Don Epifanio rhythmically rocking back and forth pushing, gathering, spreading, grinding, back and forth, Don Epifanio rhythmically forming the paper, the magic, the intention, back there in Tenango de Doria, the paper...paper for the cup, the way grandfather Anastacio showed him, the man of power, the *curandero*, the paper for the cup, the cup from the paper, all the same in the mechanic's hands.

"Will you be coming with me?" Don Epifanio called out to Charlie from across the six or so feet where in a few seconds their relationship had inverted from what it had been before with multiplicity, abundance and choice as the crown into the unexpected reciprocal of singularity, selfsameness, and identity in its new position of dominance. Before, the patron, able to pick whenever and whomever he wanted to repair his car; now, ironically enough, the pupil, face to face with the first question of the mechanic's true and false exam.

"I'd like you to tell me," Don Epifanio added casually, "about the dream you had a while back..." The mechanic paused until Charlie looked up from his inner turmoil, startled, unwilling to believe that Don Epifanio could know about the dreams he had had several months ago about being captured and ritually killed by the Aztecs and then flying with the herons into their ancestral Aztlán .

How could he know...? Charlie ruminated to himself as walked quickly in the house to tell Hugo and Elvia he was taking a little spin with the mechanic. When he returned and got in the car, he looked across at Don Epifanio and iterated the question, "How could you know about my dream?"

"I didn't, Mr. Palmerin...you're going to tell me, aren't you?"

"Well... sure, I'll tell you about my dream, but...where are we going?"

"Your car started pretty easily, didn't it, Mr. Palmerin?" The mechanic looked over to Charlie as he nodded his head and grinned with satisfaction. "We're just going to take an easy trip around the block too, there's no need to worry..." Don Epifanio put the Honda in gear and drove carefully away from the curb at Charlie's house. "So, tell me about your dream..." the mechanic invited, "when was it now...?"

No one had asked him about those dreams since that night when he had awakened Anita twice, screaming as his spectral Aztec captors were cutting out his heart with a jade knife, then later

that night as he was flying with phantom herons and sinking into ghostly quicksand at the base of the cliffs at Canyon de Chelly. Charlie had remembered those dreams almost every day, and he continued to wonder whether under the daily veil of do-this-now-do-that they were just the product of errant neural connections produced by his admittedly over-amped considerations lately about the deterioration of society, or if they were some kind of... kind of vision, yes, a vision about the future reflected somehow back from the remembered past onto the present screen of his understanding, back from the origins of the people, back again from Aztlán . No one had asked Charlie about those two dreams because Anita was the only other person who knew about them; she was the only one who acknowledged however tacitly that his dreams were not an isolated event but more like an illuminating facet of Charlie's growing awareness and understanding of their minor role in the continuing adaptation of the Aztec-Mejica people to the consequences of the Anglo-European conquest.

By the time Charlie had recounted the details of his two dreams to the mechanic, Don Epifanio had driven them several blocks south to the new mini-shopping center in the last stages of construction. He parked the Honda in an isolated cul-de-sac overlooking a wide drainage canal that runs through the center of the city and is flanked on both sides by large empty fields undeveloped and covered with dry weeds and grass. As soon as he turned off the ignition, Don Epifanio let the emptiness of his own silence summon the intersections and gaps in the silence of the out-of-the-way spot, and then finally, the all-encompassing dusk silence itself arrived, attracted to the wordless welcome of their waiting, to the dimensionlessness of their presence to which the words of their inner conversation would normally have resonated, but which now returned to the crystalline transparency of its repose, ready always, everywhere.

It was into the quickly disappearing light and silence of that place that the mechanic unfolded his map to reveal Charlie's journey.

"May I tell you something, Mr. Palmerin?"

Chapter 16 The Honda Epiphany

"Please..." Charlie heard himself reply.

"I know, Mr. Palmerin," Don Epifanio gazed out across the canal and fields, "it must be difficult for you to consider leaving the responsibilities and satisfactions of your teaching career to move to Veracruz...teachers in public schools have the most difficult of challenges, don't they? Yes... impossible to satisfy the anxiety of the public as they see the destruction of families, the weakness of religion, and the unimportance of education. Everyone looks to you teachers, Mr. Palmerin, to get us out of these predicaments, to help us, to solve our problems...We blame you, and at the same time we look to you with hope, don't we? But you know this, don't you...Excuse me for telling you about what you already experience everyday..."

Don Epifanio had yet to look over to where Charlie was listening with a nod of his head, watching the anonymous field, noticing the man-made straightness of the canal, following the meandering ridge of the Gabilan Mountains and Fremont's Peak along the northeastern horizon. Both men were watching the eastern portion of the horizon receive the last rays of the setting sun. The irregular ridge of the mountain range was a silvered golden-red like an incandescent blade edge about to be quenched in oil, but after an almost imperceptibly fleeting moment the color that suffused every molecule of visible surface had drained away, and the landscape began its return to a blue-grey coolness and emptiness of night.

"In the Valley of Mezquital," Don Epifanio sighed and continued after a few silent moments of observing the sunset, "in my town, Tenango de Doria, that is, we have few of the amenities and comforts that shield us here in California from the victory of death, you know? My people, the Highland Otomí, have very little, a small house we make from rough-cut boards and pieces of

galvanized metal, a few pieces of furniture to keep us off the cold ground, pots and pans to cook with, scissors to cut the paper we make...We work the land with our hands to have beans, corn, chayote, maybe sugar cane, some coffee or pears or apples...and we call the land our home because our fathers and grandfathers six-hundred years before us worked the same land in the same way for the same reasons. Some work their land harder than others, and they have more food to eat or sell. Some of my people have more land than others, and many who consider themselves to be modern are selling their ancestral land and leaving the valley for the larger cities. Those who buy the land that others sell are envied for their wealth and property. Those who stay and work their land more and have more food are also envied by many ignorant people. And now many who have made the trip across the border return from here very pleased with their televisions, radios, different music, modern clothes, new religions, other ideas about men and women and children. There is much jealousy, envy...confusion, misunderstanding and ignorance about why these changes are occurring, why life is suddenly out of balance, why some people have so much and others apparently have nothing of value anymore."

Don Epifanio paused to look in his mind back across the lamentable condition of his people. "Of course, you know that it is the same here in Salinas, Mr. Palmerin... more and more of our people stranded here by the yoke of work they themselves put on to buy houses, cars and those telephones... our children lost between two deteriorating cultures...yes, they are... our young men are blinded by poverty and ignorance, and all they can do is turn inward to destroy themselves and their own people, our young women clinging and devoted to those doomed men so they might be destroyed too...and the light of education and curiosity, Mr. Palmerin, it has been overwhelmed by the television, our families buying anything they can if it's available on sale...everyone is out for himself, and yet no one has anything of value anymore. Why has this happened?"

Don Epifanio twisted his head to look at Charlie who had also turned his ears' attention to the mechanic's unexpected question that interrupted the strange man's painful diagnosis of the Otomí people and then the Mexican immigrants in the United States. "Well, Mr. Palmerin, do you know the answer to that question?"

Perhaps the two teachers recognized a famished mind that hungered in each other, or then again, perhaps their mestizo genes enumerated an innate sequence of understanding between them, or then again perhaps the silence had absorbed Charlie's focus away from the second question in the mechanic's pop quiz. Neither man said a word as one gazed into the future and the other into the past of each other's eyes. For one centrifugal moment, words bubbled spontaneously up just below the eager reach of Charlie's mind, *Let me think about it and I'll get the answer, you know the answer don't you, old man, there is no answer, it's a trick question, I'll think of it, go ahead and tell me, please...*

Charlie shook his head, and wasn't surprised to hear Don Epifanio reply, "There is no need to answer that question, Mr. Palmerin, because knowing the answer wouldn't help anyone anyway...Life will always be inequitable, some will have and some will not...most will succumb spiritually or physically to the drudgery of daily life, to the devastation of envy and hate, and generations of children will be lost to the ignorance of their parents...There is no use to assign blame, is there? Because we are all struggling...either together or against each other..."

Don Epifanio reached under the seat, pulled out an oversize brown manila envelope and handed it to Charlie.

"I've brought you a present, Mr. Palmerin, a going-away present, I guess it is. You will understand it all right because you too are a teacher, and you look for ways to help people learn, and now I am the teacher and you are the student, but when you leave for Mexico after you bid me good-bye, you will be the teacher again, and you will find your students in the most unlikely places,

just like I found you, or did you find me? No matter, is it...here we are, aren't we? Go ahead... open the folder."

Charlie bent together the little metal clasps holding the flap of the envelop closed. He opened the package and pulled out twelve pieces of paper, a variety of sheets of paper actually, an assortment, all about the size of ordinary printer paper. In the fading light Charlie counted two heavy white sheets with silvered backs, two light colored sheets of what looked like paper made from bark or other natural fibers, two sheets of darker colored bark paper, and then separate sheets of tissue paper, red, black, white, pink, green and light yellow.

"Your car is fixed now, Mr. Palmerin," Don Epifanio had waited while Charlie examined the sheets of paper before he spoke again, "so now is the time and place for my real work with you. These papers are what we Otomí use to cure, to heal, to bring harmony to those who are struggling with the inequity, injustice, the envy and jealousy that infect the lives of human beings. We all need something to help us in this struggle to understand and make sense of everything. The Catholic Church, the saints—they speak less and less to the people, few fear heaven and hell, and the old gods of Huitzilopochtli and Quetzalcóatl and Tezcatlipoca and even Tonantzin are forgotten...even the Fifth and last Sun, Ollin Tonatiuh, the Sun of Movement that our ancestors predicted would end eight days before the end of 2012, so few believe anymore. Otomí healers use these papers to put things back together the way they are supposed to be, the way we are supposed to be with each other and with ourselves, the sheets of paper and the way we cut and arrange them show us the way. It is simple, so simple, with the deepest of intentions to heal the fracture between the natural and the supernatural world and to create understanding and acceptance in the people so they can live without fear, without envy and hate for each other."

"Why are you giving this... to me?" Charlie closed the envelope and looked the old man in the eye. "I mean, how did you...why me, Don Epifanio? How did all this come out of me calling you to fix my car? I don't understand why we're here now, why you gave me this paper... what am I supposed to do with this..."

"Mr. Palmerin, I'll tell you of a dream I had many years ago. It has been only in these past few weeks that I see the realization of that dream. I think you'll understand more the dream you just told me about and why you and I are here now...Many years ago the night before I left my village the first time to come north, I dreamed of a teacher, my spirit knew it was a teacher, and when I awoke, I was certain of it...and I remember very clearly this teacher was divided in two parts, his left side was native Mexican, perhaps Otomí, Nahua, Tarasco, Maya, that was not clear, but it was clear that his left side was native, he was pure Indian, and he was a teacher. The other side of this dream teacher, his right side, was dressed in a suit, you know, pants, coat, white shirt, tie...he was a modern Mexican, you know, Spanish and native together, a mestizo, like those you see in Mexico City, or here in The States, but in spite of his modern clothes, he too was a teacher. The feeling I had was that this divided or two part man was not only a teacher in the normal sense of the word, but that he was a man of power, hidden power, powerful because he had knowledge from both his sides, but I also felt that neither side knew about the other. After I awoke, I asked my father, Ignacio, and my grandfather, Anastacio, to help me understand the dream better. After all, I was leaving that morning for Mexico City and then El Paso to stay with my uncle Ramón there."

The silence and now the darkness had floated down like a blanket to insulate and protect Don Epifanio Mogote and Charlie Palmerin within the Accord. Later, much later that is, during one of those many times when he would replay and edit the video of this secluded meeting in his mind, Charlie would recognize the humor in the mechanic's choice of the four-door sedan for these

revelations, and he would understand the irony of Don Epifanio's diagnosis and parts list for the necessary repairs to Charlie's own inaccordant spirit.

"What did your father and grandfather tell you about your dream?"

"They told me what I now tell you, Mr. Palmerin. Dreams detect events in the unseen world, they amplify and give detail to these events, give them some kind of form or structure we can understand more easily...these kinds of dreams are like a vision of an invisible, difficult to understand problem or challenge we have and at the same time the solution or cure to it. All of this is deposited in our feelings, so when we wake up, our feelings tell us about the significance of the dream, and our mind translates our feelings into ideas we can understand and discuss easily."

"What did you feel about your dream, Don Epifanio...what did they tell you about it?"

"My father suggested to me that the dream showed I would encounter the two-sided teacher I saw in my dream again when I was far from home, maybe in The States, maybe not, but because I had the dream on the eve of my departure for El Paso, and because I only saw the teacher, and he wasn't in a Mexican village or a modern city, they both said it was evident that it would be in a place that wasn't familiar to me. I felt that maybe the native part of the man was me, and the other half in the suit was a spiritual ally or helper who was going to accompany me to the United States, but my grandfather didn't think so. He thought I would meet someone somewhere in the north who would have both the traditional and the modern in him, and he would be a powerful teacher because of that combination."

Don Epifanio looked directly into Charlie's eyes.

"I realize now...that *that* teacher is you, Mr. Palmerin. You are the Mexican man from a traditional Mexican family, and yet you are the modern man too, a resident of the United States, a

high school teacher, how much more modern can you get? You did your part by calling me to repair your car, then when you told me about your two dreams, visions really, weren't they? I knew for sure that you are the teacher my dream foresaw. And then... well, the circuit was completed, so to speak. No one knows how these things really function, Mr. Palmerin, but we do know that all aspects of life are connected in ways like this, and if we allow our dreams and feelings to guide us, we can move ourselves into the energy and power that these connections provide. Do you understand?"

Charlie had been staring into the darkness as he listened intently to the mechanic, nodding his head, trying in his mind to reconstruct the past...searching to recall and identify some event in time when the mechanic's influence started, to find a logical point in the personal history of his consciousness he could point to and understand as the beginning of all this...this change, the discomfort, the dissatisfaction...

"I...I..." Charlie struggled to produce words that could focus his attention on something, anything that made sense so he could respond coherently to the mechanic, so he could find himself again, bring things back together, reestablish himself as Charlie Palmerin.

"By the way," Don Epifanio interrupted Charlie's inarticulate struggle, "what did you put in the cup?"

Charlie was relieved to be able to answer an easy question, and he quickly created a picture in his mind's eye of the paper cup Don Epifanio had given him. It was still back home waiting obediently on his dresser, and it took Charlie only a second or two to open the cup with his mind, peek inside, and recognize the little list he had made of what he should put in the cup, and... Anita's letter... *Anita!... Anita, my wife, where are you?...your smiling face, the smell of your hair I bury my face and breathe in a childhood of ecstasy, all your body now with my arms and chest, squeezing you love you miss you need you why am I not with you?*

"Anita...?" Charlie invoked her name quietly with the certainty that she could hear his heart all the way from Veracruz, across the thousands of miles of jungle, streets, freeways, desert, mountains, subdivisions, people, thoughts, problems, events, minutes, seconds, sunsets... He waited a moment for the intention of his heart to return, then he spoke her name again, her name in answer to the shaman's question.

"Anita..." he repeated. "I put Anita in the cup."

"Yes, you did, Mr. Palmerin, because she is your strength, as you now know very well. You have been opened and weakened by the envy and ignorance and darkness around you, you walk into it every day, and now you must pull away from it, take your children and your power as a teacher and a man and follow your woman to your future in Veracruz. I know you feel deeply wounded by the suffering of our people and at times cut by your own colleagues who misunderstand or maybe envy you, the ones who don't understand why you are leaving, that you must leave, that something more ancient is moving you, deeper and more powerful than the single will of one person..."

"I've only discussed that with Anita, no one else would understand how I feel about...how you described it...and you understand now...How can you understand that if I haven't told you how I feel, Don Epifanio?"

"How do you know your wife loves you at this moment if she can't tell you that she does, Mr. Palmerin?"

"It's not the same, Don Epifanio..."

"You're correct, Mr. Palmerin, it's not the same...both your wife and I are humans, just like you are. Each of us is connected to you in unseen but real ways, conditions that achieve their purposes effortlessly in the natural and the supernatural world. My purpose now is to assist you in

discovering some insight into this change in your life. You already discovered that your wife is your strength in this change, perhaps in all things, eh? So, now... with these papers here..."

Don Epifanio picked up the manila envelope, pulled a piece of thin white crossgrain ribbon from his shirt pocket, and then he dug into the bottom of the pocket until he plucked out a short stub of incense that had been burned down to about three usable inches.

"...and this ribbon and incense, you will cut out the shape of the strength and healing you need and already have, and you will place them together and bind them with this ribbon the way you already know so their energy with your intention creates the healing for all of you. When you're finished, burn this incense to your most powerful *zidabmy* to take the power of your intentions and your cure into the heavens..."

"Excuse me, Don Epifanio, but... what's a... *zidabmy*?"

"Ah, excuse me for using the Otomí word...yes...*zidabmy*... means... a picture or ...a representation of a respected holy one, like a Catholic saint, or it can be an *antigua*, an old statue or idol occupied by a native superhuman, or a power object, a sacred one from the natural world, usually made by the hands of a native person perhaps from before the time of the Spaniards and surviving hundreds of years to the present...My grandfather and father have a small Maya clay mask that appeared mysteriously on their altar one morning... they also found in their cornfield a small figure carved from the blackest of volcanic obsidian in the form of a combination male and female figure in one...these are *antiguas*, very powerful for healing ... I'm sure you have such an object in your possession, from your past, from your father's past, your grandfather's past, your wife's family's past...You'll know what that is when the time comes, I'm sure of it, Mr. Palmerin."

Don Epifanio handed the envelope, the ribbon and stick of incense to Charlie across thousands of miles and years of understanding and the hundreds of years of generations marshaled

and deployed there between the two bucket seats. Charlie's hand took the papers, ribbon and incense from the mechanic, but in the darkness he did not notice that what he actually received was what Don Epifanio had intended to give him all along.

"It's time to get you home to your children, isn't it, Mr. Palmerin?" The mechanic chuckled as he turned the key in the ignition to break camp and depart the strange outlying landscape of personal power. "We don't want to worry them needlessly, do we? You have something now to help you understand the changes pulling at you ...something to do to protect you and your family..."

Don Epifanio let off the parking brake and offered his final counsel to Charlie as he carefully guided the Accord back through the unseen lefts, rights, stops, starts, and bumps of the return spin to Charlie's house. He heard the mechanic's words as if they were being filtered through a kinesthetic weave of Anita, Hugo, and Elvia, and only a residue was being squeezed through the peristaltic longing of Charlie's need for his wife and children. Something the mechanic reminded Charlie about finding an *antigua* to use in the ritual he was to perform with the papers and the incense aroused a black and white hologram in one of the side altars of his heart, a flickering three-dimensional eidetic montage of his father, Mariano, and of Rosalinda, his mother, of Grandpa Prudencio and Grandma Carmen all held together simultaneously as in a mosaic of memories by the love and attention they had all poured into young Charlie.

"I'm grateful I finally met you, Mr. Palmerin..." Suddenly Don Epifanio was parking the Honda in Charlie's driveway, and the focal point of Charlie's attention was just breaking the surface to find the mechanic's words bobbing around it on whitecaps of uncertainty, unfamiliarity and disbelief.

"...now that I have fulfilled the purpose of my dream in meeting you and offering you what I have," Don Epifanio continued, "you must assemble the papers with the ribbon and then perform

the ritual as you know best. Bless the ritual, the papers and the *antigua* you will locate with the burning incense, and then put the *antigua* in a new and appropriate location...and do the same with the cup and the papers, eh, Mr. Palmerin?"

Don Epifanio opened his door, and almost as an afterthought, he leaned over to Charlie.

"If it's all right with you, Mr. Palmerin, I'll send you my bill...You can just send me a check, all right? Feel free to call me if you have any other problems with your car, and I'll be glad to help you. Good night..."

The mechanic reached out his right hand, and for a brief and polite moment Charlie squeezed and then released the hand that had repaired and test driven his car, made the paper in the envelope he now carried, lit and snuffed out the stub of incense, and cut the ribbon to an appropriate length—only the highlights really of a circuitous pilgrimage inside the machinery and mechanism of native metals, noble and precious, an ancient transformation into alloys or amalgams if necessary, a sortilege of bearings, cams, cylinders, gears, wires and pumps, the fine tuning of timing, gaps, and sequences that would lead Charlie step-by-remembered-step back into alignment with his family's escape and deliverance from the insidious conquest of security in the new Aztlán .

It wasn't until Charlie touched the cold knob of the front door that his brain startled him by conjuring up an unexpected vivid image of the strange anniversary present León Gutierrez de Ferrer Villareal had given him in Huatusco. He and Anita and the kids had been at the ranch for a couple weeks discussing marketing some of the Villareal shade grown organic coffee through the hundreds of connections in their direct marketing business back in The States. They had been successful in organizing several of the medium-sized coffee cooperatives in the area surrounding Huatusco to provide beans directly to their direct market roaster and packager so that they could offer a new line

of shade grown, organic, free trade coffee to upscale, socially conscious consumers in Portland, Seattle, San Francisco.

León Gutierrez de Ferrer Villareal was more than satisfied to develop a direct outlet for his coffee; he was overjoyed to be working with his daughter and son-in-law on a new potentially lucrative project. The evening after they finalized the details of the agreement, León called Charlie and Anita to his study. He poured three shots of añejo tequila, toasted Charlie and Anita's marriage and children, and after they had tossed back their drinks, he poured three more, and toasted the future of their coffee business together. The two men and the woman they both loved savored their drinks and discussed their mutual futures lightheartedly. Then León cleared his throat, put down his glass, and walked over to a colonial mahogany sideboard where he stooped down to pull out the creaky bottom drawer from the rustic chest of drawers. He motioned that Charlie and Anita should come to where he was standing, and when they had joined him, he lifted out a deerskin bundle about the size of a large loaf of French bread. That same mysterious bundle that León had pulled out, and the unassuming but surprising object that he had unwrapped, Charlie remembered as he turned the knob on the front door and walked into the welcome of his house, was at that moment upstairs on the top shelf of the book case in his office.

Chapter 17 The Serpentine Ax

It was still dark when Cochehuatetl opened his eyes and saw Iztacocelotl, the Olmec shaman, speaking those same words in his head.

"Jaguar spirit in this stone. Awaken it now... bring it to me."

Cochehuatetl rubbed his eyes and peered into the darkness inside the adobe hut. He saw the stone in his head, the greenish-brown gold-flecked chunk the size of his forearm that now waited silently by the fire ring.

The day before one of the chief runners had raced two days down from the quarry in the southern Sierra Madre mountains on the other side of Tehuantepec to deliver this particularly desirable piece of serpentine to the quarry owner, Pochtecatltetl. The runner arrived in the early morning, so the owner sent his boy in the grey dusk light to inform Iztacocelotl, and the shaman had come to bargain with him from the time the sun was high in the sky to when it almost disappeared behind the jungle. He finally agreed reluctantly to exchange three teeth from a jaguar he had killed for the magnificent piece of serpentine. Iztacocelotl knew that he would extend to his favorite artisan, Cochehuatetl, the responsibility and honor of sculpting the piece of serpentine into the object he needed and had in mind. The shaman would have his servants deliver the corn, beans, fresh and dried meat, and honey comb in payment for his artisanry and labor.

Pochtecatltetl owned and controlled the quarry where the best serpentine was located, and his workers used their traditional secrets to remove much beautiful stone in rough-sized pieces. He was Iztacocelotl's cousin, and they both found satisfaction, prestige and profit in conducting business within the family clan. Their power in their ancestral village of San Lorenzo was based not only on their astute control and manipulation of natural and human resources, but also on their

ability to accumulate and invest the capital goods they each garnered in mutually productive enterprises. They had learned quickly how the stone business which supported the ongoing creation of huge basalt heads complemented very well the business of religious ritual and ceremony.

After Iztacocelotl had placed the three jaguar teeth in the hand of his cousin and took possession of the serpentine, he slowly intoned the ceremonial words of their exchange, "It is powerful magic that Pochtecatltetl brings this stone to me today because this is the day of my nagual, the Jaguar, and this piece of stone is already the shadow self of the Jaguar, my spirit animal."

He held the stone in both hands and breathed over its uneven surface several times before he continued, "The ax it will become already protects Pochtecatltetl who brings me the stone," and here Iztacocelotl paused to bow formally to his cousin, "and it sustains our people, the Xi, and the artisan Cochehuatetl who will awaken the stone, and the shaman Iztacocelotl who will wield it for the Xi. I speak it, and it is so."

Both men sealed their exchange by drinking bowls of steaming corn atole mixed with chocolate that Pochtecatltetl's servant brought in, and they discussed arrangements for more of this particular serpentine to be cut and delivered to Iztacocelotl before the end of the following month, Uayeb. Iztacocelotl pronounced the official contract between the two cousins and the schedule for delivery of more serpentine. "On this fourteenth day of Ix six days remain until the end of Cauac, then the five unlucky days of Uayeb, that is eleven days. Before the end of that time Pochtecatltetl will bring more of this stone to me, and I, Iztacocelotl, will give him three jaguar teeth. I speak it, and it is so."

The two men, successful merchants of interdependent commodities, utilized the coercive control of the shaman's hallucinatory voices and the innate psychological dexterity of the merchant's personal charisma to marshal and deploy the large groups of people willing and able to create the

Olmec culture of central public-ceremonial buildings built from adobe and mud with their quadrangular plazas and courtyards oriented along the north-south axis, elite residences, and outlying commoner housing in the many villages that controlled the vast flood plain area and the riverine trade routes of the Coatzacoalcos and Chiquito River basin.

Iztacocelotl was fortunate to have been born 1614 years after the beginning of the Fifth Sun during the high point in the Olmec culture when his psycho-spiritual acumen was welcomed, valued and encouraged by his father and the other powerful shamans of San Lorenzo's religious and ritualistic establishment. He was equally well-placed in time by being born 3157 years before the heralded arrival of Hernan Cortéz who would not have appreciated or tolerated Iztacocelotl's synchrony with the jaguar spirit's power over the fertility of the land, the rain, and the direction of Olmec religion and commerce.

On the other hand time was running out for the thirty-five year old Neolithic prelate. His momentary satisfaction at acquiring the prized piece of serpentine stone from his cousin would never compensate for his appropriately ironic death by jaguar a year later when his hubris and greed for more of the best serpentine drove him to hunt down another jaguar from which he hoped but failed to extract more teeth. The people assumed it was a message from his spirit animal that the Avatar of the Living and the Dead, *ocelotl* jaguar, left only Iztacocelotl's head as evidence of the outcome of the encounter. The shamans who prepared the ceremony for Iztacocelotl's funeral were delighted to be able to distribute his teeth among themselves as a humorous although gruesome reminder about the true nature of the power struggle between the gods and man.

In addition Iztacocelotl's prescience about the short-term benefits of his arrangements with his cousin Pochtecatl was too closely focused on business to distinguish the farther reaching consequences of the shaman's newly developed and disturbingly mysterious sense of awareness and

consciousness of himself as a man apart from everyone else. He and many previous generations of shamans and merchants had traveled the ceremonial and trade routes many days and months to the north, south, and even to the east, and they had seen and absorbed more of a shockingly larger world outside the inbred confines of the major settlements of the Olmec people -San Lorenzo and Potrero Nuevo at the headwaters of the Chiquito River, Tres Zapotes at the foot of the Tuxtla mountains to the northwest, and La Venta on the Tonalá River to the east. They had heard other voices, struggled with other languages, seen other shapes and colors of faces, smelled and touched other women, bowed to strangely familiar unknown gods, offered new rituals with other shamans. For Iztacocelotl and the other scouts of modern consciousness like him, the Olmecs were no longer "The People"; they were without doubt one of many other peoples to whom gods spoke and bestowed power through the spirit of nature.

Iztacocelotl had found himself starting to use familiar Olmec words but in odd ways to create in his conversations, prayers and ceremonies a newly imagined "space" "inside" of himself from which he had begun to excerpt events from his day, to replay word pictures of himself acting and responding, into which he could look back "within" himself at previous commercial and ritual interactions to reflect with his words on what had or had not happened. He had come to learn how to conciliate everything that had occurred and everything that he thought about what had occurred into a consistent and self-reinforcing model of Iztacocelotl himself living within an expandingly unfamiliar world around him.

People noticed the powerful change in him and in the others who would return from over the mountains, but no one was able to think of or say the right words to describe the change in them - a differentiated identity and powerful presence somehow distinct in them, apart and independent from the other Olmecs with whom he and the other pioneers of mind came in contact. It was that

catalyzation and ontogenetic bifurcation of the new reflexive consciousness within the shamans and merchants and then the attendant strengthening of their various individual talents, skills and leadership abilities that coruscated from person to person, family to family, clan to clan, and ultimately from settlement to settlement within the Olmec metropolitan area of La Venta, San Lorenzo and Tres Zapotes. Those nodes of self-awareness not only spread out to Monte Alban and the Valley of Oaxaca, into the central depression of Chiapas and along the Pacific coast, and into the highlands of Guatemala and El Salvador; but the new consciousness and advantage also emerged within the early unspecialized regional Olmec cultures of pre 1500 B.C. and drove the specialization and elaboration of the ancient patterns of Olmec culture into a true civilization that endured until its decadence and dissolution fifteen-hundred years later.

The increasing commercial exchanges of raw materials for religious rituals and the accompanying contact with other indigenous populations slowly but inexorably short circuited and then finally burned out the ability of Iztacocelotl and everyone else to hear the gods and spirits speaking directly; and in place of that exquisite mystical Eden-like bliss the shamans had learned gradually to take it upon themselves to speak and act for the gods by utilizing their dancing and rituals, the tobacco and lime juice, the peyote, the ceremonies and power objects, the intricately carved altars and huge heads of basalt, the seated warriors and children sculpted of jade, and the serpentine axes to remind the people of the spirits' and gods' voices that the people once heard in the place where now they were speaking into being the new "I," the mind, the inner and outer gods of their newly dichotomous world that once and for all would keep Iztacocelotl, his fellow Olmecs, contemporary Greeks, Egyptians, Mesopotamians and the hundreds of generations that followed permanently and irrevocably exiled from the garden of their Eden.

The next day when he entered Cochehuatetl's house to ask him to carve the serpentine for him, Iztacocelotl knew the transformation in the stone would be material, but he still understood more deeply than his nascent mind could ever begin to doubt that the stone was spirit, and the god it embodied would be liberated when the artisan let his own spirit guide the tools in his hands.

"Cochehuatetl...I come to you again," Iztacocelotl bowed and held out the piece of serpentine. "There is Jaguar spirit in this stone. I ask you to awaken it now, and when you free the spirit of my nagual from the stone, bring it to me. "

Cochehuatetl was a master of working with the stone spirit. He had spent the last twenty-eight of his thirty-two years gathering and working stone—emerald and bright green and translucent blue jade for figures and ornaments, brown and dark green serpentine for axes and celts, dark grey and black basalt for gigantic heads and columns, black and green obsidian for tools and figurines, dark grey ilmenite and iron black andesite for the mysterious concave mirrors- listening for the spirit of each kind and piece, laboring to find ways to release the spirits. He had made hundreds of stone axes and ceremonial celts for the shamans. They would place often hundreds of stone offerings usually in the shape of a cross in special pits with floors of colored clay or jaguar mosaics, and then the stone offerings would be covered with thick layers of vermilion cinnabar dust and buried as offerings to the spirits.

Cochehuatetl spent two days alone fasting, praying and selecting the hard smooth river stone hammers, collecting and cleaning the finest quartz river sand for grinding, then choosing and cutting the shark skin and deer hide for the final polishing. After he had prepared himself through his tools, he continued on into what would turn out to be forty-one days of arduous and unconscious hammering, meticulously focused chipping and flaking, repetitively finer and finer circling of grinding, and then finally endless circles of smoothing across the polished curved surface of the

untutored serpentine stone ax head into a slowly emerging incarnation of the shaman's jaguar spirit, the nagual that could transform Iztacocelotl into a Man-Jaguar and return him to the heavens and the underworld of undifferentiated mind, before such distinctions became evident, before human language could be wielded to imagine and invent a location in which those power- apportioning distinctions could reside.

After he finished his work, Cochehuatetl waited, rested and watched the ax two days until the twentieth day of Ahau, the day of the Lord of Power, an auspicious day to send word to Iztacocelotl that the jaguar spirit had been freed, that he could come any time to receive what was now his.

Cochehuatetl had made a thing of perfection. It was as if he had made a stone eagle's feather, curved on all sides, tapered on one end to a cleaving edge, smoothed and polished to invite the sun to reflect off the light green and brown flecks of magnesium silicate mixed into the darker stone matrix. Iztacocelotl received the ax from Cochehuatetl's hands, and he held the heavy object in his two hands for a long while as he softly began to intone his secret jaguar songs and breathe over the stone. His breath condensed on the surface of the green ax and then evaporated and disappeared into the cool air inside Cochehuatetl's hut much like the neoteric flare-ups of self-awareness that befell Iztacocelotl and the myriad other scouts of mindfulness who had already begun to exploit their alien consciousness with words wielded like serpentine axes meant to lure the rapidly fleeing gods back to their one ubiquitous sanctuary.

Iztacocelotl took particular private pleasure in the ax with the jaguar spirit. His fellow shamans commented privately to each other about its particularly rare color and the natural shape that allowed the spirit of the stone to be free; and they wondered out loud which quarry the stone had come from, how much he had exchanged for it, nodded their heads and murmured approvingly

when he told them who had made it for him. The people looked forward to Iztacocelotl's presence at the various ritual ceremonies for the gods of fire, rain, corn, and the feathered serpent, and at the jaguar earth god ceremonies where the shamans let blood and danced to the sound of cracking whips while they wore carved jade and wooden masks. All the people and the shamans believed that, in addition to his chanting, dancing, acrobatic contortions, and the powerful plants he ingested, one of the secret powers that permitted Iztacocelotl to transform himself into half-jaguar and half-man was the serpentine ax. Iztacocelotl kept it with him all the time, during the ceremonies of course, but also while sleeping, hunting, eating, all the time in the Jaguar skin sheath inside his woven bag along with his other powerful ritual objects.

Iztacocelotl had sponsored the ax's birth into a three-dimensional world of neolithic Olmec experience, and the stone ax had summoned Iztacocelotl more deeply into the timeless parallel world of the jaguar spirit. Iztacocelotl and the ax were empowered by their symbiotic relationship for the next eighteen months until 6 Cimi of Kayab when he was unexpectedly devoured by and transformed into his indisputable jaguar master. Iztacocelotl's two sons waited and mourned several days after their father's death until they stopped hearing his voice still commanding them. Then they began arguing, fighting over his servants and possessions, and the deceased shaman's youngest son, who had acquired his father's ambition but not his social skills, found the serpentine ax first, wielded it with unusual dexterity, surprised and killed his older brother with a skillful blow like jaguar incisors to the front of his brother's momentarily bewildered locus of consciousness.

Iztacocelotl's youngest son would later inculcate in the absorbent stone many other unprovoked acts of brutality, and the linguistic inability of the inexperienced and overprotected young man to synthesize in his embryonic mind a variety of alternate futures in which he could at will project and see himself surviving or perishing depending on the nature of his actions would

eventually hobble him and doom his own children to their father's fate. He was never able to discern the humbling fact that he was only the third owner of the serpentine ax, and that one-hundred and ten generations later when Charlie Palmerin would take possession of it, the ax would have passed from hand to hand and purpose to purpose through twenty-two subsequent generations of Iztacocelotl's offspring in San Lorenzo, the last seven generations of which had found more security in the new commerce than in the traditional religion.

After that change in the lineage of the stone ax, when the last of Iztacocelotl's descendants to possess it could no longer perceive the jaguar spirit in the ax or even the spirit of the stone in the stone, it was traded to one of the persuasive traveling merchants who regularly made the rounds from Tres Zapotes in the northwest south along the San Juan river villages of La Cañada, Laguna de Los Cerros, then inland to Cruz Del Milagro, Medias Aguas, Estero Rabón and then up the headwaters of the major trade way of the Coatzacoalcos River to the flattened hill where San Lorenzo overlooks the Chiquito River.

Along with his regular merchandise of jade, rough-cut pieces of serpentine, basalt, magnetite, pyrite and obsidian, chunks of amber, feathers, sea and turtle shells, coral, sacred birds, animal skins, rubber, salt, cocoa, cotton and other fibers, colored clays or clay rich in kaolin, and mineral pigments like hematite and cinnabar - the now long-forgotten merchant carried the captive ax back with him to his home, his family and the center of his business, Tres Zapotes. This flourishing Olmec settlement was located on the elevated right bank of a tributary of the Rio San Juan that flowed into a protected bay farther north along the coast where the abundance of wildlife in the sea and on the land drew families, clans, tribes and entrepreneurs to fish, hunt, and trade.

Although the trader maintained a growing independent business that flourished two-hundred kilometers in either direction along the coast, an enterprise that not only supported his extended

family but also cultivated in him, like Iztacocelotl before him, the metaphorical internal focus of awareness that his and everyone else's descendants would call the mind; in spite of the three-dimensional and the dimensionless distances he traversed in the thirty-seven years of his short life, he remembered no noble past, imagined no hypothetical future, and because of that he kept no records, gave no receipts. The serpentine ax would continue unpretentiously its three-thousand year hand-to-hand hegira from limbo to limbo, to Chinameca, Pilapan and Piedra Labrada on the coast, then northeast, village by village, century by century, along the huge bay to Roca Partida, El Meson and Cerro de Las Mesas and onward where La Antigua and Veracruz and Coatzacoalcos would later crown the colonial port cities of the Gulf with layer upon layer of imported and exported wealth, the gold leaf overlays of Old and New World cultures, religion, art, science, invention, and craftsmanship.

From the inarticulate murderous darkness into which Iztacocelotl's youngest had plunged it, through a thousand captive grey years of migrant anonymity from one hand to a hundred unthinking others, and then another thousand years of hieroglyphic and logosyllabic quickening in which the hands that wielded it obeyed a hundred more ideas of self, the serpentine stone ax finally thudded and settled into a consolation of cool deep earth along the shaded hillside slopes of towering Citlaltepētāl west of Huatusco where, on a foggy morning in November four-hundred and fifty-two years afterwards, Crispin Augustus de Ferrer Villareal, the father of León Gutierrez de Ferrer Villareal, the grandfather of Anita Palmerin, thrust his shovel into that same cool deep earth intending to plant another Arabica coffee bush but instead clunked metal unequivocally into stone. The object he at first cursed, then unearthed irritatedly with another leveraged upthrust of his shovel, was an ax, the same stone ax a frightened young Totonac warrior had used to split open the face of a confident young Spanish soldier on the march to Tlaxcala where his captain, Hernan Cortéz, and a few hundred conquistadors would rebuff Epifanio Mogote's Otomí ancestors

attacking at Tecoac, push on to conspire with Tlaxcalan allies, massacre the Cholultecas, then enter Tenochtitlan as the Sons of the Sun, the god, Quetzalcóatl, come back from across the sea to reclaim his throne from Motecuhzoma II.

The young Totonac warrior had dropped the serpentine ax when another Spanish soldier in line decapitated him with one powerful right-to-left slice of his Toledo blade. The ax and the head fell together to the leaf strewn ground between the headless Totonac and the faceless Conquistador, unseen by either the other attacking Totonacs plunging down the hill or the scores of slashing Spaniards calling out battle commands. The serpentine ax tumbled and stopped rolling, and then it pushed down its heavy mass, immediately beginning to disappear indiscernibly beneath the daily filter of flowers, leaves, twigs, and branches. By the time the forest canopy around Huatusco had budded, blossomed, and then let go of its shade cover four-hundred and fifty-two times, there was neither a trace nor a suggestion of the ax or the bones of the dead Totonacs or Spaniards because the New World earth that had covered them and everyone before them—Cochehuatetl, Iztacocelotl and his two sons and their descendants, the merchant and all his suppliers and customers, all Olmec, Otomí and Totonac natives, the Zapotecs, Mayas, and Aztecs who would be born and civilize after them, and all Spanish newcomers - that same one earth, New World Old World, holds on to its secrets, stays mute while it listens, waits.

Like Motecuhzoma waited too eagerly for Quetzalcóatl and like Cortéz didn't wait; like Cabeza de Vaca waited in vain for Spanish courts to vindicate him from his enemies' calumny until in 1556 he died in obscurity, shame and a conviction of failure; like Don Epifanio waited for the epiphany of the two-sided dream teacher in Charlie Palmerin; like Crispin Augustus de Ferrer Villareal waited fifteen years from the moment he stooped down to pick up the ax from its four-hundred and fifty-two year hibernation to entrust to his son, León Gutierrez de Ferrer Villareal,

who in turn waited for the return of his only daughter to Huatusco to relate his family's part in the story, and then to pass on the earth's secret to her and Charlie as that unexpected anniversary present during an earlier visit.

"It's a strange kind of gift, Charlie, it is... but you're a teacher..." the old man had said offhandedly. He gently set the deerskin bundle on the surface of the sideboard, and as he spoke, he slowly unwrapped the package to reveal the three-thousand-five-hundred-year-old dark green serpentine ax.

"I'm sure you'll know what to do with this old stone ax..."

Chapter 18 The Unfolding

"Where did you go, Daddy?"

Elvia looked up from her tight-tight-tight hug and waited for Charlie's reassurance. Don Epifanio had taken him for a test spin of thirty minutes or so by the clock, but it seemed an eternity for both Charlie and for Elvia and Hugo. The two children were busy with homework and drawing birds while their father was gone, so they hadn't had a chance or reason to worry although they were always happier and more content when Charlie or Anita was home. Don Epifanio had returned Charlie and the Honda to the house, but some cathartic chamber of Charlie's spiritual heart was still waiting to contract after taking in all that Don Epifanio had given him on their little spin in the Honda. It wasn't until he reached the front door of his house and remembered the bundle on the top shelf of his office that Charlie felt the energetic life force pulsing back around his body carrying with it the challenge and the purpose of the enigmatic objects which Don Epifanio had bestowed on him from one teacher to another.

"We just drove over to that new mini-mall to test the car, Honey..." Charlie reached down to hug his daughter and tousle her hair as he added, "We got to talking, you know...I hope you didn't get too nervous..."

Charlie spent the following three hours with his two children, preparing, enjoying, then cleaning up after dinner, checking homework for the following day, tidying the living room and kitchen, putting out breakfast, bedding down, hugs and kisses good-night, and then lights out and the final love-you-see-you-tomorrows. Charlie had avoided even going into his office before everyone had bedded down for the night; the deerskin bundle held too much that he had yet to understand or know how to think about. He knew he would need time alone to let Don Palmerin's

instructions about the papers, the ribbon, the incense and the *antigua* he could now visualize in the deerskin bundle coalesce into a three-dimensional relationship in his mind. When he finally closed the office door to insulate himself from the world outside, he took the bundle from the shelf and sat down with it in the darkness. He knew they would be there together a long time.

Charlie ran his hands gently over the leather surface of the bundle trying to allow his hands to sense the power that was wrapped inside. He hadn't looked at or touched the bundle since he put it up on the shelf the year before when they returned from Huatusco. He glanced at the clock and wondered if 9:15 p.m. could mean anything to the person who had tanned the deerskin hide or who had made the ax he knew awaited inside its leather covering.

Charlie turned his chair and picked up the large envelope that contained the papers, ribbon and incense from Don Epifanio. He slid the envelope under the deerskin bundle on his lap, let his attention return into the darkness, and then listened to the silence fill the room. Charlie waited, then unfolded the deerskin that was wrapped many times around the green serpentine stone now revealed on his lap. He ran his hand gently over the ancient smoothness and cold of the ax, and he let his fingers linger over the chipped diagonal gouge that interrupted the satiny burnished surface of the stone.

While his body was unconsciously levering its right hand over smooth layers of the ax's burnished history, Charlie Palmerin had no way of noticing in the dark that, without splashing or flailing about, he had submerged silently below the surface of the stone he was stroking, and without struggling he had suddenly, effortlessly and with the resplendent signiorage of all Olmec, Otomí, and Aztec shamans, merchants, artisans and common people, with the massing ascendancy of all native peoples, and with the prerogative and urgent press of Charlie and Anita's own people, he was unearthing the arcane purpose of the serpentine ax.

With the pedagogical authority of his edifying hands, Charlie was in fact summoning the unseen elements in the antigorite serpentine, the magnesium, iron, silicon, oxygen and hydrogen, galvanizing and marshaling the rogue and hungry electrons in the atoms of the stone itself, in the unread handwritten ledger of its historical record, in the surging and retreating of its people across the land. With the touch of his fingers' attention it was as if he was conjuring earth gnomes, water undines, air sylphs, fire salamanders, and angelic devas from all the mythological pantheons of gods, demigods and spirits to reveal from the mash and yeasted dough of chaos the gathering nodes of insight, the anions and cations of the this and the that of creation, the fractal and elegant unfolding not only of the history of his people, but also of the inner aim and outer trajectory Charlie would triangulate as he finally fled El Dorado High School, his students and colleagues, as he threw up his arms and turned his back reluctantly on the undoing of California and the cultural defeat of the new New World, skirmishes from the second conquest, as the serpentine lodestone pointed him back to Veracruz, back to Tenochtitlan, Motecuhzoma, Cortéz and Cabeza de Vaca, to the Valley of Mezquital, Tenango de Doria to be exact, back to Uriangato, his family's home, to the mother rain forest of Huatusco and Anita Villareal Palmerin's shade coffee, to the layered generations of riverside ruins at San Lorenzo, back through 142,000 Baktuns of the Fifth Sun, to the navel of Mesoamerica where the first flare-up of this saga erupted from the dream world of dark into a dream world of light, where it scintillated, spontaneous combustion, burned their minds, clenched their fists, spilled their genes, and it all swelled, burst forward and flowed out into a new reckoning, a new count.

Charlie Palmerin stroked the stone ax and began to let go of the perfidious hallucination of his differentiation from everyone and everything else. With effortless and natural ease, he ignored the persistent and self-reinforcing mantras of having emerged independently into the world of being from the nothing of nothingness. At the same time he stopped mentally depicting himself as a two-

dimensional Charlie Palmerin delineated by past and future and instead connected all the dots of place and time that the serpentine ax had absorbed in its three-thousand five-hundred-year history. Charlie did not know at the moment that he was awakening both the spirit of the stone and the spirit of the ax with the warmth and movement of his hands, human hands that conducted the wordless vigor and spirit of his humanity and compassion into the shaped serpentine. He did not know that the stone ax Cochehuatetl had created for his shaman master, Iztacocelotl, to embody and manifest the jaguar spirit, the same stone implement Charlie held and stroked in his lap, was in fact an ancient primitive battery, a paleolithic semiconductor, a stone age silicon microprocessor that had been fashioned purposefully to absorb and transmit the unseen but indisputably immense powers of the natural world.

The Olmec artisan, Cochehuatetl, and the shaman, Iztacocelotl, knew nothing of atoms and electrons, negative and positive polarity or electrical currents, but without knowing how the atomic and subatomic world functions, they had learned to utilize the stone to concentrate and wield power in the visible world of jungle, water, animals and people. Conscious men would very soon invent a metaphorical dividing line to distinguish between the spirit world and their own individual personal power. Iztacocelotl was one of those newly conscious men, most likely schizophrenic in his people's eyes, undoubtedly prophetic, preeminently powerful in the polarity of self and other that he and his fellow shamans and merchants, those fellow pioneers of mind, created in the new metaphorical worlds of their words and in the rituals and ritual objects of their hands some three-thousand and five-hundred years before Charlie Palmerin had come synchronistically into possession of the serpentine stone ax.

At the moment, however, his hand suddenly realized that it had stopped charging the stone, and Charlie was motionless now, not counting backwards or forwards by degrees or minutes or

seconds, hours, days, months, years, Baktuns, or lifetimes past present future, no longer reckoning his life by groups of five bars and dots carved in basalt. Everything now that Charlie felt but did not know and everything that he understood but did not say had, in the past several minutes, become absorbed, focused, and transmitted somehow through the stone, from the wordless unknown Mesoamerican past of his people certainly, but also somehow from an unspoken embryonic future to which Charlie now suddenly realized Anita had returned, to Huatusco, to anchor for herself, for him, for their children, a more traditional husbanding of their lives, a family way where their resources would be allocated to develop each one's inclinations and abilities and where each one could develop the assets in and around themselves to entertain, enlighten, educate and support each other.

If Charlie had not been pushed into that dark warmth of caramel skin and mahogany fragrance of a woman in the Amway line in Veracruz; if it had not been for this unexpected realization that Anita had now become the pioneer, not a pioneer of mind like Iztacocelotl and the others of his time, but a pioneer of a return to a less prodigal, less dissipative way of living; if after loving and tucking in his two dear children, whom he felt now on the other side of the office wall as the clearest multidimensional window of his presence to the future, he had not returned himself and his awareness to the silence in which all pasts, presents and futures coexist in mind; if Charlie had not taken the serpentine ax in his lap with the intention of creating the healing that an hour before the mechanic had told him he already knew how to do; if Charlie had not let the stone consolidate in the immediacy of its multidimensional presence all the electrophysiological fields of action, intention and will that he and Anita and everyone and everything that was in any way connected to them had ever created; and if Leon Gutierrez de Ferrer Villareal had not been one of history's thousands of torchbearers and handed off the ax to Charlie and Anita—Charlie never would be understanding that the urgency that now was causing his two hands to suddenly grab the stone ax from his lap,

stand up abruptly and heft the polished serpentine purposefully as if it were a tool and he had a job to do, as if it were a weapon now perhaps in a warrior's hands, and his right hand was abruptly lifting the ax high above his head, his left hand stretching out to stave off the enemy's advance somehow, striking with all the accumulated tension of his body's history so that when his motionless hand brought down the ax, he was killing the fear he once thought would paralyze him, destroying the guilt he could no longer feel, and slashing open three-thousand and five-hundred years of his people's grief and sorrow that the tears now welling in his eyes and flooding his moment of victory were now washing, soothing, baptizing in the name of all the fathers, all the sons, and all the holy spirits, in the name of the eight Nahuatlaca tribes, of Motecuhzoma II and the Aztecs, in the name of the Olmecs and Otomís and all native peoples living and dead, in the name of teachers and students everywhere, his esteemed colleagues and pupils at El Dorado High School, in the name of all Palmerins and the Villareals past present and to come, and in the name of everything both sacred and profane that ever existed and that is yet to live. Charlie's hand held the ax high above his head as he let the warm tears of his people run uncontrollably down his face and life, everything overflowing in the name of Charlie Palmerin.

Two years later in Huatusco when he looked back north in his mind, Charlie could not remember how he had stopped crying that night or when, if ever, he had actually finally lowered the stone ax and returned it to the deerskin spirit of its wrapping. Nor would he be able to catch his visual breath sufficiently to differentiate between the hundreds of images, legato impressions that sparkled arpeggio-like across his visual field, some just fragments, feelings, contours or outlines, full color and black and white snapshots, both familiar and strange, poignant, painful, bittersweet recollections, but all prophetic in summation of what had been and would be in Charlie and his people.

He swam with the inner eyes of his eternity through gathering movements of native people swarming across the lands; the smallest camps of incestuous mobs, teams opposing, extended families scrounging; scattered settlements and villages digging for water; riverine civilizations rising and falling on the tide of a leader's will and fate; the arrival and buffaloed demise of the horse cultures, the simple majesty and sublime auction prices of its trappings, forced marches to barren, alcoholic and uranium reserves; a pestilence of top-heavy SUV's crisscrossing the frontier like pregnant Trojan horses; the miniaturized plague of cellular inanity in cute, designer colors; and Internet designed especially for Hispanics when you buy the easy-to-operate generic computer on Galavision. Charlie saw big screen TV's for brains, Mpeg and CD commanders instructing the next generation of high school graduate fast food workers through buzzing microphones; he saw the onslaught of clever and humorous belly button movies hypnotizing witless girls to lower their pants in front of their delighted parents and rutting boyfriends.

It was as if Charlie reached down and touched the wake and spoor of his people spreading out across the land, where they started, Utah and Colorado, San Lorenzo, Tres Zapotes and La Venta, how they became an eternal shadow of the jungle, the river, the sea, the animals and the minerals there, the first constitution of the people. He saw them crossing the nearest mountains trading this for that, saw them start to see, begin to think, imagine a mind, turn deaf to the gods. He saw the mixing then, clan with clan, Olmec, Otomí, Maya, Aztec, Spaniard, Mestizo, Gringo, Spanglish, Tex-Mex music, California-Mex food, bicultural marriages and children. He saw all people mixed and unmixed crowding, waiting bumper-to-bumper at red lights and Carl's Junior, jamming to commute from brightly muraled, value-added, packaged salad factories and back again to the newest minimum clearance subdivisions, luxury cathedral ceiling homes and sweat equity affordable housing that devour fields of alfalfa, corn, oats, wheat, the staff of life..

Charlie passed strip malls cloned like obedient sequences of genes on a droid's chromosome, Western Union and OrlandoValuti sending money south, cashing checks, advancing more until the next paycheck, he saw vast asphalt acres of impossible Wall Mart and Costco parking lots in the Golden State, Everything's A Dollar and 99 Cent stores, land of plenty, Eden, he saw everything available in the new Aztlán. He saw aisle after aisle, shelf upon shelf, iteration upon iteration of everything everywhere there, plastic, glass, paper, cardboard, plaster, metal, animal, vegetable, mineral, hundreds of thousands of millions, hour upon hour of work and television, dollars earned, others' dollars borrowed, spent, bankruptcy without shame. He saw progress obeying no limits, no one looking where the highway split, left the new Aztlán hollow, without good credit, without teachers, without will or skill to study the way behind and ahead, wondering, pointing at the distance where others just here before had taken it away.

Charlie stood agape before hundreds of thousands of sunrise sunsets crystallizing forgotten and laboriously endless hierarchies of priests, shamans, merchants, money lenders, kings, artists; saw them making, leading, controlling, saw Quetzalcóatl, Motecuhzoma, Cortéz, de Vaca, Juarez, Díaz, Zapata, Chavez, Subcomandante Marcos, Rufino, Rivera, Marquez, Anaya, the brothers Zedillo, Enrique Camarena, Fox. He saw them writing their histories, painting their murals, building their skyscrapers, selling their commodities, taking their cut, bribing their way, giving their nod, wasting no time to enrich themselves, bodyguards and mansions on the mountaintop.

Then Charlie Palmerin heard the voices, voiceless voices, landless, forgotten, relegated voices, chanting voices, screaming, silenced, native voices, pre-Colombian, post-Colombian, sword point Christians, sword point victims, left behind without their kings, their priests, without their gods; Charlie saw them left behind to find their way without the voices saying how and what to

plant, when to harvest, when to rest and pray, why do anything at all when life is so immense and the drama in the sky so incredible?

From the dark harbor of his eidetic pilgrimage Charlie listened to angry voices from the shadowy incest of his people's muted rage. Disarmed men driven from ancestral lands, forced to watch their fathers murdered and dismembered, their mothers raped time and time again, lash out, cry out the only way they can, God damn all of you to Hell forever! Charlie heard those children, all children, we, I am abandoned, left cold and alone in this place that is not my home! Where is my father to protect me!... my mother to love me! He heard the mothers asking, Where is the food for our children? the fathers asking, Where is the work for me? And when they heard the silent answer, there is no food or work or protection or love for you people! Charlie heard their hearts wailing and their spirits roaring out again, finally again, hopelessly again, God damn all of you to Hell forever!

Charlie heard the quiet lamentations of seventy and eighty-year-old men with folded paper title to their fathers' lands, he heard their sons' indifference to the land, listened as they pleaded to sell the land to multinational electronics, strawberry, tennis shoe, and counterfeit fashion corporations, better to buy a three bedroom two bath in Los Banos, Modesto, Tracy. Charlie heard the old men curse the Revolution, the PRI, and the North American Free Trade Agreement. And then Charlie heard a sound traveling through time and space from almost a century ago, a strong sound from the Puebla mountains around Zapata's camp, heard men inking their names to the Plan of Ayala, first, Emiliano himself, General in Chief, then Emiliano's own generals scratched their names down—Eufemio Zapata, Francisco Mendoza, Jesus Morales, Jesus Navarro, Otilio E. Montaña, Trinidad Ruiz, Próculo Capistrán, then Emiliano's thirty-one colonels stepped up to write their names with hopeful ink. Charlie heard gunshots, then their shouts, Land and Freedom!... Whoever works the land owns the land, my general! Then Charlie was at first surprised, then not

surprised, to hear women, Chol, Tzotsil and Tzeltal women from San Cristobal de Las Casas, Tuxtla Gutierrez, San Andres, hear them firing twelve-gauge sawed offs, M-1 carbines, and pistols into the distance, then he saw the women and men of The Indigenous Clandestine Revolutionary Committee of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, he heard the women commanding by their own authority, We are the product of five hundred years of struggle, against slavery by the Spaniards, slavery by the politicians, slavery by our own men...and Charlie saw the links of Subcomandante Marcos' hypertext press releases, so he clicked on the blue underlined phrases and then read what the masked Zapatista had been saying, that if there be a future, it will be won with the women of the revolution... no... it will be won by the women of the revolution.

Yes... Charlie thought to himself, it will be the women, like my women, like my mother, Rosalinda, and Anita, and our Elvia someday.

But Charlie shivered as he saw a kaleidoscope of darker images crowd his view, pictures of women he couldn't keep out, women beaten by quick-tempered and peevish macho men who never learned the strength of giving. Independent women shot by controlling ex-boyfriends they were smart enough but paid too high a price to leave. Pregnant young women who never knew any men who weren't high pressure manipulators. Unmarried teenage mothers who never left home for more than that night now living with their divorced mothers. Pre-teen girls coerced, fondled and penetrated by their uncles. Adolescent women getting alcohol and barbiturates pumped from their stomachs. Party time, wasted women. The sins of the fathers are visited upon their daughters, he heard the prophet repeat.

Charlie tried slowly to shake off the unexpected miasma of depredation, the real scenes of tragedy from the second conquest that had gradually been inciting him to abandon all hope for the brutish and self-centered men of his culture. He began to think of other women, strong women like

his women, Rosalinda, Anita, and Elvia, all wonderful giving women, he knew that, and the other women from all walks of life he would never meet, women surrounded by life, at the center of life, themselves a hidden life. Bilingual professional women, he could see them in his mind's eye, pediatricians and gynecologists, nurses and home health care aides, early diabetes and AIDS community outreach workers, hospital and hospice volunteers, librarians and teachers, school drug and alcohol resource specialists, childhood education and child care specialists, board of education members, local assembly women and mayors, mothers and grandmothers, aunts and sisters. Charlie had worked side by side with these unassuming women, knew these women by name, altruistic women who give generously of their spirits and time to improve the lives of so many individual human beings, alleviate their suffering, help them pass from life with ease and dignity. This is so unlike the many men he had met, seen and worked with who were in more ways than one the smug bastard children of Hernan Cortéz, inheritors of the worst of the conquistador hubris, use subterfuge to take whatever it is you want without asking, destroy the good you don't recognize, supplant the horror of your own cruel domination, attack and kill what you don't understand but fear.

Charlie suddenly remembered the untimely passing of Cesar Chavez, the last perhaps in that extraordinary multicultural line of prophetic activists of peace who blossomed from the spirit, heart and mind of the Mahatma, Mohandas K. Gandhi. Charlie felt deeply a flood of compassion and grief for Chavez, for Martin Luther King Junior, Dorothy Day, Peter Maurin and the Catholic Worker movement, and today, for Chavez' son-in-law, Arturo Rodriguez and the United Farm Workers, and for the many other men and women who struggle daily for peace by working for justice in the workplace and in society and who fight back with the psychological aikido of non-violent resistance.

Who is there now, Charlie stared into the luminous red eyes, 11:27, that highlighted the darkness, who is there to even recognize that a minimum wage food service job is not justice? The social problems plaguing our communities, complacency and poverty, cycles of abuse, the contagion of ignorance, lack of support for all levels of education, and the endemic delusion of past splendor, this social mayhem can only be resolved, Charlie answered himself, with the potential perspectives of the young men and women who are now tragically inured to developing their minds and skills. No one cries out now, Charlie ached, to protest injustice or discrimination, they just cry out to protest what they think is too much work, too many challenges from all the opportunities they have, the difficulty of study, the mental challenge of writing, learning and thinking. Now that those wise and brave fathers and mothers from the past generations won these rights for us, the young people are too lazy and indifferent to strive to achieve anything productive and lasting for themselves or for their families and communities. No wonder Chavez passed away so prematurely, Charlie bemoaned...there is no struggle for justice in the United States anymore, only the invisible battle to maintain your spiritual direction in a land of plenty. Charlie recalled the small coffee cooperatives in Mexico and other underdeveloped countries where present day peasants continue their struggle to make a living and at the same time husband the land so that it continues producing health and profits for the entire ecosystem far into the distant future. Because of their foresight and effort many later generations will enjoy and appreciate their own daily struggles to make a living and to preserve a way of life that is sound, dependable and enriching.

And then myriad amorphous faces of astute and gifted students who had passed through Charlie's classes flooded across the history of his awareness, not just the snapshot images of their faces or the letters of their names, for after a year a teacher deletes names and disassociates them from faces to make way for the next new batch; but more the subtle qualities of their inclinations

and nature, their physical presence and body space remained in his memory like the core of a volcanic mountain resists erosion over the years.

The way Teresa said excitedly that Charlie's classroom discussion about how a God of mercy or of justice could manage the details of reward and punishment coincided with her own thinking lately, and that the discussion and reading had helped and stimulated her ideas, and thank you, Mr. Palmerin.

How Jorge would always have a smile and a good word on his face when he entered the classroom, how he could enjoy anyone's humor or joke, and how he could return immediately to the more serious work at hand, semi-colons, paragraph structure, powerful topic sentences, the change of voice in an essay, I'm going to be an architect, Mr. Palmerin.

The quiet joy in José when, within a period of a week, he shed his uncommunicative and unproductive Special Education behavior, bloomed like a Christmas cactus, and started writing complete essays, speaking with Charlie about assignments and due dates, reveling in his A grade, and absorbing with a slight smile Charlie's well-deserved positive reinforcement at every personal contact.

Joanna who walks into class with the beautiful swagger of a man and who reveals her strength and perception in bold script written with silver or bronze gel pens, fat lines that reveal her analysis of life, her fearless plans for college and career, a clarity and definition in life that her letters and words illuminate like a medieval psalter.

And then there is Gonzalo who's mantra was, *I don't know what to do*, until after three months Charlie wore him down with, *Well, what do you think you have to do?* or *I know you don't know what to do, but if on the slight chance you did know what you were supposed to be doing now, what do you think you would be doing?* and he finally got tired of his little word game, threw off the fetters of no breakfast except

McDonalds, no psychological support from parents or adults, no ride to school, no place to do homework, no one reading and talking to him at home, and no other teacher taking the time to challenge his self-assumed façade of stupidity, and he erupted from one day to the next like a dormant volcano, finishing every assignment ahead of time, asking if he could go ahead to the next part before the rest of the class, and pushing his work under Charlie's nose so that someone could acknowledge finally that Gonzalo does have ideas, Gonzalo does think and write, Gonzalo is a man to be reckoned with.

And Rosario, Jesus and David, humble and quiet like the patience of their people in Oaxaca, they fight over who will get the next Anaya or Márquez book that Mr. Palmerin holds up and recommends as an exciting and thought-provoking work, and they fight not to reconquer anything, but because now they are thirsty and hungry for the light and fire they see in Charlie's brown eyes, the light no one in their house, no one in their family, no one in their neighborhood, and no one else in the class could even imagine or know about, only Mr. Palmerin, and he says the authors put the fire and light into the words, and they want it.

His students always brought him back to reality, and Charlie's weary body flopped down into the reality of his chair as he realized once more that he was in his office again where he had started his alchemical journey several hours ago. He looked down to see his two hands still grasping the serpentine stone ax on his lap now, and wiggling his fingers, he looked around to rediscover the darkness around him again, a lightless darkness, an unlit dimension that was now beating with the pulse of all the dimensions and times of his relatively short but resonant life, a life opened up, revealed somehow through the stone ax. Charlie would never read or understand the *magnum opus* of the serpentine ax, but in the transcendent unfolding of layers of history within himself, Charlie touched and understood the where, the when, and the why of what drove his people on and on,

what finally brought them to such an untenable and precarious situation, from the slaughter of the first conquest to the victorious aftermath of the second conquest, the catastrophic denouement where they are the conquerors now, and although they will never understand it, they are the vanquished.

Charlie sighed deeply as a victorious warrior surveys the grotesque carnage of both winners and losers layering the battlefield. He looked down on the floor around him to find the envelope Don Epifanio had given him. He pinched open the clasp and took out the stack of papers the mechanic had said would provide healing and balance to him. It was and it wasn't Charlie's scissors that sliced methodically through the two heavy white sheets with the silvered backs to create the forms of a woman and a man. And it was much more than the mere scissoring motion of his thumb, index and middle fingers that cut out from the mix and undifferentiation of the dark colored bark paper what might have been the figures of a boy and girl. In the darkness of the small room no one could see but Charlie how he folded and unfolded, placed the bark paper cutouts of the boy and girl between the white sides of the paper man and woman. Charlie ran the thin ribbon through the blessing of his fingers before he wrapped it several times around the four paper figures, bound them all together, the way they were supposed to be—outside the silver armor of the paper deflecting the stone axes, blinding the Toledo swordsmen, lighting up the bankruptcy of the dark times. He knotted the ribbon tightly as his commitment to Anita, forever into the far far future when some other man, some other woman, some other teacher might possibly recall, might possibly relive through the inarticulable and powerful agency of the serpentine ax the mystery of a few more precious moments of eternity moving and rising somehow like they were through Charlie now.

Charlie got up and placed the paper bundle of his family on the desk. On top of Anita, Hugo, Elvia and himself he gently put down the serpentine stone ax where it now seemed it would

belong for as long as the four of them would be family, that is, another thousand years forever.

Charlie remembered the paper cup, the cup of Anita that had been his beginning catechism text for understanding and healing. It was there on his desk among the clutter of pens, pencils, dictionaries, stacks of papers, notes to himself. He lifted the stone, set the paper cup on the paper family, and replaced the stone on top of everything. Charlie felt around for the book of matches he knew was there on a shelf, and when he found them, he struck the primal fire and lit the stub of incense whose smoke began rising up to a dream of gods with the steadfast intentions of Don Epifanio's fingerprints and Charlie's devotion. Charlie watched the wisps of smoke melting into the darkness, and as he smelled the musky sweetness of the copal dried and ground into burning incense, he grasped the end of the tiny burning stick with his fingertips, and he purified the glowing orange ember first slowly to the heavens, then to the earth, then to the direction of the sunrise, and finally to the sunset.

A finger of warm grey ashes fell suddenly from the quickly disappearing stick of incense onto the burnished surface of the stone ax and slid off onto the silvered paper image of Anita. This was not the public ritual of an Aztec king to appease Huitzilopochtli, the Giver of Life, and it was not the collective ceremony of an Olmec king to consolidate political control. There was no one there to see the secluded healing ceremony, no one to hear Charlie's prayer, no one to know if his gestures and incantation might have been, "In the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..." or if the four cardinal points of the burning cross he etched into the three sacred dimensions of the small office were a map, ritual compass bearings to show his people the shaman's way from the steady Polestar south, and from the hopeful rising sun west, the anagogic map he would carry in him until his last days as he followed Anita, returned finally to her there in Veracruz, to Huatusco, where his people had awakened from the dream of jungle darkness into a dim dream of awareness tens of thousands of years ago, and where in two months Charlie Palmerin and his two

children would abandon the angry lemming darkness of the second conquest for the ageless and soothing shade cover of the rain forest, the ancient broadening wash of the large river deltas which in time would welcome their own individual deaths, ultimate disintegration into atoms, and quiet passing from all memory.

Index

- a place of metals 84
- Accord12, 24, 27, 46, 83, 101, 104
- AIDS.....56, 119
- Alvaro Obregon 22
- Amway..... 25, 26, 27, 68, 73, 116
- antigua*..... 104, 105, 114
- Antonio Marez 10
- Ants** 77
- aphrodisiac 27
- apprentice..... 65
- atole* 19, 91, 108
- Avila Camacho 53
- Ax**.....1, 107
- Axayacatl 35, 42
- Azcapotzalco..... 41
- Aztec . 35, 37, 39, 42, 43, 44, 47, 48, 50, 62, 76,
97, 115, 118, 123
- Aztecs 38, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 50, 62,
66, 97, 113, 117
- Aztlán 37, 46, 47, 48, 50, 54, 66, 76, 79, 86, 97,
105, 118, 129
- Bajío of Zamora.....51
- Bakersfield61
- Baktuns 115, 116
- battery..... 84, 116
- Beaumont.....61
- Bilingual 119
- 'Bless Me, Ultima'10
- bracero 52, 54, 56, 58, 129
- brujos.....65
- Cabeza de Vaca... 10, 11, 13, 15, 18, 46, 47, 65,
66, 113, 115, 129
- cacao51
- cactus.....39, 42, 121
- cajeta..... 22, 23
- Caldo de Siete Mares*60
- California 11, 12, 18, 32, 44, 49, 52, 54, 56, 57,
74, 85, 94, 99, 115, 118, 130
- canyon 45, 48
- Canyon de Chelly..... 48, 97
- Captain Pánfilo de Narváez*18
- Carlos Castaneda65, 66, 129

<i>carnal</i>	4, 7	coffee	
Catholicism	11, 15, 20	organic coffee .	25, 27, 28, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34,
Celaya.....	22	35, 46, 50, 51, 68, 70, 72, 73, 74, 75, 80,	
Cempoala.....	38, 42	87, 91, 92, 93, 99, 105, 112, 115, 120, 129	
cenotes.....	90	cognitive.....	35, 37, 62, 65, 76, 90
Central Pacific.....	54	Cohaumacotzin.....	36
Chalco.....	42, 44	Colhuacan	47, 48, 49, 50
Chiapas	31, 50, 109	Colmo del Rodeo parade.....	3
Chichimeco Jonaz	20	Colorado	47, 48, 117
Chicomotzoc	49	comadres and compadres.....	21
children....	22, 24, 30, 41, 53, 54, 55, 60, 62, 67,	<i>comales</i>	19
69, 71, 76, 79, 82, 86, 93, 96, 99, 100, 103,		comets	39, 40
104, 105, 109, 111, 114, 116, 118, 120, 123		compassionate power.....	37
Chiquito River	108, 109, 112	<i>conchas</i>	61
chocolate	6, 23, 108	conquistador.....	10, 66, 120
Cholhua'	48	Conquistadores	85
churro	21	<i>Conquistadors</i>	18, 42, 43, 50
Citlaltepētāl	41, 112	consciousness....	10, 44, 95, 102, 108, 109, 111,
cliff	45, 48	130	
cliffs.....	45, 46, 47, 48, 50, 54, 97	<i>consommé</i>	31
<i>Coatepec</i>	91	Continental Divide.....	50
Coatzacoalcos and Chiquito River basin....	108	<i>corridos</i>	57
<i>cocos</i>	61	cotton	19, 21, 58, 112
<i>Coctél de Camarón</i>	60	Coyoacan	42

Crown Victoria.....	2, 3, 5, 6, 7	Egyptians	110
Cuitlahuac.....	42	ejidos.....	52, 130
Culhuacan.....	41	El Centro	61
cup.....	25, 28, 87, 92, 93, 94, 97, 103, 105, 122	El Dorado High School.....	9, 10, 55, 115, 117
<i>curandero</i>	17, 65, 84, 97	El Norte	50
cutting out the hearts of living victims	39	El Paso	53, 57, 58, 101, 102
dancer.....	26, 27	El Salvador	109
darkness...5, 63, 68, 82, 90, 101, 102, 103, 104, 107, 112, 114, 120, 122, 123		El Tigre	18, 20
<i>Day of the Dead</i>	91	Empalme.....	58
deerskin bundle	106, 113, 114	Emperor Itzcoatl	48
dementia	56	epidemics	51
depressed.....	63, 65, 66, 67, 68	eruption.....	49, 76
Depression of 1929 and 1930	52	<i>Ferrocarriles Nacionales de México</i>	53
Detroit	54	fertilizer	30, 31
diadem	39, 42	Fifth and last Sun, Ollin Tonatiuh	101
Don Juan	28, 65, 66, 67, 68, 129	first Toltec king, Amcamapichtli	42
dream	45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 97, 101, 102, 105, 113, 115, 122, 123	forests	31, 34, 71
dreams.....	44, 46, 92, 97, 98, 102	Francisco "Pancho" Villa	22
Eagle Men	39	French Roast.....	25
eagles.....	54, 62, 85	<i>gabacho</i>	3, 59
Eagles	50	Gabilan mountain.....	77
earthquakes	19, 49	Gandhi	120
		Gang.....	3
		gangs.....	3, 5, 67

Gila Cliff Dwellings	50	Hernan Cortéz	41, 42, 108, 113, 120
<i>Ginko biloba</i>	78	heroin	56
Glendale	61	<i>herons</i>	45, 46, 47, 54, 76, 97
gold.....	15, 18, 38, 42, 50, 51, 62, 94, 107, 112	Hidalgo.....	19, 84
Gold Country	79	Hollister.....	67
Grand Emperor of all Aztec Mejicas	35	homosexual.....	56
Great Northern Pacific	54	Honda.....	77, 81, 83, 87, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 104, 114
gringo	59, 60	Hopi.....	48, 49, 50
<i>gringos</i>	24, 30, 32, 46, 60	hops	54, 58
<i>Guanajuato</i>	24, 25, 44, 50, 51, 54, 55, 85	Hospital Angeles de Pedregal	56
Guatemala	109	<i>huachinango</i>	27
Guaymas.....	58	Huatusco.....	27, 30, 32, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 79, 86, 91, 92, 105, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 123
guitarist	26	Huitzilopochtli	39, 40, 41, 101, 123
<i>guitarra de son</i>	26	Huitzilopochtli, the Giver of Life	39, 123
Gulf of Mexico.....	27, 33	human remains.....	48
gun.....	1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 22, 23	hunting	57, 58, 111
Gutierrez Zamora	30, 31	hypnogogic	44
hacienda.....	51, 52, 66	ignorance... 11, 37, 62, 63, 68, 95, 99, 100, 103, 120	
hallucinatory.....	108	Ilhuicamina	35
harp	26	immigration	52, 129
harquebuses	42		
<i>hechando pegue</i>	61		
hegira.....	112		
Hernán Cortés	36		

Immigration Act of 1917	52	<i>limonada</i>	26, 30, 31
Indians	14, 15	literature	68
<i>indio</i>	85	Lodi	58
Irapuato	53	Los Angeles	3, 52, 53, 55
Ixtlilxochitl	36	<i>los estados unidos</i>	30
Iztaccihuatl	40	magic	10, 37, 39, 41, 90, 92, 93, 97, 107
jade	39, 97, 109, 110, 111, 112	magic staffs	39, 41
jaguar	39, 107, 108, 110, 111, 112, 115	<i>maíz</i>	19
Jaguar	107, 110, 111	<i>malecón</i>	27
Jalapa	27, 72	Manantlán	31
<i>jarana</i>	26	manipulation	9, 107
<i>joto</i>	56	Maravilla	3
Juvenile Hall	6	<i>maricones</i>	56
Kansas	54	marijuana	1
King Nezahualpilli	36	Marquez	118
Korea	56	Masters	30
LA	3, 18, 56, 60	Maya	101, 104, 118
La Antigua	36, 40, 112	meat packing	52, 54
La Bamba	27	mechanical	24, 83
labor contractors	53, 58	Mejica	35, 39, 42, 44, 50, 62, 65, 76, 98
Lake Powell	47	<i>merienda</i>	31, 73
Lazaro Cárdenas	53	<i>mesa</i>	45, 46, 47
legends	48	mesas	54
<i>limón</i>	6, 27	Mesopotamians	110

Mestizo-Mejicanos	50	NAFTA.....	27, 32
Mestizos.....	35, 51	nagual	107, 110
Mexican Central Railroad.....	57	Nahua	84, 101
Mexico 6, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 18, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27, 32, 33, 38, 46, 47, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 56, 57, 62, 66, 74, 75, 85, 86, 91, 93, 100, 101, 120, 129, 130, 131		Nahuatlaca	46, 47, 49, 50, 54, 117
Michigan.....	52	Nahuatlacas	47, 48, 79
<i>Michoacan</i>	24, 50, 51, 54	native people	18, 51, 117
microprocessor.....	116	Nauchampateptl.....	40
<i>milpas</i>	31	Nogales	53, 58
mindfulness.....	111	Norteña	24
mirror.....	9, 42	Norteño.....	3, 4
missions	51	North America.....	13, 14, 66
Moki.....	48	Northern Pacific	54
Monterey Institute of International Studies .	32	<i>novios</i>	21
Morelia.....	57, 58	Nuestra Familia.....	4
Moroleón.....	25, 57	Oaxaca.....	50, 109, 121
Motecuhzoma ..	35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 47, 48, 62, 66, 67, 113, 115, 117, 118, 129	obituaries.....	54
mother-of-pearl	38	obsidian.....	42, 104, 110, 112
motors.....	83, 84, 85	<i>ojo de agua</i>	19, 22
mythical snake hero, Tiyo.....	48	Olmec..	107, 108, 109, 111, 112, 113, 115, 116, 117, 123, 130
		Omaha.....	54
		omens	39, 40
		Oregon	54

Otomí 84, 85, 99, 100, 101, 104, 113, 115, 118, 130	Querétero.....22, 51, 53
Oxnard..... 58	quetzal feathers38
pachuco 3	Quetzalcóatl.....36, 37, 38, 40, 41, 62, 101, 113, 118
<i>panadería</i> 61	quicksand 45, 46, 48, 54, 97
paper 1, 6, 13, 15, 23, 28, 42, 72, 73, 83, 87, 89, 90, 92, 93, 94, 97, 99, 100, 101, 103, 105, 118, 119, 122, 123, 130	railroads..... 51, 52, 53, 129
<i>Parque Nacional</i> 30	<i>raza</i> 46, 86
People of the Willows 50	Redlands.....61
pesticide.....30, 31	responsibility10, 16, 56, 57, 70, 72, 91, 107
peyote.....42, 109	ribbon..... 103, 104, 105, 114, 122
Popocatépetl 40	Rio Grande River.....50
popsicle salesmen	Rivera.....15, 16, 118
paletero..... 6	Rodolfo Anaya10
Porfirio Díaz 51	Rufino..... 118
Portland53, 105	Sacramento 53, 57, 58, 79
pre-Colombian..... 48, 50, 118	saint..... 63, 104
Pre-Colombian65, 66	<i>sala</i>20, 21, 57
<i>prensas</i> 19, 22	Salinas..... 3, 10, 12, 24, 58, 74, 77, 82, 85, 99
priests.....39, 118	Salinas Valley..... 58, 77
prophecy 39	Salt Lake City.....53
Purépecha..... 51	San Bernardino53
pyramid..... 39, 44, 76	San Francisco 28, 105
	San Joaquin Valley..... 53, 58
	San Jose airport.....79

San Juan.....	47, 48, 112	Spider Woman	48
San Quentin	4	students .	6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 28, 29, 35, 37, 38, 44, 55, 62, 63, 64, 67, 68, 69, 88, 89, 90, 100, 115, 117, 120, 121
Santa Barbara.....	53	suffering	68, 70, 74, 103, 120
Santa Paula.....	58, 59, 61, 85	Sureño	4
schizophrenic.....	116	syphilis.....	71
semiconductor	116	taggers	5
Serpentine	1, 107	<i>taquería</i>	59, 60
Seven Caves or Canyons	49	Tarasco.....	101
Seven Luminarias	40	<i>teacher</i>	9, 15, 16, 18, 28, 37, 44, 55, 59, 63, 65, 72, 77, 89, 100, 101, 102, 103, 113, 114, 120, 121, 122, 130
shade	27, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 46, 66, 70, 105, 113, 115, 123	Tecocoltzin.....	36
shaman.	103, 107, 108, 110, 111, 115, 116, 123	Tehuantepec	107
shell	27, 39	<i>Teléfonos</i>	32, 34, 74
skirmishes from the second conquest.....	115	Tenango de Doria.....	84, 96, 99, 115
slaves	39, 40, 42, 51	Tenoch	41
snake	48, 70, 71, 92	Tenochtitlan .	40, 42, 45, 46, 47, 48, 50, 66, 76, 113, 115
snake-antelope clans	48	Tenochtitlán	35, 66
<i>Sol Trece</i> barrio.....	56	Tepehua.....	84
<i>Son Jarocho</i>	26	Texcoco.....	36, 40, 41, 42
Sonora.....	58	Tezcatlipoca.....	101
Sons of the Sun	36, 38, 39, 40, 41, 113		
sorcerers	65, 66		
sortilege.....	105		
Southern Pacific Railroad	53		

the Ancestral People.....	50	Toledo blade.....	113
The Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroads	53	Toledo steel swords.....	42
The Catholic Church.....	101	Tonantzin.....	101
The Dog Suckers.....	50	tools.....	52, 84, 96, 110
the Fifth Sun.....	108, 115	topoglyph.....	47
the Fishnet people.....	50	tortillas.....	19, 20, 21, 22, 27, 56, 57, 72
The Mexican Mafia.....	4	Totonac.....	84, 112, 113
The Mexican Revolution.....	52	<i>Trato de Libre Comercio</i> ,.....	30
the People of Jadeite.....	50	Tres Zapotes.....	109, 112, 117
the People of the Flower Fields.....	50	Tucson.....	53
The People of the Winding Plants.....	50	turquoise.....	38
The Revolution.....	18	Tuxtla.....	109, 119
The Santa Fe Railway.....	54	UC Monterey Bay.....	32
The Stone Wall People.....	50	unemployment.....	50, 52
The White House.....	48	United States.....	11, 33, 51, 52, 57, 62, 66, 88, 100, 102, 120
Tlacaelel.....	39	Uriangato.....	18, 19, 22, 25, 55, 56, 57, 58, 85, 115
Tlacteacan, House of Authority.....	39	Utah.....	47, 54, 117, 130
Tlacopan.....	36, 42	Valley of Mezquital.....	84, 96, 99, 115
Tlahuicas.....	42	Veracruz	24, 25, 27, 28, 30, 32, 33, 34, 36, 44, 46, 66, 68, 71, 72, 74, 75, 76, 79, 80, 86, 87, 90, 99, 103, 112, 115, 116, 123
Tlatelolco.....	42, 44	vernal pools.....	94, 95, 130
Tlaxcala.....	40, 44, 113	Vicente Fernandez.....	61
Tokay and Thompson seedless grape harvests	58		

vigil.....	19, 69	Women	70
violence.....	50, 62, 63, 68	Word of God.....	71
viper.....	71, 72	Xiuhtecuhtli.....	40
volcanic activity.....	40	Xochimilco.....	42, 44
volleyball.....	77, 78, 82	Yacotzin.....	36
warriors.....	39, 42, 44, 76, 109	Yerba Buena	65
Washington.....	54, 58	<i>zapateado</i>	27
West Covina.....	61	<i>zidabmy</i>	104

Notes

All of the background for the hypothetical interview with Motecuhzoma came from the following web site: <http://www.ambergriscaye.com/pages/mayan/aztec.html>.

The sources for Charlie and Anita's adventure in Aztlán come from a wonderfully rich and exciting web site detailing the new and fascinating discoveries of the actual location of Aztlán by Dr. Anton Leon Vollemaere at <https://www.tapataalk.com/groups/ttzlibrary/aztec-origins-t617.html>.

An excellent overview of Mexican immigration is Alexander Monto's, *The Roots of Mexican Labor Migration*, Praeger, 1994, from which I have gleaned valuable perspectives and details underlying the current day influx of immigrants from Mexico.

A fascinating source and background for current Mexican immigration, a treatment of the various bracero programs, especially related to the railroads, is Barbara A. Driscoll's, *The Tracks North, The Railroad Bracero Program of World War II*, CMAS Books, 1999.

An excellent although dated treatment of Cabeza de Vaca's adventures in Mexico and South America is Morris Bishop's, *The Odyssey of Cabeza de Vaca*, The Century Company, New York, 1933. Although difficult to find now, this book probes into the human intrigue and political dynamics of de Vaca's fantastic life and career. Interested readers could also check the Internet at www.Floridahistory.com and www.archeologyinc.org and smith2.sewanee.edu/gsmith/Courses/Religion391/DocsEarlysouth/1517-FrancodelosCobos.html

In his next to last book, *Magical Passes, The Practical Wisdom of the Shamans of Ancient Mexico*, HarperPerennial, New York, 1999, Carlos Castaneda presents some of the exercise-movements, "magical passes," that he learned from Don Juan Matus. On page 38.6 Castaneda defines intent: "For Don Juan, intending was the tacit act of filling out the empty spaces left by direct sensory

perception, or the act of enriching the observable phenomena by means of intending a completeness that doesn't exist from the point of view of pure perception."

Readers interested in the continuation of Carlos Castaneda's work are directed to www.castaneda.com to find books, discussion, and excellent tapes about the magical passes. Castaneda's last two books are "Magical Passes" and "The Active Side of Infinity." This author has been very satisfied with the quality of information and service he has received at this web site.

Very informative web sites about the forces that are changing coffee production include: <http://www.changemakers.net/journal/01march/nauman.cfm> and <http://www.irc-online.org/bulletin/bull39.html>

Readers interested in the 10 principles of Agroecology and Sustainability should visit www.agroecology.org/principles/princlist.htm for an easy-to-understand discussion of these principles (Use Renewable Resources, Minimize Toxics, Conserve Resources, Manage Ecological Relationships, Adjust to Local Environments, Diversify, Empower People, Manage Whole Systems, Maximize Long-Term Benefits, and Value Health). Readers can also follow the links to learn about other traditional agricultural systems in Mexico.

A good web site to help the reader start learning about vernal pools is http://ceres.ca.gov/wetlands/whats_new/vernal_sjq.html or www.vernalpools.org or <http://www.nmnh.si.edu/botany/projects/cpd>

A fascinating and now difficult to find book about Otomí Shamans and their use of cut-out paper figures to heal and cure is *The Shaman's Touch, Otomí Symbolic Healing*, by James Dow, University of Utah Press, 1986. Interested readers could also visit on the web, <http://www.home.earthlink.net/~kering/amate.html>,

http://www.oakland.edu/~dow/courses/an371/dow_sierra_Otomí.html#fn1, or

<http://www.american.edu/TED/OTOMÍ.HTM>

A rich source of information about the Olmec cultures is Ignacio Bernal's, *The Olmec World*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1969. Although difficult to find it gives a full spectrum overview of basic aspects of the mother of all Mesoamerican cultures. Internet sources I used were also valuable- <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/archive/1996/dom/960701/archaeology.html>

<http://saxakali.com/historymam4.htm>

<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Academy/3088/naheng.html>

<http://www.crystalinks.com/olmec.html>

<http://www.tribalarts.com/feature/olmec/>

<http://www.unam.mx/voices/1996/nov/cyphers.html>

I strongly encourage the reader to read, study and absorb Julian Jaynes' magnificent although controversial treatment of the development of consciousness, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1976. Notice in particular Chapter 2, Consciousness, from which I have gleaned these ideas with the highest gratitude and respect for Jaynes' monumental work. In this book is also the best and most complete discussion of metaphor and the role metaphor plays in language and consciousness.

The Plan of Ayala. Madero was elected president in August 1911, and Emiliano Zapata met with him without success. With the help of a teacher, Otilio Montano, Zapata prepared the Plan of Ayala, which declared Madero incapable of fulfilling the goals of the revolution. The signers renewed the revolution and promised to appoint a provisional president until there could be elections. They also vowed to return the stolen land to the ejidos by expropriating, with payment, a

third of the area of the haciendas; those haciendas that refused to accept this plan would have their lands expropriated without compensation. They also signed an amendment to the Plan of Ayala, in which they ratify its main goals: "The expropriation of land by means of public usefulness, repossession of the assets of the people and restitution of the lands to those people and communities from whom they were taken away."

See a copy at <http://historicaltextarchive.com/sections.php?op=viewarticle&artid=127>

Readers are encouraged to study the modern-day Zapatista web sites to find enlightening material about the continuing struggle in Mexico to reclaim the land and lives of indigenous peoples there. www.ezln.org

www.flag.blackened.net/revolt/mexico/ezln/1996/marcos_12_women_march.html

www.flag.blackened.net/revolt.zapatista.html