



# A Cup of Coffee

*By PK Moon*

*Life in Mexico*

# A Cup of Coffee

This story is about a women and her husband who want to find permanency in the country that they have chosen to live in.

The book is dedicated to my mother who told me I could write and my husband who made it possible. And a special thank you to a friend down south for bringing it together.

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## LATE WINTER, EARLY SPRING

### SATURDAY

America Summersun has a way of life that is worth the telling. She has created it and then chose to continue on its path. A life with many differences from where she started from. This is how it is for her, one of societies many unique misfits. She has an existence that many may not have had the opportunity or desire to experience. America having never really taken in as her own the reality and society she was born into, and leaving behind the country of her birth more than a dozen years ago is definitely, most decidedly different.

One of the most important things in America's life and re-education is her house. It is there she spends most of her time, not that she doesn't like to go out, she just seems to end up spending a lot of time indoors and around her small protected yard, even though she likes to think of herself as an outdoor person. The weather is often harsh and she has got a lot to do inside. Her house is always calling her attention to one thing or another. Americas house is here in Mexico, in the state of Baja California Norte on the edge of the Pacific Ocean on a small rocky cove in an almost not there village by the side of the shore. Very close to the water, and as some would say sometimes, to close, when the waves are angry.

She has been watching her house grow for years. So many years. Not a growing so much in size but in accomplishments. America has had this house twelve years now. A full dozen. The same length of time she was in school. A very long time and a very poor comparison as far as her knowledge of life is concerned.

Everyday here along this coastline of mixed nationalities and lifestyles, definitely not California, but not really the traditional Mexico either, has been an experience of learning and fitting in, knowing this is what she wants from life. Taking her inspiration from the desire to understand. It has been her choice and it fits her.

Her house is still not finished yet by far. That is one of it's main features. It separates her from those who live in a finished reality quite nicely. America tries to keep the outside colors of her house in pink and green. Once she was lucky enough to get a truck load of second hand wood already painted pink and used it to cover up the worn out tarpaper of three of the second story walls outside her house with it. She soon discovered the previous owner of these boards must have painted them many times because layer after layer through the years peels off and hardly any bare wood shows to this day. Regrettably, to America, a few years ago one of the upstairs walls had to be recovered on the outside with more tarpaper making an ugly black square that she was hoping the bougainvillea would soon cover if nothing else did. A lot of the house trim is green and the kitchen door is red. The roof has some red and some green roofing paper on it except over the living room where the white vinyl was put down with messy odd shaped blotches of tar to contain some more serious leaks the winter before last. It had helped quite a lot. Just about everything on the house is in its second or third usage or in a few cases more. Even a lot of the nails are second hand.

A real tumble-down house that sways with winds and rocks with the pounding of the surf. No two measurements the same and everything on it has a story behind it. Each small addition a major accomplishment in itself. A success in poverty and remoteness. The house has four rooms and a sort of room up the ladder. A kitchen, a room to sit around in, bedroom and bathroom. The usual small combination. But the house wasn't always this way. Not way back at the beginning when there was nothing here on this piece of land but the rotted boards from the old fish camp. When old Don Jose Zazueta Ochoa walked off the property to legalize the boundaries and painted the corner rocks white with lime and salt water. Then there was no house and the starting to build was yet to begin.

Before America lived here in Mexico she spent two years in Oklahoma on her husbands inherited farm. Skylor Summersun is her husband of near twenty years who is rarely too far from her side. It was, Oklahoma, two years full of too

hot weather and too cold weather, extreme seasons and horrendous storms. All those once wide open spaces so sung about, all squared off now by the roads criss-crossing every mile or so and the fences making smaller squares still. Beautiful country used unbeautifully. America had had her expectations and none of them were satisfactorily met. A land full of cowboys and Indians and oil wells is what she envisioned. She did see a handful of oil wells once and Indians on a drive but not much else. So much likeness and so much roadside trash were it's distinguishing features. Once again a reminder of her differences with the rest of that part of the world and it's realities. And so America and her husband left looking for something more. They hadn't found it then, but something, something that gave them a life that was worth the whole effort, she knew it had to be out there somewhere.

Differences come frequently in Americas story and these differences play a major part in her very existence. Differences, if it weren't for them we would not be here or what we are. This is something her mother had often said at certain times of her life that had left an impression that had amounted to a belief.

It is Saturday, mid-morning on an early spring or more like a late winter day and Americas husband whom she calls Sky, is out in the shop with O'henry and Clemente. The men had finished eating breakfast and gone back out to prefect an experiment on making ice from the power of the sun. America could hear O'henrys louder or more carrying voice from here in the house and was remembering a time in the past as she sat here thinking once again how good everything in her life works out. Something O'henry was saying about having moved down here brought an old memory vividly to mind.

"Why did you move to Mexico anyway?" asked O'henry of Sky, on that decision filled day so many years ago, and who is now Americas neighbor from Rancho Mapache nearby, north, on the other side of the barb wire fence. Sky has always had a hard time answering this frequently asked question not only because such blunt questions put him off but also because he never really has a single answer for this one. Some days his answer could be a thoughtful drawn out explanation and other

days a quick joking reply. It is a question that goes deep. He thinks to himself, "For all the reasons, because my future was there, my freedom, the answer to our particular situation in life" and on and on, all these thoughts went through Skys head as he weighed the answer he would choose this time. On this occasion he had sensed it's importance.

America and Sky had taken a trip to California about five years ago. Necessity occasionally brought them north and one thing led to another and they met a man named O'henry Rappaport through a friend in common. They were offered an old furniture moving truck in his yard when they and the dogs needed a place to spend the night.

O'henrys house and half acre yard in the middle of California's biggest city was a safe spot. It contained it's own atmosphere. It was tucked between a well known graveyard and the elite of that particular area in a large tree covered ravine even the deer and the coyote came to. So it was a very good place for America and her husband too, all considering where they really were.

"It's what I've really always wanted to do. Move to Mexico". O'henry after a moments thought added quickly to his question. As though it was suddenly immaterial why Sky thought what he thought next to the import of what had been just said.

Upon hearing O'henry say this, Sky, before he had voiced an answer on the last question, went on to the easier remark, or declaration, and at the moment more interesting subject. "Then why don't you?"

"Well. I'm ready". Simply honestly spoken.

"I'll tell you how to go about it then," replied Sky. And both Sky and O'henry began a conversation that ended here in Mexico with O'henry as a well established neighbor.

This first particular conversation happened upon America's first meeting with O'henry not long after the introductions were made by a friend in common. America and her friend sat under the shade of the pepper trees on the rock wall bordering O'henrys roommates gardens. A truly beautiful place. Just the right combination of domesticity and nature.

Full of clay works the roommate made his living from. America was enjoying the cool morning air and the newness of her surroundings. Was she really in the city, was that roar in the background really just traffic and not the sea? As is normal with America she had paid little attention to both O'Henry or his roommate. Yes he did have a nice place but still what had that to do with her, she had no desire to meet strangers up here in this country.

Suddenly in the middle of a conversation with her seldom seen friend O'Henry appeared with two cups of hot coffee served in old cups and saucers of a pattern she always found interesting. Cream color with farm scenes and people. "Would you like milk or sugar? It's quite chilly out here", offered O'Henry as he handed them the cups. America really thought most Californians had lost all their manners of these type or never had them in the first place and was surprised to see this in a young single man. It was refreshing and a good opening for a long time acquaintance. America nor her husband seldom made new friends.

And now, so many years later here is O'Henry, an almost daily part of her life. America and her husband take him for better or worse because their lives have become woven too closely.

O'Henry is a good looking, more towards unique looking man, fully experienced as his face and attitude convey and somewhere around thirty five years old. He has dark brown thick and wavy hair and China blue eyes and gold-brown skin, tall and slim. He stands out a lot here and is easy for people to remember because his very dark Spanish father from Catalonia and his very light Irish mother from New York made a combination of features and colors that drew attention to their harmony and unlikelyness. O'Henry has become well known here, especially since he plays a guitar and speaks a very beautiful Spanish, both inherited from his father, and sings in a full honey smooth voice inherited from his mother.

The plan that rapidly evolved between Americas husband and O'Henry was for him to come visit, meet a woman he could marry and move in. On his first visit to Americas

house in Mexico he met Lourdes who was in Americas kitchen making tortillas and cooking the noon meal. In a very short time after the courting was over he was installed in a family of six kids, and a drunken ex-husband not to far away. Happy, content and not much more income than what he made from selling off his possessions, he was ready to spend the remainder of his life here.

O'henrys voice faded into the background as the crash and roar from the tide changing took over and Americas thoughts drifted on. She wandered over to the open kitchen door and stood in the sunlight filtering through the bougainvillea and lantana bush that twined around each other creating a dozen or more miniature living bouquets mixed in with the honeysuckle on the other side.

America could see Sky through the salt sprayed window of the shop welding a conglomeration of steel pipes together, his cut short very curly dark blond hair sticking out from under the hood. She could tell by looking at it that he had neglected to comb it this morning in his haste to get outside and continue yesterdays challenge. He looked so slim to her today, maybe because he hadn't been eating well all week as was his way when he was involved in a new attempt at his inventions. His jeans looked loose and he wore an old red sweatshirt her mother had embroidered with a Navajo design borrowed from a book that borrowed it from whoever really drew it. It was one of his favorites and well worn and he had worn it today, as he always said, to bring him luck. America knew he also had his worn almost smooth 1921 silver dollar, a fifty peso coin, two hummingbird feathers and a small black stone in a little leather pouch in his pocket.

Sky never knew till just after his marriage that his great grandmother was a Choctaw Indian, when on a visit to his parents farm his mother confessed to the fact because she regretted that her child did not have quite enough Indian blood in them to receive the benefits that these people were getting. She said they could have been on the free milk program at school and saved her much needed money. She did not bring up any reasons for not ever having told this obviously kept

secret, just sort of broke into it real casual like, getting it said and going on to some other story about Pops and the garden. But now that America knew this fact she could see where some of his ways came from. America was comforted in the feeling that he had real roots in the land where he was born. Another special thing about him.

Skys' grandfather on his fathers side had come from Checkloslavakia when he was three years old with his large family and they had gotten the deeply wooded, always fertile property that the farm was on in the Oklahoma land run. His mothers families roots had always been vague, but what was known was that they all were Southern Baptist. This is were Sky got his fear of snakes and his dislike of organized religion from. His smooth complexion faintly freckled across the checks and his dark blond hair tending to red in the sun light, especially his mustache, a bar of gold, and his full of depth dark blue eyes had come from his father. He is more than medium tall, strong and wiry with sure movements.

Watching him work on his projects, listening to the surf and the birds singing together and feeling drowsy from the hot winter sun on a cold day she was in no hurry to get to anything but doing what she was doing.

"America, America, since your not busy bring us out some coffee so we can keep on working and not break this roll we're on", after a spell, called Sky from the shop. He had removed the welding hood and his eyes not yet having on their usual tinted glasses showed their deep blueness and America could see them from where she had finally sat down on the porch step where she had stood. No Indian there in his blue eyes could you see, only the force of his will to achieve incredible goals sparked out at the moment.

"Pilar, por favor, take the men out some more coffee, okay". America asked of her ayudante, coming back in the wooden screen door and going through the kitchen into the living room. The old wooden kitchen door and frame had come from an abandoned tool shed and was very narrow and she had once again caught her hair on the door hook in passing and now wanted to braid it to keep it out of the way.

Sometimes she felt it to be a physical handicap now that her hair was well below her waist, but since Sky wanted it that way she never had cut it since they were married. America has hair that is gold, a shade or three lighter than her husbands, abundant and very fine. Her light green eyes are large and inquisitive and she stands taller than the women here. Americas family on both sides had originally come from England. Her mothers family from the city of Southend-on-Sea by London and her fathers family from the North York Moors near Whitby. She was proud of the fact that she was fourth generation Californian on both sides also. All her relatives ranged from San Diego to San Francisco up to Crescent City. She herself had been brought up in many of the Los Angeles beach towns.

Being in the bedroom had inspired her to change the skirt she had on for another with more green in it. She could feel the nearby spring today in the air, the sounds, smells, and colors and wanted to be closer to it. The skirt was a favorite of hers sent to her from her parents many years past. Light green like her eyes, full and long like her hair, with tulips, violets, and delicate green vines running everywhere. Like most of her clothes it is cotton, soft and natural and easy to patch.

Finishing in the bedroom she went through the bathroom, in this walk a circle through the rooms house, and into the living room to see if Pilar was nearing done in the kitchen. But she still had a fair ways to go being in no hurry so America settled into her chair and again let the flow of words from the book she was reading, *Paradisio* by Jose Lezama Lama, soak through her brain to form a feeling of what the author had to say.

America has reached a really good stage of her existence here in Mexico and in her life. A content time, a time of reaping her past efforts. A lot of it is because her house is more done than it has ever been. Her living room has just been painted, or rather the rest of it has just been finished being painted on the last two walls. Several years ago Pilar and her stepson helped America paint one wall and almost all of another a coppery pumpkin color. A color full of warmth and ease, but after a

while the newness wore off and the gray of the other stucco walls took back over on her more than she cared for, so it was good to have them painted too.

Those gray stucco walls had been in her living room for many years. Fortunately, there was not too much wall because there are a lot of windows. Used windows, found and donated windows, are cheaper and easier to use to fill up a wall than building material. If one needs a quick easy wall just stick in a bunch of windows. It is especially unpleasant to view the ocean on a gray day with the gray continuing right on into the house. Gray on gray. Color is so important in happiness. The more colors the happier things are. Although this gray had been far better than the black tarpaper and the second hand two by fours of the beginning years.

Now that the remaining walls of the living room were a new grass green, fresh and lively, it was the time of the year for new grass too. What a wonderful frame these colors make looking through the windows at the many hues of the sea, the blues of the sky and the green of the plants that grow there. An always changing flow of color. And of course the life fulfilling view of the village, her village. Americas own personal view into a way of life that remains daily meaningful and fascinating.

The ceiling was painted a little after the last two walls. It is an early morning blue. Several years ago Sky had covered up the wood and beams of the living room ceiling with panels. The original wood was new when Sky got it from a mechanic in trade for a good truck transmission and a broken washing machine but had discolored strangely due to lack of any preservatives and the rain leaking through and leaving odd threatening patterns in a multitude of shades including white from the salt gathering at the most persistent of leaks, the heavy dew leaks and dark green from mold in a few other leaky spots. America thought at first she would miss it as she had made so many adjustments inside herself to learn to appreciate this multicolored ceiling, it was a roof over ones head, but she realized she didn't miss it at all and besides it made the house so much warmer or cooler. Very practical.

The living room had an odd shape. It had started out to be ten feet by seventeen feet but when getting to the ocean end of the addition it flared out to twelve feet something to accommodate for the window that Sky had on hand and hadn't measured before the project had started. From that time it has made working on this room more difficult. Especially during a summer five years or so ago when Sky had the workers raise the roof where it connected to the smaller second floor to slow down the leaks. This left odd scars on the walls inside at the roof line which had to be plastered in that coming winter but served as air vents for that particularly hot summer.

Sky plasters skillfully and with a touch that leaves a feeling in the texture of nature and hidden patterns. This is one of the nicest things about her living room, that these warm and hand troweled walls are an expression of her husband and his many abilities. They make the many varied decorations on the wall look as though they had finally gained their rightful place in life.

The bathroom door from the living room, the hand made box the television sits on and the post by the ladder are painted a Chinese red now. This is an exciting color for America and adds a touch of the exotic. The two floor to ceiling bookshelves are painted yellow with a turquoise trim on one and a orangish red sort of color for the trim on the other. There remains only a lower shelf that is still the color of the old fence that was replaced and thrown out in the alley where Sky retrieved it and brought it home to Baja California to make the much longed for shelves for her many books that keep America company through life and travels. Along with these books are the treasures of her life. Shells from her great grandmother, rocks from her childhood to the last walk she took. Glass pyramids and balls, magnifiers of all sorts, a bottle of mercury, specimen bottles full of small shells, feathers, leaves, the red red earth of Oklahoma and more. Baskets and pottery, a lot of it from the Indians here, her great grandmothers teapots, bones of all sorts, some plain some painted and skulls of owls and other small animals. Gourds, a pitcher with a parrot for a

handle, a vase with a magpie on a tulip that she keeps her pens and pencils in and more.

On the long green wall is a small picture window and a patio door that had gone through many places in the house before it settled there and who knows where it was before because it's history has been long forgotten and had finally ended here in the best possible place for it. Outside these windows was Americas rock gardens, natures landscaping and the sea beyond. The short green wall that has the really big picture window has a bright light blue shelf to the left of it where an old door had been plastered in because it had worn out its usefulness and fallen off its hinges and then been used in the chicken pens for a roof support. The steps were never built so the door had been good to let in the air only. This shelf holds her long waited for tape machine and the precious few tapes she has one way or another accumulated, her world globe and the atlas, the kaleidoscope collection, binoculars, monocular, a device for viewing the world through the eyes of a dragon fly and two plastic toy wolves that caught her liking because of the simpleness of the design.

There were a few unpainted things and spots still, but they fade into being almost unnoticeable along with the fact that some of it could use a second coat which doesn't matter either, it just makes the colors more interesting and unique. The color is there and that is what counts. America has such good luck in paints. She decides the color and fate brings it to her. The coppery pumpkin paint marked down to five dollars outside of a store, the yellow paint of the shelves found while cleaning out someone's old shed. The blue paint of the shelf left at the roadside trash can by some unneedy American. All the paints coming like this one way or another through the whole house. As so many things have come to America and her husband. Patience, that is what it takes and the knowledge she will eventually get what she needs when she's ready in all ways for it.

Eventually America looked up from her book wondering what the day would bring when Blossom suddenly walked in

the kitchen door greeting Pilar and her two year or so old little girl. America realized that this is what was going to be happening at least for the rest of this morning anyway. Blossom demanded time and attention. She could tell Blossom had just come from her ranch by the way she was dressed, not from town. America thought probably her husband was with her and was now with the men in the shop. She was pleased to notice that Blossom had used her Mexican manners with Pilar and the baby and had formally greeted each with a handshake.

"Your dogs jumped all over me when I came in, I've been just fighting my way to the door. Why do you want a bunch of dogs driving everyone crazy? I need a cup of coffee, is this cup clean? Skys not here so I'm going to sit in his chair, okay?". This was said as she was lowering herself into a sitting position, her legs draped over the arm. I think I'm going to get myself a dog, a purebred, a real good dog."

America hadn't spoken yet and was putting a small peacock feather in her book to mark her place. It hadn't been a particularly good spot to stop but she had no choice. This was Blossom and America had accepted her friendship and her faults.

" Good Morning, how are you? Have a seat. I hope your not serious, purebreds are so unhealthy, get a cross." Picking out the most pleasant from the many subjects Blossom had brought up America opened a frequent conversation in this neighborhood, dogs.

"For once you could be right, I guess I'd better get a mutt, there everywhere. It's so terrible hard on dogs here. And people too. Look at my skin and we've been out of wash water for two days because the roads are too wet and Alejandro can't get to the well. I don't think I'll last the rest of winter without going mad, thank god I feel spring in the air, I smell it".

Blossom had been living at Rancho Pilas Grandes for the last six months. She married the ranch hand, Alejandro , the poor nephew of the rich owner. When America first met her she was with Cisco, the rich son of the owner and had been with him for quite awhile through many adventures. When they parted ways eventually, she left Quintana Roo and her

favorite island and came all the way back to the ranch to claim Alejandro. She had him married to her within a matter of months, much to his and everyone else's surprise. America had never made a friend of an American women in Mexico, but for Blossom she made an exception, especially because of it being her husbands friends wife. There was something in her America liked among the many unlikable traits Blossom had.

Besides, Alejandro was a neighbor and a good friend and lived on a ranch that was for America always mystical, set back in time, full of beautiful views and hidden canyons, ferns and cactus growing side by side and white quartz crystal oozing form the rocks from an ancient lava flow. A thousand hectare ranch that had been forbidden to almost all since it was given to Alejandro's grandmother, who had been a pistolera, by Pancho Villa. Even now it lay beyond three locked gates and few visitors were allowed entrance.

As it seemed so often recently on Saturday mornings, Third World, Penguin Cafe and Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys were playing alternately hour after hour on a long tape that included the favorite selections of these three. The love of Reggae music had come late to America. During Skys hard years, the years money was scarce and no electric America had no television, radio or tape machine and she missed a decade and more of music. Reggae was just a memory from a time long in the past when it hadn't been popularized yet, but when America did rediscover it, it fell in place within her, it filled an empty spot. It kept her in contact with a world she had no other way to be part of. A movement of rights and peace and good living.

The Saturday morning waffle breakfast had ended an hour earlier. This waffle machine was another sign of easier times for her. It was a gift from her mother. America and Blossom had moved to the kitchen table drinking the last of the coffee, the one listening mostly and the other talking mostly. Sabarex, Mexican coffee, is thick and dark, rich tasting and hard on the kidneys.

Once again the conversation about the dogs was brought up. A discussion on whose dogs were the best cared

for and a review of their owners was going on and America was translating bits of this to Pilar who was adding her opinions. America has always had lots of dogs out here in nature with her. Mexico really is hard on dogs and through the years Americas dogs have been reduced down to indoor and in the yard dogs. With the coming of more people it was best just to keep them close and safe. Gone were the days when she and Sky had a pack of Queensland Heelers roaming free to keep away cows, strays, tourist and company. Now she had an Aztec Temple dog, his son who was crossed with one of these Queensland heelers and had come out almost hairless with a red mohawk, and that ones daughter who also had a Queensland for a mother but still turned out somewhat hairless. A red fur patch on her head, a larger red fur patch on her rear and furry tail and feet. And then Americas latest addition to her family of dogs, the white pitbull with black manchas who Sky had got from Tijuana who loved everybody and was constantly causing a commotion.

"Anyway", said Blossom as she rummaged through her purse for lost objects, "Anyway, as we were saying before you got us back on that conversation again I just don't feel right not making money. With my abilities and looks I could be out there making twelve or fifteen dollars an hour and be putting it away in my savings. I've always made good money. Always". Blossom is short and has a nice full figure. She is in her early forties and time has not detracted from her good looks. Her eyes are what you notice first and they hold your attention for a long time. Violet eyes. Big eyes. Inviting eyes. And then next you notice her body movements, especially when she is talking. She prefers standing when she talks so as to have a wider area to express herself. When there are men in the house she becomes even more expressive in her movements. When one has the patience for it she can be quite entertaining.

Blossom is French Canadian from the town of Joliette in Quebec. This slight accent that she has retained makes her talking harder for the people here to understand, they must pick and choose out of the multitude of words that toss from her mouth to grasp at what her point is.

And she continued on. "Alejandro is not the kind of man that takes control of things, he's not aggressive enough". She said while pulling out a paper containing the details of an ongoing court case for discrimination to women and the promised bonuses not paid to her at her last job. "He just stays up there on that ranch working for his Aunt Lydia for nothing and not getting anywhere at all. He has no ambitions. How can I live like that?"

"Blossom. Haven't you noticed yet that not everyone's first importance around here is money. Alejandro has always been admired and respected here for the good life he leads. That's one of his special parts. Why don't you since you love him and married him join him in what he's doing? Don't be so sure that he doesn't have anything going for himself, he has a life most people only dream of having. Or pay for on a vacation. You've no idea how well life is treating you now. If you aren't careful you could spoil it." America said, trying to intrude in Blossom's very pre-set reality for just long enough to show her a different view of things.

"Anyway, I", stressing the I heavily, "I have to think of our future and where we will live and how we'll make money. Somebody has got to be the responsible one."

"Everyday If you'd just simply live right those things that you need, they'll come to you. Stop all that worrying and just enjoy what you have while you have it". This wasn't the first or last time America told Blossom this either.

Having had her limit on table talk and taking advantage of the men coming in the house America wandered back over to her chair near the window. It is a swivel rocker so she could encompass her view. She picked up her book to delve into it's depths once again. She was sitting where she couldn't see Francisco so after a bit letting this distract her she went over to the couch where she had been working at her hobby of making feather fans from her bird feathers. From here she could see his face and enjoy his enjoyment at being here and belonging so.

Saturdays are good days here in the house and shop. The workers are here but come later and the day goes slower

with less work done. Since America does her own big housecleaning of the week on Friday she doesn't really need help from Pilar on Saturday, but she has her anyway because that is the day workers and friends are invited to eat waffles.

Pilar is only seventeen and kind of takes everything in and doesn't comment on much but the first time she saw a waffle come out of the machine she was thrilled. She'd even seen waffle ads on TV. She told America that the next time she was in El Otro Lado she wanted her to get her a waffle machine with her wages. And of course knowing Pilars situation would not handle a waffle machine nor her finances, America never did get it for her. So every Saturday she comes and gets to make waffles. This week they keep sticking and coming out cooked in the oddest shapes. Square balloons with checks. Each one had been a source of fascination for Pilar, the baby and her step son Francisco.

This breakfast was long over with but Francisco was still in the house. He was suppose to be doing yard work but being eleven years old the company in the house was too much to miss so he sat on the rock floor with Amayrani putting beaded necklaces from a Madi Gras parade that had been retrieved from an Americans trashcan, on the very blond blue eyed doll from China that had on a wedding dress, carried a baby in her arms and played "Here Comes the Bride", a popular Mexican tune, and a few on Chapo who enjoyed it and knew the beads looked good in contrast with his coal black shiny hairless dog skin.

Sky, O'henry, and Alejandro sat at the table while Blossom acted the hostess and Pilar still scrubbed at the baked on dough that had oozed out of the waffle machine. Their conversation was focused on making money. This was an even more frequent conversation than the dogs. It was one thing everyone at that table had in common, the lack of enough money to accomplish what needed to be done.

"Mucho trabajo, poco dinero". Clemente, Skys' friend and business partner was referring to the fact that everyone was always working but never getting ahead.'

"It takes a lot of money to make money", put in Sky. "It's expensive to be rich".

"Si, es verdad", said Alejandro shaking his head at the thought of all the work he was always doing on the ranch for no money, as Blossom so often pointed out.

"Only the rich or poor can live like it's a holiday. The rich because they have nothing to do and the poor because they do nothing" remarked Blossom.

"I think Washington Irving already said that", America called over her shoulder. Of course no one paid any attention to this remark except Francisco whose ears picked up a new name to say over in his mind.

"Right now I could sure use some money to get Lourdes divorce papers. And then we could get married so it gives me a legal tie here and then I could work ".

"You should have married her a long time ago and had a bunch more kids then you'd have legal claims for sure. Alejandro and I have to go all the way to Ciudad Juarez for his papers".

"Lourdes doesn't need another child", Clemente slipped into the conversation.

"Why do you have to go all the hell the way over there?" broke in Sky as this touched off the memory of, "That's where that pregnant worker we had for a while was from. She wouldn't get up till eleven and then had to have four cups of coffee to get started". He laughed for a moment and then told it in Spanish.

"It's a long ways and we have to take the bus because the car only has tags for Baja, not national tags. Or put down a deposit for the price of the car". Blossom started to search her purse for the address of the Office of Immigration to prove the story was real while she stayed on the talk that was important to her.

"That was the same worker that thought there was two moons because the sunset had been so foggy. It sure scared her senseless". Ignoring Blossom Sky said this in Spanish and Francisco, Clemente and Pilar started laughing. Alejandro was

still gloomy, he had taken a novela out of his back pocket and was holding it up close to his face reading it.

"It's because that is the only place in Mexico that you can go to get the papers for a Mexican to get permanent residency permits for the United States at this time, I've been informed", Blossom came back with again.

At this there was a pause in the conversation and everyone looked at Alejandro with pity. He looked sorry for himself too with the plans Blossom was setting up for him.

Going on to something less depressing than Blossoms organizing of her life O'henry said, "I sold three cow skulls last week but by the time I got back home Lourdes had it all spent on the weeks mendado, I didn't even have enough for a pack of Alas, only food. A sack of beans, a sack of flour, a sack of sugar. Manteca, tomatoes, garlic, onion and peppers and a sack of animal crackers and not much else."

"Alas may be less money but they're for sure not more smokable. I' wouldn't smoke at all if I had to smoke them", added Clemente in Spanish.

"The price of milk, flour and beans went up again yesterday, who knows what the pesos will settle out at", worried Alejandro.

"At least they're just made out of tobacco, probably couldn't afford the chemicals, and they don't have one of those suspicious filters" added Blossom finally willing to drop her last conversation.

"I need to get hold of some pinche dollars to buy supplies for the shop, all I've got is pesos. I sure don't have ganas to go up to the Other Side next week", said Sky with loathing in his voice for the predicted trip. Pinche was one of his favorite words. Sky on hearing the word only a few times had made it his own on his arrival in Mexico and added it to his large collection of colorful words and descriptive sayings. "Someone broke the big vice and I'm going to have to find a second hand one. Pinche Mexicans could tear up a brass door knob if you weren't watching them".

"Do you want to go with me O'henry? I'd be happy as a three peckered pup if Clemente could go. In fact I wish that

just once I could take one of my workers up there with me. America has those free passes for the San Diego Zoo that client gave us and Francisco sure would like to go, it's a pinche shame he can't. Your the only one I know who can go. I'd like to hot foot it up there and get that done".

"El Presidente Americano doesn't like the children of Mexico and they can never go to the Zoo". This was said in rapid Spanish by Francisco.

O'henry laughed loudly and melodiously knowing that the schools here make sure they get to go, but understanding the sentiment behind the statement anyway. He then asked Francisco if he'd been out fishing yesterday and caught any more cabazones. The conversation drifted on in this manner as Blossom put on another pot of coffee and Pilar put away the waffle machine for another week. O'henry, who always has his guitar with him drew his chair back from the table a ways and softly strummed it while humming and half singing a tune to himself, something like life being a gentle glide, just a big smooth slide. The clouds had cleared and the sun shown brilliantly bringing a moment of false hope before it just as quickly went behind the next set of clouds and threatened to rain and so no one was to anxious to go back out.

America was still drifting along in a slow flow of words from her book when looking up she heard a sparrow hawk on the bougainvillea that has taken over the roof and the front of the house, or was it perhaps protecting it, that was frightening the coonskin birds that share the chickens food. She noticed that the skies had deepened to a swirly gray and seem about ready to let loose with their rain for real. Some large drops are already hitting the window now and again. The music still plays low, O'henrys still composing, the conversations continue on and the little potbelly woodstove is putting out plenty of heat. The surf is huge and perfectly shaped showing a long view of the blue tubes. The whales still blow out to the south. Good Saturday, prefect day, wonderful life. America always knew she would be the one to lead a unique existence but never the less she is very grateful for it. It must have something to do with always trying to live her life as she saw it.

How privileged she feels to live here by the edge of the Mexican ocean, on the coast of Baja Norte. What a rare and wonderful opportunity. She will try to live her whole life this way. How many people are there who truly live their lives as they would really have them. How very many would like to change their details. America is one of those rare ones who have found their place. "Never compromise yourself", she thinks to herself as she once again remembers a long forgotten friends poster of Janis Joplin with that thought "Never Compromise Yourself", or was it a command, written across the bottom.

Clementes conversation interrupts her flow of thoughts and she stops to listen to him as everyone else is.

"Esta pelicula tiene monstres y fantasmas y todos". Clemente is excitedly describing a dubbed movie he saw on the Mexican television station. He is describing in detail how a bird of some sort falls into an acid bath and comes out a monster and so on. Clemente has forgotten his shyness in the remembrance of the horribleness of it all. America, Sky, and Blossoms Spanish being their second language are interested in the words used to describe such unlikely events. A whole bunch of words all together that tell of terrible things of the supernatural and of odd birds. Quite a conversation. A lesson in vocabulary .

Clemente and America have become friends through the ritual of coffee. She almost always attends to his coffee while he is working through the day or in the house spending his time with Sky. Keeping track of his cup and keeping it clean, getting in the right amount of sugar, and milk on days when his stomach is giving him problems. In this way she shows her respect and approval of him as a worthy friend and partner for her husband. He in turn is constantly appreciative of this and thanking her every single time, never taking it for granted. Again America thinks about how glad she is that Clemente has come back to work for Sky. This village is one of those rare places where the buses don't stop and it being such a small village there are few if no workers to be found. Sky does very technical work and needs a worker with a touch of the mad scientist in him. Brave and intelligent. Or also foolhardy and

willing to try, America sometimes thinks. For three or more years now with only a gap of a half of a year once and several months twice he has worked faithfully for her husband. The business is in Clementes name and it is recorded at the Hacienda where all businesses are recorded in Mexico.

Clementes father, Don Paciano, has property here and is one of the original ejido members in this village. When America and Sky came here to live the father, a stooped and hard working man, had built a small one room house out of garage doors and came here on the weekends walking in from the nearest bus stop seven miles away to arrive alone to do all that needed to be done to hold the property. Now, many years later, he has four of his sons living here full time. Clemente moved his family here more than three years ago. A wife and a girl with about twelve years. He believes in birth control and feels he can only afford to bring up one child, he realizes he can take care of no more than that, he is a man who knows his limitations well. It's as hard to find work here as it is to find workers. So Clemente is content that he is the one who has this job and partnership with Sky.

Clemente was born and raised in a colonia in Tijuana. America knew that she really didn't know what this means to be born in Tijuana and raised there, a world of its own, a language of it's own. Clemente comes from a very good family, good at heart too. Big and close. He lived on the top of a hill down on a side of a ravine next to a slaughter house above a crowded downtown type area on a road where cars could no longer drive, then down a narrow foot path to a front yard built up out of tires held in with earth that was the front of the very small lot. Living there like that perched in those crowds of people he seemed to learn a certain valuable type of manners. An ability to blend in and come and go at just the right times. Always aware that the inside of the house is a women's territory and thanking America upon leaving for having been in the house. He never intrudes himself. These manners never leave him and always predominate his actions in and out of the house.

Clemente lived in Venice beach once for a three year period off and on. He painted houses from Malibu to Watts so he had seen a fair sampling of American life, but it never rubbed off on him. Too many Mexicans take going up there across the border to heart and lose some of the best part of themselves. This had never happened to Clemente. He saw El Otro Lado, the other side for what it was. A good place to make money but not to live. He has the most amazing shiny black hair and beard, full and thick and wavy. But the curious thing is how fast his hair grows. One day he shows up with a short modern clip and a short or no beard and it seems like such a short time all of a sudden he has hair almost down to his shoulders and a long beard and a mustache. All these combinations transformed his looks so you could hardly recognize him at times and appeared to give him different personalities but they didn't. All Clementes many brothers resemble him in looks and stature and on looking out the window to see if he is up and around yet Sky mistakes him for his brothers frequently. Some mornings Sky spends a lot of time watching to see if Clemente is going to come and work. He is delicate and can only do what he feels inside himself and not what he needs to be doing. Clemente works for Sky because he takes pride in doing so. He is one of the few people America has met who is smart enough to know that Sky is smarter and that that is to his benefit.

Pilar called over to America to say she was done and was there anything more for her to do. America told her no and Pilar and Amayrani left with Francisco who was on his way to go fishing off the cliffs by the school house. Alejandro stood and told Blossom they needed to return to the ranch and it's work. They had fences to mend at the ranch and must get back before the rain started again. Blossom is the only one there to help as the worker had taken the bicycle and not come back for weeks.

O'henry volunteered his help out in the shop for the next hour or so as he wasn't anxious to go home yet just as a customer pulled up out back and honked his horn not seeing anyone around and the shop door open. Clemente saw the

American plates on the car and held back a moment before going out, to wait for Sky to gather up his cigarettes and lighter so he would not have to confront the people first. Clemente doesn't speak English much and has no desire to try to understand a customer's Spanish even if they did speak it. Everyone said their good-byes according to their inclinations and America was alone again.

Alejandro always drove an old truck but the one he came up with this time was the best yet. It was a 1942 Studebaker truck painted soft turquoise blue. It probably wouldn't go on a long trip but it was great for around the area and even had the correct tags which was close to a miracle. So many cars here don't have the proper license plates, they're outdated, Californian, off another car. The best tags are the national tags that are cream color and allow you to travel all over Mexico. The majority are blue or yellow and only good for Baja Norte and Baja Sur. Hardly anyone that lives here full time in Ejido Emiliano Zapata, Americas village, has a car and no one but Sky and the family on the far corner by the gate to Rancho Mapache has the right plates. As long as they don't go on the Toll Road they are safe, but since everyone here in this area lives off the Toll Road there is no way to avoid a certain distance on it to get anywhere else.

Alejandro drove back through the village by the gate to Rancho Mapache, then headed up the road to the top of the hill and pulled up to the ejido store and left the motor running while he and Blossom got out and started to go in when they realized a family was already in it and there was no room for them to enter right then so they sat down on the steps and shooed off the over friendly pair of half grown almost shepherd almost not shepherd pups. The clouds had grown even heavier and settled low making a thick mist.

"The box with the tortillas looks empty", observed Blossom snuggling up close to Alejandro for warmth and affection. "Es necessary you need lentes mucho. Tu Tia es muy malo. She no paga you, she no buy nada for you". Blossom made a sincere effort to speak her new husband's language since he didn't understand much English at all, but the

attempt made one always feel that they were intruding on someone's private baby talk to each other and that it should be done in private. It was true that Alejandro needed glasses but had never considered getting them before Blossom came into his life, as was also true with so much that was new in his life. The family came out of the store and saying Buenos Dias to the two on the steps, got in their old Chevy station wagon that had lost a fender and it's paint to rust . Alejandro and Blossom went in hand and hand and stood in the entrance to see what the store had to offer today. Passage to the refrigerator was blocked by a crate of mangos stacked on top of three crates of coca cola.

"Tiene milk ?" asked Blossom. El Senior Cesartio the store owner looked at Alejandro for the answer to what Blossom had said.

Alejandro stepped around her and took a couple more steps to the back of the store and reaching over the crates opened the refrigerator door and peered in over the top of it. There were two gallons of milk among the various foods and drinks in this small refrigerator, along with the remains of the owners dinner from last night carefully stored in a plastic tortilla wrapper for his noon meal.

"Get two", said Blossom.

Alejandro reached in and got one of the milks and edged it through the partially opened door and handed it to Blossom who took it for granted that it was the only one. Alejandro said nothing preferring to take only what he needed and leave the other for the next customer. Blossom stepped over to a chair that was in front of the desk of El Senior Cesarito and his money box, and sat down to watch the movie in the video machine which featured a muscle bound Italian with cocker spaniel eyes being chased by a Doberman. She reached over to the box on the ground and felt under the towel and took out two kilos of corn tortillas.

"I separated those yesterday afternoon, no one went to town yet today and I have no fresh ones yet". Corn tortillas must be separated after they have been in their wrappers for a few hours or they stick to each other. Day old tortillas are not

acceptable in town but out here all are thankful to have even these. None go to waste as the extras are thrown to the dogs and cats for their meal, or dried and used otherwise.

"Don Apolonio brought in these flour tortillas that Gorda, his wife made. He says his potrillo has stabbed itself in the chest with a broken fence post and needs doctoring. He was out running with the other horses and he stumbled in the mud when they were jumping over the fence the storm water tore down. Don Apolonio says he has some money set aside and if I knew someone who could help would I send them over". The store owner spoke Spanish differently from any one around here even though there were accents from all over. He said he was from the Yucatan and had moved here to dodge a family that was full of problems that he cared no more about and had moved in with his uncle. He is in his fifties, fat, always slightly sweaty and nervous and at odd times way to polite, and a nice man.

"Did Don Apolonio bring in these rattlesnakes? He did a good job of skinning and drying them" , Alejandro asked. The snakes were in a burlap bag sticking straight out the top looking like walking sticks.

"Yes and he says there really potent because when he caught them he left them in a crock till the full of the moon and then killed them. You know they claim a snake doesn't die for twenty-four hours and he told me that big one there sticking out the furthest crawled right out of the sack after it had it's head cut off, skinned and the back bone removed".

"I've seen that happen myself. My uncle cured himself of the worst of his arthritis by putting the powdered snake into a bowl of Campbell's soup and taking two Excedrin a day for two months".

"Come on Alejandro, lets get this stuff and get out of here, it's cold."

Blossom always enjoyed the ride home from Americas house. It gave her a sense of belonging. Here was her ranch, it was even on the maps, she felt herself the proud and nervous new owner. Today they would mend fences and tomorrow the Aunt would be coming out to bring them their mendado. Their

bi-weekly supply of groceries was sometimes postponed and then they had to do on what was left over from the time before or shop which was awkward because Alejandro had no money and Blossom had to pay. This she did not mind so much at all, but Alejandro felt shame.

The thrill of opening the three gates to get to where the house was built about a hundred years ago for the cowboys, near the middle of the ranch was still thrilling to Blossom and with each gate and it's own particular method of opening and closing it she got more into the spell of her surroundings. The last gate she opened herself as it was an easy one, just bob wire strung on tree limbs evenly spaced and a wire loop at the bottom of the fence post to hook the bottom of the gate into it in order to pull the top into place and another loop at the top of the gate itself to put over the fence post securing it.

Once inside this enclosure Blossom waved Alejandro on and she walked the short distance to the adobe structures surrounded by a large variety of fruit trees, grape arbors, vegetable gardens and flower beds. On the way she picked some cilantro to put in the salsa cruda she had learned to make, for the noon meal. It was sad there were no dogs to greet her since the last disappeared and she wondered again on what type of dog she would get, then went on to wonder what type of chickens to get. These were strange and new considerations for her. "Ranch life, Mexico", Blossom said out loud to herself several times over as she watched Alejandro get out of the truck and go over to the nearest horse corral to get the horses ready for the ride to the back of the ranch where the fences needed mending. "Ranch life". It was a lot colder here than on the beach and after a quick survey of the vegetable garden for snails and only finding tijarias hiding under the cabbage leaves she went on in to the first adobe which was the kitchen.

Blossom wished she had a helper. The worker who had left was a good dishwasher and tortilla maker. He had also kept the wood stove going. At the beginning of her six months on the ranch she wanted the kitchen to be hers alone, then accepting the fact that all the ranch hands and whoever else

was there at the time had use of the kitchen too and enjoying the excitement of this for quite awhile, was then content for a few days at the sudden lack of helpers or family around. But after a few days though she realized that she alone was there to do the dishes, keep the fire and make the beans. Alejandro would make the tortillas but the rest fell on her. Last night the owners from the neighboring ranch had come by and they had brought carne asada so a meal was made, drinks were served, coffee poured, then drinks again and a mess made for her to return to today.

Blossom knew that Alejandro would be done with his chores in less than an hour, wanting lunch and then to mend the fences. She sighed, put a kettle of water to heat and went outdoors under the grape arbor to start on the dishes. The dish washing area consisted of a table with two galvanized tubs and a fifty-five gallon drum of water with a bean can to dip it with.

Alejandro had let all but two of the horses out of the corral to roam the ranch for the rest of the day. There was new grass everywhere and it was a good time for the animals. Plenty of food and water and they looked healthy for it. There are seventeen horses all together on the ranch. Seven of them are yaguas and five of those had all ready had their potrillos. Alejandro was hungry and anxious to finish up and see what Blossom was doing, he knew she made his life at times miserable but nonetheless he enjoyed her. He loved her and had since he met her through the years with his cousin. He thought he was safe in this love as he kept it to himself and could afford this one luxury in his lone existence, never dreaming this long established feeling would one day trap him into a life he never imagined, a fate he never suspected.

It was getting on toward afternoon and Sky had been in the shop since he had left the house when everyone else did. He had been absorbed in his new experiment and time had slipped by rapidly. Now he had come in the living room with O'henry who was still here. He had taken off his boots and had his feet on the foot stool in front of the fire which had turned to

a bed of coals when a commotion with the animals outside kept getting his attention by it's persistence.

"Let me slip into my boots and slide out the door and break it up before they kill each other. Pinche peacock anyway". Sky had regretted letting the India peacock have his freedom. He was bent on revenge for all the teasing Gudrun had given him during his stay in the pen. He called out the door as he went through it, "I bet you we could charge admission for this". The big bird and the small pit bull had taken to leaping at each other and at the moment of impact knocked their chests together time after time. Obviously this would eventually lead to disaster, the peacock was mean and clever and took the game too seriously and only cared to win.

O'henry decided to wait in the house for Sky, usually he was Mexican about it and left when the man of the house left but today he had problems he had been waiting to tell and wanted an understanding ear to hear them. Since he had left the house for the shop he had continued practicing on his guitar. This time a new song he had thought of the evening before while playing and singing with friends on a street corner in a tourist town up the coast a ways. Even though it was afternoon and he had been composing through the night and on into the morning and hadn't really stopped yet he appeared to be full of energy. He was well adjusted to this situation as he frequently missed meals and sleep when these moods struck which were caused now at this time in his life by the confusion and excitement of living with Lourdes and her kids.

America and O'henry talked of his family as he picked out different cords. She and Sky were the only friends from the United States he had here in Mexico.

"How can anyone be expected to handle almost a dozen females all cackling and talking at the same time. I sure can't, I feel like I'm in the hen house". O'henry began his story. "I wanted to just kick back, watch that sun set and sing just to myself when Lourdes and her kids came back with her sister and her sisters friend who just came in from Colonia Tabasco on the bus. I guess they got a ride to the bus stop to meet them but then they all walked the seven miles back from the

bus stop because they couldn't find a ride back. I don't think they tried real hard. So then they decided to walk on the beach and look for tin cans. They found a floor mat to a Cadillac, two beach towels, some big heavy pieces of fire wood and" he stressed", and an unopened bottle of tequila. You think they would have been tired instead of ready to party by the time they got home. Next Don Adelbertos new wife, Hortencia and seven of her twelve kids showed up not ten minutes later with Pilar and Amayrani. When they got into fixing each others hair and the bottle of tequila at the same time I decided it was time to leave but they saw me through that damn crack in the wall and called me back for opinions. How was I to know that when I agreed, reluctantly agreed I'd say, with Lourdes that Hortencias hair was the most beautiful Lourdes would get so jealous in front of everyone".

O'henry stopped talking for a moment and tried his last sentence to music, rearranging the words several times. "I know there's a song in that somewhere. I thought being head of the PTA would make her less jealous since she has such an important position now, but I guess it's gone to her head. She just likes to have a fight going for interest. I can't imagine them drinking like that, I guess it was the thrill of finding the bottle. Sometimes I think I am going to lose my mind".

America realized that what he was really saying was that he thought maybe he should do more with his life then to just drift along were it took him. She also knew he loved his life as it was so she just laughed and let the story pass. O'henry just wanted to let another human know in his own language how crazy things got some times.

She got up to go into the bathroom but the door was hooked from the inside and the blue and gold braided yarn that ran through a small drill hole in the door tied to the hook had become untied once again so she picked up the buck knife that is kept on a shelf next to the door just for this purpose and slipped it through the crack in the door and forced the hook out of it's ring and the door sprung open. She went in and retied the string and hooked the door once again. Realizing that the light was not on and needing it to see into the closet

she had to open up the door again and flip the switch outside the door so the pull chain would work inside the bathroom. Done with this familiar routine America began searching through the sacks of second hand clothes she kept in the closet looking for a sequined blouse and velvet pants she had noticed on first examining the bags. She knew Lourdes would like these to wear to the PTA meeting that was coming up soon on some always yet unknown date.

O'henry would be glad of the clothes too because he would have a peace offering on his return. Lourdes loved to get new clothes, or at least new second hand clothes, never really having bought new ones before. Like the majority of the rest of the people around about she thought only Americans and rich Mexicans were dumb enough to buy new clothes. What an unnecessary expense. Especially here in this area were the tourist handed out sacks of second hand clothes like royalty tossing coins to the poor. It makes a person from the United States feel good to do this, it somehow reassures them of their own superior position in life, with their new bought clothes, most likely not paid for yet. The only concern or worry they have of handing out their clothes, is that the Mexican may sell the clothes and make a profit. America has noticed this angers the Norte Americano here and makes them feel used and cheated. But they say here why keep it when you can sell it and buy food. Besides who has closets, let alone hangers to put all those excess clothes in. The cast offs from one American family could practically clothe the whole school and village. What the Americans do not know and would maybe even balk at handing out their seconds is that a lot of them are used to stuff the cracks in the house for winter. If you take a kitchen knife and a soft cloth you can jamb it into all the crevices and slow down the wind that whistles through a lot of the houses here.

America now wears second hand clothes frequently. She waits till something in the sacks she looks through calls out to her as her own. The Chinese say the vibrations of the last owner stay with the object. In the process of picking them as her own America likes the ones she knew who the owner was

best and if they proved worthy of having their clothes worn. Mr. Elees red wool socks, dead Jim Johnson's rain slicker, the fancy lady, in the high heeled boots with the white Cadillacs sweater.

"Here, take these to Lourdes, she'll definitely be the best dressed lady at the PTA", America told O'henry as Sky came back in the house and resumed his seat this time leaving on his boots unsure of what the dogs were going to do next, they had nearly killed one of his favorite Lakenvelder hens even though they were just playing. The Peacock was hiding on the roof awaiting it's next chance to stir things up.

"Let me sing you a song in exchange for these clothes, I just about have it worked out". O'henry stood up to stroll around the room as he sang, looking out the window and then turning to look his audience in the eye to make sure they had understood that part of the story. His voice is full of life and laughter and confidence. O'henry sang a song half in Spanish and half in English about having a family too big for the house and everyone trying to grab a chair when one was vacated, a comical song with lots of rhythm and a Mexican beat. He would stop in mid song to test a new direction or phrase, laugh and comment and go on, Sky called this act his sing song sway. The music brought in Francisco again who had been out in the yard repairing a cage while Clemente who had wandered back stayed in the shop feeling shy about so much show but enjoying the music from out there where he could hear it because the pounding of the surf right at that particular few moments was only a low rumble, the wind on shore, the clouds low and sound traveled well that day.

Just as the song ended with perfect timing once again the commotion outdoors started in full force this time and everyone ran out the door to try to break up the battle. Gudrun had the Lakenvelder rooster cornered up in a part of the yard where now only animals could get to through the collection of stickery plants and shrubs between the cages and the shop. The wall of the shop on that side was made from a patio glass door on the left and on the right a huge glass door set in a massive oak frame, like a bank door, set sideways with another

patio door also sideways above it, so it looked into a narrow area that was yard and then the back side of the bird cages. There are two Pirules, Mexican pepper trees, growing in here and they had been stunted by the salty air growing long branches at the bottom that made it near impossible for a human to get in there. Francisco forced himself to fit so he was cautiously working past the long needle like thorns of a particularly dangerous cactus bush and trying to get to the big black and white rooster before Gudrun got too rough in her increasingly serious playing left over from the excitement of the contest with the peacock. She always looked so disappointed when they died and stopped their struggle, then guilty when realizing she had lost control and would now get in trouble. One of the Aztecs, Chapo had made his way in and had serious intentions of just killing the rooster quickly. Through the dirt on the windows and the branches and leafs pressed on it and shelves over portions America could see the rescue going on. Sky was yelling Drop It!, attempting to make the pit bull put it down and stop shaking it while O'henry yelled at Chapo to get in the house and stay out of it but he was in a frenzy to finish the fight. Just as Gudrun let go the soggy and dazed rooster flew straight toward Chapo who was by know tangled in a branch but still ready. Francisco making his way over just in time grabbed the rooster with both hands and stumbled toward the solid fence at the end by the driveway where Clemente was waiting with outstretched arms to take it. He held it above his head and everyone cheered. America went back in the house with the reassurance that the rooster would most likely live and with the lack of desire to examine the results and the punishment of the dogs.

Between company and pit bull bird fights work is going slowly today inside and out. O'henrys presence always manages to slow down progress too. Sky will be glad when he is on his way and he and Clemente can totally concentrate on the experiment he was doing with ammonia and hydrogen, trying to contain them in a large still and heating them with sun charged battery banks to produce enough cold to make

ice. His plan is to make refrigeration available to those without electric in an efficient modern method.

O'henry is totally broke at the moment and needs to go home to work on putting horns on cow skulls to sell to the tourist shops. Lourdes ran off her original husband because he drank to much, way to much, and was more of a burden than a benefit. As the women frequently say here, who needs a man when you already have so many mouths to feed and care for with the children, why take on one more. She could and did support herself and the children for five or so years before O'henry came and she had a lot of children at the time. Lourdes fed them and clothed them and was home for them. The older ones went to school in fresh clothes everyday and got good grades. Their health was near prefect and their manners too along with being good to look at. Very striking, their great grandfather on one side was Japanese and Lourdes is Huichol Indian from the state of Jalisco with dark skin that is a rich and dusty brown. She liked O'henry right off and not to rapidly got rid of her best cowhand in the area lover. She was very proud of the cowboy as he had a young good looking wife and preferred Lourdes. The cowboy was the father of her last two sons all three were both handsome in a ranch hand sort of way. She had told O'henry that he didn't need to work, she could support them all and saying this raised her hands in front of her, palms up, fingers halfway curled and added that these hands, saying it twice, were made for work. Lourdes had said all this with such pride and seriousness.

O'henry had a need to see himself as the man of the household and wanted to support Lourdes and her kids. His father came from Spain on a tourist visa and never left so he did not have the correct papers for the United States for the first twenty years he lived there, the mother was Catholic and could not divorce her first husband of ten months, but never the less he had done well by his family. Now O'henry had a hard time making a living here as he was without papers also, as to say, a wetback. It can be easy for an illegal to make a living in the USA but not in Mexico. Mexico is for the Mexicans.

O'henry didn't bring in much money but he did improve their lives. He had a car and that made a major difference. The first big improvement he did was the bottled drinking water instead of soda pops. Around here the big soda semi-trucks stop out on the Toll Road to sell sodas by the case, if you have the empties, as it's easier to get than drinking water and less heavy. The water trucks bring in one thousand gallons of water and fill tambos and pilas but it is salty and doubtful and doesn't stay clean, maybe just clean enough for coffee since the water was boiled. After a few years O'henry had a pila built and it held five hundred gallons of water so they could wash clothes, dishes and bodies at the house and not from the puddle where the large size pipe line leaked that went to a nearby resort. O'henry never did get up a clothes line so its still the barbwire fence for the larger pieces and the spinos on the maguays for the socks and underwear and smaller pieces.

O'henry cherishes his life here and wants to make sure of his ability to stay with it. Sometimes while feeling blue because he has no papers and can't work he worries about his inability to fulfill what he feels to be his part. He hopes one day to have his mother visit and possibly approve, why he wants this he is not quite sure.

Sunsets. So many sunsets served up here daily for the delight of the eye, making there way into Americas memory. They come in such variety and detail. Each one lighting the village in it's own color. Each one reflecting in some unique way off the sea. Each one casting it's own light in her home, touching her couch and finally the chairs and the back wall. Warm spots in the winter and hot spots in the summer. The sun is intense in the winter because the sky is so clear and the ocean dazzles the air until everything is brilliant and separate. Fresh salted air that's heavy with the spray from the waves. Sounds multiply off of the rocks the surf is coming up on. Sprays and splashes of water leap in the air and seem to linger before dropping down into white froth running off the black rocks.

The sunsets set the stage for the coming evenings and everything else adds to it. Today is stormy with the sun breaking through at the moment of setting and casting a hazy soft glow on everything. The surge of activity here in the village as the sun gets ready to go down is always a time to be looking out the window to see who is doing what. America sees Francisco coming back from fishing with the pole and tackle box Sky gave him along with a bucket that has several large fish in it. Across the way is Doña Felicita, his grandmother, walking with two of her daughter in laws down to the oceans very edge to have a moments freedom before the daily event of the evening meal. A group of the old men have gathered at the store and Pilars husband Pancho is doing his never ending work on the water truck. The wind has changed directions once again and is blowing from the south east because America can hear music playing from the village, the clouds have broken up and it never really rained. Not a good rain at all, just a sort of drenching wet air that leaves a person with a chill.

The sunset over and the night taking hold brought Blossom and Alejandro again to Americas house on this busy and not really so busy Saturday to talk of the days happenings and to go to town in a short while for her to make some phone calls. She has a hair appointment in the United States. She needs to reschedule it to coordinate it with existing plans to make best use of her time, as she says. She is in a hurry now to go do this.

"The sun sets so differently over the ocean than the ranch. It's hard to tell which I like the best. I guess I'm lucky I can have either so easily. Look at the blister that broke on my hand, we were out for five hours and I'm still stunned from the beauty of it all. I think I became a different person today."

Blossom is in her work clothes, Alejandro has showered and changed for Saturday night, but not Blossom. She feels good with the dirt, the earth and the sweat of herself and the horse, the aura and the feel of the day spent.

"Blossom, can't you make your calls tomorrow" asks O'henry who still hasn't left yet, in defense of Alejandro who looks real tired and ready to relax

"Don't be putting ideas into his head, we have to go. This hair dresser says he can get five hundred bottles of that fake perfume for a fraction of the price they go for. Imagine the profit I could make. If I don't show up I could loose the deal."

"I don't know about what you all are going to do but I'm going to take a hot shower, eat a good meal and go to bed early" said Sky who was sitting there yawning. "It's what you'd call dark and it's getting late."

"I need to get going too before it's too dark to see. Curse my luck, Lourdes will be suspicious more than ever now that I'm so late, I meant to go home hours ago."

"Come on lets get going. Someone get these dogs so they don't try to escape. Where did I set my drink down that I brought with me, it was only half finished and that's all there is", worried Blossom.

"O'henry do you want a ride to your gate?", offered Alejandro in his friendly and thoughtful way. He was a good looking man with a face that spoke of much more than being a ranch hand.

After more good byes and see you later's Sky and America looked at each other and sighed. The special time of the day was here when they would spend their evening together eating, talking, listening to music, reading and just being with each other.

Over the last cup of coffee of the day which was cafe latté and very special because this was the most recent gift from Americas parents, this coffee machine that plugged into the electric and frothed the milk and steamed the fresh grounds, they discussed their friends from across the border.

"Sometimes I doubt my judgment when we made friends with these Americans. Sometimes I think it's just better to not have any for friends at all. It's not that I don't like them. It's just that I'd gotten away from all that type of talk and even though it's great to talk to someone in your own language I liked it better when we didn't know O'henry and Blossom. I'd

like to get away from all that nonsense. Who does Blossom think she's fooling. She wants to go to town to get another pinche bottle is all. She'll turn Alejandro into a drunk or a madman yet", mused Sky as he set out a variety of short pipe samples while he mentally ranged over the possibilities of where to obtain more of these special thicknesses.

"I wonder what is happening with O'henry. He seems uneasy. Maybe it's getting hard to live that way with Lourdes and her kids. Only one sleeping room and no more than three people at the table at a time so they have to take turns. No privacy and they go through the food so fast. Now that Juan is out of school and working as a cowboy across the Toll Road he brings his friends home and doesn't contribute a thing. He just hangs around running down the car battery listening to the radio and eating up the food. Lourdes last boy is walking now and she talks of having another one as soon as she can. She's afraid she is getting to the time of her life that she won't be able to have anymore. I can't imagine her without a baby." This was said by America as she sat with a large gray cat crowding her lap and Gudrun at her feet jealously glaring as she coveted that spot. Chapo shook his head and snapped his ears loudly to say he was cold and wanted to settle in and be covered.

"Oh boy", sighed Sky with his usual regret. "I sure wish I could talk to Clemente like I can to O'henry, things are so hard to say when the language is not yours. No matter how much I learn it, there are still so many subtle things I can't say, sometimes even obvious ones. I guess that's the way it goes".

"Well anyway things are a lot better now than they use to be. With the house so much nicer and tighter and all. I feel settled in myself and secure in the knowledge that we'll never move back to the USA. So I guess I can afford a few English speaking friends since we seem to have them anyway. But I'm anxious to take a trip, go visiting or something and get away from all this civilization and talk.

"Yep, it sure would be good to take a trip inland somewhere, just the two of us. Well, I guess it's time to call in the dogs and piss on the fire". This was Skys usual way of

saying he was going out to secure everything and make one last check on that last experiment. "Why don't you get the dogs in bed and turn off the lights, I'll be right back. I'll turn off that gas tank cause the pinche valve leaks and by morning we'll be gassed".

The Aztecs being hairless dogs had to sleep with blankets over them and this was a nightly ritual of calling them in, getting each one their own spot and their own blanket in the same order so there would be no jealousy or fights. Gudrun slept at the end of the bed and made sure the other dogs did not sneak up in the night when their blankets slipped off and they got cold and waited to be covered. The dogs were tired and anxious to get a good nights sleep and this was the same for America and Sky.

## LATE WINTER, EARLY SPRING

### SUNDAY

And again another Sunday here in Ejido Emiliano Zapata. The village always has a different feel to it on Sundays. The rain clouds had blown away with the stiff wind that was blowing out of the south. It was a clear crisp day and the temperatures had dropped with the cloud cover gone and one could smell the sun hardened earth of the mesas and the land beyond. The faces of the small waves were held up by the wind making small fans of water on each. The king fisher was out front hovering over a tide pool and two ospreys were circling the point. The Aztec dogs were asleep on the couch and Gudrun was outside chewing a fresh cow horn given to her by O'henry, waiting for Francisco to come feed the cow and the birds so she could watch through the holes in the fences. The traveling priest had just pulled up to the ball court in his old road thrashed Pinto car and was banging a wrench on the basketball pole to produce a bell sound to bring the people. The school teacher was setting up a table at the opposite end, in front of the painted lavender ball court wall, with bright green shiny cloth for the priest to stand behind while everyone stood with him for the whole ritual out in nature and the elements. Two of the pongas were out, one pulling lobster traps and a gill net and the other diving for sea urchins to send to Japan. Most of the family at Clementes was out front of the house mulling around, keeping warm in the sun and heating wash water on a wood fire. The grandmother was taking out Franciscos goat to tie it in the long grass in front of the rocks of the inlet. The door to Clementes trailer is open so he must be awake. His wife and child are in front of the kitchen washing dishes while Pilar sweeps. The water truck starts up and Pancho gets out while it warms up while playing Radio Express over the sounds of the racing motor. People who don't usually talk to each other do so on this day and the wife from the corner house by the gate is talking to the lady who runs the front window candy store. These are some of the things

America sees from out the windows while she sits in her chair having coffee with Sky this Sunday morning.

"What do you want to do today?" They ask each other this question but had no answer for it yet.

"It's so beautiful today I hate to go somewhere else", was one of the next things they said.

"We really should go out and do something different", came after this in their conversation. At least America and Sky felt the same way about the situation and neither of them had any real desires to go anywhere but just stay right at home in the ejido. They most likely would be out soon enough next week on some errand or another that had to be taken care of that would become a good time and an adventure. With luck maybe no one would come by today and they could just relax and talk about what they needed to do to continue their survival and come close enough to keeping everything covered.

A rainbow from a piece of binocular glass sitting on the windowsill pasted itself against his forehead as Sky rubbed his eyes. "There's so many pushy crackpots out there in this world and to top it off money is such a mind boggling situation". He sat there for a moment or two and then stretched and settled in again. The rainbow was now lower and on his mouth, glinting off his teeth. He looked as though he was trying to swallow it.

"Well, I'll tell you like it is. I suspicion we are the same as out of money. Only this little old wad in my pocket. That's not going to go to far and the car is same as empty".

"Then that should make the decisions a lot easier", laughed America.

"Money is a hard thing to come by for some people, have you noticed that? I sure have, being one of them. It's probably because it's not my main interest". Sky stretched and got up and absently strolled over to get another cup of the ever present coffee while he continued to speculate on why some people have money and some don't. He enjoyed to verbally go over the situation time and again in his effort to chew it up and digest it to make sense of it all and very purposefully turn the flow of things. His tensions subside as the conversation

proceeds and he builds himself a future that solves the problems and eases the present. "Life seems to deny us money to make sure we travel the right path. Kind of takes temptation out of the way when you can't pay for it". Sky knows that someday he will have money but not till the time is ripe for it. He never feels poor, just out of money sometimes. Unlike the United States, being broke usually meant you just held even till money came, you didn't get behind really. Getting broke was a good way to save money because during those times you spent little and wasted none.

America feels all they have to do is wait till their lives are right, being lived like she feels is the right way to live, a real healthy balance. "The money will come when we have the wisdom of what to do with it and not. How many people have been ruined because they get their money too soon, too quick, too easy", America said. She was watching Skys face and expressions.

"At least we will never have to worry about that happening to us", laughed Sky and she laughed with him. He hated worrying about money matters or keeping track of where it went or how much he had in his pocket. His pocket was where he kept all the money he had and to do finances he would empty the contents and unfold the wadded bills and separate them into piles of pesos and dollars, making stacks of the coins, separating new issue of pesos from the old. The American pennies being near unspendable here were saved to give to Amayrani and her cousin Chuyillo. Then upon counting the results he would know if he could afford what plans and expenses he had coming up.

This process done for this morning on the footstool in front of his chair he said, "So much for that. I guess we'd better cool it and stay home till something breaks loose". The meager pocket contents stared back at him from the footstool and really didn't amount to much at all, barely more than loose change. Sky figured he'd have more than this, a frequent mistake. "Well, if that doesn't beat all. Broker than a pinche church mouse", and he laughed again. The rainbow was now on Skys stomach bouncing around as he moved to rearrange

the piles. It looked as though he had succeeded in swallowing it. Everything combined had suddenly soothed his senses and he was once again at ease with life. His face was relaxed and his eyes a friendly blue again. He stretched and yawned and then rubbed his hands together in a quick satisfactory movement.

One of the benefits of living in Mexico for America and Sky were financial reasons. Neither one of them were good at making money in the United States at all. Sky had a certain genius for creating businesses that were successful. Good ideas at the right time. The etched glass shop with all the sand blasting equipment he invented for it and the specialty chemicals to eat a design in, the mushroom farm in Oklahoma with all the inventions of how to grow them in that climate, these and several other businesses that came out of his own self and natural intelligence, all still thriving with their recent owners, Skys friends, workers, and relatives. Because of some twist of fate, some guiding force every time Sky got past the struggle of conceiving the idea, inventing the equipment, achieving success and a clientele, that would be it for him when he experienced the moment of elation from the success then saddened by the completion he would be on his way to the next struggle, the next invention.

America and Sky were both in agreement that there was no worse fate than to be trapped in what is in today's world known as success. A success because it makes money but not a success in any other way. Those inventions and businesses left behind in those places they had no desire to live, in whose society they had no desire to participate, and whose gaining of their material possessions they had no desire to accumulate. So freedom lost them their successes along the way and America and Sky were able to get on in life in a manner that suited them just fine.

These years in Mexico together, for America and her husband, had made a marriage that was an entirely different matter. Here was no modern partnership, no struggling for an equality that had no place in reality. America was an old fashioned women, attentive to her husbands needs. She had

no qualms about playing the time honored roll of homemaker and took on the commitment with a whole heart. She felt herself a women, a caretaker of the substance of their life together. She enjoyed being feminine and treated as the more delicate of the two genders. America felt the only equality between men and women was for her to do her part with equal importance and equal success and recognition. To her the home she made was every bit as creative and necessary as the businesses her husband had brought into existence. America never wished herself a man or wished to play a mans role. Yin and Yang. Two sides, one complimenting the other, a balance.

America made the meals, cleaned the house, took care of the dogs, maintained the gardens, made small repairs, picked up dirty socks and emptied ashtrays, turned clean shirts right side out and scrubbed the toilet. She called the men when the meals were ready and served homemade cakes and cookies to Skys friends and workers in the afternoon. She tried to anticipate her husbands needs to have a chance to help him. America did not have any children so she had a lot of time to do these things.

Actually America almost had a child, he just wasn't her own. She and Sky had never really wanted children till they came to Mexico and finally saw a place that would be worthwhile to raise them. They tried to adopt children after they had been settled in the ejido for awhile but it is near impossible. Of course unless you have money. There are a lot of orphanages around but they don't have children for adoption. These orphanages have children that have someone paying for them, a relative or government or such. These places are religious and are run like a business that can't afford to loose money and want the help of those who have a lot to give.

"I think I hear Francisco out back feeding the chickens", Sky observed.

"Oh good, I'm glad he's here, I found the picture of the sinsoncle in the Audubon bird book. He wanted to know how many eggs they have. He also spotted a sand hill crane out front during the low tide. I've only seen them a few times here. He sure was in and out of the house all day yesterday, he

certainly seems to have lost all traces of his shyness. I'm beginning to think that he is here more now than he is at home. You know, in some ways it's too bad he made the decision to quit school, but really, underneath I'm glad and think he was lucky and will have a better chance in life. He needs math and reading but I'm pretty sure he got that down in the three years he did spend in school and that anymore would just get repetitious and be a waste of his time. He knows what to do with his own time anyway and he was born a worthwhile person. If he doesn't like school, that's that". She thought back to her own feelings about school and how it had been for her in Southern California.

America went into the kitchen, careful not to trip over a piece of linoleum that had come loose and hid in waiting behind Sky's chair ready to trip someone, to fix the bottle of powdered milk for the calf that Francisco would need in a few minutes. From standing in front of the sink she had a different view of the ejido. The sink had been in this spot for several years now and seemed to be there to stay. The kitchen had gone through more changes than any other room in the house. At times it had even been moved to what is now finally the bedroom and a long time ago had been outside. Unlike the other rooms the kitchen had some new store bought items in it. There were two new counters, the sink and faucet and the plumbing underneath. The best thing about it to America was the running water. There was even hot water in the sink. After six or eight years of hauling water and heating it on a stove, when luck didn't have it that it was a wood fire, this was a real luxury along with the long awaited electric. America had seen a lot of hard times and knew that having these was a privilege as well as a luxury. Even the bright yellow paint was new, a gift from Sky on a business trek across the border. America was proud of her kitchen floor, it was composed of many different shapes and colors of linoleum scraps, rather like a patch work quilt. These pieces had been found one at a time and brought home and methodically nailed down around the edges over the worn spots. The area near the stove was covered with the bottom of a plastic swimming pool that had come in on the

tide, it was pink with different varieties of goldfish in blue. The old oak table in the center was from the farm in Oklahoma and the crystal chandelier from a box of junk cluttering someone's attic brought down to give to the poor and needy.

"Buenos Dias America, Buenos Dias Sky", greeted Francisco as he came in the door and the exchange of morning conversation went on to include the health of the chickens of which two were sitting or as it is said here, anda culeca, colors of eggs, how strong the calf was getting, the dogs who howled in the night and the ongoing cat fight and then on to a bit of local chismo about Lourdes first husband being drunk and talking to his hand again and last his grandmothers health. For a boy who didn't hardly talk, let alone loud enough to hear, for the first year they knew him, Francisco couldn't be stopped now. He had a small featured alert face and a delicate light body. His hair was totally black and thick and straight, his eyes almond shaped and black, his skin very dark and smooth.

"What are you up to today?", asked Sky of Francisco in English, as he did spend near a year with his Aunt Escolastica in Oxnard where two freeways crossed and he went to school there too. He had mastered the English language in a short time and stayed close to it through television cartoons. It was so easy for illegal children to cross the border in a car full of papered ones and he had gone back and forth quite a few times.

"Nada, mi padre esta trabajando hoy y mi ajualita se fui para El Otro Lado", Francisco responded in Spanish because he refused to speak a word of English for some private reason of his own. This he would not do. America thought perhaps his United States school experience had been bad. As hard as she and Sky tried they could not get him to talk English so they spoke it to him to keep it fresh in his mind till the day he chose to use it.

"How long will Grandma Felicita be in California?", asked America, as she was concerned. She knew the smog and noise always made the old women sick and longing for her own home. Her daughter thought it would do her good to have a touch of civilization now and again, but an upstairs apartment

in a downtown area and a grueling day at an amusement park was not for her. Like the children it was easy for old people to pass the border too. Almost everyone had a friend or relative who looked near enough like them to a border guard that took all Mexicans as the same anyway and they just borrowed the ID. It is so very easy for them to cross the border and nothing will ever stop them, because they are always one step ahead of the Americans. Besides they say here the only Mexicans that cross and stay there are the ones who can't make it in Mexico.

"Viene pronto, con suerte". Francisco admired his young father but loved his grandma best and stayed in the old blue trailita with her.

"I'll tell you what, you polish these boots till I can see my reflection in them and we'll go fishing off the cliffs. I've got some squid in the freezer and a whole shoe box of spark plugs. Don't forget to bring your can", Sky teased. "Well, I suppose you can use my old pole today because I want to try out the one I traded the carburetor for". Francisco use to fish like many people do here, an aluminum can, slightly dented with the line wrapped around it with a hook and spark plug for a weight. He liked the pole Sky had given him but the thrill of using Skys much admired one was glowing in his face.

"Hurry and get your chores done so you can get going". America had learned the word chores and it's significance while she was in Oklahoma.

"America are you going with us?" asked Sky even though he knew the answer. He almost always called her America because after knowing her you realize that is the most fitting.

"No, I don't think so, I want to work in the garden, on the portulaca, while the sun is on that side of the house and I need to sew some tears in the skirt I want to wear today, I caught it on a maguay again. Maybe the dogs and I will catch up to you in a while. Go on and have a good time".

"Mira, mira, there's a baby seal down there on the rocks", Sky called out.

"Well, there goes Francisco, it looks like everything is postponed till he satisfies his curiosity over that". America enjoyed Francisco and felt he was the child she was meant to help. She did not regret not having any of her own and knew that now the time was right. There are so many children who need someone and she had saved a place in her life for one to fulfill.

Since it was just late winter the weekends had not brought many campers and picnickers. Today the sun coming out so clearly, the sun is hotter in Baja, after so many days of going to rain and not, turned it almost into a holiday instead of a Sunday. Everyone seemed to be out and about.

O'henry had quietly slipped on a pair of old Levi's that had new patches and his old pea coat and red, yellow and green stocking cap that his mother had knitted him years ago in their second home on Antigua in the Caribbean sea and had headed out and taken the goat trail and cut along the cliffs early this morning and then arrived home with his sun and exercised warm colored skin glowing, his eyes full of the sights of the season and the words to his new song circling in his head.

His family slept late on Sundays and today they had heard the priest banging on the ball pole, finally with impatience. He obviously was not yet satisfied with the amount of customers who showed up. Lourdes and her kids had meant to go to church, it was a good chance to show off herself and her kids and visit with people she wouldn't have otherwise but the beans had been knocked off the stove by the dog and eaten by the chickens when O'henry had left not getting the door shut well enough and they were out of tortillas and had not had a chance to make more. Vanesa had lost her shoes and Negrito, the youngest, kept howling because they had feed him fish soup the night before and it gave him a pain in his stomach. And really the main reason was that it was too cold to get out of bed that early even if the sun was shinning.

O'henry was glad upon his return that Lourdes and her kids were still here, as nice as it was to get away from them all

it was not pleasant for him to be in the house alone. It seemed so empty and foreign without them. O'henry had always thought it odd that they would light candles and say prayers all week to their picture poster of the Virgen de Guadalupe ringed with plastic flowers and then on Sunday stand in front of the plaster icon of Jesus Christ the priest decorated the table with. Never understanding the workings of this particular brand of religion it almost seemed hypercritical to him. He thought the Virgen was all they really needed and Lourdes being such a strong and independent woman was better off putting her time and effort in the woman and not the man. They were just both representatives anyway. O'henry would be glad when the traveling priest no longer had this place on his circuit and it looked that way as there really was no profit to be made here and few souls to collect.

"Lourdes where are you, I'm back".

"Anda buscando para las llaves." Lourdes and her kids were out back of the house looking for the keys to the gates because they had a paying camper that wanted into Rancho Mapache for the week. The honking horn had finally got them up and around and since it was still cold at night they had slept in their clothes. The very new four wheel drive with all the extras that was parked at the gate on the north end of the ranch held Americans that came here three times every year for over a decade now. This elderly couple always brought Lourdes and her kids gifts and this time they had brought down some food that had defrosted in the freezer during a power outage a while back and had refroze and semi defrosted on the way here again.

"Why look outback?", called out O'henry as he looked through a window without a pane in order to see them better.

"We've looked everywhere else and they keep honking the horn and I've already took the money so hurry up and help us find the keys. They have food for us".

"I bet Vanesa gave them to Negrito to play with again because they have that silly doll key ring I told you to take off. Let them honk, they can learn patience." O'henry shaking his head went into his work room and carefully hung his guitar on

a high nail in a dry spot, glad to get away from the situation. He had no desire to be the recipient of the Americans generous gift of doubtful food.

The problem with the work room was that O'henry had made it big, bigger than the original rooms all put together and naturally everyone gravitated to the bigger space. O'henry had wanted it for privacy, but privacy in a family like his was impossible. At least they were all outside preoccupied by the Americans who were still honking and you-whoing thinking that Lourdes and her kids had misunderstood and forgotten them. He poked around in a corner looking for an orange and a package of Tia Maria cookies he had hidden the day before but they had been discovered. The work room was somewhere near twenty by thirty feet. They had given up trying to measure it as they only had the loose end of a what was once a large measuring tape that had been abused and it only had about eight foot of the last forty and made math hard. It was breezy and chilly in the room because the south wall was all windows stacked between two by fours. The windows were various sizes and did not meet always and left gaps large enough for the cats to get in. The door was massive, off an old bar in a beach town across the border, it was suppose to represent a ship-of-old door and because of it's weight kept pulling on the hinges and sticking on the ground so this was left almost closed and not used. The main problem was the roof, it was of third hand tin from the dump and was full of nail holes and gashes were it had been ripped away. This only covered three fourths of the ceiling and left the area missing by the windows usable only for storage of things that could get wet or be covered with a tarp of some sort. There was six or eight boxes of horns sorted into sizes and color along with spare tires, the toilet that would one day might be installed, a broken bed frame and a lawn mower they hoped to sell to an American and more sacks of those clothes that almost everyone had, lots of sacks of useless dirty old clothes. More clothes than a family could get the water for, or the space to store. They used them to stuff the cracks against the cold, to clean up messes, for diapers, to put on the end of mop handles and to sell a few when they could.

During the last summer when O'henry first started to finish the room to the usable stage it had been warm enough to put the kitchen in along the north wall. He had built a counter out of an old hollow core door and Lourdes and her kids had brought over dish tubs and a two burner stove, the food box and table and chairs. It worked out great and the weather coming through kept the kitchen fresh and cheerful. O'henry had then put in a small partition to work behind but found it a lot more convenient to do the finishing touches on the cow skulls, glue on the two nose pieces, attach the horns and add a wire to hang them by, in the kitchen area out of the worst of the wind. Besides the other half of the room did not have it's floor at that time when the shop and kitchen combined themselves. Winter had forced Lourdes to move the kitchen back to the other room and it had not returned yet. The old red brick structure with the arched windows and arched door with it's red clay roof that served as the kitchen and the new wood, tin and glass addition did not open into each other and everyone had to go out the door to the yard and back in the other.

The floor was the nicest thing in this new room now. O'henry and Lourdes and her kids had persistently gone to the dump and gathered up the broken bricks and tiles from the nearby tourist resort project, taking each arm load back up the arroyo and over to where the Nova was parked and put them in the trunk. O'henry had taken them and made a pattern of great beauty. The colors swept across the floor in an indistinguishable pattern that yet had harmony and design. This floor gave him inspiration and the desire to finish up some of his other projects he had chosen for himself. Walking across it now and singing a Brazilian song that talked of walking and walking and being in heaven now O'henry decided since it was Sunday to take the rest of the day off and let the work go till tomorrow. He could see the wood fires burning and the huge tinas steaming with their contents of cow skulls that he had lit the scrap wood fires under before he left for his walk and knew that Lourdes and her kids would be in the mood to take care of work today so he wouldn't have to worry about it. Today they

were broke and couldn't go to the tanguis to buy next weeks food, their mendado, because the Novas steering had broke and they weren't able to get to the tourist stores to sell the skulls to the curio shops. It was always a lot harder for Lourdes to work when the food box was full and they had money. Lourdes is a hard worker and very efficient, she just doesn't believe in working when it wasn't necessary.

O'henry suddenly had second thoughts about spending the day at home and thought maybe he could just get his guitar and slip out the back way and down the hill without anyone knowing it and maybe visit that crazy drunk across the highway who could play and sing ranch music so powerfully, or at best loud and lively, he knew he had a lot to learn from him. Picking up his guitar and his old pea coat O'henry headed toward the back door and remembered it no longer opened. Cursing himself for his slowness in getting around to things he went back over and looked out the opposite window and saw Lourdes and her kids headed back with their arms full of soggy looking boxes. He might not be able to leave but he definitely wasn't going to eat anything that came out of those boxes. They then set the boxes down and were coming for the wheel barrow because little Vanesas box had developed a whole and was leaving a trail of food.

"Chino, Chino", Lourdes and her kids called out to him with their sobre nombre for him because of his curly hair. "Come see what the Gavachos have given us".

"Ya me voy, I'll get the wheel barrel". The children laughed because they thought Americans were strange. Mama always pushed the wheel barrow and now O'henry had taken a job that just wasn't a mans to them. Lourdes smiled to herself and let him wheel it. At thirty four years old, a drunken husband for many of those years and a few thoughtless lovers she was secretly glad to have a man who was kind to her.

"Andale andale, let's have a race". Screaming laughing riding in the wheelbarrow they picked their way through the rocks since it was the shortest route dumping kids and wheelbarrow over twice and O'henry scraping his hand on a rusted car frame avoiding a cactus bush.

"How come they just didn't bring it up to the house?", O'henry asked as they were emptying the contents of the boxes into the wheelbarrow.

"I think they were trying to tell us that last time they came they got a nail in the tire when they turned around. They don't speak any Spanish at all even if they have been coming here for way over ten years. They are my friends, mucho amigos".

Bringing the food into the work shop where the light was better Lourdes had Amparo clear off the skulls and started laying out the food. She was making two piles, one for the dogs, cats, chickens, and pigs, the other for themselves. The first pile was growing rapidly. Everyone knows you can't eat hamburger and hot dog buns that have been frozen for who knows how long and then froze again and Lourdes put her nose up over the ready made packs of tamales, and looked with horror at the half a dozen chicken pies. The winnies went to her pile being near indestructible, she would mix them with fresh eggs and put them into hand made flour tortillas tonight for dinner. The premade hamburger patties had definitely seen better days and they too went to the first pile. The animals would eat well for several days to come for sure, which was nice for the animals.

Finally having gained entrance the tourists had pitched camp and established their territory by raking out a square and rolling out a carpet. With all their on arrival duties checked off the list they were now ready to start their weeks vacation. The first thing they wanted to do was to thank Lourdes and her oldest boy Juanito for dragging over the trash can to their site and for the circle of fresh ranch cheese and the promise of tortillas a little later on. They had been busy with the tent stakes and felt another thank you was in line, besides they wanted once more to know that their food went to help the poor and they're money had not been wasted. They reassured each other that that much food could feed a family for quite awhile. In fact they planned on getting a Polaroid picture of Lourdes and her kids standing next to them to show

to the grandkids and the bowling team. They'd have to ask O'henry to snap the shot on their camera for them.

Alejandro and Blossom slept late this almost formally spring Sunday. Blossom had talked Alejandro into stopping at the cantina on the way to make the phone call and they never got any further. Blossom was relieved to be around what she considered normal people. There had been quite a lot of Americans there and she had struck up conversations with the majority of them. At first Alejandro waited patiently at the bar talking to another local rancher about the price of feed, the upcoming baths at the official cow dipping for infestations and vaccines for black leg. It almost appeared that Blossom was not with him. She was hot on a business scoop with an American women from a nearby camp who had an inside deal on real estate and then on to an elderly man who wanted to invest money in something in Mexico but he didn't know yet what and Blossom was suggesting cattle when the bar tender asked if she'd take his place on his next day off. She was a ball of energy and information, everyone's friend. And then the tide turned and she progressed to the stage of drunkenness and a major nuisance. She sat down at a table of people she never saw before but thought she knew well and immediately annoyed the jealous wife who jumped up and became indignant. At this point Alejandro stepped in and suggested they leave. Blossom thought everyone had ganged up on her and ran over to the bar and taking a firm grip of the counter started crying and yelling, her makeup was running and her hair had fallen out of it's rubberband. When Alejandro tried to drag her out the Mexican men in the corner told him to leave her be, that they had met her last week here and she was a friend and they threatened to get nasty. Alejandro in a rage said that this was his wife and he was taking her home and they'd better step out of the way quick. Feeling sorry for Alejandro the men quietly sat back down and turned their backs to give him some privacy for his embarrassment. Finally getting her out the door with the help and amusement of some tourist and into the truck he drove her home while she

threatened suicide all the way and he had to keep a firm hand on her so she wouldn't throw herself out the door. On entering the first gate she suddenly forgot the past scene and the fresh air and clearing skies revived her.

"Alejandro you are so very special, I feel like a thief taking you and trying to change you. You are perfect, please forgive me. Let's go on a long vacation and get away from all this, I'll draw some money out of my bank and...."

"Aii, Blossom, Blossom que quieres, what ever am I going to do with you. Here, wipe your face with my shirt and don't cry anymore, I'll take care of you and we'll do whatever you want, just don't cry". And she settled, nestled, down next to him and no more was said till they reached home.

So, all in all it had been a hard night and a hard morning on waking. After Alejandro and Blossom had been up for a couple of hours nursing their hangovers and hoping that the Aunt would not come while they were like this they left their smaller adobe and went into the kitchen. Blossom reached up into the low rafters and took down her toothbrush from among the variety of things stored there. They may not have much water but she could at least wash her face and teeth. Looking into the piece of broken mirror propped up on the table with a brick she was saddened to see what last night's indulgence had done. She sat there shivering and frowning thinking of her age and the need for security.

The kitchen was cold even though the sun had been up for a long time. The adobe brick walls were almost two feet thick and the heavy red clay tile roof kept in the cold. These four adobes had been built about a hundred years ago. Alejandro had been born here in the main ranch house that was on the old stage coach road to Ensenada that was now just a faint rutted out track grown over mostly with tumble weeds, sage, creosote bush, and jojobas . The front of the ranch bordering on the ocean had been sold to a resort builder and had not been in the family for fifteen or more years. Alejandro was left pretty much to himself to care for the whole place as the family had many other interests and just wanted to hold on to the property in hopes someday to sell it at the

right time which could be soon. In order to hold it they had to use it and so this is why they ran cattle on it. That is why the buildings were run down, the equipment in need of repair and the fences falling. Alejandro had a hard time getting workers since he had no money and must rely on his Aunt to pay them which she only did every six months since she provided food and lodging. Frequently he had an Indian from the near by community here as that was the type of work they preferred. Alejandro liked being in the middle of nowhere, where no one could bother him but oddly enough the ranch had a way of coming up with the most amazing situations, it was one of those places in Mexico that attracted unusual activity so he had lead a very interesting life.

"I wish we could go back over to Americas today. I need female companionship right now. I'm a mess. I need to go back to work. I wish your aunt would sell this property and we'd be rich and I really wish I could find my emery board. Yo tengo hungry para something".

"You just sit there and I'll make you a big ranch hand breakfast, here take the eyes off these potatoes while I stoke the coals". Alejandro reached up to a string that ran the length of the kitchen and took off some dried beef to shred for the machaca. The clay pot of beans was already on the back of the stove. Alejandro selected a few pieces of small manzanita limbs and slide them into the small opening on the right of the stove that sat up on a stand of adobe bricks. "Mi amor you worry too much".

It was almost dinner time and no one but Francisco had showed up at Americas house all day so far. She and Sky were still hoping it would stay that way, unless of course it was a paying customer for Skys business, which were few and far between at times and then came in sudden rushes against all odds. The sky was still clear, making everything seem near and touchable. The setting sun reflecting off the ocean lit up the mesas to the east with a golden pinkish hue that accentuated the eternal green that was surrounded by the new green of the early spring.

"Actually I caught the biggest fish even if it did get away. That rock cod must have been a foot and a half long. I could taste it as I was reeling it in, I saw it in the frying pan", Sky told the familiar story in Spanish and laughed smacking his lips and rubbing his stomach as Francisco laughed with him as he mimicked his movements.

"It's a good thing I came along to get you or you both would still be out there. Neither of you have good sense. I could see you out on the point for hours". America was used to this. "You didn't even eat lunch yet".

"We ate those baby abalones for lunch and a tourist gave us a soda each", said Sky as he caught hold of the chewed shoe Gudrun offered him and absently gave it a tug.

"We cooked them in their shells. We burned a dead maguey and set them on the coals", and Francisco went into lengthly detail of the process until he remembered the eel and its story.

"What happened with the eel?", America prompted him.

"Estaba muy feo", he began as he went into a complete description of this with sound effects and a demonstration of the movements that it took to reel the eel up over the cliff and how it popped up over the edge and landed inches from his feet as he leapt backward and landed near Gudrun who wanted to attack it and had to be held back by Sky. Sky hating anything snake like refused to let Francisco bring it home, especially when it bite the knife and took a chink out of the steel and so they gave it to one of the old men that had happened by at the time charging the picnickers that had got by the Ejido Emiliano Zapatas gate without paying for being there yet.

"I suppose you want me to clean the fish for dinner, you two look exhausted. Francisco tell your grandma that your eating here tonight. Take the three rock cods to her and we'll eat the cabazones and the garabaldi". America went in and turned on the gas stove to reheat the beans in her copper bottomed pan that had been her grandmothers. Pilar had made flour tortillas on Friday and they would do for one more night, there was no sense in wasting food. America had a certain method of shopping that ensured her of getting her moneys

worth and that was never compromise yourself or the food either. She bought real butter, whole milk, fresh garlic, flour for cakes, cookies, and pies and fresh meats from the butcher who had recently moved into the ejido and kept the animals across the Toll Road. She knew if you eat meat you accept death by choice, you're part of the killer, so she only served animals she had seen alive. She never bought anything prepared or short cutted. Sky kept chickens out back so she could have eggs and they grew their own tomatoes. America never paid much attention to prices because she always got only the things they needed most and charged them at the store in town to be paid monthly, if possible, and if not with a promise of good faith and the store owners kindness and good business sense because they knew that Sky could pay eventually.

"What did you do today while we were fishing, I wish you would have come with us, the weather was great".

"Oh, I just fooled around out in the garden trimming things back before they got out of hand. It's hard to believe how fast things grow at this time of year, I took out six wagon loads of plants I thinned out, there must have been a couple hundred pounds of ice plant and cactus branches and leaves, they grow so strong and quick".

"I see you've been reading, how's it going?".

"I think this Cuban book was meant to be taken in small doses so after about twenty pages I laid it down and started another book to read in-between. I thought I'd try a modern one for once. It's about a wolf and two boys who go to Mexico. That man sure can write good even if he is a modern author".

America had finished cleaning the fish by the time Francisco came back and sent him out to look for any last eggs so the squirrels wouldn't steal them during the early morning. Sky was carving a message on an old barnacled piece of boat wood that had drifted in on the tide and still had hints of blue paint. He was going to send it to his parents for their sixty-fifth wedding anniversary. Half the engraved letters were there and said "Happiness is not having what one wants," and then the second line would read "but wanting what one has". He had

considered "One mans ceiling is another mans floor", but thinking about it decided his parents would prefer the first.

"I wonder how my parents are doing? We really ought to go back there for a visit". The knife slipped and made a small gash on his left index finger. "Damn, pinche knife anyhow".

"Let me see, let me see" said Francisco always excited at the sight of blood, he was anxious to see if it would bleed much. "Look, it got on the wood, here's a napkin, you'll scare your parents if it's all bloody".

"I think because it's Sunday I'll use the fish plates and the blue handled silverware, what do you think?" America collected California Pottery and Franciscan ware and had a large and varied collection, hardly any matching, but for special meals she liked to use her grandmothers rose patterned dishes or at least something different. These dishes she chose tonight were clear glass and shaped like fish and the serving platter was white glazed metal with a blue fish painted on it and the utensils were blue Lucite with white swirls.

"Quick turn on the TV, I want to hear the weather report", Sky said as he sat there looking at his cut finger and thinking.

Francisco went over and pushed the on switch and waited a few seconds. Nothing happened.

"Shake the cables in back, hurry. OK, now barely twist the channel changer back and forth till it sticks on the station. Turn out the overhead light so it stops the static. Jiggle that sound button. You better try the other channel, that ones not going to make it tonight, the clouds must be moving in thicker".

"Dinner will be ready in a few minutes".

"There, you fooled around so long the weather is over and that's all I wanted to see, the rest is just brainwashing so turn it off. Who wants to watch all that negativity anyway, you'd think they need a daily dose of it". As the TV flickered off a close up shot of an important politician talking of a policy for not helping the poor showed on the screen. "That's a bunch of hooey, those guys are so crooked they have to screw their socks on in the morning when they get up".

"Como?", asked Francisco as he looked down at his feet and thought of how one could do that.

"Francisco, plug in the chandelier and then bring me some of those wild daisies out by the trashcans and a few small branches off the Juniper tree. I need a bouquet for the table. I'll get some bougainvillea".

"Mande?", asked Francisco. He usually understood English but this was too much to decipher so America repeated it in Spanish.

The three of them sat at the table at ease and enjoying each others company, there was something complete about the feeling that was generated from this scene. The chandelier threw a warm glow over all and the dogs ringed the table in anticipation of hand outs and dropped food.

"Pass me a tortilla, please".

"Here, have some more milk".

"Careful, this orange fish has a lot of small bones, get them off your plate before they get mixed in with your beans."

"Toss the pit bull the heads".

"Don't give anything to Chapo, he is to fat already".

"The salsa is hot, the serenos were really strong ones this time".

"Somebody left a sticker in these nopales and it wasn't me who cleaned them, I just picked them", stated Francisco looking suspiciously at America.

Dinner finally being over, the dishes stacked for tomorrows washing when Pilar came, and the dogs fed their own meal they all sat in the living room while Sky picked his teeth and commented on how good the meal turned out and America and Francisco got out identification books to research todays discoveries.

The evening being so visually beautiful made O'henry want to get out of the house once again and go somewhere. He had spent the majority of the day there. The view from his house was a wide circular one. He could see north up the coast, east over Rancho Mapache and the mesas beyond the Toll Road, west to the ocean and to the south Ejido Emiliano

Zapata and its inhabitants. He and his family had been sitting out front watching the flow of traffic off in the near distance headed north. The kids were counting motor homes. He felt full and good. Lourdes had made a delicious meal out of the Americans food and they had eaten better than they had in quite awhile. O'Henry had felt awkward at first when the Americans had walked over for the picture, but in a short time he realized that they were just some more nice people. They in turn overcame their doubts about him and his un-American ways. Lourdes had asked O'Henry to sing them his new song and they were such a receptive audience he continued with several others.

On departure the Norte Americana had whispered something to her husband with a worried look on her face. The husband not knowing quite how to approach the subject his wife had asked him to bring up and looking around for inspiration said, "We had a dog once who got that mange too. We finally got him over it though. My wife and I are going into Ensenada this week to pick up some souvenirs for the grandkids, how about if we take that mother dog in with us and get her something from the vets. Why it couldn't cost that much and we'd like to do it in return for getting to come here."

Before O'Henry's pride could make him refuse this generous offer Lourdes and her kids were voicing their agreement and telling stories of past treatments of dunking the dog in used motor oil and letting it wear off eventually and how that had helped quite a lot but now it was worse again with her new pups. Plans were made and good byes and thank yous said.

O'Henry thought about visiting Sky but after spending nearly almost the whole day at his house yesterday he thought maybe he better not wear his welcome out too much.

"Ya me voy, Lourdes", he said in his differently accented Spanish from his father.

"A donde va Chino?", asked the kids in unison which made him again regret he hadn't left quietly.

"We want to go to, take us with you".

"Take Bebo with you, I think he's going to grow up to be a singer, did you hear him when you sang that last song?" asked Lourdes. He had just completed his seventh year and could already ride a horse well and daringly and this gave her hope that he would also inherit his cowboy fathers voice which was really more enthusiasm increasing with the amount of Tequila he drank than any thing else.

"Amparo get your brother cleaned up and put a jacket on him. The rest of you are staying with me. The Gavachos charged the battery in the Nova so we can watch television again tonight", said Lourdes as she rubbed her hands together and bounced up and down on the tips of her toes.

O'henry and Bebo walked side by side discussing the plants and animals they were passing and making an attempt to hum a tune together. Bebo was struggling along with the guitar proudly strapped to his back. It was as big as he. His skin was as dark as O'henrys and his eyes were a snapping black. He was a brave bold boy and he and O'henry liked each other and were glad to get away from the women.

They had closed the gate behind them when they heard the sound of Alejandro's truck coming up the road.

"Jump in, come with me. I'm going across the Toll Road to help with a colt that has been hurt, I may need some help doctoring her." Alejandro swung open the door. "I just had to get out for a bit", he explained.

Ready for an adventure and liking Alejandro's company when Blossom was not with him O'henry was in the car without even answering. Taking a few seconds to settle in he started to strum his guitar and sing an Irish folk song he had learned from his mother trying his best to put Spanish words to it. Bebo kept tune by rubbing a screw driver on an empty Fanta soda bottle along the rows of ridges on the bottom half producing a back ground beat. Turning his head to where Alejandro was pointing O'henry could see Lourdes and her kids on the roof of the house. She had her mira lejos out and had them focused on the truck. O'henry knew she was looking to see if Blossom was there too in the truck. He hoped Lourdes could see that she was not there so he would not have to go

through the grilling and teasing he would have to receive on his return.

O'henry respected Alejandro and knew his life was enriched by the friendship and he didn't approve or appreciate what Blossom was doing to change his friends life. In fact, that was one of the reasons he came down here really, women. In general he didn't like American women. Loud and aggressive and expensive was his experience.

Laughing and pointing for Bebo to see the women with their ever ready binoculars, his teeth gleaming gold from within his wide mouth he changed his song to the tune of Ranchero music and the words to jealous women. Right at this moment he truly loved life and felt as though he had never felt a moments sadness. Sitting there in that old Studebaker truck, bouncing along on a rutted dirt road in Mexico with a real cowboy and a little boy who had become a valuable friend and a women concerned enough to be that jealous O'henry felt like life was perfect. On reaching the Toll Road and going south in order to get back going north to the village they were headed for O'henry once again began to sing a different song, one of his own that he wrote while on a visit to his mothers island home with the influence of his dual inheritances on him.

Lourdes was full of strong likes and dislikes, bitter feuds and quick friendships. When she was not in an indignant rage she was in a happy laughing mood and her whole short thick body bounced with life. Lourdes married her first husband when she was fourteen years old. Miguelito had met her with her family when she was twelve and had decided to come back in two years for her, which he did but he had to steal her in the night. Since he was a part time cowboy and sheepherder he had no money and he was thrown in jail, released when it was evident a father would be needed and married in a court of law. This was way Lourdes felt she didn't have to mind him, they had never been married in front of god in a church.

Lourdes enjoyed having enemies and made sure she always had a couple she was battling with. At the moment Blossom was the target of Lourdes worst jealousies. Blossom had no idea and no one had told her. The original cause along

with the fact that she was an American woman was that she had gone over to Rancho Mapache to see if O'henry would help drive her Carmen Ghia across the border because it was breaking down and needed milely repairs to keep it going. That was all she did really. The problem was that Lourdes and her older kids were not home when Blossom came and she went right into the house and sat in O'henrys chair and talked for a half hour till Lourdes got back. Her younger kids were at the window behind Blossom where O'henry could see them and were blowing kisses to indicate that O'henry had a novia now and when Lourdes came up they began to sing "Chino tiene una novia, Chino tiene una novia". Lourdes upon entering the house let off a blurt of rapid Spanish and turned to Blossom to see what her excuse for visiting her man alone was. Well, Blossom didn't even have the sensitivity, or imagination, to pick up on the situation and thought Lourdes was glad to see her. Fortunately it was time for her to get going and smiling at Lourdes and promising to come visit soon she left. Lourdes made the most of it and threw O'henry out of the house for the night and cooked him ugly food for three days. Now she is on her guard. Living next door to a ranch that the owner turned into a tourist trailer camp many years ago had allowed Lourdes to form a pretty accurate opinion of Americans and their women. She had worked at some of their vacation homes and seen them at the local cantina and on the beach for many years now. America was her exception.

O'henry laughed and laughed till it became contagious. Bebo joined in and then Alejandro. "Women", they said, "Aii, women. At least were free of them for the moment". And they drove off down the road out of sight.

"Bebo, jump out and get the gate". Bebo liked this gate, the president of this particular ejido they were going to had been shot and killed with a twenty-two rifle right on the very spot where he stood to open it. The blood had been long gone since it was near a year but he always looked for traces and always thought he discovered some. The house they were going to was not far from this gate.

"Buenos tardes Don Apolonio, donde esta la potrillo que tiene la heirda?", asked Alejandro looking for the colt that El Senior Cesarito had told him of.

Alejandro was well known for his abilities with animals and the old man was glad to see him as well as honored that he would come.

"First we must catch him and then restrain him because I must clean out the wound with iodine soap and boiled creosote leaves". This lead to a lengthily and lively chase and capture scene because they did not want to rope him and ended in the colt being cornered in the yard of a neighbors house and gently lead back with many guiding hands.

"The splintered fence post has stabbed into the chest tearing the hide open. I'll have to sew it. O'henry do you have any extra guitar string on you, I'll need something strong to hold this wound closed". Alejandro picked a long unfriendly looking sticker off an odd cactus bush and carefully started making a small hole in the thick end for the thread to go through. Then next he would pierce the skin with the point of the knife to start the opening for the crude needle.

"Bebo, help Alejandro, this isn't my line of work and that smell from the wound makes me queasy". O'henry walked off a short distance and stood there admiring the great beauty amid the crude shacks, the variety of potted plants in tin cans, milk cartons and tires turned inside out and fluted. Such incredible harmony, all blending to form a feeling of a separate reality or existence. A farming community, all pulling together to plant the nopales and flowers. This house had been here twenty five years or more and looked like a far different version of a storybook cottage. The hollyhocks had come up along with and taller than the corn and were every place they didn't look like they should be. A wild confusion of plants and fences, yards, pens, storage, so many things in such unexpected ways and places that they melted into harmony, an almost extension of nature. Even the trash looked in place and this wall here that had fallen and become a floor, the refrigerators laying on their backs holding water for the animals, the car door fence that ran along the back over to the east all looked in place. O'henry

sat there looking at all this, and at the same time following the view out further through the back bay and all its plants and animals and on to the sand beach and breakers and the coast to the north for miles. These nopal plants that O'Henry sat near as Alejandro and Bebo secured the colt and held it down, had just been picked this morning and the young tender leaves were already on the way to the Tijuana vegetable district.

Don Apolonio sat on a turned over bucket and gave his view of how it should be done while Alejandro and Bebo proceeded to do it their way. Bebo was fast and efficient with horses and had no fear. Alejandro once getting the cleaning of the considerable wound going turned the job over to Bebo who had smaller hands and could get inside better where the stob had gouged in one side and out the other. Don Apolonios old wife sat in the door scraping the stickers off her nopales one by one with a quick flick of the knife. Children were laughing in the background somewhere nearby and the large variety of birds who are active right at this time of day, the transfer time to a different realm, one of darkness and sleep, were preparing for the coming night.

Leaning against a huge eucalyptus tree with his back and one foot O'Henry sang a favorite song for a time like this. It was one learned from his old Irish grandfather and the author was as far as he knew anonymous. His Grandpa Chauncy Haley called it the Hobos Song and sang it when out on the heaths. The words went something like this:

I've written my name on the river,  
I've put my name on the sea.  
My name is on the summer skies  
They all belong to me.  
I've written my name on the violets,  
That grow in their corner fair,  
And wherever Nature has planted peace,  
My name is written there.  
As Far as the eye can travel  
From where I stand is the sun  
I've put my name on the things I see

And I own them, every one!  
My name is on the singing birds  
That mate when spring is new,  
But I won't be selfish with all these things  
I'll share them, friend, with you.  
There is no fence round the heavens,  
No vault holds the sunsets gold;  
The earth is mine and the sky is mine  
Till all the suns grow cold.  
The stars are my thousand jewels,  
And life is my bread and wine,  
All that I see was made for me,  
And all that I love is mine

Nobody who had gathered around by the sounds of this gentle music could understand the words to much but the way they were sung brought across this message and the last pink glow from the suns light had turned into a strip of brilliant orange on the horizon, the only sign of this days existence, and all present, which were more now that a small crowd had gathered at the event of a doctoring, felt a closeness that bound them beyond their everyday existence. The pure gentle sweetness, the rounded words of O'henrys song cast a sparkling of knowing that their lives were immersed in beauty, that they were free, that life was theirs. After the song ended all were quiet till Bebo triumphantly called out he had found where a rusty nail had come loose from the stake when they pulled it out of the colt. This let loose the main part of the infection and it gushed out in a flow with kids screaming and laughing to get out of the way and parents proud and content watching them at their fun.

Night had come and everyone had drifted back to the security of their individual homes to eat dinner and discuss the events of the day. Alejandro was in the process of refusing the much handled dirty handful of pesos the old man offered and accepting the sack of cleaned nopales. O'henry and Bebo waited in the truck.

Lourdes and Blossom, both of them, waited for their men to come home.

"Well there goes another perfect Sunday, I'll sure be glad to get back to work tomorrow, we have a whole heap load of work to do too. Clemente came by while we were fishing to tell me about a guy who's got a seventy something Chevy truck for sale, with papers and out of date tags. Says it doesn't smoke. He said he'd be here early tomorrow, we also have a client coming from Cabo San Lucas". Sky was relaxing in the chair in the corner of the bedroom smoking his last cigarette of the day.

"Who knows what Monday will bring".

America was sitting in bed propped against the pillows reading a passage from the book she had chosen to read earlier in the day. "Listen to this, this is excellent", and she read on excited over the find of a good author.

Sky half listening and half musing over future plans slowly drew off his Red Wing boots and massaged his tired feet while yawning. "Days I don't work I feel so tired at the end of them" he said when America shut the book.

"Your lucky to hear something from a book of that kind", said America referring to the fact he had made no comment.

"It was all right, I liked it". He was not a reader and always enjoyed when America read to him but found it hard to come up with an appropriate comment.

"Isn't Mexico great, I just love living here. Me, the dumb Okie, here in paradise and about to get rich too. My mama always told me I wasn't anybody's fool. You about ready to turn out that pinche light now?"



## EARLY SUMMER THROUGH THE CLOUD COVER

### MONDAY

It was an early summer Monday morning. It had been clear throughout the night and the early morning. When America and Sky woke at the first hint of light filtering through the bedroom window, but within a couple of hours the low cloud blanket that had been waiting off shore moved back in to float between sea and mesas. The late spring and the warm clear weather it brought always made hope for more warmth but the summer gloom had set in for a month or two. This weather had it's advantage, it was good working weather, it held out the intenseness of the sun and held warmth under the low ceiling of clouds. But it was hard to do without the sun and America had taken awhile to get used to this. She now looked forward to this quieting sort of drifting time and used it for the ever mounding pile of books she would read and to create fans from her collection of feathers from her many birds. She had always been interested in the art of feather work called Amantecayotl by the Aztecs and these fans were her own version of it.

America likes to read early in the morning before anyone comes over. She is sitting in the front room with the sounds of the Wailers softly playing, surrounded by her colors, with a silk housecoat on, that is printed with orchids on a deep lavender background and red flannel pajamas, sipping dajarling tea out of a cup shaped like a peacock with its neck for the handle. She has finally finished the Cuban book she had been reading and has rewarded herself with one of her favorite authors, Joseph Conrad. She had read a lot of his books and was pleased finding one more at a second hand furniture store in Ensenada tucked into a forgotten drawer. America has incredible luck finding books and lets this instinct guide her to them. In a book store she becomes bogged down with the choices, so she lets fate pick her books for her, finding one here, another there, in the most unlikely places. This way she reads books she would never have read if given a choice.

America has read so many many books of all kinds, the only thing the books have in common is that they are all well written and worth the time

Looking up from the book she turns her head to study the view. Around twelve years with this view outside her windows and not that many changes, but a few very significant ones told a lot. There had always been a road coming to the section Americas house was on because many years ago there had been a fish camp here but now it had a layer of good white earth over the rocky and pitted old road. And further on a few improvements and additions to the houses in the center of the ejido, a small trailer, a room addition, a fence, the ever increasing amount of trees and flowers, stored cars that would never be repaired, three new outdoor toilets and a blue and white tile fountain that looked like a men's urinal on the house up highest on the hillside. Then along the coast to the south the half dozen houses or so that the rich Ejidatarians put in and came to on the weekends or when they can or have to. These things are all new and have just come in the last five years or less. Big houses of massive rocks and heavy wood and tile. Some with almost to much imagination and others square and plain.

The most significant difference in the view though is the electric poles. These signs of progress come straight lining from the highway and reach the village and go a short ways right and left. And as life would have it they came to Americas house and she has electric after around ten years without it. Don't let anyone ever say that living without electric is quaint or enlightening or a good experience. La luz, the electricity is a pure luxury that makes life ever so much nicer and more usable. Of course the view of the mesas and ocean never changes, and the feeling looking at the village never changes either, at least not yet.

Ejido Emiliano Zapata is a village that is very special. A place caught in time or more exactly without time. Progress has nearly skipped over this tiny ejido by the sea. There was no bus stop till just last year, there was no store but the candy store till recently, the road in is bad and behind locked gates

and the old men charged you to pass and no school or way to get to one either. All this served to keep this certain small area very private and primitive and undesirable, to most. It took Americas husband Sky near a year to find this spot after they arrived in Mexico. They stayed at an American trailer camp for several months before realizing the dead end of that situation and then went on to a small tight town and were repelled by the closeness of the houses, the over used earth of the roads and yards, the lives of so many outside the windows and through the walls. And then with luck and living right America and Sky completely found this place. It was the place were they were going to belong, to have Mexico become their land of choice.

This village is an ejido, an extension of the Mexican government. Land for the people in perpetuity. To have as their own, never to sell but be handed down parent to child. Property to use and improve, to hold on to, to belong to. Every person by the fact that they are born on this earth should have his piece of it. This area where the ejido was at one time was a large ranch. When a rich company bought the ranch about twenty years ago they, as part of the law, had to give so many hectares of land to the government for an ejido. This type of land is set aside for the poor, for those who have nothing else but the land they live on. So when Sky brought America here to live, only a handful of poor people lived here also. All the houses were in their just beginning stages then and most people had to leave to go back to family and work after the weekend here. It was the few old men who were left behind full time to hold onto the land and make the improvements necessary, demanded by law, to make it their own, these strong willed old fashioned Mexicans who had come from other states long years back in search of new opportunity. Every ejido is different and in it's own stage of development.

Living away from so much that is civilized and modern and living with these people the way America does makes her a far different person than she would have been if she had lived in beach cities where she was brought up. Even her chemical makeup is different. The molecules that her body exchanges

for the next have just been taken from something clean and clear. In Mexico there is such a difference in people. The poor are truly poor in some ways, maybe many ways, primitive still. The well to do and educated can have so much sophistication and worldliness. There is a middle class but it is small and struggling and could be depleted from this Peso problem and recent scandals. What America personally and selfishly likes is that Mexico doesn't seem to be one big nation of middle classness, rich and poor just about alike in their tastes and desires.

America believed in Skys good luck and living right and that this rare opportunity had been given them as a special gift from the great balancer or whatever to make up for the fact there was no real place for them in their own country. Here they lead the best possible lives and can have the best of both worlds, first and third There are very few United Statesians in Americas unique position. Yes, there are lots of Americans everywhere here but they are in a category of their own and are lumped in together as one, Los Turistas. Los Norte Americanos. Los Gavachos. Los Gringos. Very few make it into the world of Mexico. They come for the cheap rent and alcohol, the false sense of freedom and someplace to go. Sky avoids these Americans in all but keeping them as paying customers so America seldom has any contact with them. They just don't fit into the reality here or into her own particular type of reality either.

Then you have the Americans who live on the fringes of their own society and have their Mexican friends and their Mexican involvements. They form the group known as the locals. The ones who have the low down and the inside information, the ones who impress you with their knowledge of Spanish and their friendliness with the local stores, workmen, and bartenders. It's a tight crowd and hard to get into. America nor her husband never made it, somehow they just never had much in common with them either. Sky had no outside income mysteriously arriving the first of every month and was too poor to be proper, even in these loose living peoples minds. If you are from the United States you have money, everyone here

knows that, and it most likely comes through the mail. Also America nor her husband didn't drink and that was a true separating point. This select group frequented the cantinas and did what ever drinkers do, America and her husband did not.

For the first five years America rarely spoke to an English speaking person unless it was to get their much needed money and that happened too rarely. Plus there was the usual barriers that were always found with people of her own nationality. So America and her husband lived their lives with the Mexicans as part of this ejido, gaining their respect and trust and slowly being accepted. Of course America and Sky always remain the Americans but are all one in being humans in need living in a community. Both of them are most definitely part of this place and part of the lives of this place. As some of the people of the village say of them in the form of compliment, "They're as Mexican as nopales".

Francisco and his cousin Chuyillo have come earlier than usual this morning to take care of their daily chores at Americas house because the teacher wants to practice for the parade they are having today. Francisco has made an exception and will go to school today to march in the parade. The boys grandmother, Doña Felicita sent over two corn husk carefully wrapped on a plate with a hand embroidered cloth over it. She said they had been soaked in special water overnight and in the morning the boys were to tie them tight up at the top of the calf's tail to cure it of its diarrhea. Sometimes America has difficulty in accepting a cure that she can't find the connection in but none the less is willing to give it a try. This is a very serious project to the boys and they are very business like taking care of it. Chuyillo is six years old and just starting to be responsible. He is one of Clementes nephews, the son of Chuey who lives at the campito too. Chuyillo like Francisco also has no mother present.

"Mira, mira", calls out Francisco as he has so many times at what he sees from here. He is finished with the job of the cow and he and Chuyillo are in the house looking out the window at a school of dolphins mixed with tunas gliding

through the waves. The dolphins are here often but it is always a thing to marvel at and the tunas adding their bright flash as they break free of the water for a moment is a gift to the senses from nature. The boys are excited and breathing on the window which steams up making it necessary to wipe it off and in doing so smear the window with the chocolate frosting off the cookies America just gave them. She has just washed these windows on rising to be able to see the surf better. America is always washing the windows and clearing the view. The chocolate can wait till later and she says nothing. She has the children in the house because she likes the way they are and doesn't want to force any American child training techniques on them. These boys are free and natural. Since they have no mothers, only their young fathers they are rarely disciplined and have few rules to go by. The grandmother tries to catch them by the ear as they run past and give it a good twist when they have been bad but they are very fast. Sometimes she will throw a rock at them and is a pretty good aim hitting them gently but noticeably. They have a lot of respect and love for her and they get along perfect. She is a wonderful grandmother for two such boys, giving them what they deserve at the moment they deserve it and letting nature and the natural goodness of the boys do the rest. She is warm and kind and loving and long suffering.

"Here's the fish book, lets find out some more about them", America tells them. She has had this identification book, Guide To The Coastal Marine Fishes of California, fish bulletin number 157, for over a dozen years and it is well used by many people. The fishermen stop by frequently for coffee and conversation and they have marked all the fish that they have seen around this area. America has her own mark by the ones she has seen and now the boys are putting their mark by the ones they in turn have seen

"My Tio says there's a dead whale at the sand beach at Punta Piedra. He says it's really big and smelly".

"Maybe we can talk Sky into taking us down there to see it", America says. Two years ago a whale shark over eighteen meters long had got caught and died in the fishermans gill net

they had set about two kilometers out and they had to drag it with their small wooden boat with a forty horse Yamaha motor to where the surf was breaking and let the waves take it in. A bull dozer working on a nearby project for the tourist came and tried to pull it away but it was too heavy. America, Sky and the majority of the ejido came to view it, wonder at its immenseness and cut off chunks to eat. An attempt to sever its tail and take it back proved futile because it was too heavy to move let alone carry. Everyone had so much meat that it was fed to their dogs and the dogs spread it all out and it was weeks before everyones homes and yards stopped stinking and the dogs were bearable. So the chance to see a whale up close was too tempting to pass up, even a dead one on the beach, who knew what wonders it could provide.

"I want one of its teeth" says Francisco. America had recently shown him her collection of sharks teeth.

"Look at this picture here, it's probably a gray, remember they don't have teeth like sharks". America has out another book that is just about whales and explains what it says to the boys. They are amazed that such a big animal can't just munch up and swallow a boat and fishermen whole if he wanted to. Both boys were born in Tijuana and have only recently moved to nature.

America sees the other children approaching the school house and knows it's time for Francisco and Chuyillo to get going. The teacher lives at the school. The school is in a small room that has been added onto a small camp trailer back in the late forties by some adventurous tourist as a fishing shack and getaway. It sits near the edge of a rock cliff overlooking the sea and the waves pounding on the rocks below flinging their spray high overhead. The length of the school room has a window that looks out over this scene. In back there is a wooden covered porch with a railing and a wooden walk going to the outdoor bathroom. The myoporum trees had grown large with the care they received through the years. Inside the rock wall surrounding the small yard, geraniums, several types of ice plants, hottentot figs and a brilliant orange flower with close small green succulent leaves, red hot pokers and a

eucalyptus tree grow. Along the outside are cactus, natural succulents and volcanic rock piles arranged by nature.

"What time is the parade?", America asked for no good reason because she knows that it won't be on time and that she must keep a constant look out for it so as to run to the corner and help make up the audience to witness their effort.

"En mas o menos una hora", answers Francisco as Chuyillo gives his answer of "un radito". They go out the door forgetting to shut it behind them.

Around noon after looking out the window many times especially while washing the dishes because that window too looks out over ocean, school and village, America suddenly notices that the parade is already part way up the backside of the ejido on it's way to circle around and come through it's center before turning south and heading back to the school.

In a village where there are less than a couple of dozen people total to welcome them as they march by each ones presence is very important. There are fourteen children in the school but the parade had twice as many people in it as mothers and younger children were in it too. The theme of this parade was Pancho Villa and their Indian ancestry and the school children were dressed as Indios, conquistadores and pistoleros. Bebo in a painted cardboard helmet rode a horse in front followed by three girls in long white skirts and colorful tops. The white skirt of the middle one carrying the flag was Americas good full cotton slip rolled up at the waist cleverly disguised under the red sash. Then a few boys all in white with colorful sashes too and next girls with bright skirts, boots and cowboy hats carrying a band of what appeared to be paper bullets around their waist and up to their shoulder and a paper gun on the hip followed by one very young fat little boy dressed as one of Pancho Villas soldiers too. Francisco and Chuyillo and two more boys came next with red sashes and paper shields. After this was the mothers following behind and Amayrani dressed in white as an Indian too and a large selection of the local dogs. Off to the side and a little behind was Lourdes oldest boy with Gudrun on a rope as she strained to free herself in hopes of attacking a tethered mother goat and

her babies. She must have seen the parade start and went to be with the boys. Leading this whole procession was the school teacher walking backward the entire length so as to keep the children marching in time to the battery tape deck he was carrying that was playing music that was barely discernible as music and carrying a camera in his back pocket, every five minutes or so taking a picture to record this memorial event. He has been teaching at the school now since the beginning of this semester in September. He is seventeen years old. When he completes this year of experiencing how to teach school in actuality of really doing it he will return to school, to college to further his education to become a graduated teacher. He is called Profe here and given a lot of respect. The school is in it's third year and has gone through a few teachers. One thing or another has sent the other ones on their way. This Profe misses his mother to much and has a bad tendency to play a little rough but he is a good teacher, taking the children on walking trips and making sure each one gets their share of the food he prepares at break time for them. He is in an important position and does have a lot of responsibility and must deal with the children as well as the parents.

"Buenos tardes" he calls out proudly to America as the parade passes by where she is waiting for it. The children see her but have been well drilled and do not break the seriousness of the event to wave to her. All except the one in the rear who seems to want to tell America something about the dogs and runs over to her. He is taken up by his mother and put back in place. The mothers appear casual and gossiping as they walk with little signs of the pride, excitement and contentment they are experiencing inside. It's not that often that they see each other all together and it is a big moment for them, their eyes are bright with excitement and some voices are high and some hushed. Some have chosen their clothes well and wear their best and others have on what they were working in still. Clemente's brothers Pancho and Chuey just moments before have come up rapidly in a little multicolored Ford Falcon with the hood and one fender missing

and are sitting carefully on the rusted roof to watch. They are the only fathers present.

America has been invited to the piñata party after, but since Sky has given them the little mermaid piñata, with the candy, so the girls can have one of their own without the competition of the boys, she feels like she has done enough combined with being there to see the parade pass. Frequently America takes the opportunity to go to these functions as they're fairly rare around here but this time some do-gooder from across the border school teacher and her friend will be waiting at the school to hand out second hand clothes and gifts and to receive a cultural experience to tell of back in the familiarity of their city and America has no desire to become part of that experience so she shall stay at home. Besides that she can watch it through her monocular if she wants to.

Ejido La Cienega del Valle, the ejido where Alejandro cured the colt, across the Toll Road, is tucked in a pocket between some swales below the mesas and was not visible from the highway or anywhere else unless you drove the old water scarred dirt road back into it. The Norte Americanos in their nearby camps and resorts had no idea of it's existence so close to them. It was hard to guess it was there, a lot of the Mexicans in nearby towns had not even heard of it. This ejido had a lot more people in it then the one America lived in. It was a farming community, sheltered from the sea at the foot of the mesas. Here they grew the nopal cactus and flowers. There were plastic covered buildings with rows of carnations growing chest high on the women workers, each four square inches divided by strings from ground to blooming top which was wrapped with a round of clear tape at it's base and all other buds pinched off. Near the back are the roses, still experimental due to lack of necessities for them, a profitable crop but hard to compete with the Dutch who own the big rose nurseries nearby. The Dutch had discovered Baja Californias weather to be ideal for tulips and experimental flowers. In the fields were gladiolas, not many, and in autumn the oversized orange and yellow marigolds for the day of the dead. The plots

were not big and each person had planted what they wanted how they wanted so it made a very interesting spread when entering the gate and going down into the small heart of this place.

The houses here are of very poor construction and living looked primitive. Here there are families whose children did not go to school, which is unusual. The people themselves are as rough and crude as the yards and fields that surround them. Each ejido brings it's own nature and attracts as such. Ejido La Cienaga del Valle has thieves in it. A bad element had been introduced to it when the fights over who the land belonged to began and undesirable types were hired to stay on it to help hold it. This ejido is definitely in a bad stage of development, in fact not even an ejido in the books in Mexico City.

Almost every house seemed to be surrounded by cans, buckets and tires filled with flowers. On the porches, from the rafters, on tables, spreading and spilling their contents or lined up in irregular rows on the ground. Each house having it's own measure of beauty, each house painted in bold colors or faded to a mellowing shade of indistinction. Small inventive fences, little gates, all on slants, made from imagination and necessity. The older central houses huddled close together and the later newer ones just a little further out and beyond the fields of nopales growing strong and virulent. Each separate plant with it's crop of cactus green new leaves tender and ready to be delicately sliced off at it's base and made ready in a wooden slatted box for shipping.

One home in particular, an oversized camper with a blue refugee tarp pulled over the top, bound with rope and weighted with rocks and bicycle frames, at the far end of the community about a quarter mile further on from Don Apolonios, stood out in it's bleakness, the ground hard stripped of everything living, surrounded by cars, old and not running, and their many parts in what appeared to be total abandon. It is difficult to tell that the man who lives here has his livelihood from these cars. From the useless hulks came many valuable parts since he had chosen wisely in what

wrecks he brought home. This establishment is the local car mechanics and he is well known hereabouts. The property has one lone tree that serves as a place to hang any object that could be hung. The clothes line, a piece of rusted bob wire ran from this tree to an upright car frame. One of the lower limbs that had been lobbed off has a spoke wheel hanging from it and in a crook of the limbs a plastic milk bottle of motor oil slowly oozed its way down the trunk. Nails had been hammered into it to hang tools from and a broken headless doll was caught just out of reach in the branches. A Winnie the Pooh pinata remains flapped in the breeze high up on an extension cord with no ends. All is a mess and nothing is organized but curiously enough there is not a stitch of trash anywhere on the ground and the dirt of the yard is freshly swept and sprinkled with water against the dust.

"Pass me that nine sixteenths", Sky called out from under the Mercedes to O'Henry. He and the mechanic were laying on their backs side by side on a piece of old carpet that appeared to be dirtier than the dirt around it with only the bottom halves of their bodies protruding from under the car. The car is propped unsteadily on an unlevelled jack in the soft earth and there are rocks behind the back wheels and two tires stacked under the front frame. It was typical of Sky to hire a mechanic to work on his car and then do at least half the work himself as he demonstrated proper methods and boasted of his abilities with stories of past car successes.

O'Henry believed in fate but also thought it should not be tempted so before handing over the wanted tool that was needed to once again repair the sagging muffler he said, "If you guys want to get squashed I don't want to be here to witness it". Taking out his harmonica from his back pocket he began playing a funeral dirge.

"Radio that pinche noise, a man can't hear himself think, what are you talking about?", demanded Sky.

"That gives me the creeps, your putting a hex on us", said Rower in Spanish that still held its disguised Honduras accent since he was here without papers, as he slid out from

under the car. "I heard that music in a cowboy movie and he died with a bullet in his back".

Getting out from under the car too Sky went over and sat on an old car seat that was under the shade of the tree and pulled out a package of Alas offering them around. By this time O'henry had stopped his playing and was kicking at the jack testing it's abilities.

"Is that what your yammering at, if the pinche thing gives it'll just come down on the tires, it's perfectly safe", observed Sky.

"Let the muffler hang down, the bailing wire holds it well enough, I hate to work on Mondays anyway", said Rower as he glared at O'henry who in turn laughed making Rower cross himself and step into the sun.

"Papi Papi, the coffee is ready", called out one of the five little girls who are playing house in one of the junked cars. On the far side of this car without it's hood, doors, wheels, trunk and seats is two piles of tires with a piece of plywood across the top forming the outdoor dish washing area which is next to a very small kindling fire with a pot of boiling water balanced on an oven rack. Chavela, the mechanics wife, is out of propane and cooking outside in the misty summer sun soaking up it's warmth on her frail and unhealthy body. She enjoyed cooking on the wood fire, it was a slow process but demanding and she took the job seriously as she did all her responsibilities

Rower got up and walked over to a drum of water deftly sweeping off a small amount of it from the top and sharing the water with the other hand reached for a rusted can with blue powered soap, lathered up his hands and several times repeated the motion with the water. Another younger little girl ran up with a white towel and handed it to him. Sky then did the same and O'henry not wanting to be thought lacking in manners washed his almost clean hands but avoided the soap.

The three men went into the camper each quickly seating themselves in the built in eating nook. Chavela then came in with the pan of water and sat two chipped cups and a jelly glass on the table along side the paper sack of sugar that

two of the little girls had come back with from the store that is inside the kitchen of the red brick and tarpaper house on the corner. Sky had given the little girls each a bit of loose change and the oldest had collected it up and had given it to their mother. She filled each cup with hot water and sat a jar of Nescafe and three spoons on the table by them. Having done this Chavela reached over to the bed that was built in near the ceiling at the front of the camper and adjusted the blankets on the new baby girl. The baby is awake and smiling. Three more girls come into the camper and Chavela made way for them to get up on the bed too, telling them to keep quiet while their father had company.

"How is the new one?", asks Sky in Spanish of Chavela as he stirs his coffee in.

"She has no problems and eats well, she is bigger than the others were. Hand me La Gordita so I can show the men". One of the girls unwraps the blanket the baby is bound in and rearranges the knit cap and jacket the baby has on. One of it's knit gloves has fallen off and was lost in the covers and they started a search for this. Both little knit boots are still on. Chavela did not have any diapers today so she had used an old tee-shirt as one and put the knit pants over this.

"She looks warm enough anyhow", remarked O'henry.

Rower is beaming with pride and love looking from the baby to his guests. He thought he himself had performed a miracle again. He took her from his wife and propped her on the seat between he and Sky and talked to her in baby talk while handing her bits of flour tortilla. The rest of crowded in at the door and watched as their father shows off this sixth beautiful healthy, definitely not needed girl. There was no greater event or happiness then a new baby for them.

"How many more before a boy?", teased Sky.

"Number seven will be a boy for sure, Chavelas mother didn't have a boy until the ninth one, but four of her sisters started having boys after the sixth one. I am certain that the next will be a boy."

"The doctor said I shouldn't have anymore because of my health, but one more won't hurt anything, what does he

know anyway. When is America coming to visit, the girls keep after me to go see her but now that the motor blew up in the truck we have to wait". Chavela loves to talk and when given the opportunity makes the most of it. "My comadre is selling diapers real cheap, they have no tape and she sells the rolls of masking tape to use on them. It hardly takes any, O'henry you should tell Lourdes. Doesn't Gordita look exactly like her Papi? They have the same chin and eyelashes". She is now holding the baby on her hip and sorting beans on the counter top. "These beans have so much trash in them. Look how many are broke open, the good pile is almost as big as the bad pile, just look at this". The girls in the door and the girls on the bed all looked on wide eyed as the exchange of words went on. "One of you give Don Sky an ashtray and be quick".

Sky reaches into his pocket and pulls out a tin foil ball full of pills and hands it to Chavela. "Here, I almost forgot. It's the vitamin C America told me to give you. She said to take two a day and she'll get you more soon". Chavela's teeth had all but rotted out and each time she gave birth to a child she gave up another one. No one was sure why the lumps, like knotted nerves were all over her arms and legs. These girls all have less than ten years and their mother hasn't completed her twenty fourth birthday yet. In English you are born old, two hours old, two days old, twenty years old, a hundred years old, always old. In Spanish you have so many years, the baby has completed two weeks, she has twenty years, I have fifty years. You are only old when you get old and sometimes that is quite young here.

As Sky and O'henry got back into the car to go on their way, Rower, Chavela and the six girls lined up by the bob wire gate to say their good-byes and thank yous. Sky had paid the mechanic a bit for his effort and had done it in front of Chavela mentioning diapers and drinking water and knew that Rower would have to hand the money over to his wife this time anyway.

"Well, at least they're all happy", sighed O'henry after the car pulled away and all the waving was past.

The muffler was a little better and would probably last the week out before more repairs were needed, but it was apparent that the back bumper which kept drooping more and more was in need of help when the Mercedes crossed over some ruts where a truck had got stuck awhile back. The Mercedes was a 250 diesel and had spent it's first fifteen years in Germany as a taxi and then ended in Mexico where a tidal wave had washed over it and the result was severe rust. For the back roads of Mexico it was perfect, good mileage, comfortable ride and didn't get stuck in sand and the kids loved the skylight especially because one could hardly ever get it to close. The only really bad thing was all the little rotted out holes in the floorboard that the dust floated up through. All in all it was the type of car that made you want to go places.

"Where to next?" asked O'henry. Where to next.

America supposed that Sky would be back before it started to get dark. He had left after lunch and had had to go to the mechanics, the grocery store in town to charge groceries, fill the propane tanks and the drinking water jugs, check to see who had alfalfa and pick up the mail that came to the ice cream store once a week. She worried he might run out of gas before he got back home. Once again Sky had not wanted to make the long trip in another direction to the gas station and it rarely had it's diesel barrel filled and the next place for gas was in a town just outside of Tijuana almost an hour away. Another choice was to take Toll Road to Ensenada but no one did that because the charge was too expensive twice. He was hoping that the tractor in Ejido La Cienaga del Valle across the road would have some diesel.

She had spent the day cleaning and cooking, exploring her book and working on her feather fans and was now curled up on the couch with all three Aztecas, Chapo, Tommyhawk and Mochi, snuggled up next to her while Gudrun ran in and out of the house keeping the peacock and guinea fowl away from the fences and patio door. Once again she was interrupted from her reading and had gotten up to see why the calf was bawling. It always happened whenever there was a

new animal, especially a young one that America was really the one who took care of it. Sky took the credit, Francisco fed it twice a day and tied it out, but she washed it's bottle, mixed the powdered milk, supervised the feeding and kept it untangled and watered when it knocked it's bucket over and filled in when the job was forgotten. It was fun to have a calf, Sky hadn't had one since the farm in Oklahoma.

It was going to be Clemente's daughters fifteenth birthday in another year, so Sky and Clemente had bought a baby cow, a vacerito that was white with black patches in preparation for the Quincieñera. Every year the Jersey dairy sold it's male calves for very little money, so a few of the people here in the ejido that were able to would buy them. Echeveria the trash man could not afford to feed the one he had bought. It's one thing to come up with a small chunk of money and another to daily come up with the price of a gallon of milk to feed it, so he sold it to Sky for a small profit. Of course Sky hasn't paid him all the money yet but Echeveria knows he will when he gets some money. Eche had financial involvements going with everybody.

Going outside to further investigate America could see the calf had spilt his bucket of water and had the rope tangled around his back feet. The calf had to be tied along side the road where the grass was thickest. The property was not set up for a calf at all and it took a lot of time and effort that first day to get it settled in. To town to buy it powdered milk, back again and mixing the powder in a bucket and trying to teach it to drink. That part was a three person job. Clemente held the bucket, America held down it's rear end and Sky took a firm grip on the collar while forcing it's head into the bucket and teaching it to suck on his fingers held under the surface. No one thought to put the dogs away so they added to the confusion by running in circles and barking.

A year is a long time America is thinking while she puts things to rights and soothes the calf's complaining. How can you eat a cow you've known for a full year? One more year for Chele and the cow before they are given away in sacrifice, the cows life to the celebration and Cheles childhood to the past.

She will exchange her doll for a ladies shoe in the middle of a collected audience.

That job done America returned to the house to continue to wait for Sky some more. It was the time of day the sunlight flooded the living room and if the windows were shut early enough the warmth should last till bedtime. America was glad they didn't have screens so when the windows were open there were no barriers. She is standing in front of one of them now, holding it wide open and smelling the salt of the air.

Francisco and Chuyillo are out on the low tide searching tidepools for octopus. They have with them a bottle of clorox and a rubber hose with a funnel and are busy using these to force their prey from it's sanctuary. America watches them hoping they are successful. Doña Felicita cooked up the majority of the seafood that was brought in for the children. They had the strongest stomachs and nerves for this and liked it all.

Still taking in the salt air and afternoon sun and half way keeping an eye out for the Mercedes America saw Clemente out in front of his trailer planting some cholla cactus that she had again thinned out of her garden a few days ago and had the boys haul off this time in the wagon and given to various neighbors. Clemente's trailer had been in this spot only a short time, previously the old water truck had taken that spot. The trailer had been Skys but he had sold it to Don Paciano in order for him to provide homes for his sons. Sky got the trailer on what he called a deal and sold it so it was a real deal for the old man too.

Clemente did not work today. He had come to the shop a few hours late, Sky liked to get started an hour or so after day break and it was definitely half way through the morning when Clemente came up. He's eyes looked blurry and red ringed and he had on a large black tee shirt that said "my vote for Perot" and an oversize pair of khakis and tire treaded huaraches topped by his ball cap that said Grateful Dead that was on backwards. He was clean shaven with longish hair today. Clemente had planned on being here bright and early, "tempranito, tempranito tempranito", he said in his usual

saying of a key word three times, but had stayed up to nearly three in the morning doing a jig saw puzzle of an Italian fishing village with his wife and Chele under the light of a forty watt bulb on the trailer table. He woke late with a headache and the desire to take a shower which required breaking up the drift wood his mother and the other women and children had gathered off the rocks and having his wife pour the heated water from a bucket while standing on a stool on the outside of the used plywood and cracked plexiglas shower house. Then next somehow no one had saved any tortillas for his breakfast and his mother had to make some more in a hurry while Chele fried two fresh eggs and Estella cleaned up the shower house for the next one and put the bucket back on to heat more water for dishes.

"For the life of me I can't figure out why I can't get anything done on a Monday. Let's just put off the work till tomorrow, I'm out of the mood", Sky announced as Clemente had wandered up.

About this time O'henry came up from the ocean where he had been exchanging news with the fishermen on their return to shore. "Buenos dias, what are you up to today?"

"Buenos dias, buenos dias, como ha ido?, O'henry greeted as he shook Skys and Clementes hands. "The fishermen don't have their motor today, their truck wouldn't start and the motor wouldn't fit into the Toyota. Did the whole trip with oars again. What's happening around here? I was going to put some horns on the skulls but I'm going to wait till tomorrow, there's no sense to getting in a hurry".

Clemente had ended up going home to work on his flower garden again and Sky and O'henry had taken off in the car. Clemente could keep his eye out for customers from his house if any came. Americas house was well watched, especially since the campito kitchen, front yard and Clemente's trailer overlooked her home from not too far a distance. The shop blocked her view of the back where company came up so they were forced to yell or use their car horns in hopes of getting any attention. So usually someone from Clementes heard or saw them first.

Clemente's fathers property bordered on the main street of the village and ran south one hundred and twenty meters to the back road in. There were six trailers situated in various positions and places and a delivery van, a shower house and a wooden kitchen with a small room built on the back of it. These were small trailers, all under eighteen feet, a few a lot less. Don Paciano has one to himself, Clemente has the one up front by the road now, Chuey and Chuyillo have the smallest, Tio Trino who was not here shared one with a cousin who was building a house on another piece of property and Clemente's sister who lived in Oxnard California had the best one and then an empty one for company. The delivery van was lived in by Pancho, Pilar and Amayrani. Clemente's mother and Francisco had just moved into the added on room off the kitchen whose door opened up on the yard were they all gathered. Everyone here in the ejido called it El Campito de Don Paciano.

On this late Monday afternoon at the campito were gathered most of the family out front. Each one seemed to be drawn to where the heart of the activity was, none of them were loners and were use to being around a lot more people than this when they lived in Tijuana and felt that this was a paradise. Each family member was conscience of the beauty they lived in and took that as their main source of entertainment. That is why they were all outside so much. Beauty did not lie in the house, that was just function, beauty was the outdoors and they filled themselves with it.

The kitchen was built about twenty feet off the road and the space in between was somewhat cemented in and scattered over with various types of chairs. This was also were the grandmother kept her potted plants and the collection of spring birds, the goriones, sinsoncles, cordonices and calandrias that she and Francisco trapped. All total it produced a very pleasant place to pass the time and watch the rest of the world. Clemente really appreciated living here and played an important part in the family life. Like the other brothers that live there he gave most of his money and most of

what he brought home to his mother and father to run the place on.

Closing the window America went into the bedroom thinking of the things she saw out her window. How different life would be to be raised in a place like this. These children here might lack for some of the niceties of life but they sure had a lot of the benefits. These families that lived here in Ejido Emilano Zapata were such fine examples of what families should be. America had had a good family life and this started her thinking about it as she walked about the bedroom trying to blow the ever present dust off some of her childhood momentos that she kept out.

America found it hard to talk about her childhood. It's something she kept private. When the conversation came around to how one grew up she didn't add much of anything to it. What America had to say just didn't fit in. She had always noticed since she was quite young that on mention of her view how family life was for her it brought a silence to the listeners. A moment of uncomfortableness would happen so not needing to feel any more alienated than she normally was she just skipped it, along with many other conversations people talk about in groups time and time again. Her husband spoke of having a mother who had to work away from home, an outdoor toilet and his grandpa using a mule for the farm work like it is still in Mexico here. Clemente spoke of his poverty and crowdedness in such a place as Tijuana, Blossum the strictness of her Roman catholic mother and the looseness of her Parisian father, O'henry the bitter fights of his parents. People blame so much of their present on what happened in their pasts. "My parents divorced, my father drank, my mother had to work, my brothers were mean to me", hard times, bad memories. It seems that so often of the time that is the theme of those conversations. Now Americas childhood was something quite different from all this. She remembers being asked if her family was rich or poor while she was growing up and she answered them that she didn't know, she had never thought about it. It was that kind of childhood that is spoken of now, being rich did not play a part in her as a child and

lacking for what one needed was not a part of it either. They were a family and it was where her whole life rotated. Americas parents were proud examples of what people should be. Her life was full of love and learning and wonder. Her brother was her best friend. Relatives all loved each other and did good things and had good times. The bad played an unknown part that never reached her in her ideal world. To this day America can look back through all her younger years and still not see any faults or bad spots. She doesn't believe there were problems. The good times were continuous. Her father bringing her mother bouquets on the days when he was late. Her mother taking her and her brother to the beach day in and day out. The Sunday drives in her fathers Austin Healey. The holidays with the Aunts and Uncles staying up late playing cards. And the more special memories like when her father is asked his religion he answers my religion is my wife. Her mother all excited and getting dressed up because her father has asked her out to dinner and a play. Always eating their meals together with her father serving the main dish. She and her brother taking breakfast in bed to their parents on Sunday before they were old enough to even cook and they acting like it was good. The dogs and cats and pet rats, their yard filled with grass and flowers and secrete corners with dark rich earth, the garage filled with the many activities of her father, the living room lined with books and a special place of honor for her seashells. These were all things that never served to make her friends. She loved her family totally and knew them to be far superior to the majority of the rest of the world who set a poor example for her. Her parents taught her young that the world is a hypocritical place full of people who don't have much to offer and she learned from them also that the saying all men are created equal was an absurdity. There are all kinds of men and just a very few that are worthwhile. That which belongs to the masses is false without benefit. That the best must be sought and cultivated and the common must be meticulously avoided. Her father and mother taught her many things plus her life fulfilling love of books

America treasured these few small belongings of her childhood. The stuffed koala and the ceramic cow, the fossilized seashell and the Steiff donkey. The bedroom was painted apricot with an applegreen ceiling. The trim around the French door to the yard and the windows were in lavender and the desk and chair in lemon yellow with more lavender trim. The curtains were from the forties, polished cotton in a mahogany red color covered in multicolored flowers done in great detail. The floor was red brick tile. This was the last room to be added on the house and was deeply appreciated by her

Looking out the bedroom window through the fastly fading light over the top of the shop clear to the top of the hill America could see the Mercedes pulling off the Toll Road on to the dirt road. She knew she had five minutes at least before Sky pulled up out back so she went to put on a pot of coffee and some mellow music, maybe Penguin Café, hoping that her life would stay like this forever, wishing on the first star of the evening as she always did that it would stay that way, and wondering what the future of this emerging unsteady country would bring.



## EARLY SUMMER THROUGH THE CLOUD COVER

TUESDAY

Ice plants are beautiful, spectacular and special, and Americas admiration of them has lead her to believe they compare with any other flowers. At first it was a disappointment that the plants she had learned to love and live with would not grow here. Gone were the delicateness of spring bulbs, the dahlias and anemones, the gladiolas and the tulips. No rhododendron or other fragile bushes. Not even sweet peas or morning glories. For years she faithfully planted these last two but hardly ever got anything over four inches high and a bloom or two let alone to climb. Salt in the air and the dew and salt from the fine constant heavy spray from the waves of the ocean dwarfed or burned all it touched if it was not specially adapted for this narrow area almost one with the sea but for a few yards of rocky strewn soil. So America put in the succulents and eventually filled in all her places for flowers with these and peligoniums and geraniums and cactus along with natures plants. Geraniums were another plant she had had little respect for, somehow considering them inferior or an excuse. But the force of her new choice in plants was overwhelming. Strong and thriving. Nothing fragile about them, withstanding sun and wind and lack of water and loving it and thriving with the struggle of the salt air. Succulents have bold flowers in brilliant colors. She has seldom witnessed these plants growing with much success any where else but here in Mexico in northern Baja Norte. California just doesn't have quite the climate to make such a spectacular show of them.

The plants that occur naturally here grow all around the property. There are the maguey, a member of the aloe family, sometimes called a century plant, thick dark green blades fringed in red and yellow spikes ending in a deep red needle point fringed with smaller spikes. Each plant lasting for an indeterminate amount of years until it slowly comes into bloom over a matter of many months, a shoot appears in the center rapidly growing into a six or eight foot pole sometimes

six inches or more thick, waiting for awhile to open up it's top and fold out large regularly spaced bunches of bright deep yellow blooms on their own horizontal stems. These flowers are eaten by some of the villagers and many types of birds. They are so strong they can hold the weight of two ravens at one time. These blooms last for months and then dry and stay standing for many years as the plant below it dies even as it starts to bloom, a testimony to past seasons. There is dudlia too. Small light green spears that get a long, sometimes a couple of feet long, deep orange stem with hang down delicate waxy colored orange bell shaped blooms. These grow all over and their colors together are a perfect combination with the chemise with it's new white or last years orange blooms. With the jojoba bushes you have the similar feeling of a redwood even though they are close to the ground and a bush. It is because it gives you a sense of time and age and being in that very spot for so long and having witnessed all that's passed there. Their beans are ground here and used for a coffee type drink. Their yellowish green small hard leaves hiding the crop of small beans on the female until they burst their outer covering and show there nut like insides ready to be harvested and sold to the man who comes yearly to buy them to sell in the United States at a nice profit. It's an interesting sight to see these beans drying on the roofs here. The lemonade berry bushes look their best with their beans on them too. These beans are called salditos here. They are red and have a wild wood taste covered by a sticky sour outside. It is a refreshing taste in the mouth. There's the cattail cactus and the barrel and the little beaver tail cactus with the rings of flowers on them and the prickly pear cactus. There is even some sea lavender, stasis, that has taken up its spot out front washed in from a past storm adding it's deep purple to the display. The amount of one here and one there plants is great too. Out toward the side of the house is a huge yarrow shrub and near the drive is bush mallow and out front a little thicket of tree tobacco growing with quite a large patch of nightshade with its purple potato flowers in full bloom near its base. For being the desert and the ocean there are more plants and flowers than

one can imagine and this time of year brings them out in full array. It is overwhelming with the sheer beauty and magic of them, existing under this cloud cover, this gray time, with the sun occasionally slipping through it's brilliance for a special showing and lighting them with an unreal radiance.

This Tuesday morning in early summer is going to be a toss up whether the sun will come out or not and for how long. Here and there are patches of blue, but at the moment they are loosing to the gray swirling masses moving in and out in indecision, as the mesa behind remains in tempting sun. It gives the plants a ghostly look and the day a feeling of uncertainty.

How a easygoing day can end so quick and a hard packed day begin. When a good day is happening it seems as though it will go on forever till bedtime and a good night too and on to wake to another perfect day. But this Tuesday was ordained to be a long and tiring one.

"Sky, Sky", yelled Francisco as he ran up from the ocean side of the house, out of breath and scared. "Mi padre estaba en una choque muy serio, he's had a serious accident and needs help".

Sky and Francisco while calling Clemente's name to come with them, were on their way out the door to leave in the Mercedes so they could witness this fact themselves, to be sure Clemente's two other brothers, Pancho and Chuey were only really just banged and bruised and anxious to get themselves and the remains of the water truck home before the Federales arrived and charged them for having an accident. It is illegal to have an accident in Mexico. You are guilty till proven innocent. They had just gotten around the corner when they were stopped by Clemente's mother and sister-in-law, Pilar. They too must go and were in tears and praying loudly because by now the message had reached everyone in the village. So they too got in the car. Somehow in the rush two of America dogs got in the car adding to the considerable confusion. America saw them leaving, going up the road at a good clip bumping and rattling being followed by Echeverias old truck full of men, among them Clemente's father. The old truck, a 1958 Chevy

made it part way up the hill, stopped and had to back down and make another try. It is the trash truck and driven by the village junk collector. The accident has happened just down a ways on the Toll Road before the bridge. The rest of the village is left standing in their yards looking at the direction the others left and speculating, America included. Everyone all knew the brothers had left real early that morning to go pick up a load of water and that the fog was thick and slippery making the roads dangerous because the rocks get loose from moisture and fall down onto the roads plus chuck holes just come up from nowhere. Like quite a few people in this area Pancho owned a water truck and made his living from it and Chuey helped out when he was around and in the mood.

Not as long as America thought they would be, Sky and Clemente came back under a heavy blanket of wet clouds hanging not too far overhead and pulled up at Clemente's house and stopped in this false twilight. Doña Felicita and Pilar got out of the car still crying and joined the other woman standing there to tell what they had seen and to be comforted. Clemente stayed behind to make sure his mother was going to be all right. Her eighty-five years and her weight had tired her and she was cold and scared. Sky came back to the house to tell America what was going on. He knew that she was worried and did not like to leave her wondering.

"That Pancho and Chuey must have more pinche luck than sense for sure. The truck must have rolled ass over teakettles about three or four times. That road was slicker than greased owl shit on a shingle. They ended up upside down right in the middle of the Toll Road. Right at the sand beach. Blocked the traffic and there was three federal cars, an ambulance, a federal tow truck and the local police, the whole chingado."

"How are they, are they really all right?" America asks him. "It doesn't sound like they can be".

"Just bruised. At least that's all I can see. The Green Angels left and didn't get the medics so they must be ok".

The Green Angles is the por gratis mechanics that continually traverse the Toll Road in their green trucks helping

tourist and Mexican alike. The Toll Road is equipped with Red Cross stations and ambulances, bathrooms and over the counter coffee and snack food, all in very good order. Your fee and receipt are your insurance while you are on that road. The road is federal so therefore it is patrolled by Federales in their new small fast cars. So one is totally in these stern and educated mens jurisdiction who are fair in their own terms.

"They stayed with what's left of the truck to get it back home and I sure as hell don't see how they'll do that alone, they'll have to be towed, there's no two ways about it, the water truck is history.

"How did it happen?". This was a practical question and should have had an answer but of course it did not.

"Who will ever know that I'm not sure. For one thing they had on a half tank of water and it got to sloshing. There was talk of another car pulling out of the beach parking at first but then they said the tire was bad too and they had been eating pastries and drinking milk. It's just another one of those things that happen down here, another one of those Mexican mysteries. I guess they just zipped when they should have zagged. Fog, accidents or whatever I've got to get back to work, would you make some coffee? We'll be in the shop."

By herself again America started thinking of what this could mean to a family, the loss of their money maker the water truck, and the fine the Federales gave them for gouging the pavement. Pancho and Pilar had been married less than three years and had a two year old daughter. A happy laughing healthy baby. Pilar is seventeen now and he is twenty-six. Pancho left a wife in Tijuana and took his boy Francisco with him and left the second son for her. A fair divide, as often happened in these situations. Francisco is eleven years old. So the whole family is a young one and just getting started. Like Pilars mothers wedding before hers this one started off in scandal and hostilities also. They ran away together, rapidly failed at the attempt to make it on their own, and returned. By that time nature took over and the decision was made for them to stay together. Pancho was and is the father of the child and that sealed it. There were family feuds, village upsets and

personal disagreements over all this. It was widely discussed by the village and surrounding ranchos. O'Henry found himself in a major part of the happenings. He had attempted to marry Pilar's mother only four years before this. So in some respects that made him a father to Pilar and besides he felt like one to her. He cared about her. He was helping to get her through school and somewhere else in life than a young mother. It brought up so many questions. Maybe getting married young had its advantages. You kind of grow up with your children. You are kids with your kids. At that age your energy is at its top level. And one is not rigid in their beliefs. And, as it is said here, Pancho can bring up his wife the way he wants her. Upon thinking this last thought that America heard voiced too often, she went back to her original feelings of let her have her childhood. Pancho should have picked a girl that was old enough to be a wife and then she remembered she decided back then when it happened to let time show her more wisdom on this because who's to really judge what is right or wrong. Only time. Now what would happen with the water truck totaled, over a thousand peso fee for no license, no registration and gouging the highway and having an accident. America felt like she was going to get another headache from worrying over this and the less important fact that water would be hard to get.

Trying to preoccupy her mind with other thoughts America decided to work in her rock garden before the cloud cover lifted, the air was still and there was a heavy warmth to the atmosphere. After about a half hour of rearranging the rocks to show their best colors America heard a commotion going on in the village. Pulling around the corner was the water truck at the strangest angle ever seen, wheeling and thumping down the road. The tank itself was gone and the cab several feet shorter hanging to the left, no windows and a lot of the men on the back cheering the effort. And then next was the trash truck with Echeveria behind the wheel being towed by the federal tow truck, the rescue vehicle home once again after having refused to start. Women, children and dogs rushed out in greeting and to imagine and exclaim over the damage done

and examine the wide variety of wounds received and hear the stories told.

"Well if that doesn't beat all, did you just see that" asked Sky as he and Clemente who had wandered back came in the house after marveling at the sight to have another cup of coffee and to discuss this next turn of events. "Whoever thought they could have done it."

America has come in the house too and is picking cactus stickers from her hands which prove stubborn.

Clemente sees this and calls her name twice and then demonstrates what to do so she, in turn, runs her hands across her hair a dozen times or so and no more stickers.

"Gracias Clemente. Como esta Doña Felicita? I haven't seen her back out all morning".

Muy bien, gracias, she has calmed down and is taking a nap", he said with a slight nod and a smile.

"Would you like some coffee? I've boiled a really fresh cinnamon stick in the water. I bought them from the fruit market on Boulevard Benito Juarez in Ensenada. They hadn't had time to break them up yet and the sticks must have been six or eight feet tall in a burlap sack." This was said by America to Clemente. She normally spoke Spanish to him as this seemed politer. And he spoke Spanish back. He rarely used English in her presence

"No, esta bien, es mucho problema para ti".

"I was just putting some on anyway, I'm kind of tired".

"Hey Clemente, did you see that goose egg on Chueys head? I bet you it's ringing like a sixteen penny nail hit by a greased ball peen hammer".

"Jesus Christ" Clemente did swear in English, most every from TJ did, and thought this was one on the more polite oaths. He pronounced it more like Geethath Cryth. "One bad thing after another. First the fight at the ejido meeting yesterday and now this. That's when Chuey got that bump on his forehead, yesterday, not in the truck. He got so mad when the ejido president said they were going to raffle the property again. All the lots that don't belong to ejido members. Only those who hadn't missed putting their thumbprint down at the

end of the months were suppose to participate. So you know what that means".

"But how did he hurt his head?

"Oh, he reached across the table to take hold of the presidents throat and Senior Ventura Michaelwaites mother hit him with her cane before he had a chance. Just jumped up from her corner were she was crocheting". Clemente was up out of his chair showing how it had been. "And of course everyone got into a major yelling fight then, Don Pedros little dog bit the secretary and my father was so mad he wouldn't come back for an hour so they couldn't finish the vote on when and if to have this next raffle". These raffles happened periodically and then forgotten or counted invalid. All the available property left over in the ejido would be divided into sections, everyone would put their names in a hat, Marianos usually, because his hat was the biggest, and then be drawn out. You were allowed to trade and deals had always been arranged prior to this process

As the world over, it was a battle of the rich against the poor. It may be an ejido but this was million dollar property along a resort strewn coast line so of course the rich had managed to get rights for this property by cheating and lying and knowing the right person. Politicians and business owners, heads of major departments in the cities and even a few American born Mexicans. It was a mess, and every meeting, which was a lot more than just the monthly required one, turned into a brawl. Finally the police were hired to break up the fights but each side had hired police from different levels and so this only enhanced the arguing. Meetings start at eleven and end at four presumably. The door is locked right at eleven too so if you were late you most likely missed it. The women and men left outside waited and watched the children and readied the group cook out and sometimes a band for dancing. There, most all is forgotten and a good time is had by all.

America is looking out the window again thinking how hard it is to live in this ejido. Constant fights and threats, even written evictions and a threat from a bulldozer coming right up

to the fence next to the fish pond before it dramatically stopped. All one had to do was just hold on. If your there then you've got it. You don't dare go away on a long vacation or loan your house to the wrong people because it might not be yours anymore when you got back.

"That old lady hit someone last year with her cane too. That was when they wanted to put the road right through our yard and trees. She's the one that came up with the fact that it is illegal to cut down a tree in an ejido. I hope Pancho gets his truck back on the road soon or someone else will try to scoop up the position of waterman." America talked from the kitchen.

Sky used to reluctantly go to these meetings until they, the rich ones, realized he was picking up too much on what was happening and was barred from them. He hated them anyway and was glad not to go. There had to be some advantages to being American.

"I'm just going to kind of hide out over here till all the company goes home. I hope my brothers are alright but it's their own life", stated Clemente. Ni modo, as it is said here.

The ocean is reflecting a lot of light for a gray day, the fog has swung back in again, just a thin drifty sort. The ejido is unusually active and most everyone is out in their yards. The candy store lady has a line of children at her window. Grandma Lola is washing blankets. Chuyillo is perched on top of a hill of dirt playing a game with a hand held computer game. But Pancho, Pilar and Francisco have not come out. They must be in their delivery van turned home dealing with whatever the wreck of the water truck has brought them. She thinks of Pilar and her part in all this. One thing for sure to have a crisis right in her own home has increased her status tremendously.

And all this and it is only midmorning. It is going to be one of those days. The type where it tries to crowd everything in all at one time to balance out the uneventful and tranquil spell that previously existed. Yes, America could hear the next call to this event filled day as she sat on the couch cleaning up after the last visit from Amayrani who had got a tamarindo

with chile powder sucker wrapped up into the rainbow colored afghan on the couch. Normally the dogs pick up after the children but this fiery hot and salty candy was not worth the sugar in it that Gudrun craved. They make her sneeze and send her into a playful frenzy running through the house and yard.

"America, America, "calls out someone from beyond the shop. America took off the blanket, tossed it outside the patio door to store it safely till she could wash it and quickly went through the kitchen door toward the shop where Clemente gave her a sign to wait a moment and that she had company out in the drive. Horrible sharp smells of ammonia were escaping from a tank and Sky was trying to read a hydrometer while he and the workers attempted holding their breaths between darts outside to gulp fresh air. She could see Blossom on the other side of the shop through the windows. Since this was the only real entrance to the house for company short of coming up the path from the beach she had to stand out there and wait till things calmed down in the shop. If you've walked in from the village or drove in the only way to the house door was through the shop. This was a definite flaw but this is the way the place had grown up and managed to happen and there was no changing it now.

She could see Blossom was excited about something and rudely yelling to the men to hurry up while America quietly waited for them to complete this dangerous and important step. The job over Blossom came storming through holding her nose and trying to talk, and being ignored by Sky and Clemente came on through the rest of the way out into the yard and started to tell America her troubles once again.

America hadn't seen much of Blossom for the last few months. She was always easier to handle when seen less frequently. America liked to take her doses of United Statesism far and few between. Her first reaction was "oh no, not right now', but then on second thought realized it fit with the day. Just hold on and remember her good side, America preached to herself as the frequent thought of her grandfather saying "Like people for the good in them, don't dislike them for the

bad". Another ruling factor in America life, this saying of her family.

"Hello hon, let me give you a kiss. I've been through hell and back since I've seen you last. Just let me tell you all about it".

"Good morning, how have you been. Come on in the house and have a cup of coffee, I don't think the sun is going to come out much today", America said as she subtly wiped the kiss off her cheek and tried to not breathe in the cheap perfume at the same time softening and beginning to be glad to see Blossom. This was no chummy friendship with two women pouring over the trivialities of their existence over the daily cup of coffee, sharing their secrets and killing their time. Blossom had major problems, exciting and dangerous adventures, wild and strange times. She cared nothing for Americas life or problems, she had no curiosity about others. This friendship was a good one, Blossom needed someone who cared about her and America didn't. It gave Blossom a place to go to find herself and it let America find more about herself in comparison to other people. Besides, as America always said when coming to Blossoms defense there was something about her that was very likable, something that escaped categorizing. It was true too, everyone did like her, everyone but her own self.

"Who says it's such a good morning. The sun never comes out any more, at least not when I'm around".

America realized from this start that she was in for a long string of complaints and injustices from Blossom.

"What's been happening with you and Sky, don't you have the key to the ranch anymore, you said you were going to come up with the kids and take a hike with me".

"We still are, we just haven't done it yet. Did you see the water truck? Pancho had an accident this morning and it was ruined, Grandma Felicita and Pilar have been crying, everybody has been up in the air."

"What", Blossom said quickly jerking her head up for a moment of puzzlement and meeting America eyes. Then the brief moment of someone else's problems breaking through to

her left, and she looked back down to her purse with the ever present collection of papers. "Oh really, well, we all have our problems, let me tell you. I have to hire your abogado, I need a lawyer. I tired to do all Alejandro's papers myself but now they still say we have to go to Ciudad Juarez for the physical and to sign the final papers. I called the Mexican consulate but they said it was true, that that is the only office it could be done at. They might as well say just plain no as to set up such a difficult process. It sure weeds out the poor. It's going to cost a lot to make the trip and leave the ranch. There's a thousand dollar deposit to get a car into Sonora so we have to take the bus there. All I want is his permanent resident papers, I thought marrying him would be enough and now they are asking me about communism and my paychecks and a whole bunch more nonsense with everything notarized. I'm just exhausted and need a drink and you never have any liquor here. You think you would for your friends. Alejandro woke up in the middle of the night dreaming I had fallen into the empty bottle collection in the pit out back and was being sliced to pieces. I couldn't calm him down for an hour and promised him I would quit drinking. So that's why I'm not and it feels good. I haven't had a drink since yesterday morning when I found the rest of that bottle that he forgot he hid. I sure wish you and Sky drank."

"What a thing to wish on us", America slipped in, wishing that out of the two Americans she had chosen to befriend, both of them did not have so many problems, but she knows that is part of being an American, a national heritage, to focus on ones own worries. The confusion lay in the fact that this drinking problem was a legal and socially accepted problem and gave it the appearance of being all right, Blossom did have the backing of the US government on that and used alcohol's abundance and availability as one of her excuses to continue. When she was out maybe she couldn't have a cigarette with her meal, another one of her vices, but she could have a drink or two or three

"Why don't you come to town with me, I need to see the doctor and maybe you can help me get a hold of your lawyer.

Come on, just this once do it, tell Sky I've given up drinking. Come on, you can talk him into it, you don't have to listen to him, you should stand up for yourself once in a while".

Choosing not to even respond to such misinterpretation of her and Skys partnership in life America calmly said, "I'm not going anywhere and in just a bit I'm going to make the workers lunch".

"America, you are hopeless, if you want to live in the dark ages go ahead. I've got my own life to live and no one tells me what to do".

"And that's too bad", said America to herself.

"Did you get the bread?", Sky asked America as he came in.

"No, the store is closed, El Senior Cesarito must be watching them work on the water truck and I don't know where his wife is. There's a sign saying he'll be back in ten minutes but no one has seen him for a couple of hours. The candy store is open and I bought some pan dulce to go with the eggs. If the chickens have laid some more eggs by now there should be plenty for everyone".

"What did Blossom want? Thank god she didn't stay long. I'm not in the mood for her today. Clemente said he saw Alejandro yesterday and that he looked like the wrath of god. She treats him like less than dog shit in a wagon track. Poor guy, I feel for him, from a hermit to a harassed husband".

"She needs a lawyer and wants me to introduce her to ours. Last time we were at her office I told her about Blossom, I'm sure she's never encountered that type of American yet. She ask me very shyly if that what was known as a party animal and exactly what that expression meant".

"Party animal, where did she hear that, sometimes I'm almost embarrassed to be an American. Well, the water truck, then Blossom, what next today?", mused Sky. "Let's have a quick cup of coffee before I go back out. See if the blue whale cup is around, I need all the luck I can get today, I can't find my lucky dollar".

"Who else is out there for lunch?"

"Let's see, Clemente and a customer waiting for us to finish a job for him, one of those rich Mexican ranchers from down south. Soon as I finish this last swaller of coffee I'll go find out. And now it looks like Rower coming up the drive but maybe it's one of the fishermen. Both of them have black trucks with a primered fender and a bluish bed and a head light missing, yes it's Rower all right, would you look at that, he's got the kids in the back. Oh boy, nothing like confusion. I'm not going to be able to hit a lick of the snake today for sure".

"Look Look! The fishermen are coming in right out front in their ponga and one is bailing fast, they must have a leak. Oh no, I've just ran out of water in the sink, what's happened, there was enough to last for a few more days. Now what? You better get back out and make sure the little girls don't get in that shop right now. No, you better see what's happening with the fishermen, there's a big set right now and they are obviously in trouble and going to try to land.

"I'm on my way, call Clemente to help and do something with those girls. For Christsake the fool patio door is off the pinche track and jammed again, give me a hand I can't get out. Who's that hollering in the shop? Get those dogs to stop that infernal barking".

"I guess this is a good time to apply some of that patience I've been learning down here, thought America to herself. She had known it was going to be a hard day. It always seemed if the sun didn't come out for a lot of days running things went off balance. Just as the patio door allowed itself to be opened once again the tape that had curiously got stuck in the tape deck earlier in the day decided to play and Australian didgeridoo music came blaring on at the same time Gudrun, picking up on the high level of confusion going on in the house, jumped on top of the smallest of the Aztecas pinning it to the ground and demonstrating her dominance with not too much violence.

Some fifteen or twenty minutes after all these next occurrences heaped themselves into the middle of this Tuesday America was in the kitchen gathering up the necessities to

cook crab in the yard and had put the eggs away for another time. The men were in the house deep in conversation and heavy decisions.

Francisco had left the excitement of the water truck behind and had come to participate in this new excitement. The fishermen had definitely needed a helping hand when the water heavy boat floundered on the edge of the low tide shelf next to a mass of lava rocks with more waves behind. Francisco had arrived first, then Sky and the client and in a matter of a few minutes more over half the village ready and willing to participate in or at least observe this new crisis. With the boat being caught sideways on a wave and being slammed down on the rocks landing was a near catastrophe. Now the fishermen sat in the house drinking coffee and warming themselves as they had got quite wet and had had a scare, as well as a good time. They had given America a gunny sack full of crabs and kept the five undersize lobsters themselves to sell, as two small ones count for one large one. These crabs have meat only in their claws with every so often one that has a little meat in it's body and a tasty broth when it's shell was pulled off just right and held the liquid and then was mixed with lime and hot sauce. This was a treat to be divided and shared. Francisco was in charge of the fire and dropping the crabs in the sawed in half beer keg when the sea water came to a boil. America did not let anyone at her house pull the legs off first dumping the defenseless crabs alive back in the water. One must kill to eat, even if it is only a vegetable being forced from it's source of life, but it had to be done just so. Thank you crab for your life, as she knew Sky had said when receiving this offering of thank you, as had the fishermen who had crossed themselves when bringing up the first of the catch and thanking the crabs and lobsters for making them money.

Clemente was sitting on the porch step holding a frozen package of corn on one of the little girls hands where she had grabbed hold of a hot pipe when she tripped over an extension cord coming through the shop. America had been there to escort them through the shop and so had Clemente but fate

would have it that another blow to the balance of this day would occur. Four of the girls were standing watching Francisco and the fire, as for the first half hour or so when they visited here they were in a state of awe at all the riches and fine living. Mother and girls were always thrilled to be in a home that had so much. They stood in a tight group from time to time shoving a bit and giggling. Francisco was very business like about this important job but took the time to take two of the smaller girls by the hand and let them look into the crab sack.

America came back out of the house with a sack of limes, two bottles of hot sauce, a package of napkins and all the clean glasses and cups she could find.

"Two of you girls take the wagon and go get the sodas from the candy store, I can see the window is open still so someone must be nearby, if not just yell. Get six big bottles, I think they'll be a lot of people eating". America sat down next to Chavela who was holding the baby and stroking the one with the burnt hand and told how Rower was pleased that the little girl, maybe only four or five years old had not cried and was brave as any boy and then she had started picking through the girls hair proudly telling America to look, look anywhere, you couldn't find a single lice, her children were clean, that the infestation that had been plaguing them for months was now over. Sky had given them two fifty-five gallon drums and with the one they had this gave her enough water to wash the blankets and all their clothes all in a few days and then bathe the whole family with the special shampoo America had sent over and this had ended the problem with the piojos.

"You can come over and visit now and you don't have to pin your hair up anymore", Chavela said laughingly in her harsh loud Mexican Spanish. It was a joke between her and America that when the children had lice America always visited with her hair gathered in a knot on top of her head and usually she would make more of this but her heart wasn't in it today.

America spoke to Chavela in Spanish. She told her not to worry, that whatever the problem that brought Rower to the house was something that the men would take care of. She

knew Chavela was waiting to blurt out the story that told the problem of what brought Rower out on a weekday with the whole family and was anxious to postpone this because she had the meal to make and the men to attend to. She could tell Chavela was in no shape to help by the way the little girls were dressed. They had on dirty clothes and their hair was not combed and this was something she had never witnessed. Chavela always bathed, groomed and dressed them to go to town or to go visiting.

Inside the house the men had crowded into the living room and had pulled in the kitchen chairs. Sky was seated in his own almost larger than the room could handle chair, as always, and the fisherman were perched on the edge of their chairs as they had on rubber knee boots and fishy wet clothes, Clemente was squatting on his heels next to the Rancher customer who sat in Americas chair. Rower paced back and forth and every few minutes threw himself down in the corner of the couch and buried his head in his arms cursing his fate and then getting up to continue the story.

"This document is real, my brothers papers for the property down south are this type. See this seal here and the three signatures?", the Rancher said as he held one of the deeds, this ones to Rowers wifes property in Ejido Primo Tapia, her home town, a ways north of here. "Look at this one, see the difference in the wording and the seal, this one is not worth the paper it's written on". This deed was for the property in Ejido La Cienaga del Valle that Rower and the family lived on. The customer was the owner of several well known ranchos with large herds of sheep. He held a high government position so he had a lot of extra money. This put him in a position of authority and all listened to his verdict on the various papers he was holding in his lap.

"I think the first one looks like my papers for my lot in the same place but I never read them", said the younger of the two fishermen. "My sister sold her lot for two cows and a thousand dollars but it was nearer to where the electric is going in".

"But who has the money to buy one of these properties? I have only two hours left to get the money to the Federales or I'm gone, they don't play games. Once they get me in their jail they'll hold it against me that I'm from Honduras and they'll deport me". Rower hung his head and stared at his feet.

"You'll be lucky if that's all they do, they just might keep you for a good long time", said Sky. "I told you if you kept messing around with those municipal police they'd get you in trouble. After what happened to your brother-in-law you'd think you'd have enough sense to stay away from those cars, just because your with the police doesn't make it legal or right. They're just bad guys with badges".

The Rancher added to this by saying, "Those local police don't give a darn about you, they saw the Federales coming and didn't even tell you so it would give them a chance to get away".

"It wasn't my fault", complained Rower. "I was just about ready to get the last tire off and was trying to keep the car from rolling the rest of the way down the cliff when all of a sudden everyone took off, I thought it was because the car was going to go and when I looked up it was the Federales shinning a flash light in my face".

"Not your fault, what do you mean, of course it was, no one forced you to be there".

"They know I'm not a Mexican and they know I don't have the right plates on my car, what could I do? When they come tell me there's work to do I do it".

"Si, es la verdad, esta es un broncon. That's the problem about being a mechanic, once those cops get you in their grips that's it", added one of the fisherman. "Especially that fat captain. He's the one who got so greedy they had to close the police station for two weeks. Did you see that huge chain and lock across the door?"

"At least they stopped picking on the surfers so bad after that".

"Times wasting, what am I going to do, who will give me some money for this property, if I don't show up in an hour and a half at the juzgado they'll get me, can't you think of

someone? I don't want the feel of those esposas on my wrists again".

"I'd buy the property from you, it's a good opportunity to make some money", said the client, but the only money I have on me is too pay for the work here and it's too short of notice to get more.

"Clemente, call America and come in the bedroom with me. I have a plan", said Sky excusing himself from his company and telling them there was more coffee in the pot and to help themselves.

Less than an hour later everyone but Rower was in the yard eating crab and yesterday's tortillas. Francisco had brought the pot to a boil four times full of crabs so there was plenty for everyone. Cracked crab bodies and crab legs lay all over the yard along with the lime rinds. Chavela had got out the broom and had started to sweep the smooth earth of the yard sprinkling a little water from a bowl held in her hand when instead she sat down next to America in nervous exhaustion. She was holding her youngest in her arms for comfort and talking steadily to it that its father would be home soon and all fine. The rest of the little girls had loosened up a little and were talking to Francisco about the crabs and which dogs and birds were male and female. They were sucking the meat out of the smaller legs that he handed them.

Sky got up from the rusted and holey round patio table and stretched saying to the customer he was sorry for the delay and the work would be done soon. Stepping out of hearing in the privacy of the noise of the surf Sky drew America aside for a moment.

"Well, how's it feel to be the owner of land in Mexico?", he questioned America. "I know we couldn't afford it, but I had the money right there in my hand from the rancher and I couldn't just stand by and let the father of all those girls go to jail, how cruel can life be to them anyway. Clemente agreed with me totally even if he won't be able to be paid for a while. I knew you'd agree with me but I just wanted to tell you before I did it. All we have to do is worry about the electric bill and the rest can wait".

"Well even if Rower goes through everything they have at least Chavela and the girls will have a place to stay on the piece of property you have from them", stated America knowing how things went and how Sky really was.

"Gracias para todas, hasta luego", said both of the fishermen as they got up to leave to get their equipment gathered up and in the truck and back home again. They had made arrangements with Sky to pull the boat up in the driveway and make the repairs on the bottom where the rotted boards had broke through with to hard of a hit on the jagged rock.

Sky walked over to Chavela to let her know that although he was mad at her husband for his night time activities he and America would still come visit, that they were all still friends. At this point the Rancher took the opportunity to talk to the wife of the man he had so briefly met.

"If all goes right your husband should be back in another hour or so and then it should be safe for you to go home. I think the police will want to stay away from your husband for quite a time to come, they're scared of the Federales too and they don't know what your husband has told them or not. There's plenty of other mechanics for them to pick on", he politely said and then looked away.

"I need to get that land deed to the lawyer as soon as I can to have her put it in her name for me. Good thing that Rancher was here, he knows a lot about the laws and paperwork". Sky said this as he was lounging in his chair in the late afternoon after everyone had left. He had on his usual levies and Red Wing boots and the shirt he wore today had a Haida Indian design on it in the image of a whale and over this he had a warm shirt. The day had not really changed since the blue of the very early gave way to the gray just afterwards and the misty warmness persisted.

"That sure turned out well, I was glad to see Rower get back, I don't know for sure if I trust those Federales so much either even if I do respect them. I'd hate to have a mother and six girls on my hands all of a sudden and Rower was definitely

in the wrong, he had no business stripping out a car that's gone over the cliff in an accident even if it probably was an insurance job from USA and the cops promise of him getting to keep the tires for the rest of what he took off.

"It's been a long day. I wonder how Pilar is doing and I wonder how Pancho is going to get the money to fix the truck?", wondered America who had just brought in a bucket of water from the shop and was putting it on the stove to heat for the dishes, mostly cups and glasses and crabby pliers. Her hair was up on her head for this job. Fortunately there had been a barrel of rain water so she was not totally out of water as the cows from Rancho Mapache had jumped the fence and stepped on a water line outside the bathroom wall and cracked it. She had on a dove gray cotton skirt with blue and gold dragonflies and a row of water lilies on the bottom and a blue and green plaid flannel work shirt and her llama skin boots because they kept her blood warmer when she was outdoors, but that is where you have to eat crab because of the mess it made. She still had crab splattered where her apron had not reached earlier when the crabs claws had to be broke open with rocks, pliers and hammers on the sidewalk or in the hands of someone incredibly strong, these not being the easily accessible Dungeness crabs a little further north. She was contemplating changing her clothes, she had been wearing them for three days now as they felt right, but could not make the decision of what to put on, maybe her turquoise velvet house dress and her strawberries with it's yellow flowers and leaves design apron, her favorite, it was getting late.

Sky had called it quits for this workday. He was well satisfied with his earlier decision with Rower and was holding the deed to his new parcela and wondering what it looked like. What he was not satisfied with was Rower, he was deeply offended that anyone could so irresponsibly have so many children and do so little right to take care of them. He was angry over a remark that Rower had said to one of the fishermen earlier in the afternoon which had been "at least it proves I'm still a man", in reference to his sixth girl. Americans have a national trait of helping, or at least they used to in the

recent past, and Sky felt this deeply. Maybe even more so with his small dose of Indian heritage. He had warned Rower that if he were to continue to associate with those cops he'd stop being friends with him, he had told him he would end up in deep trouble. But Sky could not abandon the wife and children that way, they were not to be punished and the friendship with America was all this young girl and her offspring had that was beyond the everyday struggle for existence.

"Do you want to have this cheese for dinner?", asked America of Sky who was putting on the only classical tape they had, a selection of Beethoven her father had made upon request for her, to mellow out the evening. This cheese was just brought over by one of the children from the house on the corner by the gate to Rancho Mapache in return for the favor of lending Grandma Lola a garafon of drinking water. Drinking water was hard to get here as you had to take the five gallon bottles to town to exchange them, they were heavy and awkward, the glass broke and plastic cracked. Grandma Lola had special company, a long lost daughter visiting from the state of Washington, otherwise they just used the water in their Pila and drank sodas.

"I don't think we should, it's probably sanitary enough but I know for a fact that they've been using that smelly old calf stomach, I saw it hanging in the shed the other day when we were helping vaccinate the cows". When a new born calf dies the lining of the stomach was removed and dried and used to curdle the milk in place of rennet tablets and it was hard to judge the proper amount resulting in the fact it could curdle your stomach, especially if your from the United States and have an inexperienced one.

"I want to shower first but I'll tell you I'm hungry as a bitch wolf dragging ten pups. That reminds me about those pinche cows breaking that line".

"Why do they have to stomp around outside the house when they have all of nature?"

"They're thirsty and smell the water, they repaired the drip in the water line and the puddle had dried up and no one

watered them. We'll have to repair the pipe first thing tomorrow morning or at least real soon".

"I suspected as much. Ever since the president of the ejido said no more cows on this side of the Toll Road it's been a lot better but that doesn't stop Lourdes cows from jumping the fence". It's been a long day, I want to fix us something nice and easy and have a relaxing evening. Let's watch the ballad of Gregorio Cortez, if we can get the video machine to work. Maybe luck will be with us, it's like going to Las Vegas and playing the slot machines. You keep putting in the tape and it keeps coming back out and then with patience, Jack Pot, it stays in and plays and the effort pays off. The last time it took almost an hour it seemed".

"Someday we'll be richer than a foot up a bulls ass and we'll buy a good TV. The miracle is that we even have one. It sure wasn't much of a trade but that customer wasn't any better off than us, so it helped all the way a round". Sky went off into one of his frequent that's the way it is conversations, and what he said amounted to when you get only one channel and all they have is the American news and leftovers it's great to have these movies that your friend in L.A. sent down. The thought of the news always angered him in the fact that there was little new about it, monotony to the point of brainwashing more than anything else.

"It's hard to find a movie you can watch nowadays with company or kids, not only because of the sex and swearing and violence but because of the sheer stupidity and the lack of real humor. If one stuck to the black and white ones they're usually safe and I like them better anyway. And another thing, it's kind of hard to explain that your against violence when your entertained by it".

Sky had taken a shower and was in his sweat clothes that had been a birthday present from America parents. They made him feel relaxed compared to his constant Levis and tee shirts and work boots. It had taken America years to convince him to wear more relaxing clothes and now at least he would wear these in the privacy of his own home even if he still felt a bit silly in them.

"I can't decide what to make, I want to use the square orange plates tonight and the red glasses, we haven't used them in over a month. Look, the Aztecas are cold, and they're hogging the couch, let Gudrun up there too, make them move over." These hairless dogs missed the sun and it's warmth as much as anybody else. Looking out the window at the last bit of light as this gray for the most part sunless day faded into a starless night that held the warmth in.

America could just make out Pilar cutting through the field and heading toward her house.

"I wonder what brings Pilar over so late in the day?"

Sitting in the General Hospital several hours later America was wondering why everything had to happen here in large doses. The second bad luck, mala suerte, happening of this day for Clemente's family, his brother and nephew. How many other things had gone wrong at their house today, most likely quite a few she didn't even know about. She and Sky had spent the last two weeks or maybe it was a month, with not much of anything happening. The days just slipping by in their likeness, a gathering close together of the routine events. Other than the workers and the children no one had been by the house, not even the much needed customers or any American friends. Life had gone on it's slow path here in northern Baja California, in the area that Sky half acceptingly and half critically called Sleepy Hollow. When your faced with the job of survival, food for the week, keeping the weather out of the house and trying to hold together what you do have, the rest of the world pales. No newspapers, no radios, and no listening to the TV, no outside company other than the villagers, all this served to make a world of it's very own. Things like what dog did what, why did a horn blow in the night, how come Echy the trash man was mad at Miguel the drunk, was the ejido really going to put in the telephone they talked of, in fact promised, for ten years now, all these things became of importance and filled the day. This was life and how it was lived here.

And now today on this any Tuesday in the middle of this cloud cover time of year comes a series of events that tells America to remember that life always maintains it's balance even if it adds it up different ways.

When Pilar came to the door to tell America that Doña Felicita wanted a ride to the doctors with Francisco because he had a pain in his stomach and that her remedio did not work, America said to Sky "I'll handle this one, you've been working to much and you still have to much work to do tomorrow".

As she was hurriedly gathering up her purse and washing her hands and face quickly and slipping on a blue silk jacket and an old felt hat with a dragon fly pin on it, she thought of how long it had taken to get to this point for this true honor. America had known these people for years, lived with them through everyone's changes and had slowly, slowly worked into a position were these friends and neighbors trusted and accepted her and Sky enough to ask them this. These particular people do not ask favors easily or frequently here, they're not that type, although through the years many, many favors had passed both ways now.

So America took off on an adventure of her own. This was rare, as she seldom went anywhere without her husband, unless it was with her family or an unusual situation. When she came here, to Mexico, she had quickly seen some qualities she liked in the women and had very soon realized that a few of these same qualities were inside her true self and had been lost in growing up American, southern California. This land, this world here is very real, it's deadly earnest. It is so much safer here than where America came from, but it is not a matter of safety so much as it is a matter of exposure. America did not like exposing herself to the world. She was seen out with her husband, she wore skirts, she talked seldom and quietly with Mexican and American manners and rarely talked to men when out in public. Many might think this is a compromising of oneself but America felt it enlightening and found freedom within those ranges. It was a real comfortable situation and she settled into herself with it.

Everyone that happened to be at home at this moment when America pulled up in front of the campito came out. Don Paciano was running this way and that and then they all disappeared. Being somewhat use to situations not going as expected she got out of the Mercedes and went into the kitchen. There sat Francisco doubled over in a straight back chair holding his stomach and slightly rocking with his eyes closed.

"Que pasa Francisco. Duele? Donde esta los otros?"

"No se", he managed to get out between gasps.

"I'm putting you in the car, entende?, lets go, I'll help you walk."

Half way to the car Don Paciano came hobbling up rapidly to help, muttering que milagro, que milagro and took hold of Francisco on the other side till he was safely in the car and then left again. "I don't suppose I'm to take him by myself, they're bound to come out again in a minute", thought America to herself, and then Doña Felicita hurried up to the car out of breath and grumbling as she stuffed a few old and creased pesos in her ample bra. So this was the reason for the confusion, obviously, no money and they were trying to scratch up enough

With departure behind her America was now hoping she could find a doctor who was in, that could be difficult. They're hours were usually around nine to one and then four to seven, but frequently they lived where they worked. Her first choice was the Clinic in La Mision, the Toll Road north to the old road south and back, where Doctor Pedro Miller was doing his one year internship. Luck was with her and the doctor was in having a late dinner with his father.

"I have a sick child"

"Bring him in, I'm going to wash my hands, I'll be right there.

The grandmother and America helped Francisco into the waiting room and through to the office. There is seldom a receptionist in this sort of place and no appointment. The clients out front inform the clients arriving of what is happening and they take responsibility for who is next,

according to they're needs and status. The clinic is well equipped for many things but when Dr. Miller examined Francisco on the table he looked doubtful.

"What did you eat today?"

"Crabs, an octopus, some sea urchins and corn flakes".

"Was the sea food cooked right?"

"The crabs and octopus were cooked but not the urizos, I just cracked them open and put hot sauce on them". Francisco was still doubling over holding his stomach and it was hard for him to breathe and hard to understand him.

"And what did you do at school today?", the doctor asked, "how did you feel?"

"There was no school today, the teacher had to go his mothers birthday".

Doctor Miller said he couldn't be sure if it was the food he told them that with this much pain, especially since it was located over the appendix, it had the chance of being appendicitis and that since that chance was there he should go to the general hospital and have it diagnosed with proper tests and equipment he did not have here. He told them it could erupt in the night and be dangerous and therefore was not worth the risk. A very good and responsible man who was born to be a doctor, caring and treating people, going into a profession that would pay him little in most circumstances.

"Can we go home first to tell the family what has happened so they won't worry where we are?"

"Yes, go home first, don't let him eat, and take this note with you to the hospital. Good luck, Take care and drive slow".

"Oh no, I almost forgot to pay, how much do we owe you?"

"Who is paying?"

"The grandmother has the money".

"Then it will be twelve pesos." People here charge according to the ability to pay.

So she took them back to the ejido to prepare for the forty-five mile round trip, after this fifteen mile trip, to the general hospital.

"I hope you got yourself something to eat, we are on our way again", America told Sky after she dropped them off at their house to discuss matters. "I don't know when I'll be back".

Then once again back to the campito to pick up Francisco and whoever else would go.

"Es un susto, nada mas." The grandmother was saying that it was just a scare and that they needn't bother with this long trip, that the boy was okay now with the remedia she had given him earlier, she said it hadn't time to take effect till now. "We won't go".

By this time everyone was home and out front along with quite a few neighbors. Pancho was standing toward the back of the crowd and America looked over at him giving him a sign that who knows, it was possible, that Francisco might have appendicitis and who would want to take the chance. He caught her meaning and said to his mother that Francisco was going, to get in the car. This time Pilar hopped in the back.

Confident of her cure Doña Felicita settled in to enjoy the outing. She had never been to Ensenada at night. But she was still aware of the seriousness of the event so she tried to limit her conversation to appropriate matters. Like everyone being so poor now, that people couldn't even afford shoes, and children always needing medicine, muttering something about dead dogs on the side of the road and the similarity of her situation, sighing and moaning about little boys who eat raw seafood. Oddly enough neither one of them talked to Francisco who was silent in the back seat. Getting toward town and all throughout it the grandmother forgot her grumbling totally and enjoyed the lights and activity that occurred after dark. This was a rare adventure. Arriving at the hospital though, served to remind her once again of the situation.

"Francisco, are you back there still?" inquired America jokingly but with concern.

"Si". Came his answer then back to a silence she had never seen him have and wishing that one of the two, step mother or grandmother would comfort him some, but not wanting to take over that role too she also kept quiet except to

answer occasional questions about the scenery they were passing.

Arriving at the hospital was much the same as the clinic only on a very large scale. This hospital was modern and efficient and had very good doctors and nurses. At this time of night it did not have a receptionist and this was a little disconcerting as they were not sure of what to do, so they went on in and stood there looking around and in a few minutes a young man who was obviously waiting for someone volunteered the information that the doctors were in there, behind the doors, and to wait. After about ten minutes a nurse popped her head out of a door to call a lady in and then disappeared. This happened several times so America got ready and when the next door opened and a patient exited she ran over and waved the paper and a doctora took it and closed the door. Twenty minutes or so passed with various people coming and going mostly seeming intent on getting someone's attention when a nurse opened a door and asked who's paper it was and America quickly ushered in the grandma and Francisco thinking it better to wait with Pilar.

What a friendly place that waiting room was. When a little boy came in with a cut head being carried by an old man three people jumped up to help, one offering his coat to wrap around the boy. Next time a door opened and a patient was called the patient motioned the boys family to take him in first. Everyone was talking and sharing what was going on. There were little Indians selling candy and sodas and boys in the parking lot washing cars and windows. The walls were hung with posters on prevention and recognition.

Francisco had tests ran on him and a through going over and it was discovered he had parasitos, a severe case and they were allowed to take him home. Then on the way back through Ensenada Doña Felicita decided that the prescription didn't need filling, that she had always known there was nothing wrong with him. She said all children get animalitos and she knew another, better cure yet. Hadn't the banana blended with manteca cured his sore throat?

Ten minutes later America pulled into an all night farmacia and went in to fill the prescription taking the last of all their combined money from her pocket to do so. At the toll gate it is discovered that they are five pesos short so the toll taker pays it for them evening out a little of the extra he has taken.

Back at home again America and her husband are in bed. The old Azteca and Gudrun are under the covers.

"Out, out, down off the bed" America demands.

"Let them stay, we were all lonely", explains Sky.

## LATE SUMMER, INTO THE HEAT

### WEDNESDAY

This so far has been a usual summer as far as weather went. Ever since the cloud cover of early summer had lifted for the last time and let beat down a full sun that always comes so unexpectedly after the cool protection of the drifting thin clouds of the last few weeks, the days had changed their pace. The dreamy, Sleepy Hollow feeling, the not in the mood to do to much feeling, created by the vacuum from the topping of clouds and the slipping by of time in a gray awareness that made of the day one long dawn extending to an early dusk had lifted too. This heat brought on a vivid reality to everything, not just where the sun beat down but were it's warmth led also. As one sat in a loose posture trying to blend with the strength of the heat of the sun there was no doubt in the mind that they, they themselves, existed and existed in a very physical way. What this weather had most in common aside from it's ruggedness was it's ability to take away the desire to do much work or at least spend much time doing it. Everyone just retreated to the shade. Siesta hour, it really does still exist here. And some siestas are longer than others

At this moment on an early Wednesday morning, the middle of the week, just before the sun has had time to come up, America is in the kitchen packing the picnic basket with chicken, potato salad, tortillas and home made chocolate chip cookies along with apples and bananas, a jar of hot sauce and some limes just in case. Sky and Francisco, who has already been here for over an hour now, having arrived in the last of the dark of the night, are packing the rest of the things in the Mercedes and it's small utility trailer that Sky has made and designed in the last several weeks or so. This trailer had been an off centered Hobie cat trailer and had to be totally redone and the axles moved. Clemente, since painting was his claim to fame, had painted it black and silver and put on hubcaps and it looked good, almost professional, at least close enough and probably stronger as Sky always over did everything in

strength from his oil field background with his father in his early years. The brutal humor and the hard labor of that line of work had left their mark on him. His father retired after twenty-five years and received a plated gold helmet and the loss of his insurance benefits. Sky had no intention of doing the same, that lesson kind of shaped his life.

They were almost done and hoping that Clemente had at least woke up and would be here soon. Hairless Chapo the privileged grandfather and Gudrun had been in the car since the first opportunity of slithering out of the house. The Azteca, otherwise known as a Xoloitzcuintli or Tepizeuintli or just plain perro viche, had made a bee line into the open car door since they had been left open, on the typical leave all the doors open because your going to come back anyway theory, and Gudrun had jumped the fence in her secret yard, ran full on, nipped at a Guinea in her path and then bounced up to the hood of the Mercedes and up onto the roof and through the skylight , a practiced performance. Both dogs sat proud and excited, they knew they'd get their way.

It had suddenly come up yesterday at the lunch table that it would be a good idea to take a business trip. It was hard to leave the relative cool of the ocean and venture into areas where who knew how hot it could be and what effects it would have on man, dog or car but the mood had struck to wander off for a few days. There were not as many tourist on the loose as other years due to the uncertain economy in the United States and of course very few of these tourist went so far as to come into Ejido Emiliano Zapata as it looked very Mexican but never the less it would be good to get away from the feeling of the masses and go where not too many people went, Mexican or American.

"Dame poco aguita por favor", said Francisco as he came in the kitchen with an old tin Adhor glass. "Sky tiene sed". He was ready to go, he had taken a real cold shower real late last night and had on a clean T-shirt that said "Kiss Me, I'm Italian". Of course he didn't know what it said and since America doubted anyone else would either she'd just not

embarrass him by telling him, knowing he would then have to go home and change it.

"Did Clemente get here yet", asked America. "The picnic basket is ready, take the water out and come back for it and tell Sky todos esta listos".

Clemente arrived half asleep needing a cup of coffee and feeling anticipation over what the day would bring, he didn't like to go in cars, he had had several severe accidents in California with terrible physical results. America thought that was why his cars seldom ran for more than a few miles at the most before running out of gas, wiring coming loose or even the motor just giving out and dying. He had never had his own drivers license, only the ones Mexicans get from the excess of IDs everyone on the U.S. side of the border seems to have. This is why he never got into any legal trouble and since other cars weren't involved in his accidents, only the harm to himself and the statue in the pond he hit was significant. Of course the license he had used was no good to anyone since it had a record and so he got a new one. This happened several times, these accidents. This could have been expensive but it was his Aunt Cuca, one of many in this business, who has the two shoe boxes full of licenses and birth certificates. One for women, one for men. She always gave him a really good discount, he was one of her favorite nephews.

He looked good today, his glossy thick black short hair, each strand was thick as well as dense, short and softly curling, no beard, only a thin trimmed mustache. A shy and maybe what could be taken for sly look were frequently on his face but at the moment there was apprehension mixed with the inevitableness of what was to come. Today's oversized T-shirt had a medicine wheel and read "one earth one people" and his turned backwards baseball cap had the contradiction United States World Series wrote on it. Clemente was a kind looking man, handsome in the way those fake pictures of Jesus Christ looked. He was a truly good man through and through, a very unusual man and a treasure to have as a friend.

With last minute details taking up at least another half hour everyone that was going was finally in the Mercedes after jump starting it and finally heading out the drive with the flock of guineas awkwardly running alongside and behind determined to escort the car down to the corner and part way through the village as everyone up and outside and a few at the windows waved good-bye. Then bumping along on the ill kept road back once again to the house before even getting to the hill to get the thermos of coffee that had been left who knew where and some dog food.

This took a fair amount of time too as the fishermen where creating an interesting scene at the shore. They were running along the edge of the cliffs and shouting and gesturing at an enemy ponga that was pulling their, the fishermen on the shores traps, taking the lobsters right in front of them. Their motor was broke and they couldn't get out. When everyone's curiosity was satisfied with that situation the Mercedes and it's guinea escort took off once again waving they're farewells with more vigor for the joke of it being the second time, as frequently happened.

"Did anyone shut the shop door?", asked Sky as he was driving up the hill.

"I think I did, I was the last one out" . America said this while rebraiding part of her hair. She had worn ribbons entwined in her braids as she knew her special friend enjoyed this and counted on Americas hair being in that way. "Remember, I went back in to say a last good bye to the poor old dogs who didn't get to come. I sure wish this car was bigger sometimes".

"That's all I need, room for more pinche dogs. If the door is open some ones bound to close it soon or the wind will blow it shut". Americas house and Skys shop didn't have locks on it, let alone door knobs. Sky always said that if anyone wanted to break in all a lock would do was keep and honest man honest and slow down a thief. He always had America leave the curtains wide open that way anyone in the house would not have any privacy to do wrong without fear of being seen. Besides the door to the yard was always left unhooked so the

dogs could go in and out and they were scary when they felt the responsibility of guarding the house. As one lost man looking for a way out said, "They sure are vicious suckers"

"Those fishermen are going to be on those other guys like white on rice, I'd hate to see them when they meet up on shore", laughed Sky referring to seeing the fishermen get their traps robbed. "Has anyone made up their minds exactly which route we want to take, what about you Clemente?"

"It makes no difference to me, your the driver", grinned Clemente. He was sort of relaxing some more and thinking this could be fun, but there were a lot of dangers out there. Staying at home is safer he thinks.

"I want to see the big people who live in the hills first", was Francisco's vote and America seconded it and Sky said it was okay by him, that it sounded good last night and still sounded good today and Clemente nodded his head in uncertain agreement. So they headed back up the coast to the road that would take them inland on this peninsula bordered by a sea and an ocean.

On the way, and really too late to turn back due to lack of gas Francisco revealed Skys raven he had stowed away under the jacket he had put on at the last moment.

"I told you I had it, honest, remember when you were putting the air in the tires, I said it then and you said sure. It was under the jacket so it wouldn't be scared".

Sky had let loose with a minor loud storm of anger that passed rapidly due to America's soothing advice that it would be good for the raven named Raven as it was yet a baby and needed company and good experiences.

"Damn you boy, you'd better start speaking English to me fast if you can't get me to understand you in Spanish. What else have you smuggled in the car, a man can't even turn his back around here anymore. Here, give her to me, I want her to ride on the head rest and don't let Chapo and Gudrun get to playing with her, it could lead to disaster. Pick out a tape", he said stretching his arms out the sky light. "I want to hear some travelin' music".

Turning off the main highway onto the only other paved road proved to be another surprise. A bicycle race accompanied by the police and ambulances and relatives and friends in cars was streaming down this road and it was shut off for the duration.

"Well, I wonder how long this will take. I hope it's not the one with six thousand bicycles. Is this a holiday or something?", asked Sky. The bicyclers were slowing down to look at this un-American dirty Mercedes filled with mixed nationalities and animals. "Who is the show here anyway?"

"Es posible El Dia de Conejo o El Dia de Guajalote?" asked Francisco.

"No it's not an American holiday, look, they're all Mexicans and look real professional, it must be an important race", answered America.

"Sale, rapido", called out Clement when he spotted a break and that the police were busy talking to a reporter and an old man with a herd of goats.

Sky darted out onto the road and fell in line between the racers until he reached the store a mile or so down this two lane road. They had to stop at the store in La Mission to buy a half dozen cans of oil and fill the water bottles to keep the leaky radiator full. The two slow leaks in the car tires and the little faster leak on one of the trailer tires were filled up at home before they left and should last overnight and long enough to get somewhere where they could get more air. America put a sack of beans, a sack of sugar, a sack of flour, a large can of coffee, two mantecas, and six boxes of matches and some toilet paper in the cart along with the oil and some supplies for breakfast. Sky was at the counter counting his money and Francisco with Raven on his shoulder was picking out candy to buy with his change. Clemente waited in the car, the least places he went in the better. You just never can tell.

"I guess I'll put it on the book this time. I'd better save this money for the trip, you never know when you might need it. I'm scared to see how much I already owe you. I'll try to get back by here this weekend, we're expecting a client. We're on our way to de La Zorra right now. Do you know who might

have some pinche diesel? How about your brother, is he out back with his dump truck?" Sky had on his ostrich skin boots today and his usual jeans with a yellow sweatshirt that had a colorful iguana embroidered on it. His hat today was his favorite going places hat. The gray fedora with the beaded band that America made and placed a owl feather with a green parrot feather on top and finished off with a triangle shaped feather, a white blending near the very tips to a golden orange topped with a distinct line of black from a Lady Amherst pheasant. The women of the store family were complimenting him on the embroidery as they knew his mother-in-law did it.

The young man who owned and ran this store had come by it in an interesting way. When he was very young he had a life threatening illness and his father and mother prayed for him and vowed if he would live they would give him this store to help him through life. It had something about god in it too. He was always willing to help out and understand. One sensed an underlying desire to break free of this role into something far more shining but it was held in and manifested itself as a super efficient store runner.

This town is on the La Mision river bed, the river that supplies a good deal of water to Tijuana and the towns along the way and wherever there is a small leak in the line. It is the sight of one of the missions on the trail. It is a large ejido with smaller colonias and tourist reserves and a foreigner community along with private land. Much of this land had belonged to the Michaelwaithe family who's great grandfather from Ireland who had become a sheriff in San Diego before the turn of the century had come down to take possession and take an Indian girl for his second wife, the other being on the California side. His off spring seem to be everywhere and now the property much reduced and divided between them.

This population of houses is divided by the river. Colonia Santa Anita and its school and two stores, usually called the Lavandojo, the not Mexican residences, privately owned property, the orphanage, and several farm houses and ranches lay on the north side. Across the bridge was the ejido area, a rich ejido full of prospering people. Not much changed

here, the old Mission school, two more stores, the social salon and the clinic, a tire repair shop and a very small pharmacy, the only new thing being the police station, a six by six room with a desk. What did noticeably change was the houses, through the years they slowly became cemented over the black paper or cement block was painted, room additions put on, gardens enlarged, parabolics dotting the landscape and more new houses starting their slow growth, bigger and nicer yet.

The La Mision area is a beautiful river valley town, green all year, surrounded by steep hills on one side and towering granite faced cliffs with talanzia of a sort growing out of the cracks and crevices making an exotic backdrop to this incredibly nestled tranquil heavily vegetated place.

Back on the road again with all the supplies and still no diesel. "Sure as anything we'll run across someone who's got some along the river road", Sky assured them as America expressed a fear of maybe not being able to make the trip without going in the wrong direction first for gas and Francisco stating that it would take hours to get to a gas station and Clemente remembering he had siphoned out gas from the Mercedes only yesterday to wash a paint sprayer with.

"I guess we have even less than I thought but I have faith in the old car, she's on our side even if we do have to jump start her now", concluded Sky.

Turning onto the dirt road headed east, an infrequent direction to travel here, everyone's mood took a change. They were away, they were taken from the everyday and the familiar into the "who knows what could happen", shedding the burden of the daily routine and donning a new existence. Where they were going was into a different world, not of Mexicans, or of Americans, or of lines and boundaries and borders but one of unity stretching from the top of the continent to the bottom. These Indians they were going to pay a visit to belonged to the earth they started from and the land they were on had always been theirs.

This section of the dirt road was heavily used as there were probably a hundred or so homes along it, maybe less, agriculture and a cement block business and the orphanage.

One of Americas favorite sights was about a mile up this road and as they passed it Sky slowed the Mercedes down to a crawl and waited for the dust to pass to clear the view of Eve Stockers formal outdoor gardens where she had held her garden parties in the forties and fifties for society and movie stars. The trees and bamboo was thick to provide privacy and stop the road dust but in a few carefully selected, known places one could catch glimpses of the green lawns, an almost unheard of rarity here, the ordered rows of roses, the tall cannas and banana trees. Paths went in straight lines crisscrossing through the area, there was a white wicker summer house and white wicker furniture that was not used as it was rumored everyone always stood or strolled about when attending these doings. No house, only a small caretakers shed out of sight somewhere. This women, a Canadian, just recently passed away, had also been a major land owner who had lost most of it for one reason or another.

This old Mercedes with the dust swirling through the holes in the rusty floorboards and the muffler rattling and the back bumper bumping was a wonderful old car and always dependable. It had never left them stranded anywhere, no matter what the problem it was always solvable and sooner or later it was back on the road again. America always hated a car that just out and out left you stranded looking for another way back home. The unimportant breakdowns this car had, had provided time for a break, a time to go for walks and look for rocks. In this way the scenery that went whizzing on it's way past the window now became intimate, you could get to know the feel of it under your feet and in your hands and examine all of interest close up and for as long as you liked. This is one of the advantages of always driving where it is beautiful and out in nature. Sometimes breakdowns would happen at a house or ranch, providing life long memories and friendships to be kept up. America and her husband were riding in freedom, in harmony with all that was around them and knowing they were completely living up to the moment.

"Off to the wild blue yonder, andale pues", called out Sky as he looked over to America to enjoy her pleasure as she smiled out the window at the passing scenery.

Caught up in the excitement of the morning and the day to come, talking and trying to drink coffee on a rutted and pot holed road, Francisco entertaining everyone by feeding Raven and translating what it had to say the diesel was soon forgot, taking care of things had ended in town. The road came to where the sand bed of the river crossed it right where a smaller dry river entered it and ended here at a sand pit where dump trucks were being filled by a skip loader. To the left was another well known place, Rancho Agua Fresca, an old adobe farm house known for it's drinking water and hospitality and fruit trees.

Sky pulled up to the gate of the ranch because the small road that continued on from here lay behind it and Francisco jumped out as he was automatically assigned the job as gate opener. At this point the Mercedes gave a suspicious cough and the engine died and Clemente commented on the fact they had all forgot the diesel.

"Well, I guess that's as far as were going to get for right now. What did you bring for breakfast, I'm starved". Sky jumped out of the car and stretched. "It's gonna be hotter than the hinges of hell".

America went around to the trailer and started looking through the boxes for the package of cinnamon roles and the milk and bananas while Clemente decided he'd better make a check on the car for any further problems. Francisco and Raven had already climbed half way up an old oak tree. The dogs were kept close as it looked like rattlesnake country.

Breakfast over, sitting on the bank next to the road listening to the amazing silence after the sounds of the sea, Clemente and Francisco volunteered to hike back down the road to the ranch house or the sand pit beyond and see what could be done about some diesel. America and her husband would stay with the car as it was blocking the gate and the road as it was narrow here and no place for a car to get around it for quite a ways.

Sky climbed up the hillside to a clump of grass and stretched out watching the few white clouds drift over and behind the oak tree remembering his childhood and doing the same thing then, while America got the dogs water when they had come back from their run in the wilds after sneaking off. All these smells were so different, just the texture of the breeze and the sounds in the air were exciting to her. When she was done with putting the car and trailer back to rights she joined Sky and let her mind drift also with the clouds that were now scattering.

America enjoyed thinking of languages and this was on her mind once again as they were going were these citizens of Mexico spoke a different one. She had been making a list of words that were not in her Spanish dictionary, common to this area where they had their own words and they're own endings to these words. There were people who did not like or approve of the language here and considered it incorrect, especially those who were not native to it. But how could a language that grew from the mixtures of people speaking it and thus this is what it had become, be incorrect if this is what the people here use and understand.

“Wouldn't it be silly if every one in the United States had to speak the queens English and if they didn't, be dubbed less educated or incorrect?”. America stretched and yawned. Leaves had gotten in her hair when she picked an unknown wild flower hidden under a tree limb. Sky made no reply as he was used to America making these thoughts on life and voicing parts of them out loud.

Ideally, to America, spoken language should grow with it's people. It should be an easily changing thing rapidly accumulating the new and shedding off the old that came to no significance.

“The English language needs to invest in a language that's for the majority. It's almost as if English is a secret code. You know, for those who take to it, study it and are always reading the type of books that use those other words. What about the people who are deprived of learning the desire to read because they don't have the born in ability, or desire, like

you, to master all the inconsistencies of how things are spelt and pronounced. Think of all the books that could educate them that they miss. It's no wonder that you don't like to read".

Sky, drifting out of wherever he was for the moment added his bit to this dialog. "They're should be two written languages. One for those who want to preserve the tradition and the background of the word and one for those who just want to use it as a tool to meet an end". A floating feather from an unseen bird caught on the air and did somersaults above his head. Circles, circling, he thought and went off once again to his world of inventions, as he kept up a small awareness of America near him and the gentle flow of her often heard theories.

"The Spanish language is so beautiful. Just the sound of it, especially here, it just bounces along, like music. Mexicans here speak like they feel their words more, each word sort of blurts out and the way they come up at the end of a word is great. All rules and regulations in print and very few exceptions. It's available to all it's people at all ages. The children learn it right off in school and don't have to spend hours and years in the further study of it or failure of it. What is written is available to anyone who reads".

America knows in the United States the best books of the English language go unread by the majority. For one thing she can tell the difference when she shops. The average super market or pharmacy here in Mexico always has a book section, not large but well selected. Some of their best authors, Paz, Fuentes, Marquez and other famous and great Latin American writers. Many translations such as Madame Bovary, Nietzsche, Mark Twain, Sartre and Kipling. Worthwhile books, important books. All these are in with the other collection of the latest and popular. But then on shopping in a super market in the United States she finds the top ten and down only and even in a book store a small section called literature and that is it. She's seldom found a book worth reading in these stores and rarely a book of true value. It really does show a difference in these two cultures and she believes it has a lot to do with the

availability of the written word. So few Americans have what it takes to read something of worth. They only have the ability to write the few words they have memorized how to spell and give up on the rest. America was lucky on this as she inherited her mothers love of words and books so she succeeded and was able to read an incredible variety and amount of books.

“Why can't they make the letters of the alphabet phonetic and spell each word exactly how it sounds? How many people would benefit from that“. By now America had stood up and was looking around the area for rocks, feathers, leaves or whatever. Sky remained still, enjoying the unexpected moment alone together.

America speaks Spanish when she needs to or wants to and almost always understands it. When she first came here she didn't know much Spanish, especially the Spanish they use here at times. From this she learned to appreciate being in a situation where she didn't understand what was said. She was very comfortable with this, this just being there with the people and yet apart. She learned how valuable silence is and how to share it. There is a way of participating in a days happenings without having to make comment on it. A way of sharing time and company while visiting and participating or not, just sitting quietly and pleasantly. There are few things as disagreeable to America as holding a conversation, or making it, the small time banter that is required in her own society.

“I hope I can always live somewhere it wasn't my own language. I can just hear Spanish as a sound without meaning or I can stop and listen. I really like not knowing what's being said around me”.

Americas husband speaks Spanish a lot, not correctly but very descriptively. With his drive to talk to people, to tell them who he is and what his plans are, the need to teach people and share his knowledge forced him to accumulate Spanish at a rapid rate. He learned by the most common method, by using it. He never once had a lesson or used a book.

Sky rolled over on to his stomach and reached for the thermos of coffee. He blew the dust out of his cup, the one with

the Japanese good luck cat on it. "Since I've got my cat cup with me we gonna have good luck on this trip. When we get back, first thing, I'm going to drop everything else and just concentrate on the experiment, my sun and ice machine. I've just about got the pinche thing licked". With this he downed the rest of his coffee and lay back again to pick up where he left off again on looking at the clouds.

America was sticking the spoon in and out of the sand cleaning the hardening sugar from Clementes coffee. She took some fresh coffee and rinsed out his cup then took both cup and spoon and wiped them on the edge of her skirt. She knew Clemente would want his cafecito when he returned. Her braids had already worked loose and the soft fine hair shimmered around her face and made the smudge of earth on her forehead look like a khol mark.

"I feel like a pealed zero" Sky said as he lay spread eagle on his back surveying the world above. Oklahoma, Mexico, experiments, success, how insignificant in comparison to this great expanse of blue.

America paused in her busyness and thought about this statement and then made her secret frequent wish to herself, Forever, may we forever be like this, Sky and I. Like the introduction to the Lone Ranger, "He was a fabulous individual", this was true of Sky also.

After quite a while she resumed thinking about language and about the language she had heard in Oklahoma and then thought of Skys mother and all of her many expressions and sayings, his fathers too, although less powerful.

"Sky. Remember the time I wrote your mom that letter about the fishermen Juan and Jesus, when you were working with them. Remember how indignant she got that your Mexican friend could be named after the son of her god".

"How could I forget? She sounded me on it over the phone next time I called. She felt a little better when I pronounced it differently though. Let's mosie back over to car, I got a hunch help is on the way.

Waiting a few more minutes, just to prolong the spell, they were then heralded by the sounds of a tractor appearing

at the far end of the sorreno pepper field with a group of men on board. America got up and straightened her softly frayed old rose red skirt with the patterns of bucking broncs, cowboys and lariats, and cactuses and walked over to the car and Sky sat up rubbing his eyes drawing his vision earthwards once again.

"Well if it isn't the spitten image of my Grandpas old John Deere he had when I was just a kid, the one he got after the mule died on him".

"I can see it's Francisco with the raven on his shoulder sitting on top of the hood, it must be coming with the gas", America concluded.

All's well that ends well it's said. They had got the diesel and been given a gunnysack of peppers and zucchinis and chayotes and were wished good luck and be careful as the Mexicans around here tend to be afraid of the Indians. The Indians are a lot bigger and have not been affected as much by the word law.

Now started the part of the trip that was out of the ordinary, a feeling of going places not so many other people had been, people had been coming here since the beginning of time but just a small trickle and it was awe inspiring to become part of this small flow.

The land of the Kumeyaay Indian. This was Americas favorite spelling of the name which had many spellings. San Jose de La Zorra is the largest settlement and village of this tribe of Indians in Mexico having around ninety people. There are several other small communities here about but the larger part of this group of tightly bound people lived on the other side of that arbitrary line called La Linea, the border. No one said much for many years, the Kumeyaay drifting back and forth with only the escort of a papered Kumeyaay from United States side when entering but some where around the late sixties someone took it upon themselves to say no, no more crossing, that's it. And that was it. The Kumeyaay that were also citizens from the United States side could still come visit, if they didn't mind the over intense interrogation reentering since times had changed, but not the severed off from the main

core Kumeyaay. They were left splintered off from the whole, they could not pass. The government here seemed to rather forget them too as their road often went out and was always hard to pass.

So now at this late date in they're history they are dwindling away. The community is so small that they can no longer marry within the tribe because by now everyone is related and there is no one eligible. They must leave their homes to wed and to work for the most part. But what does remain is what has always been here on this land. A feeling, a way of life, a world of it's own. And the people who are here still, where America is headed right now, are wonderful and real.

The road from the first of the seven gates they would have to go through was over twenty kilometers, maybe more, but they were slow hard ones with lots of stops for one thing or another. The road wound back and forth alongside hills, around corners that lead into valleys, along a ridge top with a view in all directions, through river beds running and dry and past several ranches with Indian caretakers. It was a nature collectors paradise, more types of wild flowers than imaginable in their wide variety. And all the types of bushes and trees added to this splendor. The rocks changed from scene to scene and were in so many textures and colors. Birds, bees, dragonflies everywhere.

Several miles down the road in a narrow valley with steep hills to the right and a cliff face hanging with talanzias to the left, in a prime spot, America asked to stop so she could pick a bouquet for the car.

"Sounds good to me, just don't get any like the other time that are poisonous, my eyes itched the whole trip", said Sky. "Watch out for pinche viberas de cascabel, Francisco, keep an eye on the dogs".

It was getting to be mid morning and the day was clear and hot and fresh with a chill in the shaded places still. Francisco had rapidly discovered a ferruginous hawk's nest in a pile of rocks on the side of a cliff behind a dry riverbed and was trying to get nearer to investigate but the Raven was hindering

his progress and he had to keep the dogs called to his side. The hawk was circling nearby and it could be told by it's light color it was not old. It was making a loud gull like sound, Sky sat on the hood of the car smoking a cigarette and looking through the binoculars at the nest, he could see sticks woven in with sagebrush and here and there a bone tucked in. The nest was empty.

America attempted to get a sample of each flower for the bouquet, while Clemente was picking some yarrow to take back to his mother for one of her remedios. Doña Felicita had gone with them on another time on a drive on this road and it had been a memorial experience in her life, nature is what thrilled her. Clemente had seen enough of cities to last him a lifetime and was thankful for this trip even though he usually did not look at a drive in a car as fun. He was into the spirit of the adventure and totally enjoying himself.

Along a lot of this area are cottonwoods and sycamores with the big oaks and a whole lot of willows. Mixed in with this is the tobacco trees and the desert yucca, candelabra cactus and prickly pear cactus. There's so many different kinds of bushes too, sage and sumac, lemonade berry and lilac, chamise and wild roses for a few. In Americas bouquet was the matilija poppy, a little dusty at the end of their season but still showing off there huge paper like white petals and there yolk looking center. This was a bold flower on up to six foot stems and leathery leaves. There was also arroyo lupine, two types of bush mallow, lavender and orange on their fuzzy musty green stems and leaves, and the bright red bush snapdragons and the yellow monkey flower . There was a small piece of bush rue with it's little flower and brightly colored berry. The last addition had been some almost wilted wild sweat peas from a shady ravine and two jimson weed flowers. The bouquet had become very large. Just now America was looking at some delicate purple nightshade with it's tiny dot of yellow in the center, but decided against this, as this is the plant that seemed to cause the itchy eye problem, or at least she thought it was this one. And on the way back to the car she planned on picking some daisies. She had seen the medium sized purple

thistles blooming a ways back but could find none here, their season being about over.

A few miles further down the road they crossed the first stream which had a little running water in it although it was almost gone. Just past this was the third gate. This gate had on the stick you closed it with a carved Indians head with the hair streaming down the handle and the notch catching under the chin. A form of welcome or the casting of a spell. They all got out to stretch their legs a bit and rest from the bumps.

The Mercedes did well on dirt roads, it seemed natural to the car. A wide valley stretched before them dotted with small shrunken lagunas and a large herd of cattle. Along with the charolettes were black angus and an occasional part grown half breed zebu cow. A little further on the zebu bull was standing near the road with some interestingly marked cows, like calicos and brindles. This zebu bull was obviously brought in to improve the stock. Bulls like these were given to ejidos and various projects, if it did not belong to a rich owner. No one in the car was sure who brought this one here as they did not know who's property the road went through at this point, there were no homes in sight.

"Yes, it's a fine looking zabu bull but look at some of those small cows, they'll sure enough have a hard time giving birth to calves with such large heads", and Sky added, "Vacas chicas, baceritos con cabasas grandes, mucho problemas"

Everyone agreed to this as Sky was the acknowledged expert in this area of animals. People came from all over to consult with him and his wealth of books and knowledge on farm and livestock matters.

"Mira, mira, there's dust up ahead on the road, looks like were going to get some traffic here real soon". Sky has let Gudrun squeeze half way over the seat from behind and she had her head hanging out the front side window. The Azteca sat alertly between Francisco and Clemente looking out the front window. The Raven was content looking out the window too. They rounded a curve and came through a clump of willow. "Look, I see the dust again, over there now, the road must jog around that way somehow".

In a few more minutes a pick up truck from the fifties, a pea green and faded blue Dodge with stock racks and Utah plates, came into view. They were carrying a load and had people on back too. As the Mercedes came to a wide spot in the road Sky slowed to a stop to give the truck room to pass when it would get there. He stepped outside to smoke a cigarette. The sun beat down hard on his hat and soaked through the pale blue tee shirt with the embroidered pattern of a Haida whale that had been under his sweat shirt that he removed earlier. He had thought of taking off the ostrich boots in favor of hurraches to feel cooler but had not done it yet, but no matter what the weather was he always wore Levi's. Through the years he had managed to always own a pair of boots, no matter how lean the times. When your always moneyless and have no bills, no debts, to speak of when a windfall comes in it does no harm to spend it all, all at once. Then your just right back where you started from, moneyless, no harm done.

The old truck shuddered to a stop as it pulled up even with the Mercedes. After the exchange of buenos dias and handshaking between all was completed an exchange of information took place. It started out with how the road was holding out and where all had started out from and going too and then who was known in common with the others and then into how the cars were running. The Dodge being critically low on oil everyone got out to find where Clemente had misplaced the oil bought at the store and see how much the truck would need. The two women that had been riding up front joined several of the children and sat on the edge of the road on the big red and yellow boulders that lined the edge in this section where the government bulldozer had come through two years ago to improve the road. The pit bull rushed over to them to greet the children. America and Francisco shyly went over to where they were to sit with them to wait for the men.

The older of the two women went over to the truck and took out a large jicama from a full gunnysack in back and then took a towel edged in hand done yarn made lace, a knife, and a paper sack from a box. She came back over and spread out the towel, sliced the jicama with the peel on and then sprinkled

salt and chili powder on it and squeezed a bit of lime on each. She then motioned to America and Francisco that these first ones ready were for them and they came over to accept them and sit back down a little closer.

"Is this your child?", the younger women asked in Spanish of America in a loud inquisitive country voice. Both women were wearing dresses, high heels and earrings, both were dark skinned with work worn hands and good features.

"No, he is my neighbor", America answered knowing what always came next in these conversations.

"How many children do you have?", asked the other.

"I have none".

"How come, how old are you, I know a doctor who helped my sister when she couldn't have babies. You should go there, your husband must be sad. What a tragedy".

Letting the assumption go that this was the reason America had no children, not wanting to introduce an idea they hadn't really run across, that a women had made the choice of no children, she politely took up the next step in the conversation.

"How many children do you have?" she asked the both of them.

"Yaya has eleven and three dead and I have four and one dead. Her name was Luz Mabel, she died before she completed three months and we buried her in a little white coffin in a pink dress with roses on it".

After these facts were established there was silence for a while as the three women watched the children taking turns petting the Raven and playing with the dogs. They continued to eat the jicama, peeling off the outside skin from each slice before biting into it, it was refreshing, cooling.

"How long have you been growing your hair, may I touch it? I have a niece who has this color hair, her mother was a guerra and looks very much like you. She had pale skin and always had trouble with it. Do you have good health? You should go see the doctor my sister saw. She had six miscarriages in a row and then had a healthy boy. Another doctor told her if she had any more it would kill her but since

then she's had two more. The last girl was sickly and it died last winter of the cold". America sat there listening as the two women talked to each other about remedies and catastrophes.

Back in the car again and further down the road America was making the decision of what flowers to keep up front on the dash and which to put in the trunk with the others that had taken up to much room or had proved unfriendly towards humans.

"So those were the in-laws to Isodoro Guzman, the one who takes care of the ranch you can see off of the road they say goes to Mount Colonel and Primo Tapia" said Sky while concentrating heavily on a bad stretch of road.

"The one where the gate has always been locked, the one where we spent the night when that old truck overheated and broke down and the cowboys unlocked it and brought their horses through?", half asked, half reminisced America.

"Yeah. That old truck, the Yellow Dog, how well I remember her, it left a trail of smoke ten miles long".

"Si, es verdad?", asked Francisco as everyone laughed some more.

"Isodoro and his wife invited us to visit when we saw them at the jarapeyo, when he was getting his horse ready for the roping contest. I wish we could get past that gate sometime. I want to see what things look like that way, it's bound to have some different types of plants and flowers and rocks". America grabbed a handful of flowers as they fell from behind the sun visor as the Mercedes hit a worse than the others chuck hole. "What brought those people clear out to the ranch, they must have had a key, don't you think?"

"Si tiene, tiene una llave", said Francisco and continued in Spanish, "They had bought two goats in La Gloria early this morning and were taking them to the ranch for the youngest sons baptisma in two weeks. They say the first owner had taken a bicycle pump and put air under the goats skin to make them look fatter. They say they saw the cut on her ankle where the air went in. By the time they got to the ranch the goats were skinny and hungry". Obviously Francisco had been

listening to the men's conversation too. He seldom missed anything.

"Here put these flowers in the back window, they'll do well dry, the other pile we'll put in the trunk and these I'll hang from the mirror and one for the radio knob.

"How do you call these?", Francisco was pointing at the big white flowers.

"These are amapolo de campo and the others are toloache, the small white ones are salvia. And there's garbancillo and pata de pajaró, campanilla and siemprevivas, margaritas and pino salada and malvia. And these three here I don't know the name in Spanish".

America gazed out the window and half listened to the others talk. Such a good feeling came over her again to be making this trip. A special few minutes, a time that doesn't last long or happen that often in life. She knew that this was special, this coming here to this valley, San Jose de la Zorra and the home of a special friend. And then as sometimes this mood toned itself down and a burst of analyzing situations went through her mind for a time as she continued to gaze in the same way.

"Progress has a hard welcome here where I live and where I go", America thought to herself. And she continued to think "just about every time it starts something slows it down to a pace you can hardly realize the changes with, if it just doesn't stop it completely in some ways. Buildings left unfinished, arches built with nothing behind them, roads becoming impassable or leading to nothing, living choices staying primitive. Not only out here in the land that belongs to the Indians but where I live too and all up and down the coast. I'm not sure about progress, sometimes I get this science fiction feeling that the worst plague, the most lethal cancer is us, the humans, we do not seem to be in balance with much of anything. Maybe the best thing for this earth is to rid itself of its human blight and then try proceeding again. I imagine it would go better then", she mused to herself. Maybe just save a few of these Indians up here to start it off again".

At first not having a radio, television or newspaper seemed strange to America. As though she was missing out on something that needed to be kept up on. She had always gone lightly on the news feeling it is much closer to brain washing than any thing new but now the almost lack of it is shaping her life too. She feels as though her mind has become clean, that the images she forms in her head are purer, not based on collected situations from the mass media. All those movies a person watches are stored in their being or brain somewhere and make up at least a part of their composition. When they think of one situation and then others similar, so much of that was through second hand means, not of their own original experience. America feels her mind is not cluttered or influenced by these objects. Her dropping out of this system leaves her mind free to fill in herself. Then topped with all this beauty, fine people and lack of that very limiting thing called to much progress she has been able to grow and widen her knowledge like she has never been able to before. It took years of course to get where she is, it is the time that really does a good deal of it. A person can't really go for a weekend retreat or even a year or two break in the routine and expect changes that are deep and permanent. America continued thinking "time, time, I have been here so much time, year after year after year living my life out watching and experiencing Mexico and the Pacific Ocean outside my windows. Windows of my house, my car and windows of my mind. A dozen years of refilling myself with a different substance". These are the thoughts and more that passed through Americas mind as the day approached it's goal.

After a couple of more stops, a short visit with two Indians on painted ponies who looked like, as Clemente observed, Hollywood had decked them out, they looked so authentic, two more riverbeds, one with soft sand where the car had to be pushed through to make it and several washouts on the last steep climb, they came to the last gate.

There, they parked and all got out to consume this view. This is what they came for, down below a narrow fertile valley dotted with large oaks and natural piles of boulders. Of

civilization all that could be seen was three houses and a school. Memories of past visits came back, of the times spent in some of these places and the people in them, each place and time a unique experience for America.

The feeling of excitement and adventure heightened as they descended the last grade. Here on the right was a small white washed adobe. Up close to the house was one of the biggest and oldest oaks in this area. The bottom branch was a few feet above an old car which the goats had climbed on and entered the tree itself climbing easily from limb to limb till they were higher than the house itself. It made it seem even the goats were different here and lived in trees.

It was always uncertain whose place this was. There was always one older women, never the same, and some young men. The older men were out herding cattle and spent little time at the house or in town, mainly out in the hills and ranges coming in infrequently. One of the men recognizing the Mercedes stepped into the door way from the darkness of the house and raised his hand in greeting.

Coming to a strand of Eucalyptus the road divided, the larger and more maintained to the left and the smaller wandering off to the right past a very old fashioned pump Sky slowed down to once again admire. Following the road to the right that headed into town, as the other skirted it so people who had no business here could, and usually did by pass it, they went by the school that the government had recently built. A one room school with a fenced yard. It was a good sturdy building filled with windows. In the play yard was the car tires turned inside out and painted in pastels and put in various positions creating a rubber jungle gym for the children to climb through and over. The professor was himself an Indian born and raised here, and then after school and his degree were completed came back here. He was young and tough and understanding. Sky had had the opportunity to talk to him and exchange views. He also had a paper book of Kumeyaay words translated to Spanish with a sketch of each object. America had held this once and wished she had one. Their language here was a beautiful tinkly one, precise and

quick, rhythmic. It made their Spanish accented differently, oddly making it easier to understand for an English hearing ear, the language being rather clipped and clear. Sometimes one word would express a whole thought. It felt like a secret language steeped in time.

Pulling through a large sand wash and an always open gate and then through by two small buildings they were in the center of town. There was a small church, a camper shell with a bottom built on and two more buildings and an Allis Chalmers tractor. Out of respect Sky did not reduce his speed as he drove the very short distance across this area and out between the church and a small building that had the wooden shutters closed on it. There was no lock on the door so someone was inside.

As always they saw next to no one, a glimpse of a child through a window and a slight movement off behind a fenced in garden. It was this way because everyone went out of sight till they saw who it was and what was happening. The last time America had been here the soldiers had come through and given all the males they could find haircuts whether they wanted them or not. The Indians were very cautious because one could never tell what could happen, even in this day and age.

Passing one more white washed adobe surrounded by beautiful trees and flowers and a tall thick fence of nopal cactus they arrived at the house belonging to Goyo and pulled in under the shelter of their oak, the grandparent of all the oaks. The moment was here, the adventure well on it's way.

Before anyone had a chance to open the car doors a large heavy set woman with graying straight hair came running out the kitchen door with her arms open repeating "Que Milagro, que milagro, America, America".

"Gloria, Gloria, como estas, mucho tiempo" said America as they came together in a tight embrace as they kissed each others cheeks. This was a special greeting and uncommon among the women America knew and met. Something reserved for a special friendship.

This friendship had happened unexpectedly for America and Gloria. It was not just an attraction or admiration for each others race but a recognition to both of them of something unnamable in common. When America had been in Mexico for a few years and had learned a little something about the country she was in she and her husband had given a ride to a friend of the people of de la Zorra and had discovered the secrets of this road and how to finally arrive at the land of the Kumeyaay. The friendship was instant and permanent.

As many large oaks, this one here too was used for storage of many things, saddles, traps, a cheese press, hides, old baskets, a variety of hubcaps, potted plants and toys. The tree stretched clear from the house to the creek bed with some smaller oaks so there was a really large shaded area. Under this was the parking. There were six cars, four of which were in ruins and two which obviously hadn't been used in a long while. These last had their windows, doors and trunks. There were only a few running pick-ups around at times, but nobody here had one. The Chevy Impala near the house had the windows rolled down with net over them and two babies were napping inside among the dried goods and clothes stored in it. The trunk had grain for the animals, the perishables and valuable tools. The key was in the lock ready to be removed for security when no one was here. The Ford Fairlane had it's windows cracked open a little ways and inside were two baby kittens and some baby chickens. The car was full of junco, a rush type plant that they used here for their basket weaving. There was also the completed sausal baskets from the nearby stand of willow in the riverbed.

The house was a two room adobe with a newer adobe side room that was whitewashed. The side of the kitchen had long wooden shutters that hung over the large glassless windows. They made a porch effect when they were propped open. The yard was of hard packed uneven earth, swept till the yard was much lower than the kitchen door stoop. Gloria said there had always been a home here, always. There were a few backless kitchen chairs out front. The potted plants and a vegetable and flower garden were in a small fenced yard

connected to the house. The door from the new room and the door from the kitchen were both hand made of the Dutch door type as well as the one inside to the bedroom.

Gloria also liked Sky very much and warmly welcomed the company he brought. Her curiosity was at full pitch to see what they had brought her. Unlike the custom elsewhere here of casually and politely accepting gifts and things brought over and looking at them after the giver has left Gloria was anxiously waiting to see what could be in the trailer. Not wanting to keep her in suspense and just as anxious to witness her pleasure Sky dug into the trailer and lifted out her groceries. She checked each thing while nodding approval and handed them to some young children who had come cautiously up. Laughing and waiting to see what was next Sky handed her a sack of second hand clothes which she opened and started to hold in front of herself. Then America pulled out a wooden tool box and told Gloria to look inside. Here it was, the most exciting part for her, inside was a chocolate cake with coconut and almond frosting with real yellow daisies in a pattern across the top. Satisfied and telling America how incredible that every time they showed up they had a chocolate cake for her Gloria took her little finger and carefully tasted the frosting. She admired Americas ability to go to a store that had about the same thing that the store she went to had and that America could get the ingredients for this. But what she liked best was to eat it.

"Come in the house, I have hot coffee and we will eat cake. Goyo is helping brand cattle at the Bustamonte ranch". Gloria spoke in Spanish. Some of the older women only spoke Kumeyaay.

Inside the house was dim and hard to get use to the lighting. There was a couch that was reduced to disintegrating foam covered with sacks of plants, a rifle, corn husk, and some other larger objects covered with a piece of a dress. Near the windows was the table with a bouquet of wild flowers. There were chairs in various stages of falling apart. Next to this was a trastero of sorts. A strange narrower than usual hand made one. This held Glorias decorations, her debujas. In the corner

next to an almost built in sink was the wood stove. This was like the ones in other houses here, adobe brick part way up and then a square metal box with a small door for the wood, which seemed to be handed out by the government for Indians. This stove partially vented out a pipe, the rest went under the eaves. Then there was the gas stove with one working burner and the oven door off and used for storage of food. On the wall next that the very old and possibly never painted Dutch door, the door to the bedroom which was open but too dark to see into. The walls were unpainted adobe, the floor gouged and pitted earth and the ceiling beams lost in smoke and cobwebs with a number of things hanging from them.

The coffee had been on for over an hour so it was near ready. This coffee, made from grounds was boiled thoroughly and then left on the wood stove to stay hot. The water was from the nearby community well. Sky brought in a folding chair from the trailer and Clemente stood outside near the doorway while Francisco and his new friends took off with the pit bull and Raven to explore the area. Chapo came in the house and sat on an unoccupied corner of the couch out of the way. Over in the corner was a big yellow striped tom cat named Juakin. In general Mexicans don't seem to name their pets people names as it is disrespectful, but that didn't apply here.

After the cake America had Clemente call the boys and bring in the picnic basket. Within an hour most everything in it had been eaten and cake served again to those who still had room for it which Gloria did and America had another small piece with her so they could laugh together about how much they ate and how good the cake was.

After this Sky and Clemente went out to the car and drove over a ways to a field with a small oak for shade and unhooked the trailer, then started to set up a camp. Francisco and the boys came over and started to stack rocks for a fire ring. The Indians trim the trees of their bottom and dead branches and leave them laying in place till they are needed so Sky would wait till one of the men came back to find out which area they could get their firewood from. America helped Gloria

in the intense heat of the kitchen, bringing in water to heat on the woodstove to wash dishes while Gloria shredded dry beef with her fingers to make deer machaca for tonight's meal. She had been given a job of cooking to do and was busily telling about it and chuckling, as she was in the habit of doing. This little chuckle came from the heart and soul. You could hear her ancestors in it.

Gloria talked on about the way she believed and lived between descriptions of her new job while America washed dishes.

Off in the distance the sounds of a motor was approaching. The women looked up from their work to stand at the window. Sky and Clemente had decided to put off making the camp and had just laid back in the shade of the tree to take a siesta and so stood back up to see who it was. It was coming from the opposite direction, the direction they would take on their way out. Here came the men, home early. The topless truck was speeding down the road throwing up dust. The men in front were standing up waving their hats and hollering. One of them was tall and hatless in the back and waving a mescal bottle. The dogs were running behind and two horses with riders passed them at full speed to get ahead of the dust and to be first in the race.

"Oh man, here they come", grinned Sky in English.

Clemente stood there unsure of what to do next and pulled his baseball cap on tighter and repeated after Sky, "Si, vienen, es verdad.

The horses came straight up to the edge of the camp and came to an abrupt stop where the fire pit was, kicking sand all over it, the truck immediately behind circling once and adding such a cloud of dust they disappeared from sight from the kitchen window. "Oh wow, they're here", said America to Gloria. "Just look at them". "Good luck", she secretly wished her husband, Sky, Sky Summersun.

Gloria chuckled and patted Americas hand and went back to work. This was a common scene to her.

The dust settled and America could see that the horses had taken off again with their shirtless bareback riders and now a lot of young boys were running toward the truck.

Goyo who had been standing up in the back yelling "Howka, howka, Bufame", jumped out of the truck and started toward Sky when he saw Chapo the hairless running over to check out the excitement. He stopped in his tracks and pretended to stagger backward, laughed wildly and took off after the Azteca yelling perro viche, perro viche, the hairless dogs of the Mexicans. Everyone was watching Goyo as these performances he put on were not to be missed. He appeared to be quite drunk and out of control but Sky knew this to be untrue, as he had seen him change directions when necessary. Next he came cautiously back to Sky being sure the naked dog did not catch up to him and make him lose his own hair as he yelled this out to warn the rest. He came up and shook Skys hand while clapping him on the back with the other. Without letting go of Skys hand he rubbed him a few times on the head and poked him twice while talking a jumble of threats and welcomes, calling him paisano and amigo all the while and then offering the bottle of mescal to him. Sky laughed and greeted him, joked with him and then refused the bottle.

"Yo no, not me", and he shook his finger back and forth across his chest.

"You mean my own friend won't drink with me? This is good because this is my friend who doesn't drink". He growled and laughed and gently pounded Sky a few more times, looked around and called Chapo to him and touched his back. "Good luck, if your an Indian". He turned to his audience and half dancing half pretending stumbled and made some signs he was going to the house to check things out and for them to help get some firewood.

This was Goyos way of saying welcome, I'm glad your here, it honors me. The firewood was the finishing touch, the friendship went beyond the normal limits. America sighed a sigh of relief when Goyo turned and started toward the house. Goyo was like a big joking teddy bear, but strong like a bear also and he liked to wrestle and match strength with finger

wrestling in particular, plus he usually demanded any man who pleased him to take an extra long pull on the bottle. Francisco had been warned to stay well out of his way, he was particularly hard on the young boys he caught, or who purposely let themselves get caught because they all loved and respected this good man.

On Sky and Goyos first meeting they read each other and knew that this friendship required something different of them each also. And so Americas husband did not have to go through this rough housing and he didn't have to drink to fit in or to have a good time. They wholeheartedly liked each other.

During all this no one noticed that one of the men, the one who had been sitting in the middle, still sat in the truck. He now got out and it incredibly enough was O'henry, but a different O'henry then any of them had seen before. Quite obviously he was drunk. Drunk dirty and disoriented, clutching his guitar and looking around in wonderment. How like Mexico to come up with these coincidences of meetings. It was so very odd that O'henry would be with the Indians let alone here. Sky knew that it would be an interesting story that O'henry would tell. But for now greetings were all that passed between the two as so much was going on.

Here came the horses again chasing an escaped pig that they were trying to lasso. The two oldest of the men who just arrived were rebuilding the firepit with much pointing and yelling. They then decided to have Sky drive them in the Mercedes through a field and across a stream to where the firewood would be gathered from this time, they planned on wrapping it with a tarp and tying it to the roof.

Back at the house Goyo came in and greeted America warmly and formally. Asked of her family and health. Then breaking into his famous grin he kidded her about El Chapo. The word for dog in Kumeyaay is hot, said rather quickly, and combined with the English word dog of course came out hot-dog, which was a long time joke between them. He always talked about how the Mexicans wanted to make wini tacos out of the perro viche.

When all had settled down again America and Gloria walked over to the center of town. The main way there and most used was down a small steep ravine and back up again and then a narrow worn tricky path that came up on the side of a building. Gloria took out a key and opened the door. The building was made from rough thick planks of unpainted wood and had no windows. They stepped inside leaving the door totally opened and waited till their eyes adjusted to the darkness that hid the contents. It was the type of place that needed a lot of studying in the first place as it was interesting. This was the store. Here was the counter with scales hanging above and a bait box for the money. On the sparsely covered shelves there were supplies. Nescafe, manteca, cans of Vale Vita sauce, several different sizes of brown paper bags with sugar, clear plastic sacks knotted at the top with beans, salt and rice. Top ramen in the corner was stacked high, fifty pound sacks of sugar, corn, flour and more. There were a few kerosene lanterns, candles, horse shoes and nails, motor oil. No vegetables, no paper products but toilet paper. The two bottom shelves were lined with plastic milk cartons full of honey. This honey was a source of income to the people here and they gathered it themselves. It is a mild gold color honey pleasant to the taste.

In one corner was stored the finished baskets the women made. Both the junco and the sausal type were here in an incredible variety. They were all mixed in together as each women could tell their own or who's it was. The women who stay at home are the ones who preserve most their cultural heritage. This art had almost been lost to the Kumeyaay when the government made an effort for them to revive it as a money making industry. These baskets that Glorias mother and a few of the oldest women remembered how to do were taught to the younger ones. It soon caught on as it really did make money. The baskets are sold to museums and stores here in Baja and in California and elsewhere little by little. The willow baskets were in various states of drying. This willow was gathered green and immediately put to use. The whole limb is used, leaves and all and wove together so tightly the basket can hold

water. Some of these were only a few days old and green. Others showed their age by they're stage of drying. Some near the bottom were a pinkish brown and worn smoothish by hands rubbing off the loose flaky leaves. These were in many shapes and sizes. There was one shaped like a cowboy hat and another like a pitcher. Many had lids, some were two feet wide and two or three foot tall. These big ones were heavy when they were fresh. Then there was the smaller collection of the ones done in the reeds. These were in two colors. The reed was dried and then soaked and then stripped with a razor blade of its outside sheath. This was a pale gold or oat color. The designs were in black. The finished reed was taken and wound into a circle, like a cinnamon roll, and soaked in a can with water and charcoal. These were handsome baskets varying in skill from maker to maker.

America picked out two gallons of honey and spread out the pesos Sky had given her earlier for this purpose. The price always varied on this honey from person to person and according to the situation. This amount Sky felt to be a fair price, not as much as some may have to pay but enough to feel he had been fair. Gloria put the money in her pocket and took a piece of paper from a box and carefully and seriously wrote all this down. Then with a sly smile reached under the counter and took out a pair of earrings made from the junco, woven into a plate like circle, and handed them to America saying happy birthday. Gloria knew her birthday was in August and had for many years nearing the end of summer managed to give America something. This time it was a double surprise as these earrings were a new product that they hoped to sell to the tourist when they had a chance to display there goods at various fiestas and cultural events in Ensenada and a few more towns here about. Gloria likes to say she did not know her birth date and so every day was a birthday for her.

Locking up the store and leaving the honey out front till they past that way on their return, they walked over to the adobe that was next to the camper shell beside the church. There were two young girls beside the door. The chief was working on the Allis Chalmers tractor with two other men.

This chief had been elected and he would serve three years. The ones who volunteered as chief had only one year to serve. He must stay at home and there was no work for him, only the unpaid job of his title. Fortunately he was not married even though he was in his mid thirties and very good looking. He was Glorias brother and both of them were very politically involved in obtaining their rights with both countries.

On entering this house America once again had to wait for her eyes to adjust. This was the first time she had been inside this adobe. It was a small close room heavy with odors. Drying herbs, urine, rotting wood, wet earth of the floor, smoke. Along the walls were women, sitting and standing. One was making tortillas, the extra large flour tortilla they made here. The one nearest the door was shredding dried gato montes meat with her finger tips. On a table were several baskets. One had piñon nuts that had been roasted. Some of them were in a mocaljate waiting to be ground to be made into a hot drink. Another had acorns that would also be ground to be made into a mush. These were unusual, America had thought this was something they no longer did. Looking around and peering through the smoke and obscurity she studied the bed in the corner of the room. Along with several women sitting on the edge of it she could make out three dogs and a cat lounging on it. This is something Mexicans, in general, never do, allow the dogs and cats in the house, let alone the bed. Sometimes the dogs came in to make a sweep of the kitchen floor after meals but then they were ushered out. It had been Americas observation that many Mexicans weren't that close to their animals and had no real soft spot for them. These Indians felt differently and gave them the run of the place. America was offered a cup of something hot and sweet along with a chair which she placed near the door near the fresh air. The women were all talking, most of it was in their own language except when the two young girls added something. America was noticing that as they spoke the Kumeyaay language that they would say the days of the weeks in Spanish, as though their language did not make these divisions and also the names of the food were Mexican.

She had been sitting quietly for it seemed near twenty minutes when she caught a movement on the bed and realized that there was an old woman sitting there propped up by folded blankets, sitting and petting the cat. She must have been a hundred years old. Her eyes were blue from age and she was incredibly frail, almost see through, hardly making a bump under the covers. Then America realized the motion she had seen was the old woman's hand making a signal that she, America, should come over and sit next to her. No one was paying attention and at the moment Gloria was busy at the wood stove. America got up and went over to the bed, the old woman motioned impatiently for her to sit down. Next the old woman reached out and felt America's hair and looked into her face then took hold of her hand with both of hers and settled back down. No one paid any attention still.

Suddenly there was an odd crackling sound and an electronic voice announced itself. Everyone in the room froze for a second and then started laughing and pushing each other toward the corner opposite the bed. Here was a CB, a remote radio for transmitting messages. The voice kept persistently on and the choice was narrowed to Gloria, being the most worldly of them all.

"Escuchame, escuchame San Jose de la Zorra", continued the voice.

Gloria turned to America and said, "what do I say, what do I do now?"

America claimed, "I don't know what to do".

Gloria looked around one more time and carefully picked up the speaking part and said "Si". This obviously didn't get through.

America suggested, "talk more".

Gloria repeated "San Jose de la Zorra, San Jose de la Zorra". Proud but embarrassed to be talking to a machine, she looked around the room.

The voice on the other end said it was testing the machine and asked a few garbled questions. Gloria repeated the name of the village twice more and put the speaker back in place. The voice asked the questions over several times but

that was it, the job was done and everyone chose to ignore it or look at it and laugh and talk about Gloria having to talk on it. Apparently it had been coming off and on all day but Gloria had not been there and the others were reluctant to answer it. America had the impression that they thought it was very silly and a little scary.

On coming back out into the sunshine America asked Gloria what that was all about. She said the Rotary Club of Tijuana had put in this two way radio last weekend for emergencies and they had to test it once a day.

America and Gloria picked up the honey and climbed back down the ravine and back up again and went over to the well. It was cement block with a cement slab on top and a cement square with a re-bar handle, that lifted out to get to the water. Gloria pulled up the narrow bucket and dipped into it with an ancient metal cup kept there for that purpose and drank from it, then dipped it again and handed it to America.

The job Gloria had been given was making the meals for the road crew that were working on the road further east of here, the road that went to Guadalupe. This year they had been redoing this portion of it. This was the older portion and used more. It was also shorter. So in the morning six to eight men showed up for breakfast and were fed, then sent off with supplies for a lunch and then returned for dinner. This was a good job and much coveted. It meant food in the house all the time. So when Gloria came back she began the preparations for this and America went over to the campsite.

“O’henry, whatever in the world are you doing here?”, asked America as she walked up. O’henry was sitting cross-legged before the unlit fire drinking coffee and agreeing to stories being told of hunting deer and a son who had saved his money to buy a computer. “You look sick”.

“The same as sick, I drank too much plus I drank that stuff in the plastic bottle”.

“That stuff could kill you, they probably put rubbing alcohol in it for extra kick”.

“I know, Sky just told me that too, a little late now”.

“What are you doing here, how come you were in the truck with them anyway?”.

“Go get me another cup of black coffee and I’ll tell you everything, thank the gods you guys were here”.

“Okay, let me change my skirt, honey leaked all over the side of it and I have to go to the bathroom too”. America laughed to herself at this description of this word of where she was headed right now. She stopped and got some toilet paper from the trailer and headed out towards the trees. De la Zorra had one outdoor bathroom for visitors but it was back across the ravine and a lot further away and a lot less desirable than the trees. All the Indians headed out towards the trees and took care of their mess and nature finished it. It seemed to be a good balance and was a lot more sanitary than the typical outdoor bathroom of Mexico. It just wasn’t quite as convenient, the walk was long.

It was a little earlier than America had meant to put on this skirt but the one she had on being sticky she went ahead and pulled it out of the Guatemalan duffel bag. This skirt was a yellow with six brown and white horses rearing on their hindlegs around the bottom with blue clouds and horseshoes floating above. It was an old skirt found at Marys fleamarket in Harrah, Oklahoma. There were several spots where the material had disintegrated and America had put lilac colored satin patches on to add to the color. She had on her beaded Indian belt from an Indian tribe in northern California, the basket earrings and a necklace with blue scarabs and an amber ring. She always wore her favorite clothes here. She knew that Gloria was going through the sack of clothes, brought for her, to pick out something that made her feel good to wear. It was a good occasion to be with friends infrequently seen and something to dress up for.

“Here’s your coffee, tell me your adventure now while everyone has gone to see what’s wrong with the tractor”.

“Well, the first thing that went wrong was the fool Nova broke down again. No va is an appropriate name for it anyway, think of that, that car has stranded me so many times, it just

doesn't want to go". O'henry settled deeper back into the lawn chair pulling his limbs up snug to his body.

"What were you up to anyway in the first place?"

"I was out poking around for cow skulls as usual. Someone told me about a ranch in Guadalupe, here look at this piece of paper, they even wrote it down". The corner off a paper sack said Rancho Prieta Loma, Senior Gustavo de las chivas.

"I know that ranch, it's just where this road here ends, when you make the right hand turn by the cemetery and the olive orchard".

"Every time I stopped and asked they kept telling me to keep on going. Finally when I got there his sons said the old man was out with his goats on the hillside and they would take me there where the goats and cows wandered. Well, that was a mistake. I got the Nova about five miles out from nowhere. They kept remembering places where cows or goats had died and we got four good heads that had been pretty well sunbleached, just a little smelly, you know, that roast beef smell. We saw the chivero on top of the hill and just then the linkage fell out of the transmission when we were crossing a plowed field. It's right in the middle of the field, not even near a road, so we decided to walk the rest of the way up to where he was, for what reason I wasn't sure. From that side I could see another ranch in the distance and a truck parked with some cowboys near a mile away. So I walked on over there to try and find some help. I didn't realize at first it was the Indians till we talked for a bit. One thing led to another and I thought it sociable to drink since they kept offering it. By the time we got back to the ranch they were rounding up the cattle and I could hardly see straight. I only had a few small gulps. Then when we got out the big guy, your friends husband, wanted to wrestle and kept coming up behind me and squeezing me while the others egged him on. I could see it was a game but never the less I thought I'd had it. I even thought of Lourdes and her poster of The Virgen de Guadalupe and how kind she looked. I sure thought I might need help and I sure didn't know where I was going to get it from. Then an old pickup came by with

school children headed for town and they told us all that Sky was up here. Next these crazy Indians started whooping and yelling out odd words then they all jumped in their truck to come back here, so I jumped in too and here I am. What else could I have done?" He shook his head in memory of it, gave a shudder, then laughed. "Maybe I did think of the good lady at the right time, I sure feel a whole lot more comfortable sitting here now".

"Well then, welcome to San Jose de la Zorra, your in the Indians land now and in for some more adventures. We're not leaving till tomorrow sometime so make yourself at home".

Once again things settled down for awhile and all was quiet, no one in sight and nothing moving except a hog grazing out in the field. Francisco, Gudrun and the Raven had gone with the horse riders to a nearby home to pick up some newly made baskets and to deliver some lamp oil.

O'henry was now asleep in the shade trying to rid himself of the affects of the alcohol and Sky and Clemente were quietly talking. America picked a spot to sit under a cottonwood tree near some ground that was blond flowing rock with ground out pockets for grinding grain. She knew a lot of women must have come to this spot. It had a good view of the village and the creek was not to far behind it. It was no longer used.

Off in the near distance she could see the school. What it had been to her to go to school had been far far different than what this school represented. This school here was a link with a world that would have to one day be entered. Here was a way to a different life, or at least a way to enhance the one here. Arithmetic, writing, history, a sense of pride and belonging, a celebration of major days. Learning to be with others and participate. Learning how to be on time and answer for ones actions. It is so important for these children to go to school for so many reasons and adds so much to their lives.

And America. She always felt she had been harmed by going to school. Twelve years of going through the same information over and over again. Where is the challenge in that, the adventure. She learned early that it wasn't the

knowledge gained but the system participated in, that counted to the ones who were inflicting it. And America never likes systems, not even her own and frequently proves it by doing things out of the ordinary pattern of her own life and habits. She thinks now about how school was for her. It was as though the whole system was reduced down to praising those who had an ability to memorize and repeat or to be strong and competitive. Intelligence must be based on more than this. The individual intelligence, the unique intelligence. America was never popular in school with children, but even more so less popular with the teachers. They sensed a unique soul and they're inability to dominate it threatened them. America learned the most at home in her parents library and through experience and travel. The schools here in Mexico were known to be ahead by quite a few years of the schools in the United States. And America knew that the children were required only six years total and for those who any further would be a waste of time, were then free to form a sense of work and responsibility while still young enough to do so. Get the body and the mind in tune with doing the labor that has always kept mankind going. If you spend twelve years at something and are proved not good at it, it is not a good preparation for anything.

America sits in front of the tent in a ships old wooden deck chair painted yellow with blue touches rubbed through. The green canvas of a rubber raft was used for the seat and back and the canopy was a palm leaf wired on. She is looking down the length of her body as she lounges so she can catch the colors of her clothes and jewels as it blends into the scenery. Quite a place to examine your beliefs she thinks to herself. She places her feet a little higher and separates them some at the top so it forms a black V frame with a red and orange rose with green petals on each Chinese shoe. A girl is carrying a five gallon bucket of water in each hand from the well and passes slowly through this spot as she is a long way off.

The word politics came to Americas mind as she looked down the right side of her skirt with the horse designs spread out and down across the green of the tourmaline anklet tied

with a leather thong and saw the chief of the tribe repairing a fence near the wooden corral. Politics. All these different types of governments, different stages of growth is what distinguished one from the next, one type creating the next type with time. America thought to herself, “my political belief is this, I am a non participant, I believe in not participating. If you don’t like it don’t do it, if you don’t believe in it don’t participate. I never have voted. I don’t take government money. I don’t use my social security number, I don’t get drivers licenses. I didn’t go to girl scouts. I didn’t go to church. I never joined a club or even a group. People for and people against the government are one and the same. They both play a part. The opposite side, the other half. Each giving strength to the other through their opposition. My gift to this and the USA in particular is to not participate. The best I can do is take no side at all. Just bow out. Its not me that’s making or being in any of the mess going on up there”.

Just before a dark mood came over her with the thought of all that’s wrong with the world she was interrupted. “America, are you sleeping, I called as I came up but there was no answer”, said Sky as he and Clemente came up from behind. “How’s O’henry, is he feeling any better?”.

“I must have been day dreaming. O’henry is sleeping and Francisco is somewhere near abouts. What have you been up to? I think it’s cooling off some finally. I felt the sun shine clear through me as I was walking back. Like I’ve been cleansed. Gloria said she would call us when dinner is ready. It looks like it’s going to be a fiery looking sunset.”

“Clemente and I have been operating on the dogs feet taking out the foxtails. We operated on five different dogs. One of them had stickers in all four feet. It’s amazing how far up the foot they travel, it’s a good thing we brought the vet supplies. I gave a sick calf a shot of penacilina too and took the stitches out of an old mans thigh and repaired a gas stove and transplanted a bird of paradise tree”.

“I hear Gloria calling now. Wake O’henry and come on over, I’m going now”.

The sun set as America said it would, in a blaze of color that changed all other color. The night was ready to begin. Gloria's home was already dark inside with the kerosene lamp burning. America added her Coleman lamp to help light up the table where a candle was not yet burning. There was a bouquet of new wild flowers on the table along with a coke bottle of salt, a sack with sugar, a tin can with forks, a used horseshoe, two bullets and an abalone shell and a worn piece of paper with the names of the road workers and a mark by their name each time they ate, waiting to pay on their own payday.

America quietly slipped into the darkness of the corner by the tub past the six men sitting at the table. Since there was no other woman in this spot she started to wash some of the dirty dishes in the continual process of washing dishes a bit at a time in cold water with a lot of soap and rinsing. Gloria indicated that some coffee cups would be needed to be washed next. Gloria had on the clothes America had brought her. These clothes had been her Aunts and she remembered them well and thought how life flows in strange directions. An Indian Aunt Donna, another woman another time another place. Gloria gave America her broad calm smile that matched her eyes. The men had just begun their meals.

"Buenos tardes", called out Sky, Clemente and O'Henry as they came up to the open windows and stood there waiting their turn. Some boys came and stood there too and they were handed some burritos and they went on their way. The house was scorching hot inside as the wood stove was still burning strong. Gloria's daughter rolled out tortillas and a young cousin stood at the fire turning them rapidly with her fingers on the hot top while she stirred a pot of beans and another of nopales with onions, tomatoes and garlic and green serrano chiles. Gloria was serving and just now was pouring the hibiscus juice. She was talking to the head engineer. The tom cat and Chapo sat on the couch with Goyo who was content to let his clientele eat in peace although he had a mischievous look on his face and was talking to Chapo quite seriously.

"Why won't the government recognize your claims? They won't fund your wells or agricultural projects till you get your

papers straight. You must force them to listen”, said the engineer. He was from the state of Campeche and had graduated from the University of Mexico City. He came from a family of many children and was one of the last boys born to parents who had saved their best for the oldest and provided education for the rest.

“It looks like another two weeks of work and we’ll be through for this year. It has taken three months this time. I’ll miss this place, my soul has expanded here”.

“Come bring your family and stay with us and I will tell them the stories of my people. Not so many of us know the stories now, soon they will be lost. The young people want to leave for the cities. I have always been here, my family has always been here. I teach the baskets to all who are willing to learn. Your road brings people here so we can make money and live good. The men have gone to work the ranchos and the cattle but it is now we, the women, who stay home and with our heritage help support ourselves”. Gloria stood talking and smiling over the table with her arms hung down and crossed at the wrist.

“What is it like, where your from. What type of people are there?”, asked Sky of the engineer.

“It is on the Gulf of Mexico and my people are the Maya, I am a Campechano. When I was a boy we did not live close to our heritage, we lived in town, in Champoton. My mother was proud of her Spanish blood traced back to a conqueror of the land, but even more proud was my father of his Mayan blood. He said to us children always that was what made us dark and strong, brave and willing. He said that we were constantly at war within ourselves, the civilized battling the uncivilized and amidst all this we must find who we are. And what of you, why are you out here, what brings you?”, he asked of Sky.

“He is one of us and has returned home once again from a long voyage”, Goyo suddenly stated, showing he really was paying attention to the conversation.

“So you to have Indian blood then?”, the engineer asked.

“Si. Es la verdad’, replied Sky.

Everyone had eaten and the engineer with his workmen went back down the road a mile or two to their camp where the road working equipment was stored for the night.

America was back at her camp and Sky and O'henry were sitting at the campfire watching Francisco roast marshmallows. It was a beautiful night, warm, just right and the moon near full with small clouds drifting over it's surface and gone again in moments.

"Well, I seemed to live through all this, my headache is gone but if someone has an extra blanket I'll just bundle up over there on that grassy spot and get a good nights rest". O'henry looked beat, his curly hair had leaves and grass caught in it and his blue eyes were blood shot. He looked far older than his thirty five or so years. He looked like he had been wandering for days and had just stumbled out of the woods for the first time.

America knew this was the calm before the storm. Having been here plenty of times she knew thereabouts what to expect and she was not wrong about tonight.

In the dark out of nowhere came two youngish Indian men, they stood silently in the background while America rearranged camping supplies. Sky and Clemente stared into the fire and O'henry grubbed around for a place to lie down. The two men just stood and quietly watched. No one said anything to them as that would have been rude. They were just there and that was it.

"Let's make a brew of this yerba buena and chamomile while they're fresh". America still had on her horse skirt and her braids were tied in a double knot on top of her head with the ends sticking out at odd angles, so they wouldn't fall into the fire while she was stirring the pot of leaves. "Francisco, search through the glovebox, I think I saw a cinnamon stick in there".

Francisco had come back to the campfire about dark, he was full of stories of the nature he had seen, a wild cat and two small deer, coyotes and maybe, but maybe not, a bear. He and his new friends had clambered up a dry river bed onto a high peak and looked down into an empty nest. He had ridden a

horse by himself inside the wooden corral and rode bareback behind a little boy who knew exactly what he was doing when it came to horses. They raced around the village twice with a group of older boys whooping and yelling just like in the movies he said. For the last while he had been sitting quietly next to Sky watching the fire with him, both sitting on their haunches and stirring the embers with a twig.

And the two Indians still stood in the shadows and politely watched.

Somewhere nearby a truck started up, sounding loud and clear in the quiet, the horn honked several times and the word yagua could be heard over all. The truck had no headlights so it was hard to trace its route but it seemed to wander here then there stopping now and again.

"I wonder what there up to", said Francisco as he yawned and stretched after a long day of exploring. He looked sleepy but America doubted he would get much sleep this night.

Suddenly the truck veered back around and headed across the field and headed for the dying embers of the campfire and the their oak tree.

For the second time today Sky said something to the effect of here they come, hold on.

And come they did, suddenly the truck loomed up pulling a huge log behind it raising dust like a curtain and it was full of Indians already having a good time and ready to continue. They pulled up with the front bumper of the truck touching the corner of the tent just as the head lights finally bumped on. Two of the five or six men in back jumped out and a third got out from behind the drivers wheel giving instructions on what to do with the log, the best way to get it burning. The passenger door swung open and there was Goyo turned sideways in the seat which looked perfectly onto the fire and started to give everyone a hard time for not being ready and being lazy. "Huevonas todos, flojos y pinche bueys".

O'henry had already leaped out of his sleeping blanket with the fear of being run over, not knowing what was going on

and regretted thinking the day was over and that he could sleep off the last of his hangover.

“Hey, boy, get yourself over here and start playing that guitar. We want to hear Jambalaya again”. This was said by Goyo to O’henry who had already played it at least a half dozen times on the trip in the truck with them.

Francisco schooled a little closer to Sky who was acting very nonchalant and had just remained sitting saying good evening and how beautiful it was here and what a nice log they brought.

America took the tea off the refrigerator grate that was on the campfire and strained out the leaves and sugared it very sweetly and then offered it to all present. She served Sky first to show who was most important to her. Then next she offered Goyo his in the biggest cup then Clemente and the eldest of the Indians and then ran out of cups which was a good joke and lasted for at least twenty minutes deciding who would share with who and who got how much and on into debating whether or not Chapo got a share.

By this time the log had caught on and the fire was burning brightly and everyone was content, if not calm. America sat just inside the door of the tent to show she was glad, proud, that they, the Indians had come to celebrate, celebrate life, friendship, paisanos, the night. She sat just inside the tent door, to show that she, being a woman, was not participating in the goings on, that she was waiting at home for her husband and that kind of thing. Respect is gained by acting the right way. Everyone knew, Mexicans and Indians alike, that Norte Americanas, las gavachas liked to be the life of the party and they in turn were proud to know one who knew her place and didn’t play this role.

O’henry got his nerve up to stop singing Jambalaya and to sing a Mexican song by Pedro Infante, Ahora Soy Rica, he had just recently learned to play this and three or four others from his friend across the toll road. There was mild objection but they were intent on listening to Skys story of a white mule and a goose caught in a tornado floating in the sky. The bottle passed, Clemente was telling one of his dead dog stories, and

when the bottle came his way he put his lips to it but did not swallow, no one seemed to notice. The dead dog stories went back and forth for awhile, but all agreed that Clemente had the best stories and were told in great detail. O'henry went to sing Necesito Dinero which everyone stopped to listen to and then sing with. Goyo did a jig of a sort around the fire pretending to fall backwards into it but always just saving himself before landing in it. About this time Francisco slipped into the tent and got into the sleeping bag with Chapo and the pit bull. He thought it best if the Indians didn't see Chapo again tonight.

After several hours of this the singing changed to chanting and the eldest one lead it. This was the old mans specialty. He broke off a limb from the burning log and took an empty Tecate beer can and filled it partially with pebbles and stuck the smoking end in the hole and turned it into a rattle to keep time with the chanting. Three or four hours later everyone was passed out or asleep or gone home except the old man and two other older men and one youth who chanted on.

They chanted all night clear through till dawn. They walked or stood or did small dances around the campfire. America kept waking all night, trying to stay awake and listen, the chanting going into her memory. The viejito said these were all the stories of his people turned into a rhythm. He was the last to remember them all. He said that it was hard to get the young men to chant. He must have been glad that the one young Indian stuck it out. It was not a loud chant, the rattle and foot stomping going the whole time too. America, Sky, Clemete, Francisco and O'henry bit by bit drifted into a sleep full of new and unusual dreams that wove themselves around this chanting that filled them with a sense of continuousness and mystery.



## LATE SUMMER, INTO THE HEAT

### THURSDAY

When the chanters left early that morning America went back to sleep, a sound sleep to be woke by a strange feeling, and looking through the open tent door not to far off was one of the Indians from last night standing and watching them sleep this time, just patiently watching, like one would TV, he wanted nothing more than to watch. It was a strange feeling for sure, but mainly since she wasn't aware people did that. Was he absorbing something, some unknown essence from them. It was for sure that he was experiencing them in a novel way, she could tell from the intenseness of it. She remembered back to another visit when this same young man took Skys dark glasses. He knew he would be caught because he did it in front of other people who told Sky. He then put them on the center of the table inside his house and left. Well, Sky knew this was a challenge, a test and all were wondering how he would deal with it. What he did was just walk into the mans house, put on the glasses and return to Goyos house were everyone was hanging about on Sunday. From that day on this young man started a loyal and playful friendship with Sky and both gained respect.

This Thursday had started well and America knew it would be an interesting one. The first thing to be tended to, after a trip to the trees and a quick straightening of her clothes she had slept in, America started the process of making breakfast. All was quiet and no one was to be seen, only the empty Tecate caguama bottles and a variety of others including the empty plastic rubbing alcohol bottle. She put these to one side of the campsite in case someone wanted them and they could find them easy. The log was three quarters burned and turned to coals at one end which she raked into a pile, put three rocks around the outside and the well used refrigerator grate on top. She set a blue and white speckled porcelain coffee pot filled with water on this and began to put small twigs on the coals. This was time consuming and tricky. She had to stay

out of the smoke, which seemed to want to swirl and because she did not have work worn hardened hands she had to be careful that the heat did not scorch her skin. Next she poured some wash water into a galvanized miniature tub and proceeded to wash her hands in blue powdered soap and then wiped them on her skirt and then after splashing some water on her face took the damp skirt spot and wiped over her face in case she missed anything and tied her braids behind her head. She got a glass of drinking water and walked off a distance to wash her teeth and spit. Then started the slow process of washing and rinsing and drying of the dishes and cups that had been used the day before and she was taking her time doing it every now and again peering back over her shoulder towards Glorias house expectantly.

Francisco had ended up sleeping in the back seat of the Mercedes and stretched his cramped body as he got out. "Buenos Dias. Que pasa con los Indios?" The pit bull got out right after him stretching herself too and then to go sniff around the campfire to smell what had happened there. Franciscos dark skin, it was dark gold skin, darker than many Negroes and definitely darker than the Indians here was covered with dust as was everything there.

And then when everyone else, being Sky and Chapo from the tent and Clemente and O'henry from the grassy spot were up and to the point of having their first cup of coffee, then Gloria appeared, and only Gloria, this was her time to pay her visit. She came and quietly sat by the fire after saying the Mexican good morning and coffee distributed and refilled. America got the Griswold caste iron skillet and put it on a corner of the grate that wasn't real hot but hot enough. She put the picnic basket and boxes on the hood of the Mercedes and got out a selection of things to cook. Going back over to the fire she picked up a piece of clean looking wood that had escaped the last nights fire and proceeded to use it as a cutting board, cut up onions which she added to the skillet, then chile anchos, tomatoes, a handful of sliced garlic cloves and a diced apple a little bruised from the beating of the road.

All the while Gloria watched and chuckled and commented and looked to see how much of the breakfast supplies were and weren't being used and as America got through with each ingredient she pushed it over to Gloria saying something about that's enough of that, and can you use these? One by one all the ingredients were either in the pan or in the pile Gloria displayed in front of her crossed legs. She sat on the earth, on the world, and watched.

When the vegetables were cooked, which took considerable time, adding twigs all along to the fire, America cracked open a wire basket full of blue, green and brown chicken eggs and added all to the mixture. The day before she had given Gloria a sack of store bought eggs with the other supplies. These this morning were special eggs meant to impress Gloria and give her pleasure. She commented on each one. They were from her araucana chickens that laid these colored eggs. As the eggs started to take form and shape mixed gently with the vegetables she added chopped cilantro and a hand full of raisins.

When all was done America sat the skillet on a cool corner of the grate and called out the food was ready and to come get it. She put out a loaf of bread instead of heating tortillas. The chipped and much used Franciscan ware plates were stacked on the remains of the burning log within easy reach for filling and a mason jar was balanced next to it full of silver ware. America, out of all custom, picked the prettiest of all the plates, the turquoise one, and put a good heaping of the food on it. She then ceremoniously handed it to Gloria, she served her first to show her how much she appreciated this friendship from a woman who was somehow kin to her own self on some plane or another and that right now she, Gloria, was the most important person to her at that given moment.

After breakfast was over and Gloria had taken her goods away with her, O'henry, feeling quite recovered in feelings if not in looks and happy to be here broke into song while strumming softly his guitar. America busied herself around the camp, Clemente sat in the front seat of the car fooling with the wires to the tape deck and Sky began to do the business he had

come here to do, it was a business trip none the less and it was time to take care of the gas powered refrigerator he had come to sell. He had not put on the gas burner as the road was rough and this was a fragile part. He was ready to take it the three or so kilometers up the dry riverbed on a track of a road to deliver to a blue eyed Mexican man married to a Kumeyaay woman. They were in their thirties and had five children, three belonging to this man. He was known for his method of breaking horses which involved gentleness and trust. It was fast and effective. The house was wood slats with a thatch roof. Inside on the right wall was a cleared space, next to the feed sacks and saddle. This was for the refrigerator that ran off of propane. Across the room on the other wall was the common for here adobe brick topped with the iron wood burning stove. The floor was dirt. This refrigerator would be used for goat cheese and beans and meat when the weather was warm or hot. This was really important to them, important enough to take three years to save the money to pay for it. It was an Electrolux gas refrigerator and made in the year of forty-eight when they still made things to last and had had a through going over and would last them a lot longer than a new one would. It would be a proud possession that made life easier and healthier.

Coming back and going through town they passed the church. It was wood and time worn and very simple with a cross on top, it was the only painted place around. Through a hole in each double door was a large chain with a big lock cinched up on it creating an odd message.

“Porque la Iglesia tiene uno candado?”, asked O’henry puzzled as he thought churches were always welcomingly open.

Francisco had the answer to this from a previous visit. “The church belongs to the priest and he has the key and he comes once a month on Tuesday.

O’henry said “I wish I could go, they must practice a very special type of religion in there being such a special people”.

“O’henry”, broke in America, “It’s just another Catholic church and a few of the Indians come here out of thinking the

priests gods might have power too. They're own religion is a whole lot older and wiser than this one will ever be".

"I wonder what they do believe in" wondered O'henry. "As for that I wonder what I believe in. What if when people died that whatever they believed or didn't believe in came true for them. If you believed in nothing then after you died there was nothing, or if you believed in clouds and angels and harps they would be there, or if you believed you would enter another body you would be out searching for one or what if..."

At this point Francisco broke in and asked Sky what O'henry was talking about.

"Hell if I know", Sky replied. "All I know for sure is that it sure is hot with all these pinche dogs and people in the car".

When they got back to camp it was after the lunch hour, the hottest time of day and once again everyone was hungry. As every time they came America walked over to Glorias to prepare the midday meal.

"With your permission, the use of your kitchen please?", asked America in the way this question was always asked here. All but personal belongings were communal. They did not possess their house they merely took use of it. The children were the communities responsibility, it was said it took a whole village to raise a child properly. So America used Glorias kitchen. It was dark and hot and smoky. The fire needed constant tending, opening the little drawer were small branch pieces were added to keep the fire even. All the road crew has eaten and the Indian men were out looking for a calf lost in the night.

As she prepared to start this meal she said to Gloria, "you rest, you just worked hard". As America did each job, stoking the fire, rolling out tortillas, reheating the beans, silently from the back a young girl would come and discretely help while another slipped in at the right time to stoke the fire correctly. Gloria prepared the salsa cruda while she sat at the table. To everyone and almost to America herself it looked as though she had done all the work when actually she hadn't. She really enjoyed this time of the visit and liked using this kitchen used by so many for so long.

The day got hotter and hotter and the time to leave approached. Only Gloria was there to say good bye to and it was time consuming. Gudrun stepped on the leaky honey gallon and got honey all over herself and had to be washed, more gas had to be found, Francisco at the last minute went chasing off after a badger, the trailer accidentally hooked onto an old car and it's bumper and had to be pried loose and then after all that another cup of coffee at Glorias to rid the mind of the confusion of departure. It seemed to America that every time she came here something always held her to stay longer. Sometimes she thought how nice it would be to let it hold her and just stay. Stay forever.

The road from San Jose de Los Zorro to Guadalupe was an older road and in better maintenance. The one coming in cutting up from the La Mision River Valley and the Pacific Ocean was new and a brave adventure, this one, an easy drive. A nice soft dirt road running through the oak tree country, twisting and turning, bringing up one view after the next. It passed some well known ranchos and the road to the old shooting club. As the ranchos and houses began to get closer together and vineyards appeared they knew they were nearing the small town of Ejido El Provenir, a neatly ordered ejido, obviously with it's major differences settled long ago and so very peaceful and prosperous, about a mile or two long and maybe a half mile wide, the wide streets all running square and a zocala in the middle of town whose park looked the worst for wear, and the eucalyptus, wind bedraggled, that adorned it and it's earth floor and cement paths criss crossing it and it's occasional scraggly rose bush adding little in the way of beauty.

By far the majority of the rest of town had the most incredible flowers and trees and bushes and vines in all combinations. Here was a Norfolk pine with a bougainvillea thick on it's trunk and there was a juniper with a geranium growing clear up near the top too, making of them new sorts of plants. A tangle of dahlias mixed in with anise, corn with morning glories covering their stocks while a delicate ice plant grew beneath both. Palm trees dripping with ivy, roofs covered

with a palette of vines, honey suckle, cup of gold, trumpet vines and celosia and ones never seen before by America. Every house seemed to have it's profusion of plants, ferns, elephant ears, plumbagos, birds of paradise. Banana trees and fruit trees, weeping willows, espaliered ivies, braided birch, even a few topiary gardens, giant elms and smoke trees. Every time another block was passed, along with what was growing everywhere, would be something unique. Most houses had old cars in various degrees of disintegration. Chickens, ducks, geese walked near or on the roads. Dogs came in all sizes, colors and shapes running in the streets singly and in groups. Horses with riders and horses tethered were to be seen everywhere. Here Sky stopped at the store for more drinking water.

The main dirt road went from there straight, real straight, and three or four lanes wide on either side, to the back way into Guadalupe. This impressively wide road was bordered by a variety of fences and entrances to the homes and businesses along the way. These beautiful and imaginative arches that opened up to the road and fences lined with cactus, eucalyptus, smoke trees, century plants and more led to olive orchards, vineyards, a diary and ranches. A little closer into town was an olive processing plant with a large bodega surrounded by five-hundred gallon black plastic tambos for the olives, and one could get a glimpse of the huge stone wheels inside pressing out the oil. On the right a ways further and set back considerably from the road, except of course for it's arch, was a massive ranch with many outbuildings and barns with a Russian name. And here a little further were some of the original adobes with their Russian names on the aluminum address plaques. Guadalupe had a settlement of Russians at one time, for quite awhile but there was not near as many now

One reality led to another on this route back, each becoming more civilized, modern. This road from Ejido El Provenir to Guadalupe ended abruptly on the Ensenada Tecate highway. The route had been headed eastward but now a turn was made that headed back toward the ocean. This was a big two lane highway that was paved and had semis traversing it

like it was their own road. And then onto the coast road and onto the Toll Road itself until the little dirt road from Ejido Emiliano Zapata with no official highway signs, only their own hand painted plywood was the next in sight.

What an adventure that circular route had given America once again, what a further insight into Mexico, into life here, into her own life. And then home at last to the village waiting to hear the stories of their travels and the comfort and calmness of her own house. It was always good to come home. Always.

## EARLY WINTER, COOLING OFF

### FRIDAY

Day of the dead. Day of the dead. How much more comfortable Mexicans are with death than the Norte Americano. Not that they aren't acquainted with it, death, death in the USA is a television specialty, there they can get up real close to it, be entertained by it and go back for more, sort of like an addiction, each death becoming more spectacular than the last. Here, where America lives death can be friendly and gentle, and the dead a comfort and a help, the dead are not far away. There are three days set aside in the autumn for visiting with the deceased. They are fiesta days filled with huge marigolds, special cakes and candies, old rituals and old memories.

Day of the dead, thinks America again. What it meant to her this year was far different than the years of the past. Like last year when Grandma Lola and her daughters with their children came to the door in the middle of the day to celebrate the United States version on the wrong day, all, even the mothers, with plastic grocery sacks for candy. Grandma too saying "tricky tricky" holding out her sack and just the littlest one in costume, a little red devil. America had to give them a lot of candy as she was the only one to hand it out here. In this area of so many Norte Americanos this holiday was also known as day of the candy. The day the gringos handed out free candy and put out the carved calabasas de brujas.

Today, Friday, marked the beginning of planned activities at the ejido this year that would last till Sunday evening. A variation in the usual mellow Mexican morning. The first two days would be given over to work, work on the road, the public toilets and shower, the tourist camping spots and various projects. Every member had to put in so many hours of physical labor each year in order to retain his membership. The one's who did not want to work only had to pay some one to take his place. Just like in the army here, all

men must join and march, but you could pay someone to march for you and still get your papers.

Life had got a little hectic recently. The weekdays were fine, money was coming in, very slowly, but coming in nevertheless. Skys experiments had turned to reality, even though they were in as he said Sleepy Hollow. Then come Saturdays America would wake feeling good, safe and confident of her future. She'd think about going outside and gardening or maybe collecting up the birds feathers for her fans, or find a place to repaint for the half gallon of turquoise paint that had washed up on shore and miraculously had not lost it's lid and was still good. Then as she got to doing these things and the cars started pulling in and out from the back of the ejido where the rich had tucked their extra homes she began to have a feeling of unease. But she didn't let it surface, didn't bring it to voice, it just crept into her mind and her soul and left an empty quivery type feeling. She knew better then to try to analyze why she felt this emptiness that was almost like a threat, an unknown fear because she knew there was no solution if she figured out what it was. Oh no, not another would be Sunday type day, not so soon. Maybe they could go somewhere else she thought. Get out of the house. Pull the curtains and hide. But these type days had become a bad day for anyone to leave their houses here and it was impossible to hide.

On waking on these Sunday mornings fear, anger and distress were the first things to face, if there were no few minutes upon that wakening when reality was not there yet and this had not happened recently. The ejido members would be having another meeting. They would remeasure property lines. Survey where roads should or could be and debate whether or not to keep the gate locked or who got to collect the rent from the campers, and decide who could keep their property and who would loose it and so on down the line.

Sundays had started to gnaw at her life, nibble away at it's edges and blur her future. These hours long meetings with everyone in disagreement and uproar, all these threats, empty or not. America and her husband knew this little mite of land

here next to the ocean was not theirs and never would be. Like all the rest of the people that lived here they hoped to live here forever, it was their home. But unlike the rest of the people they were not Mexican. So that in itself caused undue attention and left them more vulnerable. Basically, recently, she felt like a target. Just the thought of that many people debating over your fate so often and so long is a real bad feeling. The tranquility of the previous years, the old days, was failing her. America lived with these people of the village and was one of them in that they all fought to stay on their land and survive in this out of the way place.

With seeing all the land wars going on around her she knew that it was a reality that people could lose their homes, if not their lives. On this particular Friday she could feel another showdown coming. A small group of officials were looking again for the hundredth time it seemed for the small, about a foot high, narrowing towards the top, cement Zona Federal markers, that were fifty yards up from high tide, placed every so many meters. They started all measurements from these markers. Everything on the other side of these markers belongs to the government along all the coast. Besides it gave them an excuse to gander over next to Americas fence while day dreaming of somehow being the one who landed this valuable piece of property. It was just some Norte Americanos on it. That was what they hoped at first, just some dumb gullible gringos on it. Americans would go for anything. At the first Boo they fled and left their expensive or inexpensive homes behind with the unroutable fear of the unknown Mexico and tales of horror they had heard. America and her husband discovered all you have to do is hang on, it may look real bad, the officials might have the right papers or the right people there but all you have to do in the end is hold on, because that is what they had always done. This ejido was for the poor, zoned for tourism, for the poor to make a living from, the ejido across the way was zoned for farming, whatever the land could yield would be what it is zoned for. It was a concession, the ejidotarios had the right to have America live there and she was in the right legally too. She had no papers proving her

contract with the ejido, which, at times, was to her advantage because they can be picked apart and debated or even stolen. What she had was the hand vote of the members and as long as every meeting the majority kept voting them in she and her husband had the legal right. Sky was confident that he had over half the peoples blessings anyway.

"I think we are going to have a Sunday this Friday", said Sky looking out the window seeing the greedy faces of Los Ricos as they drove through the village on the way to their property and houses. The ones who had more than their share already. The ones who could always have a good enough car to make it out here every meeting and use the Toll Road too. Store and restaurant owners, men in political posts and government jobs, lawyers, pochos, and inheritors. All men with land and many possessions.

Just then a rapping was heard on the bathroom window at the back of the house. America opened it and it was O'henry looking worried. "Let me in the bathroom door quick before those fat cats see me again. They've been trying to pump me for information on who put the new lock on the gate to my place and why the fence is tore down next to it with car tracks. I sure didn't do that, that's why the Novas parked down the road, I can't get in either. It was most likely a camper trying to get out, who knows.

After the informality of escorting O'henry through two of the three bathroom doors, the one that opened up to the outside, and on into the living room where Sky was sitting like he wanted to disappear in his chair, she offered him a seat away from the windows.

"Good morning, how are you today?" America asks. Sky had not said much more than oh when O'henry came in and went back to his thoughts.

"Ah, Good morning, feeling better today? That's good. It's going to be a beautiful day, there's not a cloud anywhere and the ocean smells so good today", awkwardly responded O'henry.

"How is Lourdes, did Amparo get a ride to school? Let me get you a cup of coffee". America and O'henry used mostly

Mexican manners upon greeting each other, they almost always did. They didn't always go so far as to shake hands, especially at home, that seemed going a bit to far, but the set greetings and small talk were a habit for them.

"Well, what next?" Asked Sky who had so far been silent.

Before anyone had time to comment on this someone was heard calling Skys name. As always it was hard to recognize coming clear from the back of the shop and Skys name sounding like two syllables, but they were persistent.

"I don't hear anything, do you?" Asked Sky somehow sinking deeper into his chair. He had not combed his hair yet and he had the look of still waking up.

Both America and O'henry agreed with this and went on drinking their coffee.

"Would you like some more hot coffee, yours probably needs heating up a little", said America.

"Maybe a quick walk to the beach would be more like it", responded Sky.

"No, I think not, take a look", O'henry said while settling deeper into the shadows. "I usually like your view but I sure don't today".

Coming along the beach from the south was a large group of army. They were walking along the tide line. All were in their jungle disguise outfits and each had his machine gun. One was poking a sea urchin with his gun, one was carrying a puppy and another was drinking a blue gator aid. Three others were walking together on the alert a little higher up on the shoreline.

Off through the yard and the shop behind, the noise of trying to rouse someone from the house got louder, the dogs went into a barking frenzy and the peacock kept repeating his call which in turn got the parrots and pheasants to add their sounds to the confusion.

"What to do, what to do?", puzzled O'henry as tension mounted.

"Maybe we should answer the door?" said America as though she really did not mean it. She was twisting her hair around her finger.

“They may ruin my Sundays, but not my Fridays. I’ll take the soldiers any day, lets go while the gettins good, lets put on some tracks”. As Sky said this he slipped into his boots grabbed his stingy brim hat and his fresh cup of coffee and signaled for the rest to follow.

Down the path, a foot trail, past the brownish red lava stone with the cattail cactus dangerously close and a few more yards and they arrived at the black wave rounded lava stones, littered with sea weed and garbage from passing cruise ships.

The pitbull had by now come back in through the house, leaving the Aztecas to fend off the enemy, and she had jumped out a partially open window and was now far in the lead.

“Let’s head for the tidepool, the tide is low and no one is there yet”, suggested O’henry. He was tired from a night out carousing and didn’t want to walk much and didn’t want to talk much. He still had his guitar and a wad of papers he kept words to new songs on stuck in his rear pocket and a pencil behind his ear. “What a weekend coming up this is going to be. They’re sure on the war path early”.

Gudrun had guessed they would go the other way, plus she had seen the soldiers so she ran off that way. America saw this but thought other matters were more important at the moment. Jumping from lava boulder to lava boulder was quite an accomplishment. The children scampered over them like hermit crabs but as you get older you get more cautious. Some of the biggest rocks when you landed on them teetered unexpectedly with bad results possible. So the three of them picked their way out to a large tide pool surrounded by what appeared to be the very substance of the planet, it’s true surface laid bare sticking up like walls around them making for a sense of privacy and primal beginnings. The tide was down and this unique pool was about four or five feet deep in it’s sand center surrounded by good places to wedge yourself into and relax. In the shallower rock bottom areas were sea urchins, mainly the deep purple, but occasionally there would be a special red one. Small fish circled and crabs peeked out of caves and cracks. A sea slug was inching it’s way between a sun star fish and a beer can that obviously hid a octopus as

one of its tentacles explored cautiously outwards. Two pelicans sat on the lava flow that separated the pool from the sea and some royal terns passed overhead while a cormorant prepared to dive into the deep water on the other side. When the waves hit the back of the tide pool they sprayed up maybe as high or higher than several buildings and came straight back down. This was the fun part, seeing how close you could get without getting wet or pounded.

All was forgotten for the three of them. It was just them and the sea. Their lungs filled with the salt and sea smells and their eyes were for the sights only. All this was almost within shouting distance from Americas house but it was a whole different world. The troubles of the house were left behind and instant peace with an inner excitement to be involved so directly in natures force.

After a bit of exploring, mainly to find the best place to sit, the three settled in.

“Let me have a sip of your coffee before it gets to cold”, said America. As she stretched to the next rock over to take the coffee she suddenly paused and her eyes got big. Both men craned their necks around to see what brought this reaction.

Coming up from the shore were all the soldiers. They were running and pointing. This got Americas attention real fast and she looked where they were pointing. About an eighth of a mile out to sea was a white speck rapidly heading west kicking up water.

“Its Gudrun! Look look its Gudrun, she’s going to drown”.

“She’s after those seagulls circling that rock sticking up way out there, see the waves breaking on it. She’ll never make it, look at the swells”.

Although it was useless America began to try to call her back and had ran to the edge of the rocks in a dangerous position of being swept off. Sky tore off his boots and hat and prepared to dive in after her even if he could only dog paddle, which was useless too. O’henry seemed to be chanting a prayer, “Oh please come back, Oh please come back”.

After a few more moments of suspense all of a sudden there was a loud volley of gun shots. The whole world stood still for a second or two and then the two gulls keeled over and fell into the water dead just as Gudrun came up to a top of a swell and surveyed her object. She looked this way, than that way, then back behind her. No more birds, just a bunch of excitement going on back on the shore, time to come home and see what was going on there.

America, Sky, O'henry and all the soldiers began cheering on her return. She'd disappear behind a swell, maybe forever, then come down the face of it. Finally she caught a wave and body surfed the rest of the way in to the sand beach in the inlet near the tidepool. She was throwing up sea water and her sides were heaving. As everyone rushed up to her she proudly wagged her tail and gave a big pit bull smile and looked around to see what she could do next.

Sky slipped off his belt and hooked it around her neck. There would be no next performance. The soldiers were thrilled and kept wanting to touch such a brave and strong dog. Everyone shook hands all around and the three soldiers who were on patrol started to walk north again while three stayed behind to talk and retell what had just happened.

These three young boys were from three different states way down south and inland. So all sat on the beach telling stories of their different lands and lives. Gudrun played on the beach with the little mutt puppy the boys had and O'henry strummed his guitar.

"Do you know any Antonio Aguilar songs?", asked the most talkative of the three.

"A few. How about "A La Mula Chula?" suggested O'henry. This made all three of them get the giggles and they urged him on to play it for them. They sat there cross legged in their uniforms with their machine guns across their laps ready to use again if need be.

An hour later, back in the house America was trying to get some house work done while carrying on a conversation with Sky and O'henry. The disturbances of the morning were

gone, only a group of the oldest men trying once again to get the short section of drain pipe that went, supposedly under the road covered up again.

This was a long time project starting at the beginning of the year when the rain and high tides had eroded out a cross section of the road that went behind the main stretch of houses. For a month it was unusable, then it dried up and the bigger trucks could fight their way through which forced earth into the deeper holes and leveled out the ruts somewhat. Then a few months of ordinary cars passing had fairly smoothed it out. Next it was decided, at a meeting, that it needed a drain pipe under it since it was in a natural flow off. And for once work commenced rather rapidly, some of the richer, not the richest, peoples sons came out for a weekend and dug a pretty good start on the trench, big enough were a car couldn't pass. Then that was it for months and months. The road was unused, the goats tumbled rocks on it and trash gathered because it was a low spot. Finally this trench filled back in somewhat on it's own and with hitting it just so and coming to stops for each wheel you could make it through. Another meeting and one of the richest ones who had friends who worked on the highway crew came on a Sunday with a road grader, a ditch digger and two dump loads of dirt and put the drain pipe in and covered it up. The only trouble was that one of the dump loads of earth ended up in another rich ones yard and driveway. So now on a regular basis this pipe had to be recovered. That is what the old men where doing to get ready for the activities at the end of the month meeting, finishing the road.

It's a miracle anything ever gets done here", said Sky. In all the years I've been here the only thing I've seen happen is the electric go in and the pinche rich snap up properties ever since. What about that time they showed us the plot plan for the whole ejido. That was absolutely years ago".

"I remember that. A super market and a gas station up above and over at the other end a hospital", added America. The year we moved here they said we'd have phones.

“It only took them ten years for the electric. But that finally happened because the officials came from Mexico City and saw it through. Even so Senior Villanueva got a prime lot for nothing just because he used to be the head of the electric department in Ensenada and made empty promises”. Sky was back sitting in his chair cleaning his fingernails with the buck knife that was used for the bathroom door. Gudrun was on the footstool snoring and dreaming.

“What about the Seminario, don’t forget that”, put in O’Henry.

America who was working on her fans again explained “that wasn’t their doing. That was Don Benidicios idea. He donated his share of land to the church. You know the church was outlawed here in the past and until just recently they didn’t allow nunneries. That is what they are building. You notice it’s in the classic mission style”.

“Last time I was there El Barracho Don Chacho had his pigs corralled in the alter room. Good thing the floors aren’t in yet. Or the roof for that matter”.

O’Henry was yawning. He sat in Americas rocker gently rocking back and forth. This rocking chair had been in her family clear back to England. It had come over with a great great uncle on a three masted schooner and arrived at San Francisco bay. A whole lot of furniture, family portraits, vases, lamps, decorations and a baby grand piano had come too but since this young man had come from a family who never used their hands for work or money, he was born being taken care of, these objects did not last long. One by one they were sold off to support his life style. The last thing he had left was this rocking chair and he died happy of old age in it. That is why it was still in the family. O’Henry knew this story and said he could feel this mans presence when he had rocked enough time.

“You know, I swear your uncle died with a bible in his hands. I wish your great Aunt Jesse could remember more of the story”.

“ I doubt it, no one has been religious in my family, they went in mainly for education and enlightenment”.

“Maybe so but I still can picture it, maybe at the end he sought solace in it, fell in with the rest of the herd, and then died of disappointment finding it just a bunch of old myths”.

“If he died of anything it was because he had run out of things to sell”, Sky cut in. “Why in the hell do you get on these weird subjects anyway, go sit somewhere else”.

“The Bible, written one hundred years after the mans death. Translated beyond recognition of what it used to be and made popular by the hunger for power.” America sadly and truthfully stated. She gazed off, as though looking at a wilderness of unneccessity. Although she had refused to read the bible herself, and she realized the lesson, being a simple thing, was not in the reading. She knew that it still had a strong hold on many types of people. She continued on almost to herself. ”The meaning is not in the words or the sentences. The meaning is in the whole. The shape of the tale told. It’s essence. The bible became popular because of its sex and gore and vividness. It is the forerunner of today’s love of violence in our society. Why men chose to fight and separate over the dissection of a sentence, is because it is in their nature to fight. Why most all the men who lord him, Jesus of Nazareth, is their real nature to want to war, certainly not because that is what the man taught. What if each of us did our individual best to privately do our best, the best of what is in man to do?”

“Your sure right about that. All fame and greatness is, is one man here, one man there, and their successes are fair enough but one man living right, living good in his own little unnoticed corner of the world is really doing the most good of all. If all people were to do this the world would be a good place”, said O’henry. “It makes you wonder about the good sense of the Pope, with over population comes diseases and wars and poverty. What if”, and here he broke off seeing Sky giving him a that’s enough look.

“Amen, Amen, I knew it felt like a Sunday when we woke up, what’s gotten into you guys. Isn’t there a better subject than disaster and the pinche bible. I got enough of that junk in those fool southern Baptist churches to last several life times”.

For awhile all three were quiet thinking their own thoughts about whatever this last conversation brought up.

Activity hummed around the meeting house, families walked the beach wading in their clothes. No one ever, except mixed up tourists, wore bathing suits. The men usually wore pants cut off somewhere above or below the knees, the women wore shorts and blouses, the few who did go in the water. The children wore whatever they had on, you could see them wrapped in towels by their mothers shivering waiting for their spread out clothes to dry. Norte Americans need sun for a perfect picnic and a good time, with these Mexicans rain to shine they had an equally good time. There was a group of Mexican men setting up camp out front, this was a frequent scene. Men were always going on picnics and campouts together. It is such a difference than a group of Caucasian men. Somehow the Mexicans seem so much more comfortable with each other and to be having a much better time. A group of Norte Americans walking at the edge of the ocean looked so out of place, you could tell just as they came into sight, somehow they always looked lost, out of place and self conscience, of course unless it was the surfers, they are always at home when they are by the sea.

“Well, where do you think all this is going to end”, sighed O'Leary, obviously referring to all the debating that was going on along this coast becoming known as the Gold Coast because it could and should be so valuable for tourism. With all the new resorts and massive hotels and restaurants going in one would think it was booming. But actually it was a land of motel empty rooms and restaurants with only one table in use, like a ghost town. Oh there were the occasional holidays when all this emptiness filled up like sardines in a can but the moment it was over the tourist were all gone. So many arches had been built that lead to nowhere, restaurants and hotels that never were completed or couldn't be used. One two year old building, round and a least twelve stories high on completion was condemned because it leaned to much, another, one of the largest, was completed, but there was no way to get the furniture through the arched artistic doors or

windows. It has sat empty for half a decade or more. The resorts always change hands. It seems like sort of a process. An investor is found, say for a marina or maybe high-rise condos, a certain amount of work is done, then the paper work gets all complicated and money runs short. The project sets for a period of time then next a new investor, foreign of course, is found and the course repeats itself. At the end when this has happened enough times the project is finished and belongs to the government or a rich Mexican on the average.

Ejido Emiliano Zapata was tucked between two resorts. Baja Mar, famous for it's golf course with it's rattlesnakes, coyotes and rabbits and a partially started boat marina that work had stopped on and beyond that a trailer park where everyone came in their motor home that was bigger than the next one. So it was obvious why this ejido was so sought after, if you were into the theory that Baja was to become another Cozumel or Riviera with the promise of a future in gambling. Even, or especially, the rich were divided in their plans for this place, but they all had dollar signs in their eyes. The poor just wanted to live in peace, all but the few shirt tail hanger oners and they'd believe anything.

"O'henry, Señor Rappaport" America kidded him because she already knew the answer, "did you ever finish those books I loaned you yet, remember one was Steinbeck on Baja and the other by the Colombian author. Wait. Before you tell me why you haven't I'll remind you that your the one who said they wanted something to read, so don't look so guilty, if you don't like to read that's how it is".

"It's not because I don't like to read, I mean it's not my favorite thing but there's those times when I just want to try to escape".

"Why not escape into a good book then?"

"That's the whole point, I didn't want good books, I just want something to read, maybe more like that cowboy book you got out of that old car".

"O'henry, I'm afraid your going to have to do your own book hunting, my shelves don't seem to have anything to interest you". America turned back to her fan and tried to find

a right side parrot feather to match the left side parrot feather when she noticed a list of books by her many favorite authors that she had not had the opportunity to find. Just when she thought she might have read everything an author had to write, up would pop another book. She tried not to think about O'Henry but it was hard not to.

"I don't really just read, I study the construction of words", she thought to herself knowing no one else wanted to hear this. "Most people don't know how to read. They just go for the details of the story and the ending, usually in a rapid fashion. But real reading is a study of the words and their combinations, they're ability to paint pictures in the mind and subtly influence your life with the underlying principle, that is to say if you do read good literature. But so many people read mind garbage, just things that take your time and clutter you brain with inanities. Take Dickens and read him word by word. Or Hawthorne or Conrad and she went down her list thinking how good these authors were.

"Let's do something, I feel like a sitting duck in the water staying here. Clemente has to work on painting the public shower today so he sure won't be around and I don't feel like hitting a lick of the snake anyway. What time is it, lunch time?"

Maluyas restaurant was on the old road that ran between La Fonda and Ensenada. Most everyone took the Toll Road, safer and faster. The old road was full of curves and chuckholes and two narrow lanes. The semis used it a lot because they didn't have to pay a toll and they rather felt like it belonged to them. They just paid one ticket or fine for the year and they didn't have to slow down through the few small villages or this fairly heavily populated town where the police station was. It was impossible to hear when they used their Jake brakes and the engines sounded like giant trumpets spluttering, especially the Dina trucks.

The restaurant itself was wooden built onto an old adobe on the dirt river road where it crossed the old road. It had been here since before the old road was paved and the Toll Road in.

It had such an atmosphere to it, it held so many stories and events. This must have been the meeting place for time on end for people to gather to and drink and kill time. The walls were layered with paint and the last layer that had been there for apparently many years had an Arabian desert scene with palm trees and camels done in black with a border of red around it. Next to this was the menu hand painted on the wall with the prices blackened over. It was all so old and so crude to be perfectly clean and so many people passing through. The chairs were all broke down from having people lounge back in them and the walls carved on with initials. Only the door was new, second hand new, because someone had kicked it in, in one of the many fight scenes. Tourist almost always if they did get so adventurous to look in the door left in a hurry.

The Mercedes pulled up out front, the building was right on the road and if you pulled up to close you couldn't get out because there was a high step all along the front and so it took two tries to park this time. America always got a feeling of excitement at this moment of pulling up, who could be here this time, what small news would she hear of this small area, what incidences of note would occur. She wore her hair in two buns on either side of her head and wore a blue denim skirt and blouse. She was dressed conservatively as not to draw attention. She would not want to be thought of as trying to draw attention in a place like this. She could come here, in this place where most come to drink, to eat with her husband and had been accepted because of the respect the men held for her husband. These men never spoke or looked anything but polite to her. Which is a real accomplishment since the average women from the Other Side had managed through the years to almost ruin all image of being something to respect. These men didn't understand the peck on the cheek instead of the hand shake, they misinterpreted the short shorts, not realizing it was a style, they read too much into the attention a woman paid them. They took all these gestures to be what they really looked like, an invitation. And there is where the problem starts. No matter how drunk the men who came here to be

with company got they were always polite to America and her husband and his friends.

The three of them got out of the car and Gudrun immediately jumped up front behind the drivers wheel by the open window and started to bark at some passerbys on horses. At the door step sat the village idiot, Juan el Nino de Jesus Michaelwaithe, ready to greet anyone who came through the door. He was a nuisance and quite insistent upon his greetings. He got excited like an untrained pup and wanted attention. The trouble is his hands were more than filthy and America devised a method were she tapped a finger on his chest, hopefully the cleanest spot, instead of a handshake. The whole town treated him very kindly and he was fed from many places. No one drove him away no matter what sort of grunting grinning commotion he was making.

Getting past this obstacle they entered the restaurant and said Buenos Tardes to all present. Two of the tables were taken. There were only four white enamel folding tables with Tecate signs on them and a variety of chairs. Sky always liked to get his favorite, a 1950's chrome and red leather chair with a butterfly shaped back. America picked one that didn't have the foam on the seat showing. O'henry wasn't choosy, he just took the one at hand and put his guitar in the seat next to him.

After settling in a bit and adjusting to the light America looked over to see who they had greeted. A usual group at the table by the door. The next table, the one by the counter where you paid and the display of chips and gum, sat three people, one a women. This was unusual and she was definitely not a tourist either. The women in this town never ate in this restaurant and had no cause to enter. Upon closer examination she realized the women was a gypsy and that she had seen her before but never this close. She had on a red skirt, a green blouse with a blue sweater. There was a yellow and pink flowered scarf around her head and her hair hung loose. She wore cowboy boots. Most striking was her jewelry. Mostly silver and one red stone necklace with matching earrings. She must have been over twenty, but not more than

thirty or thirty five. She looked like a gypsy for sure. Unlike the Mexicans she was dirty, not dirt like in unsanitary but more like earthy and worn.

A little girl came up to the table and wiped it down with a clean towel. A college boy came to the counter and greetings were exchanged again. He waited for their order.

“Does your mom have the makings for tacos?” asked Sky. All the many family members worked here. “If she does, that’s what we’ll have”. Doña Armada fried the tortillas, shredded the beef, grated the cheese and chopped the cabbage and added tomato slices and topped all with a red salsa that was not real hot so you could still add some of her home made hot sauce to it. This food was always fresh made from fresh ingredients in a very clean kitchen by a totally clean cook with a pride in her food. Every meal at some time she would appear behind the counter for her compliments.

“Well, what have you been up to Mario?” asked Sky as he settled in a little more and lit a cigarette, of the man seated in the chair across the small room from him. The room is about eight or ten feet wide and twice as long. This was a cowboy well into his twenties. He was from the large family of Michaelwaithes. He was known around town for his drinking bouts and was talented with horses, his guitar, and poetry. He was particular about his women and lived alone when at home. He was tall with a handsome sad face, light skinned and light of bone, delicate but strong.

“Just passing the time, just passing the time. And you, how have you been?”, he replied.

“Great, if it wasn’t for the fool ejido. It’s not even Sunday and that pinche president and his lawyer buddy been sniffing around the house again. First thing this morning they were out behind the shop in full force trying to get me to come out. I’ve about had it with this pinche harassment”. Sky went on for a bit longer about what type of people they were, the so-called ejido officials, glad at the opportunity to voice himself to someone who knew the story of what was going on in this ejido. Marios own extensive family owned many ranchos and parcelas, hectares of river bottom land and he was aware of the

politics in the area and the ejidos in particular. There wasn't much that passed his notice. He had gone a long ways in school and had traveled a lot in Mexico.

At about this time Miguel the drunk from Ejido Zapata came out of his involvement of stacking beer bottle caps and mumbling to himself. He got up and shook hands with everyone at Americas table. This was a wonderful coincidence to him that they all should be in here at the same time, even though it really was common enough.

"I've been hearing about the fight going on at your ejido. I heard the rich are winning once again". Mario sat there shaking his head at the wrong doings going on and then said, "The president of Ejido La Mision says the rich are going to win out this time, but I'm not so sure. They're up against a group of brave old men. How about what happened at Ejido Cienaga del Valle the week before. Señor Cachuey is selling off all his cattle and Beatrice is staying with Don Tacho, no one knows where to go. ejidos are the welfare system of Mexico. When you try to get something for nothing you don't get much, just a lot of hassle.

"I'll tell you, now that was one of the more incredible things I've ever witnessed. It sure tells you anything could happen here and not to get too comfortable. Lourdes has been burning candles ever since so it doesn't happen to us, but if that's what they want to do we don't stand a chance", O'henry worried. "They took that bull dozer and put a chain around that cement block house and just pulled the whole thing down and pushed it up into a pile then went through the yards. Pigs and chickens were going everywhere. I didn't see it but Lourdes and the kids had been walking home that way so they could get some nopales".

"What I heard was they pulled up in a semi truck with a closed in trailer and another semi had the bulldozer. When they opened up the back of the truck dozens of soldiers jumped out and started taking everything they could get their hands on over the Toll Road fence, even the trailers and cars were drug through a hole they made in the fence and then closed up", added Sky.

“I could hardly believe it either, we drove by one day, then the next all the houses on the south end were gone, gardens, roads, everything”. This recent incidence caused an uneasiness in the pit of Americas stomach. The power that Mexico and a person in position can have is phenomenal. A rich women married to a man high up in the army had a lawyer find the flaw in the not to legal paper work of this ejido and had swooped on a hundred hectares or more with the force of her husbands army at her command and evicted half a village in one day, tore their houses down, bull dozed the yards and threw possessions over the fence on federal property all with no notice but an ongoing argument. That women took possession of the land and that was that. Many of the people spent the nights next to the Toll Road in the open with their belongings trying to guard them. It was mass confusion and a ugly brutal thing to have witnessed.

“There’s property here to be had and then again there’s property here to be had that’s not even worth measuring off. In the U. S. you buy it and you get the paper work. Here there is many different types of paper work on property. You have to study the situation and get a place with the right type of paper work. With the new law coming up that the poor can sell their ejido lands they will for sure loose them to the rich. And the ones who hold on will be brought down by back taxes in such a valuable spot. The ejido system is a dying system”. And after this long and informative speech by Mario he got up and reached behind the counter for his guitar and began to softly hum a thoughtful melodious tune.

The table with the gypsy had their food served and they were busily eating.

“Would you like to have a bowl of beans with the tacos?” asked the part time waiter.

“Sounds good, and bring us some hot water for the coffee will you”, said Sky. The instant Nescafe bottle, sugar and powered creamer were already on the table as well as a plastic napkin holder.

A small red truck pulled up behind the Mercedes. A good looking citified man in his forties got out and came in the restaurant.

“Buenos Dias”, Professor Gutierrez said to everyone as he shook hands with most of the people there. He was a Anthropologist from Mexico City sent here for a years stay to study the mission in La Mision and to build bamboo and palm leaf roofs over what was left of the old adobe in order not to loose anymore of Mexico’s cultural heritage. He also was working on the museum that was set up in the old school room during the three days of the rodeo once a year. He had films on all the missions in Mexico and would come out to a persons house to show them if they were interested. He loved his countries history and enjoyed sharing it. He joined in with Mario’s table, sitting next to him. Miguel was back stacking beer bottle lids and making occasional loud comments. The drunk next to him remained in a stupor that was maybe sleep, he seemed to be dreaming.

“I just got back from California, from San Diego, I had a lecture to give at Scripps Institute. I would have been back a couple of hours earlier but at the border I got pulled into secondary after an hours wait in line. They kept me there a half hour. I told them where I was going but they didn’t listen. Finally they returned my papers. Of course they treated me like I did something wrong. So then I didn’t have time to eat. Then on the way back the highway patrol had a check point right before going into Mexico and they stopped me to ask if I had more than a thousand dollars and thoroughly searched my car”.

“Last time I crossed the border I think every law agency they have had at least a half dozen or so men out there. Roaming gangs of cops all in different uniforms with dogs and guns and sticks going up and down the rows of cars pouncing on whoever, a minute here, a minute there. People have the look of terror in their faces. What if one of those guys went off”, worried O’henry.

“They did go off”, added Sky. “A man in an old Chevy tried to run the border, they all opened up fire and bullets

went everywhere, it was just luck no one got shot, just a radiator of a motor home and the windshield of a tourist car. Imagine getting shot or killed cause the guy next to you had a couple of pounds of marijuana. You wonder where their reasoning power is”.

“Couple months ago I was driving my grandmother back from up north, we got to the border, about ten o’clock in the morning, and they had it backed up for miles. I got side swiped twice because the lanes reduce down to were there is only three open and they don’t direct traffic, you have to fight for the lanes. I couldn’t even get out to see what happened to my truck because the traffic was to tight and I couldn’t get my door open even and it was an hour before we got across. Those cops just watched the confusion and the accidents and did no more than search cars they picked out. Now you get it both ways”, put in Mario. “I can’t figure why the American police have got to stop you going into Mexico now”.

“Sounds like they’re getting ready for a war” Miguel the drunk appropriately stated from out of nowhere and then went back again.

“They don’t accept mordida at the border anymore either. They’ve found out there is more money in doing it legally”.

“Mordida’s a system, and when it is not corrupted or over done it works quite well”, America said not to loudly.

“There sure are a lot of ratan stops going south now. I hit four of them going to San Felipe. We came back at night and those soldiers were freezing by Valle de Trinidad so I gave them an old sleeping bag. And then at the next check point they took a flash light because theirs was broke. You never know where they’ll be, you come around a corner and there they are. If your not doing anything wrong they’re no problem, they really like Gudrun too”. Sky said this. Mexico really kept an eye on their highways and country and it gave you the feeling they really had the situation at hand. And it seemed they didn’t need to wear a multitude of uniforms to do it.

“Another ten minutes and the food will be ready”, was announced from the kitchen.

The two men and the gypsy had finished their meal and the little girl was taking away the plates and glasses. The gypsy got up and stretched and walked over to Marios table to say hello to the professor, he seemed to know everyone. They shook hands and then he introduced her to Mario and she said she knew all about him already. This embarrassed him. Next the professor introduced him to Americas table. Her name was Catarina. Her father owned the traveling movie show.

Upon shaking Americas hand she held onto it and turned it over and began stroking it. "What an interesting hand, I see fortune smiles on you".

"Thank you, it does", America said shyly as she moved a little closer to Sky and gently removed her hand at the same time.

"I invite you and your wife and friend here to the movies tonight, for free, I myself will let you in at the door. Come just after it gets dark". Her Spanish was oddly accented, here they called her a Hungarina, a Gitana. Her family was a descendant of horse dealers from Hungary. She didn't do much outside her family. She was beautiful in a strong proud way.

"So, do you tell fortunes?" asked O'henry

"What gypsy women doesn't", laughed Professor Guitieriz.

"For a price I will tell your fortune, here give me your hand and I will tell you and then you can pay me what you think it is worth. Already I see half the truth".

"Don't tell me if it's too bad, just tell me the good parts, okay?" O'henry finished stirring the coffee crystals into the hot water thoughtfully. He had a scared look on his face. The two men Catarina had left at the table sat quietly not watching but knowing what was going on. Everyone else watched. He almost reluctantly held out his hand, palm down.

Turning over his hand the gypsy slowly brushed her fingers over the lines there and then studied it with expressive twinkling eyes. "This is what I'll let you know, and know this for sure. For love, there will be two women in your life. Both of them will master you. For money, you must sing, some far day you will inherit just enough. For health, you will stay strong

as long as you sleep at home. For luck, you don't lack in it. That is all I have to say". Now she held out her hand palm up to O'henry to be paid. O'henry being what Sky often accused him of, was bumfuzzled and reaching into his pockets here and there and finally found all the money that was there, a pink hundred peso note and with a brief parting look at it, put it in her waiting palm. That was all the money he had and Lourdes had already made plans for it.

Before O'henry had time to comment, Catarina turned to Sky. "Y usted?"

"Por que no, how about ten pesos worth", laughed Sky.

Before anyone could say anything Miguel the drunk started into his light melodic and catching laugh. When he could stop he said "Your fortune is Los Ricos are going to take your property". Then after he said this he looked so very sad and then laughed on till no one was listening to him again. By this time the Gypsy held Skys hand.

"I see success here. This success has to do with what I see as a mountain shining in the sun covered in snow. I do not know what this means though". She folded his fingers up and gave him back his hand after a quick search of it and picked up the gold colored ten peso coin.

"Well, I don't know what that could mean either but I hope she's right and not Miguel", said America as she gently shook her index finger in front of her chest. "Yo, no, gracious". "She is to accurate and I am afraid of what is in store for us and want no hints, I'll just wait and see", she thought to herself.

The two men got up from her table and indicated they were ready to leave, they politely excused themselves and Catarina and her husband and father left to go back and work on putting up the canvas walls that surrounded the rows of wooden benches that faced the big white canvas the movies would be shown on for three nights running. There would be room left at the back for those who brought their own more comfortable chairs and water melon wedges and popcorn with red pepper and salt on them would be sold from person to

person. This was Catarinas job. The movie could be seen at the same time as you watched the sky above.

The food was served and the conversation drifted on between bites of food and all listened while the Professor talked of the Missions here in Baja.

“This week I’m going to Loreto, to Mision Nuestra Senora de Loreto. Did you know that is where the first mission in the Californias is. It is almost the three hundred year Anniversary of the Missions. There’s one hundred and twenty seven Missions altogether”.

“What were you lecturing on today to have to go to California for”, asked Mario, sorry for anybody Mexican who had to go through that experience.

“I’m part of a new organization that looks at the Missions as a whole without borders”.

“The Spaniards marked the border between Mexico and the United States”, put in drunken Miguel, one of his many surprising and accurate remarks. He had been listening closely for the last few minutes.

“Between Alta and Baja California, your right”, said the Professor.

Miguel having got the Professors attention brought up the subject of a long time debate between he and Sky. “ Listen to this. Last year, last winter when old Senior Quinones died I saw a jack rabbit leave his house early in the morning. Every one knows jack rabbits eat dead bodies. That’s why a lot of the corpse was gone when they found him. I’ve heard of this before, always, I know it is true yet they won’t believe me”, he said offensively while pointing at America and those at her table.

The Professor laughed and said “Here at the northern border of Latin America I guess anything can happen”. Everyone else laughed with him and Miguel was satisfied that his truth had pleased everyone so well.

Professor Gutierrez apologized for talking so much while people were eating and excused himself saying he had a volunteers meeting for the Campo de Santos cleanup and thanked everyone for listening.

Mario got up and stood with his back to the wall, one boot with the sole flat against it. He broke out into song, a love song and his mind was taken away to more personal concerns. America, Sky and O'Henry continued to eat their tacos and beans. Miguel started on his old story about being a sheep herder in Kansas for two winters, back in the sixties and how cold and terrible it all was. He didn't appear to be talking to anyone in particular or any one at all and his long musical trailing laugh interspersed with minute details blended in with the strumming of the guitar and the words to the love song. Cold and hard. There were hang flies in the room and a wasp buzzed up against a window pane. Noises came from the kitchen, someone in back was instructing the little girl in math. Out back two men were making cement blocks and the sound of the cement mixer drifted in. Another semi came barreling through town and momentarily drowned out all sounds.

A new shiny car obviously from California pulled off the old road onto the river road and pulled in where the Professors truck had been. Gudrun went into a barking frenzy again and the village idiot started waving and clapping his hands and pointing.

An American couple got out of their car and carefully locked it by pointing a small device at the door and making a beeping sound. They headed toward the restaurant door and then became side tracked by Juan el Nino de Jesus and not knowing what to do with this excited imbecile they stopped and looked around and most likely had second considerations on their choice of places to eat. They looked at each other and shrugged their shoulders and approached him. The husband took a deep breath and reached out and shook Juans extended hand and then his wife did likewise and discretely wiped her hands on her shorts. This was a propitious sign that this couple was not the average tourist that was repulsed and refused to shake this small mans hand as every Mexican respectfully did.

With eyes averted they walked past in their shorts and gym shoes with a muffled hello to Americas table and sat down

were the gypsy had been. They looked self conscience. Miguel took an interest in this latest event and having enjoyed the conversations earlier now took the opportunity to further the socialbleness of the event and took it upon himself to introduce everyone present in happy going back and forths with names and explanations of the closeness of his friendships. He took much pride in this and the end result was that America ended up participating in a conversation with someone she most likely wouldn't have.

"Do you live here full time?" The wife whose name was Jane and her husband named Dave turned their attention on what was familiar, fellow Americans. This was the first question asked, the waiter hadn't had time to even take their orders so he politely held back as not to interrupt the conversation.

"Full time", thought America, what an odd way to put it. There was a pause as to who was going to answer this question. Sky finishing his meal wiped the back of his hand over his mouth and said "Well, I'm here all the time so I guess I qualify for that".

"We've been here three weeks, how long have you been here?"

"Considerably longer than that. I haven't stopped to remember in I don't know how long" he said in friendly way. "What brings you here, how come you aren't out there with the rest of the tourist" he again friendly said nodding his head towards the coast and the beaches.

"We've come to live here, do you know where there's any houses for rent real cheap, we're staying in that big old hotel back there. Between the two of us we have over a thousand dollars coming in a month from the government and we're in the process of trying to get more".

"That doesn't leave much to tell", America thought to herself as she whispered in Skys ear that Maluyas oldest son was waiting to take their order and his little sister was behind him waiting to set the table.

"Looks like their ready to take your order" pointed out Sky.

“Oh, I thought they were here to eat too. What type of beer do they have?”

Leaving the conversation Sky looked over to America for her opinion of the situation and decided to relax and see what was revealed next and they both sat quietly for a moment. Mario and O’henry strummed a tune together, one showing the other how the part should go and trying again while nodding compliments to each other.

It wasn’t too long before the couple took up the conversation again. “What papers did you have to get when you came here? We want to get ours totally straight before we make our final move down here”. Californians especially thought of all actions as starting with paper. They had no idea of the slow struggle down here to get papers, you have to almost get something first then get the papers when you can. Especially if you didn’t have money. There were so many different degrees of paper work, they ranged from a mimeographed plot plan with an X on your piece with a seal and a signature to large full folders, long years and a lot of money. “Poverty doesn’t leave you with much money left over for the extras, we’re still in the process”, Sky told them. “What did you do for a living before you decided to move here?” They were in their thirties and obviously from the working class.

“I am a grammar school teacher and my wife had a health food restaurant. My health got bad at the same time she fell and we analyzed the situation and decided we didn’t like what we saw or what we were doing”.

“I sure know what you mean about that” added O’henry. “I’ve been down here around five years myself and I could never move back to the states. I hated it up there, it has all the signs of a decaying society, just look back over history and you can see the pattern. That whole country has had it, it’s on a rapid down hill slide”.

“Democracy is just a stage of government anyway, like Tocqueville said” replied America in one of her flyaway sentences that no one seemed to hear.

“I think what they need next is a King, or a Queen would be better, someone who can guide them through this

wilderness of violence worship and empty ownership. They're minds are lulled by their possessions. Look at all I have, I must be happy". O'henry had twisted sideways in his chair and was watching to see what the reaction to this statement would be.

"We don't believe in the United States anymore either, we are anxious to make this change, we want to get away from all that. We want a house with dirt floors and no electric, a total life style change.

"How do you reconcile not believing in the United States if your supported by it?" asked America as she again thought to herself "I won't comment on the life change".

"What do you mean?, that money is our right".

"By who's right, a government you don't believe in? That money was never yours, you never had it in your own hand, in your pocket, did you? That country won't always be there for you, you better look to your future", America said thinking about the gypsy who had just occupied that seat.

At this moment the waiter came up with their meals and Mario thought it time for a Mexican corrido and O'henry joined him. America looked at Sky and they both laughed. These seemed like two nice people who were sincere enough to want to do something out of the ordinary. Sky knew of a house for rent in this area, where there was a mixture of Americans and Mexicans and would go on to tell them about this and a few other pointers.

"It wouldn't surprise me if the Mexicans didn't have to put up their own fence someday to keep the Americans out. This just might prove to be the better of the two places to live real soon" Mario said as the words from the last song about patriotism and pride were done.

"Viva Mexico" called out Miguel getting into the spirit of the conversation again. "Viva Mexico".

It was time to go and everyone was full of friendly good-byes and thank yous for the information. Sky invited the husband out to witness his business and America invited the wife to come by and take some iceplant cuttings.

"Viva Mexico" once more came from Miguel and his laughter followed them down the road on their way home.

## EARLY WINTER, COOLING OFF

### SATURDAY

“I really just can’t pinche believe this. I think some of these Mexicans are mixed up, the purpose of the day of the dead isn’t to do in the living. Give them some free time and a little something to drink and they can come up with anything. Not one of these old men, these property rich, dirt poor old men has ever done anything disrespectful to us. They made us welcome and we fight right along together on these outrages the pinche ricos come up with. When are they ever going to notice we aren’t budging”. Sky sat in his chair hanging his head down holding the coffee cup to his temple. He had on Levis and a turquoise tee-shirt with a perky looking whale with two spots of accidental red paint under it which looked like Indian messages. He rubbed his hand back and forth across the top of his head and at the same time said “I just can’t believe this pinche latest move on their part, like a ball of water moccasins in the water”.

It was Saturday morning and America had been up since before light. She is wearing a summer skirt and a gauze thin blouse, the day is hot, a total change from yesterday as the Santa Ana winds have started at sunrise and had come sweeping down the mesa heading for the openness of the sea. With them they bring the heat and the smells of the interior of this peninsula. Tumble weeds rolled pell mell toward the ocean and jump skipped the waves to float off into the distance and gather. Dust blew thick as fog at times. Rooster tails and whirlwinds and waterspouts formed. Plastic sacks filled themselves and sailed on the wind. The house shook and roared and nails cried out. Chapo trembled and hid behind a chair while Gudrun out in the yard barked at everything that moved which seemed to be everything. The wind from the ocean is invigorating, the winds from the east are debilitating, dusty and full of static that set the nerves on edge even here.

The house took on its other character and looked shabby in the dirt of this wind storm and the shelter it provided seemed far from adequate. America sat in her rocking chair staring at the floor. "I'm not even sure what happened or how it all came down. Let's try to piece it together again and make some sense out of it".

"Well we'd been back from Maluyas a couple of hours I think, maybe more because it was almost dusk. Remember we were talking about that nice American couple and that got me to thinking about Don Jose Zazueta Ochoas trailer on his ocean front property and that it might be for rent. I guess that is what got me to thinking of walking over that way so I left and told you I'd be back in just a bit, remember?"

"You hadn't been gone anytime at all, in fact I thought it was you and that's why I went out back.

"I'm surprised those men even had the nerve to have bothered you. What ever happened to Mexican manners. Just because the ejido president is about to be thrown in jail for fraud and is hid out and Guillermo jumped on the near empty position didn't give him the right the very next day to come here and raise hell. What am I suppose to do, stay home always to protect my wife from them and their insults now?"

"They came here yesterday evening because they knew nobody else was around, they must have seen you leave. You've always told me that if we had the opportunity to nail them to the cross to go ahead and do it. Well, this time when I saw him out back with his partner in crime snooping around and his so called worker trimming our trees I just couldn't stop myself from asking what was going on. When he told me he was President now and had taken over the responsibility of our property and that we would have to take out a rental agreement with him I couldn't help but laugh and tell him he was no more President then the trash man and that he'd better get off the property before I had them arrested for trespassing".

"And that's when he threatened to throw you and everything you owned out the ejido gate, right?" asked Sky sitting on the edge of his chair rubbing both knees and slightly rocking. His deep eyes a deeper shade of blue with his anger.

“Yes. He also said everyone had voted on it and agreed. That’s when that mean Chinese Indian he calls his worker took out his big knife and started to clean his nails and asked how you were. I told them they weren’t important enough to listen too and to go bother somebody else. That’s when they said they would be back tomorrow and we’d see who won this time”.

Just then Francisco came into the house from the ocean side. He had a grin on his face when he heard the last of the conversation and was glad he had got here to tell his part again. “I saw all three of them from the top of the hill and came running. I could see they were on your property. By the time I got there they were leaving and America was going back in the house and was almost crying. I never saw her so mad. When she said they should go to jail I remembered the police were up at El Señor Cesaritos store.

“So that’s when you guys got the other kids and got the cops, no?”

“Yes”, answered America who usually told these stories of deeds the rich ones of the ejido had done with less heart felt feelings and more hope for the outcome. She sits holding the hem of her gauze thin skirt while mending a rip that had caught on a loose nail that stuck out at an odd level on the door to the bedroom. Her hair created a halo of static electricity. Her eyes were red rimmed with worry and dust. “That’s when we all ran up the hill, Francisco and Don Robertos older grandsons were ahead and Chuyillo and Bebo were right along side me. The police could see something was happening when they came out of the store so they waited till we got up there”.

Francisco was standing up pantomiming the whole incident. “I told them that there were trespassers on Don Skys property and that they had talked bad to his wife. Palabras feas, groseros, molesta mucho. By the time America got there because she runs so slow they had turned the car around and were ready to head back. Since there was three of them we had a hard time fitting in and they made the dogs run behind”.

“You should have seen the look on Guilleromos face when we caught up with them. They were just getting out of their

pickup and didn't hear us till we were right behind them. The police were so surprised when the boys and I told them they were the culprits. For a minute they didn't know what to do".

"Wait, let me tell this part", said Francisco. "Old Guillermo turned his head so quick his glasses fell off, just like this". He went through the motions of the event. "Then when the police came up to him and asked him why he had been trespassing he just kept stuttering, like this". He then imitated the action of a man who can't see and can't talk either, spitting and spluttering.

"There was nothing left for them to do but write up the report. That Chinese Indian laughed and told Francisco they had the police in their back pocket anyway and this was useless, but old Guillermo looked worried enough and his partner took off down the beach before he even gave his name, but the boys knew it".

Sky scratched his head some more. "If only we could make the charges stick he could never show his face here again. But then again who knows which way a thing like this could go. Can you imagine what type of rental contract he would write for us and how much money it would be. It's only a step in rooting us out completely. Besides that, I know that none of the old men or our friends have voted on this or him being president either".

The thought of losing the house and property finally to these power happy greedy men sent Americas mind into dozens of different images and brought up all kinds of questions. What if they really were to get the house, it certainly had happened to others. Surprising her, her first thought went to her plants. What would I do with out them. I can't start again, I've got them so big and beautiful and they have been such a struggle to maintain. And then instantly upon this thought came the jolting truth that this is the only reality she knew in Mexico. This existence here at the edge of the sea near the edge of the border. This government land set aside for the ejido to make money off tourism. It may be an ejido, a Mexican village but it had the neutrality still of the sea. More picnic area, campground and vacation home then anything else. She

sat and thought and let the words of Francisco and her husband drift on past her. She thought to herself of how her life was her view, her scenes of the neighbors her existence, her everyday fulfillment. The ocean filled her soul and her lungs, her eyes were dazzled by the waves that drowned out the background sounds of life. I shall not let these people take my home, I am here, I may be from the United States but they cannot do this. This is wrong. The United States only goes by the letter of the law, whether right or wrong, fair or unfair, there is no true justice, there are no exceptions no matter to whose advantage or disadvantage, at least not on the daily level. Mexico has all it's rules and regulations too but they are used more as a guide line, to be put in use when necessary and then they are very real and precise. So much is taken care of before the next step comes and it enters into the paper work stage. It keeps the system clear. It is based more on what is fair and what is unfair. They have arbitrators that help settle the case by getting each party to come to an agreement of they're own making, before it could end up in the legal system. She had no intention of giving up her home to these bullies who thought their money was power. At some time she knew the Mexican government or a large company, most likely foreign would step in and take this jewel of a spot between two resorts in a string of resorts. Progress, always progress, the poor stepping aside for the rich. That was inevitable and could not be stopped. And then she and the rest of the poor would be forced to move on and to have learned to appreciate that time they were able to grab and hold. That time of living next to, conjuntos, with the ocean, being a part of it's shoreline, one of it's inhabitants. That would be fate, ni modo. But to let this petty official scare her out with underhanded tactics. When the big takeover did come he and his like would be swept aside too and all their small time politics and below the water dealings would be gone too. Something fair would be done for those who lived on the land, they would some day loose it, but they would not leave surprised or empty handed. And until then all there was to do was fight back and hold on.

Its easy to go to the United States and become one of it's people because it's easy to have more possessions and money and easy living. Its harder to step away from these things and do without and this is what she had done here and learned the truth of being what is known to the average person across the border as poor. This was her home and her life and she had no intention of giving it up, she'd hang on just like everyone else here. Life was a daily fight to hold onto what you have and Sundays in the ejido were the formal fight days to prove your rights. A wealth of knowledge about Mexico and it's people came from these meetings with their parties afterwards, not to say several new friendships with a few who were not poor but not greedy. Something would come up with this new situation. That man may think he was president of this small ejido but there was just as many who didn't think he was and he could not rout them out of their homes so easily.

Between waves and an odd moments lull in the wind an unbelievably loud truck engine could be heard out back and all three had been in deep thought when this pulled them out of it. The muffler was loose now for a while and Alejandro's truck was identified, but at the same time the bad feeling of maybe it really wasn't and more people with bad intent were waiting out back. This is what these people who did not care about peace of mind caused.

Francisco went out to welcome Alejandro in and the greetings were said and coffee served again. He did not ever come over just to pass the time of day as he valued his time and used it for work when he was not with Blossom.

"Well, what brings you out on this god awful windy day, what can we do for you, que pasa?" asked Sky.

" I heard the chismo about Guillermo thinking he is president of the ejido. I also heard that you got him for trespassing. I just came from El Señor Cesaritos store and the old men have gathered, they're talking about changing the lock on the gate again but that won't keep them out for long. A couple of them want to get the police to arrest the pinche ricos as they come in and get them for trespassing too but that won't happen".

“They already tried that last year”, remembered Sky.

“Jail sure is where they belong”, put in Francisco, “En el Peni”.

“Don’t worry about those officials, they throw their power around but it has no strength. You just hold on like you always have, don’t give them an inch” said Alejandro. His work worn hands and fingers drummed on the chair a nervous pattern.

“We are going through with it and taking them to whatever court we have to. The arrest for trespassing was official, and slow or not the paper work is in progress”. Sky paced the room while Francisco stood in respect for the seriousness of the conversation. “I can’t have them harassing my wife out back when I’m not home. I’m a peaceful man and have to put a stop to all this discord. One so called Official after the other has been nipping at my heels for this piece of property and the rich ones are on the band wagon too. All we can do is do what we’ve always done, stay put. I could never live anywhere else but by the ocean in this place.

“How is Blossom, is she back at the ranch?” , asked America as she studied Alejandros face.

“That’s what I wanted to talk to you about really. She’s on the other side, gone to Los Angeles for a couple of weeks now. She says she has to make money, that she just can’t sit at the ranch and do nothing. I don’t understand why she thinks taking care of the home is nothing. I miss her. She wants me to come up there as soon as the papers go through. She says it’s for just a few weeks out of the month, this job of hers, but a few weeks out of the month is a good deal of it I think. Why can’t she stay home and act like a wife, your her friend and from the other side, maybe you can tell me what to do”.

“Some people have to be making money to be secure. I have no doubt she loves you, she’s use to running things herself. She doesn’t know what it really is to be married yet. I know she loves the ranch too but it has no sense of accomplishment since it doesn’t pay.

“We always have food and gas for the car. My Tia Lidia has come every second week with the groceries since Blossom has been here. I butchered a young steer recently for my aunt and I have enough meat for a months worth hung out drying. I can't seem to make her happy. I'm even clearing a space for her own vegetable garden”.

“Give her time. She won't be able to live with how ugly it is up there after being here and how meaningless after she's made the money she feels she needs. She makes money fast. Then she'll be ready to settle down at the ranch. Besides, when she does come back to stay she'll have to live more in her own style, she's not a ranch hand for sure. It is a beautiful life and she knows she's been singled out to have the chance to live on the ranch, she's told me so many times”.

Alejandro took this in for a moment. He was a ranch hand but so much more. He was like a fine gentleman in disguise, just playing at being a cowboy because why not, what was better when you were content with life and you had the freedom to be what you wanted to be. “If only I made more money and could get her a modern trailer with a generator”.

“Everyone knows your Tia Lidia should pay you now that your married, you should talk to her, I'm sure she'd hate to see you leave”.

“I guess I've got it better then O'henry anyway. I saw him on his way home when I was coming in. He'd been out all night. He said he lost his money and couldn't face Lourdes. He was suppose to take Lourdes and her children shopping today too”. Alejandro was a responsible man and caring but did not know what it took to make Blossom happy. She had worked all her life and considered it her life. There would have to be a lot of adjusting before they found their peace.

“She finally got a puppy from the veterenario in Ensenada after all that talk of getting a pure bred. I don't know what changed her mind. He's just a little red mutt and no one knows who the father is. But he sure is smart. I hope she comes back soon to take care of him, he cries for her”.

Who can make it here and who can't, who will return to the United States and miss their opportunity at a different life.

So many people spend their time complaining and wishing it were different, a few get a chance to change it and even less take that chance. It's a slow pace life with many of the rewards disguised as everyday events here in Baja California and not that many may want to lead it, some want to only wish for it. The world is a different place here, it may be only a couple hours from the border but here it has nothing much in common, in many ways. That dividing line makes all the difference. Some how the people here are more content and laugh more. Their individual troubles take a back seat to the joy of being alive. There is a sense of guiding ones own life. In general people from the other side are preoccupied with their own selves, they pay so much attention to themselves and their well defined needs. Mexicans seem more in the flow of life and their larger selves. Life is bigger in Mexico.

Surprisingly Clemente could be heard out in the shop hammering on an anvil and it was obvious he must have stopped working on the ejido property in this wind and had come over here to work. The times he picked to work always came as a surprise. He knew Skys spirits were down with this newest tactic of the newest so-called president to take over his home and thought coming to work would make him feel better. Clemente was upset because for one thing he liked everyone to get along and be happy and this meant more hardships, more fights, bitter feelings. Throughout the day he would tell Sky that every thing was going to be all right. Calmado, Calmado, Calmado he would repeat.

Hearing the sound of work drew the men's attention outside. "Come out back and see what you think of my latest invention. I'm right on the edge of making a eight cubic foot box that holds temperatures below zero and it's all powered from the sun. Sky and Alejandro held their arms up to their heads to fend off the beating of the bougainvillea bush as the hot air whipped it every which way. The door was slammed shut by the wind with a jarring slam.

America still sat on at the edge of her chair, head down looking at the floor while she held her hands to her ears, elbows on her knees. Francisco remained with her trying to

comfort Chapo who by now was howling what sounded like to Francisco a wolf. She continued to think to herself, compare herself and to ponder over differences. "I have little of the feeling of United Statesism. I don't feel like a citizen. The government of the USA isn't mine anymore. I was born there but do not have to choose it. I can leave my participation, my involvement just like a parent I didn't like. I am a world citizen, of this planet earth, the world is not just the United States, contrary to some beliefs. I am so very glad I came to live here and I will stay here".

"The wind has gotten even worse, I've never seen it so bad, not even the turkey vulture that usually comes around when the officials come by has shone himself" said Francisco. Get up and come look, I can't even see the ocean the dirt is blowing so hard, the houses have disappeared. Maybe it will blow the roof off of Señor Guilleramos house".

"Con suerte", she absently replied watching the sheer force of the earth blown wind as it drew in the all consuming dust and formed it into a curtain that divided the ejido in half and trailed it's way out to sea. This got Americas attention for a bit but as she watched the earth from the mesas gather more as the curtain swirled back into a shapeless mass that left nothing to see as the room darkened she kept on thinking. "In the United States you must make it in a big way, all the way. There is near no more room for part measures. In Baja you can get by with as little as you can or want to do. You can get by from the everyday flow of life. Make a little money here, a little there, by doing this or that, whatever it calls for, trade for this, bargain for that, just what you need for the day. The United States has a whole sort of person that exist everywhere forever and they have not provided a spot for him anymore. Some people are born to beg, some to sell newspapers and shine shoes, wash car windows . Some live at home and do nothing but eat a few meals at the family table and watch their lives go by. These people don't pay first and last months rent plus security deposit. They don't wash their clothes at Laundromats, they don't shop in convenience stores, they don't make payments and they still have their place in life here. If

you don't want to have to make it you don't have to and it is all right, you still survive. Mexico caters to the poor, provides a place for them. The smaller the amount the cheaper it is compared to the Other Side where the smaller the portion the more it cost. Here you can buy two aspirin, a slice of cheese, a days worth of dish soap, one paper cup. Here they sell dish pans and hot plates for next to nothing and on the Other Side you can't hardly find such things. Like a conspiracy to hinder the poor. Just imagine if you were a bum or a beggar or unfortunate in the United States and it's not legal or acceptable you'd really be in a predicament". She rubbed her eyes once again and removed the built up dust in the corners and looked over at Francisco.

"Francisco remember when Sky hired that watchman for the house when we had to be away from it while Migra was looking for us". This man, his cap said Heavenly and his name was Mike, white hair and a white beard, and he had walked from Florida simply because there was no place he could stop, every morning he would have to move on. "Once he told me that even matches are expensive when you don't have money". So since this was how it was he had made his goal to get to Argentina by the same method. "I always imagined he made it to Argentina, I wonder what he did then, turn around and come back?"

"Then that brings up the reason he was the watchman", she thought to herself again, Heavenly Mikes first real pause in his long trek. In trying to make money in a nearby tourist resort by doing construction work for their well equipped vacation homes a very rich Mexican owner of that whole camp had his pride wounded when it was said that Sky was the smarter of the two when it came to constructing and a word and most likely more was dropped to Immigration that a Norte Americano was taking jobs away from the people, the people of Mexico. America and Sky had remained concerned and impressed and, of course, scared because men carrying big guns produce this effect, through the conversation that was held in their living room, accusation was closer, that they had been caught working and could be deported for seven years.

The very educated and well armed men that had suddenly appeared at the patio door ready to enter were very serious and told them to report to the office in the morning first thing, but instead, since they knew they were wrong they took the advice of a lawyer who said run. And run they did, they hid for five months, only coming back on Sundays after dark when immigration doesn't work and had better things to do. Migra kept coming and looking for them till America and Sky turned themselves in at their office in Ensenada. Nobody gave them away, all the old men said they had gone back to the USA, but they hadn't, they were hiding down the river road at a deserted ranch were America got an ugly rash from something on the old mattress. It felt good, that all who were asked covered for them. Real loyalty, also the Mexican trait of being closed mouthed and not confiding to the law. It was a good time, a learning time and the break in routine was like a vacation, only scarier. And Heavenly Mike, he stayed there on the property the whole time out back in a shed scaring everyone off so no one could seize the house and claim it theirs. He always said "don't overload me", and this solitary job didn't. The end result with Immigration was America and her husband received a formal written warning that they could only do what tourist do, spend money, play on the beach and sight see and next time would see them booted from their home. Migra had had respect for them for holding on and not running back home to the States. They were allowed to stay because of their sincerity in respecting Mexico. The object was to find a type of work that didn't take the people of Mexicos work, for Mexico always protects it's own and that is why Sky turned to inventing making ice from sun power and could through many trails and errors get his papers, his documents for working and become legal. To be legal here feels good. In the USA one tries to dodge and hold back, you try to be illegal so you can make it and it does not feel good to know where the money is your charged to live in the USA goes to.

A tree limb blew up and hit the house as it hooked two tumble weeds, then jumped the fence in an updraft and disappeared in the curtain of dust. Everything looked angry

and the ocean had gone mad mixing in color with the air. The unseeable sun put out an unearthly dirty gloomy glow.

“I like paying taxes here, it makes me feel good. I have found my own freedom in Mexico, my own place. I’m not bumping up against the walls of a country that I am in disagreement with for my whole life. That entire country and its people I don’t care for. I am prejudice, that is for sure, but it is a harmless, personal sort of prejudice because I wish no one harm, but I am aware of my shortcoming”. America thought on as the storm raged. “This is my country now and no one will push me out of it. I am here by the right of time. I have paid my dues. Nothing will happen to me to make me ever live on the other side of that border, nothing”.

Pilar and Amayrani wrapped in a sheet suddenly came through the door. She stood the child up and unwrapped the sheet that had dirt, twigs and small pebbles in the folds. Weeds were caught in the mothers hair and both looked exaggeratedly frightened. “My house is rocking on its wheels so bad I think it will blow over. Pancho put ropes all over it to tie it down then he left me there but I’m too scared”. Then she started to laugh because she liked excitement so the little girl and Francisco joined her. In just a bit it became infectious and America laughed too. It sounded just like the roof was going to blow off, you could see it breathing and heaving.

Sky and Clemente came back in the house as Alejandro headed out. By now you couldn’t even hear the lack of a muffler on his truck. Almost impossibly the wind got worse, the dust completely cleared and the view of the ocean was one to remember always. Where fisherman said the river ran south through the ocean was a wall of water that the wind had created, it went for about a quarter of a mile or maybe a lot longer and who knows how tall it was, taller than a building by three or four times anyway. A spectacle of nature. The tumble weeds bounced off the enlarged whitecaps and dotted the ocean everywhere. The sun on the spray off the waves turned into rainbows, and behind all this the wall of traveling water persisted. Everyone was crowding for window space to witness this.

“Well, one things for sure, nobody is going to be out there working let alone coming around to bother you, I told you not to worry today” said Clemente. And it was true, the planned activities, the meeting among the officials, and the confrontation they hoped to have with Sky were all called off, which in some ways was fine, but in other ways it lead one to keep on wondering what their next move was. “For today you have won, the wind storm is on your side so be calm”.

“What a welcome for the dead, I hope they still come.” observed Pilar. Since the water truck accident she had accepted and had been accepted by her husbands family. Doña Felicita treated her as a daughter and they took their walks together, played lotto and cards till late at night and enjoyed each others company. As Mexicans seem to always do, her husband just pushed on as a member in a larger family and in a short time collected up a new truck frame, then body pieces and mixed with the wrecked one was back on the road selling water. He was the son who made the most money and Pilar held a proud position. She was young and beautiful, married with a baby and truly happy. Why should she have waited for this?

Everybody stood looking out the window at the ocean. Amayrani hugged at Skis leg and said the word patrulla repeatedly trying to get attention. Francisco heard the word and turned his head to look where she was looking. Slowly coming down the road along with the dust was a La Mission municipal police car picking it's way around debris.

“Look what the wind blew in”. said Sky, “I certainly doubt if they're lost, they must be coming here. I wonder what this is about, I better go check”. He looked around for his cigarettes and then pushed open the door against the wind fighting the bougainvillea once again. Clemente got as far as the door then turned around and came back in. He could not purposely put himself in a position to face the police, not for anyone, not after being brought up in Tijuana in his neighborhood. Besides he knew Sky would not need him. Francisco took one last look at the approaching squad car and

ran out the door darting in front of Sky to be there first and fight whatever battle must be fought.

“Buenos Dias”, said Sky as the police pulled up. At this moment there was a lull in the wind, one of those curious halts that could be the end or could be gathering it’s strength.

“Buenos Dias. Anda buscando para Sr. Skylor Summersun”, said the driver with a way of pronouncing the name that made it almost not recognizable.

“Buenos dias, que quiere?” Asked Sky.

“We have papers for you”, the driver said as he knew this had to be the man he was looking for. The police station was new and the police new to this area, another sign of progress. “Here they are, just sign this form to show we served them”.

“What are they for?” asked Sky not taking them yet.

“Yes, what are they for?” asked Francisco.

“I don’t know, we were just told to deliver them, let me look at them and see if I can figure them out. I have others to deliver, one to a Guillermo, one for a Chi, one for a Bustamonte and the last for a Villanueva. The papers don’t seem to say what it is for though, just to appear this Monday at the Delegacion Municipal de La Mision at eleven thirty”.

“Are these the papers from where my wife reported trespassers yesterday evening, that’s very fast and she only named three people anyway”.

“Who ordered the papers?” asked Francisco.

“It’s likely to be something else, another matter, we heard the Ensenada police were here yesterday and what happened, but who knows. Where do these other men have their houses at, are they here?”

“That way along the cliffs in the big houses”, Francisco pointed south. “Sr. Guillermo and Chi haven’t come in today, and the Bustamonte family only come on Sundays. Sr. Villanueva was here yesterday, he is the jeffe of the water and has been here most of the week but he went back home to California”. Thank yous were said formally and they preceded to make their U-turn and leave. Half way through it they

beeped their horn and waved for Sky and Francisco to come over.

“Now what, hope they haven’t changed their minds and are coming back to arrest me”. Sky laughed as he said this, but of course he also knew it could be true. Anything could happen. Police are police the world over.

Both Sky and Francisco had returned to the house, the storm was at an uneasy standstill, maybe it was over, maybe it wasn’t. This was a hard country to try to tell when something was done.

“Don’t worry, everything is fine, no problems. I’m not sure if these are the papers from yesterdays arrest scene or if it’s another new try at our property but the policeman when he was turning around, stopped purposely to tell me not to worry because those men are hombres malos and would soon be out of the way”.

Francisco made a slashing motion across his neck to show what the policeman had done when finishing his sentence.

“Out of the way would be great, but as always, what next after that?” America and Pilar were picking up feathers that had blown out of boxes and bags. “At least the police here don’t cause any more trouble then they need to, if your not in the wrong. What else could it be but papers from what happened yesterday”.

“You better get somebody to go with you. I will have my brother Pancho go, I know he will, he’s good at those things”, volunteered Clemente. “My father will go to”.

“Well, that’s taken care of, lets try to forget all these problems for awhile, nature is putting on a show for us. Mira, those waves look like walls, the tide has turned and it’s coming back in”. Sky had taken his spot by the window again. “Look over beyond the mesas, there’s two fires started, let’s hope they stay up there. Remember the year the fires swept right through here and nobody had any water to fight it with and we had to use bushes to beat it out. That one tree never did get it’s growth back”.

“It burnt so fast it didn’t have time to catch the houses on fire”, remembered Francisco as Pilar agreed with this.

“You never know what to expect around here with the weather. Who knows how long this will last, hopefully not days. Somebody go outside and see why the water is off again, I hope nothing has broken the pipe. Most likely the valve got shut off when Francisco watered the birds earlier. And check on the peacock, I think the wind blew his gate open and he’s fighting with the pheasants, listen” asked America of anybody who would volunteer for this and Francisco did. “It’s way after lunch time and we need to eat, who’s hungry?”

“It’s not to late to have waffles is it?” asked Pilar. The waffle machine had just about had it, time and a few drops, it was a modern type and had a short life span. “Let’s try it one more time”. Soon waffles would be a thing of the past.

“Sounds good to me, we better make the most of today because tomorrow is Sunday. Too windy to work or think and we seem to have gotten by today’s scene with those police so there’s nothing more to do than kick back”, Sky said as he eased into his chair putting his feet up on the stool motioning Amayrani and the dogs out of his view.

“I’m going to take a quick shower, my braids are gummed together and I can’t undo them to brush my hair yet today. Clemente, sit here out of the glare and we’ll all have something to eat in just a bit”. America pulled a kitchen chair up near Skys chair and gave it a quick dust with her hand. She then left heading the long way around to the bathroom because she could not find the buck knife to open the door latch.

A calm settled on the house and the wind became a sound to listen to, having settled into a middle pitch drone, and all were quiet feeling the gusts and bursts of the still erratic much weakened storm. Life felt real good right now, everything was working out right, it always had. All this trouble here but it felt worthwhile. Sometimes it seems true you must fight for what you think you want. Stick with it. The storm blew on.

“Sky, Skylor”, called out America from the bathroom. She was wrapped in a towel so she couldn’t come out. The wind noise in the bathroom was less as it was a newer tighter room. “Come here for a minute”, she said as she unlatched the door for him to enter.

“What’s wrong?” he asked.

“Francisco hasn’t turned the water back on, I told him to do it at least fifteen minutes ago and then forgot about it. We need two hoses there so this doesn’t always happen, I’m anxious to shower and go back out and squeeze some orange juice to go with breakfast”.

“I’ll go check, hold on a minute”.

And standing there in her towel in that shower made of red tile and white marble, thinking of the long time she lived with only a tub and a watering can of cold water, waiting for this new system of piped in water from the community pila at the top of the hill, so she could soon rejoin this often repeated process of the waffle breakfast was the last true content moment she ever spent in that house.

Soon the silence beneath the wind turned strange. Where were the sounds of the kitchen, why was no one comforting Chapo who was now crying and alone. Where was everyone, time to stop daydreaming and redress and investigate. This time she put on Skys Levis so she wouldn’t have a billowing skirt to contend with.

Braving the storm which was tapering off again, as though it was being courteous and holding itself back when there was business to be taken care of outdoors, America went through the shop and out to the end of the driveway. There they were, Sky, Clemente, Francisco, Pilar and Amayrani with Gudrun off in the near distance by where the road forks off from the road to Rancho Mapache, not to far from the gate. They were listening to something Don Jose Zazueta Ochoa was saying. As she started the walk in that direction Sky spotted her and said something to Francisco which made him come running toward her. She could tell he was upset by the way he ran.

“El tubo de la agua es cerrado. Ellos corte su agua. Los hombres malos”, he was heard to say as he approached. “Sr. Villanueva has cut you off the water and no one can turn it back on. He has a court order that you have stolen water and not paid for it”.

Well, there it was, the reason for no water and most likely the cause of the served papers earlier and it sounded like a bad reason too. Water was a major situation and had rigidly held laws. Around two or three months ago the ejido had a water system put in from the little bit of money that was left after a community sale of unclaimed lots. Most of the money, as always seemed to mysteriously be misplaced and that was a very large sum, this time nearing half a million. A large pila was built out of cement block and was filled by the piped water that had always previously passed the ejido on the way to the next door resort. From the pila branched out white plastic tubes going to certain spots in the ground that had valves with meters inside locked boxes that had more white tubes going to each paying house. The first two months Americas house did not have this water as hers was the last to have a meter installed at the turn in the road to her house. This was a form of harassment and a display of power. Sky chose to ignore the threat and continued to buy trucked in water from Pancho filling his own olive vat tambos. About the same time the tormentors tired of withholding the water and had put in the meter, Panchos truck wore out and he had no other customers left as everyone else had the piped in water by now, so he let it finish dying out back were the other junked cars and trucks were kept. Sky was told he could have water then when the meter was installed and since no one had put the pipe to his house yet he and Clemente put it in, then he paid the bill in advance when he paid his fifty dollars rent at the grocery store to El Señor Cesarito. So for a month there was plenty of water, an absolute luxurious amount all the time at a very affordable price. And that is where Sr. Villanueva from San Diego California was able to catch him up. Illegal installation of the pipe with no written permission and paying the wrong person. These matters about water were very serious along with

matters of fence lines and gates and road right of ways. This was not anything to be ignored. The lock was on Skys meter box and it had been done officially. That was that. No water. No way to get water. This was a heavy score for the rich and greedy, the false president of the moment and his false takeover of the property was a feeble and annoying attempt but this one over the water hit a whole lot harder. Sky would have to haul his own water, as no other water truck came to the village and he would have to get it in fifty gallon drums in the back of his truck, which was time consuming, and worse, that was so little water and that is hard to live with. A step back into primitive living again. One attack from the opposing forces was not even over before the next one started. This could be one of those things that took a long time to resolve and after that month of plenty of water and the realization and admittance of how much this improved life the adjustment back to a scarcity of it would be a lot harder than the adjustment to more than enough of it.

America and Francisco walked toward the group through the village together both talking of what Sky would have to do to make this situation livable. Francisco was ashamed that his people, the Mexicans, had dealt such a low blow.

“Francisco, it’s not only Mexicans that do these things, people are the same everywhere, especially the greedy. They’ll gain nothing in the end and will live a miserable life in the mean time wanting what isn’t theirs. You learn from this and be content with what you have. We’re all better off poor with good hearts and a clear conscience”. She spoke to him in English as she was shook and her Spanish wasn’t coming out clear.

Coming up on the group Sky said to her, “Looks like the waffles are canceled and that I better get it together to start hauling water in. Try not to take it to hard, we’ve done it before and we can do it again”. He put his arm around America and gave her a hug that meant hang on. He had just been bitterly mad but not wanting to discourage America any more than necessary tried to take a light view of it.

A horizontal cloud of dust and small pebbles stung everyone's bare skin and eyes and it was time to make a run for the houses and away from the tumbleweeds and trash that claimed the air, the storm had taken back up again, this time with no show, just monotony.

It was late afternoon, this storm had died, whipped itself out and the village fairly tinkled with the aftermath, the air was electric and sparks jumped and surprised everything. Gudrun was sulking in the closet because when America went to give her a friendly tap on the nose they both got shocked and she was insulted. It was such a relief that the wind was gone the calm felt like a special event. America, Sky and Francisco sat outside by the bird pens facing the ocean. Dozens of tumbleweeds now floated calmly on the current. The three of them were laughing and drinking water with lime juice and sugar and eating cactus candy. The day had taken on a false fiesta spirit, as though they must celebrate the past long list of disheartening events to relieve the load of it's import. To celebrate what was dead. Dead and over

"Life is so pinche goddamn incredible, can you believe all this stuff has come down. It just amazes me with it's coincidences. It let's you know there's more to life than what we're meant to know". Sky held his hat in his hand and scratched his head with the other in his familiar habit. "In fact the whole thing gives me faith that in the balance some pretty good things are going to come of this. We're still here, healthy and happy, aren't we?"

"Sky, tu tiene mas suerte que todos y mucho cabeza tambien", said Francisco as he proudly poured some more lime water for Sky and then America.

"One thing is for sure life never has a chance to get dull. I'm going to be content with what we do have and not worry much about the rest. It feels so good sitting here. How can we complain, we could be sitting in L.A., or as far as that goes we could be in Oklahoma too, our old house sits there empty". America was petting Chapo, he was getting old and fat. Not being able to shower she still had on her dust infested clothes

and her braids were tied up on her head in a knot. She kept time with her petting to another Reggae song that played from in the house. It was one of those rare times the waves made individual sounds with no noise between breaks. A clear slap then silence till the next slap. "I can't give up another Sunday of my life to being worried" and the song that played inside the house echoed her, "don't worry".

"Let's teach Gudrun to wear these sunglasses" Francisco said since the pit bull had got over her pouting and come out for more attention.

"We need to tie them on so they won't fall off", said Sky.

From there the three of them decided to dress the dogs for Halloween to greet the few children and chaperons who knew from rumor and past experience that on one of these days there would be free candy for them and that could be today.

The three of them continued to sit outside, playing with the dogs, talking about life and enjoying being together. As time past Sky dozed in his chair and Francisco curled up with Gudrun, using her for a pillow, in a warm spot left from the heat of the day on the cement. America sits there still watching the people enjoying themselves on the beach, busy with excitement. She ponders on these people, the Mexicans, the poor people she has lived with. She knows she will never understand them, she watched to see what they do and how they act and react, but she'll never know who they truly are or what they are really thinking or why their reasoning is such as it is. She remembers a fisherman that told her the Mexicans don't do things for a reason, they just do them. The longer she is here the more she notices and realizes there is too much difference between being from United States and being a Mexican to ever fathom how they experience being human. Fine people, warm people. Mysterious and incomprehensible to her. Family people, kind and generous. They have good looking faces and healthy bodies in general. These are the Mexicans America has come to know in her tiny isolated portion of northwestern Mexico in the state of Baja California.

No matter what the problem going on was it could not overtake or shadow out the glow of living here for long. America felt a sudden exhaustion, so much turmoil and all these bad feelings about Sundays. She realized just as the exhaustion turned into sleep that she would reclaim her Sundays for a day that was to be looked forward to and treated as something special and that life was too good to be in a position where you had to fight for your own home. She dropped off into a deep sleep sitting in an old weather beaten arm chair, her husband and Francisco sleeping too, even the dogs slept, out there between the bird pens and the shore in the shade of a blue tarp. And they slept on into the sunset, unconsciously shooing flies, moving a bit to find more comfort and dreaming that there were better times to come. The Reggae music played itself over and over with all it's hope for the future on this day for the dead.



## FULL SPRING, NEW BEGINNINGS

### SUNDAY

Now it is very near a year and a half later. Time is slow in Mexico, like progress is slow too. As Americas husband was often heard to say, “the wheels of Mexico turn so slowly you have to drive a stake by them to see if they are really moving”. Which was not true because certain things did move. Even so, many years have slipped by for America since she has left the country of her birth and there has been many many different events, but not many changes, nothing major, till now. A new room, a new Ejido president, a big storm, a little more money, friends coming and going, problems and good times, life had found it’s course and flow during that time. The Ejido and the ocean had become a way of life for her. It had become life itself and now that all that was the past for her it was still hard to believe for America that she had uprooted herself and taken her new life somewhere new. When she had awakened from that semi sleep what seemed like so long ago, another life, with Sky and Francisco and the dogs and the still after the windstorm, she had come back new, with a new life. This startled her as well as inspired her because as of yet she had no idea what this new feeling was. The cloud of the past had lifted and the love of life and the secure feeling of a happy future flooded through her and she told herself it must be real and something was about to happen, about to change.

And now it was hard to say whether she missed what was. Change had come welcome after all the years of sameness since the long dreaded thought of losing her home has finally happened. The house as a home was lost to her now, a thing of the past. But she herself did not loose, she was not the looser. America and Sky Summersun had won the latest battles there at the same time they were making their plans to move. Fate did not let them get stuck in a situation they did not belong in again any longer. It was all a continuation really, one step leading to the next, stages in growth. Now living here in this

town was like diving head first into the depths of the land of Mexico. No more lulling of the sea into a tranquility that disguised life as views, tides and waves, gulls and porpoises, the individually known villagers on their well known errands, the anonymity of the ocean, of the coast itself, a land of whomever could claim it. That row of houses, that narrow row of houses, of homes that are the very special ones that are the first, the first row on the shorelines of the earth. That life, no matter what country, takes on a similarity. Necessities and desires that were in common, salt and spray and the sounds and smells. A separate style of life unique to itself. Their lives, the people of the first row, was in front of them, directly in front of them. They became the people of the beach and ocean beyond and it consumed their lives. The sea is a demanding scene, it constantly takes from you as it is replacing something else in you. Your senses are always in tune with the outdoors, with the boom and crash, the reflection and the contrast, the very vastness. Leaving the ocean behind America gained something, many things, about enough to make up for losing it. Her senses were her own again. It was odd to realize she could go through her days, and go through them very satisfactorily without her beloved view. Life was good here in this town, being a very small part of a small town, about the same as the rest of the community, just trying to make a living, just get by, and be happy along the way.

Of course America didn't let herself get too far away from the ocean. Up here on top of this hill, a long mile up from the sea, called Lomas de El Sauzal, right where the canyon came up, the brim of it, and ended was a panoramic view of the small commercial harbor and the ocean beyond. One could even see the waves break at San Miguel and tell whether the surf was up or not. And the three islands out front, several miles out, the view of them going from sharp and close up to just vague images or gone completely was a satisfying thing to keep track of.

This Sunday was warm and clear with a fine line of mist floating just above the shore line on the biggest island. America had gotten up early to work on her garden. She had been able

in this second season here of having a vegetable garden to get in quite a variety of crops. This was one of the things she learned in her husbands Oklahoma that she valued and never lost the knowledge or the desire in the many years that had elapsed. Every place has something to learn from. Her husbands parents not only showed her how country living was done there but also the importance of it. The importance in the quality of life it produces. This soil with a little help from manure from the small milk farm on the back side of her hill seemed to grow everything she wanted so far.

“Come on in and have a cup of coffee with me, I want to show you the diagram on my latest”, Sky called out from inside the house. This was a nice home, built by Sky and the men he hired to help. It was made of brick left behind from a failed attempt Georgia Pacific Company had made at having a brick company here and they’re buildings left behind were large and well made and looked like someday they would be something important again. On the house there was yellow and blue trim on the wood of the doors, windows and eaves. Half the roof had red tiles and the waiting half had various color roofing materials. Trees new and thriving on this spring of their growth and flowers just sprung from package seeds grew everywhere.

“I’ve just finished picking the beans anyway, I’ll be right there”. The tracings of worry had left Americas face. It was bright with sunshine and contentment, gone was the dull chill of fear and unease that would sometimes creep over her the last months of being in the Ejido. Her gold brown hair told of her good health and her green eyes showed no hidden problems.

“I feel like I did when we first moved into the Ejido, everything is still so new. I don’t even have this view memorized. I can’t see it yet in it’s entirety with my eyes closed”. America said this as she was settling down in her old rocker that faced this view now. She had on a cotton skirt that was covered with life size pansies in pinks, yellows and lavenders with green leaves for background. Her shirt was made of soft faded jean material embroidered in these same colors with flowers, done by her mother. It had just become

warm enough to wear sandals and she had on turquoise socks with them. Her hair hung long and loose down her back with two small metal bunny rabbit barrettes holding the front top a little back from her face. These barrettes were a gift from her father on her second birthday.

America said, “we need to remember the Ejido as it was at the first. Like it was by far for the longer period of time for us. I’ll be glad when the ending is a lot further from my mind. I keep shaking it loose and putting it behind me but still it comes those times when that feeling of wanting to be secure about where I live and will continue to live surfaces in me and I must look around and realize when we bought this piece of property that stage of our lives had ended”.

How secure the Ejido had felt after she had settled in for a while. When it just had been the old men and a few old shacks and trailers. Nobody cared about the place, it was overlooked. That was when Don Jose Zazueta Ochoa and the old Colonel, Don Vecinte, along with El Chivero, lived there and ran the place. They said Mexico was for the Mexicans and voted out all progress. They kept the land for cows and goats and growing nopales. They guarded it ferociously. They had a vendetta going against all but a select group of fishermen who they let take their ponga in and out there at the natural break in the waves south of the tidepool. The old Colonel carried a German Lugar pistol and was known to fire it off to make his point more clear and there were more violent tales of his youth. There was only these old men almost all of the time, except for the end of the month meetings when the rest of the Ejido members showed up with their families for the event. They had to put their thumbprint in a book so they didn’t lose their property. After the meetings would be carne asada or birria cooked in square tins buried in the earth with a wood fire, that had been being prepared by those not in the meeting, and music, always music. Everyone had a good time and enjoyed each other, children from the city experienced nature, dogs fought around where the food was being served and eaten, men drank and shot off guns and added to the excitement which everyone was taking in, in a very natural way. It was such a

different place before the electric came in and the land was realized to be of value and available under certain situations and requirements. These rules which in time appeared to be able to be stretched to include the rich.

“I may miss some of the people, but I sure don’t miss the place. It’s odd looking back how we felt we couldn’t leave. We even sacrificed our peace of mind to stay. I never even knew how good life could be in Mexico till we moved here. This is a whole different scene than the ocean, that’s for sure.

“It was good to realize that like welfare in the United States the Ejido system has become mostly people looking for a free ride. It’s been so refreshing to know the better side of Mexico living in a real town. Not one Sunday since we’ve been here has anyone come to give us a hard time, not one”.

“I’d just about rather spend my Sundays in a pinche church than put up with all that. We may have had quite an insight into one aspect of Mexico but it sure is good to see another side of it.

“I think I’ll go out and see if those beets are ready to pull” America said as she wrapped her hair on top of her head in preparation to put on her sun hat. Her nails were broken and dirty, she kept meaning to buy a pair of gloves. Going into town to do whatever needed to be done was a main source of entertainment. Ensenada is a special town, a small city with many sections. There is no apparent poverty and no feeling or fear of crime. Only the poor are poor here. It was a clean town with a busy but unhurried air about it full of beautiful hard to notice homes tucked in down town areas. Her way of life had changed, she was slowly reverting back to the city person she was born, realizing how much she really did not like the country and isolation and inconvenience of doing without because it was so far away. One thing America had learned for sure was primitive living was not something one should choose to do. To live without electric, to have no stores, to not be able to eat out because it was easy, all these things and more like them were not a way to spend your whole life. Conveniences were luxuries and add greatly to the quality of life. Here her bathroom was connected to a sewer, the water came through

pipes to the house, trash was picked up on a semi regular basis and vendors came by. All kinds of vendors came by as a matter of fact. Ones with vegetables and fruits in the back of pickups or in push carts. There were vendors with candy apples and knife sharpeners and men who carried gold plastic Louie the fifth end tables and pictures of the last supper. One truck came by that carried a large variety of trees, bushes and flowers. America always longingly watched this one go by, she had of yet never had any extra money at the moment when he slowly drove past, but someday it would coincide. One of the interesting things was the people walking by, to many to learn to recognize. A few she knew, the lady she bought the nopales from, as she had promised her husband she wouldn't grow a single thing with stickers on it on the new property. Sky had had his fill of those in the Ejido. She also knew a few of the young neighborhood wives. One of them sold Fuller Brush products and America always picked through her pamphlet and choose some thing. And children, they knew the dogs by name and called out to them. Just yesterday three of them had come by and sold her a perfect oval shaped white stone for ten pesos. With all her dogs, cats, birds, rocks and plants this made an interesting yard to walk along the outside of the cyclone wire fence and peer in at.

The decision to move had been an instantaneous one. The moment it was conceived of was the moment it was an accepted fact. America and her husband had won the case against the trespassers and they had backed off. The rich receded once again to gain strength for another attack further down the line in time. The water problem never got to court because Señor Villanueva could not afford to have his status and his background looked into to closely and for the remainder of her time there they ran eleven water hoses from Don Pacientes house late at night to fill their water barrels. This decision to move had been made the Sunday after the big blow up with the self claimed president of the Ejido, combined with the sabotage of the water. That Sunday morning America woke early knowing that life itself in it's natural tendency to balance out was taking care of her and her husband. She felt a

calm and a relief. And upon that awakening to a beautiful sunshiny day with a cloud of pelicans diving for a school of small silver fish that shimmered in the dawn light and being reminded once again of the beauty of life America looked directly at her husband and said in a voice of conviction, "Let's move" and Sky, with a quick search of her face said "Yes, let's move".

And from that decision grew action. A frenzy of searching for a new home, a new piece of land to make a house and business on, a place to live out her life, again, took place till the deed was accomplished. The only two things she knew for sure was she wanted to move and she wanted to stay in Mexico. America realized her experience had been a very limited one and the next time she settled in would be different. She had learned the fair side of Mexico and the unfair side. And besides, who were she and her husband that they should think that they should have this millionaires view for the rest of their lives. She had had it for a long time, she had had her share. It was time to move along. She had somewhat of a pretty good idea, as close as a foreigner can probably come, as to what the small makings of the ways of Baja California were all about. And she loved Mexico, it was her land now, where her heart was. How could a person live in a country that they disrespected and distrusted, that had a system that turned against it's own system. Mexico has it's quirks and it's much more than fair share of millionaires, it was far far from faultless, but it wasn't rapidly crumbling with no room for respect and admiration. The government might not be in the best shape but the people themselves were okay as a whole.

Now that she was in the regular everyday life of Mexico and away from the buffer zone of the ocean there was so much more to observe and learn and compare. All these partially finished homes and yards so closely knit that she saw out her window, contrary to popular belief of the Other Side, were not a sign of poverty but progress. These people were not poor because the room addition started five years ago was not finished, the outside of the home still in raw stucco, the yard dirt. It was just another way of life. These people ate well, were

healthy, met their debts and lived their lives in a very good way, content and eager for each day. They owned what they had. They did not need the next new thing, the next thrill to feel alive and successful. Who here needed to jump off a mesa top with a pair of nylon wings to know they were having a good time. Sitting on the porch, watching children play and neighbors pass was pretty fulfilling.

That was what America was doing now, watching, she had paused in her gardening and was watching the neighbor down the hill toward the canyon on the left side. Last New Years Eve had brought on a burst of traditional house improvement activity and this neighbor and a half dozen or so fishermen partners and friends had erected a plywood house overnight. A few months later a gust of wind pushed through the canyon and knocked the house flat in one blast, just collapsed in a neat heap. Upon the men's return from a fishing trip having no place to hole up in till the next trip they had acquired a very old trailer. Just two nights ago while they were gone again this trailer quietly burned to the ground with no audience but a few sleepy neighbors, America and Sky included. Now here the fisherman was with a wife and two children surveying the latest event. They stood talking to some more neighbors and laughing at the excitement of the coincidence of loosing two places so quick. Ni modo. A day to be remembered for them, life was entertaining and full of alternatives. They would have to stay with family till the next attempt at a house was made. America could see him now rubbing continuously on his head with his left hand as he gestured with his right, as though to say and now what next. Life here had so many interesting incidences. What an adventure it was and how worthwhile.

The sound of a truck turning off it's engine out front by the big iron gate that Sky had welded together, broke into her mediation. Next she heard someone call out and all the dogs barking, barking in a way that let her know it was a close friend. She and her husband did not get that much company as their friends from the Ejido didn't get the opportunity to come to town very often. Rounding the corner of the house she

could see it was Clemente and Francisco was with him. He had traded a piece of property in the Ejido for a truck with a full tank of gas and new tires and an old mean mottled horse. This was the first time he had taken the truck out on the Toll Road past the toll booth. America was surprised and pleased he had broken out of his boundaries and had come to visit.

Sitting on the porch that overlooked the canyon and the harbor beyond America listened to Sky and Clemente talking. Sky would talk in English for a sentence or two and then change over to Spanish for a bit while Clemente would speak back in a Spanish that was still from Tijuana. At the moment Clemente kept using the term “de volada”, he would repeat it his usual three times, tell more of his story and repeat it again. This was a favorite word. She couldn't picture him doing anything in a hurry but to him it must have been. This was one of his old stories, told many times about painting an inside of an old house in Watts. He had camped out for near a week on the empty floor and at night snuck across the street to buy hamburgers from McDonalds and ran back. Clemente always liked to tell a few old stories before breaking into the new ones. And she knew there would be new ones because more changes had come to the Ejido.

America stepped outside for a moment with Francisco who was still with the dogs. Two new ones had been added to the pack, a long haired Rottweiler called Marlibob, for added security as there was too much to keep locked up, and a Mexican all breed dog. This had been inherited from Blossom as a at first take care of it for me, then a, it's been so long I guess he's yours now. Sky called him a natural dog. A dog of all dogs. He had short course red and gold hair with a gold white bar over his shoulders, stand up ears and a full tail that became blackish with a white tip. He weighed much more than Gudrun and Chapo. He had been at the local veterinarians because the people who brought him in couldn't afford any more tortillas for another dog. Lucky Red Dog was his name. He was brilliantly smart and so self assured. When mixed dogs breed long enough they revert back to nature and look like this dog frequently. As the vet had said since he was of no breed he

had all the good points of all breeds. This proved to be very true and he was a loved and trusted member of her family now.

“The dogs miss me, look”. Francisco was trying to pet the whole pack as they crowded around him. Gudrun was overwhelmed with happiness and threatened to fight whoever was nearest but never carried it out. Chapo howled and the rest of the Aztecas barked while the two new dogs sniffed a new friend.

“How’s school?” asked America while trying to calm the dogs.

“Good, I like it”.

“I hear chismo that you do well in English. When are you going to try it on me?”

“No es verdad. It’s gossip, nothing more” he said in his usual Spanish and he was embarrassed by his lie and laughed at himself. Then he said in quite clear English “maybe someday”, and gave her one of his devilish boy smiles.

America smiled at him and said no more on the subject. She was glad he had on his own finally chosen to go back to school. He was catching up quick. He could have made it through life on his own natural wits but school, as America finally came to learn here, was a self discipline, a commitment and children need this for their future. This is were they learn to follow instructions and how to deal with situations and to make friends and deal with enemies. Her own drawn out monotonous socializing experience in the schools of southern California did not apply here obviously.

America returned to the kitchen to find Clementes favorite old chipped elephant cup that he had always used at the Ejido and continued to use here. Knowing how hard Sundays were for him being in the Ejido she decided to put a little milk in his coffee to help calm his stomach from the ulcer that had developed from the ongoing uproar in his village. Upon arriving he had stated there was a major crowd, lleno con gente, at his house and no place for him to hide out. Francisco too was relieved to get away from the ever increasing amounts of the large variety of beach visitors out front and relatives at the house. Now he stood outside in this strange

solitude of city living listening to how clear and distinct the sounds floated up the hill.

“So they finally got busted, pinche ricos anyhow” said Sky as he paced the room with the enthusiasm of this latest news. “You say they put four of them in jail? America, come in here and listen to this. They put the new Ejido president and the last fake one and two politicos in jail. I can hardly believe it. Guillermo has been accused of embezzlement and forgery, it’s in all the newspapers even. He was walking on such thin ice he must have thought he was Jesus Christ walking on water”.

“The oficiales came from Mexico City. It was right after the President of Mexico visited Ensenada. The President was checking on the Ejido systems. He has now made it legal for us to sell our land, if we don’t loose it to taxes first”. Here Clemente paused to examine this last fact. His hair has grown long and full and wavy and he has a large mustache today. He looked pale, as he always did when there were to many friends and relatives visiting. “Meetings were made between the oficiales and Ejido members during the week. I could tell Guillermo and his pack had a lot of fear in them by the way they slunk out of there. He didn’t even collect his rent from those surfers that stay weekends in his trailers and they had it too. I saw one of them counting it out and getting it ready, it was in dollars too. Then comes Sunday at the thumbprint meeting. All the people were inside arguing when the oficiales pulled up in two black Crown Victorias with three police cars. The men in the black cars pounded on the door and when Don Roberto unlocked it they walked right into the meeting. In a very short time they came out with the four offenders and put them in the police cars. Then they all left but one police car, in case there was a fight, I think”.

Francisco had come into the house and once again told the story as he had watched it from the rock point were he had been fishing. The villagers had cheered as the cars drove off, the rest of the offenders and impostors got in their cars and left leaving only those who had a real right and need of the land and they had the best get together they’ve had in years. Even

old Don Jose Zazueta Ochoa danced with his wife and great great grandson.

“That’s Mexico for you, you might think your rich and powerful but there is, almost always, someone more so”, marveled America. “You wonder how come everyone gets to break the rules and you judge what’s going on when all it’s been is nothing more than those with a little more money than others, thought they were getting away with something and they didn’t”.

“Give them enough rope and they’ll hang themselves. Good for Mexico, it may move slow but it sure takes care of things when it does. What happens to their homes?” Sky asked.

“Their property belongs to the Ejido now. To the real members, as a whole. They will use it for rentals to raise money for their projects. I always knew we would win, we were in the right. I think the government didn’t need to bother about them till now and now it is to our advantage, with those big homes and all the improvements”, Clemente explained. His pale face was beaming and positive with hope and pride. The poor here don’t always lose.

Francisco had grown considerably since America left the Ejido, he was now a teenager. He was still shy until he relaxed and then he was full of talk and noises and gestures. He came to visit on the weekends, sometimes riding the bus, he missed America and Sky and had got up the nerve to come by himself and it made him feel grown up and confident. He was tall and slim and had a feeling of knowledge about him. He was a wise boy when it came to his own personal decisions about his own life. He pretty much ran it himself and chose his own responsibilities.

Sky was still standing looking out over the view, the sun shone through his hair making it a circle of light and his blue eyes smiled while he laughed and contemplated about the fate of the greedy ones, they’re well deserved ending for all the confusion and crookedness and heartache they caused. “Another new beginning, I sure hope it goes well for all of you this time. I’ll tell you what, lets go look at the new room, it’s

about done". It appeared he wanted to break from the subject for a bit, a rush of emotion had overwhelmed him when he looked back over the last years of undermining ones contentment activities that had gone on. He slipped his hand into his pocket and rubbed his lucky silver dollar and the leather pouch suddenly thinking of the Indian inside himself.

The new room was a small addition for a bedroom where Francisco would sleep some day when he went to secondary school here. The decision to not take him with her was a hard one for America and her husband. The reasoning was that he was best left off in his own environment of a Mexican home and lifestyle. He fit into his family perfectly and had his part to play. America could see no benefit for her to take him over. She was worried that her American expectations and desires to influence might in the long run be harmful to him and he was doing so well were he was. But as there was not a good secondary school in his area for the sake of his education he would stay here during the week. She couldn't help but have a small wish he might go on to college but realized his successes in life might and probably lay in a different direction. He had the capability to learn but not the desire to bother to get good grades in subjects he didn't care for. His lessons in life were what was important to him. The know how of his fathers money making abilities, the fisherman's knowledge and Skys inventiveness and nature around him. Not only was he a good boy but a worthy person.

"Well, you think your going to like it okay?", asked Sky. "Your going to be like a pinche American kid with his own room, all it needs is a television and a computer".

"How about my own telephone", joked Francisco back. The room was empty right now and still needed the windows in and the roof. It was a good feeling for all to know Francisco was more than just welcome here but wanted and provided for. It would probably be a few more years till he put it to full use.

"A family could live in this room real easy". Clemente laughed and made a hand gesture and a attitude that said how lucky Francisco was and how easy he had come by it getting it from Americans. America and Sky joined in the laughter while

Francisco became embarrassed and then laughed too. Everyone knew the Americans always had a lot to give.

“When I get through working you and seeing you get good grades you won’t be laughing anymore, you’ll pay for it. Remember I’m not an American, I’m an Okie.”, put in Sky as he quickly touched his full hand on Franciscos shoulder and then removed it. There was a pause and then a silence that created a warm spot.

“Come on out and I’ll show you the garden. Since we got it in real early this winter there’s a lot of things ready to pick”. America liked to send produce back with Clemente for his mother. Doña Felicita needed a special diet, she had been diagnosed as having diabetes and was having a hard time following the doctors orders being so far away in many ways from a store that had fresh fruit or vegetables.

“The telephone, the telephone is ringing” called America who was the closest to the house having stopped to weave a morning glory shoot through the wire of the fence. “Somebody quick, run and answer it”.

The three already being in through the garden gate Sky called back “You answer it, hurry run, your the closest”.

“Me?”, America pointed to herself in defeat. This telephone was four and a half months old. It was for Skys business first and secondly for an occasional family member who would call to say hello. This was the first time America had answered it. It still rang seldom but had really helped her husband improve his business. They had discussed it for many months, getting this telephone, because all the years without one they grew to being very glad they didn’t have one and did not want the intrusion but the growing business made it a logical step. And as many steps in progress it was a good thing to have done. What a convenience it was and how nice to hear from family not seen for years, especially Skys parents who he called around twice a month instead of the Christmas and birthdays call from a telephone booth. It suddenly became a good feeling to become connected to the rest of the civilized world, it was another new feeling of security and easier living. All these new luxuries helped to erase the time when living

without electricity and running water had seized to become an adventure or even a challenge but just a plain ugly hardship that detracted from life in general.

Making a run for the demandingly ringing telephone America headed for the house, her hair and skirt streaming behind her, the dogs chasing her in the felt excitement.

“Buenos Trades”, she said out of breath with running and nerves from answering this telephone for the first time. “Buenos Trades,” she repeated. Sky had promised her she didn’t have to answer the telephone but that was obvious it would be impracticable and unavoidable, so here was the day. One must have the sense of a person somewhere speaking to you, not the feeling of a odd shaped piece of plastic with a tail talking to you and she thought she had lost that learned ability long ago.

“Is that you America”, the voice of Blossom asked, “speak English”.

“I thought you were a customer for Sky, nobody hardly ever calls yet”.

“Well I’m not and I’m calling you now because I have some news to tell you”.

“Oh great” America thought to herself, “I didn’t want to talk on the telephone and now I think I’m about to gossip on it, a social chat”. And out loud she said, “How are you and Alejandro?”

“Fine, fine, but that’s not what I’m calling about. Guess who’s here and why?”

“I can’t guess, just tell me”.

“O’henry. O’henry is here, he’s been here since last night and you know why? Blossom asked and then answered her own question. Her voice was full of satisfaction and pride because she had predicted this. “He’s left that ignorant little wife of his finally. I knew it couldn’t last. When I found out how jealous she was of me and how much she hated me and talked bad about me I knew she was no good. If a women can’t accept her husbands friends she has a problem. Why, the last time I was there I brought her a gift of some of that perfume I couldn’t sell and she insisted on paying for it then told me her

man was taken and I'd better watch who I talked too, Alejandro's wife or not. I've no idea why she doesn't like me. It serves her right, I'm glad he left her, he talked to Alejandro about it late last night after I went to bed. I had quit drinking but since O'Henry was here and was feeling so bad we had a few drinks with him. Are you still on the phone, you haven't said a word, how come?"

"I guess I forgot how to talk on the telephone".

"Nobody forgets that. How have you been? Is Skys business going all right, he always talked so much of making it big someday, big money, big money he always use to say. It's been well over a year since I've seen you guys. I got your letter, how come you didn't check on the price of those medicines for me, I know it would be so much cheaper there".

"I'm going to town tomorrow, I'll find out".

"Mañana, mañana, all that means is not today, I really need it for my nerves since I don't drink anymore. Here's O'Henry now, say hello to him".

"Maybe he doesn't want to talk right now".

"Of course he does, hold on".

America took this opportunity to call through the window where she could see Francisco examining the never seen before asparagus ferns to get Sky and hurry.

After some exchanges of pleasantries America asked O'Henry what he was doing so far from home.

"I just couldn't take it anymore. Mexicans are so different, they're so weird, maybe not as weird as Americans, not that weird, but they're logics are strange, I just couldn't handle it anymore. I love Lourdes and the kids but I need a break. Not just from them but from Mexico. All that carrying on over property and Lourdes jealousies and no money ever. If I could have got myself into a situation like you guys did it would have been different. You've got to be on the right side in Mexico or it will make you go mad. I'm trying to understand what it is about myself and why I can't stick with something, I just can't do it anymore".

"There is nothing to understand, you just are who you are. You people from the other side are always looking for

reasons why. It's just so, so do what you have to. I'm sure they're going to miss you. I feel bad for them, but I know they'll be all right. Lourdes is strong". America was at the window waving at Sky while Francisco told him the message. She held the telephone up for a moment to tell him to hurry and come get it away from her.

"Blossom wants to know if you've finished your house yet, she says you should have by now".

"You know nothing ever really is finished here but we've come a long ways. Tell her Mexicans look at what's done, Americans look at what's not done."

"You tell her that. I've been arguing with her since I've got here".

"Why are you there anyway? They've been living in Los Angeles for a year and more, haven't they?"

"I couldn't think of anybody else I knew in California and I thought it would be good to see Alejandro and see how he is doing here. He misses Mexico real bad but he's doing all right I suppose. You know how the United States usually brings out the worst in a foreigner but he really hasn't changed, maybe a little sadder. Blossom says they will stay and work here till they get enough money to buy a ranch of their own and then come back there to live. She wants to talk to you again".

"No, wait here comes Sky, say hello to him first. We'll miss you down here, you were here for a long time. Let us know what your doing, give us a call".

America thought as she handed the telephone to Sky, "I guess if I can use the expression give us a call I must already be reconditioned to the telephone".

Mexico is not a country that foreigners can come in and take advantage of. It is not set up for the single foreigner, outside of retirement, at all and there is hardly anyway for him to make a living here. The only thing Mexico wanted from these people was for them to visit, spend their money and leave. Maybe buy a house or two and pump some money into improvements, retire and do nothing but buy. Just as long as they brought their money from somewhere else and left it here.

With miquiladores big companies could come in now but they were so bound by laws and paperwork that the Mexicans always had the largest advantage and the vacated building if it failed. Mexico kept itself for it's own. It took an exceptional person to come here and look around and find a way to fit in and make a living. At most the average person would come for an extended stay with money already taken care of. This peninsula was filled with Norte Americanos who had money that came through the mail and a lot of those claimed to not believe in the United States anymore, they just believed in it's money.

"How come you up and left Lourdes and the kids? She was always on you but you were lucky to have some one who cared for your sorry self", Sky was saying when America focused her attention on the telephone conversation again. By this time Clemente and Francisco were back in the house to witness friends talking between two countries, neither of them had been around telephones very much, especially one in the house.

"No mas amigos de Otro Lado", whispered Francisco to America as he grasped the fact that O'henry had done what gossip had said he was going to do.

"I didn't really leave them, don't judge me so harshly. I've got to make a living. Lourdes has been bragging to everyone that she kept me and cared for me just like the rest of her kids. I know she was proud of me and didn't care that I couldn't make money but I care. I'm going to get a job and save up some money and come back and set up a real business. I can find only so many cow skulls and so many people to buy them. I have to have a real way of making a living. I had to ask Lourdes for money when my guitar string broke and that was the last straw for me. You know how we Americans are, we are our image and I can't stand seeing myself that way".

"O'henry, your already sounding like a pinche Norte Americano, you better watch out or you might end up fitting in, then how would you get out again?" observed Sky who was signaling to Francisco to bring him his cigarettes and lighter.

“Blossom wants to say hello, here, talk to her for a minute” said O’henry a little shook from the past exchange and thinking of what he left behind in pursuit of the ever needed finances to live life the way he thought it should be lived.

America, Francisco and Clemente stood and looked on as the conversation continued. Sky was heard to say hello and then a long period of yes no and maybe and a few I sees. Francisco made a sign with his fingers and thumb that meant Blossom sure talked a lot. Then the conversation took a change and Alejandro was on the line. He wasn’t much into talking on a telephone but he did it for his wife. This time Sky carried the conversation.

“Business is going great ever since I got away from Sleepy Hollow”, he was saying. “Sleepy Hollow, what does that mean? A place where nothing progresses and nobody does much of anything. No, I can’t spell it for you”, he explained. “The pinche Ejido was dead and stinking by the time I left. Clemente is here and just told me how the Ricos finally lost the war, the land war. Yeah, they are in jail for I don’t know how long, hopefully a long time. I guess everybody’s been celebrating the victory. How are you doing up there? Life is crazy, here I am an American making it in Mexico and you a Mexican making it in United States. Do you like it up there? I knew you wouldn’t but the money is good isn’t it. Saca un afalio, no? What, you don’t think it’s worth it, you’d rather be hungry on the ranch, eating chorros off the rocks? I don’t blame you, maybe things will change and you guys can come back. I was just talking to Blossom and she said she wants to come back when she gets enough money. Now all three of you will be stuck up there for the sake of your wages and living in a war zone”.

Alejandro was told by Blossom to say hello to America so once again she found herself on the telephone.

“Hi, kind of curious talking on the telephone isn’t it” she shyly said to him. “We have your dog still and he’s turned out really good”.

“Lucky dog, I wish I was him and I wish I wasn’t here. I try to make Blossom understand how bad it is here but she

says it won't be for long. First she said it was for two months, then a few more and now it seems like years". Alejandro opened up, his wife must have left the room for a moment. He felt he needed to talk to someone who knew what it meant to have lived a contented life in Mexico instead of the push and shove of a job in Los Angeles. Working on horses, rounding up cows to fighting traffic and clocking in. He believed in Blossom and that they would get money and come back and have their own ranch and not work for any tyrant old aunt that took advantage of him. Blossom seemed to get what she wanted and did what she said she was going to do. Maybe the situation for them was not a trap but a sacrifice and they would be back, they would not get caught forever in that city that was no longer what it use to be. At night they lay in bed going over memories of the ranch and it's life to keep them going through the day.

"Time goes fast Alejandro, you'll both be back here soon enough, your not made for the city. We'll be waiting for you".

"Your so lucky that you live in Mexico", he mourned. "All the United States is, other than a place to make money, is a dream that never came true".

"Your lucky too that you have each other, that should make it bearable for you there".

"I'll never leave Blossom, no matter how many stupid ideas she gets, she is in my heart". Obviously he had been drinking a little and feeling to much.

Backing up to lighter subjects and on out of the conversation America handed the telephone back to Sky who was quite willing to talk away for ever it seemed. Life goes on and goes on and what was once so real is now only the past. America was wholeheartedly into what she was doing now. No more United States and no more American friends here now it seemed.

"You be careful up there Alejandro". It was Clementes turn to talk on the telephone. "That Legal Alien card you have only makes you legal but it won't make the authorities any nicer to you. The police are dangerous up there, they catch you on a burned out blinker and before they've done they'll try

their hardest to have you behind bars. It's not like it is here and violence is just a pastime with the public. Un paso de tiempo, nada mas. Try not to go out at night. You should have Blossom with you when you do have to. At least your in a Mexican neighborhood, but be careful of going into other ones". Con cuidado, con cuidado, con cuidado, Clemente kept emphasizing. Stay out of sight as much as possible and don't talk to anyone was his best advice.

Next Alejandro wanted to talk to Francisco and Clemente tried to get him to take the telephone but he wouldn't, he backed away and put his hands behind his back and shook his head.

Clemente listened a minute longer and gave the telephone to Sky saying O'henry wanted to say goodbye again. He then turned to Francisco and said, "why won't you talk on the phone? Alejandro wanted to tell you you could have his donkey for payment of the money he owes your father from right before he left for California and had that accident when he was drunk. When he got that truck cab from him and couldn't pay for it, remember? He doesn't like having debts."

Francisco grinned and said, "my dad can go in his dump truck and get him tomorrow. I can rent him for rides on the beach this summer".

Suddenly the three not on the telephone realized the ending conversation had taken on a different pitch. They all listened.

Sky was saying, "Everyone else knows. I haven't said anything before because I haven't seen you in near a month or more. How in the pinche hell would I know why you don't know Lourdes is pregnant. I even know it's a girl because those campers that cured your dogs of the mange had taken her to a doctor for a check up and had one of those test run so they would know to save up boys or girls clothes for it. Yes, this is true". Sky said something about second thoughts as the sound of his voice was drowned out by a loud tractor going by at the same time a vendor calling out his wares from a loud speaker on top of the car passed the opposite way selling brooms, mops and dusters in every brilliant color. He motioned to

America and gave the telephone back to her with a look of here you handle this.

“Why do you think Lourdes didn’t tell me about the baby? I had no idea, I knew she was keeping a secret but I never guessed. When did you hear this, did she tell you?” O’henry rapidly questioned America.

“I thought you knew about the baby. You haven’t been spending all your nights at home and she’s suspicious of you again, maybe that’s why”.

“I was drunk those times and passed out. I couldn’t drive. I can’t believe I’m the father of a baby girl, I’m so excited. I’m going to name her Marisol”.

“There’s your other woman in your life the Gypsy told you of”, she laughed. “You are going to have a daughter along with a house full of kids now so you better think about getting more for your songs than free drinks”. And with this last news the telephone conversation ended.

Once again the mellow Mexican morning took back over as the telephone conversation took second place and thoughts of the Ejido and the happenings there took back over. Everyone had gone outside to stand in the sun and watch the town on a Sunday. Spring was well advanced in this area of no freezes. The breeze blew up fresh from the ocean making the air slightly chilled and the sun was almost uncomfortably hot in some areas of the yard. The eucalyptus trees that dotted the neighborhood stayed green year round. The bougainvilleas were blooming in all their many colors and had spread themselves over rooftops and fences. Mocking birds ate the already ripening amaranth seeds. You could hear the noise of building going on in several directions and the sharp odor of melting tar for a roof job could be smelled. It had been a good visit with Clemente and Francisco and as they stood there near each other with the fence separating them from the street and life beyond, all were aware it was time to part and each accept their differences in where they now lived. They would return to the ocean and it’s beauty and America and her husband would stay here on their hill with their progress.

“Ya me voy Sky, es poco tardes”, said Clemente and the process began of gathering up garden goods and greetings and a last minute large bouquet of sweet peas for Doña Felicita. They would go back to the Ejido to Clementes family new home which was Americas old home. Knowing it wasn't right or legal to sell or rent the house and definitely not wanting it anymore, wanting to get rid of the whole mess completely, her husband had given the house to Clemente who now lived there with his wife and daughter, mother and father and Francisco. During the time it took Sky to move them to El Sauzal, Don Paciente was able to trade his yet undeveloped ocean lot for this smaller ocean lot with Americas house on it. During this time the officials of the Ejido did not know America and her husband were moving so they thought they were getting away with something sneaky in this arrangement and it was beyond undoing when Clementes family took full possession, they were unroutable now. It foiled the opposing sides plans and was a definite success.

America and Sky after having discussed all the events of the day so far and had worn out the subjects with trying to satisfy speculation, sat on their front porch in the shade where the view looked down the canyon and out over the harbor and the toll both to the north. Neither had said much for quite awhile now. They were listening to the sounds again of human life around them. Several tapes of ranchero music played from various houses and yards. America sat with her serape thrown over her legs. The deep green of the material was stripped with all colors, browns next to grays that darkened line by line then turned to green and suddenly into a pale pink deepening to a vibrant glowing pink and then four more stripes consisting of yellow orange red then purple next to a wide bar of blue. She sat there picking out colors in the view and comparing them to the serape. All the colors were in both places. A car was coming by with it's tape playing more of this music and could be heard distinctly the words of lost love, fast horses and bad liquor as it neared and slowed to make a turn. Everyone in this neighborhood listened to this type of music and Americas Reggae tapes blended well with the mood. About every hour or

so a traveling movie theater that had set up in the dirt lot that was designated for a park some day blared out it's trying to be tempting announcement of the movie for the whole family to come and watch Hollywood violence.

Basically it was like growing up and leaving home, leaving the Ejido and coming here. It had been a rough life but was rich in preparing for the real world, the real world of Mexico. America realized she was not a country person or a going back to the basics person either. Living in a town in Mexico was an enriching experience. With all the papers on property, business and all else straight, living within the rules set up for Mexicans and Americans, life had a smooth flowing mood to it. A not much changes, we are here to stay and we fit in well, sort of feeling. It was a well established neighborhood filled mostly with a few families spread out and around, a few fisherman, factory workers, laborers and a few who just ended up here.

The amount of car traffic always seemed way out of proportion for the two small dirt roads heading past Americas house for the houses on the back of the hill and the far side of the canyon. A lot of it was pick up trucks, very old cars and some very new cars. It made the feeling of the whole town being on the move, circulating. Few had phones and family and friends were nearby.

Another truck came by, past, then backed up and pulled up to the gate. America knew her Sundays had been set free for her when no moment of confusion hit on who was coming to do what bad deed. She and her husband both sat a moment or two longer in the security of their life here, in a half lazy silence before Sky said "I guess I better go see who it is, must be a customer, let's hope so".

America sat on. Sales of Skys inventions was something she stayed away from. Frequently if the customer were an American it would be a couple and her husband was extremely long winded with his sales pitch, history of his product, living here in Mexico and personal observations and this would lead to America getting involved in a conversation with the wife. This then would start off with the usual fascination that she

choose to live here, the wife would get friendly and inquisitive on her adventure into a Mexican neighborhood to spend a large amount of cash on a wooden box that produced ice from the sun for her kitchen needs. Then next would come the uncomfortable feeling that this nonconventional woman who dared to call herself America and didn't even buy her groceries in the United States or even miss it and read the weirdest books, how could she recommend Moby Dick or Kim, and to top it off not heard of any book on the top ten list, and from here the wife would lose her feeling of confidence in the purchase and in the long run the whole situation did not help the business. It seemed to America that these women thought it was all right to vacation here or live here in an American community for retirement, but to choose to live here not because it was cheaper but because it was thought of as better was not well accepted, it bordered on being offensive and untrustworthy. To live in the United States and talk bad about it is popular, to even leave it for another country for reasons, but to totally leave it, reject it and ignore it, not be in the know of it's ways, to not believe in it's superiority was going a little too far for them.

The voices drifted in from the shop as the sale was proceeding and America roamed about her house. It was so wonderful to live in this new brick home. It was solid as can be as the inside was done in Styrofoam encased in wire that was plastered over, known as a third world product. The windows were new with double panes. The object in life should be to live well and full and America got more out of life the nicer her surroundings were. All this new second hand furniture she bought in the large second hand districts of Ensenada made the house so livable, and it being second hand was not expensive to replace when something else was spotted she liked better or if the dogs got it dirty. It was a good feeling to have learned how to live poor, it made it more in balance when the time came that she could live with more finances. The house on a United States scale wasn't even worth mentioning, but here it was one of the nicer houses in view. Many people from the United States thought that going back to nature or

back to the basics was the answer to their searching for meaning in life, but heading backwards was never the right direction. America had learned to dislike excess. The overblown, overdone, unnecessary house the middle class American rambled about in matching colors and devising schemes and using credit cards, it had become inane and wasteful to her. There had to lay a happy medium and she seemed to have found this.

Sky suddenly stepped into the house to get a flyer on his latest invention and some business cards and she went to join him in the search to find where they had been misplaced.

“Who’s out there, are they here to buy something?”

“It’s those gavachos we met at Maluyas when the gypsy told the fortunes, remember?”

“That’s the second time the Gypsy has come up today. I do remember them, they were kind of nice. Here’s the flyers laid between these books. Will they be here long?”

“As long as it takes me to sell them something”.

By herself again America went into her kitchen to wash the beans she had picked. She filled the plastic wash tub with water from the faucet and added ten drops of bleach into this, put the beans in, set the timer for ten minutes and started to stir them in different directions. Old fashioned diseases existed here that did not in the more civilized world across the border. All food and water undertakings had to be dealt with seriously. It was your own fault if you were dumb enough to buy tainted water or risk eating standing outside on a street and catch some serious thing.

Sky came to the door again and called out, “All right if his wife uses the bathroom?”

“Of course, tell her to come in”.

Sky held the door open for the would be visitor.

“Hello, the bathroom is right over there, the blue door”.

“Oh, thank you”, she replied

“I’ve got to get back out, I love you” Sky whispered to American and he went back to his work.

Twenty minutes later Dave and Jane were sitting in the living room sipping coffee made along with a cinnamon stick.

They related their financial ups and downs and described new found friendships with Mexican neighbors. America noticed gone were the shorts with tee shirts, the husband had on Levi's and a white weave cowboy hat with a long sleeve blue cotton shirt and his wife was quite similar. They both found Mexico idealic and had had no bad experiences, discovered the people charming and everything interesting.

"We just rented a fenced in lot from the man who delivers the water to our house. We're going to build a home there. The water man has a big family and we feel like part of it, it's the back half of their property. He and I shook hands on the agreement and that's all I need. We have a place for life now. My wife is teaching his eleven kids English and we are going to be godparents to his next baby. He's going to get this real good paying job and we are going to do some improvements around the place and split the cost".

"I guess you know what your doing. I suppose it sounds like a good deal", Sky said trying to hide the doubt he was strongly feeling. "I remember how it was when we first moved here".

They looked at Sky for a further comment on this and realized that was all he had to say. America had the same thoughts in her mind as her husband, "they sure have a lot to learn". Would they stay on here in Mexico when it showed it's other side, as inevitably it would. Or would it just be an extended vacation and then back to the familiar United States. These nice unsuspecting Norte Americanos stood a good chance of loosing all they came here for. There are families out their that came from generations of taking extreme advantage of their American friends and working it like a business with no compuncions. Would they if this happened realize that this was just one sort of people and not throw other Mexicans into this category, learn and go on. Norte Americanos and their money are a prize catch and claim is staked on them. Meeting people had been a big part of the adventure here for America but as Mexico became familiar she realized she did not want to meet people or become friends, she just wasn't that type. The less she saw of people the better, she was content to be alone

with her husband and retain her more than friendship with Francisco and his family, visit the Indians for something special and leave it to hellos and how are yous for the rest. Being in Mexico, being a part of Mexico was enough, it was a good way to live, to ease into the flow of life here and make it yours. The makings of Mexico. The small unknown methods of Mexico. The big over-all system is one thing and it really takes some sort of an expert to explain it at all. Some one who knows about governments and nations can look down on the thing as a whole and state just what it is or isn't. But all the small incidents, the one time onlys, that when all added up add to nothing because nothing seems to add up here, that is what is the source of fascination and incredulity. It puts a new meaning to coincidence and law of averages, systems and methods. Even now, though many years have passed and many observations have been made she finds it hard to really grasp what did happen, what has happened here in this land.

America and Sky stood at the closed gate and were watching as the pick up truck with the Americans left down the hill trailing dust from the dirt road. Those in the right usually survive if they just persist, just hang on and never give up. If these people truly wanted a different way of life then that the United States offered they would have to learn of this countries fair share of faults and then learn to live with them.

"Did you notice how many times they asked if we missed the ocean? We seem to have lost some of our glamour with our move", said America as she still stood at her gate gazing up and down at the neighborhood.

"We could be sitting there next to the ocean right now, like we did for all those years, just like always. Living out there in the middle of nowhere, out in the country, being poor with no conveniences in a dead end situation with a great view. Why should I want to have stayed for that?"

America picked up the broom and swept at the drive way. There was a water leak from a pipe that ran too near the surface on the road and had a crack that leaked the water enough to cause a bog of mud outside the gate that for weeks now tracked in on the tires. "You know, I feel like I was a slave

to beauty. I fooled myself that their was a real home for us there. Those dozen years were like a spell, a long slow spell where I found myself. I was able to sort out was the American surface and what was me, that I was born with, not acquired afterwards”.

Sky took the broom from her hands and tried to get some of the dried mud off the red bricks of the driveway. “I know what you mean. It took a long time to shake off that American attitude towards life. That pinche water pipe has been broken for a month at least, it’s got mud everywhere”. He took the broom handle and tried to break up a large hunk that had fallen off the Mercedes wheels. “At least the car is getting an undercoating and the dust can’t come in. There’s an advantage to near everything”.

America shook her head as she looked at this clay like mud that was threatening to take back over the driveway and then at her shoe realizing she had stepped in some of the wet. “I knew I was different, but not until I had something to compare it to, like another culture, then I could see how different I was than those other Americans, the ones that form the group of they in our conversations”. She had taken the broom back. “This is useless, we need to put bricks out there in the road to stop this mud”.

“As soon as we do they’ll repair the leak and it will be a wasted effort”. Sky started to walk back over to the house. Several horses with riders went by and all the dogs went into a barking frenzy that could not be calmed with words. An old Ford Galaxy was coasting down the hill to save gas with it’s tape deck on full blast with another Ranchero song.

“But still it was a good time, a truly good time, and a major education of Mexico and even more so of life”.

“We could never have moved here like this in this town when we first got here, it would have been to foreign and we never would have fit in. Two memories of the Gypsy brings back a third. Remember the curious snow mountain in the sun? That’s your sun power captured to make ice and this hill here is the mountain. I wonder what she would have said if she had told my fortune?”

“She did seem to have a certain amount of accuracy didn’t she. I was so ready for this move ”.

“We were ready, ready for a different life. And a move to town. In this short year and a half here the ease of city living has come over me. It’s so nice to call a doctor, no more near death illnesses because it’s too hard to get to their office, no more running out of drinking water and no more trying to get enough gas to go get gas”.

“So much has changed, life is easy when you get yourself in the right situation”. Sky stopped on his slow walk back to the house to kick at the mud built up on the new tire of his casi nuevo truck. It was a lot of work to keep it’s gleaming red exterior somewhat free of dust and Sky was proud of it. Fortunately the house was on the side of the street that didn’t have the dirt from the road puffing up and drifting all over every time a car came by. “Some people might say we live in a third world house in a third world neighborhood in a third world reality, you know that”, and he laughed.

They both paused when they passed the staked off area that would become a small home some day for Americas parents to retire in and finally make their last escape from the United States. She missed her parents and knew they weren’t happy living in a rapidly crumbling nation, a country beginning it’s death throes and already smelling of rot. Sky put his arm around her and gave her a light kiss.

“The way business is going it won’t be long before they’re down here safe with us too”, he said and hugged her again.

Sitting on the couch having the last cup of coffee for the day, thinking and feeling about her life, as she had been all day, America sat up straight watching Sky out of the corner of her eye. He had emptied his pocket and was counting his money, making piles of each type. She listened to him complaining that he thought he had more hundred dollar bills and then found one among the tens and became happy again. She watched and thought. “I thank the order of the universe that I have a husband that loves me, what an empty place it would be to live it alone, I think it takes two to face this. I’m in love, married and enjoying the moment as well as the past and

future". This is what she sat there thinking. It made America feel old fashion to believe so in her part as a wife and it was good to be in a country were it is the way and not just a fashion, old or otherwise. Being with Sky was like being complete.

America stretched and knocked the atlas off the end of the couch that was balanced on top of a stack of books scaring Chapo who gave her an annoyed look and then forgave her with a wag of his near hairless tail.

She paused before picking it up to rattle the tape deck as her favorite Reggae tape was finally wearing out. It was nice to know that she would not have to wait for fate or luck to bring her another one, she would take Skys well earned money and buy another tape deck or even possibly one that played the shiny lazer disc. This thought sent a feeling of success, almost exhalation through her as at the same time she noticed the atlas on the grounds page was open to Mexico.

"Look at this, doesn't it look inviting. I sure hope the time comes soon when we can travel. There's all this to see still and I want to see it all". Gudrun jumped playfully on the couch to hide a piece of dog food behind a pillow for later and made the coffee slosh out of the cup a bit.

"The thought just occurred to me that with my business we could move anywhere there was no electric and refrigeration was needed. Look at this area right on the coast, right where this coffee is", Sky said pointing his finger to the coast of Nayarit. "How would you like to live right where that drop is?"

"Do you really think we could do something like that? Now that really is the real Mexico, Baja California is so near the border and what were trying to get away from."

And from here they sipped the last of their coffee for that day and dreamed of far away places and how they could move and have a way to make money and take all the dogs and Francisco too. Who knows what the future had in store, maybe only dreams. It was good she was satisfied with were she was at in case this was true.

This is Americas limited experience, she is a house wife and knows little about what goes on on this planet anymore. She mostly stays at home and mostly doesn't participate in the news or world around her. She tries to sort out the differences and picks what suits her, what does not compromise her. This is her own story and it has been worth the telling.

*THE END*

The Author was born in Santa Cruz, California and went to school in Venice Beach, California. She now resides in Mexico with her husband and mother and dogs since 1980.

It is Mexico in the late eighties. The story tells of the life and adventures of Sky and America Summersun along with their family of dogs and friends, in a small village on the Pacific Coast.

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"A real tumble-down house that sways with winds and rocks with the pounding of the surf. No two measurements the same and everything on it has a story behind it. Each small addition a major accomplishment in itself."

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"The dolphins are here often but it is always a thing to marvel at and the tunas adding their bright flash as they break free of the water for a moment is a gift to the senses from nature."

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Full of descriptions of the area and the people the author paints a vivid picture of her life and surroundings. The Spanish and English languages mix comfortably with each other in this tale. Simple and honest.