

## **THE REVOLUTION JOURNAL OF JESUS RODRIGUEZ**

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### The Hundred Year Search for Maria de los Angeles' Grandfather

#### **Chapter One      The End of the Beginning**

Jesus heard it first. An instant later the bullet pierced his black overcoat, leather vest and white shirt, then punched through his flesh. It grazed one of his ribs, shattered into pieces, and tumbled through his chest, cutting his heart into bloody chunks.

As he toppled from his horse, he wasn't aware at all that he had stopped thinking about his business meeting with Don Ramón Obregón later that afternoon in Ario de Rosales. He didn't realize that he no longer missed his wife, Dolores, who had been waiting for him that very moment in Casacuarán. He didn't notice his brother, Elias Rogríguez, tumble from his horse with the side of his face shot off. He didn't feel it when the two revolutionaries ran out from their hiding place in the bushes, stood over the two brothers in the middle of the dirt road, and fired several other slugs into their bodies. Neither could he resist when the revolutionaries dragged their bodies to the side of the road and pushed them down into the dark, uncaring water of the canal.

Elias rolled over three or four times down the bank before his lifeless body disturbed the choppy patterns on the surface of the canal and disappeared under the cold, clear rushing water. Jesus' body rolled once, caught on a protruding rock, and pitched to a stop with only his legs in the water. One of the *revolutionarios*, Bruno "El Veneno," lurched down the side of the canal and shoved Jesus with his foot. The body rolled down and came to a stop in the shallow edge of the water. Bruno stumbled down to the water's edge, booted

Jesus' body, and watched it glide out into the middle of the current before it sank suddenly into the water.

In less than a minute Jesus and his brother were dead and gone.

"Now those two *cabrones* know who controls things in Michoacán, eh, Mano?" El Veneno called up triumphantly to his brother who was firing his two Colt Walker .44s wildly in the air.

Bruno climbed back up to the road to savor the killing with his brother. Tiburcio had stopped shooting in the air and was slapping Bruno on the back.

"Those two *pendejos* are going for a little swim, eh?" Tiburcio joked with his brother. "That's the last time they'll ride into Ario thinking that they can come here where they don't belong. We don't want those *pinche pendejos* coming from Guanajuato with their crazy ideas about taking all the land we've gotten and giving it away to some poor *cabrones* who've got nothing to their names."

Tiburcio walked over to the side of the canal and called down to the two dead men at the bottom of the canal, "Hope the water's not too cold for you two *cabrones*... Ha-ha... ¡*Pendejos!* *Vámonos*, Bruno, let's get out of here, eh?"

The two men paused to reload and then holster their pistols. Bruno walked slowly to the two skittish chestnut mares that only a minute ago Jesus and Elias had been riding. He talked quietly to each of the animals as he took their reins and led them to where Tiburcio had already mounted and was holding the reins of Bruno's horse. As he walked with the horses, he eyed the Winchester rifle and the double-barrel shotgun holstered on Jesus' and Elias' saddles. Bruno mounted his palomino stallion, and the two brothers reined

their horses north towards home, where they knew their *señoras* would be waiting for them. The morning was still cold, and the sun had not yet appeared over the mountains to dissipate the heavy white ground fog. As Bruno rode, he wondered how he could get the two guns off the two horses before his brother made a move to claim them.

“¡*Hijole!* It’s cold this morning,” Tiburcio called to Bruno riding next to him.

“Ay... Don’t freeze your *huevos* off, brother, because you might need them when you get home, eh?”

Bruno laughed crudely at his younger brother, knowing that Tiburcio was having some difficulty satisfying his young wife’s carnal appetites. He had offered to assist his brother in these sensitive but pressing matters, take care of some of the matrimonial chores as he had told him, but Tiburcio had threatened to kill Bruno if he as much as looked at Amelia the wrong way. Bruno had backed off, but he was a patient man; he could wait if that’s what it took. After all, they had waited in the early morning darkness three hours there behind the trees and bushes by the bridge outside of town, both of them shivering, passing the bottle of *mezcal* between them to keep their spirits high. Tiburcio would complain every five minutes or so, take out his pocket watch to check the time, wonder out loud if Bruno could hear their horses yet, then threaten to get on his horse and ride back home where the fire and the sheets were warm. Bruno would just nod, tell his brother to be patient, wait, they would be coming soon, they would get their chance.

“Wha’ duh we do with the horses, Bruno?” Tiburcio called to his brother.

“We sell ‘em later this morning, *Baboso*,” Bruno called back, “but not here in Ario. We’ll sell them in *Pátzcuaro* after we eat. It’s too dangerous here. They don’t know us

there, and they don't know what's been going on here. We'll find someone to buy them. Look at those horses; they're healthy and young. We'll get some *billetes* for those two animals, eh? 50-50, right? *Vámonos, Hermano*. Let's go, Brother. I'm hungry.”

## Chapter Two      Cashing Out in Cuernavaca

Maria de los Angeles, Jesus' granddaughter, hadn't just shot anyone to death, and she wasn't going to sell two horses she had just taken from two unsuspecting men she had just ambushed, but she most definitely was trying to squeeze and leverage as much as she could out of a young couple looking under the hood of her 1978 flesh-colored Thunderbird. She noticed how the husband was pointing out to his bored but submissively attentive wife all the features he liked about the car—chrome wheels, leather roof and seats, V-8 engine, Continental-style spare tire in the trunk. Maria also had the feeling that he had come ready to buy: she noticed the husband touching the bulge in his back pocket nervously, and she wondered if he would part with enough of those sequestered bills to make both buyer and seller happy.

“You said eight-thousand *pesos*?” the man probed tentatively.

“Yes, and worth every *centavo*,” Maria de los Angeles replied confidently. “It's got a new motor, new brakes, and I just had it painted a couple months ago,” she added as if she were revealing an intimate personal secret.

The man stepped aside and started to confer discreetly with his wife, and Maria de los Angeles expected him to very quickly limp back imploringly with a low offer in the range of five or six-thousand. She was getting ready to shake her head disappointedly, stroke her chin pensively, and reply that she just couldn't go that low, that she already had put in a thousand-five to get it in the like-new condition he was appreciating, and that he couldn't find another T-Bird like it anywhere here in Cuernavaca, over in Acapulco or even up in D.F. She was also ready to go down to seven and no lower, sorry, that's it, good-bye and good luck. The man and his wife whispered back and forth at first, and their voices became louder

and more audible as they continued deliberating. Maria decided it was time to increase the pressure, tweak things a little.

“You know...” Maria started in. “It’s probably too much for your budget... Excuse me for a moment, won’t you? My neighbor, Beto, told me to call him if you decided not to buy the car. He wanted to come right over with the eight-thousand, but I told him I would wait to see if you wanted it. Excuse me please for a moment...” Maria de los Angeles moved in the direction of her telephone in the other room.

“Uh... excuse me, uh, I didn’t say we didn’t want the car... We didn’t say that, did we?”

The nervous man turned to his wife, and with a subtle and focused gesture of his head put his shocked wife on the spot by soliciting her active support right there in front of Maria de los Angeles. He immediately and gratefully traded her tacit OK for the nagging harangue she would inflict on him when they drove home in the car.

“We want the car, yes, we do,” he blurted out. “Will you take seven? It’s all we have.”

“Well, I don’t know if I can go that low,” lamented Maria, enjoying the play of desire, greed, tragedy and comedy embodied in the process of bargaining.

She had spent hours watching her older brother, Roberto, as he worked people over a period of hours, wearing them down with disappointment after disappointment until they would accept the lowest offer he had been ready and willing to make from the beginning. Yes, she had learned well from the master in the family.

The poor man pulled out his worn wallet, opened it so Maria could see its contents of faded blue, purple and pink twenty, fifty, and hundred-peso bills, and implored, “We only have seven.”

“All right, all right, done, you can take the car, but if you see Beto on the way out,” Maria implored, “please don’t tell him, OK? I’m sure you’ll like the car...”

Maria de los Angeles quickly plucked the stack of bills from the man’s still proffered wallet as she spoke, smiled at the man’s stern looking wife, and handed the man the two impressive keys to the car.

*Done. And I got my price too,* she thought.

She waved like an old friend a few minutes later as the couple backed out of her apartment parking spot, and she started to think about how she would use the seven-thousand for her trip to Idaho. Next, though, she would need to sell her apartment, maybe to her brother, Lalo, in Texcoco.

Things had been piling up in Mexico for too long. Maria de los Angeles and Emilio had been working with no salary for months now, sometimes reduced salaries, second and third hand IOUs for an anticipated time in a promised future when the money would flow down appropriate and contorted bureaucratic channels from the remote and fabled government treasury. They had had it. How could they keep their kids in private school with money they were earning everyday 8 to 5 but which had yet to materialize.

“Oh, yeah, Maria, sure, Emilio, it’ll be here next month, for sure,” the district managers would commiserate.

“Forget it, You’re idiots to keep working for nothing, for salaries we haven’t received for five months,” their ex co-workers would advise.

During the late 1990s both Emilio and Maria de los Angeles had seen their colleagues and friends surrender to the ongoing degeneration of the Mexican economic and social situation. Neighbors would disappear, and the subsequent gossip was always the same: they sold everything and went to the U.S. Co-workers wouldn’t show up for work, and after a few days the rumor would circulate throughout the building that they were looking for work across the border. Each time someone would disappear, whether secretly or with good-bye parties at the office, Maria and Emilio would lose a bit more of their characteristic and precious tenacity and confidence. After all, it wasn’t just their intelligence, passion, and affability that won them positions of responsibility and power in the state government’s agrarian reform efforts. It was the government bureaucrats’ willingness to pay them more and more for doing such good work for them. But now even the upper level bureaucrats were looking over their shoulders, using their expense accounts more than usual, getting ready for something unexpected, siphoning off into their own emergency caches the money that Maria, Emilio and thousands of other mid-level workers were earning and awaiting. They weren’t stupid though, neither the bureaucrats nor ultimately Maria or Emilio.

So it was, on a characteristically spring-like Cuernavaca morning, with parrots and mockingbirds singing in the tall tops of the swaying bamboo, on the Saturday after Maria de los Angeles and Emilio had received their official-looking, stamped-with-a-gold-seal, multi-signed IOUs for the eighth time in a year, over what would be their last coffee and Danish pastry at Vivaldi, their favorite coffee shop, that they decided to accept the ongoing invitation from Maria de los Angeles’ younger brother, Jaime, to go North, to

the fabled North, to the land of opportunity, to jobs, to health benefits and insurance, to security, to a consistent and strong government, to Idaho, to the healthy and growing economy of the capital, Boise and its expanding suburbs, in this case, Meridian, where Jaime and his family had struggled to put down roots for five years.

It had been two weeks since that day, since the bitterness of the coffee, the melancholy of the birds' melodies, the finality of their decision, and their strange awareness of how out of place they seemed there sitting among the restrained upper middle-class men, their overly animated, colorfully dressed ladies, and their lively but well-mannered children. The lilt of European classical music and the smiles of immaculately uniformed, attentive waiters who happily offered to bring them more of whatever they wanted had driven Maria and Emilo out of the popular coffee shop, across the street, and down into the sprawling central market where for the rest of the morning they had strolled aimlessly while talking out the details of their inevitable departure. They now sat relaxing in the living room of their cramped apartment discussing the progress of events.

“Did you find anyone interested in buying the apartment yet, Emilio?”

Maria cooed in his ear. She massaged his shoulders as he sipped his tequila. She had bought a bottle of Don Julio Reposado to celebrate selling the T-Bird, and she hoped he had some similar good news. Emilio had been approaching everyone he knew. His business partners in Baja told him the jojoba crop had not been as good as expected, that they just couldn't afford living so far from the fields and processing plant by Ensenada. His old friends from the Colosio days didn't return his calls; they were still bitter and disillusioned about the 1994 murder of the popular PRI presidential candidate. Emilio was there supposedly protecting him at the rally in TJ, and they still blamed him for his untimely

assassination right there on the stage in front of the world. No, they'd never buy his apartment. He also probed without success for responses among his government colleagues in the regional forestry offices all around central Mexico where he regularly traveled and consulted with local leaders and political bosses about protecting the rapidly deteriorating Mexican environment while they were at the same time utilizing the timber, land and water to make and pocket quick but not too questionable profits.

“Get me some more limes,” Emilio requested, “will you, Honey?”

Emilio didn't want to interrupt the undivided and complete attention he was getting at the moment. He anticipated relaxing with the smooth tequila, letting Maria de los Angeles tease and flirt with him in her confident and purposeful way, and later marvel at how aggressive and voracious Maria could be when she was satisfying herself, wondering if other forty-five-year-old women were as hungry and focused in their sensuality as she was. He liked to make love with her – hard and serious love, verging on desperate, needy love, right here and now love, no questions asked love. He was thinking about how it would be, hoping it would be as he remembered it was last week when he had taken her abruptly on the balcony, when she came back from the kitchen with more limes and a salt shaker and interrupted him with the same question.

“Any luck with the apartment, Emilio? You know I sold the T-Bird today! Isn't that great? I played with the poor guy and his wife, but I finally got the seven thousand out of him, cash. Look at all these bills...”

She took the bills out of a small wooden box on the coffee table and handed them to Emilio. Maria would take the wrinkled, grimy well-used bills down to *Banca Serfin* tomorrow. She would stand in line with middle-class businessmen who casually dangled

green or beige leather money envelopes as they conferred disdainfully on their cell phones with unseen but apparently important people; with rich women her own age whose stretched-taut and aloof faces shone like marbled alabaster because of their eagerness and confidence in their particular favorite plastic surgeon; with nervous North American tourists with their requisite shorts, sandals, and straw hats; and with working people from the surrounding neighborhoods, dirty men smelling of old sweat, tired women carrying whining and fidgeting children, spent people, resigned to accepting fewer pesos than they knew they deserved, quiet, people dark like the bitter espresso the rich women would gossip and complain over when they left with their comfy and satisfying stash of hundreds and two-hundreds tucked away carefully in their small, snapped-shut patent leather bags.

Maria herself would soon enough be taking the dollars she would get in exchange for her pesos after the next woman in line finished recounting each and every bill the clerk gave her; she would be handing over her precious green twenties into the strange hands of never-before-seen gringos who would sell her and Emilio airplane tickets, snacks, newspapers and coffee. They planned to fly from Mexico City to Tijuana; they would take a taxi across the border to San Isidro and then to the airport in San Diego. Emilio only had a limited U.S. visa that allowed him to go as far as San Diego and no farther; he and his business partners had done good business in San Diego in the past with their jojoba oil. He had no green card like Maria, and he did not have the foresight to be born in the States as did their children (Maria had the foresight to be visiting her sister, Elvira, in California when she gave birth to her two daughters.). From San Diego they all would take a domestic flight directly to Boise where Jaime would pick them all up – Maria and their four little ones, all in the U.S. as legal residents, and Emilio, the farthest north he had ever been, desperate and

now illegal. Jaime would drive them the easy twenty freeway minutes to an old veteran, rundown two bedroom house he rented next to the mint fields where he worked four of the ten hours a day that allowed him to support himself, his wife, his two sons and one daughter, and any other family member who wanted to venture North from Mexico to try his or her luck with the American Dream. Maria and Emilio were ready to bet everything they had on it.

“I think we should go with one of those U.S. real estate companies, Honey. I’ve seen a lot of traffic going in and out of... what is it? I think it’s a Century Twenty-One office, down below the tracks over by the freeway exit. It’s just that none of my friends are interested right now. Things are too tough now, you know...” Emilio lifted the small shot glass Maria had just refilled for him and tossed the smooth, incandescent liquid into his mouth with a backwards jerk of his head. Maria nodded her head and sipped her tequila as Emilio shook more salt on the half a lime he was sucking on.

“I’ll call them tomorrow, and we can see what happens, OK,?” Maria de los Angeles suggested, eager to move ahead with their plans to sell everything and relocate in Idaho. She was the acknowledged but unheralded expert at taking care of details, calls, errands, little bothersome things that made larger important things happen, and Emilio knew it. Within a week their apartment would be up for sale, and hopefully within a short time, they would be in front of the *Notario Publico* signing documents and counting out two-hundred-peso bills. Cuernavaca was far enough north, far enough away from *la frontera*, that is, that business was still conducted exclusively in pesos. Many areas of Mexico now had adopted not only bilingual commerce but also a dual money standard, pesos and dollars. In southern Baja, for example, where northern investment and tourism dollars flowed in like

welcome rainfall, not only did all merchants speak excellent Spanish and English, but they would also be most happy to take your pesos or your dollars and give you correct change for either. If there ever was a good example of how valuable it is to be bilingual in Spanish and English, it would be in being able to accurately count out dollars in Spanish, “*Ciento cincuenta mil, ciento sesenta mil, ciento setenta mil...*” or in English, “One-hundred and fifty thousand, one-hundred and sixty thousand, one-hundred and seventy thousand.”

Back in 1912, Bruno and his brother, Tiburcio, would have been counting *en puro español* if they had taken the opportunity to look in Jesus Rodríguez’ coat pocket after they shot him because Jesus had been carrying enough pesos to jointly fund a business partnership that would have taken him up into the U.S. had he not been killed. He was going in with Don Ramón Obregón, a successful entrepreneur there in Ario de Rosales, meeting with this local power broker to discuss how to best utilize their pooled capital to take advantage of the increasing flow of commerce through Michoacán in central Mexico, across the border at El Paso, Texas, and into California. The Mexican Central Railroad passed through the capital at Morelia, and both Don Obregón and Jesus were sufficiently astute and experienced to know that opportunity was calling, and that there was money to be made during the passion and chaos of the revolution in the movement of people and products between the north and the south.

Poor Mexican workers displaced from their lands by large insatiably acquisitive hacienda owners all over Mexico during the Porfiriato of the 1910s were heading north by train to work on those very railroads as construction and maintenance workers, to labor in the mines in northern Mexico, to toil in the agriculture of Southwestern United States, and to illegally replace the hundreds of thousands of Chinese and other workers excluded by the

Exclusion Acts of the 1880s. Jesus was planning to invest his savings in his personal future and in the future of Mexico. He wanted to be in the most advantageous position to benefit from the reconstruction when the revolution eventually quieted down. Bruno and Tiburcio were just doing their work the way they knew best, the job their compadres from Salvatierra had elected them to do.

*Kill those cabrones dead. They're just coming over to Michoacán to stir up trouble, take our land and give it away, the land we took with our own hands and blood... Make sure no one sees you do it. Dispose of the bodies. Don't fail, compadres!*

People said that no one ever found the bodies, and no one ever did find the waterlogged and bloodstained bundle of twenty-thousand pesos that floated away down the canal in Jesus' coat pocket.

Maria would make sure that the pesos she would change into dollars and carry secretly sewn into her dress with her into the United States would not get lost, would not get stolen, would not be forgotten or go unused like so much of Mexico's best resources had been, like Jesus Rodríguez and his money, like Maria de los Angeles and her co-workers, like all the eager and strong Mexicans who ever fled their homeland because there just was no place for them to put down roots, grow and flourish at home.

### Chapter Three Jesus' Plan

It wasn't until Jesus Rogríguez left his home town of Casacuarán and began venturing north that he realized how lucky he was to have been born fifteen years before the turn of the twentieth century. Since 1582 Casacuarán had been a thriving village in El Bajío, the wide agricultural lowlands of Guanajuato in the demographic and political heart of Mexico. Neighboring towns that 328 years later would be the centers of patriotism and revolution drew him – first to Celaya, then to Querétaro, the capital, to Dolores Hidalgo, then farther north to San Luis Potosi, Ciudad Juárez, Monterrey, Zacatecas, and Chihuahua. Jesus visited them all, usually to the *cantinas* for a *trago* of local tequila while he listened to each drinker's viewpoint on how close Francisco Madero had come to being elected when that *cabrón*, Porfirio Diaz, rigged the election and arrested Madero. On Saturday afternoons in the parks where people met to cool off, he would ask the men waiting for their boots to be shined whether they thought Madero's Plan of San Luis Potosi could rally the country sufficiently to overthrow Diaz.

Jesus hungered to trek to San Antonio to talk with the exiled Madero himself, but going to Texas to speak with the self-proclaimed President of Mexico was out of the question at the time. Madero had already seen his call to revolution fail. Later he had found himself proclaimed President by Emiliano Zapata's revolutionaries. Then he had tried to placate and moderate Emiliano's zeal with a prime piece of land and a *hacienda*, but this was just the kind of payoff that Zapata himself was fighting to eliminate. First, an alienated Zapata in the south, and then in turn Villa and Orozco in the North turned their backs on a powerless and ineffective Madero. Finally, with the support of the United States government, General Huerta shot Madero to death supposedly while Madero was trying to escape from

prison. Jesus increasingly began to realize as he traveled a wider and wider radius around Casacuarán just what a brutish time it was in Mexico. In spite of what he had heard and seen Diaz doing to modernize the country, he couldn't ignore the inescapable fact that the way he had done it had stoked a nationwide resentment that only the violence and destructiveness of the revolution would assuage.

Porfirio Diaz had been President of Mexico since 1876. He had inherited foreign debts and unfortunately empty federal coffers to fulfill those international obligations. The governmental bureaucracy was huge with bloated salaries. Mexico had an international credit rating that was just as terrible as its reputation, and it was importing more than it was exporting. Mining was antiquated, dangerous and not producing the mineral resources needed by a modern industrializing country. The major port of Veracruz was hazardous, and most believed it should be abandoned. Agricultural technology was backwards and dated from colonial times. Mexico City was inundated regularly by flooding, and the dual epidemics of banditry and disease ravaged the country and made travel perilous.

Jesus himself had recognized that Diaz had implemented and carried out plans to industrialize and modernize Mexico. Since his childhood in the 1890's, Jesus had seen the fresh water supply and drainage system around Casacuarán improve as well as the main road that passed by from Celaya to Yuriria. He had heard about the railroad line from the capital to El Paso, Texas, as well as the one crossing the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, but he would have to wait several years to ride on either of them. Many of his friends' fathers had gone to work in the mines which by 1908 were producing 40 million *pesos* in gold and 85 million *pesos* in silver. He had heard the talk, both positive and negative, about the Americans and British

who had been pouring in to modernize Veracruz and the capital and to capitalize efforts to discover and tap the enormous oil fields beneath Mexico.

What young Jesus hadn't yet noted was how the country was becoming less and less internally isolated, how Mexico's vast agricultural lands were opening up to cultivation and production through burgeoning construction of roads and railroads, how the increased availability of raw materials in populated areas spurred new businesses and new construction, how in 40 years foreign trade had increased from 50 to 488 million *pesos*, and how the rush of economic and industrial growth fed by foreign investment had also infused the country with appealing ideas of scientific development, a Mexican cultural identity and progress into modernity. As he continued though to travel closer to the frontier, closer to the United States, Jesus could begin to look back over the previous twenty or so years and catch himself seeing a Mexico much different than the Casacuarán that had formed him several years before.

Just a few months before Bruno and Tiburcio had killed Jesus, Don Ramón Obregón had been sitting across the table from him in Pátzcuaro. Jesus had been insistent on meeting and talking with Don Ramón; he had written him several times with no answer, so finally he had ridden two days from Casacuarán to the picturesque little town on beautiful Lake Janitzeo to find him and invite him to sit down and discuss business with him. Since Jesus had no business reputation to speak of in the area, he thought that Don Ramón would be sufficiently impressed at his persistence that he would agree to meet with him. He did.

At Jesus' invitation they had met finally for lunch at his favorite little restaurant in town where they could eat, drink and discuss business under the wide portal of an old sagging wooden building without anyone eavesdropping on their plans. They had ordered

beef soup, tongue tacos, and a plate of the little fried white fish from the lake across the road. The owner's daughter brought them ice cold *horchata* in tall glasses, and as he sipped his sweet rice drink and waited for the midday meal, Don Ramón listened intently to the ideas that a still very alive Jesus was proposing. He wanted to hear everything this young eager man had to say about how much he thought they could make by investing and using some of the new inventions the *americanos* were producing in The United States and already bringing down to Mexico.

“Eh, Jesus, like you say, we could invest in some of those new diesel tractors that they're making up in Chicago. I think you're right. Maybe bring down one of those steam turbines or some gasoline engines... You said they have portable lumber milling machines we could get too?”

The closer to the border Jesus had ventured on his regular trips the more intensely he had probed and tried to find out which industrial products people were investing in. In Monterrey he had bought drinks for a couple of fellows who unloaded cargo off the trains that came in from Laredo, and what they told him they had been hauling shocked Jesus: someone was already bringing in regular shipments of big electric motors, ball bearings, roller bearings, diesel and gas motors—really large ones, carloads of aluminum and steel stock, huge rolls of wire... In Chihuahua he saw with his own eyes scores of freight cars arriving from El Paso: there were caterpillar tractors on flatbed trains, incredibly huge monstrous machines that he later learned were turbo generators that had just been invented a few years before, boxed up gas welding outfits, stacks of steel rails, car after car of railroad ties black with creosote, sheets of iron, and... oh, yes, and bottle making machines. He couldn't remember everything, nor did he recognize everything he was seeing.

Don Ramón Obregón had land. His family had had the same land since 1530 when Nuño de Guzmán, one of Hernán de Cortez' close companions and fellow soldiers, seized possession of all the Purépecha motherland from the last indigenous king of what is now Michoacán. He barbarously killed King Tanganxoan II in the then capital of Tzintzuntzan, cut off his head, and then he burned it to illustrate clearly for the Purépecha people the new direction of the line of royal succession. Nuño de Guzmán is said (by self-appointed Obregón family historians) to have given vast tracts of forested mountain lands south of the capital (in what is now the area around Ario de Rosales) to an unnamed Obregón family progenitor for reasons that contemporary family members say range from valor in fighting off a Purépecha attack on Guzmán's personal entourage, to single-handedly saving Guzmán from drowning in Lake Pátzcuaro.

The pine trees that had swayed and whispered with the winds that blew across the Sierra Madre mountain range for hundreds of years on what Don Ramón says is still his family's land, quiet sentinels that had witnessed the appearance and inevitable passing of both the Purépechas and the Españoles, the most giant of all living beings inhabiting the surface of the earth, were now being cut down methodically by determined teams of men pairing up on wickedly sharp two-handed pull saws, and in their passing were bringing hundreds of thousands of pesos into the strong boxes and bank accounts of Don Ramón and his family. He had established a productive and lucrative furniture factory in Ario where a hand-picked group of local designers, artisans, and crafts people produced the finest of household, business and ecclesiastical furniture for the *haciendas*, buildings and churches where the cultural elite, the *políticos*, the churchmen, the intellectuals, the landed *hacendados* and wealthy foreigners alike sat, smoked the locally produced and very popular

América and La Emperatriz cigarettes and cigars, and drank Mexican brandy, made mutually profitable business deals, complained and bargained with God, ate lavishly the foods that their Indian servants cooked, slept soundly, and reproduced their own kind. All the while these power and profit-dizzy merchants kept themselves insulated from the depredation and exploitation of the indigenous peoples whose very lands produced those precious and noble pine trees that had been seized from them by a new and invincible force that the Spanish Conquistadors epitomized and that the industrializing and modernizing forces of the 20th century Mexican middle class sought to emulate.

Jesus saw that Don Ramón was enthused and eager to bring down machinery he could use to update his lumber operations and furniture factory— tractors to move felled trees down off the mountains to the Rio Tacambaro or the Rio Tepalcatepec; water powered electrical turbines to electrify his milling operations, portable lumber mills to rough cut huge tree trunks more quickly, with more precision and more economy; powerful gas and diesel engines to power all the operations that had heretofore been man, horse and water driven; large gas powered planing machines, extra-wide belt sanders and multi-bit drill presses; and steam powered gluing presses for door production. Don Ramón was already taking notes about how many of this and how many of that, what it would cost if and when, and how he could facilitate the acquisition and hasten the arrival of these modern miracles. He was happy with what he anticipated would be the profits his furniture business would realize, and he was favorably impressed with Jesus' ideas and suggestions.

*I like this young man*, he thought to himself. *I need this fellow too*, Don Ramón acknowledged tacitly as he nodded his head encouragingly at another of Jesus Rodríguez' suggestions.

After an hour of animated talking, listening and eating, Don Ramón and Jesus realized that they had come to the end of their food and their meeting. They both began to go through the expected motions of maneuvering to see who could pay the bill by actually getting possession of it first. Jesus had previously told the owner privately that he wanted to have the bill brought to him, but when Don Ramón caught her eye and with a nod of his head indicated that it was time to settle up and leave, the owner conveniently forgot and brought the bill to the more affluent appearing of the two.

Jesus grabbed for the bill before the owner even had a chance to put in on the table, but Don Ramón countered with, “What’s wrong, Jesus, my money’s not good enough?”

“No, no, Don Ramón,” Jesus entreated, “It’s just that I invited you to eat, so it’s right for me to pay for the food.” After a few exchanges of mock indignation and feigned offense, Jesus yielded to the businessman’s desire to appear to be the more generous of the two and ended the contest with, “I appreciate the lunch and your time, Don Ramón. Thank you. Let’s set up another time to meet to discuss this further.”

It was that “another time,” a few months later, when Jesus and his brother, Elias, were riding back into Ario de Rosales that Bruno and Tiburcio ended this budding business partnership with a 44. caliber slug to the heart.

## Chapter Four Business in Casacuarán

It wasn't until Maria de los Angeles sold everything she had struggled and worked for, wrenched up her family roots from their ancient Mexican earth, abandoned the oasis of Cuernavaca, the city of eternal spring, like the Mayas mysteriously deserted their majestic jungle civilizations, and journeyed on the strength of her faith and will north to Idaho that she realized how lucky she was (like her grandfather) to have been born forty-five years after the turn of the century. Her grandfather, Jesus, had ventured north as his world shifted from the nineteenth century and accelerated into the twentieth. She had never met him, but she remembered well everything her mother, Angelina, had told her and her younger brother, Jaime, and younger sister, Elvira, about him.

“Oh, *Hija*, he was always gone on some trip... We never knew where, you know. I was young, and my mother was there with us on the rancho. She would say he was away on business, and that was that. We didn't worry, you know, *Hija*, because she was always there, and she loved us so much. You remember how she was, don't you, after she moved from Casacuarán to live with us?”

“Yes, Momi, she was so beautiful and elegant, she didn't stoop when she walked, and she always was so calm, she never got angry, right?”

Maria and her sister, Elvira, had spent many months with Dolores when she lived in their house with their eight other brothers and sisters. Later she had moved into her own house a few blocks away, but by then Maria de los Angeles had left home to attend the University in Mexico City. So, Elvira, the youngest, lived with her grandmother to keep an eye on her. She would arrive after school, help her grandmother water the avocado, papaya, mango, and orange trees, hose off the cement walkways, inoculate the little chicks Dolores



would raise and sell, do little runs to so-and-so's house for tortillas or *atole* or those delicious little fried enchiladas. At night Dolores would make just enough chicken soup for the two of them to eat along with a tea from the many herbs she cultivated in the large pots around the garden. Elvira loved to keep her company at night, listen with her to Kalimán on the radio, listen to her stories of the *ancianos* there in town watch quietly as Dolores walked quietly

around the garden saying her silent prayers.

But that was after the time of Jesus, after he had been dead many years, long after people stopped wondering why Dolores had never gone to Ario de Rosales to find out if the rumor about his death by some bridge outside of town was true. It was true, of course, but she preferred to preserve the memory of him being away on one of his trips north, soon to come back, and then too soon to depart again. Later she didn't talk about him much after those men drove them away, seized their hacienda in Casacuarán and divided it up among themselves. After that she came to live with the youngest of her six children in Yuriria, with Angelina, Maria de los Angeles' mother, the mother of Maria's other ten brothers and sisters. But that's part of Elvira's story recounted before at another time.

Like most people in small turn-of-the-century Mexican villages like Casacuarán that emerge from the ground as a hopeful new green shoot that needs regular rain to survive,

Jesus and Dolores had established a small unassuming commercial venture in their house. Over a period of several years it would grow to become an established business upon which the entire community depended. The success of their home business brought them a much-needed increase in their income. In addition, it catalyzed a course of events that would alter their own relationship and their family's destiny far into the twentieth century and into the second millennium.

Some of the other villagers survived by making and selling fresh cheese from the goat milk their few animals gave daily, while a few made the traditional drink that everyone drank, *atole*, from the ground corn that they cooked for hours over wood fires. Two families turned out dozens of tortillas a day that sold out quickly still warm and soft during the early morning hours at their doorsteps. Two blocks over from Jesus' house one family wove cloth from local wool, dyed it on long elegant wooden frames they stood on end in front of their houses, then sold the dark red, blue and purple *rebozos* that women had been wrapping around their shoulders for hundreds of years to keep warm. Jesus and Dolores bought sweet bread from their favorite of several families who brought it over from the bakeries of Salvatierra in basket saddlebags that hung down on both sides of their tired old burros.

The unkempt Martínez children delivered a few dozen chicken eggs to their few regular customers including Jesus, and Señor Vega's beautiful but ill-tempered daughter trudged daily to the other side of town to leave off the dozen or so eggs that their ducks obligingly presented each day with one Señor Buenavista who had been attempting to court Soñia through the fragile and infertile medium of duck eggs for more than four years. The Peña's sold basic stationary like paper, pencils, erasers, and some writing tablets; and the Sosa family maintained a minimal selection of ribbons, threads, needles, pins, scissors and

cloth sold off the bolt. The Zavala family sold lots of Coca-cola, mineral water and Modelo or Pacifico beer in an antiquated upright refrigerator they kept in the *sala* close to their front door.

Everyone in town brought the business of their hunger to the Piña family. Señora Piña and her two enormous daughters put together the most delicious little tacos and enchiladas and sold them out of the low window in the front of their house—deep fried delicacies filled with brains, tongue, *carnitas*, or beef accompanied by fried potatoes, tiny little green chilies that blistered going in and coming out, and little squat bottles of thick grape flavored *Chaparitos*. Aromatic steam and fried smoke would start to pour out of their window around eight at night, and if a person was early or lucky, he could pick up one or two of their delectable hot sandwiches layered with thinly cut steak on white crusty *bolillos* fried in sizzling lard.

Jesus would have to stoop very low to enter the front door of the old widow woman who lived in the oldest stone and adobe house in town. She would invite people in with some formality, and they would follow her steps back through the house's undisturbed secret garden of fragrant roses and jasmine into her small dark primordial kitchen where what was left of the sunlight that persevered through the small door revealed everything in the kitchen as the same burnt brown color of chocolate. She made it by hand, a mixture of ground cacao and almonds, cinnamon, sugar, and eggs formed into dark little rounds by eighty-five-year-old fingers that left their unintended print marks in each piece she would mold. Whenever Dolores or Jesus would drop in when la Señora was actually blending the chocolate, the old widow would offer her *comadre* or *compadre* a steaming cup of hot

Mexican chocolate with a chunk of white bolillo bread to dunk and scoop up the bitter-sweet drink of their Aztec ancestors.

It wasn't by choice, chance or force of will that Jesus and Dolores had been so successful in their little home business. They started accommodating neighbors by selling their surplus kitchen staples—a few eggs, a handful of sugar, scoop of lard, some beans, salt, a few matches, whatever they had left over that someone came by to ask for. The few centavos these small sales brought in over time motivated them to sit down one evening after they had accommodated six or seven neighbors that afternoon.

“Jesus, do you think we could just buy extra things, you know, more than we actually use, so we could plan on selling the leftovers to the neighbors and know that we would have the extra money? I think it's a good idea,” Dolores would always add.

Jesus was no fool, and he did not pass up an obvious opportunity to earn an honest *centavo* or *peso*. He had a mule, and he decided to utilize the lethargic animal to the fullest potential that he could imagine.

*I'm going to load up that mule next week when we go to Salvatierra,* he thought, *with as many staples as I can. Why not bring as much as I can since I'll be going there anyway?* he ruminated as he envisioned the basket panniers bulging to overflowing out from the sides of the struggling mule. More leftover staples to sell to the neighbors meant more return on his weekly trip to Salvatierra. More staples and more profit.

It wasn't too long before Jesus was making two trips a week to Salvatierra. He rented one of his compadre's mules and began to make the two trips with two overburdened beasts of burden. It was convenient for Jesus' Dolores to let neighbors know that they had

more eggs or cheese or whatever it was in case they needed it, and it was equally convenient for neighbors to inquire about one, then another, then one other thing that they needed as soon as possible.

“Good day, Dolores, by any chance do you have any baking powder?” “Good morning, *Comadre*, would you be able to spare a few pins?” “Do you have some extra starch, Señora Rogríguez?” “Did Jesus bring any blue thread this week?” “Is it possible for your good husband to pick up a pair of scissors and six meters of white muslin for me?” “Has your *Señor* left for Salvatierra yet, Dolores? You know I really need more kerosene for my lanterns. Do you think he could...?”

And so it went very well for Dolores and Jesus. More kinds of products, more trips to Salvatierra, more mules, more neighbors dropping by to pick up something they needed or to leave off an order, more profit, more income, more success. Jesus converted the small *sala* inside and to the right of their front door where they usually received guests into an actual store. He and Dolores moved their furniture and pictures into the kitchen; they built shelves for the inventory; Jesus started a ledger with their expenses, purchases, profits, losses, and customer names and usual purchases; and Jesus put a secure lock on the strongbox he hid under the rug in a hole he dug in the dirt floor and reinforced with wood. Dolores would open for business right after sunup while Jesus would either tend their bean, chile, peanut, yam and corn fields or make the four-hour trip to Salvatierra and back. They would clean up and restock the shelves in the afternoon, count their *centavos* and *pesos*, enter the figures in the books, squirrel the money away in the concealed strongbox, and then leisurely cook and eat their evening meal together.

Most couples in Casacuarán defined their marital relationships by the abuse and anger they inflicted privately upon each other, and with the colorful and lurid tales they embellished publicly for their acquaintances, *compadres* and *comadres*, stories about their spouses' infidelities, stupidity, laziness, insensitivity, ugliness, body hair, moles, lack of libido and intolerable body odor. Dolores and Jesus were unlike the other couples in town, and they alone knew it. They saw and heard their neighbors; they commiserated with their *compadres'* complaints about their wives or husbands; their friends confided in them before they asked for advice about what to do to alleviate their misery. They had been around it all. But they were different. And they didn't like to be apart for more than a few hours. When Jesus started trekking frequently to Salvatierra to stock their store, he didn't need to tell his dear Dolores that he would be back home before the sun started to cast long shadows down the dirt road out of town. These two spirits had been increasingly one ever since they had married three years ago. Yes. She knew he would be back. He always was.

Jesus enjoyed the regular trips to Salvatierra, the business relationships he developed with the town merchants, the opportunities he had to learn more about the real differences between profit and loss in business, the interpersonal skills he learned to use with unreasonable suppliers and nagging customers, and the advantages of his increasing intelligence and understanding that surprised and pleased him as he discovered the larger world outside the physical and mental confines of Casacuarán. Even though he relished the physical and intellectual freedom he found in Salvatierra and the other larger outlying towns where he purchased the regular merchandise for his store and the special request items for specific customers in town, Jesus always allowed the truer vector of his heart to guide him back to his hacienda where he knew Dolores would be illuminating their house, the store,

and their lives with her devotion, patience and love. She was the center, the axle around which he revolved, like a wheel that circles out and back on a cyclic two-way trip, a movement forward that arouses both the axle and wheel forward into the unexpected challenges of unfamiliar territories and strong emotions.

Jesus had introduced into their relatively isolated focal point of commerce a treadle sewing machine (that no one knew how to use yet), a gas stove (used as a shelf until Jesus acquired a reliable gas supply), matches (one of the biggest sellers in Casacuarán), an early typewriter (which Jesus had appropriated for his own business correspondence), fountain pens (which only Jesus used since his Dolores never had the opportunity to go to school to learn reading and writing), and all sizes of metal cookware (for those who disdained the traditional clay ware). Jesus had even purchased and lugged back to home a brass cash register and an adding machine both of which they displayed in the front of the store and which gave their business instant prestige in the village.

Jesus also always had hidden away from public view several revolvers (.44 caliber Colt Walkers, .45 caliber Colt single-action army models, and the new .45 caliber Colt semi-automatic pistols that they were using in the war) and two or three Remington and Winchester rifles along with boxes of ammunition (all of which sold well but very discreetly considering the revolution was well under way by that time). It would be months later that two men who said they were from Salvatierra but whom Jesus did not recognize would arrive at Jesus and Dolores's store to purchase three of those Colt Walkers. They mentioned several of Jesus' compadres from Salvatierra and Casacuarán, and so Jesus had no reason to doubt their trustworthiness. It was Jesus' trusting nature and the subsequent sale of those three pistols though that would prevent him from living to regret opening the door to those

two men after Dolores had already closed and locked the store for the day. Jesus' courtesy and his desire to make one more sale merely meshed with the two men's solemn purpose that had been set in motion months before in another place far away and at odds with Jesus' optimism and plans for the future.

"That *cabrón*, Jesus Rodríguez, is supplying guns to his friends over in Casacuarán, those *pendejos* who are trying to take our land they say was their grandfathers and great-grandfathers. We'll teach him a lesson, eh, ha-ha!" Señor Chávez chuckled and lifted his glass and quickly threw the brandy down his throat. His *compadres* slapped each other on the back, tossed down their drinks, and poured more of the amber liquid into their glasses.

"My two sons here," Señor Chávez indicated for his two sons to stand up, "have agreed to put an end to this business and show those *pendejos* in that *pinche* town that the revolution reaches everywhere and touches everyone, eh, *Compadres?*"

The score of men applauded, raised their glasses and called out their support of Don Chávez' willingness to take the responsibility for an action they all themselves had been considering for some time. The two only sons of Don Chávez pushed back their chairs from the table and stood up. The one with the huge black drooping moustache turned to his clean-shaven brother, slapped him on the back good-naturedly, then turned back to the cluster of men. He waited for them to quiet down before he spoke.

"We are all *compadres* one way or another," Bruno started, "aren't we, my friends? You know me as the first son of Don Chávez here, and you have known him since before the time of Diaz, some of you since the time of Juarez, before I or my brother here, Tiburcio, were born. You remember, don't you, when all of you had land, your own land,

land for your own family, as much as you could take and work, when no one came around trying to take it back and give it away, saying that it didn't belong to us, as if they knew..."

The men started to call out, "Yes, yes, you are right, Bruno, we remember those good times, and your father was with us, weren't you, Chávez?"

"Ay, yes, I was," Don Chávez agreed, "and we are together now aren't we, my friends, and we will keep our land. We have the money to buy more land, and we should be able to do that. We have invested in these railroad and factories that are good for Mexico, and we should receive some benefit from our investment, should we not, compadres? These inferior men like that Zapata, men who try to change things by taking our land will be stopped; we will stop them before they go too far, before they take our land and our families. We must defend what is ours!"

Various men called out their opinions and were drowned out by each other. Chávez stopped, let them express their support, then motioned to Bruno to continue.

"You know, all of you," he paused again until the men looked at him and quieted down, "you know that these men say that we do not deserve the profits we derive from our investments because they say we do not work the earth or touch the water, but without our pesos that we invest, they have no work, they have no food, they have no future. We are the men who are building the economy, bringing progress, more factories, modern products, industrialization that provides jobs and a salary for these poor workers..."

One man called out for a toast to Bruno and his brother, and after each man had affirmed with a few quick words his understanding and support of the group's intention, the men filled Bruno's glass then all the other empty glasses around the table. Bruno continued.

“This man, Rodríguez, Jesus Rodríguez, is an enemy to us. He was born like us, in Michoacán, but he is no longer like us. He is going out to other places in the North where they hate Diaz, to bring back new ideas about redistributing the land to everyone, our land, the land we worked so hard to get and keep. I have heard that he is traveling to Morelos, and that is where that traitor Zapata is burning and destroying what our compadres there have worked hard to build up. Everyone wants sugar, and Zapata wants to burn the factories and destroy the rail lines. Do we want Rodríguez to bring those ideas here? No! Look now too, he has guns that he is offering secretly to his friends, only to those who agree with him, pistols, rifles, shotguns...”

The men interrupted Bruno with shouts, jeers, and vulgar insults to Jesus himself, to his wife, Dolores, and to all his family and future descendants. Bruno leaned back, savored his newly discovered power to sway people’s feelings, let the men continue with their outbursts, then raised his arms and smiled.

“He must be stopped, my friends, and my brother and I will be the ones to stop him, eh, Tiburcio?” Bruno slapped his brother on the back again, and while the two brothers smiled and absorbed the determination of their compadres and friends, their father, Don Chávez, leaned back in his chair and savored his victory.

Powerful local politician and his old-time *compadre*, Arnulfo Rosas, had asked him to do something about Rodríguez. He knew that if Jesus Rodríguez was not stopped soon, that he would become eventually the leader of the revolutionaries in the area, and that he would be a powerful and respected force to be dealt with. Better to strike now, he thought as he listened to his *compadres* give their supportive speeches in favor of their plan, better now and be victorious than wait and have to fight a larger enemy. Don Chávez listened to his

*compadres* and sons well into the night as they discussed the specifics of their plan before he stood up finally and thanked them all for coming. He shook each man's hand and watched each of his *compadres* and friends ride off to their homes. His sons too shook his hand proudly before they left for their homes a few blocks away.

*This is the beginning of the end for that Jesus Rodríguez, he mused to himself as he enjoyed the last half of his cigar. The stars are clear tonight, he considered to himself, and so is the purpose of our action.*

## Chapter Five     The Voice of Jesus' Journal

“Jesus, I can get you one of those newfangled bottling machines from Chicago,” the owner of Salvatierra’s general merchandise store tempted Jesus on one of his trips. “Or how about a refrigerator, an electric refrigerator? Someone will want it, and you’ll make a handsome profit on it... what do you say, my friend?”

“Just the box of zippers and dynamite this time, Fernando, thank you.”

Jesus enjoyed hearing what his business mentor and friend had to offer, either to acquire for Jesus wholesale or to just tell him about the new this and the just available that. If Jesus could justify buying one of whatever Fernando had to offer—either because he was sure he could sell it back in Casacuarán, because he thought Dolores would appreciate and use it, or because he himself wanted it—he would buy one, wait for it to arrive by train in Morelia and then by wagon in Salvatierra, then pick it up anxiously at the loading platform behind Fernando’s building, and cart it back to the store in his new four-wheel horse-drawn wagon to an excitedly curious Dolores or a waiting customer.

It was by means of these many regular trips to Fernando’s huge inviting store that Jesus’ curiosity began to increase and his intellectual understanding of the times sharpened. He was restless to know more, and it became less easy for him to disregard his feelings. He desired to go to the places where these many products he bought and sold were produced, to know the kind of people who discovered or created the ideas for the products first of all, the people who had the know-how to mass-produce them and who used their skill to sell and distribute them deep into Mexico and God knows where else in the world.

He could not yet find the way to discuss these feelings with Dolores, so Jesus had taken to writing down the ideas that came into his head and the feelings he carried in his heart. Most nights after he and Dolores had eaten, and she was cleaning up the kitchen, Jesus would take out his portfolio, sit at a small desk by the fire, and write with one of the fountain pens he had brought into his store from Salvatierra. He would write until Dolores would come in, pull up a chair and sit next to him by the fire, and ask him about his day. After he closed and put away his journal, he would discuss his and then her business that day, Jesus' trip if he had made one, the bean or chile crop, whoever had come in that day and what they had purchased, or what they needed to do the next day. Jesus was as yet unable to find a way to include Dolores directly in his innermost personal struggle, so he spoke from his heart when he wrote in his journal. The day Don Chávez delegated his sons to kill him, Jesus had written:

*Returned this afternoon with heavy heart. Can't go with Don Fernando to San Francisco on business because couldn't leave my dear Dolores that long in possible peril. Two weeks minimum he says. That's too long even if she agreed. Too dangerous these days. Sad, sad. Want to go north past the border to see the US. Must decide what to do about this. I miss and love Dolores more than ever.*

Jesus kept his journal hidden from Dolores. Whenever she asked what he was writing, he would say it was business correspondence. She believed him, and unlike Jesus, she was content. She never did discover his journal, nor did she ever understand the depth of his need to travel and understand the world more by seeing it. It would take another eighty-three years for the voice of Jesus' journal to be heard by anyone other than Jesus. It would seem to be no coincidence and even less an accident that Jesus' fifth daughter, Angelina, had

found the green tooled leather journal portfolio among her mother, Dolores's, few possessions the night she passed away. She had never thought to open it when she came across it because she was too distraught over her own mother's untimely and unfortunate passing due to pneumonia. She had merely slipped it without a thought into her own cedar chest where it slid gradually down along the side of the red wood box until it came to rest on the bottom, like once-alive plankton and other sea animals drift down through the layers of sea water until they touch the sea bed and become eventually indistinguishable from it. The journal became covered with blankets, other more important papers, framed pictures, clothes and other more frequently excavated personal and family treasures.

Angelina had come upon her father's journal the day her daughter, Maria, had come to say good-bye. Maria de los Angeles had driven to Yuriria from Cuernavaca to spend the day before she and her family fled north from the deteriorating Mexican economy to The Land of Opportunity. Her mother was groping farther down than she had ever rummaged into her cedar chest looking for a pair of missing gold *aguacate* earrings to give Maria as a going away gift. No one will ever know, when she saw the still bright green leather cover peeking through the layers of clothes and blankets, why she forgot the earrings and followed a sudden and strange compulsion to bring out the once forgotten leather portfolio.

"What did you find there, Momi?" Maria had noticed her mother's strange urgency as she struggled to wrest the portfolio from the hold of its familiar habitat.

"*Hija...* I found this portfolio of your... it's..." She stopped mid-sentence as she finally freed the thin treasure chest of her father's words from its historical hiding place. "I had forgotten about this... I don't even know if it was your grandfather's or your grandmother's or somebody else's. You know, *Hija...* I found this with my mother's things

right after she died, and I just put it away here. When was that? That was... uh, that was over fifteen years ago when she died... yes, that's right. And I never even opened it. Here, you open it."

Angelina handed the cool leather portfolio to her daughter. Maria took the portfolio, felt the smoothness of the Moroccan leather cover and without hesitating opened the cover to the first page. She peered at the paper for a few moments then looked up at her mother.

"It was your father's, Momi. This was Jesus', it says right here."

"What is it, *Hija*? What is it?"

"I don't know, I'm not really sure... let's see." Maria de los Angeles turned to the first page and started to read aloud the graceful and uniform Spanish handwriting that filled every other line of the page.

*Noviembre 23, 1911, Casacuarán*

*Hoy empiezo a escribir yo. Today I start to write. I do not know what I will write. I know that I have the deepest need to put this pen to the paper of this fine portfolio. I start now because my beloved Dolores and I have just finished dining after a busy but wonderful day. I should be perfectly content, but there is something yet undone, unfinished, unspoken, unformed that is inside me, and that cannot find its appropriate manner of expression. My sincere hope is that by writing in this journal I will be able either to understand or to express more clearly the feelings and ideas that inhabit my consciousness these past few months. I must find...*

“Momi, this is some kind of journal or diary that your father wrote.” Maria interrupted her reading. “Did you know that he had written this?” Maria closed the book and handed it to her mother. Angelina took it, looked at the cover, opened it and thumbed through the crisp pages for a few seconds. She nodded her head slowly and waited a moment before she spoke to her daughter.

“Take this with you, *Hija*, when you go to Idaho next week. Whatever my father wrote, whatever it says, it will be for you to know about this part of his life that none of us knows anything about.” Angelina handed the book back to her daughter and continued. “When you take your family with you north to Idaho, I want you to have Jesus’ book to be like a path back here to Mexico. Wherever your grandfather’s words take you, *Hija*, I’m sure that they will bring you back here to your home in one way or another, eh.”

It was on the airplane heading north over the vast Sierra Madre mountain range that officially divides the continent between Aguascalientes and San Luis Potosi that Maria de los Angeles opened her grandfather’s journal again. She had kept it with her ever since her mother had entrusted her with it in Yuriria four days before. Her own two daughters were dozing in the two seats next to her, and she thought of what it must have been like to be Jesus’ and Dolores’s children when they were small in Casacuarán more than sixty years ago. As she located the second entry in her grandfather’s journal, she wondered if he ever took his children on trips with him.

*November 24, 1911, Casacuarán*

*Didn't finish last evening's entry because Dolores came in suddenly. Had to stop so she would not inquire as to the topic of my writing. Will tell her that it is business correspondence. Last night realized that these new ideas and feelings that have been*

*trespassing these past months upon what used to be my tranquility and satisfaction are to be encouraged and supported. Dolores and I have worked and struggled here in Casacuarán for several years building our life our family and this new business. Our life is here. Our friends and compadres are here. Yet I have a persistent hunger to leave here and visit other places, larger towns and cities, yes, larger places to see and hear new ideas, other ideas.*

*November 28, 1911, Casacuarán*

*Enjoying my regular trips to Salvatierra, Don Fernando's establishment, perusing his bills of lading to marvel at the items he orders from the north, many from the United States, Chicago, San Francisco. Talked with him about accompanying him on his buying trips to Monterrey, El Paso, San Antonio, perhaps New Orleans. He kindly lent me catalogues from his suppliers, and will start to establish contacts with agents as soon as possible when they visit him.*

*December 2, 1911, Casacuarán*

*Have been meeting many agents from suppliers in the north. Enjoy very much riding out of Casacuarán and noticing the development of the surrounding country. It appears that Diaz has been successful in developing the roads, water supplies and drainage, but have been stopped several times by Diaz' men who call themselves "rurales." They caused no problem yet, but each trip I notice more frequent encounters that I and other travelers have to contend with. I fear that they will start asking for more than who we are, where we live, and what and where is our business. People are afraid to travel now with the bandits and revolutionaries, and now we must contend with Diaz' men too. This is not good for business.*

*December 3, 1911, Casacuarán*

*Had some strangers come into the store this afternoon asking if I could acquire dynamite for them. They wanted to buy it by the box. No one had ever requested such a product here in Casacuarán. I told them that I could not, but I will inquire of Fernando what his opinion is about this. Will ride with him to Celaya tomorrow to purchase some large machinery. I don't know what*

“Coffee?” the stewardess asked pleasantly of a totally absorbed Maria who didn't hear her.

Maria de los Angeles had always been the one who tried to maintain and strengthen the ancestral continuity and integrity of her family. Now she was resuscitating her grandfather's interior life and reliving the consequential events that shaped his life and his death. The heretofore forgotten but safeguarded lines of black ink enticed Maria into the realm of her grandfather's spirit. The elongated and angular slope of the “l's,” the “t's,” the “f's,” the “b's” and “d's” above the line and the thin curved loops of the “p's,” the “y's,” the “j's,” the “g's” and “q's” below the line nudged Maria ahead letter by letter through the unfamiliar but inviting handwriting. As she read each word and allowed the deep structures of her mind and heart to fit together meaning from the words and sentences, she felt the palpable essence of her grandfather galvanize her focus not only on his own characterization of his role in the Mexican Revolution, but also on her own destiny slowly wheeling forward in front of her.

“Coffee?” the stewardess repeated a second time before Maria finally looked up. “Excuse me, I'm sorry to interrupt your reading, but would you like a cup of coffee now?”

“Coffee? Oh, yes,” replied a startled Maria. “I think I would like a cup... Black is fine, thank you.” Maria de los Angeles watched the stewardess pour the coffee into the small white plastic cup and wondered if Jesus drank coffee. Probably just tea like my mother, she thought to herself. She looked out the window to reorient herself, recognized the mountains beneath the plane, and realized that Jesus probably had traveled near here at some time in his life. She had heard the traditional story about him being ambushed on a bridge outside of Ario de Rosales, but she had never heard anything else about where he traveled in his life. Some had said that he ventured as far as Alaska into the Gold Rush in the Yukon, but she doubted it. Perhaps his journal here will reveal more, she imagined. She had closed the journal when the stewardess interrupted her, and she rested the green book on her lap as she sipped the hot coffee. As she drank, she felt the caffeine begin to quicken her awareness and cognition. She finished, tucked the empty cup into the magazine pocket of the seat in front of her, then picked up the journal, opened it, found her place, and continued to read the next entry.

*December 5, 1911, Casacuarán*

*Busy day today. Dolores worked all day yesterday in my absence, so today I tried to help her with paperwork and stocking goods. The daily work in the store helps me forget the outside world, but am still bothered by the need to travel and see what's happening elsewhere. What kind of business opportunities exist in larger cities? What kind of businesses are doing well? How are Diaz' projects being received and carried out in larger cities? Are other small villages being improved and served by Diaz' projects? Our trip to Celaya yesterday was informative. Fernando bought pumping and welding equipment, and he met privately with a gentleman I had never met before. He would not tell me nor did I ask*

*what they discussed. Fernando acted a little uncomfortable about it. Is he involved in supplying goods or even arms to the revolutionaries? I don't know. I don't know if I want to know what he is doing. Noticed that he was keeping in stock several boxes of dynamite, so think I will do the same.*

*December 7, 1911, Casacuarán*

*At Mass this morning noticed several people looking at me in strange ways, and when I greeted them, they were unusually cold to me. Asked Dolores if she knew why, but she knew nothing. That is as it should be. I don't want her involved in any of this revolution business, if that is what it is. Trying to arrange a trip to Querétero soon. Will take the train to return quickly and to be able to better see goods traveling longer distances within Mexico. Need to become more familiar with transportation by rail and how to order and receive goods at the station. Fernando is a good teacher.*

*December 9, 1911, Casacuarán*

*Spoke with Fernando yesterday about the train systems being built here in Mexico. The one from Mexico City now reaches as far north as El Paso, and there is a line between Guaymas and Nogales. He asked me if I would be interested in investing some capital in the new sugar mills in Morelos because the railroad is now able to move more sugar more quickly around to markets. Also mentioned to me that the British company drilling for petroleum up in San Luis Potosi might be an opportunity for us too. Didn't know about the Americans, the French, the Germans and the British investing in Monterrey. Steel and iron according to Fernando. Would like very much to participate in those developments, but do not have that kind of money. What a pity! Very content for the moment to be partners with Don Castro's son, Nicolás, and with Don Sacramento. Everyone smokes now, and their*

*cigarette factories in Yuriria are already sending thousands of boxes of “La Emperatriz” and “América” to the markets in Morelia, Pátzcuaro and Uruapan. Better to wait for the moment before overextending into areas where the political stability is in question and where I know nothing.*

*December 10, 1911, Casacuarán*

*Many, many young men have been coming to the store recently looking for work. Of course, we have a small store and cannot hire anyone. But I take the opportunity to speak with them about why they are away from their home and their families. I knew that many of my countrymen went north in the past years to work on the railroad far up into the United States. Now they all tell me that there is a recession there and that the economy is bad for everyone, and that they have been firing the Mexican workers so that the American workers could keep their jobs. They say that there is no work to be found here in Mexico either, that all the new construction and factories are using foreign workers from The States or France or Germany. Asked them if they considered a return to their villages to work their land. They informed me that the railroads had bought up or even stolen their lands, and that the surrounding hacendados had taken over their fields to grow crops to export to the U.S. I could not help my unfortunate countrymen. How horrible I feel at the moment! What is happening in Mexico? There is so much opportunity, and yet so much instability and uncertainty. I need to see more for myself.*

*December 12, 1911, Casacuarán*

*Fernando wanted to know if I had heard of Anenecuilco in Morelos. When I picked up my goods today at his store, he and some of his fellow merchants from Salvatierra were discussing a fellow from there by the name of Zapata, Emiliano Zapata, who evidently*

*is gathering some following there with the peasants. One of Fernando's associates described a chance meeting he had with this Zapata fellow a few months ago outside of Cuernavaca. He and a few of his colleagues had gone with the intention of investing some capital in the machinery that sugar producers are using to process their sugar cane. He said that this Zapata fellow and a band of peasants met them on the road to the processing plant and demanded that they leave immediately because this was their land, that the sugar growers had stolen it from them, and they were in the process of reclaiming it. They were not armed, as were the peasants, so they retreated without argument thinking correctly that their lives were sweeter than any profit they might make there. In Cuernavaca they inquired around and immediately learned that Zapata had been organizing the peasants all around the area, and that he has mounted several attacks on the large sugar growers, burning their haciendas, sabotaging their machinery, and driving off the workers. I had thought that the sugar mills were providing jobs for the peasants in the area, but did not realize that these sugar producing lands had been stolen from the peasants. No one knows about this here. These are events that I need to learn more about. I will ask Fernando to arrange a trip to Morelos for me with his associates. Would like to know more about this Emiliano Zapata.*

*December 14, 1911, Casacuarán*

*Hearing talk in the store and around about that fellow, Zapata. Some seem to think that he is a patriot who is helping the peasants have a better life by reclaiming their lands that the Americans and British have stolen or unscrupulously bought up through manipulation and fraud. Others like my compadres feel that he will ruin business and bring down the government if he continues to destroy factories, drive off the workers and call for the division and distribution of the hacienda lands to the peasants. Don't know what to think*

*now. Must go soon to Morelos and north to Monterrey to see for myself. Will tell my dear Dolores soon that I will go within the very shortest time.*

Maria de los Angeles looked up from the lines of Spanish handwriting and glanced around her. Her two girls, Isis and Indra, were snoozing in the seats next to her, and across the aisle Emilio was looking out the window and describing something to their two boys, Vishnu and little Emilio. Her eyes were tired from deciphering the ninety-year-old text, so she closed the journal and ran her palm across the smooth leather cover as if to reassure her grandfather and herself that they would converse again at the soonest opportunity. Maria felt that they should be close to Tijuana by now. She looked out the window and recognized the familiar landscape south of their destination.

She and Emilio had flown this far a few times to oversee the exportation of his jojoba oil across the border for sale in U.S. drug stores. They had always returned home to Cuernavaca with a feeling of accomplishment and with checks made out to their bank account. They would not return home this time because there was no home, and there was no check awaiting them. The plane glided over the toy surface below them, and it wasn't until their bodies alerted them the plane was descending that they returned from the sweet limbo of the flight to face the fact that they were going to land very soon at Tijuana International Airport. After deplaning and the stress and chaos of customs, they would collect their luggage (their only possessions now) and taxi over the border to the San Diego Airport. From there they would take the next domestic flight to Idaho, to Boise, where Maria de los Angeles' brother, Jaime, would be waiting with a wide smile and hug to pile them, their bags and all their expectations and fears into his ten-year-old station wagon.

The fifteen-minute ride to Jaime's house would be eased with small talk about the flight, the number of people on the plane, their mother and father back in Mexico, the difference between the weather in Mexico and in Boise, the progress of Jaime's kids in school, and how much Maria's kids had grown since Jaime had seen them last.

"Ladies and gentlemen, we are now approaching..." the stewardess' garbled voice began to crackle over the speaker.

It would not be until they had arrived, unpacked, talked, eaten, showered and gone to bed five hours later that Maria de los Angeles would walk outside alone into the cool Idaho evening. The air smelled of alfalfa and mint as she followed two well-defined wheel ruts past a decrepit barn into the fields that surrounded Jaime's old farm house. Maria looked up and found Orion sparkling brilliantly in the dark sky, then the Big Dipper, and finally the North Star.

*We're here, she let herself think, finally here.*

Her eyes caught the long swatch of the Milky Way, and she realized that the key to looking at the stars was in knowing the framework of the constellations.

*Then, she realized, the secrets in the apparent chaos of stars are unlocked and revealed.*

Maria turned slowly around craning her neck to take in the entire panorama of the night sky unobscured by tall buildings, street lights, or neighboring apartments.

Maria de los Angeles lowered her gaze and saw town lights in the distance and then a yellow glow suffusing the horizon to the west. That must be Boise, she surmised, and those lights probably Meridian.

*What kind of secrets will I face there? My children, she started to remember, need to go to school, we need to learn English, Emilio and I have to find work, Emilio is still illegal here, we have to get a car and a place of our own as soon as possible...*

Maria allowed herself to indulge in the enormity of the challenge before them, and she faded several minutes into the unselfconscious minutia of listing what she had to do and then making a mental schedule of how she would attack the challenges in front of her.

“Oh!” she blurted out as she stepped in a large puddle of cold water.

She instantly returned from her self-absorption and gingerly sidestepped the muddy and well used rut up onto the grassy edge of the dirt road.

“Ha-ha-ha!” she chuckled out loud.

She figured that she had been walking a good five minutes judging from how far she found herself from Jaime’s house.

*How far I’ve walked without knowing it, Maria thought to herself, out into a field I’ve never been in before, as if I belonged here or knew this place. I guess our coming to Idaho is like that too. First, my Popi with the Braceros in the ‘40s, then Rafa and Raul followed him, then Ricky and Robe and Jaime, then Momi, Elena and Chela for a time, then Elvira got married up here. They all made out OK in California. Then when things got too difficult there, Jaime came up here to Idaho... And he and Lettie made it OK. So now, I’m next, I guess. When things are bad or fall apart, in Mexico or wherever, people just move on, like we do, look for better opportunities, follow their noses. I wonder how it is in Boise.*

She stepped down onto the road again and headed back to the friendly light of Jaime’s house in the distance.

As she walked, Maria de los Angeles felt a familiar fatigue penetrating her thoughts, a physical weariness that insinuated itself into a crepuscular realm of heightened awareness and sensuality. At the exact moment her shoulders relaxed and she felt her mind and thoughts dissolving, Maria remembered suddenly and blurted out, “Jesus’ journal!” She rubbed her hands together to ward off the evening chill and hurried back to the house to get the green leather portfolio. She would be up another three hours with her grandfather, Jesus, as together they relived his past and ushered in her future.

## **Chapter Six Zapata's e-Children**

“HTML? You don't know what HTML is? That's just an abbreviation for hypertext markup language, you know, it's the code or the language we use to put up information on the Internet. Where've you been, Maria, on another planet?” Lupe looked at Maria de los Angeles as she waited for an answer, but when Maria de los Angeles merely said, “Yes, probably,” her classmate added, “Whew! You've got a lot to learn and quick!”

Maria de los Angeles started taking night classes for advanced English Language Learners at the University of Boise a few months after she and Emilio had landed jobs. She finagled financial aid in a university sponsored work-study program for Hispanic women, and she put in two hours every Monday, Wednesday and Friday morning at the office of the Organization of Latin-American Students in the Student Union building. She also found herself doing typing, filing and sending out mailings for United Women of Idaho in town, and also volunteering for MEChA (Chicano Student Movement of Aztlan) up in Moscow.

Emilio hooked a waiter job at one of the few good Mexican restaurants in Meridian, Corona Village. One of Maria's legal resident brothers had acquiesced to allowing Emilio to use his legal personal data along with Emilio's picture on a falsified green card they paid a hundred and fifty for in San Diego. He was good with people, and the tips made up for his less than minimum wage salary. He was carpooling in to intermediate English classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays. When one was at class, the other was making dinner and helping with homework at home with the four children.

“Well, Lupe,” Maria explained, “I arrived here in Idaho, well... in the U.S. about four months ago from Mexico, from Cuernavaca. I worked for the government in small towns organizing the campesinos, helping them protect their natural resources, the water, the

forests, you know, and still make a living. I didn't have much time except to take care of my kids and myself, you know..."

"Yeah, I know, Maria, it's really difficult to work, go to school and take care of kids too. Did you have computers in your work, the Internet, email?"

Lupe kept to English with Maria de los Angeles because it was her first language. She had been born over in Caldwell, and her grandparents spoke Spanish at home, but her parents preferred to speak the English they had picked up at work in the door factory in Meridian. Lupe was fortunate because she would get her grandparents to tell her stories in Spanish about the old days in Mexico so that she could acquire some communication Spanish. She was also taking Spanish classes on campus to improve her grammar because she wanted to read and understand the scholarly and literary documents written in Spanish that she needed for her research. She knew how useful it was to be bilingual these days, not only for socializing with her friends and with the public at work, but also for understanding some of the primary documents she was using in her studies. Maria appreciated the opportunity to use her growing English with a friend who wouldn't criticize her or look at her like she was an idiot because her English wasn't perfect. She felt comfortable around Lupe, and she trusted her new friend.

"We had some old computers that we wrote letters with, but that's all. What is Internet, Lupe? I heard of it, and people ask me if I have email, but I don't have them, do I? What are they for? Do you have a computer... can you show me?"

"You know, we have a computer lab here on campus. Do you have a few minutes, Maria? We can go over there right now, and I can show you the Internet."

Without answering, Maria picked up her books and purse, and followed Lupe to the computer lab.

“Sit down, sit down right here next to me, Maria.” Lupe indicated the computer next to her as she herself sat down, pushed a couple of buttons and arranged her things around her. When Maria was flustered about turning on her computer, Lupe reached over and explained to her how to turn on the translucent white and candy apple red Mac 400 megahertz G3.

“This is a computer? I’ve never seen one like this, Lupe. Does this have the Internet and email?”

Lupe spent a few minutes explaining to her friend that these computers were just part of the Internet, that there were hundreds of thousands of other computers in other schools, hospitals, offices and houses that were connected and turned on twenty-four-seven, and that they could transmit whatever information they had in them and receive information from all the other connected computers, including email. “It’s as simple as that, Maria...”

“What’s twenty-four-seven, Lupe?”

“That’s just code for twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week. It just means that the computers on the Internet are on all the time, kinda like it’s alive in a way, no one can kill it because no one can turn it off because it has a life of its own... You know what I mean?”

Maria de los Angeles didn’t understand, but she nodded agreeably and gratefully. She stared transfixed at Lupe’s monitor for the next thirty or so minutes while Lupe showed her eager pupil how to connect to the Internet; how to configure Netscape Communicator to

receive and send email, set up the address book with email addresses, and the different ways to reply to email messages; and a few basics about bookmarks, links, hypertext, saving, creating folders, and the basics of word processing. She would tell Maria what she was doing and point out the important aspects as she taught her friend, then she would have Maria do the same on her own computer while she watched to make sure Maria did it correctly.

Lupe was an effective teacher by nature, and Maria de los Angeles was excited to be challenged to absorb and remember all the unfamiliar details of the new electronic world in front of her. She grasped quickly the concept of the Internet and the World Wide Web, and when the two women finally sat back in their chairs to break from their concentration and focus, Maria affirmed the basic truth of the Internet by asking rhetorically, “You mean, Lupe, that all people in all parts of the world can communicate about everything with the Internet ... uh... twenty-four-seven, right?” Both women laughed happily not only at Maria’s use of the new code she had learned, but also because they felt the connection of their friendship as solid and beneficial.

“Lupe, some of those... what are they called? web sites, yes, thanks, that’s it... some of those web sites were in Spanish and some were in English. I recognized “La Jornada” and “El Financiero” newspapers that you had on the screen, but I didn’t know what those other web sites in English were. What were we looking at? What web sites do you look at? Are you using them for your studies here?”

Maria de los Angeles went on for another minute with questions about what web sites Lupe looked at, how she found them, and if there was some kind of book like the

telephone directory where anyone could look up different subjects and get the Internet addresses quickly.

“Once you find a site you like,” Lupe started to explain, “and you think that you might want to come back to it, you just bookmark it. Remember I told you about that... Here let me show on my computer. I use this computer almost every day, and I bookmark important sites I am using in my research. Let’s see here...” Lupe pulled down through the bookmark menu and selected a name that Maria couldn’t see quickly enough before the screen started to change. When the screen finally finished loading, Maria read the title out loud, “Za-pa-tis-tas-in-Cy-ber-spa-ce. Zapatistas in Cyberspace! What’s that, Lupe? What’s cyberspace? I thought the Zapatistas were just in Chiapas!”

“You have been in another country, Maria—Mexico! I thought you would know about how the Zapatistas were using the Internet to inform the public about what’s really happening in Chiapas, but I guess that’s the problem in Mexico isn’t it. No one has access to the truth there; no one knows what’s really happening in their own back yard. Look here.” Lupe pointed her cursor at the list of links to sites related to the ongoing Zapatista struggle in Mexico. “The Zapatistas have set up an Intercontinental Network of Alternative Communication after they... did you hear about what happened there in July of ‘96? No? Whew, you have a lot of news to catch up on, girl! The Zapatistas called for a series of meetings in Mexico in July of ‘96, and over three-thousand activists and thinkers showed up. You know, Maria, they came from over 42 countries, and the result is... Well, just look at all the sites on the Net that are connected now around the struggle against neoliberalism...”

Maria de los Angeles interrupted the zeal of her friend's lesson by asking for definitions again, "What's neoliberalism, Lupe? Is it part of the Internet? And what's the Net? Is that part of the Internet too?"

Lupe explained that "the Net" was the abbreviation for the Internet, and then she enthusiastically launched into her favorite topic. "You know, Maria, neoliberalism is just the incestuous political and economic system that rapes the land and the people who work the land from Mexico, Africa, South America, and other third world countries to take as much profit out of those countries and put all that money into the hands of the large multinational companies and governments. It's happening in Chiapas, Morelos, California, and even here in Idaho. Look."

Lupe returned their attention to the computer screen where she highlighted a few of the fifty or so links on the "Zapatistas in Cyberspace" web site. "See there, there's two about Chiapas, one on the EZLN, oh, that's the Zapatista National Liberation Army, let's see, a couple on Zapatistas and Zapatismo, here's several about the Second American Encounter they held in Spain in July of '97, including one that's called The Web of American Youth for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism, several news groups, and here's one publicizing the Third World Encounter that's occurring in Brazil in December of '99, here's the Zapatista's official U.S. web page..." Lupe pointed out to an entranced Maria web sites about the Maya peoples, several sites about Zapatista women, several sites in Italian and in French supporting action against neoliberalism around the world, archives of a variety of communiques and publications including books, videos, TV programs and public and grassroots organizations around the world.

“Lupe, is this what you are studying about here?” Maria de los Angeles had turned her head to look directly at her friend sitting next to her. “How can you be doing this at the University here? Don’t they prohibit this kind of revolutionary information? What are you doing with it anyway?”

“Oh, Maria, it’s no problem; anyone can access this or any other information here. We have the freedom to information in the U.S., and I’m using this information to try to improve the lives of all working people here and in other countries. I’m doing my Masters on the influence of the 1995 Zapatista uprising on worldwide neoliberalism. Whatever I can find out about the Zapatistas I can use to understand what’s happening in other parts of the world with land usage and reform. So, I search the Net to find documents about the Zapatistas, written by them or about them, to use in my research.”

Maria de los Angeles was silent for a moment. She looked up, and her eyes glazed over as she tried to decide whether to tell Lupe about the journal or not. Finally, Maria spoke very quietly and seriously to her friend. “Lupe, I want to show you something. I think you will be interested in something I have.”

“What is it, Maria?”

“I’ll meet you here tomorrow at the same time, and I’ll show you then. I have to go now.” Maria stood up hurriedly, picked up her things, pushed her chair back under the table, and started to rush off when she turned and asked, “How do you turn off the computer, Lupe?”

“You don’t have to, Maria. It’ll go to sleep by itself after a few minutes when no one is using it. Are you OK, Maria? You look upset.”

“Oh, I’m fine, Lupe, really, it’s just that right now I feel like I’ve been asleep for a long time and that I’m just waking up, but kinda *modoro*, you know drowsy and numb. I gotta go. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

As she stared out the window of the transit bus, Maria de los Angeles realized that she hadn’t read her grandfather’s journal since that night in Idaho four months ago when she walked out into the mint fields next to Jaime’s house. She also understood that she had been too busy and focused to do anything else other than find the right school in which to enroll her children, figure out where everything was located in Meridian and then in Boise, cope with cooking meals without most of the Mexican foods she had been accustomed to, immerse herself in English however and whenever she could, look for work that didn’t require too much English, and deal with the changes in lifestyle that made Emilio upset all the time and Maria herself cranky for the slightest reason.

To make a difficult life change even worse they had misplaced their sex life somewhere between Mexico and Idaho. She was too tired and chronically overstressed to feel any need for skin contact, and he blamed her because the kids wouldn’t leave her alone for a minute so that they never had any privacy. The two bedroom trailer that Jaime got for them afforded no suitable arena for the dramatic and passionate encounters they used to stage for themselves: they couldn’t talk dirty, they couldn’t groan or moan, they couldn’t undress each other when and wherever they had the inclination, and they couldn’t beat out the rhythm and style of their California King lovemaking with the children ready to pop out of their unfamiliar and crowded room at the slightest sound. Emilio’s normal, everyday, walking down the street jealousy had intensified to the point that he eventually insisted that they go together to English night classes at the University. He wasn’t too sure about gringo

men, but after meeting a good cross section of them in Meridian, he assured himself that any bunch of men that liked rodeo, pickups, tractors, livestock and big-breasted white women could and most probably would find one way or another to appreciate the cross-cultural benefits of a mature, smooth-skinned, brown-eyed, long-legged Mexican woman, married or not. He knew that he would if he were in their place. She was, after all, a very fine-looking woman.

The school bus would be dropping off Maria de los Angeles' children at three-thirty, so when she arrived at their trailer at two-fifty, she realized that she wouldn't have time to read Jesus' journal. I've got to continue reading, she reasoned to herself as she prepared snack for her kids, to see if I can find out what really happened to Jesus.

*I want to show his journal to Lupe, but I better know what the journal says before I do.*

Maria finished assembling the cheese and crackers, peanut butter sandwiches and glasses of juice. She spread out the munchies on the kitchen table, then flopped down on the sofa bed to wait for the sound of her children's voices from the road.

*I really don't know much, she reflected, about Zapata and his part in the Mexican Revolution. I only remember hearing about the Zapatistas in Chiapas back in '95 and '96, and I know even less about the Zapatistas now, hardly anything really.*

Maria tried to piece together what she knew of Jesus from what her mother had told her, what she had read in his journal about his thoughts and experiences in Casacuarán, and what Lupe had shown and told her about the Zapatistas and what she called neoliberalism.

*If I look for something in common, she speculated, something similar in each of these three things, then maybe I'll be able to understand them more.*

*What was it, Maria de los Angeles continued probing the dissonance in her thoughts, that my mother told me when she gave me Jesus' journal? What did she...? Yes! I remember... She said something about his journal being a road or a... a path, yes, that's it, a path back there, back to Mexico, that it would bring me back one way or another; yes, back one way or another, back home to Mexico.*

Maria stood up to walk into her room to get the journal. She saw in her mind's eye the green book where she had tucked it under some clothes in the second drawer of their dresser, and as she turned excitedly to hurry and unearth the journal, one particular notion suddenly interrupted her. She stopped to let the idea unfurl and spread out full-size in her mind. It was just at that timeless and dimensionless point of knowing that it was Jesus' journal that contained a code, and a key for understanding the connection between all these people and events, that the familiar, happy shouts of children pierced the walls of the trailer and reverberated within Maria, like a brass key opening a lock, a mathematical key decrypting an encrypted cipher, or a journal revealing the secret continuity of the past, the present and the future.

"Momi, Momi," the children all cried as they exploded through the trailer door, "we're home, Momi... and we're hungry!"

## Chapter Seven Key to the Strongbox

Several other people were hunched over their computers in the University computer lab, but Maria de los Angeles and Lupe were oblivious to their presence. They sat facing each other in front of a bank of computer screens, and neither one knew exactly what to expect from the other or from the journal in Maria's lap.

"Are you ready to hear something, Lupe? Listen to this!" Maria opened Jesus' journal and started to read where she herself had left off in her private reading.

*March 25, 1912, Casacuarán*

*Went to Salvatierra early afternoon. Needed to purchase more of the new Colts and boxes of dynamite for two customers. Talked with Fernando about trip to Monterrey or Morelos, but not a good time. Afraid they are gathering some kind of support for offensive against Zapata's people in the area. Can't keep bringing in arms knowing where they are going. Don't know how I can stop without losing these good customers. Well worth losing these two gentlemen's business if it means no problems for Dolores and me here. I am worried about her. She knows nothing about this Zapata business, but the threat is real, more real every day. Must think how to move ahead correctly. Need to go to Monterrey or south to get better perspective about what is occurring elsewhere.*

"Who wrote that, Maria? Is that for real? 1912? What is that you're reading? Lemme see that..." Lupe was fascinated with what she had just heard, and she had interrupted Maria when there was a pause. "No, read some more, please." Maria de los Angeles smiled knowingly and continued.

*March 28, 1912, Casacuarán*

*Heard more rumors in Salvatierra this past week. Told my two customers that I couldn't guarantee shipment of Colts, ammunition and dynamite anymore. Told them my suppliers were charging excessive prices for these items, and that I had to discontinue carrying guns and so forth because of a declining profit margin. They accepted what I said with some courtesy, and I think they believed me. I hope they will go elsewhere for their business. Do not want to take a position against what Zapata is working for. I am nervous about this, but do not tell Dolores, of course. I anticipate with pleasure riding to Morelia tomorrow to visit the train station and receive a shipment for Fernando, more heavy construction materials and motors from San Francisco and Chicago. Two weeks ago, I picked up a shipment for him that I think was not what he said it was. It was labeled pumps and welding equipment, but I am suspicious that he is bringing in shipments of arms for the rurales and counterrevolutionaries. Need to ask in Salvatierra who knows what. Can't get caught between Diaz' and Zapata's people. It could turn ugly for us if that occurred.*

*March 29, 1912, Casacuarán*

*Diaz' people have attacked other ranchos recently. It seems that the ranchos attacked are the men who do not support Diaz for one reason or another. They burned "El Cimental"—the rancho Don Aurelio built with his own hands, dragged him across the floor by his beard, took away all the supplies they could carry from his storehouse. Did this also to Don Erasmo's home of fifty years— "El Moro." Heard that Delfino Raya's rancho, "Chilapa," was robbed and his two young daughters violated because he refused to give them weapons. Also spoke with many who said that it is the Pantoja brothers who are responsible for these nighttime attacks, and not the rurales. Can't believe*

“OK, OK...” Lupe finally interrupted unable to listen anymore without knowing what she was listening to, “What is it, Maria? Who is Dolores and who wrote that journal?”

When Maria explained what she was reading, where she had gotten it, and that no one to her knowledge had read it since it was penned in 1912, Lupe’s mouth dropped open. When she finally started to move her jaw again it was to question her friend rhetorically about what Maria herself had already previously concluded: “Do you know that this is a primary document from the Mexican Revolution that has never been seen before?” and then “Do you know how significant it is that you are... what’s his name?... Jesus Rodríguez? yes, how important it is that you are Jesus’ granddaughter, and your mother who’s still alive gave this to you, and even she hadn’t read it? Do you know what you have?”

Maria de los Angeles had been nodding seriously but with a wry smile on her happy face. She knew by now what she had, and even though she had already read only about fifty or sixty entries in the journal, she realized that it contained important information, questions and answers for her and she guessed for Lupe too. Maria didn’t answer Lupe’s questions, but merely opened Jesus’ journal to where Lupe had interrupted her, and continued to read.

*Can’t believe that this violence is being committed by our own people upon our own people. Not groups of Indian peoples but the sons of our compadres, our business partners, our neighbors, people like us. How can they seek to destroy what we have labored so long to build up for our children and for their children? Don’t understand now what to do. Continue to work with Dolores day to day trying to improve our lives with our personal labor so that our six children can have*

*better lives, get some kind of education, and make their way in this difficult world, as if nothing was happening in our dear Mexico, as if the country was not going to come to blows soon? Or should we become clear in our heads and hearts what the sides of this conflict are, where we find ourselves in the conflict, and how we can further the goals we support and which have supported us for such a long time?*

*April 10, 1912, Casacuarán*

*Returned day before yesterday from often postponed trip to Morelos. Very tired of traveling, tired of worrying about rurales around every corner of every road, tired of seeing so much chaos and destruction in a short time, tired of trying to recognize some kind of truth from the laborious routine of people's lives and the confusion of the changes sweeping across our countryside, tired of Fernando's secrecy and lack of forthrightness in his discussions with me, tired of not knowing, tired of not knowing myself. Disappointed that we didn't meet Zapata. Asked various people in different places about where I could meet and talk with him. Suspicion everywhere. Only "No" for a response. Feel the people are protecting him from possible danger. Perhaps correctly so since I am a stranger and unknown to them and him. Will return to Morelos again to attempt another meeting with him or with his supporters. Whatever I can find out for myself. Sense more distance and mistrust between Fernando and myself.*

When Maria paused to savor the significance of what she had just read about her grandfather's plan to meet Emiliano Zapata, Lupe took the opportunity to inquire tentatively, "Do you think that I could get a copy of your grandfather's journal sometime, Maria? I would love to use it in my research project, you know?"

“What is your research project anyway, Lupe?” Maria continued, “you never told me what you are doing with all this Zapatista information you are collecting.”

“Well, what I’m doing, “Lupe started in enthusiastically, “is documenting how information about the Zapatistas and the revolution in Chiapas is disseminated to the public, how it is censored by the government, and how the Zapatistas find and use alternate methods of getting out to the public the facts as well as their philosophy without delay or distortion. Your grandfather’s journal is an incredible example of how information was spread around Mexico during the revolution and how long it took for people who lived there to realize what was happening. I would love to read it and utilize it as a primary document never seen before. Wha’ duh you say?”

“I haven’t even finished reading it, Lupe,” Maria replied with certainty, “so I don’t think it’s right for me to give it out right now. I don’t even know what else Jesus is going to say in his journal, maybe something personal about my mother or maybe even about my older brothers, you know? It’s a family thing, personal, you know? When I’m ready, I’ll let you use it in some form or another. Do you understand?”

“I know how you feel. I guess I would feel the same way if it was my grandfather’s journal. No problem. Would you read some more for us now?” Lupe wanted to know as much as she could without having to wait for Maria to decide to copy the journal and let her use it. Maria de los Angeles opened the journal again and started to read, not realizing that the next few journal entries would catalyze an accelerating chain of events that would fulfill her mother’s prediction that Jesus’ journal would be a path back to Mexico for her, a path that in one way or another would bring her back to her home.

*April 11, 1912, Casacuarán*

*Continued from yesterday. In Morelos saw much evidence of burned buildings, factories, haciendas like ours. Many residents will not talk about this and walk away at the mention of the name of Zapata. The merchants say his men come out of the night, burn the buildings, steal the guns and ride off. Have heard of killings, violation of women, but not able to speak to witnesses. The poor workers say otherwise, that they support him, that they want their small pieces of land returned to them so they can work their land and feed their families. Word has spread here that we went to Morelos to meet Zapata. In the store today several customers inquired as to our purpose there. Warned kindly about the political consequences of my trip and curiosity. No threats, but fear they will materialize eventually. Planning now how to secure items that could be necessary for continued survival if disorder reaches Casacuarán. More of this later. Dolores was anxious with uncertainty when I described my adventures. She said everything was fine in my absence, but not too sure about that. Started this journal only four months ago with intention to develop ideas about my desire to visit outlying places here in Mexico and elsewhere. Now that is occurring, and am not sure if have chosen the correct path. Difficult, maybe impossible to separate business from politics. All of my business associates have aligned themselves with Diaz. I cannot.*

*April 15, 1912, Casacuarán*

*Dolores has always been the key that has unlocked my heart and let me experience the deepest feelings of need and devotion. How can I ensure that my devotion continues in another form if I were to disappear, if I were to be killed on one of my trips? I know that my curiosity and desire to travel and develop my understanding will not disappear, so I must prepare for the possibility that I will not return some day. I must leave something*

*for my dear Dolores that will ensure her survival, her safety, and the safety of our children, of course. In Casacuarán or elsewhere. I just do not know.*

*April 19, 1912, Casacuarán*

*Have thought long enough about this issue. Have decided to leave a small strong box with sufficient gold and silver, a few pieces of jewelry which have some value, two pocket watches, two handguns and ammunition,*

“Lupe,” Maria interrupted her reading, “I don’t believe this... Do you understand what Jesus must have been feeling and experiencing to get to the point that he would do this?” Lupe nodded slowly as a signal for Maria to continue.

*maps, names and addresses of gentlemen who have borrowed money and have yet to fulfill their obligations, names and addresses of people I have met on my travels to most of the large surrounding towns who could be helpful to Dolores, and duplicate keys to several other strong boxes I have placed in various locations indicated with the keys. To keep the location of this box secret from those who should not have access to it, and to ensure that Dolores and our children benefit from it in the event that someday I do not return to Casacuarán, I am indicating here the exact location of this box, but have disguised the directions to the box’s location.*

“Lupe... uh, I don’t think I should read any more of this publicly,” Maria said politely. “It just doesn’t feel right to read this until I have a chance to see what else Jesus says. I feel like I need to protect his privacy even eighty years after he wrote this, you know what I mean? I know this is the second time this has happened, that I had to leave in the middle of reading his journal, but it’s...”

“Don’t worry about it, Maria,” Lupe cut in, “just go home and read it until you’re satisfied about how you feel with it. Let me know when you want to get together again about this, OK? I’ll see you tomorrow in class, eh?”

Maria de los Angeles got up and gathered her things, hugged her friend and hesitated before she turned around and walked slowly out of the computer lab. It would be later that night after her children had surrendered their day to unconsciousness and after Emilio had nodded off that Maria dared pick up her grandfather’s surprising journal again to reread the entry that had startled her so earlier in the day.

*April 19, 1912, Casacuarán*

*Have thought long enough about this issue. Have decided to leave a small strong box with sufficient gold and silver, a few pieces of jewelry which have some value, two pocket watches, two handguns and ammunition, maps, names and addresses of gentlemen who have borrowed money and have yet to fulfill their obligations, names and addresses of people I have met on my travels to most of the large surrounding towns who could be helpful to Dolores, and duplicate keys to several other strong boxes I have placed in various locations indicated with the keys. To keep the location of this box secret from those who should not have access to it, and to ensure that Dolores and our children benefit from it in the event that someday I do not return to Casacuarán, I am indicating here the exact location of this box, but I have disguised the directions to the box’s location. The key to understanding the directions is the favorite name I use to address my dear Dolores. She and my children have heard me use that name, and so only they will be able to use that special name to determine where this box is located. I pray that this journal remains in their hands upon my death.*

*April 22, 1912, Casacuarán*

*I have spent the better part of the past two days deciding the appropriate location and directions to that location for securing the aforementioned strong box. I have done so without informing Dolores or our children. If she knew of my plan, she most certainly would be alarmed needlessly, and that is neither my intention nor is it desirable. This is only a precaution against an uncertain future, not an inevitability. The location of the box follows in upper case letters. It is disguised, or should I say, manipulated, through the use of the name with which I customarily address my beloved wife. This manipulation of the directions to the location of the hidden strong box is intended to ensure that only my wife and my children will be able, if necessary, to find the box and utilize its contents. Only they will know the name I customarily use to address my dear wife, Dolores. I hope it never becomes necessary to utilize this code or to unearth the strongbox. May God bless and protect my wife, my children, our lives, and this undertaking.*

*These are the directions to the location of the strongbox:*

*OPYECZ OP WL NZNTYL OP WL SLNTPYOL*

*RWSN HOPWEISG RS ZO DOFSR RSZ CSHS*

*BFTYNP ELMTBFPD OP WL ALCPO OPW YZCEP*

*CV UMBZW G UMLQW*

*UACH WXE IBLH WX MTUBJNX*

*BAJO UNA LARGA PIEDRA PLANO*

*“Whew!” exhaled Maria softly as she closed and laid the journal on her lap. I never expected anything like this... ‘bajo una larga piedra plano... under a large flat stone’...*

she reflected to herself. *I wonder if my grandmother ever found that box, or if my mom or any of her brothers or sisters ever discovered it.*

Maria de los Angeles felt her train of logic accelerate as she pondered what she had read. They would have had to use this very journal to find the directions to the box, unless Jesus at some time told them or showed them where the box was. Maria paused a moment while the logical steps she was negotiating fell into their correct sequence.

*I have to talk with Momi, she realized, as soon as I can to see if she knows anything about the box. I also have to keep reading the journal to see if Jesus mentions this again. It's too late now in Mexico, she realized, so I'll call Momi tomorrow. I'm tired now... I gotta go to sleep.*

Maria de los Angeles stood up, reached down and retrieved the green journal, and held it to her chest a few moments before she whispered as if in prayer, “Jesus... I am Maria, your granddaughter, daughter of your daughter, Angelina. I have your journal here with me. Thank you for writing this journal, thank you for the honor of reading it after so many years since you wrote it.” Maria paused as she felt the deepness of her connection with her family and with Jesus swell and grow in her heart. “I promise,” she whispered to her grandfather, “that I will protect and take care of your spirit and life in this book. I will follow wherever your words and spirit lead me. I ask you to be my compass and shield. Thank you.”

One small lamp by which Maria had been reading punctuated the darkness inside and outside the small trailer. In Idaho, alone in this trailer far away from home, Maria de los Angeles felt more illuminated than ever, even when she switched off the lamp, and the trailer returned to the calm obscurity of its undifferentiated darkness. She checked to see that the kids were still breathing, then went to bed and even more quickly to sleep.

## Chapter Eight      Unlocking the Door

“ACSII, asymmetric key cipher, cipher alphabet, ciphertext, code, computer encryption, cryptanalysis, cryptography, Data Encryption Standard, digital encryption, encryption algorithm, encryption key...”

“Hmm,” Maria murmured out loud. “Maybe that’s it, ‘encryption key’...” She jotted down the two words in her notebook and continued scrutinizing the list of code-related words on the web site.

“... equidistant letter sequences...” She stopped and scribbled down that promising idea.

“... factoring, homophonic substitution cipher...” *This is another language, she thought to herself, even more difficult than English.*

“... key distribution, key encryption...” Yes, she assured herself as she noted the words, this sounds more like it.

“... monoalphabetic substitution cipher, one-way function, polyalphabetic substitution cipher, random key, substitution cryptography, transposition cryptography, Vigenère cipher.” Having come to the end of another Internet glossary of code terms, Maria clicked the window closed and went back to the Sherlock search window, but before the window had time to finish reappearing, Lupe tapped her friend on the shoulder and sat down in the chair next to Maria.

“Oh, you’re on line now, eh? What are you looking at? Let’s see... uh...” Lupe peered at Maria’s screen, and when she quickly mentally categorized the links in the window as sites related to codes and encryption, she inquired, “Codes, eh? What are you doing

looking at codes and all that secret stuff? Are you plotting the overthrow of the government, girl? Are you really an undercover Zapatista? Ha-ha-ha!” Lupe chuckled, and Maria smiled at her friend’s joke.

“No, I’m just doing a little research myself trying to find some information about different kinds of codes. Do you know anything about codes or encryption, Lupe?”

“Not much, except... I think Netscape there uses some kind of code... it’s 128-bit encryption or something like that to scramble up credit card numbers or personal information. Yeah, I remember from one of my computer classes. You enter your card number, Netscape sends to the company you’re buying from for their special thing, an encryption thing, that scrambles your card information in your computer and sends it back to the company. Then only they can unscramble your credit card information and not anyone else between your computer and their company. Nice, eh? Pretty clever system, I’d say. I don’t know the details, but that’s basically how it works.” Lupe smiled with satisfaction at being able to explain digital encryption to her novice friend.

“Hey!” The tone in Lupe’s voice changed from triumph to curiosity when she asked suddenly, “Does this have something to do with your grandfather’s journal? OK, it’s none of my business, I know, but I remember you reading that last part in the journal about Jesus leaving something, a strong box, wasn’t it, with secret directions about its location... that’s it, isn’t it, Maria? You found the secret in the journal, didn’t you?... I bet it’s a code, it’s a code, isn’t it?... and you’re looking for the key to unlock the code! Am I right, or what? That’s why you’re checking out all this code stuff on the Internet...”

“Yes... I haven’t told even Emilio about this, no one except you now knows about this.” Maria de los Angeles hesitated a moment before she continued to divulge her

discovery. “Promise me that you won’t tell anyone else about this, please, Lupe... I want some help, and I think you could help me, but I don’t want a lot of other people asking questions or wanting to read the journal.”

“Sure,” Lupe replied sincerely, “I’ll be happy to help you. I’m really curious to know about your grandfather and his relationship to the revolution, to Zapata, what his perspective was on how the revolution developed, and how people found out about what was happening. I won’t tell anyone, Maria, about whatever the secret is. I love a good mystery and a good secret, especially when I’m keeping it. So, what’s going on?”

Maria explained what she had found in Jesus’ journal, the directions to the strongbox that were disguised using some kind of code, and the special unknown name that he used with his wife that offered the key to deciphering the directions. Questions rushed from Lupe that expressed the logical issues that needed to be pursued.

“Do you know what the special name is? Have you talked with your mom yet to see if she knows what that special name is or if she knows if anyone has found the box yet? Do you think this is really true, or was he just making it up? Do you know how to decode the directions yet, or do you have any idea how to find out? Are you thinking about going to Mexico to look for the strongbox? Do you think it’s in Mexico, maybe in Jesus’ home town, where is it, I forgot the name...? Casacuarán, that’s it. Do you think it’s there, maybe close to his house or even in the house? What do you think, Maria? Will you show me the scrambled directions? Maybe we can figure it out together, eh?”

“Alright, alright... Let’s go make a copy of the directions right now... I’ve got the journal right here.” Maria showed Lupe the journal page that contained the hand-lettered, square-form, encrypted directions to the strongbox. Before Lupe could express her

amazement and ask to see it, Maria de los Angeles stood up with the journal and started to make her way to the closest copy machine. She made three copies, gave one to Lupe, put one back in the journal facing the original, and held up the third to inspect it.

*OPYECZ OP WL NZNTYL OP WL SLNTPYOL*

*RWSN HOPWEISG RS ZO DOFSR RSZ CSHS*

*BFTYNP ELMTBFPD OP WL ALCPO OPW YZCEP*

*CV UMBZW G UMLQW*

*UACH WXE IBLH WX MTUBJNX*

*BAJO UNA LARGA PIEDRA PLANO*

Lupe and Maria de los Angeles both stared at the enigmatic maze of letters, then Lupe raised her eyebrows, and instructed Maria matter-of-factly.

“*Bajo una larga piedra plano?*” Does that mean ‘under a large stone, uh, a flat stone?’... OK... But where is the large flat stone? It could be anywhere... We need some expert help here, Maria, don’t you think? We can’t ask anyone, even if they know about codes because they will just want to know more, but we can look in some code books right here in the library. Maybe we can find something in a code book that looks like this word jumble here... At least we can take a look; it’s a start, and we have to start with what we have, right...?”

There turned out to be more books about codes than they cared to look at, too many to be able to determine which ones they should start with, over a hundred or more, so they each grabbed about four or five that looked basic and new.

“I gotta go to my anthro class in ten minutes,” Lupe informed Maria on their way out of the library. “I’ll call you if I find anything that looks like the scrambled directions, and you call me, OK? Oh, Maria?” Lupe stopped and grabbed Maria by the elbow. “Say, Maria, I appreciate you asking me for my help. We’ll find a way to read the directions, I can feel it. I’ll see you tomorrow, eh... Good luck with your books!”

It was so easy for Maria de los Angeles and Lupe and their contemporaries north of the border to find the facts and information they wanted. Whatever it was, Zapatistas or code breaking, it was available in libraries or on the Internet. The University had twenty-four-hour, high speed cable access to the Internet, and any student or community member could use the lab. The libraries on campus were stocked with the newest publications about topics ranging from materials engineering to The Human Genome Project to the history of Idaho to the role of women in the Mexican Revolution.

Life is good in Idaho. The capital of Boise is not so large that it is difficult to drive across town and not get stuck in traffic, but not so small that it doesn’t have Starbucks, a modern zoo, skyscrapers with mirrored glass, trendy and upscale Japanese and Italian restaurants, and plenty of recreational opportunities for youngsters and families. Thirty-year-old California Silicon Valley geniuses take their millions to aptly named Treasure Valley and buy up acreage carved out of hundred-year-old tracts of fertile bottom land that tired and aging widows and widowers are selling to get away from the burden of alfalfa, oats, wheat, the mint, and the potatoes. The small bedroom community of Meridian is building freeway interchanges that flow into frontage roads with their symbiotic Best Westerns and neighboring fast-food oases. Along Fairview Avenue and Franklin Road five miles of duplicate cloned strip malls conveniently connect Meridian and Boise with the familiar and

comforting infestation of storefronts that stock everything an American factory can produce and replenish for satisfied consumers. Tires, auto accessories, real estate agencies, banks, wholesale outlets and churches all flourish in Meridian.

Outlying communities of Eagle and Kuna each flank Interstate 84 and feed their ideal two-parent-two-children-family-unit workers, consumers, and students through this main freeway over Boise River, through several green belt parks that grace the city, and then directly into the historic center of the capital. The majority of the Hispanic population is concentrated in Ada and Canyon counties, and Nampa and Caldwell have traditionally attracted a rapidly increasing immigrant population arriving from Mexico by way of California, Arizona, and Texas. Nampa and Caldwell also both straddle the great East-West Interstate 84, but they are perched on rolling foothills five miles farther west from Boise than Meridian, Eagle and Kuna. Because the cost of residential and commercial property is significantly less, and because many factories have located on this lower priced land, many newly-arrived Mexican families locate in Nampa or its twin, Caldwell, across the freeway. Ironic that so many braceros worked in Nampa and Caldwell during the heyday of sugar beets at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A ready market of minimum wage factory jobs and Spanish-speaking markets of essential Mexican food and products accommodate eager and often unskilled workers and spenders while they become assimilated into a white way of life.

Maria de los Angeles' brother, Jaime, had arrived in Meridian eight years ago with a friend. They both had struck out from California looking for something better for their families. Jaime had holed up in a motel room in Nampa while he scouted out as much work as he could get. He quickly noticed that Meridian offered cleaner streets, nicer houses, more open space, friendly people and more English. After several months of hoarding his

salary and eating one meal a day, he sent for his wife and three children. The three jobs that occupy more than twelve hours of his day, six days a week support them well, and his natural intelligence, people skills and California certified training in pesticide and herbicide application are enabling him to work his way into supervisory positions that afford more money, upward job mobility, and the economic security that enabled him to invite Maria de los Angeles and her family to join them in Meridian.

No one is sure whether Jesus ever made it as far north as Idaho. Although some say he worked in the Alaska gold fields, Maria knew better. She and Jaime had heard the stories and rumors about their grandfather, and everyone wanted to believe that he had roamed north into California or beyond. She was beginning to realize that Jesus probably never survived the revolution to make it any farther north than, say, Monterrey or Chihuahua, maybe even El Paso.

*No, he didn't make it up here,* Maria de los Angeles acknowledged to herself.

She sat outside the computer lab looking across the river and facing the mountains to the north. She had not only been thumbing through the code books that she had found in the library, but she had also continued reading Jesus' journal for other clues about the encrypted directions to the strong box and for information about his involvement in the revolution that was changing his and Dolores' life in Casacuarán. She had come to a journal entry that really didn't surprise her, but that seized her with a cold inevitability that she had been trying with all her heart to avoid. She had read it several times that day.

*July 3, 1912, Yuriria*

*Have had to go into hiding here in Yuriria with my sister, Rosa. She offered shelter and food to her poor brother. This is the first chance I have had to sit down and write. Want to understand what happened three days ago in Casacuarán. Still can't believe what occurred. Pray to God Almighty for protection for Dolores and children. Don't think any harm will come to them if I am absent. Will stay here as long as I am welcome or until I hear from Dolores that it is safe in Casacuarán. Why did Arnulfo think that I would fight against him? What made him think to enter my home armed, to surround the house, to threaten the life of my dear Dolores, to try to intimidate me with their wild shooting and yelling, to do this in front of my frightened children... I know we have our disagreements over the election, but I can never forgive him for what they did. Of course, I can never abandon my principles and join his party. Need time to decide what to do. Will stay here for as long as possible, or stay with my brother in Morelia. Yes, to stay with Elias would be the best course of action. Must ride there tomorrow. Will send a boy to get my things from the hacienda.*

When it actually happened, it was unexpected and terrifying. The sudden knock on the door reverberated into the kitchen where Dolores was cutting chunks of fresh cheese into a pan of bubbling hot *chile negro* on the stove. She looked up apprehensively at Jesus who was setting plates around the table. Customers never called this late, and the sound was not a knock. Someone was banging on the door and demanding to be allowed to enter.

“Hey, you, Rodríguez, open the door,” called out Arnulfo Rosas, “Show your face! I want to talk to you now! Let me in, or I will let myself in! Open this door!”

Señor Arnulfo Rosas had been Casacuarán's representative on a state level for years, and he had been recently elected mayor of Casacuarán. He had organized all his *compadres* and *comadres*, motivated his friends, intimidated his acquaintances, and

threatened every other man in town to vote for him. He had also established the veracity of his threats early in the short campaign by having his closest *compadre*, Don Chávez, arrange for two of the most vocal and active supporters of Jesus Rodríguez to be shot and then mutilated in a way that would have rendered them useless to their poor wives had they survived the several .44 caliber bullets lodged in their lifeless bodies. The mutilation was not Don Chávez' idea, but he went along with his *compadre's* desires, and found two out-of-work men who had been denied employment by Jesus a few months before. They agreed to pull the triggers and make the cuts in exchange for gold and employment in Señor Rosas' administration. Almost no one in Casacuarán minded if Arnulfo Rosas was mayor, and no one would interfere.

Jesus stood erect, hugged Dolores, and walked determinedly to the front door. He remembered when neighbors had discovered the two blood-soaked and tortured bodies on the sidewalk in front of Jesus' hacienda. He recalled how silent and seemingly unperturbed everyone was in town when they realized that Rosas had actually killed two well-known businessmen in such a cowardly way. He recollected now that the warnings he had received by anonymous letters should have been taken as actual threats. As he approached the door, he visualized where he kept the guns in the house, and he felt for the derringer in his vest pocket before he turned the key and opened the front door.

“Well, Arnulfo...” Jesus stood in the doorway and faced a short, muscular man wearing his characteristic oversize charro's hat and standing with arms folded across the two menacing bandoliers crisscrossed across his chest. “What a surprise to see you at this hour of the evening. Let me congratulate you on your victory...” Jesus extended his hand to

congratulate *Señor* Rosas, but Arnulfo misinterpreted Jesus' gesture of reconciliation and reacted by suddenly by lowering his hands to the two pistols hanging low off his hips.

“What’s this, Arnulfo? I’m not armed...” countered Jesus, trying to remain calm when he noticed that there was a large group of men similarly armed standing behind Rosas. “Just offering my hand in peace, Rosas.”

“There’s no peace between you and me, Rodríguez,” Arnulfo bellowed belligerently, “until you either join us or get the hell out of town.”

Rosas stared Jesus in the eye, waiting for some kind of reaction so he would have a reasonable excuse to go ahead and pull one of his Colts and shoot Jesus right there. Jesus thought as much, and decided the appropriate course of action was to invite his political enemy into the house and away from his men.

“Oh, no, Arnulfo, that won’t be necessary. Come in and have a drink with me. We’ll talk about what we can do together to get Casacuarán through these difficult times, you and I, eh?”

Jesus stood aside and motioned for Rosas to come in, and as he did, Rosas signaled for several of his bodyguards to follow him into the hacienda. As they passed by Jesus, his intuition and their demeanor made Jesus question his decision to placate and talk with men like these. What happened during the next thirty minutes would not only alter Jesus’ decision about dealing with Rosas and his people but also destroy everything that he and Dolores and their children held dear and worked so hard for.

“Sit down, gentlemen, please, Arnulfo... make yourselves comfortable... Dolores?” Jesus called into the kitchen, “Dolores, can you bring some brandy for *Señor* Rosas and his friends... seven or eight glasses please.”

As they entered the *sala* opposite the small store, neither Rosas nor his men took off their hats; no one put down their rifles; not one man sat down; and none of them picked up any of the glasses that Jesus filled and set on the tray before them. No one said a word while Jesus filled the small glasses.

“Here, let us drink together and put aside any political differences we may have had in the past. We all live here in...”

“¡*Silencio!*” Rosas shouted directly at Jesus. Both men were standing close enough to touch each other, and Rosas’ outburst shocked Jesus. He stepped back and noticed that Dolores had gathered the children back into the kitchen from where they had all congregated to see who had come in the house.

“Please, Arnulfo!” Jesus raised his voice as he felt his own anger rise. “I invited you into my house to entertain you and your men, not to be insulted. Please sit down, relax, and we can discuss whatever differences...”

“You have insulted me and everyone else in our party, and almost everyone in this town,” Rosas stepped towards Jesus and began to assault him with insults. “You either join us or leave Casacuarán... I didn’t come here to drink your *pinche* brandy or sit in your fancy chairs. I came to get your decision, now! We don’t want you and your revolution ideas and your woman or your ugly children around here anymore, but we’ll let you stay and keep

your *pinche* rancho and store if you agree not to interfere with our plans! Decide now! What's your decision, Rodríguez? Speak up, man!"

Jesus Rodríguez had had no political aspirations in Casacuarán. He had always tended his fields peacefully; he sold his bean, chile, peanut, yam and corn crops in Salvatierra at a reasonable profit; he and Dolores had established themselves in their small store as astute and hard-working business people; and everyone in town seemed to respond to their civility, kindness, and respectful natures. Jesus neither sought nor made enemies, and he would go out of his way to resolve differences of opinion with anyone. He wanted merely to live his life in peace with his family, develop his business to support their children, and pursue his curiosity to know more about what was happening outside of Casacuarán. He wanted only what was best for the Mexican people, the people who worked the land as he did.

In contrast, Arnulfo Rosas exemplified the finest of political treachery and the worst of Mexican manhood. He had received his state deputy position from a *compadre* who had the great good fortune of being one of Porfirio Diaz' generals. Governor Mercado of Michoacán had also chipped in his support with part of the \$12,880 a mile railroad subsidy given to governors for construction and maintenance of the section of rail line that passed through the Casacuarán municipality. Rosas lied convincingly whenever it was to his personal benefit knowing that his corrupted word would be heard as the truth by those who wanted his help. He flattered and curried the favor of only those who could help him the most, and he used the growing revolutionary unrest to cloak his personal and perverted manipulation of opponents and detractors. He had no integrity, scruples or conscience.

On the other hand, Rosas did maintain several mistresses to complement the woman he exhibited as his wife. The women were strategically positioned around the state so that none would encounter each other, and so that whatever scandal might eventually become public would be minimal. He was a forward-thinking man, and his thoughts were always focused on leveraging the most money and influence he could from whatever opportunities life offered him. He had his eye on Jesus' large fertile plot of farmland, and he had let himself imagine a new liaison waiting for him in Jesus' hacienda. He knew that there was no recorded title for Jesus' property, so he could just as easily seize and claim it the way Diaz and his father-in-law had been doing with prime parcels of land all over Mexico. Jesus' personal integrity and charisma had allowed him to remain politically neutral, and so Rosas saw this as the perfect opportunity to easily and quickly separate Jesus from his holdings. It wouldn't be necessary to evict him after raising his taxes either. No one in town would wish it to happen, yet no one in town would have the courage to stop Rosas or even voice their protest. All he had to do was eliminate Jesus, and he could walk in unarmed and take everything.

"We should probably discuss this tomorrow," Jesus looked Arnulfo in the eye a moment then added, "You should know that I make no decision unless I choose to, and if..." Jesus caught the instant that Arnulfo's arms twitched. He reached quickly into his pocket, and in one movement that stunned Rosas, pulled out the derringer, pointed it directly at Rosas' forehead, and cocked the hammer with an ominous click.

"You wouldn't try to kill a man," Jesus said jokingly to cover his fear, "in his own house, would you?" Rosas' men had raised their rifles and pointed them at Jesus. Rosas had stopped moving his hands towards his pistols, and was glowering at Jesus.

“You wouldn’t pull that trigger either, Rodríguez, you don’t have the balls to kill me, do you, you coward!” Rosas was shaking with anger and fear, and his men had started clamoring for Jesus to put down the small over-and-under pistol or they would blow his head off his shoulders.

“If your men fire first, Rosas, you’re dead before I am.” Jesus spoke seriously now, fully aware of the deadly situation he had precipitated. “If I fire first, you’re also dead first. Think about it, man. Tell them to put down their guns. Tell them now, Arnulfo!”

Fortunately for Jesus, the fact that Rosas stood between Jesus and Rosas’ men meant that any volley from their rifles would go through Rosas’ head first. Everyone understood that fact as Rosas called to the nervous men in back of him.

“Put down your guns, compadres. We’ll be back another time to take care of this one!” Without waiting for Jesus to lower his gun, Rosas turned slowly about face and calmly walked between his men who followed him out the front door of Jesus’ hacienda. Jesus stood rigid still holding the pistol pointing at Rosas until he had exited the door and disappeared into the trees. Rosas and his men released their tension and fear as they fired wildly into the air, cursing Jesus and his family. Dolores had already lowered the Winchester she had had pointed at the lead Rosas man from her kitchen hiding place, and she ran out to embrace Jesus.

“Jesus, what are we going to do? They’re going to kill you...” The children rushed out crying, and Dolores gathered them into her arms to comfort them.

“I have to leave, Lolita...” Jesus held her tightly and felt her trembling. He spoke very quietly and told her what he had been thinking for some time. “There’s only one way, my little Lolita... I’ll have to leave.”

## Chapter Nine Jaimito's Code

*July 6, 1912, Morelia*

*Finally made it to Morelia. Have been here two days now at my brother's house. Rode back to Casacuarán during the dead of night to assure my dear Dolores and children that I am safe, and to bring two horses along with other necessities. It was very wise to leave the strong box for Dolores. I can send money now, but don't know how long that will continue. She still knows nothing of the box. Candelaria takes good care of Elias and me. Elias trusts her, and so I must. Our sister in Yuriria, Rosa, was kind to take me in for a few days, but she is fearful, and rightly so. While I was there a group of heavily armed men appeared on the street in the middle of the day looking for me. Had it not been for Candelaria's quick warning and our previous discussion of such an occurrence, I most definitely would have been killed. As it was, I escaped through the rear door in the chicken coop and onto the opposite block from where I was able to run and hide myself in the marketplace. This is not good.*

*July 7, 1912, Morelia*

*Spent the day discussing matters with Elias and other trustworthy men, some are his compadres, some are supporters of Zapata. Learned about his Plan de Ayala and desire to abandon hope that Madero will help the people. He calls for people to continue armed struggle. Elias' men said that they have attacked Yautepec, Tescuilco, San Martin Texmelucan, Santa Maria and the rail line from Cuernavaca to Tetecala. Later attacks on Jojutla, then Puebla, then Huitzilac. I had so hoped that Madero could rally the country and avoid continued bloodshed between Mexican brothers, but I understand that is not to be so. Elias says that Zapata and his people have lost faith in Madero, and that they will work*

*against him now. I would still like very much to meet the man Zapata, and have discussed this with Elias, but it is now more impossible than before. Elias has mentioned the wisdom of relocating to a little rancho of his south of Pátzcuaro near the town of Ario de Rosales. Never visited there, but Elias says it is farther away from the contention and violence here. They don't know me or his political activities there, so it would be safer. Could even take Dolores and the children there. Will ride there within the week to investigate.*

*July 15, 1912, Morelia*

*Things move quickly when there is the necessity to survive. I had wanted to travel north to visit El Paso, Chicago, San Francisco to see where the machinery that is building the future is manufactured. I am afraid this will not occur in the near future, as it appears that within the week I will be moving farther south, to Ario de Rosales. Not for my further education and enlightenment, but to become absorbed in the population, hidden from Rosas' men who seem to think I am a threat to them. Perhaps I am. I mean them no harm, but I do think they are untrue to the ideal that Emiliano calls "land and liberty." As a man who has enjoyed both land and liberty, I have to support his efforts to bring back each man's land and his liberty to farm and make a life for his family. No one seems to think of Emiliano's ideas, the basic change he is working for so that all men can live in peace and make a life. Everyone talks of the violence he commits, and they call him a beast, a traitor. I think I have changed my way of perceiving the situation in our dear Mexico. I have seen enough of Diaz' work to know that it benefits only a few at the expense of the many. I will do what I can with whatever capacities and resources I have to support his efforts for the future of our Mexico.*

*So that's why he was in Ario de Rosales, Maria thought to herself. He really was there... and it must have been this Rosas or other of Diaz' men who killed him...*

Maria de los Angeles had read three more journal entries before she arrived home that afternoon. She was waiting on the line listening to the phone ring in her mother's house in Yuriria and waiting to ask her mother if she knew what pet name her father used with Dolores and if she knew of any strongbox in Casacuarán. As the phone signaled its characteristic buzz, Maria wondered how to tell her mother about the journal, what it said, what it meant to her, what she had learned about Zapatistas...

“*Bueno?*” The familiar and soothing sound of Maria's mother's voice from two thousand miles away interrupted her thinking.

“Momi! *!Qué tal!* How are you? I haven't talked with you for so long. How are you and Popi?” Maria wanted to start in asking questions, but appreciated the initial customary small talk.

“Ay! *Hija!* Where are you? In Idaho? Ay, how are you and your children? Did you and that husband of yours find work? Where are you staying, with Jaime?” Angelina was the one who asked questions because it had been several months since she had last seen or heard from her daughter. She inquired and Maria dutifully filled in the obligatory details until Maria felt that the family database had been updated satisfactorily. Then she opened the topic of Jesus' journal.

“Momi, I've been reading Jesus' journal, you know, you gave it to me that night when I visited you in Yuriria? Yes, that one... Well, it's very interesting... it talks about how he wanted to explore other parts of Mexico and...” For a few minutes Maria de los Angeles recounted to her mother everything Jesus had said he wanted to do until she realized that she was talking in circles, so she stopped and blurted out, “Momi, do you remember a special

name that your father used with Dolores... some kind of name he used when he talked with her?"

"What, *Hija*? A name? What name?" Angelina was puzzled with her daughter's strange question. "Oh, a name that my father used with my mother? Well, he called her Dolores... uh, sometimes... let me think... yes, Dolores and... I remember whenever he was worried about her, he would call her... uh... Lolita, yes, Lolita, I remember him using that name, but not too often, *Hija*... why are you asking that?"

Maria de los Angeles took a deep breath and launched into the convoluted details of the strongbox, the scrambled directions, the secret codeword that now could be "Lolita," and the revelations Jesus had written about his involvement in the political events of the revolution. She realized that no one else in the family knew about Jesus' journal and the secrets it contained within. She also understood that the seventy-eight-year-old woman listening on the other end of the line was the person most familiar with Jesus and with Dolores. As she spoke, she wondered what Angelina, her mother, would say and how she would feel.

When Maria had finished talking, the line was quiet for a moment. She paused a little longer before she interrupted what she realized was her mother's bitter-sweet reminiscence of the times when she was a girl in Casacuarán... when she would open the back door of the hacienda at dusk to call the ducks in from the river that flowed right behind the house; when she would run her hands through the gold coins and let them slip between her fingers like water back into the basket; when she and her two brothers and three sisters were warm and content with their mother cooking and their father at home reading or writing; when she would listen to her mother and father talking after dinner; when she and

her father would ride his two favorite horses far into the upper foothills above the rancho; when her mother showed her the tortoise shell combs, white silk stockings, perfumes and other private treasures that Jesus would bring back to her from his trips; when the men came that day to threaten them and she looked out the back door for an escape and there was nothing but armed men there too; when her mother told her that Jesus had business in Yuriria, that he would be back in a few days, but he only came back at night; when they all had to...

Maria de los Angeles heard her mother crying quietly... two thousand miles away, and she could not see or touch, nor hug, nor comfort her mother, her own mother who at that moment was once again the youngest child and daughter of Jesus and Dolores, who at that moment remembered her father's goodness and simplicity, her mother's elegance and dignity, the cruel injustice of what finally happened to them, and her mother's quiet death by pneumonia in a cold ambulance outside of Morelia.

"Momi, I love you... and... I wish I was there with you now... Remember you gave me Jesus' journal, that day I was there with you... you said it would lead me back somehow, back to Mexico... remember that? I have some work to do here in Idaho about the journal, then, this Christmas, I think, I will come down for two weeks. I'll bring the kids, but Emilio has to fly down to Ensenada to check on his business. I need to see you and talk with you about Jesus and the journal. Maybe we can go over to Casacuarán and look around, eh? Maybe we'll find that strongbox that Jesus left for your mother... If we do find it, it will be yours, if we find it, that is, because I need to try to understand the directions he left... I'll try to use, what was it... oh, yes, 'Lolita,' yes, that's it, I'll use his special name to try to understand his message, eh?"

The two women stayed talking on the line that connected their hearts for another five or so minutes, then, after Angelina finally said, “*Cuídate mucho, Hija...* Take good care of yourself, daughter,” mother and daughter finally let go and returned quietly instead to the silent and secret love their hearts would continue to exchange.

It would be the next day, several hours after Maria had told Lupe about her conversation with her mother and then exchanged the books they had been looking at for two other armfuls of miscellaneous books about codes, that Maria would chance upon the missing part of the strongbox puzzle. She already had the directions to the location of the strongbox, but they were jumbled up somehow by using the special name of Maria’s grandmother, Dolores. She finally had a name now too – “Lolita,” and since her mother provided Maria with the name, Maria was fairly confident that she had the key to unlock the directions. She only needed now to discover how the name was used to disguise the directions to the box, perhaps the most elusive of the puzzle pieces. She would learn the secret alright, but she would not be the one to discover the final piece that would unlock the message.

Maria de los Angeles had gone to her brother, Jaime’s, house for dinner. He worked six and sometimes seven days a week, but he and Letty had planned for some time now to invite Maria and her family over for a barbecue. Maria had inadvertently carried in her book bag with the other bags of groceries and food she brought in the house for the party. She set the bags on the sofa next to the front door and went out for another load of supplies. When she returned, she found Jaime’s first son, Jaimito, looking into the bags. Now Jaimito could, and if the opportunity presented itself to him, would eat anything that was sweet, especially half gallon ice cream floats made in large serving bowls with Dr. Pepper.

“Sorry, Jaimito, no ice cream this trip, just meat and vegetables and bread.” consoled Maria.

“What are those books about, *Tia*?” Jaimito inquired as he pulled one from the canvas bag. “Are these video game books?” The fact that scooping ice cream, playing video games and computers were Jaimito’s major interests when he was at home explained somewhat why he was physically uncoordinated and a hundred pounds overweight. What no one could find a logical explanation for though was his eccentric sense of humor. When challenged to state some aspect of this ideation process, to respond to someone’s question, or just to engage in intentionally innocuous conversation, he would juxtapose words and ideas that one was not completely sure should be so juxtaposed, particularly by an eight-year-old boy. Serious conversations were rare, and true communication remained on superficial levels. He was a great joker, and he was a mystery. Other sisters and brothers-in-law pointed to his father’s long hours away from home working. Some attributed it to his mother’s inability to discipline any of the children fearing that Jaime would criticize her as being abusive. A few maintained that his personality quirks were blessings compared to his little brother and sister’s apparently genetic learning, behavioral and communicative deficiencies. No one would say out loud that they thought privately. Jaime would hear nothing of it.

“Yes, Jaimito, would you like to look at them? Go ahead, take a look...” Maria watched as Jaimito pulled out each book and stacked it on the end table next to the TV. He sat down on the carpeted floor, leaned against the sofa, took down the first book from the stack, and proceeded to carefully flip through every page. Maria de los Angeles was satisfied

with her student's project, and, as she took the other bags into the kitchen, she encouraged him to look at all the books.

*Curious kid*, she thought to herself.

Two hours into the cutting of onions, chile, cilantro, lemons and tomato for salsa; spooning that same salsa on whole crispy fried corn tortillas; tending the charcoal smoking and sizzling under ribs, sausages, *tripas*, and thinly sliced steak; squeezing lemon slices into icy bottles of Corona; pushing onion halves, piles of green onions, jumbo jalapeño chiles and tortillas around the grill to the point of doneness; and finally folding whatever morsel of meat, onion and chile you've been eyeing off the hot grill into a soft tortilla and biting off as much as you could manage considering that other people are watching... after two hours of good Mexican barbecue, someone asked where Jaimito was.

"Oh, how embarrassing," Letty apologized, "I don't know where he is... let me go look for him." She turned around from the sink, and started to call his name. She walked into the living room and found him next to a stack of books carefully drawing or writing something on a tablet of paper on the low coffee table.

"Jaimito..." Letty implored as if she alone had been responsible for his whereabouts, "Where were you? We were calling you... where have you been?"

"I been here, Mom, lookin' at books and drawing," he quickly said without looking up at his mother. He didn't like to be interrupted, especially by his mother.

"What are you drawing, Jaimito? Action figures... Power Rangers... Pokémon?" Letty was familiar with the pantheon of idols that Jaimito worshiped. She liked it when he was drawing because he was not eating or bothering her.

“I making some code games, Mom, squares of code I made from my name... see...” The overweight boy held up his grimy cartoon notebook and held up a page of lines of letters in the form of a square, chicken scratches to Letty.

“Oh, that’s real nice, Jaimito, good work,” Letty said sincerely as she turned and walked back into the kitchen to tend the mound of greasy dishes that encroached on the sink area like a tall mesa dominates the desert horizon.

“Is Jaimito OK, Letty?” Maria inquired, being herself constantly attuned to the whereabouts and welfare of all children in the area.

“Oh, how embarrassing,” Letty started in, “He was in the living room drawing pictures of squares with lines of numbers or letters or I don’t know what... he said it was some kind of code he made with his name or something like that... But he’s fine... Have another taco, Maria...”

Maria stopped chewing and looked at Letty. “He’s drawing what?”

“Oh, it’s just some kind of puzzle or code he says,” Letty replied nonchalantly, “with letters that he said he made from his name or something... Say, is it OK if he looks at your books too? Those are your books, aren’t they, Maria?”

“Sure, it is Letty,” Maria was up before she finished her answer. She walked casually into the living room and found Jaimito exactly the way Letty had described him.

“Wha’cha doin’, Jaimito?” His lack of response allowed her to look over his shoulder to see what he was drawing or writing before she had to actually make contact with her uncommunicative nephew.

“Drawing something, Jaimito?” She repeated. She was surprised to get a very clear and intelligible response.

“This book shows how to draw secret squares with different letters you can move around using my name...” He held up his notebook for Maria’s inspection and praise. “See here... first letters of each line,” he pointed to the first letters of seven horizontal lines of letters, “begin with the letters of my name. J-A-I-M-I-T-O... that’s my name... Cool, isn’t it, ’?” Maria realized that the horizontal lines of letters were really the alphabet shifted to start with the letters in Jaimito’s name.

jklmnopqrstuvwxyzabcdefghi  
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxy  
ijklmnopqrstuvwxyzabcdefgh  
mnopqrstuvwxyzabcdefghijkl  
ijklmnopqrstuvwxyzabcdefgh  
tuvwxyzabcdefghijklmnopqrs  
opqrstuvwxyzabcdefghijklmn

“Yes, that’s really cool, Jaimito, really cool.” Maria took the notebook and asked, “Can I see it?”

It took her little time to realize that uncoordinated and overweight little Jaimito had found what looked to her like the code or whatever it was she was looking for that could unlock the directions to Jesus strongbox. Jaimito was eager to show his aunt the page in her library book where he found and learned what he had been working on so intently for the past hour.

“Can I borrow that book now? I’d like to look at it too.” Maria took the book and sat down at the end of the sagging sofa on the other side of the living room. She watched

Jaimito return without a word to his private world of discovery and invention before she looked at the page she held marked with her fingers. When finally she opened the book again, she saw something that resembled the square of lines of letters in Jesus' journal except each line was shifted one letter to the left of the line above.

*ABCDEFGHIJKLMN OPQRSTUVWXYZ  
BCDEFGHIJKLMN OPQRSTUVWXYZA  
CDEFGHIJKLMN OPQRSTUVWXYZAB  
DEFGHIJKLMN OPQRSTUVWXYZABC  
EFGHIJKLMN OPQRSTUVWXYZABCD  
FGHIJKLMN OPQRSTUVWXYZABCDE  
GHIJKLMN OPQRSTUVWXYZABCDEF  
HIJKLMN OPQRSTUVWXYZABCDEFG  
IJKLMN OPQRSTUVWXYZABCDEFGH*

Maria got up, rummaged through her canvas book bag to retrieve Jesus' journal. She opened it to the page marked with the copy of the message he had scrambled, and compared it with the square of lines of letters in the library code book.

*OPYECZ OP WL NZNTYL OP WL SLNTPYOL  
RWSN HOPWEISG RS ZO DOFSR RSZ CSHS  
BFTYNP ELMTBFPD OP WL ALCPO OPW YZCEP  
CV UMBZW G UMLQW  
UACH WXE IBLH WX MTUBJNX  
BAJO UNA LARGA PIEDRA PLANO*

She thought for a moment, then interrupted Jaimito. “Jaimito, will you look at this code for me?” She held out the copy of Jesus’ message. Her nephew looked up from his scribbling, then crawled across the floor to inspect the paper.

“Look, *Tia*, these are words... see the spaces between words,” his pudgy fingers indicated the spaces after each mixed up word, “... except the words mixed up with their letters in a different way. Maybe someone mixed up the words using their name like me with my name... See...” Jaimito held up the notebook he had been drawing and writing in and pointed out to Maria.

“Oh, yeah, Jaimito, you showed me that be... ” Maria stopped in the middle of her last word as she suddenly grasped the relationship transforming in her mind between Jaimito’s game with his name, the square of lines with the starting letter shifted one letter each line, Jesus’ coded directions to the strongbox, and the special name Jesus used with Dolores– was it be Lolita?

“Can I use your notebook to write some code with the name of my grandmother, Jaimito?” Jaimito liked someone playing his game, and in two minutes Maria had written out in Jaimito’s notebook the lines of alphabet shifted with “Lolita.”

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxy  
lmnopqrstuvwxyzabcdefghijk  
opqrstuvwxyzabcdefghijklmnop  
lmnopqrstuvwxyzabcdefghijk  
ijklmnopqrstuvwxyzabcdefgh  
tuvwxyzabcdefghijklmnopqrs  
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxy

“I could use this, couldn’t I, Jaimito,” Maria watched Jaimito’s eyes sparkle as he realized his aunt understood and was playing along with his game, “to write some mixed-up words like these in my grandfather’s journal, or I could translate these words with these lines I just wrote here, couldn’t I...” Maria de los Angeles’ mind raced as she picked up the copy of Jesus’ scrambled directions and placed it under the “Lolita square” she had just devised.

“Let’s see...” she thought out loud as she compared the two papers. “There are six lines in the directions... yes! just like in the one I made with “Lolita...” She studied the two papers another minute before she blurted out to Jaimito who was waiting quietly, “Jaimito, the last line of the message is in Spanish, I mean, it’s not mixed up, and look... the last line is the regular alphabet... it begins with ‘A’ because the last letter of my grandmother’s name is ‘A’... The other lines above it must be connected some way with the other letters of ‘Lolita’... and they’re not written with the regular alphabet...”

“I see?” Jaimito took the two papers when Maria nodded. He looked closely at the letters, then quickly exclaimed happily, “I know the answer, I know the answer, it’s in that book... Look...” The precocious boy showed his aunt how the letters in the “Lolita square” were lined up above each other in vertical columns under the regular alphabet, and how the fifth “T” line could be used to translate each word in the fifth line of Jesus’ scrambled directions back into regular Spanish using the top line that started with “A.”<sup>1</sup> Before Maria could ask him, Jaimito was painstakingly writing out the original Spanish of Jesus’ directions to the strongbox, decoded for the first time since he had encrypted it cautiously eighty years before at his desk in Casacuarán.

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<sup>1</sup> For those readers who like the author have difficulty following little Jaimito's explanation of how to decode Jesus' message, take moment to look at Appendix A where a simplified explanation of how this Vigenère Square is decoded. I suggest that readers interested in codes look at Simon Singh, *The Code Book* (New York: Doubleday, 1999)

dentro de la cocina de la hacienda  
diez tabiques de la pared del oeste  
quince tabiques de la pared del norte  
un metro y medio  
bajo del piso de tabique  
bajo una larga piedra plano

Maria de los Angeles waited until Jaimito finished. He held up the paper on which he had just scribbled Jesus' directions to the strongbox. She congratulated him with a wide grin and a pat on the back.

“Great work, Jaimito! Do you know what it says in English...?”

Jaimito shook his head and raised his eyebrows sheepishly, “I forgot a lot of my Spanish, *Tia*, when I come to Idaho...”

“That’s OK, Jaimito... It says, Inside the hacienda kitchen,” Maria started to translate as she read deliberately, “Ten bricks from the west wall, fifteen bricks from the north wall, one meter and a half, under the brick floor, under a large flat stone.”

“Yes!” exclaimed Jaimito. “That’s cool!”

Both he and Maria de los Angeles applauded their work, and they each enjoyed the satisfaction and pleasure of their mutual accomplishment. It was this kind of playful yet focused collaboration that would cause Jaimito to continue to read, write, draw and feed his imagination with input from first books, and then from other people and their ideas. Years later people would remember little Jaimito as Jim Gómez, the computer prodigy who had invented first a steel and then a digital padlock both of which utilized a person’s eidetic images for locking and unlocking information, and after that, plastic digital storage discs

that shifted color along the spectrum according to how much data they contained and how much storage space that still remained.

Maria de los Angeles, on the other hand, would always remember her nephew, Jaimito, Jesus' great-grandson, as her younger brother, Jaime's son, the strange little pudgy boy who had helped her find her way back to Casacuarán and to Ario de Rosales, her way back to Jesus and Dolores, back to Mexico where she would find the part of herself that she had left behind.

## Chapter Ten      Ario de Rosales

Everyone had roses in town—small tea roses and climbing roses in particular. Many had been planted in the town plaza; old adobe walls were taken over by thorny tendrils of old style multi-petaled roses; and most people had pots of whatever variety would survive with the least water in the sunniest parts of their *salas*, corridors and courtyards. Most assumed the beauty and aroma of the flowers was reason enough to name the town after the roses.

What no one remembered or bothered to talk about anymore was that when Nuño de Guzmán stormed through Michoacán in 1530 with Hernán de Cortez, among his companions and fellow soldiers were several mercenaries from the area that is now Germany. Like many of their Spanish counterparts, one of these nameless and homesick men found his own way to disengage from Cortez' machine of conquest and disappear in a small mountain valley surrounded by high, green forests where the cool mountain air and sudden thunderstorms reminded him of his native Alps. No one knows if he brought with him some knowledge and perhaps clippings of roses, or if he found wild varieties on his hikes into the surrounding peaks. What is surmised though, is that because for as long as anyone could remember the small peaceful town had been called Ario de Rosales, that is the Aryan of the Roses, there must have been such a man, and he certainly must have loved roses. Or so say the people there.

When Jesus first rode into Ario, he noticed the flowers first. He and Dolores had started to cultivate roses from cuttings they would get from neighbors, customers, and new roses from other towns from which Jesus would politely request a cutting. He thought it a good omen to be seeking shelter in a town with so many roses. Elias' small house was

tucked between two other adobe houses that cut through the entire block on the outskirts of town. It was marked only by a rectangular steel blue Dutch door, and it appeared from the dirt road that it was part of the neighboring houses. It was an excellent place to hide.

Ario de Rosales was a good three-day ride from Casacuarán, and a two-day ride from Morelia to the south, so Elias was certain that no residents knew his brother, Jesus. Oh, he had mentioned to a few folks that he had a brother, but he had never brought Jesus to town. Better let people know, Elias concluded, as soon as possible that Jesus will be here for a while to avoid folks jumping to conclusions or guessing why he is really here.

“I’m not planning to stay forever, Elias...” Jesus replied to his brother, “only until this trouble with Rosas is forgotten... I don’t know, a few months, a year, we’ll see...”

“Well, you know that you can stay here,” Elias countered, “even when I’m not here. People will come to know that we are brothers, and will not inquire further.”

*July, 20, 1912, Ario de Rosales*

*Most of the time Elias is not here. He has his work in Morelia. Everyone needs horses, and he has the best in the area. I pass my time working the horses he keeps here, probably twenty or so at any one time. Elias introduces me as his brother who is here to help him with his horses. Good thing I have some knowledge about these animals. Elias brings me reading materials from his friends, from some of his compadres from the south, and letters from Dolores and the children. Thinking about the possibility of Dolores and the children spending some time here in Ario, but it is only a thought now. Reading Zapata’s Plan de Ayala when have time, usually in the evenings. Finally understand the basis for his actions in the south and elsewhere. Rejecting our current president, Madero, because,*

*according to Emiliano, he only intends to satisfy “his personal ambitions, his boundless instincts as a tyrant, and his profound disrespect for the fulfillment of the preexisting laws.” Emiliano also says that Madero also has “left standing most of the governing powers and corrupted elements of oppression of the dictatorial government of Porfirio Díaz” and not lived up to his own Plan of San Luis Potosí where he called for all Mexican brothers and sisters to revolt against Díaz. He accuses Madero of “nullifying, pursuing, jailing, or killing revolutionary elements who helped him to occupy the high post of President of the Republic.” I have seen and heard of this in my recent travels, so Emiliano is correct. He also says that Madero has used “the brute force of bayonets to shut up and to drown in blood the pueblos who ask, solicit, or demand from him the fulfillment of the promises of the revolution, calling them bandits and rebels, condemning them to a war of extermination.” In addition, Zapata accuses our president of “entering into scandalous cooperation with the científico party, feudal landlords, and oppressive bosses, enemies of the revolution proclaimed by him, so as to forge new chains and follow the pattern of a new dictatorship more shameful and more terrible than that of Porfirio Díaz.”*

*July 22, 1912, Ario de Rosales*

*More study of Zapata’s Plan. He calls for the withdrawal of support for Madero, and replacing him with Pascual Orozco or if not Orozco, then Zapata himself. As I understand his Plan, Zapata promises to fight to victory or death to remove the remaining elements of Díaz and Madero. Very surprised but understand now more of Zapata’s campaign of action. He called for the legal owners of properties which landlords, rich hacendados and científicos, took from them to take them back immediately with force of arms if necessary. I feel that he is correct in his purpose. I know how I feel having been*

*driven from my own property by Rosas' threats against us. Emiliano also calls for one third of all large tracts of land held by these powerful proprietors be given to "the pueblos and citizens of Mexico" to "obtain ejidos, colonies, and foundations for pueblos or fields for sowing or laboring, and the Mexicans' lack of prosperity and well-being may improve in all and for all." Noticed that several acquaintances signed this Plan of Ayala—Severiano Gutiérrez, Ponciano Domínguez, and Lorenzo Vázquez. Didn't know that they were involved with the revolution this way. Finally, I have a way to understand Zapata's intentions. Noticed that this Plan of Ayala<sup>2</sup> was signed December 11, 1911. Wish we could have gotten a copy earlier, as it is, the information is six months old. Need better ways of communication to guarantee that people have the correct information as soon as possible to understand more and to avoid missteps. Some large towns have telephones, but in the country, like in Casacuarán, there are no telephones nor are there the appropriate lines to transmit the telephone messages. All people need to know what conditions are in different parts of our country with different groups of our people, who is working to improve the lives of the working people, and who is not. I see some time in the near future when the telephone can connect all people and serve the acute need we have to know what is happening as soon as it happens. I will investigate the possibilities of investing in the telephone services or companies that are being started in the area.*

“This is the second time Jesus mentions this Rosas fellow, the first time that he was trying to get Jesus, and now that he drove him off his hacienda... I wonder what Jesus did for money, how their little store survived, “Maria asked rhetorically after she paused reading the journal to Lupe. “He doesn't say what happened to their business. He was the

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<sup>2</sup> From John Womack, Jr, *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1968, 400-404).

one riding into Salvatierra to get supplies for their store every few days... So, when he separated himself from everything there in Ario de Rosales, how could they make it?"

"I'm sure he took some money with him to Ario de Rosales," Lupe replied, "don't you think? Maybe his brother gave him money too. You know, it's too bad that the Internet didn't exist during the Revolution, eh? Jesus mentioned how there were so few phones in Mexico then, and I guess it's still true now too... how people are isolated from each other with no convenient and inexpensive way to give and get information."

"Yeah, Lupe," Maria added, "in Mexico, in Cuernavaca where I lived, we had to wait a year before we could get a telephone line to our apartment, a year, can you believe it? and it wasn't even a private line."

"Are you kidding?" Lupe was honestly surprised at the low level of telephone service in Mexico. "I'm glad we have good phone systems here and the Internet and that computers are cheap too. Still though, a person has to have about a thousand dollars to get set up with a computer and an Internet provider. Lots of people still are isolated by their poverty and ignorance, eh, Maria, both in Mexico and here in the states."

Both women sat quietly for a moment. In the distance the surrounding low mountains were dusted with another of the first winter snows that demarcated the hot summers from the cold winters in Idaho.

"Have you decided to go to Casacuarán to look for the strongbox?" Lupe's breath made cold plumes in the clear afternoon air as she inquired. She had already decided to ask if she could accompany Maria to Casacuarán if she decided to go. "I mean, now that you know where Jesus put it... well, it's either still there, or it isn't, right?"

“Yes, Lupe, I’ve decided to go back to visit my mother in Yuriria during Christmas break, and I’ll probably go to Casacuarán, maybe Ario too, but I don’t know what to do about the strongbox. I don’t even know if Jesus’ hacienda is still there, and if it is, someone else probably is living there... I can’t just go in and start digging, can I? I don’t know, Lupe... I’m not sure what I’ll do if I go to Casacuarán.”

Lupe decided against asking if she could escort her friend back to Mexico. Instead, she asked Maria a question neither she nor Maria expected to ask or hear.

“Maria, would you help me with my research? You know I told you a little about what I’m studying, and I would value very much your input and opinion about your experiences and perspectives as a Mexican woman who has immigrated north. I could really use your ideas about what you’re learning and thinking about Jesus’ journal and his experience during the Revolution. I would just ask you some questions, you know, kinda like an informal interview. Then I’d use your answers in... well, I don’t know yet how I would use them, maybe quote your words, or paraphrase your ideas... I don’t know yet. What I do know is that I value you, Maria, your experience and your understanding of things. Well, would you help me, work with me?”

When Lupe had started to ask her question, Maria de los Angeles quickly understood that this would be a good opportunity to think through what was happening to her with the move, the journal, the strongbox, her mother, everything. She liked Lupe’s eagerness to investigate and learn new ideas, and she appreciated her deference and respect of her personal life. Even though she had some anxiety about it, Maria was excited.

“I’d like to work with you, Lupe, yes, I like that idea. When do we start?”

It was a few days afterwards in the student union lounge that Maria de los Angeles, not Lupe, asked the first question when she surprised her friend with, “Lupe, how do you decide what questions to ask me, I mean, I think you could ask a lot of different questions, couldn’t you? So how do you pick the right questions... the ones you think will get you the best answer for your research?”

“Jeez, Maria, you should be doing the interviewing with me. That’s a great question... You really want an answer, don’t you...? Yeah, you do...”

As Lupe started to try to give her friend the most succinct and intelligent answer she could, she realized that she had found a good friend in Maria de los Angeles, a close friend, confident perhaps, someone she could trust and work with, woman-to-woman, in a way she hadn’t missed or looked for because she hadn’t had a friend like Maria before. Their friendship, she realized, was like an unexpected and undeserved gift from, well, from someone or somewhere... she didn’t know or care.

“Well, sure, I can give you an answer. For a few months now I have been studying chaos theory, a new way of thinking about how systems grow and evolve. There’s some basic principles in chaos theory that describe not only how these systems, you know, like crystals, flowers, evolution, ideas, our lives, anything that starts and develops is a system, I guess... Anyway, these systems grow, and as they grow, they produce structures that are formed from the process of that system’s development. You following me?”

“I think so, like how shells and flowers have some kind of pattern or design to them... I mean there must be some kind of genetic rule that makes them all grow in their certain way, and after they do, you have a shell or a flower or whatever else, and it’s obvious when you look at them that there was a principle behind their growth. Is that right, Lupe?”

“That’s it... you got it. You pick up ideas fast, Maria, did you know that? Well, you do, girl... Anyway, there are some interesting principles that are emerging from chaos theory research about how systems develop that attracted me,<sup>3</sup> and I used them to develop some questions that I think will focus your attention on how those principles have influenced your own personal development... Cool idea, eh?”

Lupe was excited and proud of her understanding of chaos theory, first, and secondly, her astute application of the principles to such a basic yet compelling information-gathering process as the interview. In her research now she was starting to structure all her questions to focus on how chaos affected specific examples of the development of the particular system in question. Maria de los Angeles would see her go on to finish her master’s research about how chaos theory articulates how information was disseminated and repressed during the Mexican Revolution. She would later publish her doctoral dissertation entitled, *Chaos Theory and the Ongoing Revolution in Mexico*, and at Maria’s urging, would query scores of publishers until one finally recognized a best-seller and put Lupe on the talk show circuit for six months.

“Yeah, it is,” Maria made herself comfortable in the arm chair as she readied herself, “So let’s start.”

“OK, let’s see... Is it OK if I record this so I can go back later and transcribe it? I really want to listen and take some notes as we go, and I don’t want to have to write down what you’re saying. OK? Great, right... first question... Would you please explain some of the significant ideas or events that have influenced you.”

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<sup>3</sup> Readers interested in chaos theory are directed to the author's favorite text from which the ideas I have included in this book have sprung: Heinz-Otto Peitgen, Hartmut Jürgens, Deitmar Saupe, *Chaos and Fractals* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1992)

“Sure, let’s see, let me think... well, the basic event was being born in Mexico I guess, in a small town where I learned to value my family and my own children. I had a normal Mexican childhood with lots of brothers and sisters. My dad started to come to the U.S. in the late 40’s as a bracero, and he would come back every year during Christmas for two or three months to make more babies... Ha-ha! Yeah, my mom was busy alright when he came back, you know? Eleven brothers and sisters...”

Maria de los Angeles went on for ten minutes detailing how she was the first of the last two daughters to be urged to go to the university and get her master’s degree; how she participated in the drama of the October 2nd 1968 Tlatelolco plaza massacre of hundreds of students and others; how she went on to educate peasants in isolated mountain towns of Michoacán to use their natural resources wisely and to organize their municipal governments to serve more people more efficiently; how she had to prove herself as a capable leader among the male-dominated political and community leadership; and how she learned to read, guide and manipulate people to achieve the political and social goals she had set for herself. Lupe listened intently, then asked her second question.

“Well, would you explain how these events that you just described have formed you to be the way you are?”

“I’ve... always wanted,” Maria continued to freely talk about herself, “to be a leader, confident, wise, strong... and I think I have become that. I am really the one who cares for my children, not Emilio, he’s accustomed to being gone working here or there most of the time... It’s me who takes care of things. I guess when I started to see Don Fidel... oh, he’s a *curandero* in Amatlán outside of Cuernavaca, where *Quetzalcóatl* was supposedly born... when I started to see him for *limpias* and readings, he opened my eyes and spirit to

power I had never understood or felt. I went to see him every two or three months. He would give me a *limpia*, you know, purify my auras or my energy fields with bunches of fragrant and bitter herbs, then he would read the Tarot cards for me to help me move forward spiritually and...”

As Maria de los Angeles recounted for her what she learned and how she maintained her spiritual energy through the various practices that Don Fidel taught her, Lupe listened intently and realized that she wanted to learn whatever she could from Maria de los Angeles about spiritual energy, about her own spiritual nature, about how she could reconnect with her own roots in Mexico, about how she could best focus constructively on her nagging interest in the ongoing Zapatista revolution, about...

“Where did you go, Lupe?” Maria had noticed Lupe’s glazed over eyes, and interrupted her friend’s musing. “What are you thinking about?”

“You know,” Lupe replied quietly, “I thought I was interviewing you, but I guess I’m listening to you as if you were somehow talking about me, or giving me advice, or... I don’t know what... It’s just that what you’re saying touched something in me...”

“Turn off the tape,” Maria interrupted her friend, “and let’s go for a walk, eh? We’ll continue the interview tomorrow...” Maria stood up, grabbed her things and started to walk off. “Come on, let’s go...”

For the rest of the afternoon the two friends talked and strolled along the river green belt past the Morrison Center, over the river to the art and historical museums, then into the zoo where they finally crossed the Japanese bridge and sat next to the pond. They watched the ducks paddle effortlessly and without purpose around their small world, and

they waited for the geese to fly in suddenly and land with a beautiful whoosh of splashing, quacking water. The sun was low in the sky, and the afternoon yielded imperceptively to the evening. The two women boarded the bus home not needing to acknowledge to each other that the teacher had become the student.

The silent focus that Maria de los Angeles and Lupe enjoyed that afternoon as they observed the world unfolding around them was exactly the kind of contemplative environment that Jesus had found and enjoyed in his brother's little house in Ario de Rosales. He hadn't planned to enjoy his self-imposed exile, but after a few days, he found the silence and simplicity of the daily routine opening his inner eye to new kinds of perceptions and understanding. He would rise before sunup, stoke the wood stove, heat water for coffee or tea, make breakfast for himself and for Elias if he was there, then read by the light of the kerosene lantern until the sun began to show itself over the surrounding hills.

Jesus had gathered books around him to keep him company—the Bible of course; a few books about mechanics, the principles of wood construction, basic physics, and geometry and trigonometry; a world atlas; a 1910 almanac; some magazines and newspapers from the United States; Rafael Landívar's *Rusticatio Mexicana*, Justo Sierra O'Reilly's *Un Año en el Hospital de San Lazaro*, Pedro Robles' *Los Plateados de Tierra Caliente*, Pedro Castera's *Las Minas y Los Mineros*, and Rafael Delgado's *La Calandria*. Each day he would read an hour or two in the early morning, and then an hour in the evening before finally taking his journal to record the results of his daily mental peregrinations.

Jesus was faced with a serious problem. Should he go back to Casacuarán to continue his life with Dolores, their children, and their little store, and if so, when? If he miscalculated and went back before Arnulfo Rosas had forgotten about him and his hacienda,

he would surely be killed, and perhaps Dolores and the children too. Yet if he stayed in Ario too long, their little store in Casacuarán would have to close its door because Jesus wasn't there to procure the goods they sold. Dolores couldn't work the fields and couldn't keep up the store or the hacienda; they would be forced to sell or abandon their home.

*July 24, 1912, Ario de Rosales*

*Going to meet with Don Ramón Obregón again. Will see if he can arrange some kind of investment for me so I can put the small monies I have to work while I am isolated here. Will try to find industry or factory in the U.S. where our money is safe, and where my name is unknown. Or hopefully a telephone company that needs investors to expand. Don Ramón was attracted to the ideas I had when we met in Pátzcuaro several months ago. Will see if he would like to work further with the ideas I have about bringing industrial products down into our Mexico. This revolution will end someday soon, I hope and pray, and I need to provide for Dolores and the children. The strongbox is not sufficient. Only for an emergency if things come to that. No, I will try to invest with Don Ramón for the future of our families and of Mexico. We both see that. And since right now I can do nothing to assist Zapata directly, I will assist by trying to develop whatever resources I can with the little money I have. Perhaps Elias would like to meet with him too. I know he has some funds saved. I will ask him when he arrives.*

*July 25, 1912, Ario de Rosales*

*The men in town stop by to ask if I know what is occurring elsewhere in Mexico. I think they see the books and papers that Elias delivers to me, and they assume I know what they do not. I try to be friendly, and their women bring atole and tortillas to me. These are good people, hard-working, but ill-educated. Most cannot write or read, but all want to*

*know about the revolution, about Zapata, about who is President now, about who I support, who is good for Mexico and who is not. I cannot answer them honestly, that I myself am not totally sure, but that I support Zapata because he wants all people to be able to support themselves and their families on their own piece of land. The more I try to explain the little I do know, the more I realize that I need to know more.*

*July 31 1912, Ario de Rosales*

*Dolores and the children arrived last week. We had arranged for their visit, and it is a good idea. The children love the mountains here, the horses, the change of scenery, and we have all missed each other greatly. Don't know about the store and the hacienda in Dolores' absence. Dolores says the neighbors will check daily, but who knows anymore who is a friend and who is not. Elias brings news of Zapata's activities, in Puebla, the Cuernavaca railroad in Tres Marias and Parque del Conde, also defeat by the 24th Army Battalion.*

*August 8, 1912, Ario de Rosales*

*Dolores and the children left yesterday. A sad day for us. They must return to the store, to the children's school, to the hacienda. Could not tell Dolores when I would be returning to Casacuarán. She understands, but the children do not. Nothing else to write. Elias arrives in a few days. Will go for a walk instead. The night is clear with half-moon and brilliant stars. The smell of roses fills the streets, and tonight it is all I have to comfort me.*

## Chapter Eleven Investing Jesus' Past in Maria's Future

“Which of these do you want me to answer first, Lupe?” Maria de los Angeles was perusing a sheet of paper with the rest of the interview questions that her friend had just given her.

“Well,” replied Lupe, “I thought I should just give you the questions, and you could answer them... uh... I shouldn't just be asking you a bunch of questions like I knew the direction the interview should go. I enjoy talking with you, a discussion, I guess... I don't know how to start that except by giving you the questions I prepared. Maria looked back at the page of questions, not hearing Lupe talking in the background.

1. *What caused you to come to Idaho?*
2. *What were some of the very early influences in your life?*
3. *What have been some of the transitions and conflicts in your life, and what resulted from them?*
4. *What kind of limits have you encountered in your life, and what effects did those limits produce in you?*
5. *What are some different, unusual things and places you have experienced in your life?*
6. *What are some reoccurring situations, themes or understandings in your life?*
7. *What are the biggest changes you have experienced, and in what ways have those changes developed or evolved?*
8. *In what way is your life complex and complicated?*
9. *What are some small aspects or details in your life that are important to you?*
10. *What are you going to do next in your life?*

“Maria, you're not listening to me,” Lupe peered at Maria who had yet to look up from the sheet of questions, “are you? I guess I chose some good questions, eh? Did you hear anything I said?”

Maria de los Angeles looked up from the paper, gaped humorously at her friend, then replied more seriously, “You know, no one ever asked me to think about my life and the ideas and events that have formed me, no one, Lupe. Most people are just interested in talking about themselves, their problems or what they just bought. I really appreciate you taking the time and energy to ask me to think about myself in such a useful... such a... an interesting way. Can I have this, do you have a copy of it? I’d like to keep these questions... use them, I’m not sure, but use them somehow...”

“Keep them, Maria, keep them... We’ll get back to them one way or another, I think. I’m glad you enjoy the questions. Say, did you hear anything I was saying before?”

“About what, Lupe?” Maria hadn’t heard a word of what Lupe was saying as she was reading the interview questions.

“Ha-ha,” Lupe laughed knowingly, “Just what I thought, girl... OK, listen... I was saying that I think you should publish Jesus’ journal. I talked with some people I know here on campus and asked them what they would think if they got their hands on something like his journal, and they said that they would jump at the opportunity to publish it with some kind of commentary especially if a student at the university wrote it. Maria, you could publish your grandfather’s journal, and who would be better than you to write the commentary. They will pay you thousands of dollars for the rights to publish Jesus’ journal, tens of thousands of dollars, you know?”

“Publish his journal? You mean make it into a book? Sell it in stores, like that? Eee, I would feel real strange seeing this book of his,” Maria pulled the green leather journal out of her book bag, and set it on the beige wooden library table where they were seated,

“this book here, on bookstore shelves for sale, where anyone could read it, not private, open for everyone to see... you know what I mean?”

“Sure, I do, but you could delete any parts that you feel are too personal or intimate, you know, like the strongbox part or whatever. You’d be the editor, right? I’ll help you, Maria, wha’ duh you say? Let’s at least consider it, eh?”

“I think we need to go for another walk, Lupe...” Maria stood up acting as if she were offended. Lupe looked up fearing that she had hurt her best friend’s feelings. “Let’s get out of here,” Maria continued in a stern voice, “and figure out how we’re going to get Jesus’ journal published, eh? Ha-ha...”

“*Ay, cabrona,*” Lupe grabbed Maria’s arm and shook it. “You had me worried for a moment... Let’s go... partner! I’ve got someone who wants to meet you...”

It took Maria de los Angeles and her *ad hoc* agent, Lupe, a week of phone calls, waiting and conferences to set up a working timetable with the publishing department of the university. First, get Jesus’ manuscript in shape for publication—edit it to remove personal material, decide which entry of the manuscript should be duplicated as is to show Jesus’ handwriting, translate all of it into English, and write the commentaries and any appendices. A formidable project, even for two women. They had decided to publish the Spanish original and the English translation on facing pages, with notes about the text and about Maria de los Angeles’ relationship to Jesus as appendices. They had also agreed that Maria would get a five-thousand-dollar advance on her cut of the total sales—ten to fifteen percent as the sales went up.

“Did you have any idea,” Lupe nudged her confidant as they walked to the bus stop, “that you’d be publishing your grandfather’s journal, and getting paid for it? What a world... You know, Maria, there’s an idea in chaos theory, it’s a rule, I guess, called linearity. It says that whatever rule determines what a system, in this case, you, is going to do next is not influenced by what that system, you again, my dear, is doing now. I mean, who knows what’s going to happen next with you and Jesus’ journal? I bet you never thought...”

“I think I know,” Maria interrupted her friend with a touch on the arm, “what’s going to happen next... not exactly, but more or less. I have this feeling, Lupe, that I’ll be going to Mexico... well, I had already planned to fly down this Christmas, but, well, that I will go to Casacuacán, and that I’m going to protect somehow, I don’t know how really... protect what my grandfather left there. The strongbox, his love for Dolores, my mother’s memories, what he tried to achieve there, the hacienda maybe... I don’t know exactly, but I do know that I will protect it somehow... and publishing his journal will be part of it. Something crucial in me that needs to grow depends on it. I’m sure of it. “

When they boarded their bus, neither woman knew how Jesus’ personal story had ended. Maria de los Angeles hadn’t even finished reading his journal. Yet the succession of events that had started with Angelina inadvertently uncovering Jesus’ green journal at the bottom of her trunk, and that had continued with Maria immigrating to Idaho, little Jaimito deciphering the directions to Jesus’ secret strongbox, and finally Maria publishing Jesus’ sensational journal were all precipitating the merging of past, present and future within the person of Maria herself— pathfinder of the Pérez family scattered across a hundred years of turbulence and change, scout for the spirit of Jesus roused from its hibernation, reconciler of

unfinished and destroyed Mexican men and women, and voyager into a new revolution of dimension where home is not where you were but where you are.

Of course, Maria de los Angeles was little conscious of this. At the moment, she just wanted to get home, take off her shoes and use the last fifteen minutes of peace and quiet to make the kids' afternoon snack before they rumbled and tumbled through the trailer door. Later, only after she had recounted for Emilio and the children all the particulars about the upcoming publication of Jesus' journal, after they had made and eaten dinner together, after all the homework, housework and clean-up was done, after everyone (including Emilio) was tucked in, and after she had stepped outside for a breath of fresh air; only after all this would Maria de los Angeles pick up the journal, the pivotal journal, and read two hours until she carefully turned what she thought was another page to discover only the smooth white disappointment of the last thirty or so blank sheets of the journal.

*August 12, 1912, Ario de Rosales*

*Have been approached by several of the local families asking me to give classes to the children. Ario has a school, one of the many state schools in the area. The locals tell me that the teacher is a drunkard, often does not open the school on Monday morning, so the children are left waiting sometimes until noon. I understand from them that he is unfortunately the brother of the district supervisor of all state schools in the area, so there is little chance that things will improve soon. Some of these families want me to offer classes in the evening in their houses, not to conflict with the regular school during the day, such as it is. I have agreed to help the children with their letters, writing, reading, and so on. There is a great need for trained and responsible teachers. Most teachers in Ario, as in Casacuarán, have had only a few years of elementary school education, and many are only in the*

*classroom because they draw a regular salary not because they have a skill or interest to help youngsters learn. Since I have been blessed with a sufficient amount of patience, I think I will do well. We will see.*

*August 13, 1912, Ario de Rosales*

*Went around today to meet more families interested in a new school. They seem enthusiastic that I be the teacher. I have many books already. That is no problem. Looking today for an appropriate location. Two families have extra salas in which we could meet. The count is now twenty-one youngsters, mostly boys, some girls, from four to nine. I think we will begin Monday, as today is Thursday. Haven't realized adequately how ill-educated the young girls are. Many are kept home to help with domestic chores, and many are not allowed the privilege of even a few years of education. Surely this must change. It seems part of the revolution in which all men and women will have the means to make a living with the land and skills they inherit from their parents. I see so many young girls in homes I visit who, after speaking with them, I realize are ready and eager to learn, to read, to write, to discover more of their world outside of the kitchen. This will change slowly, I think, perhaps like the political situation too.*

*August 18, 1912, Ario de Rosales*

*Very tired the past few days. Started our little school in Don Tinoco's sala with twenty-four students Monday and Tuesday. Spent the weekend working with Elias buying and selling horses in La Huacana. Good to see my brother. He tells me that several men from Yuriria have called on him in Morelia about horses, but have inquired about my whereabouts in an indirect way. He thinks they are Rosas' men because they knew little about the horses he showed them. It is not good that they have connected me with Elias, not*

*good at all. I must be vigilant, especially if Dolores and the children come to visit again. I don't want them harmed because of me. School tomorrow, and I must prepare.*

*August 19, 1912, Ario de Rosales*

*Went around to my patrons' houses inviting to school the young girls I know are staying home because their parents will not allow them to attend. Decided to invite the parents too to make it easier for them to chaperone their children. Two fathers actually came to class this evening with their daughters. I think this is a good solution because the men are also learning to write and read. I heard their daughters thanking their fathers as they were leaving. This is a good strategy. All students are copying sentences about Mexican geography, some are working on writing the alphabet, and some are already reading some short novels or local histories written by Mexican authors. A few advanced students I have put to writing short biographies of their families, and they are enchanted to interview their mothers, fathers, aunts and uncles about their histories.*

*August 20, 1912, Ario de Rosales*

*I feel isolated from the vitality of Morelia or Yuriria, and of course from my own Casacuarán. I have taken the opportunity to meet again with Don Ramón to discuss investments in local or national telephone companies. I am attracted to the idea of developing a system of relatively instant communication that could connect all parts of Mexico and permit increased understanding of all the events and influences that drive us to fight with each other. I used a telephone in Morelia to speak with a gentleman in Chihuahua about such an investment in his U.S. telephone company that is putting lines into the northern regions of Mexico. I will see if Don Ramón has an interest to visit that area to see the equipment and machinery to accomplish such an undertaking. If we put together our*

*resources, I think we can ride up there with a good chance of returning well invested. I see him again tomorrow for his yes or no. If yes, I will ride to Morelia to bring back enough pesos to make his participation worthwhile. Must stop and prepare for school. Have to break several green stallions tomorrow.*

*August 21, 1912, Ario de Rosales*

*Will ride to Morelia tomorrow, Saturday, to bring back pesos to invest with Don Ramón who is indeed interested in joining me to invest in the new telephone companies to the north. He suggested the train, and I agree. Although no travel is not without hazard these dark days, the train offers the most security. So, it is done. He will acquire the tickets for next Monday, and I will give my little students a week's vacation while I am visiting Chihuahua. Finally, I will have a chance to see the other Mexico. I will bring Elias back with me when I return with the pesos. He is well respected in this area. Elias and I have discussed the needs that all small villages seem to share, both Ario, Casacuarán, and all the hundreds of others like these. When this revolution has run its course, we must ensure that all towns large or small have a school and a teacher committed to the education of their boys and girls. Education for all children will increase the understanding of ourselves and others. Perhaps this will reduce the need to commit violence against those with whom we disagree. I see our men perpetrating this violence. Dolores has taught me the value of patience and compassion. Perhaps our women can teach us men how to improve our political and public life. But we must commit to educate all women and men before we can hope to accomplish this difficult task. I think we are doing our part here in Ario. Would like to invest funds in another school in Casacuarán when the political chaos runs its course. Perhaps my investment in the telephone companies to the north will enable me to do that.*

*Elias is interested also. He shares my patience. Perhaps his work with horses has prepared him to work with students. We will see. Big day tomorrow, so to bed now.*

Maria de los Angeles surely would have been devastated, not merely bewildered, if she had known the actual reason why there were no more entries in Jesus' journal. She guessed what to her seemed the most obvious, that he had become too busy with the school in Ario and with his business trips north to pick up the journal and write any more. What else could one conclude from all those blank pages left untouched? He had originally started the journal... let me see, Maria said to herself as she flipped back to the first entry where Jesus had stated his purpose in beginning to write. Yes, here it is ...

*Today I start to write. I do not know what I will write. I know that I have the deepest need to put this pen to the paper of this fine portfolio. I start now because my beloved Dolores and I have just finished dining after a busy but wonderful day. I should be perfectly content, but there is something yet undone, unfinished, unspoken, unformed that is inside me, and that cannot find its appropriate manner of expression. My sincere hope is that by writing in this journal I will be able either to understand or to express more clearly the feelings and ideas that inhabit my consciousness these past few months.*

Yes... Maria mused to herself. *I wonder if he just didn't need to write any more, or maybe he misplaced the journal, and then it was only after he died that Dolores found it among his things... or he just gave it to her so she would know about the strongbox, or... I don't know, Maria thought exasperatedly, looking for the right answer to another mystery that surrounded the journal. Perhaps, she speculated silently, there's maybe another journal somewhere else... or if someone in Ario de Rosales remembers Jesus.*

“Hmm,” Maria broke her puzzled silence to ask herself, “I wonder if there is someone in Ario de Rosales who would remember Jesus being there.”

Retreating again into the quiet progression of her thoughts, Maria de los Angeles imagined going around town and asking old timers if they remembered Jesus who lived in... she would have to find Elias’ house too... who lived in Elias Rodríguez’ house. *What would I ask them if they said that, yes, they remembered him?* Of course, the logic was clear to her, those interview questions of Lupe’s, the one’s about chaos that she gave me...

Maria de los Angeles let the ideas she remembered from the questions rise in her memory—what caused you... early influences... transitions and conflicts... limits you encountered... unusual things and places... reoccurring situations and themes... changes ... your life is complex and complicated... details... what next in your life...

“What next in your life?” Maria stopped thinking to repeat the last idea for herself. “That’s a good question, girl... What are you going to do next?” she cross-examined herself rhetorically. Next, she imagined, next...

No one had ever bothered to track down the truth about Jesus’ disappearance. People knew he just vanished, never showed up in either Ario or Casacuarán when he was supposed to. It was rumored of course that he had been shot outside of Ario, but no one ever confirmed it. And then Dolores... she died fifteen years ago with the invisible but painful scar of his disappearance most surely constricting her heart. As far as Maria de los Angeles could tell, no one knew of Jesus’ journal nor of the strongbox either, not even Angelina, her mother. And nobody knew if Dolores succumbed to pneumonia safeguarding those secrets too?

“Next...” she whispered the invocation. “What next... and... where...?”

Once again, the feeble light from Maria de los Angeles’ small lamp defied the familiar darkness inside the trailer, and Maria’s own sudden illumination created a harmonious perfection within the moment of her decision to stretch herself forward timelessly and in time back to Mexico, to Casacuarán and to Ario de Rosales.

## Chapter Twelve Return

To the airport outside of Morelia, to Mexico herself, to the black night sky sown with millions of brilliant milky stars, to Yuriria, to the familiar streets and doors and La Paz 21 where her mother had hot *atole* and breakfast waiting for her at that familiar table off the dark kitchen, to her deeply expanding past and unformed future, to the same bed she slept in for sixteen years, to her mother and father, to her familiar Spanish, to a Christmas of celebration and mystery, to uncertain questions and even more precarious answers... to Casacuarán and eventually to Ario de Rosales.

“Call me if I have to sign any checks,” Maria joked with Lupe at the airport before she left, “or if you need to contact me about the book, OK?”

Lupe decided to stay in Idaho. They had spent almost two months together translating Jesus’ journal from Spanish to English, and now she was under an even tighter schedule to publish her own dissertation. She also realized that Maria de los Angeles’ trip was some kind of a search, a spiritual quest, Maria had told her, and she needed to confront it alone. Lupe secretly envied her friend... the adventure, the secret of the strongbox, Jesus’ fate... but she never pressured Maria to go with her.

“And you call me when you get there, girl, and if you find anything, you know?” Lupe suddenly felt the empty absence of her friend as Maria, Emilio and all four of Maria de los Angeles’ children turned and walked through the boarding gate. Lupe watched her friend shuffle through the x-ray inspection, and as Maria turned back to wave, Lupe called out, “Have a good trip... come back!”

It took three days for the dust of their arrival to settle: for everyone to get their hugs and little presents of clothes from the U.S.; for the kids to get cozy in their room; for Maria and Emilio to gather enough blankets to sleep comfortable back in the cold tin-roofed *tejavan*; for the relatives and neighbors to stop calling to pay their respects, catch-up on the gossip and economic prospects from the north, and to see if Maria had a little something for them; for Maria to help her mother tidy up the house; and for things to calm down sufficiently for Maria to ask her mother if they could drive over to Casacuarán and take a look around.

“*Ay, Hija*, why do you want to go to Casacuarán? There’s nothing there but the old hacienda... I don’t even know if anyone lives there anymore. The last I heard was that there’s a school there, but I’m not sure.”

“Well, Momi, after reading Jesus’ journal, and learning more about his life, I just want to go there again to see things for myself. I know we used to go there when I was a little girl, but I don’t remember much from those days... Do you think Popi would drive us over there this afternoon?”

Maria de los Angeles’ father, Rafael, loved any opportunity to get out of the house early and take a little sojourn into the countryside. After all, he had been born and raised in Ochómitas, another little village tucked up against the hills over on the other side of Yuriria. All of his children had been born in that tiny three by six-meter rectangular brick building they called a house. Maria’s mother, Angelina, had nursed, fed, washed, hugged, reprimanded and spoiled all eleven of their children in that simple home until they finally— Thank God! moved to Yuriria where Rafael built the family another rectangular house except that it was considerably larger and laid up two stories from concrete blocks.

The family still ventured out to Ochómitas on weekends to visit, reminisce, and barbecue the afternoon away. Rafael would sooner or later find his way to the gray metal door of the old brick house and open it. Inside the dark space one burned out light bulb hung askew from the whitewashed ceiling. In the sad building Rafael would find no people, no Angelina, no cooking, no food smells, no warmth, no kitchen paraphernalia, no table and chairs, no straw *petates* for sleeping, no clothes hung on the walls and no sounds of children crying and playing like there were in the old days. Rafael would walk through the doorway and let his eyes adjust to the darkness and shadows. He always knew what was there. Two or three 50 pound sacks of wheat, bags of fertilizer, several gas bottles for cooking, a lantern, shovels, hoes, rakes, an ax, a car jack, a case of motor oil, rolls of baling and barbed wire, the broken down old white enamel cooking stove, eight or ten rickety wooden chairs for a barbecue picnic, a roll of black Visqueen and a roll of tar paper, some bales of hay, horse trappings hung on the wall, and a family of mice. Rafael could usually endure only a few moments of his past before he would amble outside and then quietly back into the family orchard behind the small building.

Rafael and Angelina's "new" house in Yuriria was between two other Pérez houses on Calle La Paz, The Street of Peace. It was flanked by a deep lot fronted by the small adobe lean-to of one of Rafael's brothers and another equally deep lot graced by a dependable well and partially finished brick shed with several rooms that belonged to Rafael's father. By the time all their children had moved out in the 80's, Rafael and his sons had bought up the two adjacent lots with their run-down and decaying buildings and several other lots and fields in and around the town of Yuriria. Property was wealth.

Rafael understood and taught the sagacity of investing in land, and his sons (but never his daughters) would overextend themselves in intricate and incestuous webs of mutual indebtedness. Some would no more consider selling their land than they would cooking and washing dishes or holding a crying baby, yet some would dumbly surrender their holdings in exchange for a brutish Chevy four-by-four or to fund the rejuvenating pursuit and acquisition of a tantalizing high school girl's virginity. It was good in their eyes, really good, to have a little piece of something, real estate, for example, when you needed it.

As he clutched the wobbling steering wheel of the old brown 62' Ford pickup, Rafael started in talking as if everyone was listening to him.

*"Había un señor..."* he began...*"There was this man..."*

He was revving up his customary introduction to a story he evidently felt would be appropriate to the occasion. He had agreed right after breakfast to drive Angelina and Maria de los Angeles the easy fifteen minutes to Casacuarán. The newly-paved two-lane road left Yuriria and immediately drifted down to the shore of the lake. The water was now polluted from the fertilizer and herbicide runoff of the surrounding area's modern agriculture, and it had become increasingly cloaked by aggressive but beautiful lavender water lilies that covered a good third of the surface. No one made a living any more from the small white fish that used to thrive in the clear waters. Everyone in the market of Yuriria knew the stalls that offered contaminated fish and the vendors who hawked healthy catfish from the tanks of the new hatchery south of town.

"... and he was walking along the road towards Casacuarán with his wife..."  
"Rafael continued setting up the all-too-familiar story.

Neither his wife nor his daughter turned their heads towards Rafael who was continuing to flesh out the details of his story, nor did they express an iota of interest with an “Oh, yeah?” or “Uh-huh...” or even “Not that story again!” They had been talking in undertones about Trini, one of Rafael’s three sisters who lived on their block in Yuriria. In any conversation that was more rumor or gossip than anything else Angelina was master of her voice. In those situations of discretion, she could modulate the pitch and volume of her speech to make it audible only within a mere half meter radius. As other people reduced the volume of their own conversation in order to lock on to Angelina’s signal, she would sense it and talk even more quietly. If people persisted in screening her conversation, she would look up suddenly and giggle like an embarrassed school girl. In this case, Rafael was disregarding their gossip in the same way that they were ignoring the story they had heard many times before. For the ten minutes it took to arrive at the turn-off to Casacuarán, Rafael continued nonplused to recount the events that transpired in the story between this man, his wife and a barnyard animal, and the eventual humorous and pithy double entendre punch line that he delivered deadpan or smiling according to whether people were just listening, getting ready to laugh, or actively ignoring him, as his wife and daughter had grown accustomed to doing.

“Turn right up here, you old fool. Did you forget where it is?” Angelina interrupted her tete-a-tete with Maria to articulate her chronic mistrust of Rafael’s ability to maneuver in space, carry out a task, or recall important information.

“You’re the one who’s lost, woman.” Rafael acknowledged his wife’s suggestion. “I was already getting ready to turn. Couldn’t you see that? There it is over there. Did you bring your glasses, or do I need to drive closer?” Angelina tipped her head and huffed indignantly as Rafael finished his painfully slow right turn. He peered ahead and pointed the

tired pickup along the two-kilometer dirt and gravel road that connected the main highway with the small settlement of Casacuarán. No one disturbed the silence inside the cab of the pickup as mother, father and daughter bounced along, each one visualizing what they remembered or imagined they would find when they arrived at Jesus Rodríguez' hacienda. After two minutes of straight ahead, one left, and two right turns, they spotted the familiar building.

Rafael struggled to guide the slowly rolling one-ton truck in towards the hacienda at a sharp angle, succeeded in applying the brakes after it banged against the broken curbing, recovered his poise after the two women cried out that they were going to die, and then finally managed to kill the motor when he forgot to disengage the clutch. The truck shuddered to a stop as Angelina and her daughter stared in disbelief at Rafael who was now peering intently into the rear-view mirror.

“Well... that's it... We're here... aren't you going to get out?” he mentioned as if the two women didn't know that they had arrived. Rafael methodically exited his side of the truck, and once out, farted loudly as he looked around to orient himself. He walked around to the back of the vehicle and stooped down to inspect something-or-other that could take his attention away from the fact that Angelina and Maria were in the truck waiting for him to come around and yank open the stubborn passenger door of the rusty pickup so they could get out. After about thirty seconds of satisfying himself that whatever it was that needed his attention had received enough of his attention, he stood up, farted again, and made his way around to the sidewalk.

Angelina was struggling to roll down the window and at the same time berating Rafael more insistently. As the window lowered slowly, the volume and quality of her

denunciation intensified. She tried to stick her head out of the gap and crane her neck around to find where that old reprobate husband of hers was.

“Rafael! you get over here and let us out of this truck right now!” she called back when she spotted him. He was making his way over to the door of the hacienda about four meters in front of where he had relinquished control of the pickup. Ignoring the pleas of his wife and daughter, he had taken out of his pocket a large skeleton key and was absorbed in trying to insert it into a dark irregular hole in the hacienda door.

“That man! That father of yours...” Angelina recognized the familiar fact that her man of sixty years was not going to open the door for them, and had started pushing Maria de los Angeles towards the driver’s side of the pickup and out the door that Rafael had inadvertently left open.

“... got to let ourselves out of this pickup without his help,” Angelina mumbled. “We should have driven ourselves and not even asked the old fool...”

First Maria de los Angeles and then her exasperated mother exited the truck. Angelina had slammed the door shut and was now walking towards the hacienda door where Rafael was persisting in jiggling and pushing the key. The front wall of the hacienda jutted up at the inside edge of the sidewalk and continued along the entire block of the street. The most recent coat of the now dingy white paint covered the plaster and adobe construction, and here and there, the whitewash had chipped away revealing layer upon layer of unexpected but characteristic colors – sky blue, brick red, lavender, beige, more white, and then the actual tan colored adobe blocks flecked with straw and pebbles.

The door that Rafael was trying to open had never been painted. It had the characteristic weather-beaten look of wood exposed for more than a few years to the heat of the daily sun, the night time cold and frost, and then the sporadic rain. The grain of the wood was both hardened and worn so that the patterns of its original growth were delineated like the wrinkled faces of both Rafael and Angelina. The hinges, the nails, the locking mechanism, and the key in Rafael's hand had all been pounded out over eighty years ago into their characteristic shapes by the hammer of Casacuarán's only blacksmith now long dead and forgotten.

"What are you fooling around with over there, Rafael?" she called over to him. "I told you to leave things alone until we find out how to get in. What are you doing now?"

"I'll get it, woman..." Rafael retorted to his wife who was now standing next to him and trying to push him aside from the door. "I never told you I still had a key at the rancho that I kept from the old days."

As Angelina mumbled something about the police coming any moment and arresting them all for breaking and entering, Rafael fiddled a moment more with the key until the corroded lock could no longer withstand his persistence. The key turned suddenly, and a surprised Rafael warily pushed open the heavy oak door.

After she stepped down from the pickup and her mother had gotten out after her, Maria had remained alone in the middle of the quiet street. From the moment she and her parents had left the doorstep at La Paz 21 in Yuriria, Maria had observed with some compassion her parents play out the rigidly defined roles of their mutual discourtesy and resentment. It was a familiar tragicomedy that only she and her sister, Elvira, had ever discussed or tried to allay. Eventually, both she and her sister agreed to let Rafael and

Angelina be themselves: no more criticism or advice about how they would be happier if they did or didn't do this or said or didn't say that. It was, Maria de los Angeles had finally realized, their choice how they lived, coexisted and worked out their relationship. Sooner or later one of them would pass on, and that would be the end, and it wouldn't matter whether they had been dysfunctional or not. Just love them the way they are, Elvira had told Maria. Just love them whenever you can.

Maria de los Angeles had noticed her father push open the hacienda door. She suddenly grasped the fact that the old door was swinging open to the *sala* where Jesus and Dolores had built their store, where Jesus' secret directions indicated that he had buried the strongbox apparently towards the middle of the room under the floor tiles and four feet of dirt and stone. If the strongbox ever did exist, she reaffirmed to herself, that's where it was... or is still...

As she stood alone in the street, Maria's imagination replayed the images and memories of events surrounding Jesus' journal: getting the journal from her mother, learning about Jesus' desire to see more of the larger world, the successful store he and Dolores built, his plans to invest in Mexican infrastructure and technology, his business advice and relationship with Don Ramón, his discovery of the socioeconomic forces that drove his country to revolution, his failed attempts to meet Emiliano Zapata, the secret strongbox right over there, Jaimito and the code, Jesus' flight to Ario, moving to Idaho, meeting Lupe, publishing the journal, and .being here.

*Here I am, finally, she thought, across the street from it all.*

Maria de los Angeles returned from her internal check of reality, looked up, and walked quickly to the hacienda door where her father and mother were gesturing at each other, and Angelina was continuing to criticize Rafael.

“What are you doing... opening up this place when we don’t even know who owns it anymore?”

Angelina was insistent that Rafael not enter the hacienda as it had long ago fallen out of the hands of the Pérez family. After Jesus had disappeared, and Dolores had returned to Casacuarán to try to reestablish her life with her children, Arnulfo Rosas had returned and made good on his promise to own Jesus’ hacienda. He and his men showed up early one morning before the sun was up. When Dolores opened the door, not knowing who it was, they pushed their way in at gunpoint and announced that she and her children, including Angelina, had ten minutes to pack up their things and get out. Not one neighbor even opened a door or window to see what the crying and screaming was all about; they knew it was Rosas, and they knew what his intention was. He was, after all, mayor of the town, well ensconced in his bed of bribery, payoffs and corruption. No one said a thing. No one did a thing. Dolores and her children fled on horseback to Yuriria where they sought shelter and took up residence with Jesus’ sister, Rosa. Dolores accepted the seizure as proof that Rosas had killed Jesus.

“Good morning, are you the new owners?” A very old woman had appeared quietly from the next door down the wall of the hacienda. She spoke in a friendly manner as if she was accustomed to greeting people this way.

“Are you with an agency?” She had noticed that the door was wide open, but that neither Rafael, Angelina nor Maria appeared to be real estate agents.

“Oh, I’m Eugenia Quezada,” the stooped woman continued. “I live next to the hacienda... I take care of it, you know, watering the garden and all, until they sell it.”

Rafael introduced the three of them to Señora Quezada, explained how they were able to open the door with their key, told the old woman a quick summary of their connection to the hacienda, and convinced her that they meant no harm, that they just wanted to see the old place and nothing else.

“So,” *la señora* inquired, “you’re not interested in buying the old hacienda?”

She asked her question, then as she waited for their answer, she peered with honest curiosity at each of them, first Rafael, then Angelina, then Maria. She was dressed in widow’s black clothing, and she conducted herself confidently but with a deference that emanated not from servility or inferiority but from humility and experience. The sparkle in her eyes made one think twice about responding to her inquiry appropriately.

The three Pérez visitors looked at each other for a moment. Rafael shrugged his shoulders and raised his eyebrows to indicate his noncommittal stance, Angelina shook her head decisively, but Maria de los Angeles stepped forward and asked the obvious.

“This hacienda is actually for sale?”

When she flew down from Idaho a few days before, Maria had no firm plans other than simply to visit Casacuarán and Ario de Rosales. She had no hopes for what she would find in either village, but she was sure that the progression of events that had developed around Jesus’ journal during the past few months had not yet run their course. Maria did expect something else to materialize though, something further to present itself, something additional to unfold from the complex matrix of relatedness that her present had

already articulated and that her future, she was certain, would further reveal. This would be the next step, the next step to... well, she wasn't quite sure.

“Well... yes, it is for sale... uh...” Señora Quezada replied, “... what was your name? Yes, Maria... it has been for sale for quite some time now. Let me see... about a year now, I think. It was a school for several years, an elementary school. But... you know, all the younger people and their families are moving into larger cities... Yuriria, Salvatierra, Morelia, Celaya... There is just not enough work in Casacuarán these days, so the school closed down, and it's been empty ever since, just here, no students or teachers. The owners live in Mexico City and never get down here. They're selling it through an agency over in Salvatierra... But no one seems to want to live here evidently, town's too quiet, no work and all...”

Eugenia paused to catch her breath and let her thoughts collect enough to start in again, but before she had a chance to do either, Maria inquired apprehensively, “May I ask who the owners are?”

“Oh, certainly... Yes, perhaps you have heard of them. The Rosas family. He's a politician, Don Antonio that is, in the Chamber of Deputies, I think. They told me, the agency that is, that his grandfather... uh, yes, Arnulfo Rosas was his grandfather... he died years ago they say, before I moved to Casacuarán... let's see, that was in nineteen-forty-nine, yes, nineteen-forty-nine when I moved in here next to this hacienda... that he... Arnulfo Rosas... was the original owner during the twenties. The neighbors told me about him when I moved in... Yes, he was mayor here in Casacuarán... quite a respected man, they said, powerful, rich... you know the kind...”

“You said ‘Arnulfo Rosas’?” Maria asked incredulously, not wanting to hear confirmed what she knew immediately must be the truth.

“Why, yes...” Señora Quezada confirmed. And then she added, “Did any of you know him?”

“*Hija!*” Angelina had cried out to Maria as she threw her arms around her daughter’s shoulders. “He’s the one who took your grandmother’s house!” Angelina was suddenly talking wildly, near hysteria. “... when your grandfather didn’t come back... we came back here, and after... he came with his men, Arnulfo Rosas, I remembered his face from before... when he came to threaten your grandfather... I remember she said his name when he came... it was him... he was the one who took this hacienda from us... it was him... it was Arnulfo Rosas...”

Rafael had hurried to Angelina and his daughter both of whom had been profoundly affected by the widow’s shocking disclosure. Maria de los Angeles’ attention went to her mother’s distress as Angelina recounted for Maria and Señora Quezada how Rosas had come first to threaten Jesus and then later, when Jesus had not returned either to Ario or to Casacuarán, to seize the hacienda from Dolores and her children.

As her mother described the terror they had experienced at the hands of Rosas, Maria’s shoulders slumped and she sighed several times. Her eyes defocused as she remembered the three entries in Jesus’ journal where he mentioned Arnulfo Rosas. He had written that Rosas seemed threatened by Jesus, that he had driven Jesus off his property, and that Rosas’ men evidently came to Elias’ ranch in Morelia looking for Jesus.

*My God! It has to be the same Rosas, Maria quickly deduced, Arnulfo Rosas... He must have killed Jesus... that’s why no one ever knew for sure... they all kept quiet about it in Casacuarán because he had them in his pocket... and he took Jesus’ ranch after he killed him... took it away from Dolores... and my poor mother here... after Jesus was dead,*

*that coward son-of-a-bitch!* Maria de los Angeles was starting to tremble as she finally understood the despicable progression of events.

“Are you two going to be alright...?” Señora Quezada asked after Angelina had stopped talking and sobbing. “I had no way of knowing that Señor Rosas... uh... I didn’t know that you had lived... I’m so sorry... I didn’t know... Please, come inside.” She gestured for them to step inside the open door of the hacienda. “There are some chairs inside the *sala*... please sit down... Yes, go ahead...”

Señora Quezada stepped up into the wide hallway of the hacienda and held the door open. She motioned them through the archway into the dark *sala* to the right. Both Angelina and Maria hesitated a moment after Rafael entered. They paused at the step and squeezed each other before they stepped up and through the oak portal into the cool, dark anguish of their unfinished history.

As they waited in the *sala* for Señora Quezada to return with lemonade, Rafael sat impassively a few inches from his wife who was still trying to calm herself down from her unexpected upset. They had gathered four chairs that had been scattered and abandoned by the last students to attend classes held in the hacienda *sala*. Maria de los Angeles perched her chair up against her mother’s and was comforting her with small hugs, pats and soothing words about the past, the family’s fate, and the appropriate punishment that evil men inevitably suffer. After several minutes Señora Quezada reappeared with an elaborately carved and painted wooden tray that held four large glasses of freshly made lemonade.

“I hope you’re all feeling a little better now...” she smiled as she passed the tray in front of each person. She took the last glass and, let herself down onto the remaining chair in the circle, looked around the group to find a person who appeared sufficiently calmed

down to engage in small talk. Finding no opening in Rafael's calm indifference to his wife's hysteria, in Angelina's halting recovery from her breakdown, or in Maria's absorption in her mother's plight; she refocused her attention to her glass of lemonade which she sipped politely until she could no longer maintain the awkward silence.

"Uh... excuse me..." the old woman finally uttered, "but would you like to look around the hacienda? I mean... if you would like to have some privacy here by yourselves so you can walk around and see how things are... I'll just leave you here... I mean, I'll be next door, and when you're done, just knock on my door, and I'll come and lock up... What do you say?"

"That's very kind of you," Maria stood up, eager to return the courtesy to the *señora*, and then replied, "Of course, yes, we would like very much to have some time here by our... that is, some time to just see how the hacienda is now... Yes, thank you. We'll knock when we're ready... Thank you so much, Señora Quezada, you are very kind."

The kindhearted woman smiled and bowed slightly while she picked up the glasses and put them on her tray. She turned around, walked out the hacienda door, and was gone. For a moment the *sala* was silent. Maria de los Angeles looked around the bare room, the room she had read about in Jesus' journal, the *sala* he and Dolores had converted into their thriving little store, the *sala*...

*My God!* Maria suddenly remembered. *Jesus buried the strongbox right here... under my feet... I had forgotten all about it. Let's see... It was... uh... ten bricks from the... west wall and fifteen bricks from the north wall... yes, that's right...* Maria looked around to orient herself, could not determine north inside the dark *sala*, so she excused herself saying that she needed a little fresh air and stepped quietly outside into the hallway then out the

front door to the sidewalk. Maria peered up into the sky to orient herself. There's the sun, she assured herself, as she slowly turned around to take in the full panorama of the sky.

*And... that's south over there too, she thought. So, the entrance hallway runs north and south... so... the front wall of the hacienda is north.*

Maria de los Angeles walked towards the open front hacienda door, but as she stepped up onto the sidewalk, she suddenly remembered and imagined her mother still inside, walking around the dark hallways of her childhood home with her tactless husband following, probably criticizing her for being so emotional, for crying, for breaking down, for embarrassing him in front of Señora Quezada.

*She stopped and lamented to herself, I never knew this little sojourn to Casacuarán would turn out to be so traumatic for my poor mother. How horrible for her to arrive and find out that Arnulfo Rosas still has power from the grave to keep her separated from Jesus and Dolores. And I wouldn't have known that he was probably the one who killed Jesus unless he had written about Rosas in his journal... That journal, she reflected, has been like a magnet, a lightning rod, a black hole, I don't know what... So much attention and energy in that journal... and it's drawn so much energy.... first, Jesus' notions of himself and his life, and now my interest in him. So much so that here I am in Casacuarán. And then there's the publication of his journal and the generous advance on sales that they...*

Maria's thought process jarred to a halt, struck head-on with the utter irony of having just decided in that split second to buy the hacienda with her earnings from the publication of Jesus' journal.

*Of course, she congratulated herself, it's perfect... Buy it from Arnulfo Rosas' son, steal it from the son-of-a-bitch with a low offer that he's bound to accept after he's waited so long for a buyer... yes, steal it from him... Maria threw back her head, closed her eyes and smiled at the glorious sky overhead. Get it back into our family, but don't let Rosas' son know who the new owners will be, that's beautiful... and very appropriate, she realized, almost like some kind of divine intervention to bring me here with my mother, me with the money in my account right now, money that Jesus planted in his journal and that I'm just harvesting for us all. Yes, I'm going to buy Jesus' hacienda, Maria nodded happily to punctuate her decision. And whether or not Jesus' strongbox is still buried under the sala floor, she understood further, or whether it isn't, it won't make any difference because it will all be back where it belongs, strongbox or no strongbox... Whatever Jesus left for Dolores and for Angelina, it will be here for them.*

Maria de los Angeles walked inside the dark open hallway and found her dear mother and father. They would spend the rest of the afternoon in the hacienda. Angelina would tell her daughter more than she had ever even remembered and more than Maria had ever dreamed of hearing about her mother's childhood in Casacuarán. They would walk into every room where Angelina's recollections swept Maria's understanding with the vigorous colors of her mother's green and brown pastel joy and then with the deep tones of her shadows and loneliness. Maria understood immediately that it was not yet time to tell her mother about her decision.

## Chapter Thirteen      One Way Ticket

“Yes, one way to Ario de Rosales, please.” Maria de los Angeles was calling from the old upstairs middle bedroom. “You said it leaves Morelia when? Four-fifteen? And how long is the trip? OK... When is the last bus from Ario to Morelia?” Oh... that’s late...”

Rafael had driven his wife and Maria back from Casacuarán in the late afternoon. He was pleased that Angelina had redirected her customary criticism away from him and his shortcomings to Arnulfo Rosas’ family. All the way back from Casacuarán she had said nothing about his ability to drive, his past supposed indiscretions or his state of mental acuity. Even when he fell asleep and ran off the road onto the bumpy gravel shoulder near the fish tanks and restaurant outside of Casacuarán, and there was a moment of panic when everyone thought they would careen into a mesquite tree, Angelina kept up her attack on Rosas and refused to redirect her denunciation to her everyday target. Then when Rafael swerved sharply to avoid a lethargic dog crossing the road into Yuriria, and everyone lurched against the driver’s side of the out-of-control vehicle causing Rafael to overcompensate and end up on the opposite side of the road, no one said a word, nor did anyone even glance at Rafael who managed to maintain his aplomb by cursing the dog and the dog’s owner. It was a relatively uneventful trip back to Yuriria, and Rafael was happy when Maria had suggested they stop at Pina’s to pick up taquitos and enchiladas for dinner. Angelina was in no condition to cook, and his daughter always made those modern salads he detested. When he parked in front of La Paz 21, everyone was tired and hungry, and after they had eaten standing up, each one of the adventurers found their own bed and surrendered to the stubborn forces of personal history and fatigue.

Maria de los Angeles had called that next morning to book her one-way ticket on Primera Plus. She assumed that the last piece of the puzzle of Jesus' fate in all probability was to be found in Ario de Rosales where the last entries of his journal recount his life there. He wrote in his last entry that he was riding into Morelia to return to Ario with money to invest with Don Ramón Obregón in new telephone technologies, and that they were going to take the train to Chihuahua to investigate a U.S. phone company there.

Questions swarmed through Maria's brain, *Did he make that trip to Chihuahua? Did he continue to live at Elias' house there? Did he continue to hold classes at night in neighbors' homes? Did he move back to Casacuarán or to Morelia? Was he actually killed in Ario like everyone in the family says? If he was killed, where is he buried? And what happened to Elias? He just disappeared from history along with Jesus... Somebody must know what happened, somebody...*

The bus left Morelia at four in the afternoon, and the two-hour trip would get her into Ario around six-fifteen. Since she would arrive in the late afternoon, she phoned to reserve a room in the *El Viajero* Hotel on Aristo. *Who knows how long I'll be in Ario*, she wondered. *I'll stay as long as I need to find out about Jesus.*

Rafael, Angelina and Emilio all tried to dissuade Maria from traveling alone. After reminding them that by the time she was in her twenties, she was driving her VW bug alone into isolated mountain villages in Michoacán with a machine gun hidden under the seat, and that she was accustomed to riding busses full of sometimes disagreeable and cantankerous mountain people, she agreed to let them drive her to Morelia instead of her taking the daily bus from Yuriria. They were apprehensive about her taking the trip alone whereas Maria was anxious about what she would discover there. She had the distinct

feeling that just as they had done in Casacuarán, an unexpected answer would be waiting for her, an answer that would clarify her uncertainty.

“Momi, do you have a picture of Jesus?”

Maria de los Angeles was in her mother’s bedroom helping her with the ironing. The wrinkled shirts, pants and underclothes were piled on the same chest from which months ago Angelina had extracted the green leather journal that had sent Maria off further than she had ever imagined any trip taking her—further into Angelina, Jesus, and Dolores’ lives, further into the power of her own Pérez ancestry, and further into her future as a modern Mexican woman.

“*Sí, Hija*, I think I have a picture somewhere here,” Angelina replied.

Angelina turned around and her eyes swept the layers of overlapping photos of family members cluttering the wall of their bedroom. Some were framed and covered with glass; others were creased, bent, torn and faded from the many times they were taken down, shown, remembered and discussed, then repined in their place among the many others. Angelina located the old picture from 70 years or so ago. There was a young-looking Jesus Rodríguez captured in black and white, dressed very American with a jaunty cap and tie, looking into the camera. The person he was shaking hands with had been cut off either by the photographer or by the end of the roll of film. Angelina unpinned the worn picture from the wall and handed it to her daughter. Maria de los Angeles peered a few moments at the small snapshot before she inquired of her mother.

“Momi, do you know who Jesus was shaking hands with here?”



Even though her mother had no idea about the hand's identity, Maria immediately thought that the obviously masculine hand belonged to the also long departed Don Ramón Obregón, Jesus' business mentor from Salvatierra. I wonder if the Obregón family still lives in Salvatierra, she asked herself... I'll have to check when I get back from Ario.

“Momi, can I take this picture with me tomorrow when I go to Ario? I want to have it with me so I can show it to some of the old folks there. Maybe it will

help them remember Jesus, eh?”

“Ay, *Hija*,” Angelina started in worrying again, “I wish you would take Roberto or Enrique with you. You know how those busses are, especially over in that part of the mountains.”

Maria de los Angeles reached out and embraced her mother to reassure her that she would be safe riding the bus to Ario.

“I'll be back in a few days, Momi, and then we'll have some time together, just you and me, alright?”

After twenty minutes to the “T” intersection where a right takes you to Valle de Santiago and Salamanca and a left shuttles you over Lagos de Quitzeo, up up up over the new freeway notched into the red volcanic dirt of the mountain by the energy of thousands of Mexican men’s hands, and eventually into a bustling and expanding capital of the state of Michoacán, Morelia, Rafael arrived tentatively at the curb of the busy bus station at four o’clock sharp. Several unplanned stops on the way delayed their arrival a good hour or so. Rafael had stopped at a roadside *palapa* to sample and purchase some *jicama de agua*, he had braked to a near halt at every *tope* or *vibrador* that slowed cars entering and exiting each little town along the road, and they stopped to help an old woman change the tire of her decrepit automobile.

Before the car had stopped completely at the curb, Maria de los Angeles had already thrown open the door of the pickup, leaned back to kiss her mother and father, and when the car finally bumped to a stop, with a wave disappeared into the tiled chaos and noise of the bus station. She knew she would make her bus, but she had doubts as to whether at this late hour there would be a seat available. She didn’t want to spend two hours standing up swaying back and forth in an enclosed atmosphere that reeked of week-old body odor, and where crying babies dueled with adolescent rock and roll boom boxes. Neither did she relish the fact that, if she was unlucky enough to stand by a seat inhabited by any type of male animal, young or old, she would be opening herself to unsolicited but freely proffered comments about the perfectly rounded form, the pneumatic motion, the innermost female mystery, and finally the temptingly close proximity of what any man would swear to the Virgin Mary was one of the finest asses any woman, Mexican or gringo, could ever haul around. Their descriptions would correspond, of course, to the reality of Maria’s lush body,

but she didn't want to hear it from the kind of men she knew would be riding the four-fifteen bus to Ario de Rosales. She liked to hear it from Emilio, but not from them.

The Morelia bus station epitomized the dichotomy of racing anxiously to find your bus and then once found waiting interminably to board it. Everyone was either running, waiting or looking as if they couldn't decide whether to do one or the other. Loudspeakers constantly spurted out muffled names and unintelligible numbers onto the heads of people who either were not listening or not understanding. Outside the station building itself and near the busses vendors hawked colorful cut chunks of pineapple, mango, papaya, cucumber and kohlrabi impaled on roughly carved sticks; candies made from seeds, nuts, and fruit purees; sodas and waters poured into plastic bags and rubber banded around a straw; sandwiches on white bread or bolillos; and magazines, newspapers, comic books and small pocket-size pulp *novelas*. Inside the station, before the wide and slippery yellow tiled steps descend into bus limbo where people wait their turns to leave for their chosen destination, anyone can buy anything—food, clothes, artifacts and handicrafts, tickets for any type of transportation or lottery, trinkets and gifts imported from every nook and cranny of Mexico, genuine bull's horns and stuffed armadillos, ceramics and pottery, jewelry, tapes and CD's, handmade musical instruments like guitars and violins, and gaudy posters of Mexican movie and pop stars.

Maria de los Angeles picked up her ticket at the *Primera Plus* counter, negotiated the last-minute-gift-gauntlet and swooped down the shiny wide steps into the departure area. She located her bus, checked her ticket with someone who appeared to be the driver, and boarded the new bus to find not only all the seats taken but also the entire aisle packed with people happily chatting and waiting for the bus to start up, lurch around and out of the

cramped boarding area, into the cobbled streets of Michoacán's capital, and on to Ario de Rosales. She had straddled the top step and the floor of the bus craning to see if anyone would offer her a place to position herself, some hope of at least being able to take this bus. This was the only bus to Ario, and even though Mexican bus drivers pack the seats and aisles to accommodate as many passengers as possible, the driver probably would not let her stand for two hours on the top step next to the door.

“Hey, *compadre*... get up and make way for this lady here! Can't you see that she...”

The bus driver had noticed either Maria, the woman, or her plight, eyed her carefully up and down for a moment, then pushed his way back past Maria to the second set of seats. He had started to direct a well-dressed, middle-aged gentleman to get up, since any gentleman would have already done so, and being the real man he appeared to be, offer up his seat to her.

“Oh, no... that's not necessary...” Maria interrupted the driver when she realized what he was doing. The driver himself was starting to move people aside so that Maria could easily negotiate the two meters from the top step of the bus to the seat that awaited her. The driver's *compadre* finally consented, rose, and with a sweeping gesture of his hand indicated that Maria should sit where he had been.

“Please, sit here... sit down, Señora,” the driver's *compadre* said politely, “You'll be much more comfortable sitting than standing, eh?”

“Yes, yes,” iterated the driver, “Sit down and be comfortable so we can get on the road, eh? You going to Ario...? Family there...?”

Maria de los Angeles nodded and smiled her thanks to the bus driver and his *compadre*, then quickly accepted the *compadre's* seat after noting that next to him sat an overdressed matronly woman who appeared to be his wife. The woman smiled politely, moved her purse from the seat, and greeted Maria.

“It seems that everyone is going to Ario this afternoon,” the *compadre's* wife said pleasantly, “doesn’t it, dear? Where are you from?”

There was no room for the frustrated snack vendors to make their last-minute rounds through the aisle of the bus as the driver took his seat, blessed himself twice, touched the head of the large realistic statue of the Virgin Mary that dominated the dashboard of the driving compartment, and levered shut the door. In the five minutes it took for the bus driver to start the belching diesel motor, grind the tranny into the appropriate low gear, wrestle the silver and green behemoth around the other parked busses and onto the street, and merge with the chaotic afternoon one-way traffic, Maria had learned that the *compadre's* wife was not his wife. She was the *compadre's* mistress, and they were off to Ario for a secret getaway. The *compadre* and his wife lived in D.F... they were unhappy... she wouldn’t give him a divorce... he met her at a business meeting... blah-blah-blah... he really loved her... he was more romantic than any other man she ever... blah-blah-blah... Maria smiled, asked a few innocuous questions, then when the woman stopped talking about herself, Maria looked ahead and let the conversation drop. By the time they were out of town heading west toward Quiroga, the *compadre's* mistress had leaned over Maria to confer with her paramour several times, checked her hair and make-up in her small gold shell compact, then while her lover told jokes with the driver, dozed off to the rocking drone of the bus as it upshifted and downshifted across the rolling hills to Ario de Rosales.

The road to Ario bobs over the hills and coasts into the valleys that gird the mountain ranges of Michoacán. Past the quaint and artistic mountain town of Quiroga; to Tzintzuntzan where the flat stones of ruined Purépecha temples were laid perfectly square without mortar hundreds of years ago; to Lake Pátzcuaro and its tiny island of Janitzeo with a faceted stone statue of Morelos whose hollow head offers non-claustrophobic climbers a commanding view of the entire valley; then past the cut-off to Uruapan where waterfalls, crystal clear river water, and the forest trails of the Parque Nacional provide visitors respite from frantic city life; beyond Santa Clara del Cobre where before the Conquest of Mejico, Tarascan Indians mined copper to make rattles, masks, breastplates and other items, and where today their descendants produce jewelry, ladles, jars, and plates from that copper; by the cut-off to Lake Zirahuén, the most beautiful lake in Michoacán where the Purépecha emperor, Siguangua, was said to have built a rest house by the pine and oak tree forests, where the red soil contrasts with the trees' green, the blue sky reflects from the lake, and the colorful corners of the lake have crystal tones that modulate from intense blue to dark green.

The compadre's woman had slumped slowly against Maria's shoulder as she fell asleep, and Maria sat still so as not to awaken her. The driver and his compadre continued to chat and laugh over what Maria could not quite hear but only imagine by the key of their laughter. The majority of passengers had settled down quickly to the tedium of sitting, gossiping, waiting and witnessing the familiar countryside pass by. Restless babies squawked, a group of adolescent Maná fans refused to turn down their boy-band music, a young couple quietly tried without success to go as far beyond kissing and petting as they could without completely removing their clothes, several old people added to the cacophony with a wide variety of snorts and snores, and the unpleasant stench of one day's body odor

layered upon the next permeated the entire bus and provided all the passengers with the urgent goal of opening the bus door to Ario's fresh mountain air as soon as humanly possible.

Maria de los Angeles took the picture of her grandfather, Jesus, out of her shirt pocket. She wondered if there would be anyone in Ario who would recognize him from his picture, especially if he dressed differently in Ario.

*Does anyone know his name anymore?* she asked herself. *How am I going to find Elias' house where Jesus stayed? Does anyone know about the evening classes he held in people's houses? Where will I start? How will I start?*

Maria stared at Jesus' picture as if waiting for some message or direction from him, but neither the picture nor Jesus responded to Maria. The internal silence which totally absorbed Maria in no way interfered with the complex events unfolding around her in the bus, nor did those events impinge upon the focus of her contemplation. It was only when the bus hit an unusually large fresh pothole, and the compadre's woman suddenly woke up and noticed the picture of Jesus in Maria's hand, that Maria returned to the bus, to the moment, and to the compadre's woman's unexpected question.

"Is that your grandfather, dear?" The woman fussed with her hair that had become flattened against Maria's shoulder. "Oh, dear... I must have fallen asleep. We had a little drink at lunch, and I guess it just put me to sleep, ha-ha..."

She leaned over Maria again to get the compadre's attention. "Oh, darling, why didn't you wake me up? I fell asleep, and this poor dear had to keep me from falling on the floor... How embarrassing... Where are we, honey... in Ario yet? Do I look alright, dear?" The compadre's woman whispered to Maria as she checked her appearance in her compact.

“Yes, yes,” Maria confirmed for her seat partner. “Your hair is fine now... see...” Maria waited until the woman finished her primping to tell her that they were about twenty minutes from Ario, and that it was her grandfather in the picture.

“Do you recognize him, by any chance?” Maria figured it was time to start inquiring. “His name is Jesus Rodríguez. He and his wife, my grandmother, Dolores, and my mother, Angelina, and her sisters and brothers lived in Casacuarán around nineteen-ten, nineteen-twenty. And then I think he and maybe his family lived in Ario for some time, but I’m not sure how long... Casacuarán’s north of here, between Yuriria and Celaya... I’m going to Ario to find out if he really died there like everyone in our family says...” Maria provided the compadre’s mistress as much of Jesus’ story as she could in the little time that remained before the bus lugged into the Ario de Rosales bus station.

*Funny... thought Maria as the bus came to a stop. I thought I would see more roses here in town, but I guess in fifty years...*

“Well, dear,” the compadre’s woman interrupted Maria’s thoughts to get Maria to let her out of the seat. She and the majority of the other passengers were standing, waiting to escape out the still unopened door into the cool fresh mountain air.

“Oh, excuse me,” Maria apologized quickly, “I didn’t notice we had come to a stop... Yes, well... it was nice talking with you. I hope you and your... I hope you two have a nice stay in Ario. Where will you be staying by the way?”

“We’ll be in the Mesón De La Granja on Madero. What about you, dear?” The compadre and his woman reunited in the aisle in front of Maria, and arm in arm they shuffled toward the now open door of the hot bus.

“Oh, I’ll be in the El Viajero, only a little way away. Maybe we’ll see each other, eh? Have a nice time.” Maria gave a little wave as they descended the two steps to the ground and disappeared into the scattering crowd.

Within half an hour Maria de los Angeles had found the El Viajero and her balcony room on the second floor, and then finally the little hotel bar where she sipped away a half hours’ worth of El Jimador tequila before she ordered the local specialities, *corundas*, triangular tamales made with ashes and wrapped in fresh corn husks, *chiripu*, a rich red chile broth containing beef and vegetables, one of the local soft cheeses, and her personal favorite, *capirotada* made from bread, cheese, eggs, brown sugar and raisins. When she had finished, she paid her bill, asked for a recommendation for breakfast, and slowly climbed the staircase to her room.

The cool mountain air that drifted through her window carried the perfume of roses, but it wasn’t until Maria finally turned out the lights, stretched out on her bed and started to relax that she noticed it.

*Yes, there’s the roses, she congratulated herself. Where are they growing? probably right outside the window here. I’ll have to look around in the morning to find them, maybe in the courtyard of the hotel. They smell so sweet. I hope the people who live here in Ario don’t get accustomed to the smell and then never appreciate it any more... I guess that woman I met in the bus is smelling them right now too... just down the street from here. I never even talked with her man. He was so nice to give me his seat on the bus... I wonder why they come here for their little love trips... Why so far away from Mexico City? It’s probably... the fragrance of the...*

The sweet fruits of Maria de los Angeles' imagination merged into the undifferentiated harvest of all creativity and longing as she drifted unaware into deep sleep that assumed its character more from the vector of history and her intention than from her fatigue or the fourteen hours she slept.

Busy street sounds eventually invaded Maria's bedroom carried in on the scent of roses as the bright morning sun pierced the open window and warmed Maria's return from sleep. Before opening her eyes, she allowed herself to savor the chatter of Spanish conversation mixed with the fragrance of the roses. She imagined how the street would appear in the morning light, how the smells would become more varied when she stepped out onto the street, and how she would feel excited yet apprehensive about the task in front of her. It was ten minutes later that she suddenly threw off the bedcovers, showered quickly, dressed and hurried down the stairs outside into the world of Ario de Rosales.

She followed the directions she had received the night before and found the little restaurant called Los Arcos de Rosales. It was located in an old hacienda right off of Morelos. She entered the wide arch laid years ago into the meter-thick adobe walls and strolled inside to the patio where there were wrought iron tables and chairs waiting for someone to accept their invitation. Maria complied by choosing a table towards the back of the patio and sat facing out so that she could see the people passing by the front of the hacienda. She settled into her chair, looked around to notice that she was alone in the patio restaurant, and then she saw the roses.

*Why, of course, she recalled... the name of this restaurant is The Arches of Roses. Look at them... she affirmed as she scanned the perimeter of the patio... over there too... why, they're everywhere. And the smell... it's so sweet... almost overpowering...*

Every side of the patio was flanked by a continuous veranda covered by a sloping tile roof and supported by eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve... twelve thick cream-colored adobe arches. The hand formed arches were punctuated at every point where they emerged from the ground by huge square brown and burned grey-black clay pots overflowing with old fashioned white roses that climbed up and covered every surface of the arched wall.

“Good morning, ready for breakfast?” The waiter had come up quietly to Maria’s table with a menu. “Oh, yes, the roses... They’re beautiful, aren’t they?”

“Do you ever forget how beautiful they are,” Maria replied to the handsome young man, “or not smell their fragrance in the morning?”

“To tell the truth, I do forget sometimes,” the waiter started to confide in her, “but then a beautiful woman like you comes in to remind me how beautiful the roses have always been.”

“You’re very romantic for a young man,” Maria parried back.

“And you’re very beautiful to be sitting here alone,” the young man returned the compliment. “Are you waiting for someone?”

“No, but I am looking for someone.” Maria took out Jesus’ picture and showed it to the waiter. “Do you know this man... he is my grandfather, and he lived here in Ario about eighty, eighty-five years ago. His name is Jesus Rodríguez, and his brother was Elias, Elias Rodríguez. I’m trying to find out how he died. They say he was shot by a bridge outside of town, but no one knows for sure or what happened to his body.”

The waiter took the picture and peered at it, slowly shook his head, then returned the photo to Maria. “No... I sure don’t know him... but... there’s an old timer in Ario who’s

lived here all his life who has a reputation for remembering everyone's face and name in Ario. Maybe he'll remember your grandfather. His name is Don Eusebio Iturria, and he lives alone about a kilometer to the left of the main road just as it comes into town. When you see the giant sycamore trees by the main road, you turn left there and just continue till you start to pass the old haciendas, and then you come to his place, an old adobe place set back from the road close to the canal. You can't miss it."

"Well, thank you very much... I appreciate the advice and the name. I'll look up Don Eusebio today... Are you serving breakfast yet? I'm really hungry. Is that a menu you have?"

Maria de los Angeles ordered, plucked a *concha* from the basket of *pan dulce*, devoured her *chiliquiles*, and then sat back with a cup of *té de limón* to relish the patio garden. Several other couples and groups had come in, sat down, and were now chatting and eating. She finished her tea, paid, and got up to walk out onto the street. She strolled into the deep arch that delineated the entrance, and as she was about to exit onto the sidewalk, a couple walking hand-in-hand turned into the entrance.

"Oh, excuse... Oh!" a surprised Maria recognized first the compadre's woman and then the compadre. "Good morning, what a surprise to see you again," she greeted them cordially as they shifted positions to chat under the front arch of the restaurant.

"Oh, my dear!" the compadre's woman gushed. "How nice to see you this morning!"

"Good morning," added the compadre himself. "A pleasure to see you again."

The compadre's woman noted that in her opinion Maria de los Angeles had chosen the best spot for breakfast in all of Ario, and that's why they themselves were arriving, a little late though, ha-ha, and very hungry, thank you... Maria corroborated the woman's opinion of the food and the ambiance, complimented her on her good taste, and wished them a happy stay in Ario.

"Oh, my dear..." interjected the woman as Maria started to walk away, "would you like to join us for a drink this evening? We can meet you at your hotel if you would prefer, or you could come to the Mesón De La Granja. The bar is very colonial, did you know? They have so many antiques there... those little fertility statues are so cute, and the copperware... just stunning... isn't it dear?" The compadre took his cue, agreed, and ratified the invitation for a drink later in the afternoon. His woman didn't realize that he secretly looked forward more to fantasizing about Maria de los Angeles than to chatting with her, but the fact that he agreed with her invitation pleased her, and she showed her appreciation with a peck on his cheek.

"Well, I don't know..." Maria started to refuse but was cut off by the compadre.

"We won't take 'No' for an answer," the compadre decreed, "We'd love for you to come... We'll expect you at the Mesón De La Granja, in the bar, around seven... Is that a good time for you, or some other time?"

"Well... alright... that would be nice, of course," Maria conceded. She confirmed the time and place, shook hands with the compadre's woman and with the compadre himself, and then walked briskly out into the morning street life of Ario de Rosales.

Maria de los Angeles had already decided to explore the town first, walk around, see what transpired. Tomorrow she would search out the giant sycamores and see if by any chance Don Eusebio remembered Jesus or Elias from the time of his own childhood. The morning itself unfolded into the recurring routine of Maria ambling around town, spotting older *Ariorrosaleños*, introducing herself and briefing them on her search, showing them Jesus' photograph and asking them if they perhaps recognized him, then thanking them when they expressed sympathy but shook their head, no, they didn't recognize his face or name. The search plodded along similarly into the afternoon with no one expressing even a hint of knowledge about either Jesus or Elias. By the time the low winter sun began to disappear behind the mountains, the lengthening shadows mirrored Maria de los Angeles' disappointment.

The day had evaporated completely and too soon with nothing to prove that Maria had walked up and down most of the streets in central Ario, except her sore feet of course. She made for her hotel room thinking of a hot shower, sitting down, and dinner. As the steaming water poured out of the shower head, the comfort of the warm thick liquid soothed her and washed away the nagging notion that she was foolish to have trekked all the way to Ario expecting a revelation or at least a breakthrough about what had happened to Jesus. She let the burning water pour over her head and body, and when she could no longer stand it, she quickly turned it off, stepped out of the shower, and wrapped the large bath towel around her to keep in the warmth and comfort that the water had given her. Within a half hour she was rested, dressed and walking down the hotel stairs wondering where she would eat dinner, and what the compadre and his woman would want to talk about in an hour.

“Check please...” Maria called an hour later to the waiter who apparently was out of range. She waited to catch his eye, and when he glanced her way, she made scribbling movements in the palm of her left hand. The waiter nodded, and Maria de los Angeles turned to the last half of her coffee to wait for the bill to arrive. She had gone back to Los Arcos de Rosales that evening to see if their dinners were as excellent as their breakfasts. She had ordered *posole* with red corn and found it almost as delicious as her mother’s. The *flan* did not have as much caramel as she liked, but it too was rich and satisfying. The stuffy middle-aged waiter finally arrived and left the bill without a comment, and Maria likewise left the *pesos* without a tip. She figured that he preferred to lavish his services on large parties that racked up substantial bills, and a single woman did not warrant his full attention. Really different from that attentive young waiter this morning, she chuckled to herself as she walked out the door into the street.

Maria de los Angeles had located the Hotel Mesón De La Granja earlier in the day during her fruitless interviews, and she greeted people cordially she passed on the sidewalk on her way to the hotel as if she had lived in town all her life.

“*Buenas noches*, good evening.” Most would smile and reply, “*Buenas noches*,” enjoying the traditional Mexican civility of mutual social recognition and respect.

*You can't go around town in Meridian or even in Boise, Maria lamented to herself, and say 'good evening' to everyone because they'd be suspicious of you, think you were going to hit them up for money or religion. How much I miss my own culture and my hometown, she commiserated with herself as a melancholy descended upon her heart already defeated from the day's interviews, and how different Idaho is... I wonder how it will*

*be to return to our little trailer there after understanding and feeling so deeply the pain of my family's history in Casacuarán and now here in Ario.*

“*Buenas noches,*” another couple greeted her.

“Beautiful night, isn't it?” Maria replied.

The *compadre* and his woman were waiting in the hotel bar, he swirling a snifter of brandy and she sipping a strawberry margarita. He stood when he saw Maria enter and extended his hand to shake hers. The *comadre's* woman reached up and shook the fingertips of Maria's extended hand.

“Oh, my dear,” the woman gushed, “how nice of you to come. We were just wondering if you were coming, and then I saw you arrive, so I told Leo here, ‘There she is... I told you she would come,’ and here you are. How nice...”

The *compadre* raised both eyebrows slightly to remind his woman that he had never been introduced to Maria, nor she to Maria come to think of it.

“You know, dear,” she looked up at Maria, “I don't think we have been properly introduced... have we, Leo?” She tugged at the hem of her man's jacket playfully. “Yolanda Gutiérrez,” the woman stated happily as she shook Maria's hand again. After Maria returned the introduction, the *compadre* extended his hand again and introduced himself, “Leopoldo, Leopoldo Navarette, at your service, Maria de los Angeles, I'm happy to meet you. Please sit down.”

Leopoldo pulled out a chair and Maria sat down opposite the smiling couple. After she ordered a midrange tequila, El Jimador, in case Leopoldo grabbed the bill, she opened the conversation with what she already had decided would be an indisputably polite

inquiry yet a question that would scratch the surface of their social skin and force them to decide quickly and without benefit of previous consultation just how much to reveal to Maria.

“So, what brings you two here to such a romantic spot?” Maria let her probe drift out over the table and mingle with the smells of perfume, alcohol and cigarettes.

“Oh, we just love it here,” blurted out the compadre’s woman. “We decided that this is the perfect place to be together, haven’t we, dear?”

“It is such a wonderful little town, isn’t it?” The compadre sidestepped the intent of Maria’s question, and returned it back to her. “What brings you here, Maria?”

“This would be a wonderful place for a second honeymoon, don’t you think? I should have brought Emilio, my husband, here with me. “Maria decided to keep up the offensive and at the same time add a twist by divulging her marital state.

“Oh, where is your husband, dear?” The compadre’s woman was skilled at asking the obvious questions, and the compadre allowed her to run defense.

“Oh, he’s in Yuriria with our four children while I’m here for a few days looking for information about my grandfather.” Maria didn’t know if the compadre’s woman had already told him about her purpose in Ario. “He used to live here back before the twenties during the revolution,” and then she added without thinking, “Have you two been to Ario before, or is this your first time here?”

Maria de los Angeles’ tequila arrived, and the compadre took the opportunity to order another brandy and margarita. She let her question linger as she picked up her shot of tequila and sipped it while the compadre and his woman decided silently what to say. After a

few uncertain moments the compadre established the direction of the evening by revealing what Maria would not have guessed but what really didn't surprise her considering how events of the past few months had unfolded.

"You know," he looked at Maria and said earnestly, "I was born in Ario de Rosales, and I spent my childhood here until I moved to Morelia to go to *secundaria* there. From there I went to the university in Mexico City, and never moved back here, but I did take over my father's business here, import-export. I always enjoy very much coming back here. That's why I like to bring Yolanda here with me. We both enjoy it so much."

Leopoldo looked endearingly at Yolanda, and she corroborated his verdict with her assessment. "My, my... how long have we been coming here to Ario, dear? It must be six or seven years now, isn't it? We just love the mountain air, no smog like in Mexico, and not much traffic either. We always stay here at the Mesón De La Granja because they give us the honeymoon suite with the most spectacular view of the valley. Oh, my dear... I just... we just love it here, you know?"

Maria had listened to Leopoldo and then Yolanda and wondered whether it was worth pursuing the issue of Jesus considering that Leopoldo had spent a good amount of time here and must know a lot about the town and people.

*Let's see, she estimated quickly while Yolanda was talking, Leopoldo looks to be about sixty or sixty-five, that puts him back to about... nineteen... thirty... five or so, no earlier... well, Maria continued deciding whether to broach the topic of Jesus or not, someone may have told him about Jesus or his classes or something... so... I guess I'll never know if I don't ask...*

“What a surprise, Don Leopoldo!” Maria announced. “Who would have guessed that you’re an *Ariorrosaleño*. Congratulations!” Maria lifted her shot glass, saluted Leopoldo with it, and tossed back the last of her tequila. “You must have a lot of memories still alive when you come here, eh?”

“Oh, yes,” Leopoldo leaned forward toward Maria de los Angeles as he warmed to her interest in him. “I still remember when I was a boy here. I was born on the other side of town, a couple blocks off what is now the main street here, in a little adobe... It’s still standing, you know...” He smiled and nodded to Yolanda, and Maria realized with his gesture, that his woman already knew all about the history he was about to recount. “We always visit it when we come here... it’s run-down now, no one lives in it anymore, but the neighbors take care of it, don’t let anyone take it over, kind of like it’s theirs. They’ve lived there ever since I can remember, they’ve always been like family.” Leopoldo was quiet a moment. The drinks he had ordered arrived, and after ordering another tequilla for Maria, he toasted Maria and continued. “I like it that way, I prefer that no one else is living there, you know... I enjoy the place the way I have always seen it.”

Maria de los Angeles had been listening attentively, nodding her head to encourage his disclosures. She asked a question that she hoped would lead to an opening for her to inquire about Jesus. “Did your neighbors ever tell you about the old days here, you know, during the revolution...? I understand there was a lot of conflict between the Zapatistas and Diaz’ people in Michoacán and Guanajuato, wasn’t there...”

Leopoldo leaned back smiling in his overstuffed chair and sipped his brandy while he pondered how to respond to Maria’s question. Leopoldo’s family had lived in Ario for as long as anyone knew. He remembered his grandfather, and of course, he had worked

in and eventually inherited his father's import-export business. He knew his grandfather had been born in Ario, and he always assumed that the Navarette family had been *Ariorrosaleño* probably since some time after the conquest of Cortéz. Everyone accepted that fact since their Catalonian surname complemented the blue eyes that most family members passed on to their children as he had with his three boys. His family had always voted PRI for as long as he could recall. Most of the well-off families in Ario did.

He remembered his grandfather talking about how Diaz should have had more time to work out his policies, that Zapata and Villa had undermined the progress Diaz had already made, and that the revolution had set Mexico back a hundred years rather than helped it. He knew his grandfather, Aurelio Navarette, had been involved in the revolution. He had recounted to a young Leopoldo exciting stories of how he and his compadres in the neighborhood had set up ambushes and planned raids on Zapatista enclaves in the surrounding areas of Michoacán. He never knew if the stories were true or apocryphal, and he never really cared. He enjoyed sitting with the men of the family and the neighborhood, and feeling the fervor of their stories, seeing their eyes glisten and shine with the vigor of their manhood, listening to their impassioned advice to defend to the death the freedom of Ario, Michoacán and the fatherland.

One way or another Leopoldo had taken all that energy and funneled it into building his father's business into one of the most profitable import-export businesses in all of Mexico. His father had died of diabetes in the late sixties, then his mother in the eighties, and so he had taken over the family business. He was the oldest of two brothers and two sisters who had found their lives as a lawyer, a politician, an executive secretary, and a cloistered nun. His three siblings helped him whenever he sought assistance with legal

loopholes, political influence or bookkeeping. He always assumed that his sister in the convent prayed for him daily, so she played an important part in the business too.

“Well, Maria...” Leopoldo started in, “Yes... I certainly heard a lot of stories about the revolution and those chaotic times from my grandfather and his compadres. They were always talking about the old days, about the skirmishes between the revolutionaries and Diaz’ people.” Leopoldo left it at that, and Maria realized that he did not want to talk politics.

*OK, that’s fine, she accepted his desire to keep politics on the sidelines, I’ll just go ahead and ask my question and see what he says.*

“Did your grandfather and his compadres ever mention anyone by the name of Jesus or Elias Rodríguez? That’s why I’m here in Ario... to find out about my grandfather and his brother.” Maria waited for some indication from Leopoldo that he recognized the names, but when he continued listening attentively, she continued her story. It took her ten minutes to lay out the significant facts of the story, Casacuarán, Cuernavaca, Idaho, Jesus’ journal and his involvement in the revolution, Elias’ place in Ario and his busy horse breeding business, Jesus’ little school in Ario, the family legend about his death, and her search for information about Jesus. When she finally picked up the second tequila that Leopoldo had ordered for her, she realized that she had divulged too much of her family’s personal history, that he wouldn’t know anything about Jesus anyway, and that it was time for her to return the conversation to Leopoldo or Yolanda.

“But that’s enough of my story, Don Navarette...” Maria put down her empty glass on the coffee table and turned to Yolanda. “Tell me about how you two...”

“Excuse me, Maria...” Leopoldo interrupted Maria’s question and reached out to touch her hand still on her glass. “I think maybe I know something about your grandfather’s brother, is it Elias? Yes, about Elias, and perhaps about Jesus too.”

Maria de los Angeles stopped talking and was looking at Leopoldo. He sat back in his chair and with a motion of his arm indicated for her to do the same. He called the waiter over and ordered another round of drinks, smiled at Maria, leaned over and kissed his woman on the cheek, and settled into his chair again before he continued.

“Let me tell you what I remember from when I was a boy,” he began. “My grandfather used to tell me about a man in Ario here who used to raise horses, like you said Elias did, you know, breed them, train them. My grandfather said people from all around the area used to come to him for horses, but he said he sold only a few here in Ario because all the rich *Morelianos* would buy them up for their *charrerías*, you know, their rodeos. I remember he told me that this man, I don’t remember his name... Maybe he never said his name, I don’t know... Anyway, he said this man had the best horses around because of how he trained them. He said his horses had a reputation for being very gentle but obedient, so everyone wanted them, especially the upper-class riders.”

“Did your grandfather ever show you where he lived,” Maria inquired, “you know, here in Ario?”

“Yes, I remember... he took me to see the horses one time,” Leopoldo replied, “I remember it was outside of town, just off the main road as it comes into the commercial area. I remember we turned off at a large sycamore, have you seen it? You can’t miss it when you pass by it. There’s still a lot of old adobes and run-down haciendas over there. All of the

modern development in Ario has bypassed that outlying area. A few old-timers still live over there, but no one bothers them anymore.”

The waiter arrived with their drinks, and the compadre paused while everyone was accommodated. He checked with his woman to ensure that she was still happy, and after he kissed her again on the other cheek, he picked up his drink and sipped it methodically. It was Maria who returned to the topic when she inquired, “I know I shouldn’t ask this, but I wonder if you could show me that place... tomorrow perhaps. I would love to go out there and have a look, maybe talk with some of the older Ariorosaleños out there, see if it was Elias that you’re talking about, see maybe if they recognize my grandfather’s picture... I’ll get us a taxi to take us out there after breakfast. I know I shouldn’t be asking a favor like that, but I...”

“Of course, we will,” agreed the compadre’s woman, “won’t we, darling? We’ll be glad to show you that charming little area, very rustic, you know? Only a dirt road out there, but I’m sure the taxies will take us, won’t they, sweetie?”

“Yes, they will, darling,” the compadre smiled at his paramour. He was glad she had agreed that they should take Maria de los Angeles out to the old adobes so it wouldn’t appear that he had any inordinate interest in Maria. He really wasn’t attracted to Maria, no more than he was fascinated by any woman’s mystery, but he didn’t want to put any damper on his female’s excitement and enthusiasm due to any unnecessary jealousy. Thus far his mistress had been very receptive and accommodating of the compadre’s most intimate proclivities; perhaps Maria de los Angeles’ presence had piqued Yolanda’s womanly prowess and confidence, perhaps not.

## Chapter Fourteen      Sycamores' Witness

“We don’ go out there anymore, lady...” the taxi driver explained impatiently. “The road’s no good, you know, all dirt, no pavement... What do you want to go out there for anyway? There’s only run-down ol’ places and a few ol’ codgers who only remember the ol’ days. They got one foot in the grave already... I dunno what they’re doin’ still alive anyway... I’m surprised the city hasn’t jus’ gotten rid of the whole bunch of ‘em... They’re no good for anything...”

“Any other taxies around here,” Maria shot back, “willing to...”

“Nah, no one else, lady...” the driver interrupted Maria to be done with it.

“... Willing to take us out there for double fare?” Maria continued as if the driver hadn’t interrupted her, “Not you, I guess, eh?”

“Oh,” the driver responded quickly, “for double fare I would drive you all the way to Morelia. Get in, ma’am...”

“Can you handle driving to the Mesón De La Granja first,” Maria asked the driver sarcastically as she struggled to climb in the back seat of the VW bug, “to pick up my two friends?”

“Can do, lady,” the happy driver acknowledged. “I hope they’ll fit in this tin can... ha-ha-ha!”

Within a half hour Maria de los Angeles, the compadre, his woman, and the joking driver were putt-putting and backfiring their way out of Ario’s central district and heading for the old adobes out by the giant sycamore trees on the edge of town. Maria

thought the two lovebirds should sit together, and even though the back seat was cramped, they accepted their spot happily and chatted with Maria who had slid close to the taxi door.

“Turn right here,” directed the compadre who had pointed out the large trees as they appeared within view. The taxi hooked right and bumped and lurched onto what at one time was a dirt road, and Leopoldo narrated as the now tense driver tried carefully to negotiate the uneven and eroded surface without bottoming out.

“Look at those trees... I remember my grandfather telling me that sycamores always grew wherever there was water, that their roots went down deep to find water, and he showed me all the canals and rivers around this area. See that canal over there,” Leopoldo pointed to the side of the road, “it’s always full of water during the winter because it carries the run-off from the mountains up there. It follows the old road several kilometers out of town. You can’t see the old road or canal now because when the state put in 120 to connect Ario with Apatzingán, they bypassed the whole area, cutting off this whole neighborhood.”

As the taxi bug bounced along away from the main road farther into the small secluded valley, Maria recalled the family legend that Jesus had been killed, shot on a bridge coming into Ario de Rosales.

“Don Leopoldo, are there any bridges by the canals over by the old road?”

“Let me recall...” the compadre’s eyes glazed over as he tried to recall the times he had played and hunted along the old road. “You know, there was, or is, I don’t know if it’s still there, I guess it is... Yes, there’s one place where the old road crossed the canal... the water was really wide and deep there. We used to go fishing there, hunting too. There used to be really thick bushes and trees where we would hide and shoot ducks that flew in and

landed on the water or the pigeons in the sycamores. We'd go swimming in the summer, but no one went swimming there in the winter because the water was just too strong, it would carry you away. Yes, I remember those days..."

Maria de los Angeles felt her stomach tighten as she sensed the historical puzzle pieces of Jesus' fate fitting rapidly within their appropriate geographic coordinates.

*So... it could have happened, she realized quickly... there really is a bridge outside of Ario. Now I have to see if any of the old timers out here knows what happened to Jesus and Elias.* Maria felt her shirt pocket to reassure herself that Jesus' picture was there.

"There's the spot where my grandfather showed me," the compadre touched Maria's shoulder, pointed through the window, and continued, "all the horses I told you about, Maria... you know, the ones someone raised here in Ario. Look... you can still see some of the posts from the corral over there, see..."

It was obvious that there had once been a corral off the side of the dirt road. Half of the corral posts were upright, some leaning, some laying half hidden on the ground, surrounding a huge area that had been cleared once, but that now was filled in with second growth pines, cedars and sycamores. If you weren't looking for them, you could miss the posts and the corral because the undergrowth had become so dense.

"My grandfather said that he... the man who raised all the horses that is... that he lived over... over..." the compadre peered through the taxi window a moment, then rolled the window down to see more clearly, and after scanning the roadside another moment, pointed at the line of adobes that were coming into view.

“There it is...” the compadre stated happily. “My grandfather said that he lived over there... in that one... the one with the two small windows... see it, with the wide blue door...?”

The taxi lurched toward the succession of low adobe buildings set away and slightly elevated from the roadway. At one time, another time years ago, before Ario had built up into a major tourist destination in Michoacán, scores of families made babies and created lives in the small low adobe houses, dark with smoked walls and dirt floors, red tile and sheet metal roofs, small windows cut high in the walls, with small family gardens in the back. The green chile and tomato plants, the hidden onions and garlic, the fat carrots and potatoes, the lush *yerba buena* and *té de limón*, all those plants and vegetables that parents planted and children tended and that allowed them to grow strong and persist into their futures were all gone now, dried, withered, forgotten. Only the round river rocks remained to outline the areas where people planted and harvested their lives season to season.

“Pull over here, driver,” the compadre ordered. “Over by that house with the two windows and the blue door... yes, in front, please.”

Maria de los Angeles, then her two companions, then the driver got out, stretched, and looked around without speaking. The breeze that daily sweeps across the mountains and then down into the valley where Ario was settled had not been generated yet by the warming sun, and the entire area was still, unmoving, listening to itself. Once the songbirds recommenced their singing, and the innate mystery of the place fell back out of focus, the group shuffled the thick leaf carpet as they meandered around the neutral area surrounding the taxi. After a few moments of indecision Maria de los Angeles strode up to the adobe that the compadre had identified as belonging to the unnamed horse trainer. She peered into one

of the windows, nose up to the glass, then into the other window, then knocked on the door. She waited a moment, knocked again, waited, knocked one more time, then turned around to walk to one of the adjoining adobes. She shrugged her shoulders when she caught the compadre's eye, then pointed to the next adobe when she heard a faint voice.

*“Buenos días, Señorita. ¿En que puedo servirle?”* the weak voice seemed to emanate from one of the adobes near her, “Good day, miss... How can I help you?” but by the time the words had floated away, Maria hadn't determined which adobe they came from.

“Did you hear that, Don Leopoldo?” Maria had stopped and was craning her neck to pick up any other sounds or voices that might appear. The compadre shook his head, raised his eyebrows, looked at his woman who likewise shook her head ‘No,’ and pointed to the next adobe.

“Hello,” Maria called politely in the direction of the adobes. “Anyone home?”

“Yes,” a dry voice came back to Maria. “I'm home... I've been home here for more than ninety years. Come over here...”

Maria de los Angeles looked more closely at the next two adobes and suddenly saw a head then a torso then a body peek out the door of the third adobe. It was a woman dressed in widow's black and grey, a slight woman with a cane, a woman who was now hobbling over to where Maria had stopped in her tracks when the woman materialized. Maria started to walk toward her, smiling but uncertain, nervous but eager to find out what there was to know about this place.

When the two women were two or three meters away from each other, the widow announced slowly in her faltering voice, “When I saw you at Don Elias' house, I... I thought

you were... uh, uh, from the city... the city, yes... those people from Ario, but now... now I can see that you're not... ” Maria blinked her eyes quickly when she grasped what the widow had said, and suddenly... she was shaking hands with the old woman, looking into her clear dark brown eyes, absorbing the sweetness in her toothless smile, feeling the friendliness in her resolute handshake.

“My name is Adelfina Villafuerte,” she introduced herself continuing to hold Maria’s hand, “It’s a pleasure to meet you.”

“How do you do... My name is Maria de los Angeles Pérez, and... I came to Ario,” she stopped talking to take out the picture of Jesus then continued, “I came here to Ario to find out what happened to my grandfather.” She handed the picture to the widow who took it, shook her head, pointed to her eyes and shook her head again, and handed the picture back to Maria.

“His name was Jesus Rodríguez, and... did you say that *that* house,” Maria turned to point to the adobe with the two windows she had peered through then turned back to the widow, “that *that* house was Elias’ house?”

“Why... yes, I did...” the widow replied. “Don Elias owned that house and, and... he lived there until the time, the time of the revolution... We never knew what happened to him, you know... he never came back... left all his horses over there...” she pointed back to where the corral was, “We waited for him but no one... no one knew what became of him... My father had us feed the horses, water them... finally he had to sell them, they eat so much, you know... my father sold them because Elias never came back. No one ever came back... no one...” The widow’s eyes changed. She remembered back to the time of the revolution when people commonly disappeared suddenly and without explanation.

Maria was silent as she realized what was transpiring. Her eyes watered, and she was surprised to be feeling sorry for Elias, a deep remorse that rose into her chest and flowed out her eyes as bitter tears. In all the past months Maria had never cried for Jesus or for Elias, but now she was here, where they had lived and hid from Rosas' people, where Jesus started his little schools...

*I'm here, Maria realized, here at last...*

"Elias was my grandfather's brother," Maria finally murmured, "My grandfather stayed here in 1912, when Elias was still alive... Maybe you met my grandfather... Jesus Rodríguez... Anyway... Elias hid Jesus from some people from Casacuarán... they wanted to kill him, they took his hacienda, and he had to hide here..."

Emotions which Maria de los Angeles had suppressed for the past months with her research and travel now overtook her, and with motherly compassion, the widow listened to Maria recount what she knew of her grandfather's life based on his journal and his fate based on family legends. The compadre and his woman had sensed what was happening and were milling around the taxi joking with the driver.

"So... your grandfather's brother was Elias... and your grandfather's name was Jesus Rodríguez, was that it?" the widow asked compassionately, "So... Elias Rodríguez, yes... that was his name... Elias Rodríguez... Yes, it was."

"Do you remember seeing my grandfather in Elias' house," Maria asked quietly as she touched the widow's arm. "That would be in... let me see... that was around August of 1912. He stayed here in Elias' house about a month that I know of, in August... I don't know

if he was here after that. I don't know what happened to him after... That's why I came to Ario... to find out what happened to him. Did you see him here?"

The old woman looked into Maria's moist eyes and replied, "*Hija*, I was only... only, let's see... I was about eight or, or nine in those days. I never went to Don Elias' house. I remember that only men, yes, only men who wanted to buy horses went to his house, important men... some men from Ario and some, and some men I never saw before... Don Elias would always leave with them. We used to watch him, watch him break the horses, train the horses in the corral, many of us children... we liked to go to the corral and watch him, Don Elias and the other men."

"So, you never knew of Jesus, never met him, eh, *Señora*?" Maria asked again disappointedly.

"No, I don't think so, *Hija*... like I said, there were so many men there when Elias was there... so many men I didn't recognize... I'm so sorry I can't help you. You know, we were busy, the children were so busy, we didn't have much time to be looking at, looking at the people at Don Elias' house, we had to tend the gardens, get the wood, yes, everyday wood for the fire, then the water from the well, the well over there... " the widow pointed up the road, "and then our studies... I remember we had a new teacher, yes, a new teacher who gave classes at night, yes, at night... and my father sometimes would go to the classes with me... I remember... yes, he would come to class with me, and... and we would read and write together when we got home, the next day, we would study at the new school at night, so we were busy, my father and I, and of course, my mother too with..."

"Excuse me, *Señora*," Maria interrupted excitedly, "but you said there was a new teacher who gave classes at night?"

“Why, yes, *Hija*,” the old lady confirmed, “at night, classes at night... most of us children from here would go... sometimes with our fathers and sometimes not.”

“*Señora*, was the teacher a man or a woman?”

“Why, a man... a kind and patient man... I heard my father tell the other men that he was a good teacher, and... sometimes he helped Don Elias train the horses too... we always laughed about that... teaching us stupid burros and the horses too... he-he-he...”

“What was the teacher’s name? Do you remember his name?” Maria asked, hoping to hear confirmation of what she now realized was true.

“We always called him ‘*El maestro*’...” the old widow replied happily, “*Sí*, ‘*El maestro*’... we always called him ‘Teacher’... I don’t remember his name...”

“That was my grandfather, *Señora*,” Maria whispered. She realized immediately that it was Jesus, her grandfather. Jesus had been this woman’s teacher, and she recalled him, recalled Jesus. Finally... someone remembered, someone...

“Your *maestro*, your teacher was Jesus Rodríguez, Elias Rodríguez’ brother, my grandfather... He stayed in Elias’ house while he was *el maestro*... Oh, it was him...”

The old woman slowly put her arms around Maria and held her. Maria relaxed in the widow’s arms, embraced the old woman for a few moments, then pulled back to look into her old eyes.

“You know, *Hija*,” the old woman revealed, “No one has put their arms around me for years, yes, for years... ever since my *marido* died... yes, he died... ten, yes, ten years ago... Ever since then, I’ve been living here alone in my house. I’m happy you found your

grandfather... Jesus... Are you content now... now that you know he was here, that he was *el maestro* here...? Do you feel better now, *Hija*?”

Maria nodded her head without speaking. She breathed in deeply, feeling the cool mountain air coming down off the pine trees fill her lungs, invigorate her, renew her spirit. She remembered the *compadre* and his woman who were still waiting by the taxi, so she wheeled around to locate them, gave the thumbs up sign with a big grin, then turned back to the smiling old woman to ask the final inevitable question.

“*Señora*... do you know what happened to *el maestro*... to Jesus, my grandfather?”

“Well... my father told us one day that the classes were over,” the old woman recounted, “because *el maestro* was gone, yes, gone... but he never said where *el maestro* went or what happened to him, no... not that I remember...”

“Is there anyone else living here,” Maria asked hopefully, “anyone who might remember what happened to him... if he died here, if anyone found him dead, if he was buried here...?”

“You know... there’s not too many of us,” the widow replied as she shook her head, “no, not too many from those days still alive here in Ario... not many, except me and a few others down the road... yes, down the road... You know, maybe Don Eusebio, yes... maybe he would know about what happened, eh... what happened to your grandfather... yes, maybe he would...”

“Why Don Eusebio... why do you think he would know, *Señora*?”

“He took care of the cemetery,” she explained, “the cemetery down the road by the canal, the old cemetery they used before they built the new one in... in nineteen... nineteen-fourteen or fifteen, yes, nineteen-fifteen, I think it was... Maybe he remembers if your grandfather died here, or what happened to him...”

“Can we talk to him?” Maria inquired tentatively. “Do you think he would talk with me, talk with me now? Could you take me to see him, *Señora*?... I mean...”

The old woman smiled, nodded her head enthusiastically, and suddenly began pulling Maria de los Angeles down the dirt road towards where she had said Don Eusebio lived. When Maria realized what was happening, she turned around and shouted back to the compadre and his woman who were still standing by the taxi and looking perplexed.

“I’ll meet you back in town later,” she called, “I have to go meet someone else down the road... When I get back, I’ll reimburse you for the taxi and explain everything... Thank you! Oh... I told the driver I would pay him double, eh!”

The compadre and his woman looked at each other, nodded their heads, waved back to Maria, and waited for her to walk off with the old widow before they got in the VW bug and bounced back into town.

Maria de los Angeles ambled along slowly, arm in arm with Señora Villafuerte, listening to her descriptions of each adobe they passed, the names of families that had lived there- Solanche, Cahue, Malagón, Vélez, Villavicencio, Blazquez, Vidriales, Sotomayor, Amézquita, Domenzain, Mújica, Peñaflor and others, the names of all the children who had grown up there, her terse description of each family’s shortcomings or crimes, where they died or where they eventually relocated, and then her advice to Maria based on that

particular family's fate. Maria listened gratefully and asked questions to encourage *la señora*. She tried to absorb all the sights, all the sounds, all the smells, and all the more subtle sensations of the place itself, so that when she eventually went home to Yuriria, then to Idaho, she would be able to remember deeply, recreate completely in her mind and for her family this secluded and private place where Jesus had spent what she was beginning to feel were his last days.

After walking step-by-step, struggling to hold on to *la señora* so that she would not stumble on the rugged and uneven surface of the road, following the lead of the old woman she had met just minutes ago, Maria and her escort arrived at one of the adobes farthest from the main road, an adobe set farther back from the road than the others, one that was smoothed, rounded, weather-worn from years of rain and wind.

"He lives here..." the old woman whispered to Maria. Then she startled Maria by shouting up to the house. "Eh! Don Eusebio! Are you still alive?" she called out in a husky voice. "It's Adelfina... Adelfina Villafuerte... from down the road... next to Elias' house... Are you there, old man?"

Both women waited a moment, looked at each other, and then both raised their eyebrows when there was no answer from the adobe. The old woman called out again, "Ey! Don Euse..."

"I hear you, old woman!" the raspy voice came back interrupting *la señora*. "Yes... I'm still here... still here... Wha duh yuh wan now? I gave you eggs last week... Why don't you get more chickens if you need more eggs, woman... eh? Get more chickens..."

“There’s someone here to see you, you old mule,” *la señora* shot back, “someone who wants to talk with you about the old days... Can you still remember those days, Eusebio... the time of the revolution... eh? Come out, you old hermit!”

The curtain behind the one lopsided window slowly moved to one side, and a face appeared behind the dark glass, a face that peered out at *la señora* and Maria for a good minute before it quickly disappeared behind the curtain which fell back to cover the window. A moment later, the weather beaten grey wooden door creaked open, and Don Eusebio called out, “Who is it now?”

“My name is Maria de los Angeles Pérez, *Señor*, and I’m looking for some information about my grandfather, Jesus Rodríguez... I think he died or was killed in Ario... He was the *el maestro* here for a month or so during the time of the revolution... he was the brother of Elias who lived back down the road, by Señora Villafuerte here... and... he stayed in Elias house while he was the *el maestro*... I have a picture of him here... if you would take a look at it... and maybe you might remember him...”

“Bring that picture up here, young lady,” the old man ordered. “I can’t see anything from here, you know? Well, come on... walk up here, don’t be afraid... I’m too old to bite, eh, Adelfina?”

Adelfina nudged Maria up the short path toward Don Eusebio’s adobe, and indicated with her head that she should approach the old man alone. Maria walked up the stone path where the grizzled man had come out of his door and stood waiting bent over and inspecting Maria as she approached him. He wore the traditional *calzón blanco*, the white muslin pants that most men wore in his time, greyed and worn thin and ragged, and on his thin shoulders hung a dark blue wool *gavan* that covered his torso and allowed only his head

and hands to protrude. His shining dark brown eyes punctuated an even darker face from which stubby grey whiskers sprouted. He scratched his head vigorously, and as he did, his matted grey hair fell over his eyes.

“Well, show me the picture,” he said gruffly as he reached out his gnarled hand to Maria. “Yes, I’ll look at that picture...” and as he snatched it from Maria’s hand, he said again, “Let’s see that picture there...”

The old hermit peered at Jesus’ picture, held it up close to his face, rubbed his eyes with his sleeve, started to shake his head, then looked up at Maria and asked, “Who is this?... Who’s this man here? Who’d you say...?”

“That’s my grandfather, Jesus Rodríguez, Elias’ brother...” Maria answered wondering if the old man recognized Jesus or if he had only forgotten why she had shown it to him. “He was the *el maestro* here before Elias disappeared. I was wondering if you knew what happened to him... why he disappeared...?”

“Course, I know what happened to him...” the peculiar man revealed, “I buried him with my own two hands.”

“You what?” Maria cried out. “Are you sure you buried the man in this picture... are you sure you buried Jesus...?”

Maria de los Angeles was shocked not only to finally hear that Jesus had died, even though she had suspected it ever since she had first heard the legend from her mother, but also stunned to have come so far on such a tenuous uncertain journey to hear this odd wizened man stand in front of her declaring without doubt that he himself had buried Jesus.

“I said I buried him, didn’t I?” Don Eusebio appeared offended that Maria questioned his word. “I fished him out of the canal over there,” he pointed up the road to the distant cluster of sycamore trees where the compadre had indicated the bridge on the old road crossed the canal. “Some of the boys who were fishin’ over there came runnin’ to tell me they saw a body in the water... so I went over there to see for myself... they were right, those boys... someone had shot him up pretty well... full of .44 slugs... been in the water some time, I think... just had his shirt, vest, pants and boots on, no wallet or money, no watch... pretty messed up with the water and bullets, you know?”

“But how can you be sure it was Jesus, my grandfather... I mean are you absolutely certain?”

The old man turned around and disappeared inside when Maria was only midway through her question, and she thought that he was exasperated with her interrogations and just wanted to be left alone. She considered for a moment whether to wait or leave, looked down to Señora Villafuerte for some hint, whispered down to the old woman to ask if she thought it was best to wait, accepted her shrug of the shoulders, and turned back to find Don Eusebio standing there holding up a gold chain from which dangled a round gold medal the size of a new brass and silver five peso coin.

“I took this off his neck...” the old man stated proudly. “Look... look on the back of the medal... see fer yerself...”

He thrust the chain and medal in Maria’s face and continued to explain as Maria gingerly plucked the chain from his grasp and examined the medal. On the back Maria could

read faintly inscribed in elaborate script two names and what was in all probability the date of their marriage:

*Jesus y Dolores Rodríguez 18 Julio 1904*

“When you said Jesus Rodríguez... I recalled the name... this’s the only identification he had on him... like I said before, no wallet, no watch on him... only this, so I kept it like I do all the valuables I find on stiffs. I find money or watches or rings without names on ‘em, and I sell ‘em to cover my expenses, yuh know?... but when there’s someone’s name... well... maybe I’m superstitious or somethin’, but it just don’ feel right sellin’ it... so I just hold on t’ it, keep it, you know... ’til someone comes to claim it or... well, anyway, I got quite a collection of things I took off a lot a folks I buried... all strangers, you know, not folks that lived here... no, just strangers... there was lots of strangers turnin’ up dead in those times, yuh know, with the revolution and all... Got any idea who shot up yer grandfather, young lady?”

“I know some men from Casacuarán or Salvatierra were looking for him...”

“From Casacuarán or Salvatierra, you say, eh?”

“Did you ever find Elias’ body,” Maria asked, looking into the old man’s eyes.

“It’s possible that he got shot along with Jesus... Did you find his body in the canal too?”

“Just him...” the old man replied, “just your grandfather.”

“Where did you bury Jesus?” Maria asked excitedly eager to find his grave and put an end to her search. “... around here? Did you bury him here?”

“Sure did... buried him in the old cemetery by them tall sycamores.” Don Eusebio again pointed down the road to the tall trees in the distance. “Used to put all our

people in the ground there... for years I took care of the cemetery, got folks ready and all, you know, buried ‘em. Yeah, I put your grandfather there after I found him in the canal that day, yes, I did...”

“Would you take me there... or tell me how to get there so I can see his grave?”

“No graves there anymore,” the old man replied, “all washed away in the winter o’... le’s see... that was... 1914... yeah... 19 and 14... it was... biggest storm we ever had since I can remember...rain ‘n’ wind ‘n’ all the canals and rivers overflowed... washed away houses, animals, some people... an’ the cemetery too... yes, even the cemetery... washed away everything... stone markers, crosses, bodies, everything... washed down past La Huacana and Churumuco into the reservoir, you know, El Infiernillo... Hell of place to end up in, yes, it is... No one ever found anything in the water... just all washed away... everything, including your grandfather...”

Maria de los Angeles was silent again as she opened her hand to look at the medal. She turned it over and looked at the inscription, then at the other side which was the head of The Virgin Mary in relief.

“You can have that chain an’ medal, yuh know...” the old man’s voice had softened now when he spoke to Maria. “Belonged to yer grandfather, so I guess it belongs to you now, eh? Sorry I can’t tell yuh any more ‘bout your grandfather, but... you know all there is to know now... all I know ‘bout him... yes, all I know...”

“Thank you... thank you very much, Don Eusebio...” Maria’s voice trembled when she thanked him. “I... I... appreciate you telling me about what happened to Jesus... and... and thank you for burying him, thank you for doing that for him. I’m happy to know

now what really happened... Now I can tell my mother... You know, we never knew for sure, but... now... Let me give you..." Maria started to rummage in her pocket for pesos, but Don Eusebio touched her arm and shook his head vigorously.

Maria de los Angeles' voice trailed off and she was silent. She put the chain around her neck, and after a moment she reached out her hand to Don Eusebio. He took her hand, shook it and patted it gently, then with an uncharacteristically compassionate note asked Maria an unexpected question.

"Before you go... tell me, young lady... was he... your grandfather... a good man?"

"Yes..." Maria replied, "He loved and respected my grandmother very much."

"Well, then, young lady..." Don Eusebio said softly before he let go of her hand, "it's time for you to go back..." He turned and disappeared behind the door he shut deliberately after him.

Maria de los Angeles turned and stumbled down the path to where Adelfina was waiting for her. The old woman had been scanning the sky, peering closely, stopping now and then. She looked at Maria when she approached, touched her arm, and told her matter-of-factly, "You know, *Hija*, many things have occurred here in Ario, yes... many strange things... and ever since they put in the highway... well, we've been... by ourselves here, under the moon and stars at night... flooded... yes, flooded by the warm sunlight during the day... We have wind that comes down the mountains and carries the sweet smell of roses across the valley, and birds still have a place to make their homes in the sycamores..."

The widow was quiet as she looked in the direction of the distant sycamore grove. The tall trees spread out above the pines, their huge leaves golden, green and tan in the morning sunlight, roots grasping into secret water sources underground. Everyone in Ario knew the sycamores and referred to them to orient people new to town... “Turn right at the sycamores... behind the sycamores... the place over by the sycamores,” but only a very few recalled the secrets the sycamores had kept for such a very long, long time.

Maria now knew one of their secrets... *There are other secrets, of course, other mysteries... but to discover the key to one secret, to one's own mystery... well... not everyone has that right, has such a secret, such a gift...*

The two women talked for an endless moment, embraced, then said their thanks and good-byes. The old widow, Adelfina Villafuerte, waved as she tottered back down the empty dirt road toward her earth and wood home. She knew that Maria would need to be alone, quiet, listening... Maria de los Angeles watched as the old lady who had helped her so much disappear around a bend in the road.

*I feel so empty now, Maria's heart opened... or maybe full, I don't know.*

She looked around her at the wooded panorama surrounding Ario's past, and recounted how much had occurred in two days.

*I found where Jesus had stayed, she commended herself, and I even met someone who was a student of his, actually knew him... What a wonderful woman... and Don Eusebio... without him, I wouldn't... never have been able...*

Maria de los Angeles walked farther along the dirt road that still delineates the hidden valley where the old Ario de Rosales bloomed and then faded. She walked,

remembered, imagined, and disappeared into the timeless eternity of the road and her thoughts. She eventually stopped and turned around.

*He's not there anymore, she reminded herself... the water took him... But I have his medal, she realized as she touched the thin chain and then the medal around her neck. And I have this day, the compadre and his woman, Don Eusebio... and Adelfina too... and now I know.*

## Epilogue            A Fitting End

Whether Maria de los Angeles ever continued wandering alone farther into the hidden sycamore grove, ever found and ventured across the old concrete bridge that still crosses the wide canal there unseen... there where the old road used to come into old Ario de Rosales, whether she ever could know or imagine exactly how Jesus Rodríguez had died, had been killed along with Elias by Arnulfo Rosas' compadre's two sons... well, those are other secrets which will linger hidden, perhaps unformed and unresolved in the reader's mind.

Jesus never had the opportunity to finish his journal, never penned the last entry that would had said so much, never summed up his life with personal eloquence, and he never had the chance to bid Dolores or his children good-by. And so, it is fitting, necessary perhaps, that what in the end has turned out to be Maria de los Angeles' story remains unfinished, open, tender like a healing wound, sensitive like a broken heart.

A few details can be settled though, without compromising Maria de los Angeles' privacy. Within a few months of her visit to Casacuarán and return to Idaho, she returned to her Mexico to purchase her grandfather's hacienda. With an advance from the publication of *The Revolution Journal of Jesus Rodríguez* she snatched his hacienda from the historically brutal and mechanical grasp of Arnulfo Rosas' family. Once again and for always it returned to Jesus' family. Whether Maria chose to leave it as is, create a historical site, or live in it herself... that again is something the reader must discover off the highway in Casacuarán between Salvatierra and Yuriria in Guanajuato, Mexico. Maria did not allow the bitter irony of the circumstances to dissolve in the sweetness of her discovery and success. She did not

divulge the contents of the letter she wrote to Don Antonio Rosas, Arnulfo Rosas' grandson, after getting title to the hacienda... not to Angelina, her own mother, and not to this author.

And what of the strongbox that Jesus had said he buried in the *sala* of his hacienda to provide for his family's security in case of his untimely death at the hands of Rosas' people? After Maria de los Angeles took ownership of the hacienda, there were many occasions when she herself examined carefully and then counted off ten bricks from the west wall and fifteen bricks from the north wall, all the while imagining whether underneath the intersection of those brick coordinates there actually ever lurked or perhaps still remained buried such a family treasure. This author has spoken with Maria on many occasions, and never has she divulged if she surrendered to the temptation to dig up the brick floor to unearth whatever treasure might or might not be there.

Yes, Maria de los Angeles did return late in the evening to El Viajero in Ario where she stayed one more night. The compadre and his woman were waiting for her there, anxious to know, eager to touch some part of her mystery, feel some part of their own mystery. The following afternoon she stepped down off the ten a.m. Primera Plus from Ario onto the sidewalk outside the Hotel Rinconcito in Yuriria. She walked the three blocks uphill to her mother and father's house at La Paz 21 deciding where and how to start to tell them all that had transpired in Ario, to put the medal and chain in their brown wrinkled hands. Within a week she had bought tickets to Idaho and taken off tearfully from the airport in Morelia with her four children and incredulous husband to fly back to the mystery and secrets unfolding as her future.

Maria continues to attend the university in Boise where she is pursuing advanced degrees in International Relations specializing in how the Internet and the World Wide Web

can facilitate and enhance business partnerships between entrepreneurs in different countries. She and her friend, Lupe, are collaborating on a book about the historical roots and family stories of contemporary Zapatista leaders in the Guanajuato and Michoacán areas. She has quickly become fluent in English, but she continues to speak her native Spanish with her children and husband because she understands the humanistic and commercial value of being bilingual. She divulged recently to this author that she considers the legacy of Jesus' hacienda to be her children's cultural and family inheritance.

Of course, Maria de los Angeles found herself enriched in many ways by her search for and discovery of her grandfather, Jesus. In the poignant passages of Jesus' journal, in his Casacuarán hacienda and Elias's adobe in Ario, and finally among the people and events of his life and death Maria found her roots and her future, the resources she would need to make a new life for herself and her family in the open spaces and opportunities of modern-day Idaho.

The details and events of Jesus and his granddaughter's story mark the years intervening between the beginning and the end of the twentieth century. The misfortunes that accumulated during the first years of Jesus' century were somehow redeemed in the last years of Maria's. Their story could be seen as historically informative, culturally enlightening, or personally heartbreaking. It might seem though to the reader that the tragic events of this story – Jesus' and Elias' murder, the theft of Jesus' hacienda, the forced ouster and relocation of Dolores and their four children from the hacienda – were never adequately vindicated or redressed, either legally or morally.

It is therefore appropriate, ironic and not without some pleasure for the author to disclose to the reader this story's final twist of fate. In a recent conversation, Maria's mother,

Angelina, unexpectedly revealed to this author that Arnulfo Rosas and his youngest son had been found together in the last days of the revolution during a heavy rainstorm, uncharacteristically crawling across a flooded street in their hometown of Salvatierra. The fact that they were dragging their twitching intestines after them, and that they eventually drowned with their contorted faces buried in the mud must have gratified whomever had come up behind them and twisted their knives into the unsuspecting abdomens of the respected oldest and youngest Rosas men.

No one was ever fingered, indicted or convicted for the dual murders. As the revolution wound down, people considered it to be just retribution for every crime and misdeed the elder Rosas had ever committed. If her mother ever tells Maria de los Angeles what happened to him, she will no doubt consider it a fitting end to Arnulfo Rosas.