



Para Sara por su hijo
Regalito Puerto

una jornada

PROLOGUE

In a hotel room in Nuevo Laredo, Regalito began to tell his story. He starts as if he is talking to his mother, Sara. Then his voice moves to speak more directly to the reader.

Next month, Regalito turns twenty-two. But he started his journey when he was eighteen.

He remembered the afternoon when the storm came suddenly, dark and huge, with wild winds. He was biking with friends and were washed into the marina; they struggled to stay afloat. He was rescued by a fishing boat from Nicaragua; days later he ended up in Veracruz, where he made friends with students from la Universidad Veracruzana and met Alina.

He worked out of fondas and earned his way by providing translation and interpretation services. He lived undocumented in Mexico until finally he visited the U.S. Consulate in Xalapa to claim his identity.

His journey continued to Huautla de Jiménez, Chiapas, DF, and Monterrey, and now he's at 'La trenza fronteriza,' as Alina called it.

On the floor and bed of his hotel room he had notes written on scraps of paper, scattered, some tucked in books, scribbles jotted down in a hurry; no entry was more than a couple of paragraphs. He had maps taped on the walls.

In one stack in the corner he kept his ID documents, letters, copies of articles, and notes on Huautla and Chiapas.

He slept on the floor to avoid disturbing what he was arranging on the bed.

One morning, he pulled out his portable Royal manual typewriter and began with Comienzo.

The story is a working draft, told over a series of vignettes.
Thank you for taking the time to give this draft a read. Nov 2024.

COMIENZO

The morning Tia Estela and Tio Lolo came by, he was driving his cool 1957 black Chevy coupe with aqua blue trim and shiny chrome.

Amá, you always liked that car. Tio kept it looking like the day he drove it off the lot. I remember you saying that he bought the car right after high school and paid for it by working for his father's produce trucking business. And later on, he bought our uncle's bakery.

Amá recuerdas, in the early morning before entering, it was already in the air—the aroma of pastry and breads in the ovens. Tio and the baker would sniff the air and know when to pull them out.

That morning, I was outside waiting across the hotel when I saw the car, waved hello, and showed Tio where to park. He stepped out, lifted his sunglasses back, and brought his wristwatch to eye level. The drive to the valley was two hours and thirty-five minutes, and seventeen minutes to cross the river, he said, tipping his stetson fedora hat. Tia was all smiles, with out-stretched arms.

They were looking good. They followed me into the hotel and up three flights of stairs to the top floor. At the far end was my room. It did not have a kitchen.

The toilet, sink, and shower-head were set off in the corner by a partition wall and a half-size wall with an entrance.

There was an armoire, a small table, two chairs, and a bed. Windows were along the three walls that faced the hotel, and a balcony around two of them.

They wanted to sit down, but I got them to follow me to the courtyard. Don Alberto, the hotel owner, walked by and greeted us. "A' tú familia," he said.

I introduced Tia and Tio to Don Alberto, and we continued to the courtyard.

Walking around the garden, Tia recognized some of the herb scents and pointed out flowers. We sat at a table under a ficus tree in October near noontime.

Tio talked about the storm and said that it hit some neighborhoods hard, but somehow the houses in their neighborhood withstood the whipping rains and winds.

And tia remembered how windows blew to pieces, sections of the roof flew apart, and rain came in. They held on, she said. And when the wind howled, they could hear the house creak and moan like a reckoning. Tio Lolo looked at me nodding, remembering.

Amá, Tia said that you and Elvida came by and packed everyone in the station wagon, and followed Tio with people in his delivery van to the church. He said how they had to go around flooded streets, broken trees, and fallen electric lines.

Tio said that before the storm hit he hurried and parked the Chevy on blocks in an open space in the backyard, covered and protected it as best he could.

It survived, and he proved that today.

We sat there, in the quiet of the courtyard, not saying anything. Then I asked about you.

Tia removed her sunglasses and looked straight at me. She closed her eyes to hold back tears but she couldn't. Tears were down her cheeks when she stood and motioned for me to stand.

She hugged me tight. Her voice in Spanish was a whisper in my ear, saying that you had died. I lightened up, and she held me closer.

Tears rolled out; I felt them on my cheek, and for a moment that took forever — my breath stopped.

Tia said that the church was full to the balcony. The stress on the structure was too much, and it collapsed on the kitchen and serving area.

Amá, Tia said you were serving when the load of people and structure came crashing down, injuring many, killing you and three others.

She said the storm was busy being wild and that the church was not big enough for so many people.

We didn't say anything for a while.

Then Tio stood and pulled out a handkerchief from his back pocket, gave it a snap, and wiped the inside rim of his hat. He combed his hair back, put his hat on saying, Let's go eat.

I took them to a fonda across the plaza, not far from the river. I told them how I used to earn money there by translating documents, and would read and write letters. I told them that the first thing I bought was a pocket-size English-Spanish dictionary.

Amá they talked about your funeral, and how lovingly everyone spoke. At the burial, when you were lowered into the ground, everyone, along with the kids, shoveled the earth back into your grave. The little ones too small for a shovel grabbed handfuls and pitched in.

Despues, everyone gathered at Tio Beto's house, in the country backyard, with food and music.

At that time of the year, for a few days, cotton plants bloom. The evening light across the fields have a faint pink glow. Soon, they will transform into cotton.

Tia remembered when the two of you were young and would sneak out from the dance hall and go past the lights along the shadows of the cotton fields. Tia said that their mother, Concha, always kept an eye out. When the boys who also snuck out got close, she'd step in. Tia said that it made you mad because you couldn't see the boy who would be my father.

Tia wanted wanted to know what had happened to me. Some gave you up for dead, she said with one hand on her forehead. I tell them that on Saturday afternoon before the storm hit, I was biking with friends along the marina. It was sunny, but then suddenly the sky was shut down by rolling darkness. It came with huge winds and wild rain.

One big old wave washed us off our bikes and threw us into the wild. It was confusing to know which way was up and which way was that way. In the chaos, I heard Zeke and Bobby yelling for help. I didn't hear Feddy's voice.

I was being tossed and tried to keep my head above water. Then I began to sense that I was close to the marina's rock barrier, near the opening to the bay. I see a search light and hear a voice. The light was on an orange-ring buoy. I reached for it and pulled on the rope, and they brought me in.

Tia lifted her eyebrows, "Okay, y entonce?"

I continued saying that I was rescued by a fishing boat from Nicaragua. Onboard, right away, I was taken to the bridge, where the captain was behind the wheel, steering the boat. He turned to me saying to fasten down on the bench behind him. The bench was bolted to the floor, and under it were two bundles of rope.

When the boat was out of the bay and in the Gulf, I could see parts of the island. Huge waves looped and whooshed over, crashing behind the boat. The wet wind was coming from everywhere. The captain rode the boat like a bronco,

steering between or straight into the waves. I did all I could to hold on and watch.

It went on rowdy like that. Then we were in water that looked heavy and relaxed. The captain pointed to a spooky wave that was building fast, heaving its way right at us.

The captain gave orders to turn the engine off. It was a lone giant wave with a white haze on top. The captain steered the boat into the belly of that wave. We splashed through like a dolphin and left that scarcely wave behind. I looked back and saw that big o'wave folding on itself, with showers of water making waves.

On the other side the sky was clear, and there was starlight beginning to show along the horizon above the water.

The night sky was everywhere, it was a show, star light made the horizon clear, the curve and being in space. The sky seemed to pulse and breath with stars.

In the early morning from the radio on the bridge came a voice in Spanish announcing that the storm had lost its strength in Kansas.

We were in choppy waters. The morning light was as far as you could see. There was no end to the water. The sky was in shades of blue down to the horizon.

The captain gave out some orders in what sounded like Spanish, but it wasn't. The crew understood and got busy; some went below deck.

He asked me my name. He spoke some English he'd picked up fishing and selling their catch in ports along the Gulf Coast to Florida. He grew up speaking Miskitu and was schooled in Spanish. He asked me to help him by speaking in English. He tells me his name—Anastacio Omar Andrew Cruz, Capitán Cruz.

He asked me where I was from and all that.

Capitán Cruz said that we would make port in Veracruz in three days. The captain said I could help the crew work the ropes and nets. It was hard work moving those ropes and nets around. I liked being out on the Gulf with a big sky.

Before dawn the captain ordered the crew to cast the nets, and he switched the lights over them. I was put to work as a muscle to pull on ropes. We brought the nets in and unloaded them on the deck in piles. Thousands of shrimp and some fish. We separated the fish out and shoveled the shrimp in large

containers with small holes, they were hoisted below deck and stored inside tanks filled with gulf water, and a pump to circulate the water.

The crew thought that in Veracruz the catch would bring in a good payday. The next morning were nearing Veracruz. In the water dolphins swam along the boat, looking for a snack. The crew tossed them small fish.

Seagulls circled the boat, sounding like a bunch of kids at a party. The captain gave out orders to ready the boat to make port.

I didn't have any more to say. Tia just shook her head in disbelief and eyed Tio Lolo.

I felt a need to say more. I talked about placing a phone call.

I said that most phone lines along the coast were back up. And calls to Texas could be made. To make a call, I'd go to this place where you walk up to a counter, give them the number you want called, pay for the connection and time, and you are sent to a booth with a phone. It was cumbersome and expensive.

I tell them that I was able to speak with two primos, luckily one from each family. Before my time ran out, one primo said that they would get the word out and have someone call me at the hotel.

Tio and Tia just looked at me. I continued and said that one morning I was in the courtyard when I heard, "Tiene una llamada internacional."

I looked at Tia Estela and said that it was her on the phone.

She gave me that look that said, Muy interesante, pero qué vas a hacer?

I didn't have an answer for her. She paced and worried over me. I could ride with them, she'd say, cross over and back home. I tell her that I had nada. Nothing to identify me.

She says that I have one year left of high school; and that she and Tio would vouch for me. I don't trust the crossing guards. And said that I did not want to make trouble for them. I had read and heard stories about crossing into Texas.

And all those eyes of Texas suspicion at the river—I didn't want to deal with that.

She was insistent, saying I could go to the U.S. Consulate, and on like that. It didn't feel right and it was something I did not want to get entangled with. I said that I was staying until I figured something out.

Tio Lolo looked at me like a coach sizing you up. Then he smiled and stood, and I stood, and we hugged. He put his sunglasses on, adjusted his hat, turned to Tia, saying, "Vamonos esta bien."

We said our goodbyes, and Tia handed me a large envelope. That was the last time I saw them, driving off in Tio's Cool Chevy coup, looking good and running smooth.

CENA

One morning in my room, I found atop the armoire some comic books in Spanish and some paperback books. One, titled *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* by Oscar Acosta; a journal by Anais Nin; and *El Llano en llamas* by Juan Rulfo in Spanish.

I went to ask Don Alberto about the books. He was in the hotel kitchen, standing over the stove, stirring toasted ground coffee, cacao beans and a canela stick.

He was going on about how his twin daughters want to have a party, una fiesta. He shrugged his shoulders, saying that he asked them for what purpose, and that they answer “Pues, para un fiesta.”

Round and round they go, he said. He finally gave in, allowing them use of the courtyard on a Sunday afternoon and the hotel kitchen, and they would have to cleanup afterwards. He said that they had to come up with a plan and that they needed their mother's approval.

He added the grounds to a pot of hot water, strained it, and poured me a cup. I added crema y asugar.

About the books, he said to keep them or leave them behind. Then he mentioned that he had more in his office. I said that I would like to see them, so we went.

There were five stacks against a corner wall. He let me look through them and left me there.

Mostly romance, thriller, detective, a couple of Gideon bibles, school books, tour books, some in English and some in Spanish. From the pile, I picked out *La Relación de la Jornada de Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca*, and *Poemas sueltos* por Jaime Sabines, both in Spanish.

When he returned, I showed him what I had picked out. He said to take more. Too many books to travel around with, I said. We had talked about me leaving the following week.

“Ah’vas a Veracruz,” he remembered. Then he invited me to dinner with his family Saturday evening.

Don Alberto once mentioned that he inherited the property from his father, whose holdings went back six generations, owning at one time 4,060 acres of land. It is smaller now, and his six brothers and sisters own the property in a legal partnership. A portion of it is where the hotel sits. It went through the clash of 1910, or *el Choque*, as Don Alberto’s father calls it.

For dinner, I put on a new guayabera and brought a special gift. A custom made vase from a local pottery shop. I had sketched out on paper a vase tall enough for a handful of long stem flowers. With the word hogar on the vase.

I showed the potter the sketch. “Claro que si,” he said.

They let me hang out while they made it. The potter placed a chunk of clay dough on a work table, patted it with wet hands, kneaded it like masa, shaped it, and mounded it onto the potter’s wheel. He gave the wheel a fast spin with his hand and began to formed the oval base.

He increased the speed with his feet and brought up the form of the vase, and with one finger he reached for a dap of deep purple paint and added it to the vase. In the whirl, he drew what resembled a river. He slowed the spin and blended the background to a mauve color, fading to the top.

Then he let the spin come to a stop on its own, and let it rest there.

Later, he removed the vase from the wheel and placed it on the work table. He made final touches and handed me a nail to etch the word hogar. And into el horno it went.

A couple of days later I dropped by, and they were giving it a final polish. I paid them and take it with me, and set the hogar vase on the balcony facing the afternoon sun. It had some sparkle. A purple line weaved along the vase like a river.

Don Alberto’s house was across the courtyard. The entrance was an archway to their patio; the wall to the left was blue, and went up to a second level to a small balcony. On the ground along the wall were herbs and flowers in hand-painted clay pots. The wall to the right was high, with kids' scribbles and artwork all over it.

Straight ahead light came from two large kitchen windows separated by two tall doors with stained glass.

He sees me, and the twins come out to greet me. They welcomed me in.

Mya turns, saying “Esta es nuestra cocina, aqui esta el horno, la parrilla, and the other twin Marina said, “y aqui esta nuestro papi.”

I set the vase on the counter and we did an hola abrazo. The counter was long, the top was covered with tiles the twins and their friends had made. Don Alberto said that his primo made the stools and prepare counter surface to lay the tiles.

The doors and all the widows wood trims were all done by his primo. Next to the kitchen was a long table with chairs, also made by his primo.

The kitchen walls were painted in the colors of a parrot's feathers—lime green, yellow, pink, blue, and red. A yellow horizontal tile strip was across the walls, separating top and bottom colors. I had never seen such a beautiful kitchen.

A moment later, Xiomara walked in.

“Y aqui esta nuestra mami,” said Marina.

I liked Xiomara right away from the first day she checked me in to the hotel.

“Aqui nosotros vamos a preparar nuestra cena.” She announced.

Marina and Mya jumped up and down. She got them busy cleaning and cutting vegetables, and to grind ajo, toasted pepper corns, and comino seeds into a paste. Xiomara reminds them to add a little water to the molcajete.

Don Alberto pulled out two red snappers and laid them on a cutting board, dabbed the moisture off, scored them, and rubbed them with olive oil and raw garlic.

“Vamos a prepara huachinango a la Norteña,” Xiomara said and slid a wooden tray across the counter with a small carafe of tequila, una botela de agua mineral, lima y sal, y un vaso vacio.

I slid the Hogar vase over.

Right away, she recognized the work from Don Reynaldo's shop. She showed off the vase like a trophy.

“Vamos a inaugural tú regalo señor Regalito Puerto,” she said.

The twins went outside to get flowers for the vase. Xiomara turned to the stove to toast dried quajillo and pasilla peppers on a hot plancha, then she set them aside. After the peppers cooled into a molcajete con ajo they went, she added sal y un poco de agua, grounded it into a paste, and mixed in some of the paste the twins had made.

Xiomara started up about me going to Veracruz—and why not back home?

That stumped me; being so casual and direct, her voice was friendly. I looked around for an answer and finally said that I didn't know; quizás es un impulso.

Don Alberto sensed that I was not comfortable and said it was okay if I preferred not to talk about it.

Then Xiomara asked, “Tienes conocidos en Veracruz?”

Don Alberto smiled shaking his head, and went off to check in with the twins.

I tell her how, in the storm, I was rescued by a trawler from Nicaragua, and after three days on the Gulf, the captain brought the boat to port in Veracruz.

“Entonces,” she asked.

The twins were sautéing vegetables, but I knew they were listening.

I continued and said that at port in Veracruz, Capitán Cruz handed me twenty dollars and one 500 Córdoba bill, and one 500 peso bill. The Captain welcomed me to continue and work with the crew and do catches for quick sale in ports on the way to their home port in Nicaragua, at Puerto El Bluff en Bluefields.

Mya glanced at Marina and asked, “y que es Boofils?”

I told them that I would get some maps we could see before I left.

That morning, with the money Capitán Cruz had handed me, I bought a bus ticket to the border. And here I am.

Xiomara gave me a hand signal to continue.

I go on and say that in Veracruz, I met some students at the Universidad Veracruzana and that is who I know there.

“Regalito, tienes tres semanas y días huéspedado en el hotel,” she said, trying to understand a sequence.

I looked at her empty, because that was all I had.

She left with that and went over to Don Alberto. He was oiling la plancha under a high flame to smoking hot, and laid the huachinangos on the plancha. Puffs of smoke and aroma went up, and the twins came to see. Xiomara looked on and gave him a nod, and he flipped them over and turned the flame off.

She pulled a warm large oval clay pot from the oven, added olive oil, laid whole celery, carrots sticks, onions and some bay leaves on the bottom and placed the fish on top. She drizzled aceite de olivo, on top, sprinkled vinagre, y exprimio lima sobre los huachinangos. Then poured the chili puree over the fish, covered the pot, and into el horno it went at low heat.

The twins cleaned up, and made space to peel avocates, dice tomatoes, chile serrano, cebolla, cilantro, y lima. They made quick work of it and put the bowl in the fridge.

Xiomara gets them started with the rice. Don Alberto asked them what they wanted him to do. Dice onions, slice carrots, bell peppers, and peel garlic.

Mya placed a large pan on the stove over a medium flame. Marina poured olive oil into the pan, and Mya lowered the flame. They added some of the onions their father had chopped. The onions sizzled the moment they hit the pan, and Mya gave them a stir and added some of the paste had they made.

The smells were from my home days, when the kitchen was cooking.

Don Alberto put a record on and set the volume below cantina level.

When he returned, I asked how they met. He looked at Xiomara and said that his second year at El Tec en Monterrey was when he first saw her.

She had brought a class of young dancers to perform at an event. He was out with friends and remembered seeing the dance rehearsal.

“Ahi fue, cuando vi Xiomara terminando un ensaio, y en el mismo momento se desaparece detras una cortina oscura.”

He said that he turned to a friend, se llama Xiomara. Que es de Monterrey? Don Alberto said she was gone; he didn't even know how to contact her.

Entonces I asked. He excuses himself to change the music.

Es su historia Xiomara says, Es un romantico.

The twins return with flowers and some basil and mint. Mya adds water to the vase and Marina drops in long stem flowers.

Xiomara made a drink. She squeezed the juice of two whole limes into a glass and added a squeeze of grapefruit, snapped off some herbs and rubbed them between her palms. She added two cubes of ice, poured some mineral water, added tequila, and gave it a stir it with the rind of a grapefruit, and strained it into my glass.

Don Alberto returned and asked me if I recognized the music, the group. He had raised the volume. It sounded like conjunto, corrido, and ranchera, I said.

Algo así, he nodded.

The twins moved with the music.

"Son, Los Tigres del Norte, grabado envivo en San Jose, California. Pero son de Sinaloa." he said.

It was was pulsing, moving forward and honest. I liked the sound of it.

A ranchera song came on, and he held his hand out, Xiomara took it and came to her feet with a snap of her shoes. He gave her a twirl; she turned and slid away.

He let go; she did a full spin, swayed her hips, and landed her right foot to a stop.

Don Alberto admired her. I was careful not to show that I was fascinated by her. I thought, How could one not be attracted to her.

FONDA

The morning after the dinner, I felt good. I washed, got dressed, and went out to the fonda, ready to work my last two days.

The first customer was waiting. His grandson in South Carolina had mailed him a birthday card with a letter. He'd never seen him except in pictures, but they spoke on the phone. He said his grandson was unable to write because he broke his hand playing baseball. He had been practicing to write with his other hand. The letter was written in English and he asked me to read it and say it in Spanish. As I read, he'd look off, imagining. He turned to me, pushed his hat back, smiled, and shook my hand with both of his. He thanked me and handed me twenty pesos and a five-peso coin. I pushed the coin back and told him that I didn't like to carry coins.

Next were a brother and sister with government documents from immigration, the U.S., and Mexico. They told me about their older brother, who was in college in Michigan. They have not heard from him in many days. And now they had these documents about his student visa. This required someone who understood this stuff and could fill out forms. I tell them that I only interpret, translate, read and write letters, not fill out forms.

In the documents they carried was a copy of an official, stamped, three-page letter. It was addressed to the college at student services in the brother's name.

It was from the INS saying his visa had expired and a warrant would be issued for his arrest and deportation. I told them that they needed a lawyer. The sister leaned back and said, "Todos son ladrones." Then she sat up and remembering that they had a cousin in Monterrey, estudiando leyes.

The brother said, "Bien, solo queremos que leas la carta en inglés lentamente y la traduzcas al español."

The sister had a school writing tablet and jotted down notes; sometimes she would stop me to show her where in the letter were certain dates. The first thing I thought was that they had to find their brother. We talked, and I learned that the brother worked and had a college roommate.

He would always call them, and they did not have a number for him. Where did he work? What about the money he would send them? Where was it sent from? The Mexican letter had their address, and it said that their brother would have a visa violation record and that it would be difficult to reapply.

The brother in Michigan sent them money to a Western Union inside a tourist store. These kids, just a couple of years younger than me, wanted to hire me. But they could only pay me once they got paid from their jobs.

I told them that I would be leaving. Both sat back and sighed; they were disappointed. I told them to find out where the money was being sent from. And to contact their cousin in Monterrey.

I did that work during my stay at the hotel. Two days after the dinner with Don Alberto, Xiomara, and the twins, Mya and Marina, I headed out to Veracruz.

ENTONCES

Before leaving, I bought a military-style duffle bag. Then dropped by the seamstress, who had been a client when I was in the translation business. I had asked her to make a canvas tote bag with wide straps to carry over my shoulder, and sewn with strong colored thread with El Rio Bravo across one side. At the time she asked.

“Lo quiere escrito, o como?”

I hadn't thought about that, and drew in the air with my finger, el Rio Bravo. Seeing what I drew she said, “O ya entiendo, quier que dibuje el rio bravo con elo fuerte.”

She had used three threads, each a different color, for the river; blue, green, and yellow. And different colored thread to the stitch the support that formed the bag. The shoulder straps where stitched a criss-cross pattern. The bag was durable and useful, and looked cool. I was happy to pay her, we did a little adios hug and I walked with my rio bag.

I went to a store that sold maps. One map showed Yucatan and Central America good enough to point out Puerto El Bluff en Bluefields en Nicaragua.

Which Mya called “Boofils.” I bought that map for them and others to travel with.

I was hungry and found a place that served cabrito al pastor. I went in, sat down, and ordered one hind portion.

I pulled out the maps, and on one, it looked like the distance from the river to Veracruz was like from Brownsville to New Orleans. I got to thinking about what to carry.

The cabrito came out on a large plate with grilled green onions, jalapeno, and serrano chilies. Frijoles de olla y tortillas. And a side order of sliced avocates and lime.

I ate everything, hungry, like after a football game.

After a while, the waiter came over and said, “No deajo nada ni para los gatos.” That was true.

“Participa en un deporte?” He asked, I answered no.

He probably wanted to talk, but I had to go.

I walked to the terminal and bought a bus ticket for the next morning to Veracruz. It showed a stop en Ciudad Victoria and a connection in Tampico.

I returned to the hotel and the twins were in the courtyard. I handed them two large fold-out maps. They opened the map of Mexico. They knew I was leaving in the morning, and looked for Veracruz on the map.

“Vaya, parece ser lejos.”

“Y a la par del mar.” Marina looked in close.

Mya opened the U.S. map across the table. She was on the chair on her knees to have a good look. They had one map over the other, Marina unfolded one out to the full size. They placed the map of the U.S. over the others and asked me where I was from.

I point to Texas, the southern part.

I asked them to point where we are.

Marina pointed to the Texas Mexico border region.

“Aqui.” Mya said, pointing to the river that flows into the Gulf of Mexico.

I asked her to move her finger up and to stop where the coast began to curve out.

“En la costa?”

Mya placed the Mexican map on top and looked for Veracruz.

“Entonce, mañana, abordas el bús hacia Veracruz, Mira Marina la distancia.”

They had a lot of questions, I tried to answer them but they had more questions.

We had been talking when Don Alberto came out because of all the talking. He placed his hand on my shoulder and handed me an envelope. It felt like money.

“Y esto?”

“Tu anticipo sobre alquiler habitación en el hotel.”

I had forgotten about that, my deposit.

Marina asked me to wait and ran off and returned with an envelope and handed it to me; it was a letter. She said that she remembered how I didn't like to carry too many things.

We said our goodbyes, and I went to my room to get my thing together. I didn't have much.

Early next morning, I boarded the bus to Veracruz with my duffle and Rio bag.

On the road to Ciudad Victoria, I pulled out the *Revolt of the Cockroach People* by Oscar Ascota and poems by Jaime Sabines.

I liked how Sabines laid out Spanish words. The first poem I read, 'La Luna,' started with this:

La luna se puede tomar a cucharadas
o como una cápsula cada dos horas.
Es buena como hipnótico y sedante
y también alivia
a los que se han intoxicado de filosofía.

I put the book down, and I reached for the *Revolt of Cockroach People*. This is how it began.

"It is Christmas Eve in the year of Huitzilopochtli, 1969. Three hundred Chicanos have gathered in front of St. Basil's Roman Catholic Church. Three hundred brown-eyed children of the sun have come to drive the money-changers out of the richest temple in Los Angeles."

It got me right away. I read most of the book before *Ciudad Victoria*.

Oscar Acosta, un vato loco, is what we would call him back home.

He had subpoenaed every member of the L.A. County grand jury. Ran for LA County Sheriff under the Raza Unida Party. Wild powerhouse Chicano lawyer dude.

In *Ciudad Victoria*, some got off and some boarded the bus. I stepped out, and the evening was over. The driver taps the horn, and I stepped back in and sat next to a man going to Tampico to see his sister and family. He talked about the best seafood markets and restaurants. After a while, he fell asleep.

I reached for *El Llano en Llamas* by Juan Rulfo. The words were tight together; no room for more. The first story I read was *Luvina*. The sadness was strong. It made me feel like I was there in that solitude of illusions. I thought, How does one live that? From the story, I wrote this down.

"Yo les dije que la madre del gobierno era la Patria.
Ellos movieron la cabeza, se rieron y dijeron que no,
que el gobierno no tenía madre."

I stared at the words but was not reading; somehow the words left the page. I put the book away and decided to continue with the cockroach people. That vato loco Acosta took the law and swung it like a machete.

The driver was gearing along, building speed to make the mountain roads, and he had the engine running smooth on a steady roll. It was night, starlight came through and the moonlight was behind the bus.

I took a snooze, and when I woke we were passing Cuauhtemoc, then Altamira and onto Tampico.

In Tampico, the terminal was busy. The wall clock showed a time of just past ten. I found a phone counter and place a call to Santiago in Veracruz. There was no answer.

AMIGO

I first met Santiago the day we made port in Veracruz.

At port Capitán Cruz had the crew busy refueling, cleaning the deck and the holding tanks below. Three crew members got off board to buy food and supplies, and invited me along.

They showed me the hotel they use; it was small and cheap. I got a room and continued with them to a mercado with fresh food, herbs, and chiles in large baskets; it was like a mall but open, cooler, with scents and aromas. There was lots of bustle. And musicians.

Martin took me to an area that sold clothes. I bought two pairs each, jeans, t-shirts, underwear, and a pair of sneakers. At one stall I saw a small rebozo and bought it to carry the clothes. I had enough money left from what Capitán Cruz had handed me to eat and buy a bus ticket to the border.

We caught up with the other two crew members, and they had a lot of stuff. We carried the load back to the boat. I thanked them and waved at Capitán Cruz. He gave me a salute and waved.

I returned to the hotel and showered, slipped on my new jeans, sneakers, t-shirt, and went out for a walk along the coastline. I was breaking in my jeans when the road came to a bend, and up on top a slope was la Universidad Veracruzana.

I roamed the campus and walked into a building. Down the hall, I peeked into a lecture room, walked in and took a seat.

After the lecture, Santiago came up to me and introduces himself. He spoke English, like in TV shows. He picked up that I was not Mexican. He was from Xalapa and played soccer, but not for the school. He asked if this was my first time on campus. I nodded yes. Then he said, Let me show you around, and right away we are walking and talking.

He was studying business but saw the corruption. It made him gloomy when he talked about it. He did not like it, but his parents insisted he study business.

He brushed his thumb across the palm of his hand, counting, saying, “Asi es la bolsa.”

Not happy with his choice. He talked about how he enjoyed anthropology. So he studied both.

“Un baile entre académico y corrupción,” I said.

“Precisamente,” he said making a point with his finger.

We ambled along and shared stories. We were talking and becoming friends.

ENTONCE en TAMPICO

I placed a second call to Santiago; each call cost me pesos. It was night, around nine, and the number was to a paid phone in his dorm hall.

Someone answered that Santiago was not around. I left a message about my arrival time, *mas ó menos*.

The bus to Veracruz would board at midnight. Across the street were a couple of late-night fondas. They knew the bus schedules, and one had ceviche and fresh squeezed oranges, papaya, and pineapple juice.

From the fonda, you could hear the bus schedules being announced, and the bus to Veracruz was boarding. I paid and left with the ceviche and pineapple juice, each in a plastic sandwich bag one with a plastic spoon and a straw for the juice.

Enough starlight come through the bus window to read. I pull out from my rio bag the envelope that Tia Estella had handed me when she and Tio Lolo drove off. In the envelope were some photos from the funeral. A letter that my mother had requested my brother to write. The letter asked that the church build a nursery and child care addition. It was dated one year before the storm.

There was a picture of me with my school football team. A letter from my brother in Houston, attending college and working.

And a yellow envelope with 25 ten-dollar bills. That was a bundle. I'd never seen or held that much money before. I folded the envelope in half and slipped the wad in my front jean pocket. That meant a lot of pesos, and I needed to figure that out. I sat back and looked out the window. We passed Naranjos and small villages.

En la madrugada, in the shadows was Zempoala—in the fog the outline of a pyramid, and morning came over José Cardel and La Antigua.

At the terminal in Veracruz, the engine was turned off and it sounded exhausted, breathing heavy and sneezing out dark puffs of smoke.

Santiago was there to meet me and hurried me along; he had a cab waiting.

There was a lecture and reception we had to attend that afternoon. What about my stuff? I need to clean up.

“Tranquilo, hoy miso vamos a mi dormitorio, ahi vas a dormir, acomodas tus cosas, te das un baño.”

When we arrived he showed me around the small room and said that his roommate Alejandro had class and would be in later. He pointed out the window and showed me where to meet him. He left, saying that the lecture started at four. I gave him a thumbs up.

I went out and found a mercado, and with the money Tia Estella had sent I bought a new pair of wrangle jeans, a dark blue guayabera, and a pair of boots. I returned to the dorm room and found a small space for my bedding that was easy to put away. I checked out the space and took a nap.

When I woke, it was time to get ready, and headed to the shower room. I washed my guayabera and hung it to dry and relax the fabric. I shaved, grabbed my guayabera, it was damp, and went to the room and hung it by the window. I put on my new wrangle jeans. I slipped my boots on, combed my hair back and headed and opened the window and waited for the guayabera to dry. I walked up and down the hall to break in my jeans and boots. The guayabera was damp in places but I put it on and out to the lecture hall.

When I showed up the shirt had dried, and the lecture was starting. Santiago looked toward the door and motioned for me to come take a seat.

The guest speaker was a popular professor visiting from the main campus in Xalapa. He talked about the clash and the change that came with the Spaniards. And how some indigena groups had isolated and insulated themselves not just from the Spaniards but from Mejico.

Then he mentioned and talked about a book titled “Las Vinas Abrietas de América Latina.”

Afterwards, at the reception, Santiago introduced me to Lorena, his girlfriend. Lorena introduced me to her friend, Alina.

“Tu nombre es Regalito?” She said with a smile in her eyes.

Lorena and Alina were students, and both from Xalapa. I asked, Why not just study there? They roll their eyes, saying that it is so stupid to take a semester here and there.

“Una locura,” said Lorena seeing it as dumb.

There was a table with food that I eyed, Alina noticed and took my arm, and notice she noticed that my sleeve was a little damp, I explained why, and we walked over the food tables. It was laid out with arroz con camaron, calamares con jalapeño y cebolla a la plancha, una olla de frijoles negros, baguettes,

quesos, olivos, avocates, red onions and cucumbers in olive oil, garlic, vinegar, lime, and oregano. And a pastry table, and section for aguas frescas, mineral, and coca cola.

I asked Alina if she cooks; she didn't care for the preparation, the cooking, or the cleaning. That made me chuckle. "Pero te gusta comer?" I teased her.

She poked my shoulder and said that she liked going to the market and shopping. She asked if I cooked. I do, I said that I learned from my mother and my abuela. And that lately, I have been learning more. But I had not cooked in a kitchen in weeks.

Then I see the professor; the group he was with had parted, and he had walked over to the pastry table. I mentioned to Alina that I would like to meet him; she knew him.

"Somos Xalapeños," she smiled and gave me a nudge. We walked over.

"Hola, profesor Cordova." They did an hola hug, and Alina introduced me.

"Le presento a mi amigo Regalito Puerto."

He was not sure he heard it right.

"Asi es su nombre." She said.

I didn't care what she had said; her green eyes, her voice and smile were one.

Profesor Cordova held classes in etnologia y historia. I asked him who the author of the book, Venas Abrietas, was. He said that his name was Eduardo Galeano, from Uruguay. He was a young journalist and writer. I asked where I could find a copy to read. The library in Xalapa has a couple of copies, he said.

Alina suggested that maybe I could visit Xalapa. I looked at her, and she shrugged her shoulders.

"Claro que sí." The professor said, with his plate of fruit and pastry.

I had been in Veracruz since morning and now talk about Xalapa.

Alina and I walked out to the patio; there were passing waves of breeze coming in from the Gulf. She pointed across the campus to her dorm.

In the same moment, we turned toward each other. Our eyes met, and nothing else mattered. She smiled and tapped my chest with her forefinger supported by her thumb, asking, "Cual es tu agenda, Regalito?"

I didn't know what to say. Agenda, I thought in English. I tell her that I was confused by the word agenda.

She explained what she meant. I said that I did not have an agenda. She laughed, and looking around for an agenda.

She mentioned what Santiago had said to her, and waited for me to say something. I tell her about the storm and being thrown into the marina and rescued by a Nicaraguan fishing boat. And days later, we made port in Veracruz. And now here I am without any identification.

"Ah, eres un norteamericano indocumentado en México?"

We laughed at once. It had not come on me to see it that way.

"Vale, voy a creer tu historia. Santiago me comento lo mismo."

I tell her that I was staying in his dorm room and sleeping on the floor until the end of the semester.

"Y entonces que?"

I shrugged my shoulders and smiled; she took my arm, and we walked back in and met up with Santiago and Lorena.

Alina wanted to go dancing, and we went to a club with a live salsa band.

EMBRUJADO

Early next morning, Santiago was out the door to the shower room. I put my bedding away. When he returned, he was in a hurry getting dressed. His class was about to start. Going out the door, he says to meet him at 12:30 in the campus lunch room. I gave him a thumbs up.

His roommate had been asleep when Santiago and I came in the night before. He began to yawn, stretched, and sat up on the bed.

“Qué tal, me llamo Alejandro.”

“Hola me llamo Regalito.”

“Si si, Santiago me lo dijo, y como se conocieron.”

His first class was at ten, and we got to talking. He was from a village up from Teotitlan del Camino and was in his senior year studying anthropology and history.

I asked him about the lecture, and tells me that he had attended. He talked about his family, and his village in the mountains. I mentioned that professor Cordova talked about El Choque and that it was new to me.

“En el choque es cuando mi gente subió la sierra Mazateca.” He said. I began to see el choque as a big deal.

But he was interested in Chicanos. He read news and had seen on TV Chicanos in protest. He was curious and wanted to learn more. I thought that maybe I was Chicano—and what was that?

He noticed the time and hurried to get ready for class, and was out the door.

Alejandro had books on the Olmecas, the Maya, and the Toltec. One I saw was translated from German. Then it was time for me to get ready and head out.

In the lunch room, I see Lorena at a table; I waved at her. The food line was laid out with fat tamales wrapped in banana leaves, rice, black beans, small baguettes, olives, cheeses, crema, sliced cucumbers in avocates with vinegar and lime juice, and grilled green onions and peppers. There was a station with a plancha that took orders for lonches.

I loaded up a plate and sat down, Lorena looked at my plate, “Vas a comer bien fuerte.”

She had a torta with avocate, grilled vegetables, cheese and crema. I asked about her classes.

“Bien aburriós.” She did not want to talk about that.

She asked me what I thought of Alina.

“Encantadora,” I said.

“Ay tú, y que es eso, dime que ondas?”

I said her that I felt comfortable with her. “Si si,” she interrupted me.

“Ahi, dios mio, pero cómo te parece?”

I said that I liked her smile, and the way she spoke with her eyes.

“Asi, y que mas?”

I tell her about last night and how we danced.

Then she spotted Santiago in the food line, and Alina was also in the line .

“Esa sonrisa embruja, Regalito,” Lorena said and smiled.

Santiago came to the table with a fat tamale and a fried banana con creme.

They kissed on the cheek, and Lorena tells him that we had been talking about Alina. Santiago raised his eyebrows and went after the tamale.

Alina came to the table, I stood, and we did an hola hug. She had aqua fresca de melon the same torta as Lorena. They wanted to talk about last night, not the lecture.

Santiago said that the club we danced at brought in top merengue, cumbia, and salsa bands—and sometimes jazz bands.

Alina turned to me and said, “Donde aprendistes bailar?”

“A’noche.” Lorena slapped me on the back and we had a big laugh.

I mentioned what Alejandro had told about his people when they heard about Cortes and the Spaniards; that they fled the lowlands and headed for the hills, up in the clouds, en la Sierra Mazateca.

“Asi es, cuando llega el extranjero todos a un lado.” Lorena said, with a smirk at the practice of accepting.

Lorena liked to read, and we both wanted to read *Las Veñas Abrietas*.

Alina looked at me and said, “Quizas un viaje a Xalapa, la Universidad, tienen dos de sus libros. Recuerdas lo que dijo el profe Cordova, como la vez?”

I looked at her and everything else faded away. There was only one star in the sky. I was embrujado.

We began to hang out, but it was hard to be alone. Lorena was her roommate, and it was a female dorm, so that was a no—and so was Santiago Alejandro’s room a no.

UNA TRADE

One evening I invited Alina to the fonda, where I did interpretation work. Doña Chita was the owner; she was all business, and her menu was a choice of one of two comidas corridas. She had three helpers in the kitchen, and she had a lot of customers. She served until she sold the last plate but would hold some back, which she shared with her kids and the kitchen workers.

I tell her that Doña Chita would close in the afternoon and open in the evening with a different meal; in between that time I paid her for a table space.

Alina tilted her head.

“Ah, ya entiendo porque de desapareces.”

Doña Chita’s evening meal included ceviche y arroz con calamari en su tinta. She would prepare a dish of fresh mariscos, which were delivered behind a pickup truck. A man and his son would deliver the days catch on ice. Doña Chita’s Fonda was on their route.

When we arrived, Doña Chita came out from behind her kitchen. I kissed her on the cheek and introduced Alina.

“Un placer,” Alina said with a big smile.

Doña Chita smiled—a smile I had only seen around her children.

She took our order, ceviche y arroz con calamari.

We sat across the table from where I worked. I asked her about Xalapa.

“Humido, esta entra las nubes.”

She was the youngest; her older brother was in DF, working for an engineering company on a tunnel drilling project. She liked the excitement of DF and being with her brother.

Her sister, the eldest, was married and bored.

“Todos es drama en su matrimonio.” She said.

We talk about me going to Xalapa. She said that if I wanted to learn more about the lecture, el choque, and read las venas abiertas, the university in Xalapa was where to be.

“Como al ves, que ondas?”

I looked at her eyes they were in shades of green, the center was dark like her hair. She asked what I was looking at, what I saw. I could only smile.

A moment later the ceviche was brought out in one bowl with two spoons. It was topped with slices of avocado; She fed me a spoonful.

I remembered Lorena once saying, *que su sonrisa embruja*—and it was working on me.

It was easy and natural for us to talk, and she'd speak while smiling. I asked if she learned to do that.

“Que cosa?”

“Habla y sonreír a la vez,” I said.

“Ah, eso. Ambos a la vez.”

She had learned to do that in acting class.

“Y cepillar los dientes.” She flaked a toothbrush across her teeth.

“Entonces, es un acto, o eres tu?” I asked.

“El momento dicta,” she said and dug into the ceviche. We ate from the same bowl.

I could smell the calamari on the plancha. Doña Chita added slices of the calamari to the rice, stirred the pot, served it into a large bowl, and brought it out with two spoons. Alina gave a little applause. The bowl was steaming. We talked and ate the bowl clean.

We sat next to each other, *pegaditos*, holding hands under the table. She was happy with the meal.

“Ya veo que te gusta al cocina.”

I was learning her smile, and she jabbed me on the shoulder.

“Pero porque?”

“Porque me gusta comer.” I said and she chuckled softly.

We thanked Doña Chita and left.

We stepped into the night, and walked down the street with our arms over each other acting like cantina buddies. We hailed a cab to the university.

In the back seat we began to kiss. I slipped her skirt above her knees and placed my hand there. She had her hand over my crotch. The cabbie saw us in the mirror and told us where we could get a room.

“Es discreto, cómodo, limpio, y barato,” he said.

I turned to Alina; she was holding back a big smile.

I told the cabbie, “Vale, vamos.”

The hotel room was by the hour, and Alina showed me two fingers down by her side. The moment we entered the room, she turned the room light off and turned on a lamp. We stood facing each other, we kissed, and I removed her skirt, and she unbuttoned my guayabera. We rolled on the bed, and the rest of our clothes came off.

Her skin was the color of the soft copper glow in the room. Her breast fit in the cup of my hand. Sus ojos color marijuana—as someone called them.

In the romp, we were on the floor when we heard a knock on the door—our time was up. We hurried, cleaned up, got dressed, and took a cab to campus.

XALAPA

One morning, a couple of days after the semester ended, the five of us boarded a bus to Xalapa. They had luggage and boxes underneath; I also had a box underneath and carried my duffle and rio bag.

Alina found two seats, and sat next to the widow. She tapped on the seat next to her for me to sit. Santiago and Lorena sat a couple of rolls behind us. Alejandro took the sole seat at the very front by the boarding steps. He had the same view out the window as the driver.

We were leaving Veracruz and the coast behind, and soon the drive geared the bus along the mountains. Alina had to lean back for me to see; she tapped my foot and when I turned; she twirled her finger for us to switch seats.

I saw a snow-covered peak. I gave her a little poke and pointed.

“Ah, es el Pico de Orizaba.”

She was used to it, but I’d never seen anything so massive among the clouds. I remembered the morning after the storm on the Gulf when we were nearing port at Veracruz, when Martin, a crew member, pointed, saying, “Mira!”

I didn’t think much of it then—but out the window it was up close. It was a mighty volcano with snow on top.

Alina had a notebook open, with sketches of public parks, patios for buildings, houses, schools, and hospitals. She was sketching away on a plaza and patio designs.

She had talked about having to submit a design project proposal to the university the first week of January. If her proposal was accepted she then had to present her project to a school committee in March. It would score toward her degree, which she had yet to declare. It weighed on her, but like a challenge.

I peeked at her sketches and said, “Parce ser una plaza de patios o una patio grande de placitas.”

Her eyes widened, the green, the emerald in them shared the morning light. She smiled, gave me a peck, and said that she knew how to focus and title her design project. She got busy writing notes and drawing. I got busy looking out the window.

We made a stop in Rinconada—Xalapa was next. At the stop, Alina and Lorena stepped out and walked around the bus. The driver opened the cargo door, luggage was exchanged, and the driver tapped the horn to board.

Alina took her seat with a little bounce. She said that she felt good about putting together her proposal and presenting it. But she had to make a decision on a degree major. She was interested in architecture, and pulled out a magazines with drawings and photos of plazas in Oaxaca, Yucatan, San Miguel de Allende, Spain and Morocco. She liked how the intimate and spacious areas flowed. She was keen on contrast.

I listened and came to see that her parents were like Santiago's parents—La bolsa she said and look at me to understand. She had that to deal with. Her parents wanted her to study to be a teacher like Lorena and marry well. That her interest in acting and theater were okay, with them, but architecture design was a tough environment and career for a woman. She didn't care about that, but knew that she had to deal with it.

Her design project meant a path to architecture design. Not teaching, which is what her parents were supporting.

“Entonces que ondas?” I asked.

She bit her bottom lip.

Coming out of the last mountain pass, the road eased down to a hilly lowland, and there was Xalapa in sunlight shaded by clouds. Across its hilly landscape were patches of green trees and plants; the roof tops in red and orange tiles.

Alina was right about Xalapa, “Esta entre las nubes.”

At the terminal, Lorena's older brother, Roberto was there to meet us. He was driving a pickup truck. We put our stuff in the back, and the three of us sat there.

Lorena and Alina sat in the cab. Santiago looked at his watch and said that it was ten-seventeen. We drove through Xalapa, and the streets were busy, people were moving about.

Roberto drove to a place that specialized in sopes.

They looked like tamal dough from back home, but were flatten thick with the edges pinched up all around and topped with creamy black beans, and sprinkled with cojita cheese and quesos fresco. I asked for two whole raw jalapeños, and they all looked at me at once.

“Para desayuno?” Lorena said—that it was too early for her stomach.

The sopas came out, with a jar of curtido, and two whole jalapeños on a small dish. I took one, sliced it with my pocket knife, and added the slices to my sopas. Alina watched me the whole time with a slight turn of her head and patted me on the back like a good boy.

I became aware that maybe some of the barrio in me was coming out, and I continue as if unaware.

The sopas were crunchy on the outside, and inside was doughy.

After we ate, we were back in the truck and headed to Alina's house, it was up a hill that overlooked a city park. I placed her stuff on the sidewalk, she rung the gate door, and we hugged adios, and drove off a couple to Santiago's house. We helped him unload his stuff and continued to campus.

Alejandro and I jumped off and walked to his dorm room. The morning sun had broken up some of the clouds and light was shining through.

He carried a heavy box on one shoulder, a shoulder bag on the other, and was hauled along a suitcase. He stopped and placed the box on the ground. I lifted the bag off his shoulders and took it, and we rested before continuing to his dorm room.

I tell Alejandro that I was grateful for his generosity.

"Es un placer, Regalito." He said clear and plain.

In Veracruz, Alejandro said that I could stay until the start of the next semester, when a roommate would be moving in, and I would have to go.

I settled in the room and helped him with the box; it was heavy because of books, clippings, and notes on the Olmecs, Maya, Toltec, Aztec, and Spaniards in the box.

It was all new to me, but I like the sound of the word Olmec.

He was interested in the people who did the work, the traditions that held them together and the rituals they believed in. He'd mix in some mazatec words when he talked about what life must've been like before el choque.

Sometimes when I spoke in English he like Alina he did not care for the sound of it.

BIBLIOTECA

I finished early with my work at the fonda and headed to the room. Alejandro was on his bed with a large book with glossy pages of pictures and illustrations showing what the Olmec left behind.

On one page was a photo of a painting with two campesinos. A man and a woman de la Sierra in the city, standing with strong feet in sandals before the glass showcase of a clothing store. The campesinos look at the mannequins, a man and a woman dressed in fashion with polished shoes.

He had another book by his side, thick and in Spanish, about the arrival of the Spaniards.

Alejandro wanted to show me La Biblioteca. We head outside, walk along a path and as we neared the building he pointed to a long rectangular structure with glass across its length. It was the reading room, he said, with tables and chairs, and seating areas.

I am in as Alejandro's guest. We go down stairs to shelves of books and archives. I followed him to the history section and he pointed to what he was reading.

Students needed a special permit from a profé to check a book out from that section, but you could read it there. Alejandro said that he sometimes would sit on floor and read. I asked but why when there is a nice reading room upstairs.

"Todos los libros que me interesan están aquí."

He said said the obvious.

The reading room was perfect and I had to figure out how to read a book there.

After Alejandro had shown me around, we left and walked out to a small pond, and sat on a bench. He wanted to know about Los Chicanos. I told him that he probably knew more than I did.

He chuckled, "Como puede ser eso?"

I tell him because he was better informed, that La Biblioteca had newspapers and magazines from all over. And he had access to news footage of Chicanos protesting.

"Si, pero eres chicano? Que sabes sobre el partido politico raza unida?"

He asked with a confused look because I didn't have an answer.

We went back to the dorm room. We were relaxing when he said that he had idea. How to begin and not involving U.S. immigration until later on.

Begin what I asked?

“Vaya pues, no tienes ningun documentado que diga quien eres.”

That was true.

Then he sat back and said that I needed to get a certified copy of my birth certificate. He said that I should not request a copy myself but have a family member go to the courthouse to get a copy and to include a letter from my church and school and mail it to me.

Then he said that with that in process, he would speak with Lorena’s aunt, she directed the university office in charged of foreign students enrolled and those in a program to practice Spanish. I could be a tutor for the foreign students in the program to practice Spanish. Alejandro thought.

We talked about how to present myself to Lorena’s aunt. Truthfully and simply. We would mention the storm, and then Veracruz—and how we met on the campus, and now we are here.

That was something I could do.

Then came how to answer the question of why I had not contact the U.S. Consulate in Veracruz. We were stumped.

There was a knock on the door; it was Lorena, Santiago and Alina. We used the two small beds as couches. We were talking at once with one another and around each other.

We settled down, and Santiago pulled out a bottle of wine. Alina and Lorena had brought two fresh baguettes, goat cheese, two whole tomatoes, green onions, olives, a can of sardines, limes, three avocates, and two raw jalapeños for me.

We made a spot on the floor and placed the food down. Alejandro brought up that we were talking about my status as an immigrant without papers in Mexico.

“Ah, eso,” Lorena said like finally.

She said that they—the four of them—had been talking about this. And they believed me.

“Pero persiste la pregunta. Porque no haza ententado contacto con el consulado? Eso merece respuesta Regalito.” Lorena said, her brown eyes were kind, but she was looking straight at me.

Alejandro agreed and said that we had to come up with a plan, but there was that bothersome question. Why didn’t I go to the consulate?

Santiago said that a copy of the birth certificate and letters were good, but why not go to the consulate? He was stuck on that.

I thought about it, and they were right. I needed to answer that.

No one said a thing. I held Alina's hand, and she gave me a look to say something.

I said that I could not see myself showing up to the U.S. Consulate saying, "Hola, me llamo Regalito. And I have no papers, señor."

Lorena jumped up laughing; And Alina laughed, but not as loud because she had a big smile and was shaking her head.

Santiago said, "Okay, aver que hacemos. Bonita estoria Regalito, pero solo vale entre nosotros. Que sacamos de este grano?"

They knew how I felt about not wanting to deal with government assholes.

"No puedes decir que coman mierdá, Regalitó! Que es esó? Eso no es solución." Alina said.

It was important for them that I have an answer.

I thought about and said that I didn't want to bother the consulate until I had my birth certificate, other documents and employment to present them. And that now I was of legal age and seen as an adult in Texas.

"Perfecto!" Lorena and Alina said at once. "Eso, Sí!"

Two thumbs up from Santiago and Alejandro. We were all smiling and relaxing, like we were done with a step to become documented.

Lorena, Santiago, and Alejandro were talking, and she was saying, "Si si," like connecting things. Lorena wrote, on a small calendar pad she carried, a reminder to talk with her tia.

I saw Lorena as a sister I didn't have. Sometimes she'd wear her hair held back, twirled on one side, or both. She had different-style brooches to keep her hair in place.

She knew I wanted to get into that library. She said that she knew the first book I wanted to read and felt that it was the same one.

Alejandro had a record player and three records. He put one on, a collection of canciones romanticas. The first song was 'Esta Trade Vi Llover.'

Alina stood and brought me up with both hands. We danced in a small space.

CALLEJEROS

The first time I walked to Alina's house, the dogs behind the fence would come right up to it, and they'd bark and bark like on duty until I walked past them.

Then I noticed that some street dogs began to follow me but stayed back, sniffing the air to get a sense of me. They did not see the barking dogs as a threat; they looked on them as being behind the fence. I kept walking; and some dogs fell back, and three continued to follow me, sniffing and getting closer.

They walked behind me, I slowed down, and they slowed down. I stopped, and one dog came around and looked up at me. I gave the dog an hola que tal look. The dog looked at me for a moment and returned to huddle with the other two.

While they were think it over, I motioned with my hand to follow me. They did right to Alina's house; when we got there, she greeted me and looked at the dogs sitting on the side walk.

"Tus amigos?"

The dogs looked on.

"Y que onda con ellos?"

I said some water for them. She said okay, but they could not come in.

"Son callejeros."

She laughed, saying, "Algo como tu Don Regalito, veo que tinenes otros talentos."

She took my arm, we go past the metal door and through a breezeway patio. Around it was the laundry room with a large tub next to a smooth concrete countertop, and underneath were some buckets. I filled one.

"Pero son tres perros." She reminds me.

"Son callejeros." I said, they'll figure it out.

We went out and I placed the bucket next to the fence.

"Mira que inteligentes sons, estan organizados," She observed.

They took turns lapping it up and checking her out. I gave them the sign to wait and relax.

We went to the laundry room and returned the bucket. And walked to the back patio where she pointed up.

"Allí, la tercera planta, es mi habitación."

But first, I had to meet her mother.

She stopped in the breezeway. Turned toward me, and for a moment I felt that her eyes were speaking, but no she was talking, about what she had said to her mother about me.

"Que eres un norteco de Tejas y que una tempestad del golfo cayó sobre su ciudad. Que andabas con amigos pasandola por la playa cuando la tormenta llega de un instante y rapido con aguacero y los barre en la marina. Y un barco de pesca de Nicaragua te rescato y desembarcates unos días despues en Veracruz.

Y que estas en contacto con el consulado para reclamar tu identidad y esblacer algun oficio como tutor con el U."

She said it so easily—it was better than I could say it in English. She looked me and I nodded that I was okay with that.

We walked to the back patio. The patio roof extended nearly the width of the house, attached to it, the roof went out about fifteen feet.

The roof top was layered with palm leaves on a frame held up by brick columns and wood support posts.

On one side was a seating area and two hammocks. Two large kitchen doors opened to the patio. Along the edge of the patio roof hung three silla hamacas.

Alina led me in the house to a sitting area, the windows were open, and her mother was on the phone. She saw Alina and got done with the phone.

"Mami, te presento Regalito Puerto."

She stood.

"Un placer, si, miya me dijo sobre tus experiencias. Las tormentas del golfo son tremendas!"

Alina and I sat on the sofa, and she sat in her comfy chair. We got to talking, and she said that Alina had mentioned a tutoring position. It was something we had talked about, I said. I had read up on it, and had experience in interpreting and translating, with the work I did out of fondas.

She was all smiles just like Alina. It was not put on, it was natural for them.

She asked me to call her Dalia, then she took notice of my Rio bag. I showed it to her, and she admired the stitching and pointed to the wavy line across it.

"Es el Rio Bravo mami."

Alina took the bag and my arm saying that we were going to listen to music.

We went outside. She had my bag over her shoulder and tugged me along the steps, up the slope to a flat space, on it was a small square structure, a bedroom.

“Vamos, sigueimos,” she said, leading me up to the top.

To the right of the last step was a spot that overlooked a city park. Her room was on the other side of the steps. Outside the entrance to her room was a small round table and three chairs next to a hammock.

Her room was an open space, except for two walls for the bathroom—she had cantina swinging doors for the entrance.

The entrance to her room was her study shop area and where she entertained her friends. She had for a square table, two chairs, and a wide cushion chair. Next to that space was her bed, it was set off by a four-shelf wood unit. The shelves were the length of her bed. The top was a bit wider than the shelves and was lined with rusty red-colored floor tiles across the top. She had a vase on it with a wilted flower and other things. The side that faced her bed had an engraving. The image of a slice of raw corn with a crown of kernels rising from the ground like a sun.

Across the foot of her bed was a wall that went half way up to the ceiling. On the other side, there was a small counter, a tiny sink, and a mini refrigerator on a wood stand. The space continues past the half-wall, with a narrow rectangular wood table waist-high against the building wall, one stool, and a bench by the window. She kept her theater classwork on the bench.

In the shelves that faced her study area, she had school books, sketchpads, a couple of rulers, stack of notebooks, large-size books with pictures, and other stuff.

Against the back wall was an armoire, and next to the corner wall as a wood dresser with five drawers. Both were custom made.

The bathroom tub was square and tiled, a shower head above and hot water. There was a nook for towels, for her stuff, and a chair in front of the sink.

“Y eso?” I asked.

“Arriba, el espejo, para maquillaje.”

She had a record player on top of the dresser drawers; she kept her records in the bottom drawer.

She liked Agustín Lara and Maria Teresa Lara.

“Come te parece Agustín Lara?”

I said that it sounded like Frank Sinatra.

She had a Beatle’s album, salsa, corridos, rancherías, mariachis, classical, and romantic songs in 45 format. She also had a radio, and I found a station playing favorites.

We sat on the bed and I pulled out the book, a journal by Anais Nin, which she asked me about back in Veracruz. I handed her the book, and she thumbed through the pages.

“Pero esta en ingles.”

I said that I would read it for her, “Es un regalo.”

“Gracias Regalito, por este regalo.”

She’d had fun playing with the word Regalo.

We went outside and laid in the hammock, she got it to swing with her foot.

She wanted to talk about the schools that had sent her information. She rolled off the hammock, ran inside, and came out with some envelopes and brochures, and sat in the hammock facing me, and I sat up. She had talked about a fun place to live with a school of architecture that focused on design. She was clear about that.

She picked up information about Tech Tech and the University of Texas at Austin. I tell her that Tech Tech was in west Texas, that I could not picture her in West Texas. UT in Austin would be fun, I said.

She looked at one from Chicago. I had never been in Chicago, but had seen piles of snow in the news. I tell her that she would not like the snow, the cold, or the wind. I pointed to the brochures, and to look at the other information she had. She put that one aside.

She held one from California in LA. I had never been in LA—only knew what I had seen in movies and on TV, newspapers, geography in school, and the music.

She said that it was too far and left it as a maybe.

And she had stuff from the UNAM in DF.

I had been in Mexico City and felt overwhelmed by the day and night bustle. Everything is there. The University was like the mountain top.

She gave me an elbow nudge to say something.

I said Austin or DF.

She laid her papers on the patio floor, and laid back on the hammock. She gave the hammock a swing.

“Sabes, somos iguales, eso es nuestra magia, y problema.”

I looked at her, she spoke quietly.

“Regalito mira, eres como un ave en el aire un moment aqui en el otro asaber.

Yo, en mi ser soy semejante a ti. De un inmediato reconocí eso cuando Lorena nos presentó en la recepción del profe Cordova en Veracruz. Okay, mira yo ni tu tenemos recursos propios, yo soy mayor en edad, y a ti ni a mi nos gustan asuntos financieros. Entonces eso llega en problemas, un choque. Como la ves, que piensas?”

She had given me a whole bunch to think about. It was too much to answer her right away.

“Que ondas?”

I answered that I understood her and said, “Entonces vamos a los panqueques.”

She wagged her finger at me.

We walked down the street, and los callejeros came along. The street at the foot of the hill was busy, and down from there, near the entrance to the park, was the panqueque stand. The woman knew me; Sometimes I would stop by when I'd go visit Alina.

The callejeros knew that they were getting some panqueques. They stayed out of the way and sat by the park wall. They did not bother the stand when I was not there. I let them know that, so we had a deal.

Alina had never been to the stand. I introduce her to Doña Montes and say that she lived up the hill.

Doña Montes asked, “Y para los callejeros?”

“Dos para cada uno.” I answered.

“Entonces síes, y para ustedes.” I lifted three fingers.

Alina started to feel cold. We were in the clouds, and the evening light was leaving. I pulled out the rebozo I had bought the day I stepped off Capitán Cruz' fishing boat in Veracruz.

I shook the rebozo loose and placed it over her shoulders, and laid her hair over it. She wanted to, but did not want to cuddle in public. El pinché chisme I thought.

We stood next to each other. I felt good with that. Buses made stops past the park and the street that went up to her house.

The panqueques for los callejeros were served, and each ate theirs in three bites and done. They sniffed around for more.

We took our panqueques, served on butcher paper. Alina made a motion for a fork. I motioned to eat with her hand.

“Vaya Regalito,” she said. I handed her some servietas.

Doña Montes would roll her cart several streets from her house. I learned that she made her panqueques with ground corn meal and wheat flour, eggs, honey, crema, vanilla, baking soda and a couple of drop of vinegar for lift, and cinnamon sticks brewed in water with for the batter. She had a couple of other spices I could not make out, and she would not say.

She’d pour the batter on a hot plancha, when the edges bubbled around she’d flip them and cook the other side.

Alina ate hers before me. One panqueque was left, and she took it, pulled it apart, and handed me half. She fed her half to los callejeros; they ate it in a blink, licked their chops, and sat back. We shared the other half.

We walked up the hill and she held her hands under her rebozo. Los callejeros led the way. The behind the fence dogs mostly watched us go by.

At her house, we fill a bucket for the dogs and take it out.

We snuggled in the tight space between the opened metal door and the fence. We kissed and held each other. One of the callejeros came around for a look. We stepped from behind the door; she picked up the bucket; her hair was loose over her rebozo; she walked in, the door clanging shut.

I liked that rebozo and figured that I had to get another one.

NO SE NO SE

One evening, to celebrate the end of the semester, their return to Xalapa, and our friendship—I treated them to a meal at my new workplace, the fonda owned by Doña Julia. I had discussed the meal with her and it being a celebration treat with my friends.

Alejandro had a broad smile when we showed up. I gave Doña Julia a little hug, and introduced everyone. I mentioned that her specialty was enfrijoladas with a cream chocolate sauce.

Doña Julia went off to the kitchen, and I could hear them talking, getting busy. We are served a plate with sliced avocates, crema, grilled green onions, limes, jalapeños toasted and flattened on the grill, comal hot corn tortillas.

We were munching, and Santiago pulled out a bottle of aguardiente. I had some fresh mint leaves in my rio bag, and we ordered mineral water, more limes, and salt. Alina and Lorena had an immediate reaction to the drink.

“Pero como pueden tomar eso?” Lorena didn’t like it.

Alina made a face and put her glass down. They poured more mineral water, added more mint, and squeezed lime juice. She smacked her lips and looked at Lorena, and shrugged.

Alina asked Santiago what he planned to do after he graduated the next semester.

“No se, no se,” he said, in a smile that held back his struggle. He was working that out. Santiago was methodical. But he was in the indecision area.

Lorena said that he would have a good life in Xalapa.

“Ah si, trabajar en la empresa de almacénes de mi parde.”

“No, eso no es para mi.”

He knew he had to make a decision.

The aguardiente got to working in him, and he stool and got to talking. We listened, and he went after justicia y corrupción. The rich only care about getting richer—he said and tore into that system.

He went on about the dirty money between the rich and politicians in a foul system of corruption.

“Realizando la mordidas como necesario,” He’d smirk.

That they campaign he said—con sus temas de justicia y liberty y que viva la revolución, todo una mascara de tras de sus negocios sucios con peste de

ladrones. Los pinché corruptos con sus babosadas de justicia! Si eso es justicia, pues entonces amigos, aqui sale sobrando.

He reached for his chair and sat down. He made his views known. Lorena looked at Santiago and kissed him on the lips.

“Buena observación, Santiago. Asi para un descruso.” Alejandro said, in a modest sarcastic manner.

A moment later, we all laughed once we saw how absurd it was for such a college class.

The enfrijoladas came out on a large oval plate. Alina liked the chocolate sauce. We finished the plate and sat back, not saying anything.

“Entonces que ondas, nos vamos?” Lorena asked.

We get up and leave a big tip, paid and said adios to Doña Julia. We crowded into a cab.

CHIFLAR

A couple of days later, I got mail from Tia Estela with an official copy of my birth certificate, letters from the church and school, and one written by her and signed by family and friends. Her letter was written on a typewriter, with some handmade corrections.

In the letter, she said that the city streets had been cleared and that she was back working at the law firm, and helping Tio Lolo with the bakery's bookkeeping.

There were also some newspaper clippings from after the storm and a small envelope with fifteen, 20-dollar bills.

I returned to the dorm room, and Alejandro was standing by the door, saying hello to a dorm mate.

We go inside, and I showed him the money envelope. He said with a surprised look.

“Andas trificando drugas para ayudar el movimiento, pues?”

I said that maybe the last part of that was true.

The money was what my Tia had sent me along with other stuff. I said, and that I would like to call her.

Alejandro would call home every Saturday morning. He didn't use the dorm hall phone; it was too loud, too many coins. He'd go to a phone station he liked to place his calls. They had individual booths with a phone without a dial.

I placed a call to Tia Estela, and she answered and sounded like her sister, my mother, saying Regalito. She wanted to know if I had gotten the package and gave me an update on everyone. I tell her what I had been doing since my last letter.

I asked about the typewriter. She said that Tio Lolo bought it for her on a getaway weekend they had in San Antonio. In moments, her voice had my mother in it.

She said that the typewriter was portable in a case that closed with a handle to carry around. I said that I wanted one, and she said to get one with the money she sent.

Their two boys, my cousins, were in middle school. Tio Lolo coached a little league team that both were in. The older boy would rather play basketball. Tia talked and the small red light on the phone blinked, our time was running out. I

let Tia know about the time, and she said, I love you, que dios te guíe. Phone time ended.

In the next booth I could hear Alejandro; he was speaking with his family in their language. I had heard Nahuatl before, and what he spoke sounded different.

He finished up with his call, and we walked down the street to a food cart serving sweet corn bread and café con chocolate en crema, azúcar, y canela.

I asked what language he spoke with his family. He said Mazatec. And that they use whistling in their speech, across the mountains.

MEZCLA

Los callejeros were waiting at the bus stop, and they led the way to Alina's house. I buzzed the door, and she came out—she knew, water for the dogs.

We walked in through the breezeway and around the house to the back patio. Alina's mom was sitting at a wrought iron table with a tiled top. Next to it was a short palm tree in the ground with large leaves. She sees us and stands, I gave her an hola hug.

I mentioned to Dalia about her saying in a previous visit that Alina's Irish in Mexico went back generations to an immigrant named O'Leary.

“Asi es.” She said

She had done some research. She got up and went inside.

I pointed to the steps along the path to her place.

“Arriba.” Alina said looking up.

Dalia returned with a ring binder, she sat and opened it.

“Que haz descobrido mami,” Alina was eager to know.

Dalia said that Alina's Irish roots in Mexico on her father's side go back to 1847, when James Joseph Murphy O'Leary, age fourteen, left because of starvation by the British and the potato famine that had spread to Ireland. Alone and without family, he boarded a crowded steamer to Veracruz. She had a copy the ship manifest, and some church records.

Alina's eyes widened—she wanted to know more about the famine.

“Espera, hay mas,” Dalia said flipping through her notes.

She said that James was employed at a coffee farm near Veracruz. He married a woman named Lucero from Boca Del Río. They had five children; the two boys married girls who like them were Mexican and Irish, and the bunch had nine children. And one of those nine was Alina's father.

I asked Dalia about her family. She said that she had an Irish grandmother. “Tia Nora,” Alina said.

Dalia continued, “Por esa via se mide en siglos. Es una mezcla de indigena, espanol y europeo, asia, por todos lados.”

Alina had her smile, but Alina practiced hers not to pretend but to be true to how she felt—that is what she'd tell me.

Alina stood and tells her mom that we were going to listen to music.

We go outside and stepped up the slope to her place. In her room, she put on the Beatle's Magical Mystery Tour record, the song was Strawberry Fields Forever, she set the volume loud enough for her mom to hear.

She sat on her bed and I sat next to her. We both knew to only go so far. She pushed me back on the bed and slipped her top off, leaned in and turned her head to one side over my face. I kissed her there, she giggled-wooded and pointed down to the patio.

The next Beatle's song was All I Need is Love. And we had gone so far. She slipped her top on. When the song ended, she turned the volume down.

She got off the bed and went to her armoire and pulled out her a black flamenco hat with a red trim, she put it on and wrapped her rebozo around her waist. She eyed for me to go lay on the hammock. She clipped a white flower from a pot and slipped it over her ear.

She sat on a chair, crossed her legs, held a book and said, "Le presento la obra de Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca."

She found the place from the previous reading. She read, imitating how she imagined a Spaniard speaking in his time.

Her voice was clear; it was an act for her, a role she played. Once she found the voice, she sounded like a Spaniard to me.

She read along, and would comment, still in the voice of a Spaniard ordering one around. She made a tight smile and rolled her eye.

She read where Cabeza de Vaca seemed to have been in Arizona and that he was considered a strange healer who carried a cross around his neck with the image of a man hanging lifeless; he carried herbs, seeds, twigs, and leaves; and spoke about sin and a redeemer.

"Pues andava de curandero algo estilo hippy, con sus pestilencia y ambiciones cual desembargaron aqui."

Alina said, with one finger on her lower lip.

She read a little more, then removed her hat, rebozo and slipped into the hammock, and left the book on the chair.

We found ways to lay on the hammock and be together and talk loud enough to be heard on the patio where her mom was. We talked about Boca Andreá.

We let the hammock sway and learned how to be one. She'd act out a laugh to cover her joy.

The hammock swung to a rest, and she got up and led me to the bathroom. We freshen up and went down to the patio.

Alina's mom was not there; we walked to the street door, and she reminded me about the posada party.

The evening light was fading and some of it caught her looking back over her shoulder, with a small relaxed smile.

I stepped into the street and los callejeros followed me down to the bus stop.

POSADA PARTY

Alejandro and I took a bus to Alina's house for the posada party. At the bottom of the hill, los callejeros were on the run along the bus; they knew I was in it.

We stepped off, and los callejeros looked up at me, and I signaled that all was cool. They sniffed around Alejandro. He knew what to do; he grew up around animals. Everything was good, and we walked up the street, and the dogs behind the fence were barking because that was their job. One of the callejeros got out in front of us and took the barking up the street.

At Alina's house, los callejeros knew to stay away from the entrance. I go in with Alejandro and fill a bucket of water and take it out for them.

We left the bucket there, and walked past the breezeway to the back patio, where groups of people were talking it up and laughing. There was a play area for the kids. Flowers in vases everywhere—a small nativity scene. Under the patio roof, on the counter were three glass jugs with aguas frescas. A large block of ice in each.

I saw Alina talking with three older guys who looked to have resources; as she would said, "recursos propios."

They were dressed like they were going to work in an office: slack pants and nice shirts, polished shoes. She was having a good time, and I didn't want to bother her.

I went out to check on los callejeros and from the laundry room I heard voices in a struggle. I walked around to the entrance and opened the door. Luz's husband had a hold of her with both hands on her shoulders, being a bully.

I stood still for a moment, but I wanted to pull him away from her. He held her arm by force and turned to me, saying, "Y tu, qué quieres?"

Full of macho man, but I could tell that it was no in him.

"Que la sueltas." I told him.

He let her go and walked up to me, but it was not in his eyes; they shifted around. I caught him look away, and with my hand down my side I motioned for Luz to leave. He sees her walking out and calls her name.

"En voz mas alta," I said.

He shot back at me, "Come, Mierda!" And he left to join the party.

I went to check on los callejeros. They were good, they did not bother anyone coming and leaving the party. They stayed away from the entrance and gave the look of friendly watch dogs.

Back at the party, I see Lorena and Santiago. Lorena calls me over and says, “Mira, ahi, esta me tia. Ven y te presento.”

Her tia was on a sella hamaca. Lorena introduced us, and we pulled chairs in. Lorena’s father was her tia Graciela’s brother. Lorena had talked with her tia about me.

I saw Alejandro come out of the house, and I gave him a head tilt to come over. They all knew each other. Santiago shared with Graciela about my work in interpreting and translating documents and letter writing. That got her attention —that I worked out of fondas doing that.

Lorena said that they had thought about a tutoring position with the foreign students coming to practice Spanish.

Graciela looked at me and said, “Puedes presentar documentos de inmigración, credencial de tudor?” I nod, no.

Alejandro said that I had gathered all necessary documents to present to the U.S. Consulate.

She turned to me to say something.

I said that last Thursday I had visited the consulate, told them my story, and presented the documents and letters I had. And that I could provide her with a copy of the letter the consulate gave me as receipt for what I presented.

She adjusted herself on the hamaca and said, “Des entonces has vivido indocumentado en Mexico?” I nod, “Asi es.”

She gets off the hamaca and saying, “Que te parece, visitamos el proximo lunes en las mañana, a las diez.”

Before walking away, she turned to me, “Regalito hables español okay con un toque norteno. Mira, con puerba que estas en process con el consulado para establance tu identidad y resolver inmigración. A ver que arreglamos.”

And she paused, she was curious about me working out of fondas and asked that I write one page in English and another in Spanish, what I have learned that would make me a good tutor. I understood and nodded.

Graciela went inside the house, and Lorena gave me a hug. Alejandro and Santiago, two thumbs up. “Cual es el proximo paso?” Santiago asked.

Alina came over and joined in our talk about Lorena's tia.

“Y que ondas contigo?” Lorena asked.

Alina said that the two and another one keep asking her out.

“Entonces?” Santiago asked.

“A una cena, algun evento quizas, pero algo romantico no.”

Lorena chuckled, “Coqueta.”

Alina gave her a little dance hug.

She wanted to get something going—and invited six students to come along to her place.

Eleven of us up the slope, marching up the steps to the top, onto a space that overlooked a city park. We stood around, and you could hear the party below.

I whispered to Alina that she has not introduced her friends.

“Ay dios mío, disculpenme.” Only she knew everyone.

Lorena got things going by first introducing herself, and we went around like that. Alina did a little dance step, saying to follow her. Not everyone fit in her room, and some of us stayed back on the small patio.

Across from the patio were two students, one was on the hammock and the other on a chair next to a small table. I walked over and said, “Rebecca y Pilar.”

And Rebecca says, “Y tu eres Regalito.”

Pilar was on the hammock, and I asked how she liked it.

“Tengo una algo equal; esta parece ser de hilo sintectico.”

Rebecca got up to check out the stitching and wondered where Alina got it. I was with her when she bought it, I said.

We could hear them from inside deciding which record to play.

I asked how they knew Alina. Pilar sits up on the hammock and says that she has a theater classes with her, and Rebecca has a design class with her.

Then came the song Esta Trade Vi Llover. Alina came out with her flamenco hat and pulled me away to dance with her. Others joined in and danced.

Alina sang softly in my ear, “La otra tarde vi que un ave enamorada, daba besos a su amor ilusionada, y no estabas.”

I looked at her, and she swayed away and came to a mock macho stand, arms crossed, with a smile and a look in her eyes of calm and readiness. In the moment, Estaba embrujado; I was vulnerable.

She twirled towards me, and we danced.

CLARO de LUNA

Alina had invited me to a piano recital at El Teatro del Estado. The last piece stayed with me.

Afterwards, we walked and she wanted to take a cab. I suggested the bus. “Quizas un microbus,” she said. We took one and talked about the recital. She asked what I liked.

“Cuando recorre de rápido con energia todos las teclas, y llega a un descando en belleza.”

“Ah, es un movimiento en la obra Claro de Luna. Creo que es sonata numero catorce.” She said. “Cuando el chavo escribio esa obra, tenia comó treinta años. Y dicen que y estaba sordo cuando la escribió.”

“Como puede ser eso?” I asked.

I had never heard such music before.

At the stop, we stepped out and los callejeros were not there.

I held her hair back so she could adjust her rebozo. We held hands and walked up the street towards her house. She was tired and wanted to get home.

“Y tu?”

I said that I needed sleep—I had a client early the next morning. I tell her that I wanted to hear more of that Beethoven dude’s music.

As we walked, I sensed that we were being followed. It was a street gang of five. Alina became tense.

They quickened their pace, the dogs behind the fence barked and yawned, and Alina tightened her hold on my hand.

I stopped, placed Alina behind me, and I turned to face them. She held both my hands—but I needed them free, and she got it and let go.

We faced each other assessing the situation; Then, like magic, Los Callejeros showed up, and the gang turned and see the dogs. I motioned for them to come in and gave them a sign to be alert. They knew what was happening and came in slow like a hunt, they did not bark but gave low growls and showed their teeth.

The gang leader looked at Alina wetting his lips. The dogs sensed Alina’s tension, and they closed in.

“Orale, que ondas con los perros?” The gang leader said being cool for Alina.

He said he only wanted to say hello and made a step toward Alina. I told him to step away or deal with Los Callejeros. They were ready for a fight and he

knew it. He turned to me and gave me a sizing-up look that said he would see me another day.

He walked away with his boys, and turned and looked at Alina, licking his lips and grabbing his groins. She was looking over my shoulder.

They walked away down the street, and one of the callejeros followed them with parting barks.

We continued to her house. She held my hand with both of hers. We didn't say anything; the rebozo was over her head and around her shoulders.

At her house, by the metal door, we hugged. I stepped back, and she turned her face away.

“Alina, mírame.”

She didn't want me to see the tears rolling down her cheeks. I used her rebozo to tap tears off her face. The night was chilly, and moonlight flickered through.

Los Callejeros were sitting and looking up at her. She opened the door, we went in for some water, and this time she brought the pail out. One callejero reared up with both paws and placed them on her waist. She petted the dog, which she had never done. Her eyes were moist. In a low voice, she said, “Hablamos mañana.”

She took the pail and went in; the metal door clinked shut behind her. I walked down the street with los callejeros; one of them led the way. I got to thinking that we should've taken a cab. I knew that I needed to talk to her.

PRÓXIMO DIA

I finished up early with a client at the fonda and headed to campus. I knew her class schedule and waited for her to come out. She stepped out, her smile was there but had sadness in it.

We walked off the path and stood next to each other. She looked off and turned slightly away from me. She held her smile behind tight lips; her eyes were aimless and she looked away.

I tell her that we should have taken a cab. That I should have listened to her, that it would have avoided the fright, the disrespect the gang leader showed her.

Alina turned to me, “Y que ondas con los callejeros?”

She smiled, some of the sadness had faded. She gave me a friendly little hug because we were on campus. She walked off to her next class.

That evening I wanted to call her, but she did not have a phone in her room. I didn't want to call because her mom would probably answer.

The next morning, I went to campus and waited for her before her first class. We see each other, and go sit on a bench off the path.

We looked straight ahead. I asked if she had told her mom. She nodded a slow no. After a while, I asked if she was. She nodded yes, looking away.

I wanted to hold her, but did not because we were on campus. I thought it best to just be with her.

She stood and took my hand to stand with her. She looked at me, and I saw that she was working through what was broke inside her. We didn't say anything, but felt that being there helped us move along.

She gave an elbow nudge and said, “Entonces, nos vemos mañana, okay duut.?”

She went of to a class and I returned to the dorm. I thought about telling Alejandro, then I imagined what that might create. He would only have my side of it. Alina had her own. I felt that she would know when to share her side.

The next day I saw a couple of clients and went to see her before the start of her theater class.

I arrived on campus and see Pilar walk by. I had met her at the posada party; I called out to her. She came over, and right away she asked me if I had noticed something different in Alina.

“Que cosa?” I asked

Pilar said that she noticed that Alina at times seemed “Pensative, tu sabes como es; a veces no es ella.”

I looked over and saw Alina, and Pilar called her over. She had a good hola smile and hugged me right there on campus.

“Bueno chavos, los dejo,” said Pilar and gave Alina a hug, and left.

Alina took my hand and said that she had talked with her parents and that they wanted to see me. Oh no, I thought. Was I in trouble? Would I be told not to see her?

“Regalito, solo quieren expresar gratitud.” She was smiling.

“Te pido que por ahora no hables sobre el susto.” I nodded okay.

“Que te parece el proximo jueves a las seis, un cena en mi casa.”

She kissed me on the cheek, on campus, and went off to class. There was something new about her.

JUEVES CENA

Thursday afternoon, I saw a couple of clients at the Fonda and left early.

Alejandro was not in the room. I got my favorite guayabera out and took it with me to the shower room. I washed it and hung it on a rack. I showered, shaved, and went back to the room.

I laid back on the bed. I didn't want to think, I was getting good at it.

Then it was back to the day: I polished my boots, I got my best jeans out, and I thought that I should bring a gift. The cena was at six. There is not enough time to shop. I looked at my Rio bag, and emptied it and went back to the shower room, washed the bag, and hung it to dry. I picked up the guayabera; it was damp, and I brought it to the room and hung it by the window.

Alejandro had this one book I had seen before. It had large glossy pages with pictures of art and photos. For Alejandro, the Olmec were it, he'd say that they gave birth to Mesoamerica. I put the book back; I had to get ready.

The guayabera was not completely dry, but I put it on anyway, put my pants on, and slipped my boots on. I remembered the Rio bag. I hurried to the shower room; the bag was damp. I took it with me, and down the hall was Alejandro, entering the room. I went over, and he saw the Rio Bag.

"Y que ondas con la lona?"

I tell him that it was a gift for Alina, and would explain later.

I took the bus to her house. At the stop, Los Callejeros were waiting. They came along me up the street. When we arrive at the house, I pressed the buzzer.

Alina came out in a light blue Mexican skirt, embroidered with a dark blue wide band above her knees, and a pink lace around her waist.

Her sandals were simple, her toenails were colored pale pink. She had a snug fitting green top. She dance stepped to the door.

She turned to Los Callejeros and said, "Un momemtito, señores." They understood.

We went in and the street door remained open. I tell Alina about the door, and she said, "Ahi estan Los Callejeros."

"Que ondas con el rio en trenza, tu bolson?" she asked.

I told her that it was a gift.

"Ya se duut, pero esta vacio y humido."

I smiled at her, and she took the bucket of water out.

While the dog lapped the water, Alina told me that her sister Luz had not told

her parents about el amezazo with her husband in the laundry room on the day of the posada party. And said for me not to mention it.

Then she said, "Descubro otro de tus talentos, guardaspaldas."

She faked the jabs of a boxer on my chest, and we continued to the back patio.

Alina's parents were on sella hamacas. As we walked up, they stood. Dalia gives me a big hug and, in a low voice, says, "Que dios continúe iluminando tu camino."

Felipe, her father, and I did un abrazo. We did some hello talk. They thanked me for protecting Alina.

I apologized for not taking a cab. Dalia reached out and held my hand and said that they are thankful that Alina was safe: "Has demostrado eso Regalito."

Felipe went off to the kitchen and returned with a tray with glasses and what goes with tequila. Alina reached for a slice of lime, squeezed the juice in her glass and mine, and dropped the slice in my glass and added aqua mineral.

"Alina, como puedes usar su vaso así?" Asked Dalia.

Alina said that I do that myself.

Felipe stood to give a toast and looked at Alina with their family smile without saying a word.

He turned to me, showing his gratitude. He continued and mentioned Los Callejeros. Alina jumped up with her arms in the air.

"Eso! Que vivan Los Callejeros!"

Then she asked, "Y la cena?"

"Cual cena?" Asked Dalia.

Alina had not told her about dinner but she had two house workers waiting in the kitchen. I didn't hear any cooking action.

In the sitting room light, Alina's eyes had some of Felipe's green. He told me what Alina had shared with him about my adventures and living without identification.

He asked how I got along: "Indocumentado desde entonces?"

"Hasta la fecha. Así es." I answered.

Alina had told her parents about the storm, the Gulf, Veracruz, and now Xalapa. Felipe wondered why I had not gone to the U.S. Consulate in Veracruz.

“Todo mundo preguntan lo mismo,” Alina said, and added that I had already visited the U.S. Consulate in Xalapa.

Felipe turned to me, and I told him about the documents I had presented to the consulate. And I mentioned my translation and interpretation work in fondas and my possible job as a tutor for foreign students at the U. He listened carefully, and took a long pause.

I flashed a look at Alina, and she returned a look that said to relax.

Then Felipe said that he knew members in the state assembly who might help. I asked in what way.

He said, “Aver, quizás alguna forma de permiso Mexicano temporaneo tipo visa mientras el consulado resuelve tu estado legal. A’saber.”

He was matter-of-fact and waited for me to say something.

“Por mi parte, que sugerir sobre iniciar una solicitud con los diputados?”

“Estar presente,” he answered.

He would arrange for me to meet a couple of state assembly members and would let Alina know. He asked me for a copy of the letter from the U.S. Consulate showing that they had received my documents. I gave him a thumbs up.

Alina began to talk about the incident. She said that she felt that something had broken inside her. And she felt shame because they licked their lips at her. Each of the five did that she said. And that it broken her heart that I was seeing that. But that I stood firm and then Los Callejeros arrived.

When she was done she lifted both her arms in the air and saying, “QUE Vivan Los Callejeros!”

Felipe asked what I would have done without los callejeros showing up.

“No se,” I said. My instinct was Alina’s safety.

“Parece que puedes defender,”

Alina nodded and said that when Los Callejeros showed up, and when I told the gang leader to leave or deal with the dogs.

“Eso descargo el momento,” she said, looking at her parents.

“Los Callejeros,” Felipe said.

Son buenos perros, I said, and we laughed.

I reach for the Rio Bag, still dampened in places, and hand it to Dalia and say that it was a gift.

"Regalito, como puede regalar eso?" Alina asked and laughed at herself with the word play of Regala, Regalito.

"Para quien es?" I said that it was a gift for them, her parents.

Dalia showed the Rio bag to Felipe. He felt the fabric and said, "Lona."

He pointed to the line across it, and Dalia told him the story.

I asked to have a look in the kitchen, and Dalia gave me the okay.

I get up, and Alina joined me. In the kitchen, she introduced me to Hortencia y Flor, both about her age. They worked for the family, mostly house keeping, and were working late. Alina had them in the kitchen, doing nothing.

The kitchen was clean and well equip. I asked Hortencia y Flor what was on the menu. Flor said, "Lo que ve aqui, y esto." Black bean, rice, one whole chicken, fresh vegetables, spices, pots and pans.

I huddled with Hortencia and Flor to plan a meal, and Alina was on her toes, stretching to hear what we were saying.

I brought her in and ask her to help Flor and Hortencia. And that her job was the black beans. I asked her to get a pot and empty a bag of black beans and give them a rinse. Add water to above the beans, set the flame to low and cover.

She stood still for a moment and looked for a pot like it should appear. Hortencia handed her one. She laughed out loud at herself. We laughed because she was laughing.

"Alina," I said and she turned, coming out of her laugh, "Los frijoles." And she stood there.

I tell her in English, "Dude give the beans a rinse, add water to above the beans and place on the stove on the back burner on a low flame."

Her look was all I needed to know she understood and did not like the sound of English. She held back a smile because she was playing mute.

She didn't like me speaking to her in English.

"Muy tosco." She would say.

She would not even answer me in Spanish. When I went all Spanish we were good.

I huddled with Flor and Hortencia over the menu. For the chicken, Flor suggested a recipe from a dish she had being doing at home. It was

Huachinango Veracruzano in style but with chicken. And a tomato sauce with mustard, garlic, onions, chili, olives, bay leaves, lime juice, spices. I was good.

“Pollo Floresca,” I said. They applauded, Alina had been listening and she pitched in her smile and two thumbs up.

incomplete . . .

We placed cut up chicken in a large skillet and in a tomato stew, arroz on another pot, and frijoles negros. I asked,

Why not spoon some caldosito over the rice?

They didn't know, and they shrugged their shoulders. Alina looked on, wanting to step in, and I asked her, Why not add some caldosito? "Ay Regalito," she said, and took me over to her mom.

Alina told her mother that I had some suggestions for the meal.

Dalia said, "Claro, no solo mi casa, también mi cocina es su concina."

Felipe said that he'd like to come along. Alina led us into the kitchen, and he took a stool at one end of the counter. She gave Hortencia y Flor two thumbs up and signaled for me to take over.

I asked to lower the heat on the three pots and to spoon some caldosito from the pollo over the rice. I huddled with them. Alina was on the tip of her toes, trying to hear and have a look. She liked standing around the stove doing nothing, just being there.

What's on the menu? I asked Hortencia y Flor. They say that what I saw was it. The kitchen was well equipped. I opened the refrigerator door, and next thing I know, Alina is behind me, peeking in. I close the door. I said, "Alina, por favor espacio," and did my best imitation of her smile, and she returned her real smile and went off to the sella hamaca.

In the refrigerator, I found olives, crema, butter, parsley, cabbage, and cheese. In a cabinet, I see a bottle of wine. I show it to Felipe; he smiles, and I place the wine on the counter.

I asked Flor y Hortencia what they thought the meal should be. Hortencia said that she could use la crema and the avocates to make a sauce and could sauté garlic and parsley in butter and spread it over the baguettes. Flor said she could add more tomatoes. "Pero no de lata," I said.

"Enteros?" she asked. I nodded yes, and she gave the tomatoes a raise and brought them over to the cutting board. I cut one in half, took a half in each hand, squeezed the juice and pulp out, and dropped them with the skin in the chicken pot. I asked her to do three more like that and to add some ground garlic, comino, and some water to the beans. Flor asked. "Le agregó perejil?" I

asked her to wait until the heat was off, then add it.

All this time Felipe had been observing and said, “Se comunican bien tu y m’ja.” I told him that I knew no other way. He laughed. It is natural, I say. I ask him if he would like to help, si si he says, and I call Hortencia over.

Felipe is cordial with her. I asked him if he could help her with the cucumber and onion vinaigrette, slice the baguettes open in half, add the butter, garlic,

and parsley sauce, and put them in the oven. “No esperaba tantos pasos,” he said.

I told Hortencia not to worry; he was her helper. All the commotion in the kitchen was too much for Alina; she got off the hamaca, came in, and stood around the stove. Being in the way. Felipe was at the counter, slicing cucumbers and onions. “Mi’ja, mi vida.” He said, “Lista para ayudar?”

“Ay como son ustedes,” Alina said.

Flor and Hortencia said in one voice, “No, no es asi.” The hard part was that she did not contribute to the preparation; she got in the way.

Flor was watching over the chicken, and I asked if it was her recipe. It was something she had been working on, she said, estilo a’la Veracruzana en sopa. Once the meal came together, I asked Dalia if it would be okay if Hortencia and Flor joined us at the table for dinner.

“Claro, claro,” she said, looking at me with both her eyebrows raised.

I asked Alina to help set the food out; she placed on the counter a folded towel for each pot and a large wooden spoon next to it. She laid next to each plate a yellow napkin made of cotton embroidered with a green trim.

Hortencia and Flor were new to sitting at the table for a meal with their employer. We served ourselves. Flor was curious about me; she’d sneak shy looks at me, trying to figure out where I was from. Alina picked up on it and said to Flor, “Mira, el es...” And goes on to say that I am Norteamericano, de tejas. Hortencia repeats the word tejas in a question. She and Flor were from Xalisco, a village next to a river that meets up with el Rio Pánuco. In Xalapa, they lived with Hortencia’s uncle and his family in Colonia Obrera Campesina. Felipe told stories from his days in DF at UNAM, where he studied accounting. He was a partner in a firm with clients that included the state government.

Dalia called the meal wonderful—I gave Flor y Hortencia two thumbs up; they were embarrassed, and Alina went over and hugged them, smiling all over

the place.

Hortencia y Flor started to clean up, Felipe and Dalia went to the sitting room, and Alina was leaning against the counter doing nothing. I go in and help them wash the dishes. Flor and Hortencia protest that they should do it. I say that I enjoy it, and why would they want to take that away from me? “Ay dios mío!” said Alina. I asked her to help put things away. She came up standing right in front of me, saying que cosa. I asked her to please help Flor; she smiled with her green eyes and gave me a little jab.

Alina helped clear the table; in one moment, we looked straight at each other, and I let her know that I appreciated her. She closed and opened her eyes slowly.

Hortencia y Flor were leaving, and I asked where they were going. “Para nuestra casa,” said Hortencia. I told them to wait, and I'd take the bus with them. I do my despidos to Dalia and Felipe, and Alina follows us out, and the callejeros are there.

I introduced Flor and Hortencia to los callejeros, and they sniffed around. I give Alina a little hug, and she goes in. We walk down to the bus stop, and we take the same bus. They talked about how they had never had a meal with them. And we were nervous. I teased them and said that they were fine. At a bus stop, they made a connection and I continued on to campus.

TUTOR

Alina was at my place on the hammock. I sat next to her with my legs over her thighs.

She asked how I was doing with the request Graciela asked me to write, one page about my experience working out of fondas.

“Una pagina, en ingles y espanol.” She said, looking at me.

“Aja, asi piensaba,” she said.

She got off the hammock, took my hand walked me over to sit down at the patio table. She went inside and came out with paper and pencil and placed them on the table.

“Póngase a escribir. Tu cita con Gracila es el martes, en memos de dos dias.

“Duut, escribir.”

She had suggested that I mention the brother and sister, and their older brother in college in Michigan with student visa troubles. And she said.

“Y del abuelo con un nieto aya en Carolina.”

She said to first write in English, and she would help me with the Spanish. Then she went inside and left me there. On a blank sheet I drew a horizon with a sun rising, some mountains, a path from a small village,

Alina came out and saw what I was doing; she folded her arms across her chest.

“Que es eso? Que haz escrito?”

I pointed to the drawing.

“No, no duut, ese es un dibujo no son palabras.”

She went inside.

I wrote on a blank page what she had mention about the brother and sister and their brother in college in Michigan with an expired visa. And about el abuelo. I had something going about living in Mejico and listening and learning to speak Spanish.

She came out to check on me. I read what I had in English. She followed carefully; she was better at listening to English than speaking it which she rarely did. She didn't care for the sound of it. She liked what I had written. That is was plain yet refined, she like it because she felt that Graciela would see as she said.

“Nexus en su propria vida.”

“Y la versión en español?”

I showed it to her.

“Ya la escribetes? Okay, vamos a ver que ondas.” She was surprised.

She read through it, suggested corrections, and to include that I would remain in Xalapa, with a visa, and would complete my duties as a tutor. That was a good point. She went back inside.

I re-wrote and wrote, and produced crumpled up paper on the table. Then I had to open the crumpled paper to continue. I added her mention of committing to fulfill my duties as a tutor in both in English and Spanish.

She came outside again and said, “Okay, y ese papel arrugado sobre la mesa, son tus ententos. Aver que haz escrito?”

I handed her the Spanish revision, she made two corrections, and kissed me on the lips. In the low light in the patio she closed her green eyes and I kissed each eyelids.

I gathered my papers and we went inside holding hands like from a long walk. We got the tub ready. She stepped in and sank in completely, when she came up I was sitting across from her. We looked at one another, in the eye and it felt as we. We were in our own zone, we were not complicated, we accepted the magic.

Early next morning I wake and get up and pull on her ankle to get going. She didn't respond. I leaned in over her ear and very softly said that she had class and I need to meet with Graciela. Her smile wakes her and kisses me and get herself ready.

We walked out to the bus stop. At the campus stop she stepped off and she looked simple and beautiful.

I continued and made a connect to downtown and the Humanities campus.

It was Tuesday morning, in the building I hustled up the steps to the second balcony. The office door was open, I waked in and knocked on Gracie's door which was slightly open. I heard “pase, pase.” We did an hola handshake and talked about the day we met at the posada party. As we talked, she'd make subtle mentions of the way Alina and I were when together. I thought to say something to put it aside, and said that we were friends and that I liked her company.

She moved on and said that she had spoken with the U.S. and Mexican consulates, and they told her that they were processing my documents, and on and on. Then she closed the folder; my first name was on the tab, and I got a

sense that I was being tracked in files. But I did my best to be okay with it. I needed a job, a connection to the university, and the use of the library.

At the university Graciela was Directora Dominguez. She went on to say that the school had fifty-six foreign students. Fourteen enrolled as regular students; the others were, as Santiago called them, "Estudiantes de Truismo." The tourist students arrived each semester on a program to learn and practice conversational Spanish. A new group would arrive the following week.

Five from Finland, sixteen from Colorado, fourteen from California, and seven from Minnesota.

Directora Dominguez said that each student would receive a packet, which would include every student's name, class schedules and the tutor assigned to each student. I was assigned students from each group, except Minnesota.

She said the tutoring job would start in two days with an orientation, a review of materials and reporting stuff would be explained.

She asked to see what she had requested for me to write. I handed her both the Spanish and English versions. She read the English one first, and read the one Spanish slower.

Then she nodded and commented on how the English and Spanish saying, "El inglés y el español suenan distintos, y igualmente comunican lo mismo."

She placed in front of me two sheets of paper and said.

"Tengo permiso de nuestra administración, conciente que tus documentos están en proceso con el consulado para establecer tu identidad. Bueno, eso dicho, te presento este convenio."

On the pages was the job description, the pay, and reporting. I read it carefully and agreed, and she handed me a pen. I signed it, and she signed it and invited me to a welcome reception they were having for the foreign students.

I asked her about the use of the library.

"Un momento."

She said and turned to her typewriter and slipped a university stationery sheet with a carbon sheet before a blank sheet. She didn't look at the keys, but at the paper. She pulled the letter out, signed it and folded and slipped into a university envelope, she handed it to me and said, "Valido por el período de este semestre."

As I stood to leave she said, “Regalito, quizás después que el consulado confirme tu identidad aprovecha matricularte en la universidad.”

“Quizas.” I said.

“Es cierto lo que dice Lorena sobre ti.”

We did our adios, and I headed out to the street to catch a bus to the main campus.

It was a chaos of traffic and honking, which somehow moved along. At the intersection a policeman attempted to control the flow of traffic, but to no use. It moved along on its own no matter how much he blew his whistle, which seemed to play along with a marimba band down the street. I find the bus and get on. I didn't know the time and asked, and someone said, “once con viento.” I gave it a thumbs up. I got off at a stop and made a connection to campus.

Now I was worrying about time and that there were files about me. I got to thinking about that but left it for later. Walking up to the lunch room, I asked for the time, again. I was eight minutes early.

I walked over to the serving tables. I was ready to dig in, but I waited for Alina and Lorena. A moment later, here they come talking, and Lorena says, “Que ondas chavo.”

I point to the food, and we get to serving ourselves. I got a bowl of soupy black beans, and from the spread, I made a chicken torta and loaded up a plate of fruit with crema y un vaso de agua fresca de piña. Coca cola always seemed to be around.

They both had a cheese and grilled vegetable tortas with avocate and a plate of fruit y agua de papaya. They led the way to a table.

I was hungry and took on the beans; the broth had parsley leaves floating in it. It seems that black beans hold on to flavor more than pinto beans. But pinto beans can be cooked with pasilla and quajillo chiles.

At the table, they continued with what they had been talking about. Alina turned to me, saying, “Lorena tiene un admirador.”

She poked Alina and said.

“Anda ilusionado.”

A young professor had a crush on her. Lorena was studying to be a school teacher, and her admirer that afternoon was holding a preview of the class he

taught.

When I finished my meal, I told them about my visit with Graciela. “Entonce, entonce!” they said.

I tell them that I signed an agreement to be a tutor. And I showed them the letter for the use of the library.

Alina pumped her fist up and like a slogan, “Que Vivan Los Callejeros!”

Lorena gave me a side hug and a kiss on the cheek.

Then Alina said, “Que tal Don Regalito, planificamos un viaje al Boca André?”

I was in with a nod to go. We would celebrate her design project, my new job, and a new semester about to start.

Before leaving, I invited them to the bienvenida reception for the truismo students, the school was hosting. Right away, Lorena laughed, recognizing what Santiago calls them. They had class to get to and left.

I headed to La Biblioteca. At the reception counter, I presented the envelope to a woman; she had seen me before as a guest. She looked at the letter, excused herself, and went off to an office.

A few moments later, she returned with a man. He was the library director, and he said that he had just spoken with directora Dominguez.

He'd be happy to provide me he said, “Un credencial valido por el periodo de este nuevo semestre.”

And said that a card would be made; in the meantime, I could use the letter he handed which would permit me the use of the reading room and to checkout books, except those in the archive. I thanked them both. I now had two letters.

I went down stairs and walked past the archive section to a corner area with a long table and magazine racks along the walls. Back issues were in archives.

Next to the entrance was a small counter where Sergio, on staff, was stationed. He remembered me from before and knew what I was looking for.

He placed Look magazine on the table, and I turned to the lead story titled “Seeking the Magic Mushroom” by Robert Gordon Wasson.

He was a Wall Street banker who studied mushrooms as a hobby. There were photos of Maria Sabina. He had promised her that he would not publish pictures of her. He betrayed her.

I read along but could not continue because it was snooty and it didn't feel right, so I folded the magazine close, thanked Sergio and walked away.

I went up one floor, and found Galeano's *Venas Abiertas*, took it to the reading room, and wrote down the opening paragraph because I had too, like I had with Oscar Acosta's *Cockroach People*.

Galeano wrote:

Hacia el fin del siglo XVI, un poco antes de la consumación de la conquista, el Virrey Francisco de Toledo, quinto de la serie virreinal del Perú, dictó las primeras leyes de Indias. El Código de Indias, como se llamó, reglamentaba la vida de los indios con una benignidad que tal vez ninguna legislación del mundo haya igualado. Era obra de los mejores juristas de la época, que anticipándose aun a Hugo Grocio, el holandés que más tarde formuló el principio del "mare liberum", crearon un cuerpo de derecho internacional en sus aspectos más avanzados del derecho de gentes y reconocieron al indio el derecho al respeto de sus costumbres y creencias, a la protección de su propiedad comunal, y a un trato equitativo ante la ley.

I had missed the opening paragraph when Lorena and I first began to read the book.

HABITACIÓN

Alina took me around to find a place; I had to move out of Alejandro's dorm room before Monday—he was getting a roommate for the new semester.

We looked around, but nothing seemed to fit.

“Qué te parece? Vamos a relajarnos con unas aguas frescas,” she suggested. And off we went to a licuado stand. We took our drinks to a small park. I pulled out a map of Xalapa from a carry-around bag I had bought on the street.

“Y qué ondas con tu bolsón, tejida en trencita, el rio fronteriza?”

She modified it saying, “Trenza Fronteriza.”

I reminded her that I had given my rio bag to her mother.

“Ah, sí es cierto.”

On the map, she spotted La Parroquia del Corpus Christi in a neighborhood close to campus and elbowed me. “Que tal?”

I gave her a thumbs up, and went to catch a bus.

We got off one block before the church. As we walked about, she'd stop someone and introduce herself, saying, “Disculpe la molesta. ¿Nos puede ayudar? Buscamos alquilar habitation para él. Sabe de algun hotel pequeño en este vecindario?”

One man told us about a place in the neighborhood a couple of streets away. We thanked him and went to find it.

The place was in a courtyard. We stood there, and soon Don Ramon, the owner, came out to greet us.

Alina said that it was close to campus. Which led him to ask if we were students. That is what Alina was looking for; she talked about that—and that I was a tutor. Don Ramon said that they have guests from the university stay at the hotel.

No way; Don Ramon could not have been taken by Alina.

I walked around the place. There were two apartments on each side of the courtyard. In the back was a two-story building with eight apartments.

Don Ramon showed us one of two vacant apartments in the courtyard.

We go in one and do a walk around. It had a kitchenette and I was sold.

Alina tugged me along. The bed was comfy, and noticed folded sheets, pillow covers, and towels on an unmade bed. Don Ramon said that is was to show

that the mattress is clean. Alina gave her see you here later look, with a soft smile.

Against the back wall in the corner was a plain dresser drawer. The bathroom had a oval tub, and above it was a shower head, and hot water. She applauded.

The tiny kitchen had a three-burner stove and an oven. Next to the stove was a small counter space, and underneath was a half size refrigerator. Across the stove was a small sink and some counter space. Along the counter facing the kitchen were two stools, and behind that a round table with three chairs. Against the wall was a two-seat sofa. Two windows on each side of the door faced the courtyard, two windows were spaced across each of the side walls, and small window above the tub.

We stepped outside, and Alina gave me the okay look. I turned to Don Ramon and said, “Vale.” We shook hands.

Don Ramon walked off to his office. Alina and I sat at a table and she opened the map and said that I could walk to campus. But I was working at the downtown campus.

She said, that I could take the bus—“Te gusta ese transporte, camiónes con su bulla como un gallinero. Que no?”

“Asi es,” I answered.

Don Ramon returned with a receipt book, and explained the rent amount, the maintenance, and said that the two women who did the hotel cleaning and laundry also did personal laundry for hotel guests, but that I would have to speak with them about that.

I tell him that I wanted to pay three months in advance. He reduced the total amount and wrote out a receipt. I looked at it and showed it to Alina. I agreed to the amount and pulled out a wad of pesos. Alina made a small chuckle. I didn't want to look in eyes because I would forget what I was doing.

I counted out for three months. Don Ramon handed me the receipt and the key. Alina applauded and kissed me on the cheek.

I asked about cooking pans and stuff. He said that he would ask his wife—she ran the restaurant they owned that was across the street.

I suggested to go eat at their restaurant. He came along and introduced us to his wife, Doña Rosa. We didn't order anything to eat—Alina gave quick look that she was not hungry, and needed to get to class. I tell Doña Rosa that I had

gotten carried away by the scents coming from the kitchen, and remembered that Alina had to get to class. I told them that I would return with my stuff.

We left and took a bus to campus. At the stop we stepped out. We double thumbed each other; and she went off to her class, and I went to the dorm room.

I tell Alejandro about my new place and that I was moving out. He gave me two thumbs up.

“Y tus cosas, que tal?” I say that I could pack in five minutes.

I didn't have much; I had a duffle bag and a street bag as a temporary replacement for the Rio bag. And a small box with stuff, and a replacement rebozo for the one Alina had. I had bought that rebozo, she wore, my first day in Veracruz and used it to bundle things in—easy to carry around.

One chilly evening at the panqueque stand I laid that rebozo over her and it became hers.

I tell Alejandro to come along and say that Alina was meeting me there. He got up and asked what he could carry. I handed him my replacement rio bag and the new rebozo with stuff in a bundle.

I had my duffle bag over my shoulder, and carried the small box with both hands. Alejandra stopped and said, “Hombre asi.”

He took the box and placed it on my shoulder. That made sense, it was easier.

We get a cab and go past La Parroquia del Corpus Christi. A couple of streets later, we arrived at the hotel.

We walked into the courtyard; my room was on the right, next to the only other unit on that side, and it was vacant. We drop our load, and I pulled my key out and opened the door, and welcomed Alejandro in.

“Va'pues, tiene su cocinita, te felicito compañero.”

I pulled out two bottles of wine Santiago had given me. I opened one to celebrate. There were no drinking glasses around.

I take Alejandro with me across the street to the restaurant. I introduced Doña Rosa to Alejandro, and she took to him, and they got to talking. I asked her if we might borrow some glasses.

“Mire señor Regalito, le voy a entregar, cuatro vasos y platos, dos ollas y sartens, dos cuchillos y cubiertos. Como le parece?” I hugged her.

“Me parece bien, gracias.”

She said I could use them while a guest at the hotel and she handed me a box with the stuff.

Crossing the street, heading to my room, I tell Alejandro that I now had two boxes. He had a good laugh.

“Te estas domesticando, Regalito.”

I thought it was true, but I didn't like it. More stuff.

We unpack the box. I gave the glasses a wash. Alejandro checked out the small sofa and discovered that it could fold out. I knew what he was thinking, guest bed. When folded out, it was about the size of a dorm bed.

I poured us some wine and do a brindis. He didn't have an appreciation for wine. The other was a white Spanish wine. I placed the bottle on the freezer tray.

Alejandro was from a village near Huautla. His family worked on coffee farms and on a communal fields of corn and vegetables. He spoke Mazatec back home. I asked if it was a dialect of Nahuatl.

“No, no. Su idioma es distinca tiene raises en Oto-Manguen.”

He tried it on me; it had, a sing-song, matter of fact melody flow to it.

The sound of a single word had more than one meaning, he'd said. It was too complex for me. But I liked how it sounded.

They also whistled to communicate from a distance in the mountains, he said. He got to talking about how the Mazatec, the Oto-Manguen, and Asian languages have things in common. He enjoyed analyzing things like that. I liked listening to me, he knew a lot, and I tried to follow long. He would thank me for listening, even when at times I didn't understand. He'd say that me listening helped him simplify what he was learning. Back in Veracruz he had given me a list of four books to read.

Alina showed up with Lorena and Santiago. Alina's hair was damp; she had on Converse black high-tops, jeans rolled up above her ankles, a coral colored leotard, silver earrings that dangled, and her rebozo was around her waist.

Lorena and Santiago checked the place out and liked it.

“Muy domestico, interesante,” observed Santiago.

Which is what Alejandro had said.

We laid out the food they brought, and Santiago pulled out a flask of tequila. I had four glasses, and Alina said that we could share one.

After a welcome brindis, Santiago got to talking about a decision he had made, one that only his parents knew.

Santiago was methodical; he told us that he had struck a deal with his parents. He would work and pay for his anthropology classes. That was the deal: He would earn a degree in business and trade. And pay his way to study anthropology. He said that his parents agreed to support that and a move to el UNAM en DF.

We stood and applauded him.

Lorena hugged him, and Alina pumped her arm in the air, saying, “Que vivan Los Callejeros!” She was learning to whistle from Alejandro, and she whistled what sounded like a bird in the distance.

Santiago’s spirits where up in the sky.

I took Alina’s hand and led her out to the patio. I turned to her, and stood like she had shown me, and we danced. I knew which song she imagined, and she sang in her low voice over my ear: “El otoño vi llegar, al mar oí cantar, y no estabas tú...”

We dance along to the music in our heads.

DEPUTADOS

I was inside el Congreso del Estado. Alina's father, Felipe, had arranged for me to meet with three diputados. They were seated across an open space in a lounge area, surrounded by plants.

I was surprised to see Alina! I had no idea she'd be there. She gave me a passing look. I felt a rush come over me. Maybe I was being deported. Alina read me and gave me a look to be cool.

When I walked up, Felipe greeted me and introduced the three diputados, including Alina. We sat down.

Felipe began by recalling the scary incident Alina and I had one night with a street gang and the appearance of los callejeros.

He said some kind words about me and asked Alina to share with the diputados what she knew.

I guess she spoke for about three minutes; it seemed longer the way she spoke with ease. She talked about the storm and how my mother died in it, how I was recused by a Nicaraguan fishing boat, and that in Veracruz I walked on campus and into a lecture in progress.

She mentioned Santiago, who had introduced us. The diputados knew Santiago's father. She talked about how I worked out of fondas. She mentioned los callejeros presence against the street gang. Spoke about my life as an undocumented person living in Mejico.

She said that I was being considered for a tutoring position at the university. And that I had provided directora Dominguez a copy of what I had submitted to the U.S. Consulate, including a copy of the letter from the Consulate acknowledging the documents I had submitted.

Alina's telling was a story in which I thought she was talking about someone else. And she kept her smile small so not to distract.

She wore a dress that came to her knees, she had her rebozo over her shoulders, and was in high-heeled shoes. Her legs glistened. I'd never seen her in high heels before.

One of the diputados knew Graciela. "Directora Dominguez, si, si," he said. Alina looked at me, letting me know that he was the dude who can get things moving.

The diputado said that he understood that I had a request for them.

I asked for permission to remain in Mexico while the U.S. Consulate established my legal status.

The younger diputado said to the other two,
“Quizas un llamada a la embajada.”

The young diputado would sneak looks at Alina.

We talked a little more, and said our good-byes, I thanked them for their time, excused myself, and left.

LA MISMA TARDE

That evening, after meeting with los deputados, Alina showed up. I was in the patio, going over some tutoring stuff.

She placed her shoulder bag, with a groceries in it, on the table and sat down. She crossed her legs, and said, “Que tal señor, tengo entendido que estuvo con unos deputados.”

“Tambien estuvo una sorpesa, la hija del convocador.” I said.

“A’si, y la hija, como te parecio?”

“Como un ángel.”

She stood and acted out being coy and did a salsa step, showing off her jeans snug around her booty. She had a loose-fitting t-shirt over a yellow leotard, and black high-top Converse. Her rebozo was in a twist around her waist.

She was hungry, and we went inside. She pulled the grocery bag out and laid it on the counter, and laid her shoulder bag on the bed.

“Vas a pasar la noche?”

“Claro duut, tenemos que planificar nuestra jornada a Boca Andreá.”

I looked at what she left on the counter. A fresh smelling baguette loaf, two tomatoes and some green onions, a can of sardines, olives, and tequila in a small coca cola bottle. I asked her what happened to the coca cola?

“Mi lo bebí.”

Lots of sugar I tell her.

“Ah, asugar,” she said wetting her lips over mine.

She took a deep breath and said that she was now ready to be useful and learn how to prepare a meal. I held her hair to one side, and said that she needed to have it out of the way. She drew her hair back and gave it a twist, and tied a knot below her neck.

I asked her what she thought we could make. She looked at the things on the counter, looked around the kitchen, and found olive oil, garlic, carrots, crema, avocates, lime, some of raw jalapeños, species, a bag of rice and one of black beans.

She thought we should take a break.

“Que tal duut, como la ves?”

She poured aqua mineral and tequila and added a squeeze of lime. She remembered seeing some sliced pineapples in the refrig. She sliced a piece off

and added it to the glass, then reached for a kiss. We drank from the same glass.

“Okay, Doña Alina. Noto algo de chef en ti.”

She applauded and gave me a couple of fake punches on the chest.

“Adelante, que segue?”

She turned to the food laid out, thinking about what to make. I looked at her to keep it simple. She added the black beans to a pot and raised them, and I placed my finger on one side of the pot, to where to add water and place the pot on the back burner with the heat off.

She set the rice aside, the can of sardines, avocates, tomatoes, green onions, olives, and crema.

She focused on making a paste from those ingredients.

I opened the can of sardines, and scooped out advocated. I had a small mocajete, and once she got the hang of it, she worked in ingredients and made the paste.

I cut the bread open in half, and asked her to sauté garlic in butter. She stood there. Like end of the road.

She didn't know how to snap off a clove from the bulb, how to peel a garlic clove, or use a kitchen knife. I handed her garlic bulb.

“Y esto?” She made a cute smile which I was not buying.

I tapped her hip to scoot aside. I snapped off one clove, with the heel edge of the knife I nipped off the root and the taper ends, gave it a press with my palm, and the skin peeled off the garlic clove, and chopped it.

She had been watching and I said that we needed eight cloves, peeled and chopped.

“Ocho!” she said bumping her hip against mine to step aside.

I placed some parsley and mint on the cutting board. She was getting comfortable with the knife, placing her palm on top of the blade, chop-chop and minced the parsley. I suggested to wait on the mint.

I handed her a stick of butter.

“Y esto?” She asked holding the butter like they do in TV commercials.

I tell her that it needs to go in the pan.

“Todo esto?”

I said to cut a third off and add it to the pan.

She added the butter and the pan was a bit hot, removed the pan from the heat and lowered the flame and returned the pan to the burner. She added the

garlic, sauté I tell her, then add the parsley. She looked me without a word that said “Ya con el sauté?” She asked. Here is where I thought she was funny, But she didn't see it.

When she added the parsley and it joined in with the butter and garlic to bloom a fragrance. She gathered her hair to one side and breathed in the aroma.

She was fascinated by the process, the the aroma it produced. I held her hand to turn the flame off, and handed her a plate to over the pan. She understood what was going on. Let it cool and harden to spread over the baguette halves.

I gave her a hip bump to turn the flame on under the bean pot. We gathered garlic, bay leaves, salt, bell pepper, olive oil, green onion and comino and set them on the cutting board. Once the water start to boil we added the ingredients, slowed the flame and covered the pot. She lifted the lid to get a smell. She was smiles and I was about to add a jalapeno and stopped me.

I asked her to rinse the rice, add water and place the pot on the front burner, with the heat off.

We went to the table to look at the map. We leaned in close over the map that showed the northern Mexican coastline. She trace the route with her white painted fingernail, the round edges were pink.

She placed her finger on Xalapa and followed the bus route to José Cardel, and up the coast to Palma Sola. Boca Andreá was a couple of miles before.

We talked about two overnights in Boca Andreá, then Zempoala, Villa Emiliano Zapata, and maybe Veracruz, before our returning to Xalapa.

How to pay for it. Here is where Alina and I were alike and not good at. And this was the problem. She was accustomed to the man paying for everything.

We took a pause, when we began to breath together she said.

“Okay, duut, vale, hacemos un presupuesto, y cada uno pone mitad.”

I brought out a blank tablet and began to writing about our trip. She looked at it saying.

“Duut esto no es un presupuesto, es como la entra de un novela con dibujos. Aver.” And took the tablet and drew a grid on a couple of pages. She sat back and looked puzzled. I suggested she name each visit and list our expense and balance under that. We agreed that she keep the tablet and I would carry the money. We gave each other two thumbs up.

“Vale, el primo lo nombramos Boca Andreá.”

I said, "Alina we start in Xalapa."

"Por cierto." She said, then looked over at the kitchen, saying, Los frijoles! And skipped off to check, I was behind her and she was about to lift the lid, and I placed my hand over hers to leave the lid alone. I turned the heat off.

Okay I thought, she has priorities. Los frijoles and dinner.

She wanted to take a break and made another drink. I cleaned up around the kitchen and set things up for the meal.

She went and sat on the couch, took her Converse off, stood, and slipped out of her jeans.

She tapped her hand on the couch for me to come sit down. She rested her legs over mine and looked at me; her eyes spoke, and she smiled with closed lips.

I understood and said, "Okay, pero de rapido, asi como conejitos."

She chuckled, and closed her eyes. I pulled her t-shirt up and loosened her hair, I kissed her below behind ear, around her neck, and she reach down and pulled her panties off and my short off and brought me in. We had that two-seater couch dancing.

After the couch stopped dancing, she laid lax like a cat.

I took her hand and we went for a quick shower.

We dried each other off, she wrapped a towel around her waist, and I tossed her one of my t-shirts. "Y esto?" She looked at me.

I told her that she could not be naked in the kitchen.

She motioned Why Not?

I tell her that she would get food on her breasts and get her tummy and legs splattered by hot water and oil.

"Ay no!" And slipped the t-shirt on.

"Y la toalla?" I asked.

"Porque?, me la quito."

"No, Alina, equal como tus senos, tu pancita y tal vez tus piernas en caso que se te desaga la toalla." She unwrapped the towel and handed it to and slipped her jean on. I looked at her bare feet.

"Mis pies tambien?" I nodded yes. Slipped on Converse and I wrapped the towel around her waist.

"Ando de moda." She chuckled.

I turned to the baguette and laid the halves out, the butter mixture had hardened and spread it over each half, and set them aside to toast later in the oven.

After toasting she said that would spread the paste she made over the baguette halves, and add sliced tomatoes and green onions on top. She liked the process, being in the kitchen, the steps, how food was prepared, cooked and served. The time and attention is what she'd talk about.

"Te consume." She paused to laugh and continued, "Te consume para uno consumir." She laughed again and walked around shaking her hands down her side. I laughed along because it was her, no class acting, no pretense, she was funny. Sometimes funnier than she thought she was. She'd place her open hand on her chest below the neck to help her clam down. The laughing would moisten her eyes and they'd sparkle like twin emeralds.

I asked her "Que ondas chef?" She turned toward me, took a step back, and did her jabbing routine.

We returned to the table, she opened our budget notebook over the maps, and we worked on a budget for each day.

I reminded her about the rock cove Lorena had mentioned. We didn't need to say or look at one another to imagine the same.

LA MISMA TARDE SEGUE

She had taken her jeans and Converse off and was barefooted wearing a large t-shirt with a towel wrapped up high above her waist over her t-shirt. She gave me a look that said that she did not like the towel, that it was silly, and she knew my eyes were on her nalgas, and she turned slightly away and adjusted the towel. I got it and laughed, and she gave me a beautiful, relaxed smile.

I said, "No puedes estar tan expuesta."

"Duut, todos esta cosinado, solo falta organizar y llevar la comida a la mesa."

She was right, and I undid the towel and tossed it over my shoulder.

incomplete . . .

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She went to fold the maps and clear the table. I severed one bowl with rice and beans, and a plate of advocates y crema. She brought the table the baguette own her first time made paste. She was on her toes with one arm up saying, “Que Vivian Los Callejeros!”

We eat from the same bowl, a couple of fillings. The baguette was crunchy, the garlic butter toasted them. She brought her paste out in a bowl, and made a drink from the last of the tequila she had brought in a small coke bottle.

Sometimes I would speak with her in English. She was good at listening and understanding most all I would say. I would read to her from Anaïs Nin’s journal, and Alina once remarked, “Habla como una mujer, asi de neta, los placers y penas, en lo sensual y erotico. Que mujer!”

When she tried to speak in English her accent was all over it. She felt that English was gruff. She’d say, “No me interea el sonido, como que le flata alma, ritmo. Excepto a Anaïs.”

She said that Santiago likes the English he speaks. “Como te parece el ingle de Santiago?”

I told her that I admired him for learning, but I agreed with her about sounding Hollywood.

I mentioned for her to heat the pan. She stood there, and I said, Alina, you need to turn the burner knob, and she gave it a hard turn, and the flame jumped up, and so did she with a yelp. I reached around her and turned the heat off.

She had never prepared her own meals. They were served to her at home, at restaurants, and on campus. She had zero connection to the food and preparation. And she wanted to change that.

She said and kissed me on the cheek, like we were done with that.

“Estas en la cocina girrl friend.” I said. She liked the word and pronounced it way better than dude. She took the towel, turned her back to me, and wrapped the it around her waist. I still saw her without the towel, she sensed it, and did a cumbia step. We kissed, I held her hair back, her fingers were moving her hand down. And we stopped. It was not abrupt, we just did.

She remembered the beans and skipped to the stove. They were okay.

She spread the sardine paste across the bread. I handed her some crema, and she drizzled it over the spread.

“Vaya tantos pasos, para algo tan sincillo.” She said.

“Que sigue duut?” She was eager to continue.

She’d sing-song, “Okay, okay, vaya pues, asi es, okay, okay.” She’d say it to dance steps.

I held her face in my hands; she was a flower, and then she said, “Tus manos oler de ajo.” Then she sang out, “¡Ay, ayy, ayyyy, el sarten se esta quemandooo!”

She stepped aside and turned her back to me and slipped the t-shirt on. Then I tell her that a around her waist was not a good idea. And again Why Not. I just looked at her and she went off and slipped on her jeans. I give her a thumbs up and let her know that she is protected from

She drizzled olive oil in the pan and added some butter. Before adding the carrots, I motioned for her to step back. The two whole carrots went into the pan, the water in them burst out, and Alina did a little squeal.

I lowered the flame, handed her a wood spatula, and placed her other hand on the pan's handle. She held it in a grip, and I looked at her to relax. She chuckled at herself.

She thought she was done and wanted to walk away, but I'd turned her, saying that she had to take care of the sauté or it would burn. She gave me a tight-lipped smile. I told her to move the two carrots around and turn them.

"Como, no ahy campo en este sarten!" She said.

I asked her to lower the heat; she reached to dial down the flame, and in her other hand, she held the wood spatula with which she knocked over the bottle of olive oil; the lid was on. She stood back with her hands on her hips. She'd look at me for help. I said, "Se estan quemando las sanorias."

"Dios mio, dios mio," she said. She had trouble moving them around. I handed her a fork, and she got it to work with the spatula. And again, she wanted to walk away. I said you need to add the minced garlic and green onions, keep an eye on the pan, know when to turn the heat off, add a dap of butter to the pan, and cover it. I put my hands on my hips and said to clean up around your work space.

She was trying to hold back a big smile and said, "Sí jefe." And gave a salute, then an elbow.

We took the food to the table and continued looking at the map and talking about Boca Andreá.

fogosa, ardiente

ESTUDIANTES BIENVENIDA

The welcome reception for the foreign students was that evening. I had been encouraging Alejandro to come along—But he wanted to stay and study.

“Vamonas, ya deja eso, toma un relajo.”

I mentioned that there will be food, music, and foreign students.

“Ah, si si, los estudiantes de truismo.”

He was dismissive, too occupied with his studies.

I tell him that Lorena, Santiago, and Alina will be there. He closed his book and gave me a thumbs up, and we got ready. I put on my favorite guayabera, and Alejandro said, “Ya dale un descanso a esa guayabera, tienes dos que no usas. Toma ponte esa.” He said.

He had handed the black one. I put it on, I hadn't worn it before, and it felt good. He was right, I needed to rotate my three guayaberas and give each one a night out.

We headed out and took a bus downtown to the Humanities building. Inside the plaza was open to the sky—four floors surrounded by balconies, classrooms, lecture halls, some hangout space for students, and offices—and a small library.

I see Alina; we catch each other's eyes. Alejandro and I went to the food table, it was laid out with serving dishes of sopes, chicken flautas, guacamole, cheeses, fruits, aguas frescas—and coca cola.

The U.S. foreign students didn't take to the sopes.

Directora Dominguez walked up to the microphone and asked for everyone's attention. She welcomed the foreign students, highlighted places in Xalapa, she mentioned el Museo de Antropología and went on to explain their class curriculum and schedules, and the services available through her office.

She introduced the professors and the tutors to whom the students were assigned. She thanked everyone and said, “Disfruten!”

The DJ began with salsa music, and had the volume too high for the plaza.

Before playing the next tract, he'd introduce it and show off what he knew. The foreign students were bunched up in their own groups on one side of the plaza. There was no dancing, because the DJ was busy talking.

Alina leans in and gives a little shove to look—it was Lorena walking up to the DJ. She got his attention, and he stopped talking. A moment later, he played another salsa piece and adjusted the volume to fit the plaza.

Asked her was she would do to improve the plaza. She looked up at the balconies and the plaza floor.

“El techo de los balcones mas anchos, piso de cuadrados de cemento, un escenario, pintar todo el exterior de un solo color en diferente tones. Algo así” Alina said, “Oí, vamos a mostrar como bailar.”

She held my hand, led me to the center of the plaza and we moved with the music. We were in sync three steps apart circling each other. She’d look away from me and smile all around, and spun herself to a stop and brought me in.

We danced slowly for a few beats, and she swayed away. I could see the students enjoying her dance moves.

Lorena and Santiago danced; he had smooth moves, and Lorena glided and would look up above the plaza into the sky.

I went to meet the students assigned to me, and walked over to the group from Colorado. I introduce myself and Alina. The women commented on how well she danced. A couple of the dudes had some callejeros in them and eyed her.

The music was loud, and I see Lorena getting the DJ’s attention and points to her ear and points down. He got it.

We stepped away, and Alina turned to face me, not saying a word—her back to the students. We look at each other and I understood her. She wanted me to select who she would dance with, and she would select who I would dance with.

She gave me the look to hurry. I said, The guy to my left against the wall.

She looked at me, trying to place him. She motioned her eyes slightly to one side, and I nodded. She asked why.

“Porque parece tener algo de callejeros,” I answered.

She laughed so loudly that she turned and moved away, she had both hands over her face. When she removed them there was her smile.

She moved her hair to one side and punched me on the arm.

I asked who she wanted me to ask. Facing me, she lowered her voice,

“La Chica, algo de Chicana me parece.”

I asked her why.

“Porque quiero ver como bailas con un chicana.”

The next selection was a corrido. I walked over to the student from Colorado and asked her name, Maribel she said. I invited her to dance, and

says in English that she doesn't know how to dance to that music. I took her hand and tell her I that would show her—that it's like Texano country swing. She shrugged.

On the dance floor I gave her a spin, and we got into the corrido's beat.

Alina was patient with her partner's dance steps. She was having fun, and her dance partner got into the rhythm.

I walked Maribel back to her group and thanked her for the dance. I reminded the students assigned to me that we would have our first tutoring session the following Tuesday.

My tutoring duties were to converse with them in Spanish and use English only to help the Spanish along. Their regular classes were about word use, grammar rules, and pronunciation examples. The other two tutors focused on that.

It seemed odd to me that I would get the students who were further along speaking in Spanish. I was good with that; I had little experience with grammar rules that would help anyone.

Alejandro was having a good time talking it up with the students from Finland.

Alina and I walked over, and he introduced us. Two had been assigned to me; the guy was tall, like a basketball player, lanky, long blond thin hair, and blue eyes. She was my height, with blonde hair in braids, and her eyes were deep blue. Both were polite and unassuming.

Their Spanish accent made it hard to understand them. It was precise but blocky. We made small talk; they had a friendly, studious manner about them. I reminded them about our first session.

We left the reception, and the five of us took a cab to my place. When we arrived, I remembered that I had placed a bottle of white wine in the freezer tray. It was icy, not frozen. I let the bottle rest on the counter.

Santiago said he and Lorena had fun; they both danced with students from California. Santiago spoke with them with his English, he said, and learned about LA.

Alejandro had been with the students from Finland. He said that they had learned classroom Spanish from a professor from Spain. And were interested in Olmec culture. That was all Alejandro needed to hear.

I had a Swiss army knife and unscrewed the cork slowly. The bottle hissed and the cork came off. I set the bottle on the counter, and Alina pours us a drink.

She asked Lorena what she had said to the DJ.

“Pues. Que no era necesario comentar sobre cada selección. Que ponga una tras una, y que incluye musica norteaña.”

We were on the patio talking, and Alina got up and went inside. I followed her; we stepped into the bathroom and closed the door.

Moments later, we returned to the patio.

The talking had slowed down and Lorena said she needed to get home. Santiago stood and we walked toward the church, where cabs cruised by. Alina hailed a cab, they got in. We held hands and walked back to my place.

Inside she undressed and slipped into bed and pulled the bedsheet over herself. She wanted to be alone.

I went outside and cleaned up. Inside I ran water in the tub and adjusted the temperature to how she liked it.

I stood quiet by the bed, she sensed me.

“Que ondas, duut?”

She pulled the sheet away, and I took her hand and led her to the tub. She tested the water, and liked it, and stepped in and slashed water over herself and sunk below the water and came up with her hair draped over her head. She let water run off, some rolled over her breasts.

She parted her hair away from her face and gave me the look to join her. We sat in the tub; she was behind me, resting herself against the slope of the tub.

She gathered her hair, gave it a twist, and laid it over her shoulder and mine.

LOS ESTUDIANTES

Tuesday afternoon, I met the students for the first time. Fourteen of them in a classroom. We went over the materials and what Directora Dominguez had outlined.

I asked who spoke Spanish at home, eight raised their hands. How about with friends, three raised hands. I walked over to one of them and asked in Spanish for him to tell something about himself. He was the guy whom Alina had danced with at the reception. He asked me what I wanted him to say.

“Pues de donde eres, algo de tu familia, tu interés académico, participas en algun deporte?”

“Man, you want to say all that!” He smirked.

I looked at him like I didn’t understand, and walked over to the next person and he did speak some Spanish; it needed practice. The next was Maribel, the student I had danced with. She spoke Spanish like a translation from English; she pronounced her each word in Spanish with an English accent.

Maribel seemed open to learning, she had a nice smile with a little shyness. Another spoke Spanish and knew the rules, but it was halting and sounded like he was reading a grammar book.

I sat down and said that my role as their tutor was to help them put into practice the words and grammar they were learning in class. I said that the practice would be mainly conversation. First amongst ourselves, and when we are out exploring Xalapa. En español, I said and adjourn the class.

I went outside, and walked down the street from the Humanities building to a licuado fruit bar I would drop by. Clara was the owner, she had transformed the house garage into a licaudos bar. She was young, the mother of a cool teenage son, and an energetic twelve year old daughter. They all worked at the licuado bar.

The daughter, Melissa, worked in the afternoons. I had noticed that she kept a school tablet and would flip pages and write in it.

Her mother said, “Asi es ella, bien organizada, pero tiene su carácter.”

I tell Clara about the students I am tutoring and that I was looking for a place where students could pick up information, and for someone to help coordinate schedules. I tell her, that Melissa might be good for the job, and that I would pay her. Clara looked at me with one eyebrow slightly raised. She stepped away and came back with Melissa.

Right away, she says, “Hola Regalito.”

Her mom tells her what we had been talking about. A job, and before Clara could finish Melissa was jumping up and down. Clara looked at me and I saw the love for her daughter. Then Clara asked Melissa how she was going to manage her time.

“Mami, mira, me prioridad es la escuela, aquí, y el negocio. Y mami mas clientes.”

Clara looked at me and we shook hands. Melissa was bouncy, wanting to know what to do. I tell her that I would drop the following afternoon and we could go over things.

Going through the school to hire Melissa would've been a hassle, and probably no.

The next afternoon I meet up with Melissa. She was waiting and before I sat down she whirled a licuado de melon; sin asugar, hielo, y un poco de crema.

She knew how I ordered it, and one whole lime.

She brought the licuado over and sat down. She had her school table and showed me a page where she had drawn vertical and horizontal lines. Boxes in rolls and columns. On top of the first column she had handwritten Nombre. The next column was a place to enter a code. She had code for each visit, and a box to note when a student picked up information, and one column she name 'Ojo.'

I had seen enough. She was smart.

We worked out a system where students would check in with her for information. And she would use her school tablet to record and make notes on.

“vale, entonces?”

I tell her that she can come to our next class and describe the system and her job.

“Vale pues, cuando?” she asked.

“Jueves a'las seis.”

Melissa asked where in the college, and how much time she would have. I tell where and about how much time I struggled, and she said, “Vale, entonces quence minutos.”

I left and took a bus to the main campus and met up with Alina.

LICUADO

When I arrived on campus Alina was sitting on the bench we would use. She had a mongo in her Rio bag. I peeled it with my pocket knife. We sat there eating, and she said.

“Contrataste la chica del los licaudos, que nó?”

I had mentioned it before but we had not talk about it. But she sensed it.

I said, “Si.”

“Buena selección duut.” She said adjusting the lace of her Converse.

I tell her how Melissa was organized, and that she had a school tablet where she kept school work, and another tablet for the business, and one she had started for our visits out in Xalapa. I tell Alina that she would present her system to the students.

“Cuando?” And she offered to help Melissa get ready for her presentation. We got up and hugged, and she walked her to class.

I went to my place, it was a thirty minute walk. I remembered Maribel, from Colorado, once asking me where I found Melissa. I didn't her find I had said. She lives down the street and works at the licuado bar. And said that I had hired her.

I remembered students would tell me how attentive, smart and efficient, always smiling Melissa was. She was picking up some English. Melissa brought in business.

When I got home I sat out on the patio and wrote out the place we would visit.

Museo de Antropología de Xalapa—and noted that Alejandro would come along as a guide.

Mercado de Xalapa

Parque Juarez

Doña Chita's Fonda—

And a walk through the state capitol

I noted that we would only speak Spanish. I would ignore them when they spoke English.

PROFÉ CORDOVA

Profesor Cordova was presenting a lecture titled El Gran Choque. Santiago and Alejandro met up with me at the Humanities building. We walked up to the third level, and Santiago was telling us a joke in TV English. The way he spoke English was funnier than the joke. I laughed, and Santiago thought he had told a good joke. Alejandro didn't speak English, but he laughed to be polite.

When we reached the third level, on the balcony was Maribel with two other students. Hola Regalito, she says, with a nice smile. She didn't hold her look in my eyes, but she moved them slightly off.

I introduced Maribel to Santiago and Alejandro. I asked, "Y tus amigas?" She did not understand. I turned to her friends, Vanessa and Linda, from California. I introduced myself, Santiago, and Alejandro.

Maribel asked me in English if I would like to have coffee with them. I looked on pretending not to understand. She said, "Usted, gusta, tomar cafe con us." Wow, I thought frontier Mexican up against Southwest English.

"Como les parece, despues de nuestra proxima tutoria, vamos a un cafecito," I said. Santiago and Alejandro walked off to attend the lecture, and Maribel's friends walked down the stairs.

Maribel asked me if she could speak in English. I nodded yes.

"Where are you from?" South Texas, I answered. This time, she did hold her eyes on mine briefly. She attended the University of Colorado in Boulder and was a single mom with a two-year-old son who was staying with her mother in Denver.

She tried to flirt, but I tell her that I needed to get along and that we could continue, sobre un cafecito, after our next class.

When I arrived, the lecture hadn't started. I sat next to Alejandro and Santiago. On the wall facing the entrance, profesor Cordova with the help of a couple of students, unrolled a scroll that looked like butcher paper and taped it along half the length of the wall. It was a timeline with titles for periods in history, notes, and little colored drawings.

After profé Cordova was introduced, he got right to it. He stood where the timeline started—the Olmec. Geneticists agree; he said that teosinte gave birth to the corn we see today.

He'd joked and said that Coca-Cola was researching the use of corn syrup. "Tambien se puede encontrar en maquejaje, en cantidad de otros productos,

y tambien comida en lata.” He said.

He had a photo album, which he handed to a student to pass around. He moved along the line to the Maya. He said that they got their architecture and social structure directly from the Olmec. And he made a point to say that their languages were not related.

He moved along the timeline to the Zapotec. Santiago showed us his watch; el profé had six minutes left, but he didn't seem bothered by the time. He continued on to explain how the Zapotecs developed a calendar and a logograph system for writing.

The focal point on the timeline was El Choque, which he didn't get to. The class professor had stood, he had a schedule to keep, and thanked Professor Cordova.

The lecture was over, the class ended with polite applause, and students went off to other classes.

We went up to El Profé. He was jovial and knew a lot about Mesoamerica, the clash, and the scramble for power set loose by the arrival of the Spaniards.

I told him that I had a question about the timeline.

“Cual punto an el cronograma?” He asked,

I said El Choque.

“Claro...” He said, thinking, and invited us to meet him at Parque los Berros on Saturday morning to talk more. He lived nearby and would walk to the park.

We gave him a thumbs up.

TUTOR CONTINÚA

The next afternoon was our second class, and we went over the schedule and the places to visit.

Aro and Kata, the Finnish students, called me over, and Aro asked me something in Spanish. I could not help myself and chuckled. He turned to Kata. She smiled, but not amused. I looked at her and apologized.

She spoke Spanish well, was precise, had a stiff rhythm, but her voice was sincere. She wanted to know how to ask for directions. How to stop someone and ask.

I placed her slightly to my side and in front of me. I walked up to her, saying, “Hola, perdone la molesta. Buscamos ‘ta y ta’ nos puede orientar en este mapa?”

Kata said something to Aro; he had an army backpack and pulled out a Finnish-to-English dictionary and another English-to-Spanish dictionary.

“Molest?” Kata asked in English.

I understood her. I shook my head and say that the word molest in English carries a sexual reference. In Spanish, the word molesta is not seen as sexual.

I gave them an example. “Ay, que molesta son los estudiantes.” They got it, saying, Ya ya.

Maribel was with her Colorado group and asked me over. She had a question about the schedule. She said that the information on the places to be visited was in Spanish. I asked her to show me. I looked at it and said that it was in Spanish. I heard some chuckles from her group. She looked at me, trying not to chuckle herself. I felt the moment was right and sat next to her; the group was seated in a loose circle.

I reminded them that they are in Mexico where Spanish is spoken; and that they attend classes on basic rules, usage, and pronunciation. I tell them that I was one of three tutors; the other two help with that. Here we will practice Spanish in conversation.

I tell then about the visits on the schedule, and that a guide will be at each visit. I remind them to read the information they have, that it will help them ask questions and speak with the guide.

I went over to the four students from California, who were seated at a table, and sat with them. Linda said that they heard what I had said to the

group Colorado. About being here to learn Spanish and that they had read the information. She said in Spanish.

I asked about Stevie; he was missing from the group, and Oscar, Stevie's buddy, said that he had a date. Linda and Vanessa let out a wooo whoo.

They were an alert and fun bunch. They attended UC Davis. Oscar said that he came with his parents from Jalisco when he was a boy. His family worked in the almond orchards and grape fields.

Linda and Vanessa's fathers were cousins and came as youngsters from Durango. They lived in San Jose, and Oscar lived in Stockton. They spoke Spanish at home, but among themselves, they spoke California style Spanish, not Tejano. They were upbeat.

Vanessa was studious, had a nice smile, and spoke Spanish. Before we adjourned, I asked everyone to check in with Melissa at the juice bar to confirm the visits on the schedule and receive updates.

Afterwards, Maribel came up to me and asked, "Listo para un cafecito." I said, "Yes."

Vanessa and Linda had met Maribel the day after they arrived in Xalapa and they became buddies. We walked out, and on the way to the licuado bar, we stopped at a bakery and picked up two each of molotes, hojaldre, and empanadas de piña.

We continued to the juice bar, and I asked Linda and Vanessa about Stockton. "Hot," they said.

When we arrived, Melissa was at the counter with a school book. Hola Regalito, She said. I introduced them, and Melissa said that she remembered seeing their names.

She said, "Un momento," and went into the house.

She came back with a tablet and a folder.

"Aqui, sus nombres," she said, flipping to a page with the schedule and saying, "Bueno, aqui en esta página veo que en el horario sus nombres no aparece confirmando ninguna visita."

They turned to me for help, and I looked away. They had to deal with Melissa. She was organized, quick, and cheerful, always smiling.

Melissa took our orders and handed us a plate for the pastry. The place had three small round tables, and behind the counter were three blenders and a

small sink. They'd whirled fresh fruit with milk or crema, cane sugar, and ice and whirled into a liquado. In front of the counter where five stools.

I asked them what they were studying. Linda said that after graduating, she was on to law school. Vanessa and Maribel were into history, but Maribel seemed interested in English and American literature. She mentioned Shakespeare, Steinbeck, Faulkner, Updike, and Vonnegut. I was familiar with Steinbeck.

Maribel asked what I thought of Shakespeare. I said that I had only flipped through pages at the biblioteca. She gave me a little hand roll to continue. I did not know enough about him, I say, but I was reading other stuff. I said that I would like to read Steinbeck's *East of Eden*.

Melissa came over with our liquados and napkins. I emptied the bag of pastry onto the plate, and I asked Melissa to take a piece. She picked up a hojaldre, broke it in half, and went off with a skip behind the counter to clean up.

A woman with her two kids walked in and came up to the counter. Melissa knew them; they ordered liquados de melon, pa llevar.

I asked Maribel and Vanessa what they were studying in their history class. Vanessa said, "Ah, you know, early colonial America, the Louisiana Purchase, expanding south and west."

Linda asked me which school I was a student at. I said, "None." She said you're not a student at a college or university. I said that I was not enrolled anywhere as a student.

Maribel sat back, narrowed her eyebrows, and held a small smile. In disbelief, she said. "You are not a student anywhere." I said, No.

If I were still in Texas, I said, that I would have graduated high school a couple of months ago. I sensed a flash come over them.

Maribel asked me if I study history. I told her that I was interested in what Vanessa had said about colonial America and the expansion south and west. In what way, she asked?

I said that I had attended some lectures given by both Mexican and American historians. And I had some discussions with them, and done some readings.

From that, I see that the movement to the South was driven by cotton and the right to own slaves, and the movement to the West, was the glitter of gold, a fast way out of poverty, but first they had to remove the Indians.

I had come to understand that this drove people to move south and west.

Maribel looked at me.

“That’s different from what we were taught in class.”

I shrugged my shoulders.

Vanessa said that she was uncomfortable with the way that the expansion portrays Mexico. Saying that "it’s presented like a 30-minute TV show with commercials, you know."

Linda added that, “It is always guns, being macho, a hero and a savior.”

I moved the conversation to the schedule. They were interested in el Museo de Antropología de Xalapa and el Mercado de Xalapa.

I tell’em that el Mercado was my favorite place to learn about food. Linda said she couldn’t wait. I say that they could go on their own before our group visit.

I reminded them that a guide would be at each visit—along with a friend, Alejandro, whom you met at the reception. He’ll be our Museo guide. They remembered him, and I tell them that he was about to graduate, and that he knew a lot about Mesoamerica.

Melissa came over and showed us a sheet of paper laid out on a grid with their names. They looked at their own calendars and wrote down the dates.

Melissa noticed that Linda had not confirmed the visit to Parque Juarez. I heard Linda say that she was visiting friends in DF that day. I stood and Melissa took my seat, and they continued organizing the visits.

When I got up to leave, Maribel asked me if I would like to walk her home. I teased her, saying, “To Colorado?” She gave me a shy smile and said, “Maybe.”

OTRA VEZ

Lorena and I were at La Biblioteca one afternoon, reading silently from one book, 'Las Venas Abiertas de América Latina' which was not allowed for check-out.

At times, Lorena would explain to me about what I didn't understand in Spanish; this slowed things down, but she was good with it because it also helped her, she would say.

Out the window, Lorena sees Alina walking up to the library. She walked in with a tiny spring in her steps, took a seat at the table, and smiled hola to us.

She sees what we were reading. "Vaya, ese libro, es todo un estudio, Las Venas Abiertas de América Latina. Imaginate con ese título, bueno vale. Tengo novedades."

She held her hand on one side of her face and said she had been approved to submit a design project—a big deal for her path toward architecture design.

Lorena gave her a silent applause and was happy for her. I gave her two thumbs up.

"Lo celebramos en Boca Andreá." I said.

"Okay, duut." She was not getting any better at saying, dude.

Lorena mentioned a cove on the northern end of the beach, where Santiago and her—she paused, didn't say any more, and then winked at Alina.

Lorena looked at the time, saying to Alina, "Vamos, vamos!" And left for their class.

I went down the stairs to the basement and walked to the area with magazine racks. The staff person, Sergio, remembered me from before and knew what I was looking for. He placed Look magazine on the table, and I turned to the lead story, "Seeking the Magic Mushroom" by Robert Gordon Wasson, a Wall Street banker who studied mushrooms as a hobby.

This time, I read carefully and took notes. The more I read, the less I liked the way Wasson said that he was the first Westerner to report his experience with psilocybin in Mexico, in the mountain with the quaint people as he reported.

About the first Westerner thing—Mushroom grew in other regions, I imagined the Spaniards, the French, and others who roamed all over the Americas. They eat mushrooms, they must've reported in their journal back to Europe.

Wasson had a photographer with him, and promised Maria that he would not publish pictures of her. He betrayed her. In the magazine there were pictures of Maria Sabina, en viaje, in communion.

The publication drew a lot of attention on Huautla. Maria's house was burned to the ground by villagers upset by all the commotion she had brought to their community.

PARQUE PUBLICO

Saturday morning I'm was up early, and Alina was still asleep. I needed to get ready to meet up with el Profé. I tried to wake her, saying that we needed to get going.

She moaned and kicked the bedsheet, stretched out her arms, and the sheet came off. She lay there, I pulled on her ankle.

"Okay, duut, me puedo quédar aquí?" I tell her no.

I needed to get her home.

She got off the bed and went to wash up, and we got dressed and walked out to catch a bus.

At the bus stop to her house, los callejeros were there to meet us. I let them know that I was in a hurry.

We ran up the street. Alina started with a jog and then picked up her pace with long strides. I stayed slightly behind to admire her. She was wearing her Converse black high tops; the rebozo was around her waist, and the ends flew like flags. Los Callejeros were leading the way.

When we arrived, we took a breather.

Alina went in and returned with water for us and the dogs. She knew that I was in a hurry, and we kissed and hugged. I told the callejeros to stay with Alina and I left and ran down the street to the bus stop.

I arrived at Parque los Berros and walked around. I see Alejandro; we greet, and I ask about Santiago.

"Quizas nos espera," he said, and I followed him.

Across the gazebo, seated at a bench, was Santiago reading the newspaper, the sports section. He was into soccer; he knew the professional and college teams, the players, the game analysis, and the stories. He played in an amateur league and coached a kids' team.

We got to talking while we waited for el profé. Alejandro said that Kata, the Finnish student—that she had flirted with him.

"Okay, dude, y entonces?" I asked, and for him to continue.

Santiago folded the newspaper, and Alejandro said that Kata asked him to meet him at the juice bar. She wanted to check in with Melissa to confirm her visits. And asked him to join her.

We talked about that. Alejandro and Santiago were overanalyzing what it could mean.

I said to Alejandro, “Tranquilo, no anticipes nada; relax, dude.”

Then we heard a voice saying, “Buenos días, que tal.”

It was El Profé Cordova, he had come off a path. We do our holas and abrazos. El profé had a bag of fresh pastry from his neighborhood bakery; it was still warm. He also had a large thermos filled with hot coffee with sugar and cream and four small cups stacked over each other.

Santiago had a question for el profé, he nodded, poured us coffee, and tore open the bag of pastry. Santiago mentioned how he had said, in his class lecture, that the Olmec influenced the Toltec, Maya, and Aztec, yet the Olmec language was distinct and not related to the others. How did they communicate?

“Ah, claro, buena observación, Santiago.” El profé said.

It was trade he said; and that the merchants on their trade routes learned the languages spoken along the way. And they kept information and passed some on.

“Comercio!” Santiago said. Alejandro looked at him, saying, Asi es.

I came to see trade routes as networks, moving things and ideas. The traveling merchants were the connectors.

El profé said that they influenced trade policy and currency exchange. Then he stood and invited us for a walk. We stopped at a statue.

“Su nombre de nacimiento es Miguel Gregorio Antonio Ignacio Hidalgo y Costilla Gallaga Mandarte y Villaseñor.” He said faking an exhausted smile.

In the statute he held a banner, looking one way, and pointing the other, it was a call for independence.

El profé said, “Mas bien conocido como Miguel Hidalgo, quien impulsa el movimiento cual inicia al guerra de independencia de México con su eslogan, el Grito de Dolores.”

He knew all that stuff and told the weight of the story in plain terms, making you see the scope of it and come to understand.

He was mostly objective and neutral, but at times his annoyance showed at the Spaniards over the conquest.

We continued on along a path and walked down to a pond. We sat on benches next to each other. El Profé remained standing and pointed to a place beyond the park. He told us that near where he pointed was where Cortes came through, with his gang pushing everything over. Stealing food and taking women.

He came with hundreds of thousands of warriors, he said, provided by the tribes pissed off at the Aztecs over human tributes and taxes. He said that they marched on with Cortes to Tenochtitlan to get their revenge, and a share of the wealth. It led to destruction, subjugation and humiliation, he said and stopped.

I had never learned about that in my school days in Texas. History was about Mexico invading Texas, the Alamo, Davy Crockett, and Santa Ana being captured in a surprise attack and humiliated.

That Mexico invaded Texas, and that the heroes of the Alamo fought bravely for independence and liberty.

I had come to see it as silly because at the time Tejas was part of Méjico. Invade? After defeating Santa Ana's army, the cry for freedom rang out, and the newcomers formed the Republic of Texas to bring in slaves for the cotton fields.

And the Mexican Tejanos became tenants in the new country, and lived over there. That is what I was taught in school.

El profé sat down and talked about his son, saying that he played soccer and had a game he had to attend. Santiago asked to join him, and they left.

Alejandro and I walked off to catch a bus. We boarded separate buses.

At my place, I reviewed my notes, and wrote down what I could remember from our visit.

BOCA ANDREÁ

We had talked about it, studied maps, and made plans, and now we were at the bus terminal in Xalapa, standing next to each other like tourists. Alina was in jeans, a t-shirt gathered around her waist to one side and tied in a knot. She wore her Converse high tops, and we had our Panama hats and sunglasses on.

We met there; she arrived by taxi and I by street bus.

She carried a bulky knitted bag over her shoulder, held a handbag, and her suitcase was on the floor. I had my duffle bag and my new Rio bag, which she noticed right away.

“¿Cuándo, dónde, quien lo hizo?”

We were next in line, and say that I would tell her on the bus. She ordered two tickets to Palma Sola; the stop at Boca Andreá was about two miles before.

The agent looked at her suitcase and said that she would have to check it in. She did not like that. She wanted her maleta with her.

“Veo en el boleto que en José Cardel hay cambio de bús. Señor, que mala suerte llegar a Boca Andreá sin mi maleta. Imaginece!”

She looked at the agent and smiled. It was too much for the dude. I placed twenty pesos on the counter, and he gave us a nod, and went to the luggage room, he returned with a hand-sized bright yellow tag with Palma Sola Parada en Boca Andreá handwritten in black. He taped it on her maleta and said, “La tiqueta amarilla llama atención, que en José Cardel, que su maleta sera traladara al bús hacia Palma Sola, con parada en Boca Andreá.”

I paid for the tickets and Alina took them along with her claim stub, and thanked the agent.

We boarded the bus, and she gave me the eye to take the window seat. She sat and pulled out our budget notebook and wanted to know how to note the twenty pesos I had slipped the agent.

“Marcalo como mordida,” I said.

She laughed out loud that other passages noticed, stretching their necks to have a look. Her eyes shined with tears she held back from laughing so loud; she lifted her thumbs up, saying, “Todo bien, todo bien.”

She looked at me, shaking her head, smiling, trying to say “Duut, duut, algo de callejero en tiii!” But she could not quite finish because she small laughs going on.

I said, Alina—Si, she said, coming down from her laugh. I reached in my Rio bag, pulled out a rolled-up canvas, and handed it to her. She held it up, and a coral-colored Rio bag unfolded. A gift for her.

The canvas had been softened and buffed. The stitching was done with three colored threads: yellow, green, and maya blue.

The stitching for the river, la trenza fronteriza, was similar to the original one I had given her mom and the new one I carried. I tell her that the seamstress' shop was near the Humanities building.

Alina looked at me in complete surprise! She stood to show off the bag over her shoulder. Some applauded, and the passengers around her were saying, “Que bonito tejido.”

She gave me two thumbs up, sat down, and kissed me on the cheek. I tell her that maybe they think it was a marriage proposal. She poked my side and whispered in my ear, “Que piensen lo que piensen.”

It was Thursday morning, and the bus was rolling out from Xalapa. We would return the following Monday afternoon.

Moving away from made it hard to have a full view of the city surrounded by mountains.

We passed Rinconada, and José Cardel was a few minutes away. She placed her knit-woven shoulder bag on my lap, and her new Rio bag on her lap. She sorted through the woven bag and picked out things to put in her Rio bag.

When we arrived at the terminal in José Cardel, Alina looked at her watch; it was about nine. We got our things together, waited for passengers to get off, and then stepped out.

She went and stood by the bus cargo door, waiting to see her maleta with the yellow tag. The cargo door opened, there was her maleta, and it was loaded onto a cargo cart. She followed the cart rolling along to where it was left against the wall next to the storage room door.

Alina stopped one of the luggage guys and showed him our tickets and her luggage claim stub.

She wanted to know why her maleta with the yellow tag would be left outside the luggage room. The cargo guy was no help; he shrugged his shoulders. Before he walked in, I motioned him over, and we stepped aside.

“Como la vez,” I said, and slipped him ten pesos.

He walked back to the cart and took Alina's maleta inside.

She pulled the budget notebook out. She had made place to record moditas. We had two moditas entries, for 30 pesos, and we had not accounted for propinas. I mentioned that and she said, “Es cierto.”

We were just getting started I thought, and we had two moditas and some propinas. She kept the budget account and I carried the money.

Across the terminal, before a line of trees, were women with baskets selling food covered in warm towels. We went to check them out. But we still looked like tourist. I removed my sunglasses and she removed hers. I tilted our hats back and we walked up to one of the women. She pull back the warm towels to her enfrijoladas, the warm vapors carried home cooked beans and corn tortillas and I looked at Alina smiled

; I ordered six wrapped in butcher paper.

Another woman had enchiladas, and she told me that she mixes in her own chili sauce with the masa, that her tortillas, Estan enchiladas antes que llegen al comal. I looked on at them stacked and she handed me one. That was the first I held and enchilada in my hand. No dripping, she said that the tortillas go on a hot comal. The masa and chili sauce cooked together. Before serving it was sprinkled with cheese then folded a couple times and ready to eat. I wanted to take her basket; but I sensed Alina and only ordered sies enchiladas sencillas, and a serving of her salsa. The enchiladas were wrapped in butcher paper.

“Duut, a quien mas has invitado a Boca Andreá?”

I laughed, and put the food in my bag. I was still laughing and the women were all smiling. I looked at Alina and she gave me the look fur us to walk over to a shady spot under a tree. She removed her Rio bag and held it out for me to hold. It had some weight like carrying around a melon and some bananas. She looked a the bag from different angles and reached for it, and slipped it over her shoulder.

“Me gusta bastante, duut!”

The bus to Palma Sola had arrived. Some folks got off and the luggage guys came out with a cart. Alina handed me her hand bag, and with her Rio bag and woven bag over her shoulders she walked along with the rolling cart to the bus

cargo bay. The bay door opened and her maleta with the yellow tag was placed near the front because we were getting off before Palma Sola. She gave the cargo guy a smile and a thumbs up.

The driver tapped the horn, and we were the last to board. Alina showed the driver our tickets, and they spoke, and she came and sat down and leaned back. She turned to me with her eyes closed saying, “Ay, que lio con mi maleta. Imaginate!”

She placed my Rio bag on her lap and made room for some of her stuff. She found the food and lifted it up emphasizing its weight, and handed it to me.

I could smell the chili in the tortillas cooked to almost charred. I pulled one out, she looked at me and I offered her a bite.

“Pero que rico, tan sencillo y delicioso. Ojo, la comida esta manchando tu bolson.”

I offered her the last bite of the enchilada.

We sat listening to the bus on the road, and at passengers in conversations. Out the window was the Gulf of Mexico.

I remembered the storm and being rescued by Capitán Cruz onto his fishing boat from Nicaragua. The Gulf waters where mean that day. Then the day opened to the sky and sunrise and sunset were over the water. I worked above and below deck.

Out the window we past small plots of land with crops, villages, and along the coastline, cliffs, and sandy beaches in places.

I noticed the driver looking in the mirror, and I nudged Alina to look up. The driver let her know that the stop for Boca Andreá was coming up. We get our things together.

The driver stopped the bus off the road and went out to open the cargo door. Her maleta was there; she jumped applauding, and gave the driver a little hug.

The bus drove off, kicking up dust. Alina waved her hands across our faces like shooining flies away.

I handed her my Rio bolson, and took her knit woven bag, I had my duffle bag and carried her maleta.

We crossed the rural road and walked to a large hut with a hand-painted sign that read ‘Restaurante y Hotel.’

PLAYA

Inside the restaurant, a young woman, Sonya, came up to greet us. We introduced ourselves, Alina said that we were interested in a cabaña for two nights.

We followed Sonya outside, around back, to an open area with eight cabañas spaced out like a small village amid foliage, and trail to a grove.

Four were vacant, and she showed us one. Alina walked around and gave me the no-look.

“Quizas algo mas amplio.”

Sonya said that they had the cabaña matrimonial vacant. We went to see it. We walked around. In a separate area, I noticed a small space with a knee-high refrigerator under a counter. The sink was against the wall and next to it a stove top unit with three burner, and a little toaster oven. There was a nook with a table for two next to the window.

Alina checked out the bathroom; there was a mirror and a sink below it, and a tub that was built for the cabin. It was made of concrete, the surface was polished smooth and trimmed in tile, and the bottom under the shower had little ridges for feet to grip.

She heard Sonya mention, No hot water. Alina paused and turned to me, her eyes saying, No hot water.

I tell her in English that I would heat water for her and make the tub water warm.

“Y la ducha?” She asked.

“Pues, una lluvia de aqua natural, fresca, muy rica.” I said, and I that would let the water roll of me and warm it for her to use. She stepped aside, and turned to Sonya, gave her a thumbs up, and said that we would take the cabin.

She understood every word I said in English, but that did not stop her from disliking the sound of it.

I walked out with Sonya to the restaurant to pay. I asked her about the food. She said that they had fish, shrimp, crabs, and calamari. Her mom, she said, was known for huachinango, which was prepared in banana leaves, and finished on the grill over a flame. She said that they could grill chiles and onions if I liked, and pineapple. I was sold, and Sonya said that the preparation takes time and that she could take the order now for that evening. I said that I would check with Alina.

When I returned she was on the bed. Her Converse and jeans were off. She

was going over our budget and expense notebook. I handed her the hotel receipt, and put all the money we had on the bed, and dozed off.

Later I sensed her sitting on the edge of the bed. She had her back towards me, tapping me on my leg saying, “Okay duut, una sola trenza.”

She shook and tossed her hair loose and handed me a wood comb to comb her hair out to the ends. When I finished she skipped off to the bathroom and returned with a towel dampened on one end. She rubbed the towel over and under her hair and handed me the towel to continue.

When I was done, she tossed her hair in the air, and with her hands over her head she parted down her back into two strands. She held one strand out for me to hold, and twisted the other straight down and held it in place with a rubber band. I did the same with the other strand.

Her hair was a handful, like a twist of her rebozo. She placed my hand over hers and made the first couple of braids. I made the rest.

She reached back and looped one rubber band midway up. She went to the bathroom to look at her trenza, saying that she had a new bikini. “Te lo muestro, espera.”

She skipped to her maleta, pulled out her bikini and dashed back to the bathroom. I heard say, “Gracias por poner me maleta sober el ropero.”

She came out and walked toward the bed, her trenza made her face seem roomier, her eyes larger, and even her smile had more space. She modeled her bikini to cumbia dance steps.

“Okay, listos para la playa.” She said.

It was too much for me, I got off the bed and lifted her in my arms and laid her on the bed and lavished her.

“Muy galan, que hermoso comienzo a Boca Andreá.” I remember her saying.

We got moving, she got her jeans on over her bikini, t-shirt, Converse high tops, her Panama hat and sunglasses. I carried her woven knit bag with our stuff.

We went out, and along the way Alina asked me what I thought of her bikini. I said that I was not paying attention to her bikini.

She got ahead of me and turned stepping backwards and gave me a couple of fake jabs. I caught her jabs, and they had a snap.

We stopped at the restaurant to place our order for dinner.

Sonya was not in, but her mother, Doña Apolina greeted us.

We hadn't met, I introduced myself and Alina, and I commented on how their names had a similar ring. Alina smiled, and Doña Apolina smiled to be polite.

She said that her daughter mentioned a meal.

Alina said that we were interested in her huachinango, and asked if her menu included calamari en sus tinta con arroz.

"Claro, tenemos huachinango, calamari, camarón y cangrejo. Hoy mismo del mar."

They talked and Alina settled on our meal and time.

We walked to the road; there was no traffic. We crossed and followed a path down the cliff. I was in front of her as the dude she could fall on in case she slipped.

We went along the sloping path, and we noticed a trail across the brush. We went to check it out and came to a small clearing. We stood there, looking out at the Gulf. We had to hold on to our Panama hats.

I rolled out both our large towels on the ground, and we sat down.

"Que vez?" I asked.

"Pincel, por todos lados."

I tell her that we could not be seen from the path that led to the beach.

"Que lindo." She said and stood, removed her converse off, slipped her jeans off, and slipped her Converse back on and stood.

The sun and the Gulf were behind her. Her t-shirt was over her pale pink bikini, with her Panama hat and sunglasses on.

We headed to the beach, and right there she removed her Converse, hat and sunglasses, took her t-shirt off and used it cover her sunglasses and placed her Converse on top.

She went and played with the waves reaching the shore.

Alina, in her bikini, in the sun gave her skin the color of piloncillo shavings. Her bikini top was a small piece of cloth over each breast and there to cover, not support. The bottom was simple, snug, and covering half of her naglas.

She stepped into the water, past small breaking waves, dove into a wave that was forming, and swam along the calm water the wave left. I swam along with her. We dove into coming waves and swam along after the wave moved on.

We caught one and rode it toward the shore. We shook the water off and went up the path to our spot. I handed her a hotel towel.

I cleared one of the large towels on the ground, bowed to her, and said that her place in the sun was ready.

She sat on the towel, and took her bikini top off. She laid backside up. With one hand behind her, she motioned for me to oil and massage her.

“Si mi princesa,” I said.

She knew I was admiring her, and twirled her finger for me to getting going. Her arms were resting along her body, her head and terenza to one side. I rubbed coconut oil on my hands, and started with her shoulders and neck.

“Princesa, siento tensión en sus hombros,” I said.

She knew I was making fun, and became lax. I oiled her backside. I used my thumbs to massage the muscle along her spine and around her waist. I skipped her booty and started with her ankles, and up to her firm calves.

She had fallen asleep. I even folded her leg up with her toes against my chest and massaged her calves that way. I gave her thigh a shake and she didn't respond. I massaged each thigh up to her booty. I oiled her booty, under and around her bikini bottom. They were two sunny mounds, curving down to her thighs. Firm like corn masa. They held their shape.

I slapped her nalga, and she turned over. Total different area to massage. She reached for her sunglasses. I asked her to wait, and to keep her eyes closed while I massaged her face. Then she could put them on. She reached for her Panama hat, and placed it on top of her head to shade her eyes. She gave me a staged dismissive gesture to continue.

I dabbed oil on her face, massage her temples, across her forehead, and over her eyebrows. I massage gently over her eyelids. With my thumbs, I pressed up softly and across her cheeks, along her neck, and over her shoulders. I didn't touch her breasts, I just looked at them.

Alina reached around and slapped my butt and looked at me from under her Panama hat, without a smile, and in a low voice that the wind took, she said, “Duuut..” It was too much for me.

I lifted her hips up and slipped her bikini bottom off. Her oil was on me. I stroked her eyebrows. We kissed, and I couldn't help myself; I know I growled, and I slid her on top of me. We settled in, and she leaned down and whispered in my ear, “Buscas algo, quizas esto.”

She teased me, brushing her breasts across my lips. I was on the ground on my back, absorbing her energy. The Gulf was out there, Alina was on top of me, and high above clouds passed by.

She held my hands to support herself over my hips. We released more energy—dissolved into one another.

She rested over me. I told her that we had probably scared some small animals.

She slid off, and we laid on our backs, holding hands, looking into the sky and breathing with it. She slips her sunglasses on, and lowered her hat over her face, and we took a nap.

Moments later, I felt the sun and woke. I lifted her arm to turn over, and she did. I oiled her backside, her butt—she turned to me, saying, “Te gustan, eh,” and gave her booty a wiggle for me to continue and oil her legs. I oiled her down to her feet and toes. I slapped her nalga and tell her that I was going to walk around.

The ridge we were on faced the Gulf. I paced out about 150 yards in length and 40 to 50 yards wide. The side edges were steep; we were near the northern edge and about 100 feet from the path that sloped down to the beach.

I went back to our spot, and Alina laid there with her backside up like a loaf of bread out of the oven. I said, “Alina, hey dude, te estas tostando. Rotación chica, tostar equal.”

She turned over, slipped her sunglasses on, and reached for her Panama hat. She twirled her finger for me to oil her up. She lifted her hat and said, “Duut, no solo mis senos, todo mi cuerpo.”

I was on my knees next to her, and I stood laughing, saying “No solo mis senos.”

She motioned for me to continue. I oiled her up—her entire body. No special attention on her breasts. I asked her how she felt and she umm...

I tell her that I was going for a walk along the beach.

I walked northward and came to a mist from crashing waves. I saw the rock cove Lorena had told us about. I looked back to see our spot and it looked small; I did not see anyone, and Alina was not up, standing.

I walked closer to the rock cove, and walked into the water and saw large waves breaking down around it. The water around it was good enough to swim

in. I swam out, and from my angle, I saw part of the entrance. I swam to shore and walked inside the cove, into waist deep water, hefty waves entered from the Gulf of Mexico, everything seemed to heave even the sky out the cove.

The rock cove was shaped like a huge turtle shell.

I walked back to our spot and there was no one on the beach; seagulls flew by in groups, and sandpipers skimmed along the shore. The sun was strong.

When I returned, Alina laid there nude, still face up, with her Panama hat covering face to her Hollywood sunglasses.

She had not turned, and her skin was about to burn. I oiled my hands, she lifted her hat, and eyed me. I oiled her tummy, thighs, and feet. She felt a ting, her skin had too much sun. I twirled my finger for her to turn over. I oiled her backside.

She tapped on the towel for me to lay back, then she swung her leg over my waist. She sat on me and leaned forward, sliding her breasts over my chest, and moaned in one ear, and in my other she said, “A la cabaña, tenemos cena a las siete.”

She kissed my ear and stood, we got our stuff together. Going up the path, Alina was in front of me, I was that dude to catch her if she slipped, and be the body to cushion her if she fell. I didn't care if she fell on me.

Even in her loose jeans her booty stepped along. She knew I was looking, and give me a wiggle sway up the path. We crossed the road and walked to our cabin. On the porch, she took her Converse, jeans, and t-shirt off and laid in the hammock in her bikini.

I went inside and heated some water, and ran water in the tub. I grabbed a towel and a wet wash towel and took them to her.

I returned to check on the tub and turned the water off, and added the two pots of hot water. The water seemed okay to me. I heated more water and went outside, and she was sitting on the hammock and had undone her trenza.

I took her hand and led her to the tub. She dipped her fingers in the water and gave me the look that it was not warm enough. I added more hot water, she tested it, slipped her bikini off, and stepped into the tub.

The bikini left faint tan-lines because out on Boca Andreá on our spot in the sun she was naked most of the time.

I took my notes on Huautla and went outside and sat on a chair next to the hammock and rested by feet on it. I transferred what I had on pieces of paper to a note tablet. I was getting used to tablets, Santiago and Alina and Lorena and Alejandro all used them to note, sketch and write and kept things.

I had a copy of an academic paper written by a former university student from a village near Huautla, who was a friend of Alejandro and el Profé.

The paper was written on a typewriter, and the print copy in places had faded. I noted which parts I needed help with. The paper described the different types of mushrooms. And made a point to say how some gave the ritual a bad look, casting it as witchcraft.

I got to thinking about what I had read in Watson's Look Magazine story on Huautla. Some praised his work, the research, and his journey into the quint 'indigenous' use of mushrooms. The more I thought about it, the more it stirred me inside.

I went to check on Alina and she was asleep in the tub, her head resting on the curved slop.

I said, "Girl Friend," She liked the sound of the word girl. Sometimes I'd say Girrl, and she'd say girl better than dude.

"Girl friend," I said. "We are having dinner in a few minutes."

I reached in and pulled the drain plug. She stood, and the bath water flowed off her hair over the small of her backside. She turned the shower on and cold water rained down on her, she stepped back saying, "aye aye esta fria!"

I stepped in the tub and stood under the shower head and stood her in front of me. The water fell on me first and took some the chill, she felt the water okay and got closer and rinsed her body and hair. We stepped out and I handed her a towel. She picked up her bikini and laid it on the edge of the tub.

We dressed and did not talk because we did not want to be late for dinner.

BOCA ANDREÁ CENA

Alina was in a purple skirt with an embroidered band above her knees, sandals, long sleeve lime-yellow leotard, and her rebozo. I was shaved and polished, and wearing guayabera, and the new sandals she has surprised me with.

We walked out to the restaurant and Alina asked, “Cuántas veces, duut?” She wanted to know how many time we had made love. I said, Alina, we arrived in Boca Andreá and checked into the hotel around noon, today.

I asked her for the current time, she looked at her watch and said, “Las sies cincuenta y cinco.”

I reminded her that midnight was in five hours. She shrugged her shoulders, and looked at me like I hadn’t said anything.

“Cuántas veces, hoy, Duut?”

She was not going to let it go. We stopped walking and turned toward each other and again she asked,

“Cuántas veces?”

I told her in English, “Fourteen.” She laughed.

“Ah duut, cartorce, por cierto? No lo creo.”

I asked her number. She didn’t have one—then she said,veintiuno.”

We laughed.

We knew that we were not going to agreed on a number. She nodded and said, “A la basura con eso.”

When we walked into the restaurant, I noticed how her skin had a dorado glow. The green in her eyes adjusting to the soft light in the restaurant.

Sonya welcomed us, and we sat at a table. She said that our meal would be ready soon. Alina asked Sonya if she could bring a bottle of wine. Sonya nodded okay.

Alina dashes off to the cabin, and returned with a bottle of wine and her design project notebook. No corkscrew; I used my pocket knife and opened the bottle, and Sonya brought out two glasses. Alina poured one glass half way up, and we sipped from it.

She wanted to talk about her design project, which she had to present to a university committee—in four weeks. She was stumped, stuck and needed help.

“Mira, revisa esto. Dime que ves? Ando enredada.”

She slid her notebook in front of me. I had seen it before, only parts, and it was in front of me.

She waited for me to say something, maybe 20 seconds went by, and she said. “Okay duut, dime, que ondas?”

“Espera, un momento.” I tell her, and flipped through the pages. And asked her where was the one she started on the bus from Veracruz to Xalapa. She said that it was at the cabin in her Rio bag. She wanted to run out and get it, I held her hand.

“Alina, girl, relax.” I said and she smiled and sat back.

She wanted to know what I thought of her notebook.

I flat out tell her that it seemed bogged down by many details—side notes, dimensions, calculations which she had to do—but her sketches were mere outlines with nothing quite defined, like afraid to show themselves.

Unlike her sketches in the other notebook. She made a slight attempt to go get the notebook. I looked at her and she let it go.

Reminded her that in the notebook she had back in her Rio bag, were idea, strong sketch, was una plaza de patios. She had described it as something alive, showing how each piece could be scaled and rearranged to look like or be a public space. She had it pictured in her mind.

“Recuerdas Girlfriend.”

Her eyes were expanding, She remembered.

On that bus trip to Xalapa we had talked about it. Instead a mother patio with a partial roof.

She remembered and said.

“Su alrededor, bueno, algo amplio, y sus patios pequeños se pueden utilizar durante fiestas,” she said, and paused to think.

The she nudged me to say something.

I tell her that what she had pictured in her mind on the bus trip from Veracruz, was not the notebook in front of me.

She said that she had to work out structural strength, material, and design. I asked her what not have design first, and structure to support the design. She took a sip of wine and sat back. I took a sip.

And she talked about drawing each piece separately, scale, and be rearranged to become one mother zocalo.

Then she said. “Quizas un escenario mayor, y su alrededor otros pequiños, algo asi.”

“Y fondas.”

“Duut, fondas. Mmm...” She gave it a possibility.

I opened her notebook to a blank page and handed her a pencil and with my hand on hers we drew a smooth bold line.

She looked at me and was more beautiful than the moment before.

“Ya capte la onda, duut!” And began to sketch.

Sonya came out with the calamari con arroz in one large bowl with two spoons. The rice was light purple in color, calamari slices, some charred, were mixed in with the rice.

Alina feed me a spoonful. I told her that it was the best calamari con arroz I had yet tasted.

“Mi favorito!”

She tasted it and didn’t like the charred bits. I moved the charred bits to one side of the bowl. We ate the entire bowl, and munched on avocate slices, grilled green onions and jalapeños, lime, and comal hot corn tortillas.

Pointing to the empty bowl I said, “Este es mi favorito, el mas rico que a provado.”

Her favorite was in Veracruz, at the fonda where I did my translation work from.

“Será algo nostálgico, nuestro primer calamari con arroz, primer momento intimo. O sabor, calidad?”

“Ambos al momento,” I answered. She laughed because that was her line.

“Ah, lo intimo, eso equal es rico.” She smiled to herself.

She remembered our first dinner, and the taxi to a hotel with rooms that rented by the hour. She had turned to me and lowered her voice.

“Regalito, nuestro primer momento intimo la pasamos en un hotel cual cobra por hora?”

“Asi es.”

I reminded her that when we were asked for the number of hours, that she held two fingers. She nudged me on the shoulder, asking me if it was true. I nodded that it was.

We laughed.

“Aye dios mio.” She couldn’t believe it.

“Alquilar por la hora, duut!” She said surprised at herself—and I lifted two fingers.

She had never been in a hotel that rented rooms by the hour.

“Aye dios mío ando corriendo con un callejero.”

I mentioned that I had found the rock cove Lorena had talked about. She squeezed my hand under the table. She wanted to know more.

First she asked, “Y donde estava yo?”

“Cuando?”

While I was out exploring the cove is what she wanted to know.

“Estavas tendida, sober un toalla, desnuda, con tu sombrero y cafas. Muy Hollywood.” She laughed and nudged me.

She leaned in towards me wanting to know if she was indeed nude and alone. I nodded yes. She sat back.

I let her know that I had my eyes out for her, and on the run I would be by her side in a flash. We held hands under the table.

I could hear the kitchen, the voices, the laughing, in one commotion. I smelled the aroma of the huachinango in banana leaves. I guessed that the fish was not cooked in a pan on the stove or in a pot in the oven.

Behind the kitchen was a space with a half-size brick wall around it—wood slats were spaced out across the half-size wall. The roof was covered with palm leaves, with a pitch and a small opening for heat and smoke to escape. Near the center Doña Apolina had a wood burning oven. It was made of concrete and bricks, next to it was a grill and next to that a plancha. She controlled the oven heat by moving the wood around, and under the grill and plancha.

The huachinango was cooked out there, behind the kitchen. I guessed that the fish was first rubbed with her paste and laid on bananas leaves away from the flame, maybe. I know that they would change out the banana leaves, because I’d hear them talking deciding when to do the change.

The huachinango was finished over flames. It seemed that banana leaves were charred along with the fish.

Doña Apolina brought the huachinango out on a large oval plate on fresh lightly grilled banana leaves. The fish was drizzled with an avocate cream sauce.

“Pero que plato tan lindo!” Alina was in awe.
We thanked Doña Apolina.

I pulled some charred skin away and made her a taco with the fish, advocate, grilled green onions, and crema—I pointed to the jalapeño, and she wagged her finger, No. I added two thin slices of jalapeño. I kidded her about being a Xalapeña who does eat jalapeños.

“Pero chico, que rico es esto.” She said, and tapped my foot for another fish taco. She eat four. Each time with a little more jalapeño and crema. She commented that it was better than the high end restaurants in Xalapa and in DF. And that prices in those restaurants are crazy, she said.

The fish in DF brought in caught the same day from the Pacific, Atlantic, and Gulf of Mexico. DF had top sea food restaurants all over. She could distinguish.

The way Doña Apolina prepared the fish in banana leaves, was her secret. I was able to guess the ingredients for her paste—ground olives and oil with raw garlic, anchote, oregano, bay leaf, into cocoa into a paste. A couple of other ingredients I couldn’t identify, but she did tell me that her process was the key ingredient.

We eat the entire fish, the bones were the only things left on the plate. Alina padded her tummy, and stood and walked toward the kitchen saying, “Doña Apolina, Delicious, Super Rico. Gracias!” And gave her a thumbs up.

She sat and we began to listen to customers in conversation.

Alina picked up on some gossip, she’d look at me saying, “Aye dios mio,” and lowered her voice saying that the people at the table by the wall have a married friend. She is having an affair and she might be pregnant. Alina said that the chisme, if the affair is found out, it would be a big scandal in the area.

She sighed, and we finished the wine and got up to leave. I paid for the meal. Alina asked Sonya, “Nos puede proporcionarnos una factura?”

Sonya said that she a never done a receipt for food. Alina said okay, and torn a page from her notebook and wrote out one for our diner. And Sonya looked at it and signed it. She thanked Alina for showing her how to write one out.

We walked to our cabaña holding hands. The night air was chilly, she had her rebozo over her shoulders—we could hear the waves in the distance. The

moon was moving westward and its light flickering through the foliage and over her.

She stopped, turned to me and tapped my chest with her notebook saying, “Gracias Regalito, duut.” The moonlight caught us kissing.

First thing in the cabin she took her clothes off, fell on the bed saying she was tired and needed to sleep. I told her that we should make love right now before she fell asleep.

“Porque?”

“Para aumentar la cuenta.”

“Cual cuenta duut, eso lo dejamos en al basura.”

Then I told her because she was there beautiful and nude, and that afterwards she would sleep peaceful throughout the night. I growled at her and she pulled me down and said, “Tomame.”

I was tender with her, she was exhausted, but cooed. I rested over her, and she whispered in my ear, “Duut, cuantas ves, hoy?”

She laid there, in her sunny body moving where I placed her. On her back, less effort for her.

I stopped and she lowered my head down over her face. Her eyes were peaceful, the green fading in places, waiting on me to take over. I kissed her neck, down to her breasts and she ached her back, I kissed tummy, inside her thighs, she reached down for us to join. We were gone forever, maybe twenty minutes.

I rolled off her and covered us with the bedsheet and we cuddled to sleep.

Alina woke suddenly, turned the lamp on, reached for her watch, shook me awake and said.

“Ay, ay, en quince minutos sera media noche.”

I didn't understand her. “Cuantas vez hoy, duut?!”

She said kissing me down my chest, ready for our rhythm to be one.

I was worn out and she rolled off me and looked at her watch and said that we made it before midnight.



Para Sara por su hijo

Regalito Puerto

una jornada

more in the series . . .

Zempoala

Villa Emiliano Zapata

Despieda

Teotitlan

Huautla

Chiapas

DF

Monterrey

Nuevo Laredo

November 2024

ENSENADA de BOCA ANDREÁ

Alina had been awake looking for food. She needed to eat, I got up and went outside along a path to a grove, which Doña Apolina's family maintained; I picked a couple of limes, a mango, and avocates, cut off two áloe vera leaves, and went back inside.

She was standing nude by the tiny sink. I placed what I had in the sink, and gave them a rinse. I asked her to have a seat. I slid the piny edge off an áloe vera leaf and split it open, and rubbed gel over her body, her neck and face. She took some gel with her fingers and combed her hair.

I set two pots of water to heat, and went to run water in the tub.

“Y la sabila, cuanto tiempo?”

“Hasta que se reseque, entonces un baño.”

“Oooo, que rico!”

I took the two pots of water off the burners and poured them in the tub. I went and held Alina by the hand and led her to the tub. She checked the water and was okay with it, and stepped in. She sank below her head and stood washing the sabila off her body, the water streamed down her hair to the curve before her booty.

I returned to the kitchen and spooned the advocate halves onto a plate.

She'd like to pour crema in the hollow, squeeze lime juice over them, and break off one piece at a time from the edge and dip it in the crema. After the edges were gone, she'd pressed with her fork what was left of the avocado and crema to a mash.

In the tiny fridge were two enfrijoladas I pulled one out and heated it in a pan to toasty. I placed it on the plate with mango and avocado, crema in a cup, and a lime cut in half. I squeezed lime juice in a glass of water and added a thin slice of mango and placed the plate and drink on the table by the window.

I went outside and cut a stem off an oregano plant. I slipped the oregano stem in an empty wine bottle and gave the leaves a quick rub, and they released a faint scent.

Alina stood up in the tub and called me over pointing to la ducha, I knew the drill; Me under the shower water, take the chill from the water that spilled off my body for her to raise herself.

When done we stepped out of the tub, I helped toweling her hair, and she finished toweling her body, and wrapped the towel across her waist. She did a dance step and went to the table.

She looked at the plate, and leaned over the oregano and inhaled. The green in her eyes in places were like the color of the avocado on the plate.

“Que precioso, duut.” She applauded, and sat. First thing she did was to pour crema in the hollow of the avocado. We talked about the cove, she said that she could still hear the sounds the waves made enter the rock cove.

“las pequeñas olas que nos movieron cerca a uno.” She said, and we turned to one another and felt the same moment.

She had finished one avocado half, and was broke off pieces of the mango. When she was finishing up she asked.

“Que ondas con la ensenada, la cual Lorena menciono?”

I suggested we go now. She gave me a hand signal that said Why. Because the early morning sun would be easier on her skin. I said that her body had enough. She said that she would keep herself covered. I shook my head no to that; she was not going to keep herself covered. And I said that the water will be warmer, and we could swimming.

She unwrapped the towel from her waist and went off to the bedroom, and returned wearing one of my t-shirts over her bikini, with her Converse, Panama hat and sunglasses.

“Alina,” I said in English. “The morning light is justing beginning—What’s with the sunglasses?”

She chuckled and lifted them and looked at me. She understood but did not like me speaking in English to her. She gave me a frown, and went to get her project notebook. She returned and sat flipping through the pages, and tapping her pencil on the table.

I went and sat on the bed with my notes. I was getting used to tablets, those around me used them, I begun to use them to kept my notes, and not have to carry around pieces of paper. I was getting to understand not to write every darn thing in it. But as a place for my notes, and sketches.

After a while Alina came over and removed her t-shirt showing off her pale pink bikini. She pulled her bottom to one side to show a faint tan line. I had seen her faint tan lines before, but not in the why she was posed.

“Comó te parece, listos para la ensenada?” She smiled with her lips together.

I gave her a thumbs up and she slipped her t-shirt on, and I tossed her a towel. She gave me the what for look. I made a gesture to wrap it around her your waist, and she gave me another what for look. I held my hand over her head with my fingers spread apart to represent the sun. And moved my hand up and down, and I gave her a low growl.

She did a low ah ah ah laugh and threw fake jabs at me. They had a snap to them and had gotten sharper, more on the aim. I caught one of her jabs and brought her in, and we hugged. We held each other, breathing slowly together.

Then we gathered our stuff into her woven net bag and walked outside with the towel around her waist. We stood on the porch holding hands, the morning light was expanding, clouds moseying along in the sky.

I thought were kissing and we were, she moved her head back and said.

“Vale—síguenos.”

We walked along, and talked about a meal, and she said.

“Quizás un baguette, un pan francés pues, toastato con mantequilla, ajo y perejil.”

“Alina, donde estamos?”

I asked if she had seen in our time in the restaurant any signs of baguette or pan francés being served. She gave me a slight head tilt that said no.

Lets ask them I said. We walked on to the restaurant, it was too early to serve but they were open. Everyone was in the kitchen. The beginning of a meal coming together was music to me. Alina peeked in and Doña Apolina came over and they talked about a meal. Alina mentioned that she liked the calamari con arroz, and ceviche she served.

Alina told her what we had in mind for a meal. And asked about baguettes.

“Baguettes nose, pero pan francés or bolillos, quizás.” Doña Apolina said.

She mentioned that they got their pastry and pan francés and bolillos from a bakery in José Cardel. The bakery had a route to Palma Sola. She knew that they baked baguettes, because she had seem them when they received their delivers. The bakery, she said, takes orders if called in before eight. Alina didn't have her watch, She asked the kitchen for the time and someone said siete con dies.

The minimum order for a single item was eighteen, and would be dropped off in the after around three. She stepped away to talk to with Sonys and both come out to us.

Alina told Doña Apolina that she missed fresh baguettes, and understood that the minimum order was eighteen. She looked at me and said that we would buy eight.

Doña Apolina and Sonya stepped aside to talk it over. I heard lonches, and sopa de mariscos. There were figuring how to sell them.

Sonya turned to Alina and said we had a deal. She got on the phone to place the order. Alina settled on our meal with Doña Apolina and asked about extra time for check out, to wait for the baguettes to arrived, and the bús to Zempoala. They settled on something.

We went outside and crossed the road tracked down the path to the beach and walked northward. The morning sun was to our right. The waves were rolling on shore with a soft splash. Alina walked along the last foamy waves on ashore.

The sky in full blue over the morning light peeking over the Gulf.

Seagulls were around, looking for a breakfast snack, sliding low over the water.

She removed the towel, her t-shirt and left her Converse on, and swung the towel and t-shirt over her shoulder. She looked at me and seemed relieved.

We walked and I stayed a couple of steps behind her, admiring her walk, in her bikini and Converse. I knew she would remove her towel and t-shirt. The sun was nearing full above the horizon. The morning light was gaining on the dawn. That light glowed over her skin and her bikini stood out.

“Que ves, duut?” She asked adjusting the bottom of her bikini.

“La ensenada, mira.”

She stepped away from the water for a look.

“Es una cueva.”

She walked in.

“Escucha mi voz, retumbra, ven.” She swim toward the opening to the Gulf.

“Donde estas?” Her voice resounded.

I swam in from around the opening and surprised her.

We swam closer to shore were we could stand. I lifted her and she swung her legs around my waist. I tip-toed us a in circle, and her bikini top up and her breasts appeared, the waves rolled over them.

We kissed, see each other in the eye. We moved with the waves coming from their long journey. We held each other, she rested chin over my shoulder, both breathing like on a run. The waves coming in directed us and all else fell away.

My shorts had floated away, she swam out and fetched them before the Gulf took them. She tossed them to me and adjusted her bikini top, and bottom.

We walked out to the beach, and continue north and soon we came to a laguna that flowed into a lowland. We found a shady spot and sat down. We didn't need to say anything.

I reached in her woven net bag and pulled out a sábila leaf and my pocket knife and slip the leaf open, and she turned her back to me. I applied it all over her back, and I tapped her to stand. I jelled her body and face. She stood like a pose, I tell her, "Alina puedes anda, mobilizarte. Que ondas, Dude?"

She laughed, and them relaxed.

We walked back along the shore on the cool soggy sand. The wind was calm.

I asked where was our next visit, Zempoala she said.

She wanted to see, la Zona Arqueologica. The design, the heaviness of the structures and effort it took to build intrigued her. We talked walking along the small waves that rolled over our ankles. I mentioned what I had learn from el profé, Alejandro, and from my own snooping around.

"Quizas, Zempoala es donde Cortes primero desembargo su conquista."

Alina stopped us and turned to me and said, "Zempoala?"

"Pues es lo que opinan los académicos." I answered.

"Imaginate duut! Tenemos que pasar la noche ahi, en Zempoala. Y visitar la zona arqueologica en el amanecer, y en el ocaso."

She turned saying, "Vamonos." And jogged off splashing and kicking sand back, she was on the run to get to Zempoala.

I had the woven bag, her t-shirt and towel over my shoulder. I did my usual and ran a few steps behind her. We reached the path the road and took a break. She stood there with her hand on her hips breathing heavy like when a bus arrives at the terminal, her Converse were like the tires. Her hair had aired on the ran and was moist. I held her t-shirt and towel up towards the Gulf and the wind dried them. She slipped the t-shirt on and wrapped the the towel around her waist. We went up the path and she stopped.

"Duut, porque posites la toalla tan arriba de mi cintura? Para ver mis nalgas, que no?"

I lifted my sunglasses, and gave her nalga a tap, and we continue up to the road.

Vamos a romper nuestro presupuesto.

LOS BAGUETTES

Vamos a romper

her eyes were full of green energy. Still in a jog she turned jogging backwards throwing jabs, and did a dance step and made a turn and continued jogging.

Not missing a step she removed the towel off her shoulders and took her t-shirt off and wrapped it around her waist with part her nalgas showing, she twisted the towel and placed it around her neck. She knew why I lagged behind and she sped up, and I ran behind her.

We reached the path to the road and took a break. We talked about having to check out at noon, and we guessed that it was maybe close to noon. She slipped her t-shirt on, and wrap the towel around her waist, and we hurried up the path and we crossed the road, and went to the restaurant.

Sonya was there and the restaurant was starting to get busying and Alina told her that we would return to settle up for stay, and wait for the baguettes to be delivered. Sonya needed to attend to customers, she smiled and waved us along and she went to work.

We left and Alina quick stepped it to the cabin and went in. I stopped at the porch and unhooked our hammock and took it inside. I wrapped the hammock into a tight bundle and placed it on the bottom of my duffle bag. She dropped her t-shirt and towel on the bed and got to packing her maleta in her bikini. I asked her if the word 'maleta' could also mean burden, a bother?"

She paused, and said, "Cual cosa? Esta maleta, o esta maleta?" She was making fun, and I point to her suitcase. She laughed, and I waited for her to finish and asked her for the time. She reached for her watch.

"Once veintidós."

What about the bus schedule to Zampoala. She pulled out our note tablet with our trip stuff. She found the schedule and said that there were two in the afternoon. The next would be at two and other at six.

"Hay una parada en La Isleta, y tenemos que trasladar a un bús hacia Zempoala. Hay una espera unos cuarenta minutitos."

She paused and looked at me and said, “Ay, espero que mi maleta no sea un lio.”

We would figure something out, I said. She wanted to see the structures at the site before dawn. She had notes and some drawings in her project notebook.

Before we left Xalapa on our trip she had made arrangements with a hotel near la zona arqueologica. We decided to take the bus that dropped by at six. We figured that we would have to pay extra for check out, and we had to wait for the baguettes.

“Ocho baguettes, girrl, que vamos acer con tantos baguettes?”

She looked at me, but I turned away because she was in her bikini and it was too much for the callejero in me.

“Duut, tranquilo. Mira el bús a Zempoala es alas seis, y estaremos en nuestra habitación algo como las siete y media. En eso ya consumémos tres baguettes.”

“Alina los baguettes son tamaño de tu brazo. Nos vamos empacharnos.” She looked at me with a solemn face. But it was not genuine. I called her out on that and she chuckled.

We looked at one another, she dropped her bikini and I my shorts and stepped into the tub. The water from the shower over me first, she soaped herself, she turned for me to soap her back. I soaped her all over and I reached over her ear and whispered the beginning of a poem for her.

I turned her to stand under the shower head. She winched but then relaxed. She turned the water off and danced her booty over mine, and turned to face me, her smile was peaceful, her eyes alive with green. We disappeared into one another.

We were done and she turned the water on, and this time she stepped under the shower alone. We raised each other off. We stepped out, dried each other off, we continue dto pack and got dressed.

We left our stuff and in the cabaña and walked outside. She had her watch on and I asked her for the time. It was almost 1pm, she said.

“Entonce pagamos por síes horas extras?” I asked.

She nodded yes. We were holding hands. I lifted two finger. She nudged my side, because she remembered of first intimate time at a hotel in Veracruz that rented rooms by the hour.

We walked to the restaurant, lunch time was over, and Alina spoke with Doña Apolina about our extra check out time, and the baguettes. They settled on something, and Alina stepped aside and asked me for for 120 pesos. I handed it to Doña Aplona, and Alina asked for a receipt. Doña Apolina looked at Sonya, she and Alina sat a table and wrote out a receipt.

We returned to the cabin. Alina pulled out our budget notebook and wrote down the receipt amount. We went outside and sat on the porch, we laid on our backs on the porch and talked until we took a nap.

I woke and lifted her arm to see her watch. I nudge her awake and she looked at her watch and it was time to go. We gathered our stuff and walked out, we dropped the restaurant to say gracias y adios.

We went outside with our stuff to wait for the bus. The evening was falling behind us and over the Gulf.

I wished that I could paint,

When we'd get stuck on a decision we'd stop and take a stand.

Her stand two steps back with her arms crossed over her chest; sometimes looking at me or away. Alway a smile even when small. My stand was to not move and act ignorant. She didn't like that, she thought it was too passive. That is how I make my stand I would tell her. We'd let it work itself out, that is how we rolled.

Zempoala

The bus stopped at La Isleta, in front of a ... and we got off. she had been allowed to carry her maleta on board.

"Es terco, pero brillante. Siempre está soñando, pero de alguna manera, me ayuda a aterrizar mis propias ideas. Tiene un corazón tierno, aunque a veces se cree más callejero de lo que es. Y cuando estoy con él, todo se siente más vivo."

where the unknown and the unscripted are embraced to make us an experience.

In this way, Regalito's vignettes work like a jazz composition: they move us through fragments of emotion, thought, and interaction in a way that feels organic and reflective. His story's structure and style seem to embrace the jazz ideal that the journey itself—the improvisation, the unpredictability, and the individual expressions within the collective—is where the true meaning and beauty lie.

Was allowed to carry her maleta on board. Playa Zempoala- chachalacas stop

Cautívame. escapémonos juntos

I had learned some tremendous from Anisis: lush, sultry, sensual, allure,

Do we have a relationship, I never been in one. I didn't her saying, but in Spanish, relación, desenvolviendo

Relación o Socios,

We were developing our own look and eye language. If one of us looked away in a discussed you lose your point. And I had lost mine.

The look of a cat stalking, slow, deliberate

guardarme palabras o decirlo tal y como, blah blah... habla como un escurso

I know

elasticidad

Como estar en una planeta, el barco en un espacio con

Like a dare to make the first move

The moans, and coos in giving birth to new sensations.

Estar a'tu lado, entender y no juzgar tu motivos, intencions, decision,

Her eyes show up first

I was her partner, I had learned steps she had shown me, with her, m

their one who followed her steps and movement,

Relationship why not partnership. She looked at me, looking around my eyes

Alina got into the design, the structure, and architecture to imagine, plan and get people to built it.

Used sea shells, ground to powder

Porque lloras? "Porque soy mujer." And she walked await to the .

we spotted expectation nothing else was happening. We were non expectant.

We understood each other. Our lust was fun, i

Zempoala had a population of about 30,000 when Cortes arrived. Add more warriors to Cortes' army, because they were pissed off at the Aztecs.

"Cantabas sin palabras, en coo coo come un ave, y aveces como el fin de una canción. Temblabas, y nuestra energía unida."

aññada

Es complicado se lo analisis y analisis, yo prefero vivirlo

“No duut, no necesitamos eso. Yo y tu, casados! Imagínate Regalito, Duut. No veo ventaja complicar con matrimonio.”

She stood there nude, tapping her foot, waiting on me.

She had her arms folded across her chest under her breasts. I supposed that she was right when she'd say that I had some of los cajelleros in me.

I was learning to control my impulses, but my instinct was to ravage her.

She knew how I felt, she looked at me, her eyes had enlarged slightly.

Entonce es un negocio, ... My eyes widen, she saw and said” Asi pensaba, lo ves equal

Each movement we made slowed,

She stood nude, her arms folded across her chest under her breasts. I supposed that she was right when she'd say that I had some of los cajelleros in me.

Me fascina

Y marcarter me esplada.

Ahi dios mió, es cieto duut? Y entonces?”

“Rompimos la cama.” I said.

She to get off the bed and sees that it is on the floor.

She walked off like an athletic, throwing Ali jags.

She stood, her eyes wide

She had tuned in to what I was think, and chuckled. I thought

Held her lips together to hold back a big smile,

ALI

Sabe, Regalito, lo que me fascina es que reconoces me estado económico, nunca

Never asked for help when he knew I needed we first met.

She had a video tape of clips from Muhammad Ali fights. Her father had made the tape for her.

Santiago's room like Alina's was atop a hill. His room was more spacious, the bedroom was walled with

spacious and Which also had a slope with steps to get to. His room faced the steps, next to a small patio built around a tree, he had a hammock tied on one end of it. The another end tied to the out side wall of his room.

In half wall to separate his room. I notice one of Lorena brooch's on the dresser. he had the latest sound equipment, even a headset, slick turn-table, speakers on the floor, radio tuner, and a cassette player that also recorded. It was like a well laid out kitchen.

He had record albums on shelves like books. He had some jazz albums and in the bunch was Ray Charles Live at Newport Jazz Festival. I pulled the album out and there was Ray Charles, on stage in a blue suit, looking thin, singing and holding a saxophone.

Santiago remembers me telling him how my uncle would sometimes pick me up on a Sunday morning and we'd go across town near the port docks.

"Recuerdas, dude?" He asked, because he did remember, saying that I had mentioned a small church. And that outside before entering one could hear the singing, a chorus of voices over each other singing in full to the roof and out the windows.

"Dude, recuerdas?"

I did remember. It was a black church. My uncle liked sitting on the back bench and hear the singing and the piano from there. My uncle was beginning to be body heavy, but he sway

the and he'd stand, sing, and clap along. Standing, I could feel the union of voices; it was all you could hear.

The sermons were stories, mostly about the struggle for freedom. In our church the preaching was about sin and repenting and accepting ever lasting life.

Santiago placed the record on the turntable and set the needle on the first selection. 'Night Time is the Right Time.'

The moment the saxophone played the first note Alina was up on her feet. She swayed, she took my hand and we danced. She let go of my hand and listened to the lyrics and when the song came to the female singers' part, "Night time is the right time."

She sang along with her accent on the word Right and held out the word time. She's repeat the lyrics adding, "Mi callejero..."

Lorena got up and danced with Alina, to the next song 'In a Little Spanish Town.' They did salsa steps. As the song ended, Alina acted out a tango pose.

When 'I Got a Woman' came on we all got up and danced, even Alejandro. The rock'n roll in the music was jumping.

We listened to the entire album and talked, snacked and made drinks from tequila Santiago had. Alina had not heard that music before, it moved her. I mentioned that I had three of his albums, or did before the storm.

She nudged me to look at her, and gave me a peck on my lips.

She had a video tape of clips from Muhammad Ali fights her father had made for her. Santiago

I tell her how the green in eyes goes out from a dark circle, out to lime yellow green. She dashes off to look in the bathroom mirror.

"No lo veo?"

I went in turn the light off, enough came through the windows. She saw what I had described.

"Algo como ojos anunciando una flor." She turned to me and we held one another, in big and small hugs. I held her off her feet.

Me tratadas como una persona, y en la cama como mujer.

I got to thinking that maybe I didn't need all these papers to identify me. Los callejeros did not have identification, no one owned them. They had no fixed home.

I said that I was studying her eyes, the color, how they changed from

In one movement. There was no need for us to think about it.

Villa Emiliano Zapata

Lo idial frente la realidad

“Duut nuestra, umm, aver.” she paused, looked off and said.

“En esa pausa siento en comunicación, como entendido, y cuando hablamos es solo un expreción de eso.” She smiled satisfied.

God guns and Trump

— —left for Xalapa.. bús de Secunda clase and allowed Alina to carry her maleta on board. The bus did stop at the terminal because

Taxi to her house, her parent where in Jalisco for the week.

waited for a horse to cross, carrying a sacks of corn on its back.

She clinked her teeth

She combed my hair straight back, and stood back. gave a flirty passing smile.

She wanted talk... hammock ... she would marry have two kids and live in a nice house, she would marry some

“At times to be silent is to lie. You will win because you have enough brute force. But you will not convince. For to convince you need to persuade. And in order to persuade you would need what you lack: Reason and Right”

— Miguel de Unamuno

“The less we read, the more harmful it is what we read.”

— Miguel de Unamuno

“¿Y qué es amor? ¿Quién definió el amor? Amor definido deja de serlo...”

— Miguel de Unamuno, Niebla

Ni sabe el pueblo qué es fe ni acaso le importa mucho

La palabra, este producto social, se ha hecho para mentir.

De la cuna nos viene la tristeza
y también de la cuna la alegría...

“Leer, leer, leer, vivir la vida que otros soñaron.
Leer, leer, leer, el alma olvida las cosas que pasaron. Se quedan las que quedan,
las ficciones, las flores de la pluma,
las solas, las humanas creaciones, el poso de la espuma.
Leer, leer, leer; ¿seré lectura mañana también yo?
¿Seré mi creador, mi criatura, seré lo que pasó?”

“La esencia del mundo es musical.”

“Casi todos los hombres nos aburrimos inconscientemente. El aburrimiento es el fondo de la vida, y el aburrimiento es el que ha inventado los juegos, las distracciones, las novelas y el amor. La niebla de la vida rezuma un dulce aburrimiento, licor agridulce. Todos estos sucesos cotidianos, insignificantes; todas estas dulces conversaciones con que matamos el tiempo y alargamos la vida, ¿qué son sino dulcísimo aburrirse?”

“Y siguieron los dos, Augusto y Eugenia, en direcciones contrarias, cortando con sus almas la enmarañada telaraña espiritual de la calle. Porque la calle forma un tejido en que se entrecruzan miradas de deseo, de envidia, de desdén, de compasión, de amor, de odio, viejas palabras cuyo espíritu quedó cristalizado, pensamientos, anhelos, toda una tela misteriosa que envuelve las almas de los que pasan.”

¡Comprar yo su cuerpo... su cuerpo...! ¡Si me sobra el mío, Orfeo, me sobra el mío! Lo que yo necesito es alma, alma, alma”

“Pasame tu bolsón, aver que ondas.”

I handed it to her and she emptied it on the bed. She set the books and tablets

“Vas a trasdala todos estos troces de papel con escritos y dibujos, en a cual tableta?”

She had set aside five tablets on the bed next to four books. She motioned for me to pick one. I picked the one on top. She sat back and chuckled and said.

Aja! Asi pensaba. Aver, si, tienes lo que has trasladado de tus troces desparramado en cualquier tableta a tu manos.”

“Asi és.” I answered.

“No duut.” She said and read through some pages. She put that one down and picked another one. She stayed on a couple of pages for a while. I looked over and she was reading a quote from Miguel de Unamuno.

¿Y qué es amor? ¿Quién definió el amor?
Amor definido deja de serlo...

She asked what I thought about it. I said that I wrote it down and others quotes by him. She understood and wanted to see more. I motioned to the tablets, she looked me and reached for one at random. She moved her eyes and smile away from me, and flipped pages, and stopped at a page with notes and quotes by Anaïs Nin. She laid the tablet down and said.

“Okay duut. Como la ves, después de cena me leerás del
“yo coqueteo, tu lo sabes, los hombre son fascinados

“Como vez nuestra relación?”

“Favor, duut, no andes con ondas imprecisa. Deseo que me digas tu.”

This had come up before but we had both played it off, as friends. And now she was ready for a discussion.

I had to do it. She needed me to hear from me on how I saw our Relationship. From the start I didn't even like the sound of the word. I had associated the word with objects, and family member. And she was right, I'd get all tangled in defining the word.

I asked her if we had a Relationship would it have a name? She sat back and thought about it.

“Okay duut, entiendo el punto. Entonces que ondas cuando la gente, ya sabes, preguntan?”

I understood her.

I reminded her what she had said on the bus to Boca Andreá when I handed her, her own Rio bag, and she had stood and showed it off. And that the passengers admired it, some applauded. And I said that maybe they thought that is was a marriage proposal.

“Okay, duut, que dije?”

“Que piensen lo que piensen.”

She remembered.

I remember once she laughed so hard that she was in tears but she kept laughing.

I thinking that it was went I brought in how dogs do have a relationship, but she corrected me by saying that los callejeros have a relationship.

I was ready to answer her, but in English. She gave me a look that said okay but to go slow. Her face was relaxed and peaceful, her eyes waiting for me to speak.

CHIAPAS

Met Sean Liam Doyle. Fell of a horse on the King ranch, his head hit the ground and he woke in the hospital and understood that he was mute but he could hear.

But the doctors thought that he was deaf. Sean remembered trying to speak and only heard grunts coming out. The doctors gave him a hearing test and found out that he could hear.

His parent had decided to send him to the state school in Austin.

The official name of the state is Chiapas, which is believed to have come from the ancient city of Chiapan, which in [Náhuatl](#) means "the place where the [chia sage](#) grows."^[12] After the Spanish arrived (1522), they established two cities called Chiapas de los Indios and Chiapas de los Españoles (1528), with the name of Provincia de Chiapas for the area around the cities. The first coat of arms of the region dates from 1535 as that of the Ciudad Real ([San Cristóbal de las Casas](#)). Chiapas painter [Javier Vargas Ballinas](#) designed the modern coat of arms.^[13][need quotation to verify]

Canadian reporter

are delivered with a simplicity that belies their depth.

NUEVO LAREDO

I went to a restaurant bar where tourist hung out. I needed to hear and practice my English which Alina had mentioned that I had develop “Un tantito de acento costeño.”

My English had a Spanish accent? I never heard that. I took a seat at the bar, there no local only young punts, older guys with time off from their wives. They were talking about women, the punts would giggle, and older guys when talking would raise their eyebrows. They won't subtle about it because they were across the river.

Listening to the English it did sound gruff, almost foreign but is wasn't. I understood Alina's reaction when I spoke in English with her. So I kept all Spanish with her.

I thought about that from the moment I was born I heard Spanish, and out in the world is was English. I got accustom to both. But in the neighbor it was a mix of both.

Buy paper, rim, ribbon, Whataburger.

