

The brothers love to *pistear*. Drink. Get drunk. They brag about it. Maybe they are trying to escape the boredom of life on the farm. Raul claims this only happens on holidays. I'm not sure I believe him. Salvador behaves like a true alcoholic. And everyone in the village talks about the joys of *pisteando*. Maybe there is more despair here than I think. There is a lot of repression. *Where are the whores, the women?* Mainly there are Catholic girls and married women, and a lot of horny boys and young men.

No wonder I am sitting in a gay bar cracking jokes about screwing the fairies with drunken Mexican cowboys. How ironic! *When will they find out the truth and turn on me?*

We carry a couple of bottles of hard stuff back to the farm. For tonight and tomorrow. I get to meet more relatives. There will be a dinner of rooster stew. Many drinks and toasts at another house. The family wants me to bless the babies. A set of twins! They are very proud. I fear I might give the kids my flu germs, and they could die. As all this goes on, I ask myself, *Where is Raul?*

Under a moon becoming full, I finally am able to escape with handsome Chico to the roofless movie house. In the dark of the theater Chico asks to borrow my pocketknife — he puts it in his back pocket. He claims he might need it for a fight. Later, when I ask for it, he says he lost it. An acquaintance passes us a bottle and asks, "What's he doing her?" The *gringo*. Meanwhile, the movie is hideously bad: We watch a muscular black being tortured. He's a convict trying to rescue a kidnapped white child from bad guys. There's a hero dog like Lassie. In the end the black is sent back to jail. Isn't it pure racist insanity? The audience loves it.

We walk out into the night. When I was sitting close to Chico in the theater I wondered if I could be sexual with him. I decided — it would be impossible without someone finding out. Near the church games have been set up for *Feliz Navidad*. On a hand painted wooden table Chico and I play *futbolito*, foosball. Kids gather, watching. Chico is surprised: I almost beat him.

Fantasies build up in my mind. I think to myself: I never want to leave here. I want to be one of Raul's brothers, friends in this village. Forever. I want to spend my life with sleepy Raul. Could that be possible? I can't forget Chico making his white horse dance on the river rocks. By whipping it from side to side with a rope. Yet, at the corral back home, he gently combs its tail. Joking with me, he places the horsehair wig on my balding head. *Could I spend my life here?* With Raul and his family.

Raul doesn't want to rise at dawn; his parents yell at him to get up. In the morning light he ropes the ankles of a cow, brings a calf in close, shoving the nipples in its mouth to make the milk flow. He milks the rest into a bucket, then loosens the rope, slaps the cow on the ass, and goes for another one. Ten or fifteen are handled in this way. *I wish he'd handle me.*

Thin, getting tan, using a rope, Raul is muscular but vulnerable. With a frown or quizzical look on his blonde face, he tosses a stick at a chicken or throws rocks at birds eating the seed in the fields. He lines the cattle up on the road, helping Chico with the daily drive. In a t-shirt, one pant's leg slightly rolled up, shoes with no socks, he wears a serious expression on his face. I love this slender boy in the sun or on horseback. I would almost die for him. He wishes I would — *die!* And go away. It's not altogether true, but he made me wonder if I should really be there. I asked him outright, "Am I complicating your life?" He replied, "No."

I began to understand a few things about Raul: His skin is fair, almost white, and his eyes are gray or gray-green. What a painful identity crisis! He is the lightest skinned person in Bamoa, including his family. Of course, he feels ashamed. In comparison with the others he doesn't look like a Mexican. No wonder he prefers loving "on the other side." Across the border. He looks like an American. "*Vamos a morir*," I heard him say to his mother. We're going to die. Raul told me, "My temperament has always been *serio*." Serious, pensive. One of his brothers described him as having "*cuita*" — grief, sorrow, affliction.

Also, he is the youngest in his family. In Bamoa he must take orders from his father and older brothers. He'll never inherit the farm. The land isn't big enough to support that many children. All Raul can do is get a job in town — hard work at low wages. Does this explain the headaches, desire to sleep, sudden anger, needless cruelty? I'm not a psychologist, but — Raul loves his nephew Javier yet teases him mercilessly. "*Que feo! Ay feo!*" he calls to him. Hey ugly! The two have dirt fights throwing clods hard as stones. I worry someone might get hurt.

On the bus I saw Raul talk with several local girls. They were glad to see him. He's loosened up in the village. Friends and schoolmates greet him with genuine feeling.

On Christmas Day we feast and feast. The father says, "The farm is rich, not in money but in food." They love to eat. Homemade *tostadas*. Lettuce, tomatoes, hard corn shells, hot sauce, a sweet salted meat they call "buffalo". Beans, tortillas, milk. Cucumbers. The special dinner of peppery chicken stew. All the relatives show, the brothers with their families. Raul has at least four. Daniel, the oldest, is powerful, huge, curious about me. We play volleyball. He tries to get me drunk on strong tequila with hot sauce and V-8 juice. It burns my gut. Daniel jokes with me about coming to work in Oregon, like Raul. He senses Raul goes there to escape work.



JOSE GUADALUPE POSADA, AMAZING MIRACLE (1893)

I take pictures with my camera of all the kids, the relatives. I'll send them the developed photos. They are pleased, clown, give me the V sign, hold up bottles of booze. What a wonderful family! I am part of it, they say. As we say goodbye, and the golden light of the sun sets behind the cathedral to the west, I ask the question: Will Raul go with me on my travels to other parts of Mexico?

That night a large orangish moon rises above the corral. My intuition should've told me. Everything is going too smoothly. I can tell by the color of the moon something is wrong. I need an answer from Raul. We talk at the side of the house as the light of the moon becomes brighter, almost like daylight. "Do you want to go?" I ask. "No," he says. "Why not?" I almost beg. "I have plenty of money. Sergio can come too," I continue. "What's the reason, a girl?" "No." "Is it work?" "No." "Can you tell me in general what it is?" "Olvidate!" he replies almost angrily. Forget about it! This is what I like about Raul — he has a blade of steel inside. Finally I persuade him to go to Mazatlan for overnight.

Then secretly, mysteriously, he gets on the white horse and rides away in the moonlight. Thinking about him, I lie awake. *Where's he gone?* To a girl? To check on his marijuana crop? I hear the coyotes howling and his father snoring from my cot in the living room.

In the morning I find out there's no room on the buses. Because of holiday travelers. I decide to go by myself. It's too damned complicated. Raul agrees to spend the day with me while I cash travelers checks in Guasave. We'll hitch on a truck again. On the way, while walking along the road to Bamoa, we pass by the graveyard. I ask Raul to pose at his grandfather's grave. Even though he acts crotchety I get a stunning photograph, which illuminates his personality. It's one of the finest photos I've ever taken.

All day long Raul will be matter-of-fact with me, fulfilling this last duty. Before the *gringo* goes. *Is he hiding his feelings?* Guasave is crowded with holiday shoppers. The patience it takes sometimes to accomplish seemingly ordinary things in Mexico! Several buses are filled to capacity; we have a long wait to get a bus back to Bamoa. We squat at the crossroads with the soldiers and the weapons. It takes several hours, dust blowing in our faces and clothing. Raul has that patience. I don't. Unperturbed, he leans comfortably on his haunches, then he gets up and smokes a cigarette. The picture I have of him growing up in this raw and violent community makes me feel tenderness for him. *Is his life in danger here?*

The bus stops in front of the house. It's dark. The stars are out at 7 o'clock. At 10 I catch the train south to Mazatlan. The family is watching the tiny TV set, powered by car batteries. The father orders Raul to get me a ride to the station. He disappears. When he returns Raul has to carry my suitcase to the truck. "I can carry my own —" I protest. No, a guest shouldn't have to do anything. I thank the family for everything. Raul and I ride together in the back, and the neighbor lets us out near the railroad tracks. Other anonymous passengers are waiting for the train to arrive. The family has sent Raul along as my baggage boy. *Little do they know!* I want to put my arm around him, hug him before I leave. Damn it! I try to explain in barely fluent Spanish what he means to me.

He listens to me, a frown on his face. Won't there be any sign of affection? I try to joke with him. I pick up a pebble and ask him if he loves me that much? "No," he says. I pick up a tinier piece of earth and say, "Do you love me this much?" He blurts out, "Nada." Nothing. And my brain flashes to a couple of complicated conversations we had at the farm. "Two men can't

love each other," he told me. "We can only be friends." He will never have sex with me again. "*Nunca mas!*"

I'm upset. In the last five days I've barely had a chance to touch him or be close. We're always surrounded by others. Even now, his brother is watching us. Had Raul known all along that his brother would be there? Maybe. The brother genuinely likes me and asks when will I return, I must stop back on my way northward and visit the family. The train arrives. Raul carries my suitcase. As I board Raul and I do an elaborate Chicano handshake. Perhaps he's afraid I will chicken out. Raul almost pushes me onto the train. Saying "*Tu vas!*"

Boarding, I watch him and his brother out the window watching me. I realize he had a headache. But his last words were straight from the heart. "*Nos vemos*." We'll see each other. The boy meant that. Swaying and rattling on the tracks, the train is swallowed in the darkness of the flat Mexican countryside. Mysterious and sad. Almost in penance, I am squatting on the floor next to my suitcase, trying to blank out everything and go to sleep. *When?*

Walt Curtis is considered by many to be Oregon's Unofficial Poet Laureate (described by *The Oregonian* as an "irredeemable, irreverent and irrepressible street poet"). He lives and writes in Portland. This article is reprinted from his famous book *Mala Noche* (from which Gus VanSant made his first film), which has been enlarged and reissued for its 20th anniversary. Allen Ginsburg called *Mala Noche* "an American story many of us have lived and more will as the empire disintegrates." Copies can be attained by ordering through local bookstores or mailing \$14.95 (+ \$2 shipping) to Bridge City Books, 1717 SW Park #616, Portland, Ore. 97201.

Sally Lacaff & Roger Hayes made a drawing together through the mail and over the phone. They had been asked to combine their art for the Times Eagle, any surreality they wished. The final assembly was done together with a little paste and a few new lines. Their result is on the following two pages.

~MPMc



"He didn't say 'al dente,' did he?"

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