

The next morning we were up at dawn to make final arrangements. Jesus left to check out his airplane while Jesse and I ran through our supplies—clothes, sleeping bags, ponchos, Polaroid and Pentax cameras. We intended to get some preliminary photographs before Gene Anthony came down, mainly to get the farmers used to the idea of cameras.

At mid-morning Eduardo, who had taken Jesse's pickup into town, returned with Sanchez. We threw our gear in the back of the pickup and climbed in. There was a small airstrip on Jesus' rancho and we were to rendezvous there. Jesus kept his planes at the small airport in town when they weren't in use. He had gone there to get his Cessna.

While we waited for Jesus to arrive with his plane, Jesse and I talked. "Our troubles aren't over yet," Jesse said. "Once we get to the village in the mountains, we still have two or three days on muleback before we get to the fields." Sanchez agreed.

"The most difficult part is ahead of us. We not only have to hire mules, we have to convince the growers that we're good guys, so they won't shoot our asses off while we're up there."

"The campesinos in the mountains have no reason for letting us up there in the first place," Jesse said, puffing reflectively on a Fiesta. "It can't possibly do them any good, and it sure as hell could do them harm. In fact, Sanchez is a little worried that they might be down on him for bringing us in."

"Then why is he doing it?" I asked.

"Because we're friends of Jesus, and Jesus is the biggest buyer in the area. Without him we wouldn't be going anywhere."

I glanced at Sanchez. He was squatting back on his haunches. His short body seemed soft and flabby at first glance. A second look revealed the passive strength lurking beneath the surface. His dark, knotted feet looked like roots inside his huaraches, like they could send shoots down into the ground and grow if he stood in one place long enough. When he shook hands it was with a limp, dishrag gesture that was disconcerting. The whole aura of the man was one of slow, casual indifference, a passive solidity set off by the .38-Super tucked in his belt.

Sanchez heard the plane first. He stood up, slapping the dust and wrinkles out of his clothes. I stood up too, although I didn't hear anything, and rubbed my knees. They had grown stiff from squatting. Only then did I hear the motor. In an instant a small blue and white Cessna hit the end of the dirt strip and bounced to a stop in front of us. Jesus held the door open while Sanchez grabbed a number of sacks of fertilizer and our gear and threw them inside. As I entered the plane, I noticed that Jesus had a pistol tucked in his belt—the badge of the Mexican! Jesse and Sanchez jumped in and Sanchez pulled the door closed. Within seconds Jesus was gunning the aircraft down the strip.

I held my breath as we lifted off, sighing with relief when I felt the plane leave the ground and climb into the clear Mexican air. A lone hut drifted under us as Jesus banked the aircraft and started to climb over the first ridges leading into the mountains. In the distance I could see white smoke from fires which farmers had set to burn off their fields. It mingled with the mountains and disappeared as it drifted upward. Jesus leveled the plane out at 11,000 feet, and we continued northwest. Villages, rivers (muddy from the recent rains), and canyons rolled into view and fell away. The whole country seemed like a vast, prehistoric garden, rich and tumbling beneath us, a verdant, organic palette on which gods mixed their rainbows.

I looked over at Sanchez, whose seat next to Jesus faced the rear of the plane. He was holding onto the safety strap above the door, and peering over his shoulder into the mountains ahead. I felt as though I were flying into some irrational, half-primitive, half-mechanized dream world—Sanchez with his cracked, ground-beaten feet, and the hawkish shadow of the plane fitting silently across the valleys and mountaintops below. As the ragged landscape unfolded, I thought of the ancient myth of the Indians, of the white man who was to come from the east one day, either from the sea or from the sky, and I wondered if marijuana had anything to do with that vision. I looked at Jesse, the Tarascan blood etched in his cheekbones, my friend for more than ten years, and recalled the prophecy recounted many times in the huts and tents and hogans: Some day the Indian would regain

his gods, and the white man, who had destroyed them, would be taken in hand by the children of those Indians and led back to the ancient deities. Perhaps the young gringo kids turning on to pot, actually an Indian hallucinogen, and tripping about the country in their restless searches for some honest answers were acting out that myth. Hundreds of kids had gone to New Mexico, Nevada, and Arizona to join the Indians and live in hogans and tipis. As the plane drifted over the mountains I felt my own self drawn irresistibly toward them. We were all Indians, on a journey in search of gods.

The mountains we were flying over were like a vast nether world, fantasmagoric and beautiful, yet ominous and strange. Because we were up so high the peaks below appeared flat; I could see only the color, deep and rich in the canyons and bright gold on the mountain-tops. A dark chasm cut through the landscape directly below us, disappearing under the airplane and reappearing on the other side. I strained to see what lay in the gorge. Jesse had said the village was scattered somewhere along its edge, clinging to the sides of a river like detritus lodged there after a great flood. I saw no village, but as we flew across the gorge I could see a slow fluttering of white objects and recognized them as birds lifting off the peaks at the sound of our craft. Below the birds I could see their infinitesimally small shadows gliding over the ground, and by following the shadows could see the ground dip and weave and drop away into thousand-foot gorges. I gasped. The landscape below me was like a vast blanket quilted by a mad woman who had sat huddled over her work for a thousand years, a million years, who still sat over her work, embroidering, stitching, restitching, making new and anew her wonderful earth blanket.

I snapped out of my reverie as the plane swooped down from the clouds and circled a small village perched on the banks of a swift river. Down below, a white statue raised its arms amid the blues and greens of the mountainside, and as the crosslike shadow of the plane flitted overhead, a bevy of white birds took flight like flowers thrown into the air. The landing strip we were approaching was smaller even than the one we had left an hour and a half before. It was hacked out of the cliff, and the high bluffs rising on either side of it made landing

dangerous. A dozen people stood at the end of the strip as we swept over it and then turned for our approach. I held my breath as we dropped toward the ground. Jesse landed and brought the plane to a jolting stop, and whipped it around for the takeoff. Before the plane stopped, Sanchez was out the door. Jesse and I threw our bags out and followed him. Then two Indians who had been standing beside the plane jumped in and threw out the sacks of fertilizer. When the plane was empty, Jesse gunned it down the strip and took off. I watched the plane go with a certain wishfulness. Jesse was supposed to pick us up in two weeks, but I wondered if I would ever see him again.

Jesse and I waited in the shadow of an adobe hut while Sanchez went to see about renting mules. Curious children stared at us, their wide faces smiling and friendly. It was about ten A.M. and the morning sun stretched high above us. We were in a small valley settlement about 6,000 feet up in the mountains—a few huts clustered around the end of the landing strip, two or three more substantial houses, and dozens of burros, pigs, chickens, and children.

A few of the men were shooting at one of the chickens, taking turns with a slingshot. One man finally killed it with a well-aimed rock to its head. The other men laughed, and they all chipped in a few pesos to quiet the woman who owned it. Each of the men carried a pistol in his belt, and even without holsters, they seemed anxious to display their weapons properly. From time to time one of them would take his gun out, aim it at some imaginary target, and then wipe the barrel across his pantsleg before stuffing it back in his belt. Here in the mountains a gun is both an ornament and a necessary tool. Each man has his piece and knows how to use it. One of the men stood fifty yards from a tree and squeezed off three rounds, plunking berries with his weather-beaten pistol.

In Mexico the gun serves as instant judge, jury, and executioner in many personal confrontations. Almost every Mexican carries a gun, including city Mexicans, and every day one newspaper or another carries a story of individuals resorting to the gun to settle differences—or simply to demonstrate their *machismo*.

6 enero to strong in Mexico

In Michoacan a small-town mayor bragged of his prowess with a gun to a group of his drunken friends. "I'm the best shot in the state," he cried. "Bah!" his friends scoffed. "You couldn't hit a *pitata* with a shovel!" The mayor pulled out his pistol and aimed it at an Indian sitting across the plaza. "Go ahead, shoot!" his friends goaded him. The mayor pulled the trigger and shot off the back of the Indian's head.

The Mexican is so concerned with his manhood that he wears his balls on his shoulder, so to speak, to show that he has a pair. An incident, a friend's taunt, an unexcused bumping on the sidewalk, a minor traffic accident, can lead to a confrontation. This attitude is manifested in the *macho*, the super-male. The *machista* is fearless, has *huevos*, and takes no shit off anyone, neither his woman nor his enemies.

Originally *macho* meant the male mule, a strong, stubborn animal. *Mula*, or female mule, which is by implication the opposite of strong, is a Mexican slang term for prostitute. A *machista* therefore is a strong, heavy dude who doesn't leave himself open, who doesn't expose himself to anyone or anything, while a dude who lacks *machismo* is like a prostitute, open, exposed, vulnerable, weak. To be *macho* is to be strong, physically, sexually, politically. A bull which acquits itself well in the ring is *macho*, as is the man who dominates others in business or bed. The *macho* is closed, cold, unconcerned with the feelings of others; at the same time the *macho* dominates and is dominated by appearances; thus a gesture or glance or a slip of the tongue can take on major significance under certain circumstances.

In Mexico City a gringo saw a pretty señorita walking along on the sidewalk and gave her the familiar American greeting: shave-and-a-haircut-six-bits, with his car horn. Within minutes half a dozen Mexicans had abandoned their cars, many of them in the middle of the *glorieta*, and were tearing at the gringo's automobile. Only a policeman was able to pull the *machistas* off the ignorant gringo. What he had inadvertently done was insult the mothers of every Mexican within the sound of his horn. Shave-and-a-haircut-six-bits means "Go fuck your mother, *cabrón*," in Mexico, and every Mexican who heard

the horn was sure that it was he personally being insulted.

Mexico is a country dominated by the male. From a very early age boys are treated better than girls. If a Mexican's first child is not a son he is humiliated, angry, and mocked by his friends. There are hints that his *huevos* are not entirely adequate. Naturally one is careful not to insult a man who carries a gun in his belt, for although his *huevos* may not be adequate enough to make a boy, his pistol is capable of making you dead.

The homosexual connotations behind the Mexican's use and abuse of the gun cannot be ignored. A shaky manhood is steadied by a .38-Super tucked under the belt. Even the *idea* of a .38-Super is enough for some people. In Mazatlan I saw a group of young studs prancing along the *malecón* on Saturday night. One of the dudes carried a cigarette lighter made in the shape of a .38-Super. At first glance the lighter looked like a real gun—and was worn so by the kid. The shiny cold steel of the lighter-gun against his abdomen reassured him, represented an element of manliness, and made him feel less vulnerable. At first I thought it was ridiculous because the lighter-gun could do nothing but light cigarettes; then I realized that its secondary function—as symbol—was really its primary function. As a symbol it said, "Play around with me, fuck with me, insult me, and you have big trouble."

The constant testing of one's manliness in Mexico sometimes reaches ridiculous proportions. I was sitting in the Plaza de Mariaches in Guadalupe when a man came around with a magneto. For a peso you could hold a metal rod in each hand as he twirled the crank to test your ability to withstand a shock. At the table next to mine sat six Mexicans and their wives or girlfriends. At first they ignored the magneto man, but when one of the men was finally persuaded to grab the metal rods, both the magneto man and I knew that each man at the table would pay his peso to test his strength. Sure enough, the metal rods journeyed around the complete circle, each man holding on grimly as the electric shock surged through him. After each man in turn had received a jolt, the first *macho* told the magneto man to turn the current up before he tried it again. Again the rods circled the

table. Fortunately the magneto's power was limited, or the rods would have circled the table until one of the men had proved that he had real *huevos*, the implication being that the rest of the men were pussies.

Under different circumstances this attitude can lead to a fatal confrontation between Mexicans. If the magneto had been a gun, the men would have been playing Russian roulette. Each man would have had to spin the chamber and pull the trigger. The game has to go on until one man is the winner or one man the loser. If one man had refused to play, then he would be the loser, and the butt of jokes for the rest of the night. He would also, I imagine, take the pressure off his companions. The term *macho* implies the existence of its opposite, and it's someone's lack of *huevos* which enhances the *huevos* of the rest of the crowd. Quite often in Mexico the tongue replaces the gun in contests of superiority, and Mexicans have raised to a high level the art of cutting, or repartee. Similar to the verbal game called the dozens, played by Blacks in the U.S., the Mexican's verbal jibes and puns are usually imbued with heavy sexual overtones and innuendos. The *macho* uses words to wound and defeat and defend; naturally there is always the possibility that the dude who runs out of verbal ammunition will resort to his final weapon—the bullet. Under certain circumstances though, the *macho* loses his balls if he resorts to violence. I was in a whorehouse where a *maricón* was teasing a *charro*. The *charro* had come in from a day's fiesta and was dressed in his finery, tight leggings, wide-brimmed sombrero, inlaid boots, and a very large pistol strapped to his side. The *maricón* was getting laughs from the crowd by mimicking the *charro*, prancing behind him, making obscene humping gestures as he walked. Under the circumstances the *charro* was helpless except for his tongue. With words he could do battle with the homosexual; if he resorted to his gun or fists, he would be putting himself in the same position as the queer, ball-less, without *huevos*, an object of ridicule and scorn.

Machismo has come under severe criticism recently, not only in the United States, where feminist forces have seized on the term and its attitude, but also in Mexico itself. Recently José G. Cruz, a millionaire publisher and illustrator of comic books in Mexico City, published a

thirty-six-page booklet entitled *El Nefasto machismo* (Tragic Machismo) in an attempt to counteract the violent, exaggerated sense of male superiority and manliness that requires the Mexican man to prove constantly that he is tough and forceful.

Usually Cruz's comic books deal with popular romance and adventure stories or an occasional historical and political biography, but there are most Mexicans read only comic books, if they read anything, he has recently published comic books dealing with contemporary phenomena. After the student riots of October, 1968, in the Plaza of Tlatelolco in Mexico City, where more than three hundred students were massacred while protesting their country's spending millions of pesos on the Olympic Games while the Mexican people were starving, Cruz published a comic book entitled *Treason to the Fatherland*, wherein he raked the subversive students over the Mexican coals for not loving their country more, and not supporting it in all its manifestations.

When the longhair invasion from the United States began to infiltrate Mexican youths, Cruz published a comic book entitled *La Basura hippie* (Hippie Garbage). In it he warned his countrymen of the dangers to young Mexicans who imitate the behavior of the Hippie-verted American youths from up north. Cruz describes the Hippie Garbage as "irresponsible, loose-living," and "a dark malignant cancer." The cover depicts a massive pig, behind which sit a dude and a chick with long hair and beads, marijuana smoke curling around their faces. He ends the booklet with a patriotic plea to Mexican mothers to raise their children with a sense of cleanliness, beauty, and personal decorum.

Despite efforts such as José Cruz's to counteract some of the manifestations of machismo, however, the attitude is ingrained in the Mexican psyche, and will be for a long time. Not all connotations of machismo are negative. *Macho*, in certain circumstances, implies good qualities that have nothing to do with an exaggerated sense of manliness, or the need to be forceful and tough. A Mexican who is *macho* can be a dude who is straight, who will back you up in an emergency, who will not let you down.

The term *macho* is difficult to understand because, like many words which are used to describe attitudes, it has as many meanings as there are inflections in the human voice. The way the word is spoken can denote a certain thing; whether the term is cut off short or drawn out, and what the eyes are doing while the tongue is speaking, all lend import to the particular meaning intended at the moment. Understanding the various meanings does not come from studying, but from the incidents themselves.

I leaned against the adobe hut and watched the Mexicans playing with their pistols. For a fleeting moment I imagined myself making some blunder, a gesture or word that insulted one of them. The thought was not entirely without justification. Once in a bar in Patzcuaro I innocently declined a drink offered by a drunk campesino—and quickly regretted it. The campesino was insulted that I refused to drink with him and pulled out his pistol. Needless to say, I hastily apologized. "A thousand pardons, señor, I misunderstood you," I said, gulping the drink down. One does not refuse a drink when it is offered in a bar in rural Mexico. You understand this or you don't enter rural bars. Naturally custom dictates that once you have accepted a man's hospitality, you then offer your own, so I bought a drink for the campesino. Many drinks later we both staggered out of the cantina and into the street. While the campesino weaved and groped for his pistol so he could demonstrate his marksmanship on the street lights, I fled down the street to my home, drunker and wiser.

Rural Mexico is ritualistic, and the mountain dwellers of Mexico are the most ritualistic of all. While watching the men play with their guns I thought of Jesse's and my position. We were essentially alone in the mountains, at Sanchez' mercy, with almost \$5,000 in our pockets. Neither Jesse nor I carried a gun. I knew that if a Mexican was insulted, or even thought he had been insulted, likely as not he would draw his gun and shoot. If he killed someone, it would be a run in the Sierras for him, as the saying goes. Death is not the same in Mexico as it is in the United States. Perhaps because the Mexican lives so close to the earth, he is more prepared to send one or be sent into it. The

very aggressiveness toward life of so many Mexicans is a far cry from the aloofness to life that most *norteamericanos* display. For the Mexican death is close. In the United States, death tends to be invisible, can therefore life itself takes on a deathlike quality.

"The rest of them and therefore life itself takes on a deathlike quality. When Sanchez returned, he had only one mule. "I've sent word up to have the men bring them down. They'll be here in a few hours." We loaded our gear on the one available mule and walked into the village. Mules are at a premium in the mountains. A good one costs about \$200. Compared to total income, that's about as much as an American pays for his car. We paid fifty pesos (\$4) a day to rent each mule. Because they are so valuable, we hired a boy to come along with us and care for them.

The trail to the village sloped down a bit, then rose to skirt the cliff above the river. The water boiled against the rocky walls of the canyon; trees and bits of timber tumbled in the current. Above the blue slate walls of the canyon, rich, verdant brush took hold and spread up toward the timber line. We walked in single file along the trail, passing through half a dozen tunnels hacked through solid rock. As we emerged from the last tunnel, I saw the village clinging to the cliffs above the river. With its cobblestoned streets, its ancient stone buildings, and the old church thrusting up its lonely spire, it looked like a scene from the Middle Ages.

As we entered the town, I saw the remains of a large sign painted on one of the buildings: *Plata*. We were entering an old silver mining town. I could see the mouths of old tunnels in the cliff face, and a number of abandoned ore cars lying bottom up along the trail. The village was larger than it had seemed from the air. As we entered it I saw the red roof tiles stretching up and around a bend in the river. We passed the church and walked down the narrow streets to the village square. The square was like all other village squares in Mexico, except that this one was in miniature. It measured no more than 40 by 100 feet. The rococo bandstand, with its floral curlicues, colonnades, and grills, looked like an illustration for a children's book. Sanchez left to check on the mules and Jesse and I sat in the plaza and talked to the crowd of children who gathered around us. Sud-

denly, as we talked, a door of a house fronting the plaza flew open and Sanchez emerged with a grizzled old campesino in tow. The campesino strode rapidly to where we were sitting and threw his arms around Jesse. After the *abrazo* he thrust a bottle at me. "*Aquí señor, toma!*" I looked quizzically at Jesse and Sanchez. "You're being welcomed into town," Jesse said. I reached for the bottle but before I could grab it the old man turned away and strode rapidly back across the plaza toward the open door. I followed Jesse and Sanchez after him.

Inside the door was a cantina, really just a bare room with a large plank lying across two barrels. On the wall behind the plank bar were wooden shelves holding three or four bottles of clear liquid. The adobe walls of the room were blackened by smoke from oil lamps, giving one the impression of being inside a cave. Stooping under the plank, the old man, Refugio, pulled the string that lit a dim light bulb and grabbed three glasses from under the bar, wiping them thoroughly on the front of his shirt. Filling them carefully to the very brim, he thrust one at me. Somewhat self-consciously, while the rest of the men watched, I drained my glass in the traditional campesino style, in one gulp. *Yak!* The stuff hit me immediately. My mouth felt like I had just stuffed a handful of hot coals into it and they were rapidly burning their way down through my guts. With tears streaming from my eyes I held onto the bar, gasping for breath. Neither Sanchez nor Jesse had touched their drinks. Refugio filled my glass again but I shook my head no, I wasn't going to touch that stuff again. As I fought for my breath he calmly poured a little of the liquid out onto the bar and struck a match to it. It burnt with a blue flame as it ran along the bar. Everybody broke into laughter at my expression; it could just as well have been my guts burning there on the bartop. Refugio then took his glass and drained it down without expression. "It's homemade mountain mescal," Jesse said. I nodded my head. I had been initiated.

The village had no restaurant, but we were invited into the home of one of the women who fed campesinos when they came down out of the mountains to go to church on Sunday. Señora Sala's house was a typical adobe mountain home. The kitchen was open to the air and

fresh water stood in the yard. There was a rough wooden table with four chairs beside the *pila*. While her nieces made a *pila* containing prepared chicken *mole*, a dish cooked in a hot tortillas. Señora Sala prepared

Everything was done in the old way: the adobe oven, the charcoal stove, the rough-hewn table, the utensils—all had centuries of use behind them. Even the sounds were old, the slap-slap of the mules' hoofs as they worked the tortilla dough, the clack of the mules' hoofs on the cobblestones outside. The scene in Señora Sala's house was to repeat itself again and again in the mountains, each time we stopped on the ancient, patient manner of the women, who knew to eat or rest. The ancient, patient manner of the men came in exactly what their tasks were, who knew that when the men came in to eat, no matter what the time, they were to be fed. Wherever we went in the following weeks, when we arrived at a small hut stuck away in a mountain canyon, the man was always there to invite us in and the woman always ready with food on the table.

While we were eating, the mules Sanchez had arranged to rent were brought down from the fields by their owners and tied up outside the house. "Why don't the campesinos use horses?" I asked Sanchez. "They are no good in the mountains," he replied. "They don't have the balance or the stamina of good mules." When I looked sceptical, Sanchez explained further. "The trails here in the mountains are very steep. Sometimes there are no trails at all. At night a horse will get frightened and slip and maybe fall. Mules can see in the dark, also they can carry a much heavier burden much farther than a horse. No one uses horses in the mountains, they are impractical."

Later on I saw a horse in the village square. It seemed out of place. Sanchez saw me looking at it. "It's not used to go up into the Sierras," he said. "The man who owns him only rides on Sunday."

After eating, we packed our gear on the mules and said our good-byes. Raul, the young man Sanchez had hired to care for the animals, came over to me and double-checked my load. He untied my trucker's knot, which I was extremely proud of, and bound my load down with rawhide thongs, then led us through the village toward the trail. I

looked in the open windows of the houses as we walked through the village and saw dark eyes staring out at me. Occasionally a young girl's face would appear and then abruptly disappear. I was worried about mounting my mule because I had never ridden before and I didn't want to look ridiculous. When the village ended and the trail began, Raul motioned me up on my animal and we were off.

The mules set a brisk pace and I felt myself bouncing up and down like an idiot. At a wide spot in the trail I let Jesse and Raul go by me and then brought up the rear. I wanted to learn how to ride with no eyes on me. When we came to the first switchback in the trail I turned around and looked back at the village. It had lost all appearance of a village; the red-tile rooftops were linked together in a ragged jigsaw puzzle, a geometric pattern reminding me of a cubist painting. The houses and church looked like huge tumbled rocks and boulders which had lodged along the banks of the river. Above me the mountains beckoned, stretching higher and higher, peaks folding into other peaks like gigantic steps leading into the clouds. Far above, the brilliant blue sky stretched over everything, a majestic sea rolling over the whole world.

There was no noise except that of my own animal. The silence was incredible, a quietness beyond the creaking leather stretched over wooden saddles, the iron hoofbeats on rocks. As I looked down into the valley the silence seemed to beat up out of the canyons, permeating everything. The world seemed to have come to a halt along the river. As I watched, a lone hawk dropped below me, circling from one saddlehorn of rock to another, far, far below.

We rode for two days, climbing higher and higher into the steep canyons. The trail was steep at times, and at other times it simply meandered along the ridges. Space and silence were everywhere, mile after mile of rolling ridges sweeping westward toward the sea. Fantastic cumulus clouds paraded over our heads like vast ships struggling over mountainous waves. When we crossed arroyos, leaves swept up out of them, borne upward by the stiff breezes blowing out of the canyons. At times we rode through fields of yellow flowers, so tall and profuse we lost sight of one another. Other times we picked our way

THE furrows planted on hillsides so steep it seemed past cornfields, the furrows planted on hillsides so steep it seemed impossible anyone could stand there, let alone till and work.

Occasionally we met other riders on the trail, *montañes*, *los que viven en las montañas*—those that live in the mountains. Inevitably they appeared out of nowhere, silent, many of them carrying weapons on their backs. Whenever we met them, we would stop. Sanchez would converse with the men, slowly, courteously, the conversations would converse with a strange formality. If there were young boys in the group, inevitably they would reach out and take Sanchez' hand and echo, inevitably they would reach out and take Sanchez' hand and group, inevitably they would reach out and take Sanchez' hand and kiss it. The gesture surprised me. I saw Raul do it when we first hired him to care for the mules, but I thought it was a gesture of thankfulness. The gesture was repeated often though, always with young men reaching out and kissing Sanchez' hand. I realized it was part of an mountain code, the way the young men showed their respect for an older, dignified visitor. Sanchez was no stranger to these mountains. I saw that he was considered an important person, someone to be honored and respected. The mannerism seemed rooted in the past. I spoke to Jesse about it later, and he said the gesture was the result of a cultural accident. During the 1860s, when Juarez was climaxing his drive to rid Mexico of Maximilian and the French, a number of French soldiers deserted and fled into the mountains. The ones who survived assimilated with the Indians, marrying and having children. The offspring of these children still lived in the mountains, light-skinned, blue-eyed campesinos. Many of the campesinos back at the airstrip where Jesse and I first arrived in the mountains had strikingly blue eyes and fair skin. Jesse said they were a legacy of the French soldiers who had fled into the mountains, and the custom of kissing the hand was a legacy of those same Frenchmen.

Entering the Sierras of Mexico is like entering a world bypassed by time. The mountains themselves take on a prehistoric quality, and I found myself drifting off into vague reveries about "first man." Occasionally I got separated from the rest of the party by a half-hour or so, and when that happened a strange feeling crept over me. I wasn't frightened; in fact, the feeling was quite nice. But I had never felt more alone. The ridges above me and the valleys below me took on an

abstract quality, a tentativeness that brought my whole existence into question. I began to wonder who I was. I could feel myself becoming amorphous, drifting out over the ridges and mountain tops. When that happened I spurred my mule to catch up with the rest of the group.

At times the trail was so steep we had to dismount and walk beside our animals. Sanchez had incredible stamina, tramping up the trail with a steady pace that left the rest of us far behind. My ass felt like raw hamburger from the hard wooden saddle, and I welcomed each moment of walking. I had long since removed my jacket and shirt to pad my saddle. Each moment on the mule's back was agony, and I gazed upward longingly, hoping our destination was in sight.

I am proud to report that before I left the mountains I was riding as well as any man, the campesinos themselves complimenting me. Now though, each rest period was like a reprieve from hell, and when Sanchez motioned for us to stop, I fell off my mule and lay panting on the ground. During rest periods I gazed down the trail we had climbed and saw it disappear in shadows far below.

In the late afternoon of the third day, we passed the first dwellings I had seen since leaving the village—a nest of adobe huts perched on the edge of a field. The field was fenced off with a stone wall. People watched as we passed, saluting Sanchez, who waved back from his mule. Across an arroyo I saw a large two-story adobe house. One end of the house was buried under a magnificent bougainvillea. I pointed it out to Jesse. "That's where we're going to spend the night," he said.

The house looked magnificent in the late afternoon sun. The rough adobe walls and dull-red tiles contrasted beautifully with the brilliant blue and purple flowers of the bougainvillea. The house belonged to Sanchez' family. At the moment, Rafael, Sanchez' brother, ran the place.

As we dismounted, three men and two women came out to greet us. We shook hands all around and the men took our mules away to be fed and watered. The women invited me and Jesse into the house. The house was immense, with a large back room containing two old-fashioned beds and a loft which was reached by a crude wooden

The front of the house had a patio-like room whose walls were ladder. The front of the house had a patio-like room whose walls were a series of arches open to the outside. One wall of the patio-room was waist high, beyond which was the kitchen, ancient, dark, exuding exciting smells.

It was harvest time and the floor of the patio was covered with piles of beans and pea pods. Sacks of beans stood in the corners, and two young girls were busy shelling peas, their hands moving swiftly over the piles. On the walls hung the working paraphernalia of the mountains: mule trappings and leather lariats, blankets and halters, and a romantic 1940 calendar depicting a bandit and his beautiful señorita in their mountain hideaway, the bandit either just returning or just leaving, the girl in tears at the door. In the corners of the room hung strings of chilis and corn and onions.

The two women who ran the household were Sanchez' mother and Rafael's wife. They bustled into the kitchen after we arrived and soon the smell of boiling coffee filled the house.

The two women worked in the kitchen in perfect harmony, each knowing exactly what to do, one stirring pots and cutting pieces of chicken, the other slapping cornmeal into tortillas and preparing the coffee. I mentioned the harmony to Jesse. "No one seems to be the boss," I said.

"There's no need for anyone to be boss," Jesse said. "There's just work to be done. Mexican women have no jealousies or animosities when their men come in from the fields, they know exactly what to do."

I thought of the States, where every kitchen is a sanctuary which other women enter at their peril. In rural Mexico, tasks have not yet been broken down into ill-defined areas. In the mountains every job is explicit, the woman's in the house among house things, the man's in the field among the animals and outside things. The intermingling of tasks that has appeared with the lessening of roles in the United States was not apparent here in the mountains.

"Women's liberation is a luxury of bored women," Jesse said. "Here in the mountains a woman does not have time to be bored. It would be ridiculous for a Mexican man to go into the kitchen, he

would never do it. If he did the woman would laugh him out of the house."

I was interested in what Jesse said. During my years in Mexico I had often observed the rigid separation of duties in the typical Mexican household. Although the separation was tending to break down a little among urban Mexicans—despite the cult of machismo—here in the mountains there was absolutely no sign of a breakdown. At the same time I couldn't get over the feeling that women—or at least the idea of woman—tended to dominate Mexican society. There was always the image of the woman, the earth mother, the hovering female presence that seemed to loom over everything like a vast, brooding bird with soft, warm wings. Despite the super-masculinity of the typical Mexican's attitudes, I felt Mexico to be a feminine country.

When the food was ready, Jesse, Sanchez and I were seated. I was given the first helping, hot chicken *mole* and tortillas, rich black beans, and a large mug of steaming black coffee loaded with sugar. I tore into my food. I especially dug the chicken *mole*, piping hot with a rich, chocolatey taste. Chicken is evidently the only meat eaten in the mountains except on special occasions, for in every house we entered we were fed chicken *mole* or some variation thereof.

After Jesse and I were through eating, the other men sat down beside Sanchez and ate, the women serving second and third helpings of whatever was desired. I noticed that after all the men had eaten, the women themselves sat down to eat. They had cheated a little though: while they were cooking, both of them continually stuck morsels into their mouths.

After eating I walked outside and stood under the bougainvillea, gazing into the valley below. I saw the shadows of clouds moving across the valley floor, soft, ominous shapes almost invisible except for the muted changes they made in the colors of the trees and rocks and canyon walls. The vast panorama below me appeared like a vague Technicolor dream, the shapes and shadows shimmering in a delicate light. Across the canyon I saw the peaks of other mountains, one after another, marching westward to the sea.

After everyone had eaten, we saddled up again and began the final

leg of our journey up to the fields. Jesse and I wanted to inspect the fields, and Sanchez wanted us to hurry so we could return to the house before dark.

We climbed steadily for two hours, passing through grasslands, fields, and barren, rocky stretches of land. Finally we entered a cornfield, and barren, rocky trees whose limbs were twisted as though tortured by the hardships of their lives, or a fanatical gardener had spent years misshaping them into weird mountain topiary. Beyond the ill-formed trees we entered the final rise of the mountain, heading up a chasm formed between two high ridges. At the head of the chasm Sanchez raised his gun and fired, signaling the man guarding the field that we were coming. We all dismounted. From here on we would walk.

We tied our mules to some bushes and followed Sanchez up a steep, narrow trail. The undergrowth was so dense we had to fight our way through it in many places. About 200 yards up the trail, Sanchez signaled us to be quiet, then he cupped his hands to his mouth and yodeled into the distance.

The sound of my breathing seemed much too loud as I waited with the others for the answering call. When it came, Sanchez started down the trail, crossed a small stream, and climbed another slope toward the marijuana field. Jesse and I hurried after him.

When we reached the field, I saw the farmer scurry into the underbrush, his gun on his back. The marijuana plants stirred softly in the breeze and the sun glistened off the bright golden leaves. Jesse and I looked at one another; we had made it! Row after row of cannabis plants stretched quietly up the hillside. A lower half of the field in the process of being planted. The rows had been tilled, and an irrigation hose fed water to each terrace. The upper half of the field was redolent with hemp, the foxtails glistening in the late afternoon sunlight.

Leaving us standing beside the field, Sanchez climbed the path skirting the field and disappeared into the brush. Jesse and I carried our gear up to the middle terrace and I sat down to rest under a small tree. A cool breeze played over the field, and it felt good to lie back

in the shade and think of the long journey that had brought us here. More than six weeks of work and sweat and hardships. If nothing else happened, if we went no further than this, to me it was still worth it. Jesse, perhaps, thought differently. It was getting late and he didn't waste time musing. He worked his way down the rows of plants, inspecting each one by squeezing the *colas*. If the grass is good, a sticky residue of cannabin will stick to your hand when you grasp the foxtrail. After squeezing half a dozen plants, Jesse held up his hand and smiled. His palm was covered with resin. By the time Sanchez returned, Jesse had inspected half the field. We walked back down the trail to our mules and set out for the rancho. In the morning we would return and talk to the man who owned the field.

That evening Jesse and I gorged ourselves on the dinner Señora Sanchez prepared. After dinner we sat back and looked at the stars while Sanchez broke out a bottle of mescal. Everything was beautiful, the incredible starlight, the mountains, the shrill sound of the cicadas. We talked for an hour or so, then I left the group to relax under the bougainvillea with a joint. The moon disappeared behind a cloud and the stars came down to join me, seeming to share in my contentment. Seeing the stars so bright reminded me of a night in Big Sur when I had dropped some acid and walked out on my porch to gaze at the stars; every constellation seemed hand-drawn, golden lines connecting stars into instantly recognizable pictures, Andromeda, the Pleiades, all the constellations one read about but never saw. In my acid hallucination I recognized every constellation and knew where the Mayans got their images. They came from the stars! The geometric configurations which I had seen on the temples of Chichen Itza and Bonampak stared down at me from the heavens. I remembered standing on my porch in Big Sur transfixed; I was wearing a Huichole Indian costume that I had bought from an Indian in Tepic, and the sense of drama was so great that it seemed like I was being drawn up into the heavens, sucked into a vortex, attracted and frightened at the same time. My fixation on the stars that night in Big Sur was so profound that for a moment I was afraid for my sense of reality. With the least prodding I would have stepped off my porch (there was a thirty-five-foot drop

to the ground) to join them. At that moment I decided that such distances were beyond me, so I stepped back inside.

Tonight was different. I hadn't taken any acid, just smoked some good dope, and as the moon moved in and out of the clouds, the whirring of the cicadas gradually ceased, and in the distance I could hear a mule cough, then the yapping of some dogs. I spread my poncho on the ground underneath the bougainvillea. As I was stretching out, Señora Sanchez, Rafael's wife, came out of the house and grabbed my shoulder. "*Venga, venga*," she said. I got up and followed her. She led me inside to her bedroom and pointed at her bed. "*Es suyo*," she said (It's yours). I stared at her in stupefaction. Jesse looked up from the circle of men sitting in the patio. "The guest always gets the master bed," he said. "They're doing you an honor." "I don't want the master bed, I want to sleep out under the stars." Jesse grinned. "Too bad, if you refuse they'll be insulted."

Dumbly, I walked outside and dragged in my sleeping bag. I knew I couldn't offend Rafael's hospitality. I threw my bag on the bed and began undressing. I felt miserable. To add to my embarrassment, everyone watched as I took off my clothes. They stared in surprise when they saw I wore no undershorts. The señora blushed and quickly turned her back. I blushed too, feeling more stupid by the minute. I had undressed in front of everyone because everyone was standing in the room and I thought that that was part of the custom too. The men grinned at my discomfort. I was suddenly too tired to care.

As I crawled into my bag, Señora Sanchez returned and began yanking blankets out of the corner. I asked her what she was doing. "I am going outside, señor, to make a bed so I can sleep." I leaped out of bed. "Wait!" I cried. I grabbed my clothes and struggled into them, stumbling outside. The men looked up from their discussion. "Where're you going?" Jesse asked. "I'm not going to take her bed, she has to sleep on the ground if I do." "Don't worry about it." "Bullshit!" I said. "I'm not going to sleep in that bed, courtesy or no courtesy!"

The men laughed as I stumbled over them, dragging my sleeping

bag behind me. Stammering, I turned to Rafael. "Señor, I appreciate your courtesy but it is such a wonderful night and I really desire to sleep out under the stars tonight." "¿Cómo no?" Rafael answered. He stood up and grabbed several large burlap sacks, the kind marijuana is stored in, and spread them out on the ground. I rolled my bag out on the sacks and crawled inside. My high, which I had completely lost in the bed hassle, returned and once again I gazed up at the stars. They moved with unearthly stillness across the heavens, seeming to be close at hand and infinitely far at the same time.

The next day we returned to the field. José, the farmer who had disappeared with Sanchez when we arrived the day before, was waiting for us. He was a small, thin man with a pockmarked face. He stood beside his mule, which was tethered under a tree.

Both Jesse and I were carrying our cameras. José looked at them suspiciously. Sanchez explained to José that we wanted to photograph the field, and get some pictures of him as he worked. José looked at us incomprehendingly, his eyes darting from our faces to the cameras. He looked at us as if we were holding guns on him. The idea that someone would come all the way into the mountains to take pictures of his field was crazy. He shook his head from side to side.

"José," Sanchez said, "these men are good friends of Jesus. He brought them up here; they come with his recommendation."

"Claro, hombre," José said, "but this is my field. Jesus does not pay me to grow mofa. If the señores want to buy mofa I will sell it, but I cannot make any money with pictures. . . ."

Jesse and I looked at one another. This is what we had expected but had hoped it wouldn't happen. The Mexican campesino is naturally distrustful, not only of gringos with cameras, but of anything outside his mountains. José had no reason to let us approach his fields, let alone film him working in them. He was in a peculiar position because of our friendship with Jesus, however, and I could see he was uncomfortable. All the same, he was adamant. He wasn't going to let us photograph anything.

Sanchez said nothing, just stood beside his mule looking uncon-

cerned. For him the trip meant being paid to guide us. It did not matter whether our trip was successful or not. I could sense that he too was uneasy around our cameras. Both of the men were probably thinking that Jesus was a fool for letting Jesse and me come into the mountains in the first place. My feelings were ambivalent. On the one hand I respected José, and on the other I was pissed off that he was making our job difficult. Jesse was more practical, however. He put his camera away and told me to do likewise. "Bueno, hombre," he nodded to Jose. "Forget the cameras. We'll help you work in the field."

With our cameras out of the way, José loosened up. We followed him along the rows of plants as he displayed his crop. He was proud of his work. Many of the farmers in the mountains are relatively unsophisticated when it comes to growing weed, throwing seeds into the ground and forgetting them, except for minimal clearing and care, until they are ready to harvest. José obviously was different. He took care of his plants, and the field showed it. Each plant had a small dike built up around it for irrigation. All the rocks had been cleaned out of the field and tossed into the arroyo below. The field itself was terraced down the hillside in two-foot-wide steps, and each row of plants was slightly higher than the one below it. As we moved along the rows, José stopped at each plant and plucked off a few bottom leaves—the garbage leaves, he called them. He was trimming the leafy growth that produced little cannabin but at the same time used up a lot of the nutrients that should be going into the rest of the plant.

José had fifty-pound sacks of commercial chemical fertilizer that had been supplied by Jesus. In the old days, he explained, when marijuana had been cultivated by Indians, each plant was fertilized with a small fish buried alongside it. I queried José about the practice, wondering how the Indians got the fish up into the mountains. He was vague. Later Jesse confirmed his story. In the old days, however, there had been no danger in cultivating marijuana since there was no law against it, and it was grown freely in the lowlands. "Grass was very popular with the Indians of ancient Mexico," Jesse said. "They used it as a medicine." I knew that many Indians in Mexico did use grass

medicinally. When I visited Quintana Roo in the late fifties, marijuana grew wild everywhere. Once I stopped at a Mayan settlement along the coast and one of the delicacies I was offered was grass—not as a high but simply as an Indian remedy for fatigue.

As we followed him down the rows, José caressed each plant, holding out the long branches to show off the colas. The average height of the plants was approximately seven feet, and each cola was about ten to twelve inches long, thick with resin and seeds. José explained that high noon was the best time to harvest the plants because the resin oozed out of the plant in the hot sun and glistened on the leaves. In late afternoon the resin was sucked back into the plant, and the leaves were relatively unsticky. He grabbed a cola and squeezed it. When he held up his hand, his palm glistened with resin.

Every so often I noticed a dried, frazzled-looking plant which looked dead. I asked José about them. He said that they were the *hombre*, or male, plants, and most of them were pulled out of the ground before the female plants matured. His explanation was that if they were left growing they would fecundate the female plants and thereby decrease the resin content of the flowers. I asked him how come all the male plants were not removed from the fields. He shrugged his shoulders. "It's not necessary," he said, and let it go at that.

One of the myths among cannabis aficionados is that the male plant must be removed from the fields before it fertilizes the female plant. José's confirmation interested me, but what interested me even more was that he felt he could safely leave a few male plants in the field. He seemed to think that a little pollen wouldn't hurt his crop, perhaps reasoning that it would be cruel to deny the female plants all male companionship. I knew that the female plants were pollinated by the action of the wind, not by insects, and I reasoned that such a minute number of male plants could hardly fertilize more than a few dozen female plants. Nevertheless, as we walked down the rows I saw that all the male plants were dry, shriveled husks, obviously beat after supplying so many females with their pollen.

The process of marijuana cultivation has changed considerably in

the last few years. Before weed got popular the whole process of growing, packing, selling, and shipping was extremely casual, with few standards. This casualness was epitomized in the mountains, where, for the most part, the farmers simply threw seeds in the ground where, for the rainy season began and then harvested the grass when the plants looked mature. Any other agricultural considerations were unheard of. The quality of the grass that resulted could be anything from substandard to dynamite, depending on a number of circumstances. If the soil was especially fertile, the sun reasonably hot, water abundant, and the plants allowed to mature properly, then more than likely the weed would be potent. On the other hand, if the soil was poor, water scarce, and the growing season short, garbage grass would be the result. The casual cultivation by the farmers was due partly to the nature of the cannabis plant itself, which grows wild wherever seeds are dropped. In the years since the marijuana business has become serious, the cultivation techniques employed by the farmers have improved.

In the first place, many entrepreneurs began to provide growers along with tools and equipment, potent seed, probably the single most important factor in producing powerful weed. They also impressed upon their growers that care was needed to produce higher-quality weed, and that better weed would bring more money. Now farmers like Rafael prepare their fields carefully. When the seedlings emerge from the ground, they are meticulously cared for. In Mexico the first crop is planted in May or June, right before the rainy season begins. In a few weeks the seedlings emerge from the ground and must be protected from rabbits and deer and other predators. In a month or so the plants are from a foot to three feet tall, and the farmer must spend every day in his field. Quite often he lives beside his field in a small hut.

It's hard work for a farmer to grow a marijuana crop because he must also take care of his corn or bean crop, which is often hours away from his weed patch. Successful weed farmers sometimes hire other men to care for their corn and bean fields, and sometimes a few farmers will band together in a weed patch, sharing the work. This

has become especially common in the last few years as the demand for weed has increased. The cooperatives work together not only for security, but also because of the sheer amount of labor involved. After the plants have shown their sex, the male plants are removed from the field. Then comes the job of trimming the garbage leaves, or fingers, as they are called, from the female plants. It is a pruning process that goes on as long as the plants are growing. The farmer must make sure his plants receive enough water, but not too much, for too much water will cause the roots to rot. The best soil for growing marijuana is light and sandy, the kind that water drains through quickly. Usually water is no problem for the first crop since plenty of rain falls in the high mountains during the season. It is the second crop, the one planted in October, that needs watching. The second crop must be irrigated, and many farmers string plastic pipe from a nearby stream down to their field. Obtaining the plastic pipe is next to impossible for the unaffiliated farmer. It is the farmers who are linked with entrepreneurs like Jesse who are able to string irrigation pipe to their fields.

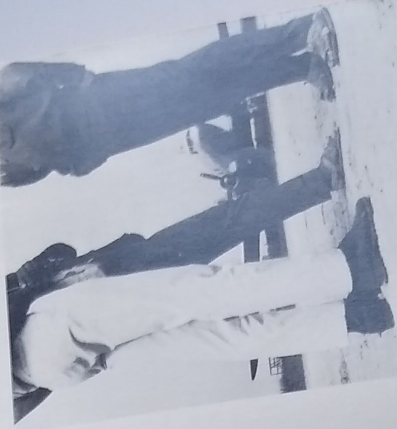
Before weed got popular, few farmers bothered growing two crops, most of them being content with the one crop that grew during the rainy season. Like everything else though, success breeds industry, and now many farmers grow two crops. Some even attempt to grow three crops in one year but few areas in Mexico are suited to support three growing seasons. Most of the weed grown in these four-month periods is harvested while immature, and therefore is not of very high quality.

The average growing period for marijuana is six months. In that time the plants have a chance to mature properly and to flower. The harvesting time is crucial for good marijuana. If the plant is left in the ground too long after blossoming, it will lose a lot of its potency. Most farmers harvest their weed a week or so after the flowers bloom, cutting them down during the hottest part of the day when the resin is thick on the leaves.

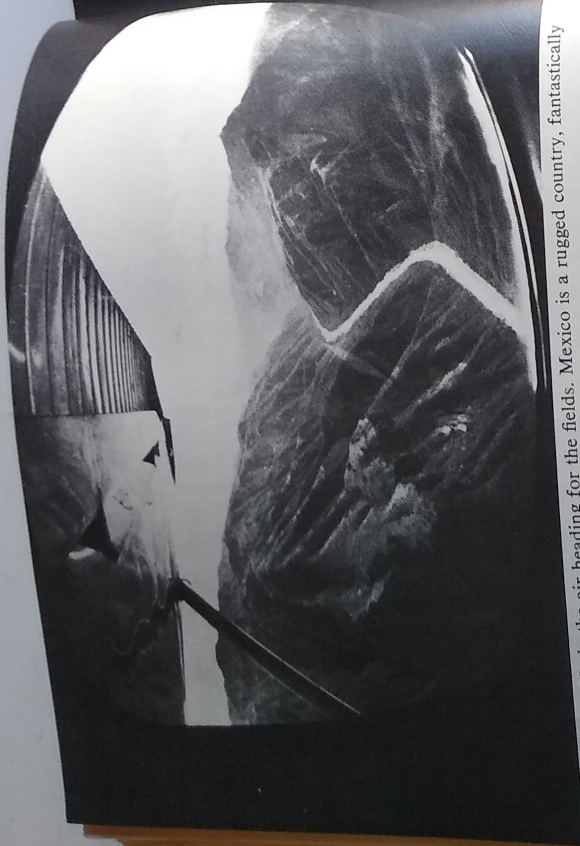
Jesse and I worked all day with José, helping him trim the garbage leaves off each plant and repairing the dikes that had fallen down. Each dike was carefully cleaned of weed and debris and then rebuilt,

On the road, Jesse and I spent months on the back roads of Mexico, driving over 30,000 miles looking for the connection who could take us into the Sierras. Every lead had to be followed, every dirt road traveled down.

Waiting to Meet The Man. Three-quarters of dope smuggling is waiting, the last quarter is running. Here Jesse and the author have driven into the campos and are waiting for the man who will lead them to the man who will take them into the mountains.



A small dirt airstrip in Guerrero. Waiting for Jesus to arrive with his Cessna. Going into the mountains in a Cessna is a luxury. If we had to go on mules the trip would take 10 days. In an airplane it takes two hours. After we land we still have three days' journey on muleback.



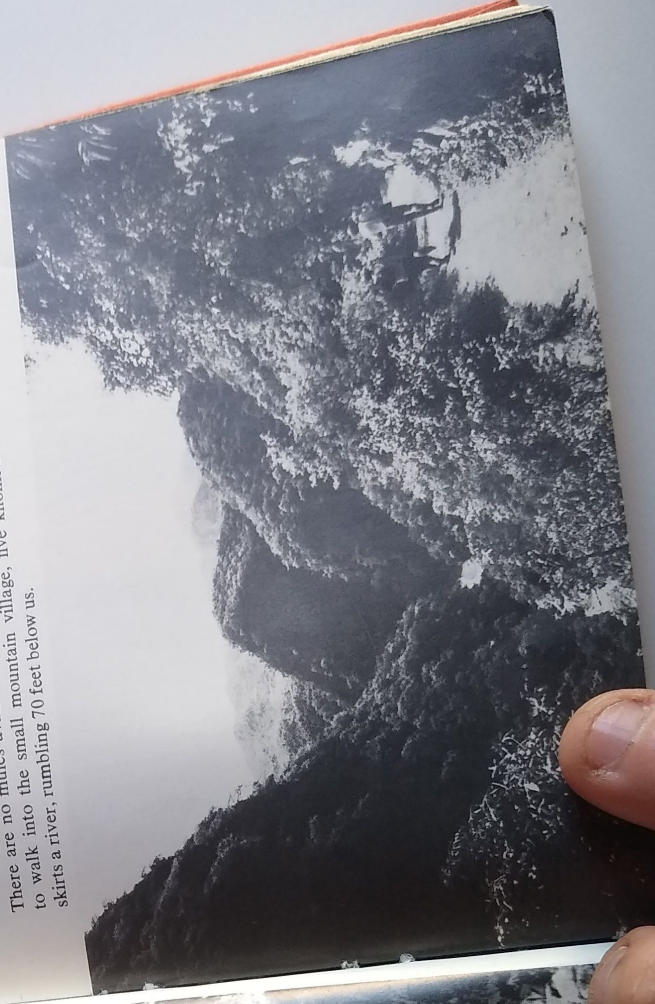
Up in the air heading for the fields. Mexico is a rugged country, fantastically brutal. There is no easy way to get anywhere.

Jesus taxis in after landing. The airstrip is not much wider than the plane. To land, Jesus has to approach the face of a sheer cliff, dipping his wings and dropping down onto the rugged surface.



Mountain people. Airplanes are uncommon, so the campesinos gather around. Jesus makes about two trips a month into the area during the growing season. For most campesinos Jesus is their only contact with the outside world.

There are no mules available when we arrive at the dirt airstrip so we have to walk into the small mountain village, five kilometers distant. The trail skirts a river, numbling 70 feet below us.

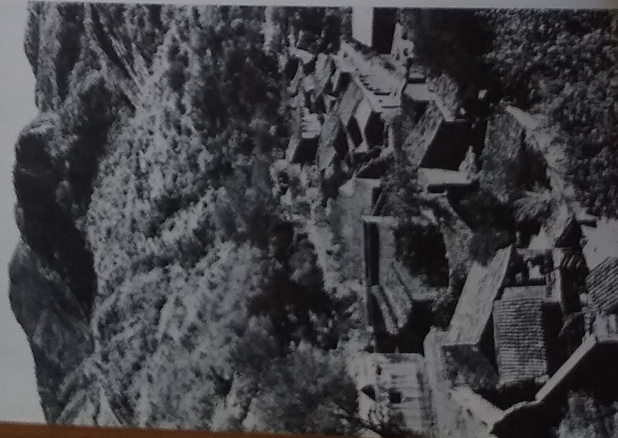


In the village Sanchez hires some mules. We saddle up and prepare to go into the mountains.

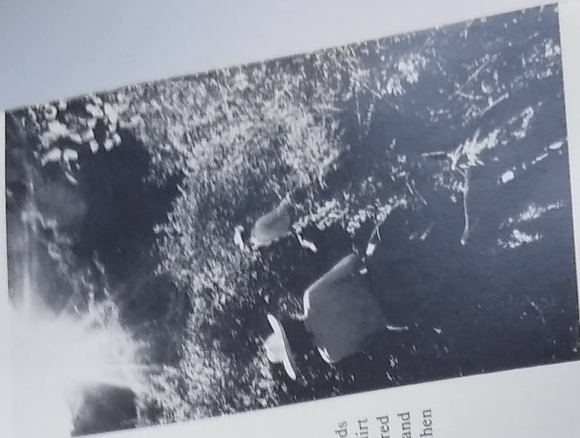
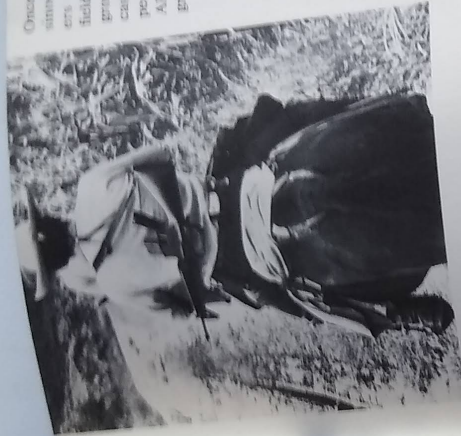


Leaving the village, Raul, our mule tender, takes us toward the trail leading to the mountains.

The village seen from the trail above. A mosaic of tile roofs, the village was inhabited by silver miners during the early part of the century. Now it is almost deserted, nothing but a few shacks and marijuana fields.



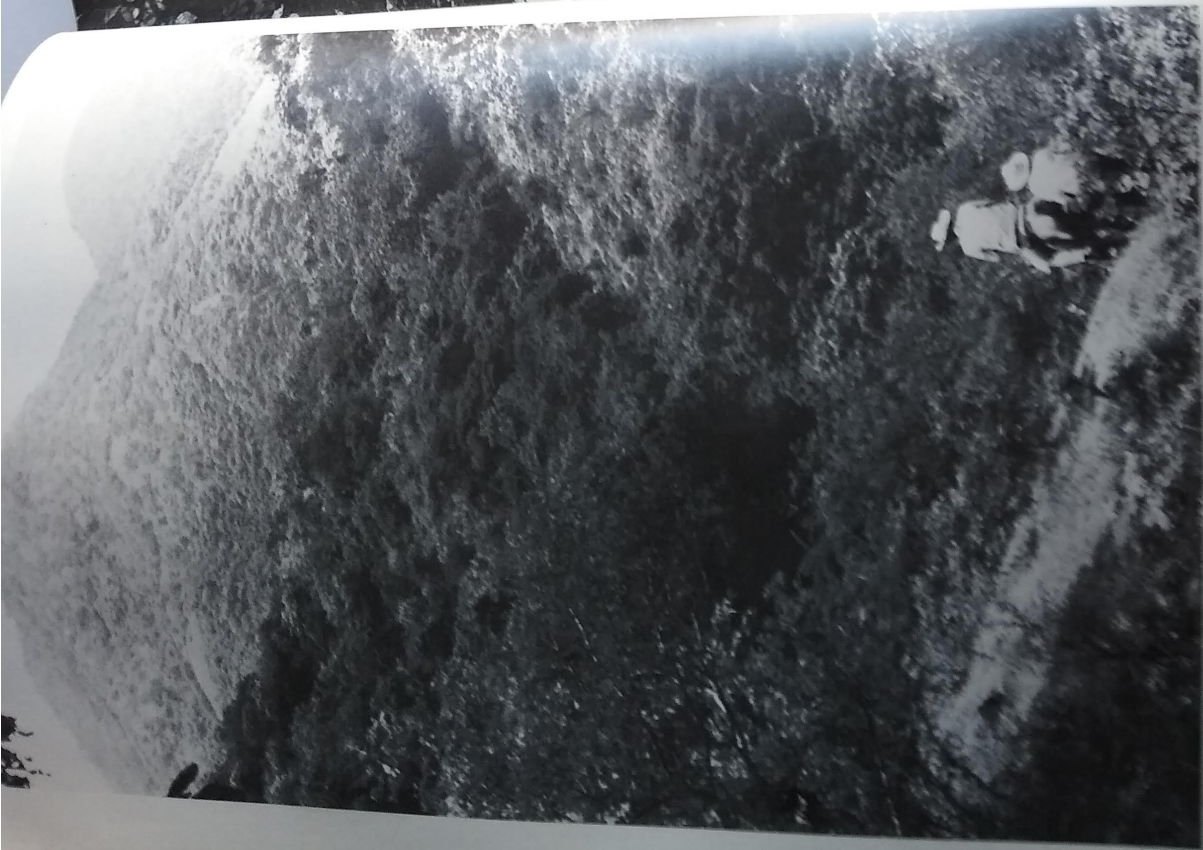
Once we leave the village more camp-staves join us. These are marijuana growers of marijuana traveling up to their fields. The AR-15 rifles are used by the growers to protect their fields from occasional army patrol audacious enough to penetrate into this part of the Sierras. The AR-15s are supplied to the marijuana by gringo smugglers.



The trail gets steep. The marijuana fields are two or three days' ride from the dirt airstrip. In the Sierras mules are preferred over horses because of their stamina and superior climbing ability, especially when the trail gets rocky and steep.



At the 8,000-foot level we meet a grower coming down the trail. Courtesy demands that we stop and exchange pleasantries and information. The mountain grapevine is extremely important. The movement of strangers, soldiers, anything unusual is noted and passed on.

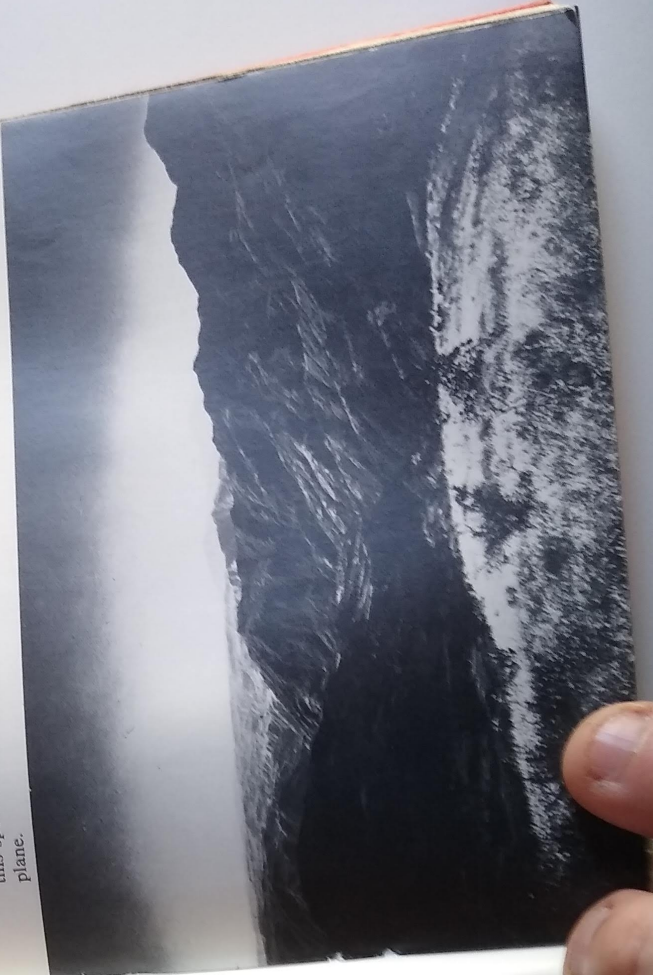


At 9,000 feet the mountain peaks still loom over us. Above are the marijuana fields, hidden in the canyons and gorges.



After two days everyone is exhausted. We stop to water the mules in a mountain stream.

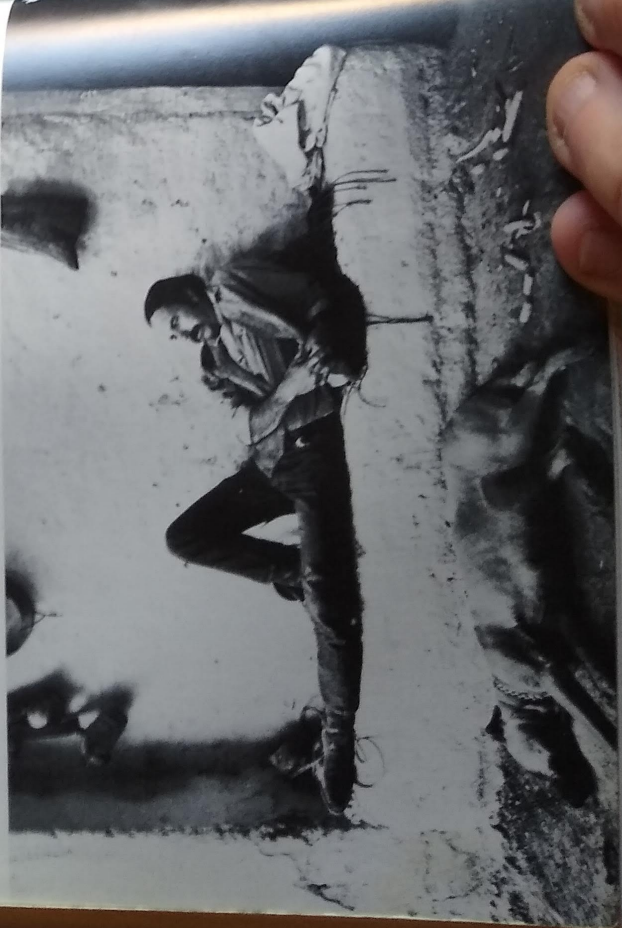
Seen from above, the Sierras take on an ominous, surrealistic appearance. Fifty miles away, toward the west, is the sea. There are no roads between this spot and the ocean. All movement is either by foot, mule, or small airplane.



After three days we reach a mountain settlement. Here we will rest before continuing on up to the marijuana fields. Even the dog is tired. A nice thing about the mountains is, no matter where you go, the houses are open to you. During every phase of our journey the mountain people opened their homes and their hearts.

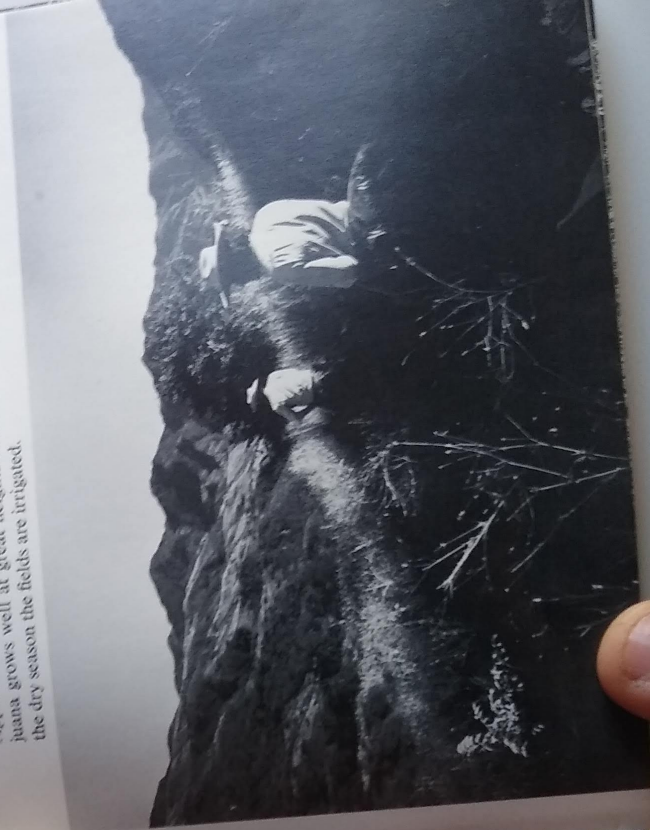


The author resting after two days on a m

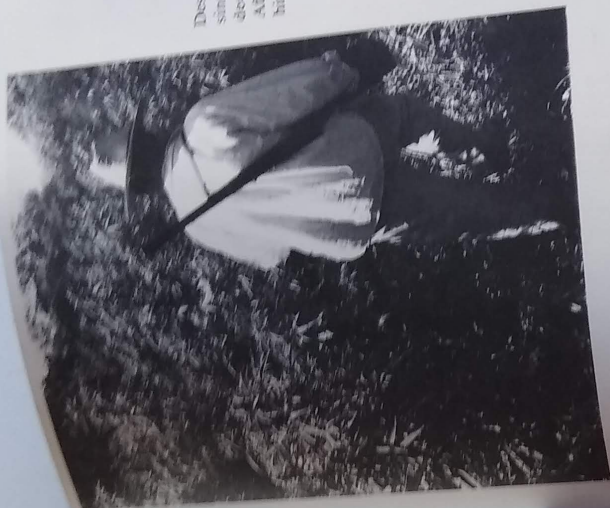


After a night's rest the mules are saddled. We have another half day's journey ahead of us before we reach the marijuana fields.

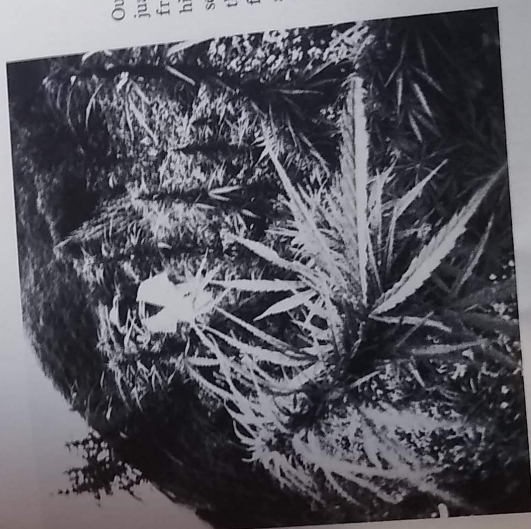
Approaching the marijuana fields. The elevation is over 10,000 feet. Marijuana grows well at great heights in areas where there's lots of rain. During the dry season the fields are irrigated.



Despite our signals the campesino guarding the field still seems it intelligent to split. After coaxing, Sanchez will get him to come out of hiding.



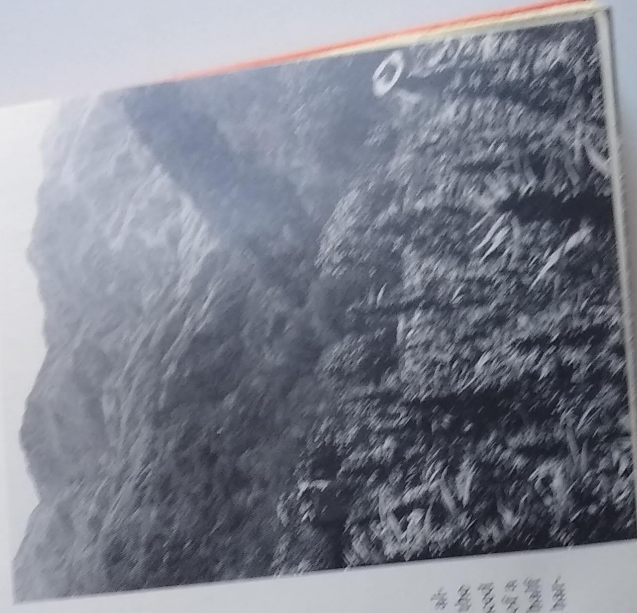
Our first good view of a marijuana field. A campesino peers from behind the plants. For him the forbidden weed represents six months' hard work and this year's supply of food for his family. Campesinos are encouraged to plant marijuana by the big city entrepreneurs because it is one of the few money crops they can actually grow. Here the plants are over eight-feet tall.



As we near the field in late afternoon a campesino signals with his rifle. If we approached the field without signaling, there is a good chance we would be shot.



The field is even more than Jesse and I expected. Some of the plants are over eight-foot tall.

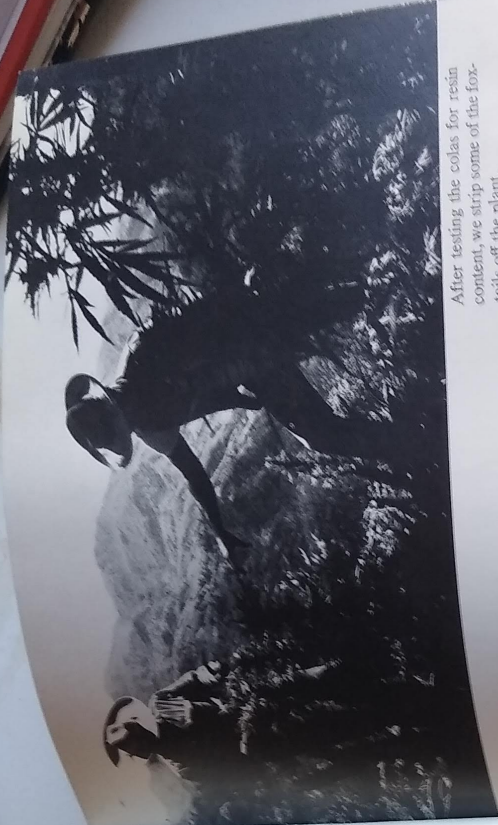


The field is well concealed, almost impossible to spot from the air. This field with its unusual crop is hidden in a cleft of a remote arroyo. The lower half of the field has already been harvested.

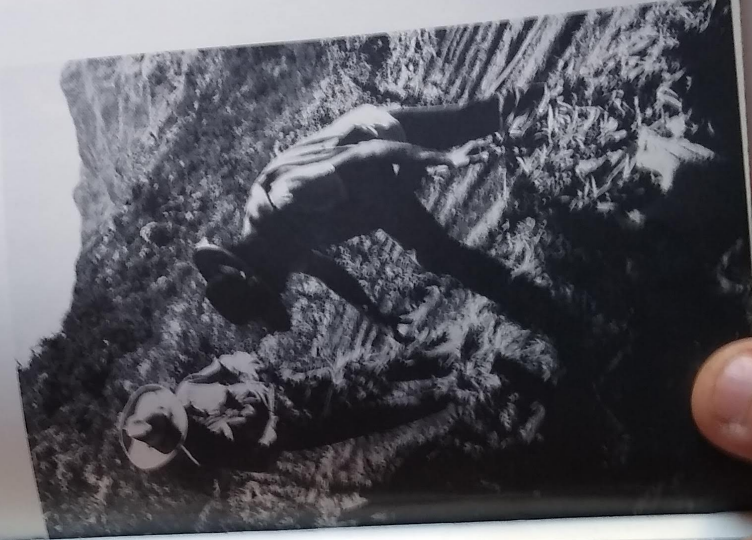


This is a four-month-old crop of corn, growing in a cleft of a remote arroyo. The lower half of the field has already been harvested.

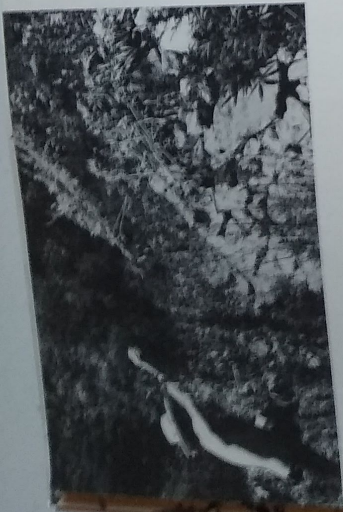
The first thing we do is test the resin content of the plants by squeezing the colas. If, after squeezing, a sticky residue is left on the hand, you know you have good weed!



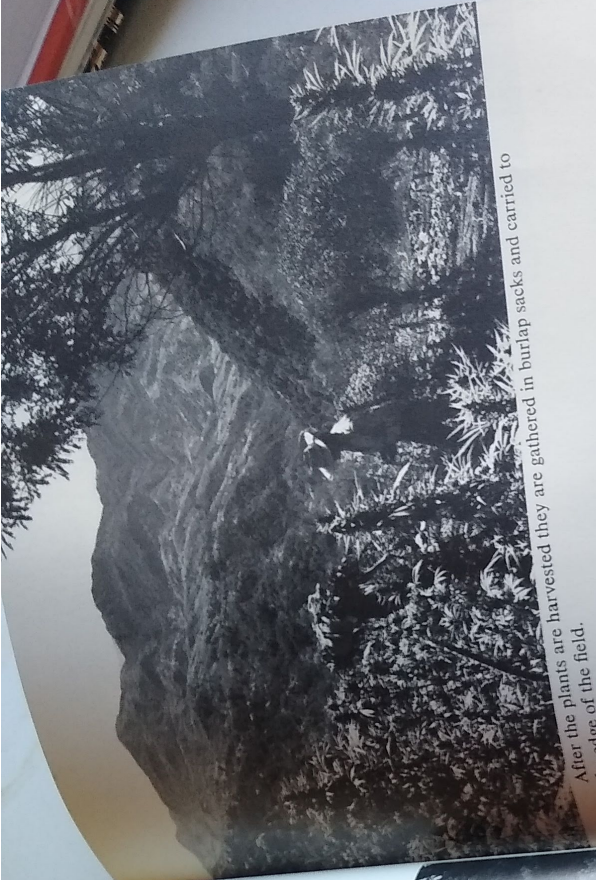
After testing the colas for resin content, we strip some of the fox-tails off the plant.



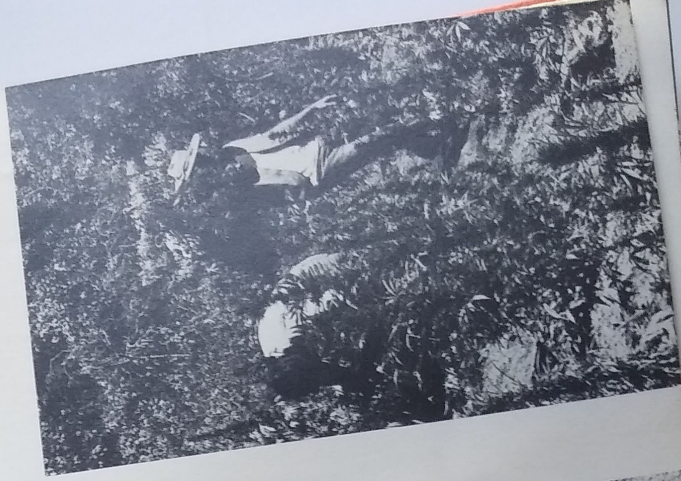
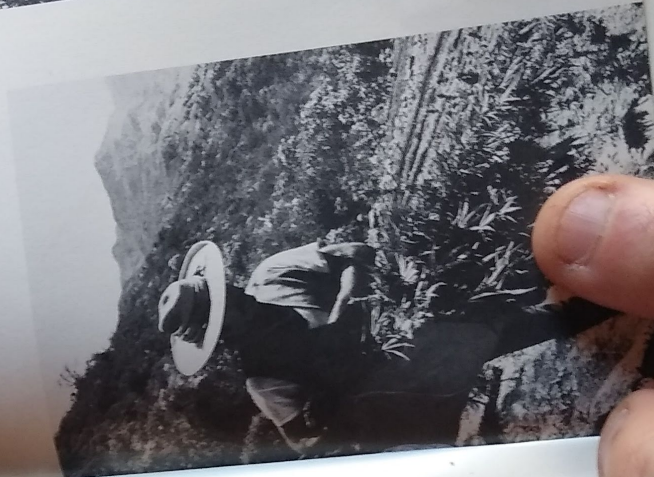
When the plants are mature the upper parts of the plant are stripped and bundled in burlap bags.



Stripping the upper parts of the plant. The marijuana plant is divided into three parts during harvest—the colas, or flowers, the upper parts, and the bottom part. Each part of the plant varies in quality. Sometimes the various parts are mixed together to form a uniform product; more often than not they are sold separately.



After the plants are harvested they are gathered in burlap sacks and carried to the edge of the field.



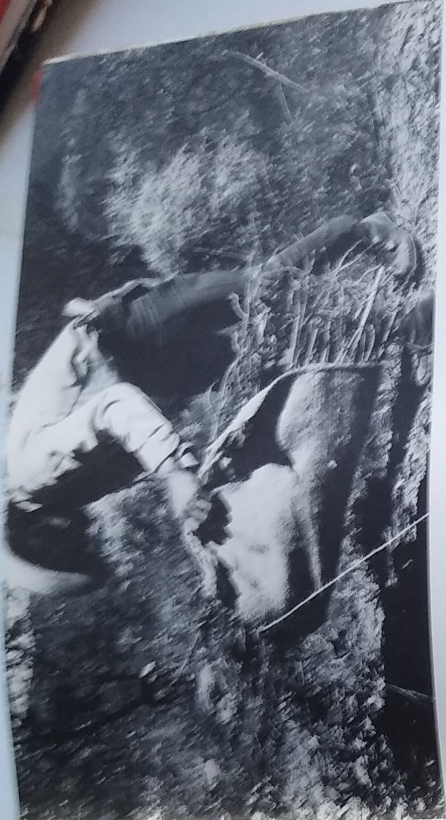
After the weed is harvested the bundles are tied on burros. Then they are transported to a drying shed—usually quite a distance from the field.



The drying shed. The colas de zorra are placed inside the shed on special drying racks. The regular parts of the plant are spread out on the ground to dry.



Spreading marijuana out on the ground to dry. At night the weed will be gathered up and taken inside. The next day it will be spread out on the ground again—and periodically turned over. It takes about 10 days to properly cure marijuana.



Sanchez oversees the operation with indifference. The 38-super is tucked in the belt — typical Mexican style!

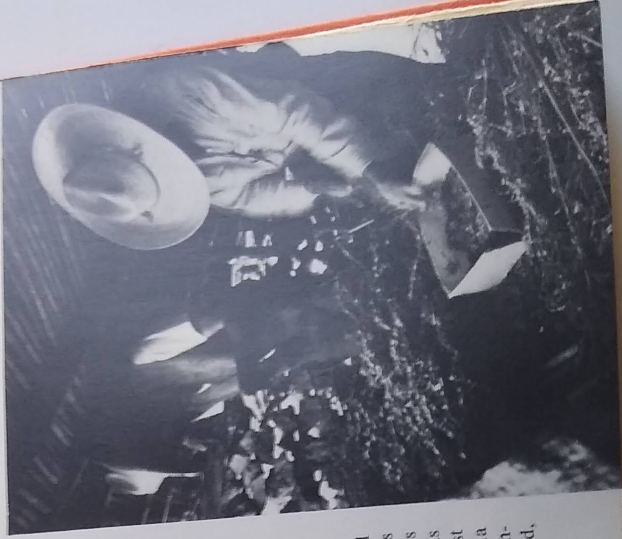


The colas de zorria, or foxtails, are special. They are dried on special racks inside the drying shed.

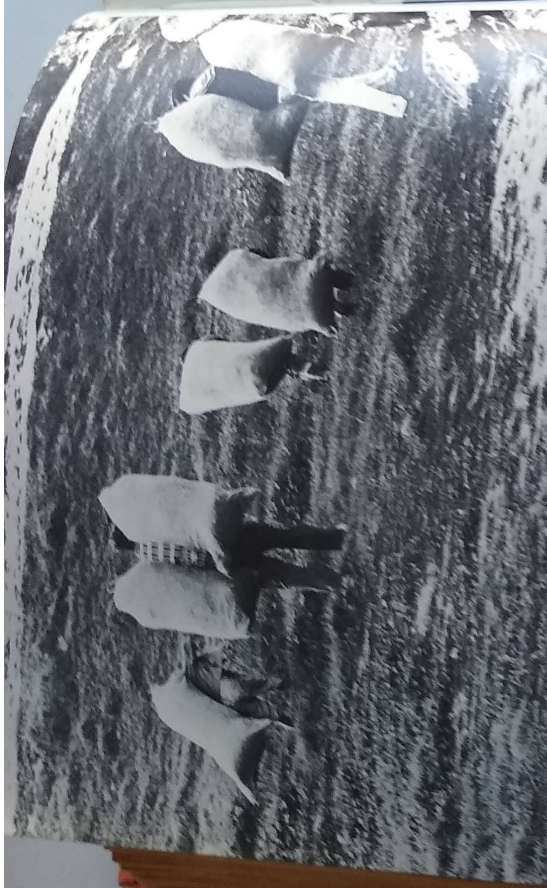
Taking the colas inside the drying shed. The colas are always dried out of the direct rays of the sun.



Spreading the colas out on the drying racks. Every day the foxtails will be turned over to insure uniform drying.



Stripping a sample from a dried cola. The man on the right is shredding the actual flowers from the rest of the plant. This is for sampling. This is the most potent part of the marijuana plant. After it is stripped a sample will be "tasted," or smoked, to determine quality.



After all the marijuana is cured it is stuffed in burlap sacks and carried down the mountains. Here the campesinos are carrying the sacks of marijuana toward the dirt airstrip for loading aboard the plane.



Taking off with a load. The airplane has to maneuver down the bumpy airstrip and then hurtle out into a canyon. A fully-loaded Cessna often drops two or three hundred feet down into the canyon before gaining enough momentum to rise above the mountain ridges. The bush pilots are experts, however, able to land and take off in seemingly impossible places.



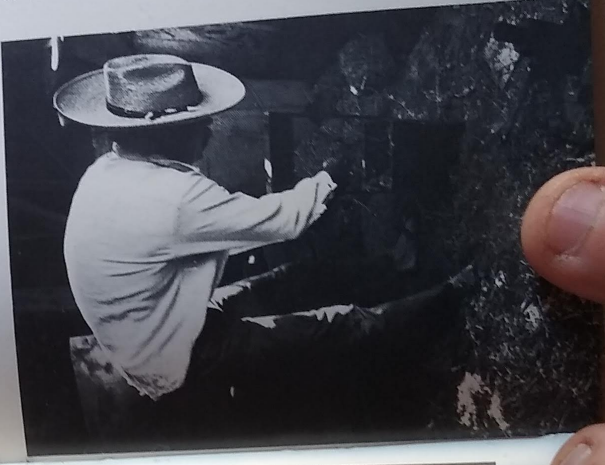
Once out of the mountains the sacks of marijuana are loaded into a truck. From here it will be taken to a warehouse where it will be stored until ready for shipment to the States.



The author standing beside half a ton of weed in a warehouse. Does he look nervous?



Once the marijuana is safely stored in a warehouse, many Mexican entrepreneurs will brick it. Bricking marijuana into kilos often destroys some of the quality, therefore many gringo smugglers prefer to buy their weed in bulk form. Here the bricking process is shown.



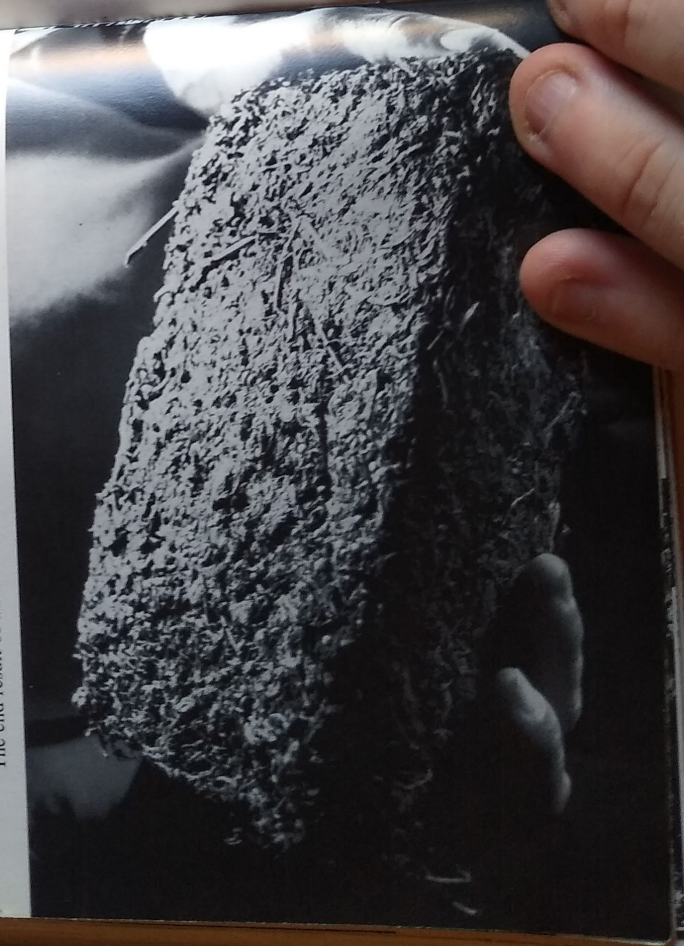
Stuffing the marijuana into the press. Most marijuana presses are made out of old automobile parts. A hydraulic jack is used to compress the weed.



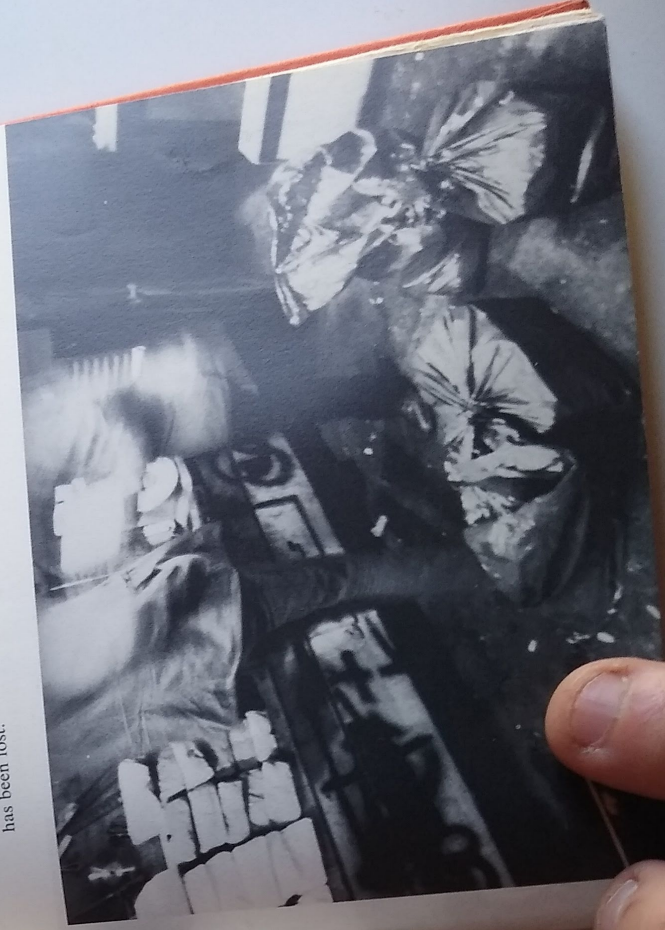
Squirting in some Pepsi-Cola. Many campesinos mix a sticky sugar solution in with their marijuana—ostensibly to make the bricks bind. Actually, the sugar does nothing but add weight to the weed—and it destroys the quality of the marijuana!

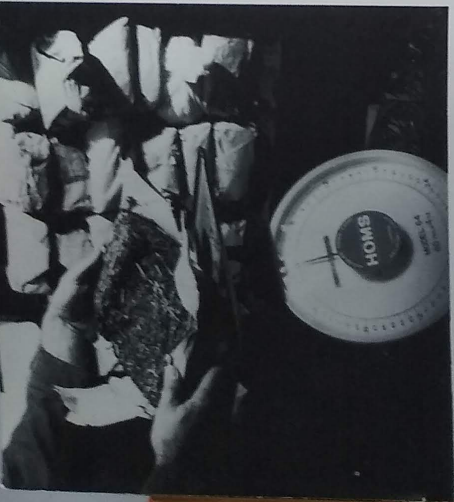


The end result of all the effort—one kilo; 2.2 pounds of marijuana.



After months of work and many miles, the kilos are unwrapped in a warehouse in San Francisco. The first thing the Stateside dealer will do after receiving the shipment will be to weigh all the kilos to see how much weight has been lost.



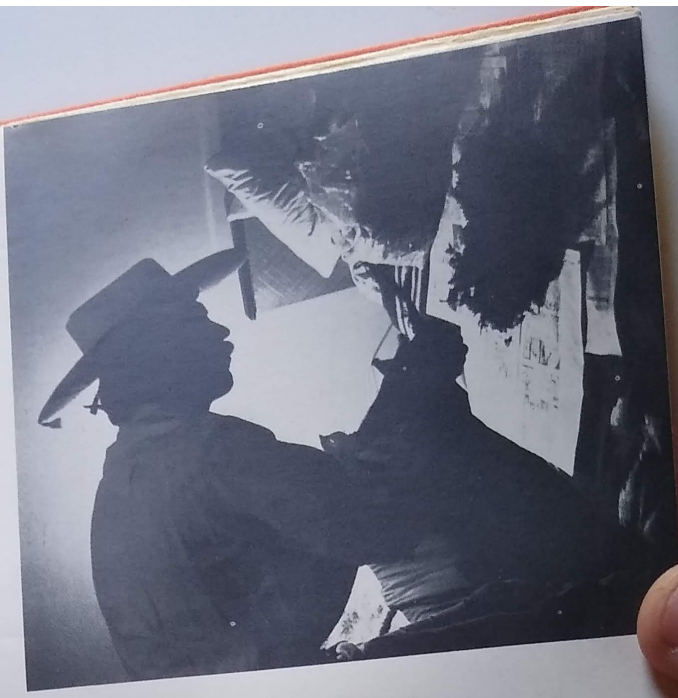


Some of the kilos are broken open and weighed individually. This is to check for stems and any sugar residue. This marijuana has not been sugared, however.



The kilos haven't been pressed into brick form. Here the choicest part of the marijuana plant is spread out on newspaper for inspection and sampling.

Cutting into a brick reveals a nice, stem-free kilo.

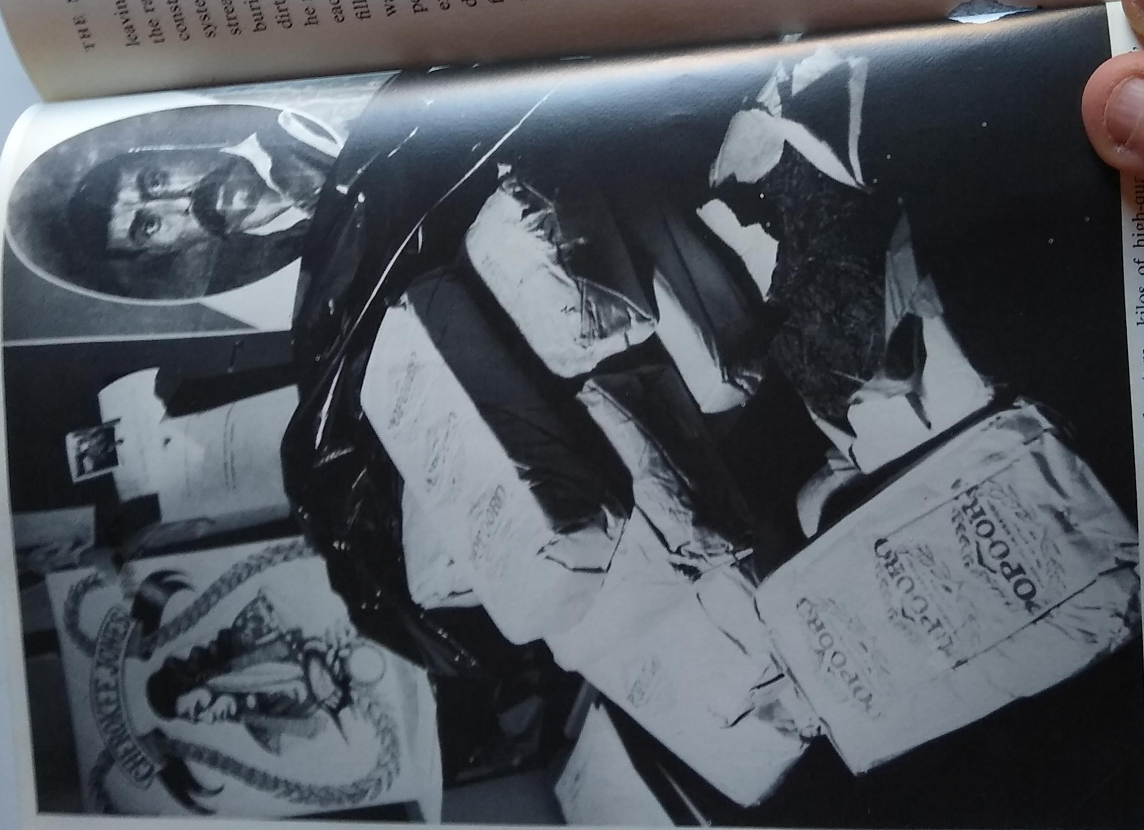


THE MOUNTAINS

leaving a small aperture for water on the upper edge. At the end of the rainy season water gets scarce in the higher canyons so José had constructed an elaborate irrigation system to water his plants. The system involved a small dam which he had built across a nearby stream and a long ditch from the dam to the field. In the ditch he buried 400 feet of plastic irrigation line, covering it with leaves and dirt so it couldn't be spotted from the air. When he watered the plants he moved the end of the irrigation line up and down his field, feeding each terrace individually. The water would run down the terrace and fill each dam through the little gaps we had left. Each plant was watered twice a week. The soil in José's field was light and sandy and perfectly suited for his crop. Although the plants didn't grow tall (José explained that he kept them trimmed down to avoid detection), they did spread out quite fully. Each day José devoted half his time to his field, trimming the garbage leaves, checking for rodents and pests, and repairing his dams. In two or three weeks his field would be ready for harvesting.

In the days before marijuana was as popular as it is now, at harvest time the whole plant was cut down. After the weed had cured for awhile, and sometimes even before it had properly cured, all of the leaves and stems and flowers were bricked together, with no attempt at segregating the good parts from the mediocre. Now the farmers are more particular, primarily because of the fuss made by smugglers and entrepreneurs, and the plant is carefully separated into different parts before it is packaged. First the colas are cut off the growing plant and dried separately. The colas are the most potent part of the marijuana plant. They are the flowering tips and most of the cannabin resin is concentrated in them. After the colas are cut off, the plant is often allowed to grow another two weeks or so before the rest of the plant is harvested. When the plant is finally cut, the bottom half is segregated from the top half. The top part of the plant is considered quality grass, and the bottom provides commercial grass, not the quality of the top half or the colas, but still good enough to get you stoned.

One interesting development in the last few years is the growth of super grass, or dynamite, as it's called in the trade. Before 1966, any



The end result of six months' adventure—kilos of high-quality marijuana, specially stamped and ready for delivery. These packages will bring a minimum of \$400 apiece.

marijuana that made its way up to the United States was eagerly gobbled up by incipient heads, quality not being much of a consideration. The only criterion was availability. With the popularization of marijuana and the growing sophistication on the part of so many smokers, however, a demand for better quality began—especially among the young professionals and rock musicians who had money. They would get a taste of some especially succulent variety and realize what grass could be, so they started demanding quality. Many of them started subsidiary careers in smuggling to provide the kind of grass they and their friends wanted.

During the early days of weed smuggling it was never easy to score quality grass, however, simply because there just wasn't much available. In the middle sixties, when Jesse and I were providing a fair amount of grass to the San Francisco Bay area, it was relatively easy to sell anything, and a deal never fell through because of quality. One time, though, when we were making our rounds a customer handed us a small can with some grass in it. "That's the kind of grass I want," he said. Inside the can there was an ounce of weed, golden and sweet smelling. When lit it burnt sweetly and caused harsh coughing for a moment until the high took hold. It was the remnants of a mature cola, and the dude had tasted enough grass to know that with some imagination and bread he could probably find a source for it. Jesse and I took the can of grass with us when we returned to Mexico and showed it to a number of entrepreneurs. Naturally every entrepreneur we showed it to said that he could provide the same type of weed. When it got down to the actual cop, though, we found that few of them could, at least in any quantity. This was the first time, to my knowledge, that smugglers had taken a sample down to Mexico to duplicate. The night we showed the sample to our main supplier, he took us into a small town in central Mexico to see a ton of grass that had been set aside for us. To inspect the ton, we pulled out each sack and opened it, searching for the colas. As usual they were mixed up haphazardly with the rest of the grass, and it was a tedious job separating them. The Mexicans stood around dumbfounded as we slowly threw the colas into one sack and the bulk of the plants into

another. After working all night we ended up with about 300 pounds of colas, the basis of what was to become known as Michoacan, the super-grass imported from that mountainous state.

Jesse and I became known as the gringos who wanted only *colas de zorras*, the foxtails, and we would pay extra for them. For a long time it was difficult convincing our own entrepreneur that the plants should be segregated as we had done. Eventually we had to drop him and work directly with another man in the mountains. Jesse spent many months in the mountains of Guerrero and Michoacan showing the farmers how to segregate the various parts of the plants, instructing them in elemental precautions like not harvesting too soon, waiting for the resin to appear before cutting, then curing the weed properly, which meant slowly. While we were doing this, other smugglers in doing the same thing in other parts of Mexico. One smuggler in particular spent all his time roaming through the small villages of Mexico searching out the particular varieties of grass that were super-stony. Oftentimes there are only a few pounds of heavy dynamite in a whole crop, but if that grass can be found and segregated, then it forms the basis for a business back in the States without equal. Jesse and I never concentrated on this super-special type of weed that could only be found in small amounts; what we were after were relatively large shipments of Gold, the kind of weed that no sophisticated head will refuse.

Quality is still the exception rather than the rule in the Mexican grass industry. There are hundreds of gringo smugglers who are so eager to cop any type of grass that they will pay high prices for garbage and consequently spoil the industry for those who are gone stantly seeking to improve quality. Many times Jesse and I have gone to bid on a crop and found ourselves dealt out by our own high standards—simply because there was some *gringo rico* who was eager to buy the whole crop and quality be damned! The Mexican entrepreneur is eager to sell to this type of buyer because he knows he is dealing with an amateur. He also knows that he will receive few complaints from the gringos later. Most entrepreneurs are quite eth-

ical in their dealings, however, despite the ease with which they can sell anything, including garbage weed, to many smugglers. Jesse and I found that reputable entrepreneurs always back up their quality and weight once you have dealt with them for a while. For this reason we usually dealt with the same people, unless they had nothing available. If we or our customers were ever dissatisfied, it was no problem making up on shortages on the next run.

There just isn't enough dynamite grass available. It always amuses me to hear stories, common in the industry, of ten cops of Gold or thousand-kilo scores of Zacatecas Purple. I know from my own experience in copping some of the best grass in Mexico that it is rare to score 500 kilos of really top-quality marijuana. Often you will find that 75 percent of such a score is high quality and the rest is average, or just the reverse. Smugglers who have established connections and routes in the mountains are the ones who usually score the best grass. In the last few years some high-powered Mexican entrepreneurs have started warehousing the colas from their crops and selling them in pound lots for very high prices. There are some warehouses in Mexico where, during the height of the season when lots of grass is available, knowledgeable smugglers can walk down row after row of kilos and pick the type they want—by the variety and price. Gold going for so much a pound, and Michoacan for so much less, etc. Dynamite weed, however, doesn't stay around any warehouse long.

The mythology of the weed business is manifested in the names for the different varieties of marijuana peddled in the last few years. The mystique of the name is quite often more important to the dealer and user than is the weed itself. Heads love to sit around and rap about the fine Gold or Panama Red or Colombian they enjoyed last week, and dealers pride themselves on being the bearer of the latest, loudest variety.

There is a type of marijuana that turns the color of light gold when it is cured. The marijuana is favored by a good climate, rich soil, and a high altitude. Because it grows in the mountains surrounding the resort city of Acapulco, gringos call it Acapulco Gold.

Ask a Mexican for Acapulco Gold and he will laugh at you. To

him, there's only good weed and bad weed. If the weed is good it will get you high, if it's bad it will give you a headache. Acapulco Gold, however, has become the name for a type of weed which is the standard by which most other varieties of marijuana grown in Mexico are judged, and smugglers vie with one another to exp weed of Gold quality. Since high-quality weed is not confined to the mountains of Guerrero, however, many smugglers score other varieties of weed from different states and label them as Acapulco Gold. In fact, the use of the name Acapulco Gold has become almost a generic name for quality grass, no matter where the weed came from.

Other varieties of marijuana are just as potent as Acapulco Gold, some even more so. Jesse and I were responsible for some of the first loads of Michoacan, named for the state where it's grown, to be brought into the Bay area. The weed has a dark-green color, and a joint of it is comparable to a joint of Gold.

Sinsemilla is another extremely potent grass. The name means "without seeds" in Spanish. For a long time weed mythology had it that Sinsemilla was grown only by women in the high mountainous regions of Oaxaca, in southern Mexico. The truth of the matter is that Sinsemilla is simply a variety of weed that produces fewer seeds than other varieties, although it does produce some, and it is grown in many areas of Mexico, although the best crops are grown south of the Tropic of Cancer. Often the farmers who grow Sinsemilla (men grow the crops) shake the cured plants to remove the few seeds that do actually grow on the colas.

In the late fifties some weed made its way to Chicago wrapped in sugar bags. Smoking the weed left a distinctive, sweet taste in the mouth. That flavor let you know you were smoking Chicago Sugar Bag. Actually the weed was probably a very good-quality grass that had been sugared when it was bricked. Chicago Sugar Bag was a nice name, though, and it stuck.

Zacatecas Purple is a variety of marijuana that grows in a particular high mountain valley in the state of Zacatecas. When cured, the seeds from the colas have a distinctive purple hue, and the weed is extremely potent, especially if it is allowed to cure properly. In the late sixties

a beatnik dealer planted a crop using some Zacatecas Purple seeds in the mountains of Big Sur. The resultant weed came to be known as Big Sur Holy Weed, and holy it was, too.

Other varieties of marijuana also exist: Guadalupe Green, Yucatan Red, Colombian Red, Nayarit Yellow, and one of my favorites, Popo Oro, which grew on the slopes of Popocatepetl.

Popo Oro was a special shipment of weed that a smuggler got into San Francisco and sold only to his friends. After the shipment was exhausted the smuggler returned to Mexico to get another load but the grower who had been responsible for the harvest had been wiped out by Federales and the field was gone.

There are also many names that denote bad weed: Culiacan Garbage, Tijuana Regular, Johnson Grass, etc. The need for mythology in the weed business arises out of its illegality, and because the realities of smuggling are unknown to most people. Marijuana smuggling may be no stranger than any other enterprise, but when you have an illegal product, and outlaws bringing that product to you, mythology prevails. The names that are invented to give substance to the myths are real, and will live on long after the weed trip is over.

Quality marijuana is not created by mythology, however, it is created by hard work in the field. Like any crop, the hemp plant improves under the proper circumstances, and rapidly degenerates under adverse circumstances. The simple matter of too much or too little water will drastically alter the resin content of the plant. The plants may be cultivated to throw all their energy into creating fine stalks, producing the good fibers that used to be popular with rope and basket makers. Under different circumstances, with less water and more sandy soil, for instance, the fleshy stalk remains thin and dry and the energy goes into the leaves and flowers—thereby producing more resin, essential for good smoking grass. Hemp plants were once cultivated in the United States for their fiber content, and the descendants of this strain, which grows wild in the Midwest, are still primarily fiber-producing plants, not resin-producing ones. This accounts for the poor high the plants produce. Kids who smoke the leaves produced by Midwestern hemp plants are doomed to bum highs, headaches, and little else. On the other hand, seeds taken from

good Mexican hemp plants and cultivated properly will produce grass as good as any available in the world, including the highly touted ganga from Bangkok and the Near East. I have smoked some marijuana grown in various parts of California that was produced from Mexican seeds, and can say that the high experienced was capable of scaring the shit out of anyone, no matter how sophisticated a weed head he pretends to be. My own particular name for this type of grass is "snakes in the trees." When I get loaded on it, every limb on every tree turns into live, writhing snakes.

Few things are more relative than the quality of marijuana. Any knowledgeable dealer realizes that his super-weed may be your bum trip. Grass that makes me paranoid may send you into paroxysms of laughter. Serious smugglers know that the super-grass grown in one area may produce a high entirely different from the super-grass grown in another area. I have found, for instance, that grass produced in the mountains of Michoacan, which is of excellent quality and much sought after, gives an entirely different type of high than, say, the grass produced in the state of Jalisco, in central Mexico. Cultivation factors undoubtedly have much to do with the differences, things like soil, water availability, minerals, strain of plant, etc. However, it is difficult convincing buyers that the super-grass they bought last week which produced such a loady high may be no better than the super-grass currently for sale which is just as potent, but produces a completely different type of high.

One of the problems of the industry is that there are no standards and the only way a person can tell what he has is by smoking it. One time I contracted to supply a half-ton of weed to a dealer in Berkeley, a client whose only requirement was that the grass I import be super. Super what, I could have asked him—super downer? super sleeper? Super worker? After being in the industry for awhile, knowledgeable smugglers can almost pick their high, the only real problem being to satisfy the particular customer's demands. For many heads the standard for really super-weed is that it knock them on their asses for half a dozen hours. Granted, marijuana that does that is potent, but for me it's a bum high.

I've often been chastised for scoring weed that is mellow, giggly,

and kind, rather than the very stony type of grass that renders you comatose for half a day. For some inexplicable reason, known only to those heads who prefer that type of grass, knockout weed is always referred to as the heaviest, the loadiest, when in reality the high may be a bad one. For the next guy, the grass that gives him the high may for twelve hours be super-grass, a glorious, freewheeling, mirthful high where everything is ridiculous, funny, insane. My own particular delight is the kind of grass that gives me a feeling of mellow contentment, a benevolent, calm, sensual high, turning me onto activity rather than off it, and rendering me completely open to every activity and sensation.

To say that each type of grass is different is also to say that they are the same, however, for the truth of the matter is, all types of grass and every high involve many of the same characteristics. One of the first effects of any strong weed is a slight feeling of paranoia, a paranoia that either goes away after a short time or grows stronger, depending on the circumstances. The user of marijuana will be greatly influenced by the state of his own head, by who he is with, and by where he is at the time he gets stoned. But for those who want a mellow high, for those who like working grass, and for those whose kick is cannabinol knockout drops, all kinds are available, ready for the picking.

One of the unique things about Mexico, aside from the many varieties of marijuana that grow in the country, is that it is the only country in the world that is blessed—or cursed, depending on where your head's at—with over 200 natural hallucinogens. Most of the hallucinogens were known and used by the ancient peoples of Mexico as sacraments in their religious services, and also for medicinal purposes. Many years ago in Mexico I heard a rumor about the existence of a fantastic illustrated manuscript that contains not only sketches and descriptions of the 200 plants, including cacti and mushrooms, many of which are no longer known, but also detailed observations on the various states of mind each hallucinogen puts the user in. The manuscript was supposedly compiled painstakingly over the years by one of the first monks to come to Mexico after the conquest, and has been

in the hands of the Vatican for over 300 years.

Of all the hallucinogens illustrated in the manuscript, none is as well known as marijuana. Two others which are only slightly less well known are still used by Indians in Mexico, peyote by the Huichole in the western state of Nayarit, and the magic mushroom by the Zapotec in the southern state of Oaxaca.

Mexicans as a whole frown on the use of hallucinogens, considering them slightly barbaric. During the last few years this attitude has hardened because of the influence gringo youths have on Mexican youths. To the average middle-class Mexican, if such a creature exists, marijuana is *malo*, bad! If anything, his attitude is even more rigid than that of his counterpart in the United States, where the general feeling toward marijuana has been loosening up. For years though, the drug used only by black and brown ghetto dwellers and, even worse, artists and Bohemians. In Mexico, according to the Mexican middle class, only Indios and low-class country people smoke marijuana.

It's hard to say who actually does smoke marijuana in Mexico. I have heard countless stories of wiry old campesinos who still work sixteen hours a day in the fields and at night come home to their Corona-size joints; also, who knows how many tokes guys like Rafael and Sanchez take on Sundays before hiking down the mountains to church? When I was in the mountains I seldom saw the farmers smoke any weed, unless I rolled a joint and offered them some. Even then, their acceptance of the joint seemed more a matter of politeness than of desire. When Jesse and I visited growers' huts and sampled various qualities of marijuana, the campesinos always sat back and watched. They seldom smoked themselves. Once I asked Sanchez, "Who smokes mota in Mexico?" He replied, "*La policía y la aduana*."

—the police and the customs.

In a sense what Sanchez said was true, even though he meant it partly as a joke. Only Indios and low-class campesinos smoke marijuana, according to the Mexican middle class; only the police and the customs people, according to the Mexican campesino. When the middle-class Mexican scorns weed, though, he is actually scorning the

Indian, the campesino, the people of the fields. When the campesino is calling them hypocrites because they spend their time arresting farmers who grow and transport marijuana, yet turn around and deal the weed themselves once the farmers are out of the way.

One segment of the Mexican population where the use of marijuana has more or less always been accepted is in the army, where a bag of mota is part of the standard issue, at least in popular Mexican mythology. Whether soldiers are actually issued marijuana, or whether it's just easily available, I haven't been able to ascertain. No one denies, though, that the Mexican soldier has always enjoyed his weed. In most cases marijuana is cheaper than alcohol in Mexico and much easier to obtain. The use of marijuana among soldiers is due also to the fact that most of the troops are campesino conscripts, from the land where weed has always been used.

Jesse and I worked all day in the fields with José, returning to Rafael's house late in the afternoon. Already I was falling into the mountain rhythm, and looked forward to the meal the women were preparing. After unsaddling our mules and washing, I sat among the circle of campesinos who gathered in the patio. I was introduced to Lupe, a tall, thin man who had just arrived. I shook his outstretched hand firmly, then relaxed my grip as a slightly pained, rather bemused look appeared on his face. In my usual gringo enthusiasm, I had forgotten that Mexicans don't shake hands like gringos, and Lupe's campesino I was put off by the limp, listless handshake, having been brought up on the gringo concept that unless a man's handshake is firm and strong, the man himself is somehow weak. For Mexicans the handshake is a formality the strength or weakness of which means nothing. In essence all they do is touch palms. The real greeting among friends in Mexico is the *abrazo*, the arms around the shoulders and the free hand slapping the back. The *abrazo* is done only between friends, however, never new acquaintances like Lupe and me. Later, after we got to know one another and actually became friends, we too would use the *abrazo*.

Lupe was a farmer who had a field elsewhere in the mountains. He had come to Rafael's house when he heard Jesse and I were there. I had an immediate regard for the man. His thin, narrow face was the color of walnut, and his finely chiseled lips looked like a small girl's. When he talked his eyes flashed, and the quick way he handled the mescal bottle, gesturing with it before and after drinking, revealed an appealing liteness. Lupe smiled when he talked, his lips parting to reveal flashing teeth. "I have very good plants," he said, "and it would be an honor for me to show them to you." Word had gotten out in the mountains that Jesse and I were interested in looking at fields.

While Jesse talked with the men, I cleaned my Polaroid camera. A number of children stood around the circle, their big eyes clamped on me. I aimed the camera at one small boy and clicked it. The children jumped like goats, shrieking with laughter. In a minute I had the print out and the children gathered around. It showed the small boy, a look of mock horror on his face. All the children crowded in to have their pictures taken. I lined them up against the side of the house under the bougainvillea and aimed the camera. They scowled seriously as the shutter snapped.

Soon every man, woman, and child was crowding around to see the magic prints. I arranged everyone in poses to take best advantage of my limited film supply. Lupe stood in the line, severe and noble, with his hair wetted down and his rifle held across his breast. After all the women and children had prints, the men who had not stood up to be photographed looked at me nervously, not knowing whether to risk it or not. The picture I took of Lupe was magnificent, showing him standing regal and still against the edge of the house. His eyes burnt out of the picture, and I could tell that the rest of the men needed little prodding to stand in front of my camera. Jesse had removed his 35-millimeter camera from its case while I had been shooting the kids, and started photographing. He moved among the people, snapping away. They were disappointed that no magic pictures came instantaneously out of his camera but soon were back dancing in front of my Polaroid. By the time it was dark I had shot up a dozen boxes of film, and everyone held an image of himself in his hand. Even José, who had shied away from our cameras up in his field, stood quiet and

reserved in front of my magic box. He smiled widely when I gave the print to him, blowing on it delicately to dry the sticky coating that had seen me do.

The next day Jesse and I accompanied Lupe and another campesino named Jorge up to his field. We carried our cameras slung over our shoulders. Lupe's field was on the opposite side of the mountain from Jesse's and it took us half a day to reach it. On the way we passed Lupe's house, a hut made of stones topped with small poles. The poles that formed the upper half of the structure were bound together in a loose weave that allowed the air to pass through. As we approached the hut, Lupe's wife ran inside. It took much coaxing on Lupe's part to get her to come out. Finally she did, three children tagging after her. Lupe wanted me to capture them all with my magic box. When he explained to his wife what he wanted, she rushed the children inside and scrubbed them down and dressed them in their Sunday clothes. The children hung behind their mother's skirt, shyly peeking out as I focused on them. Lupe dressed in his Sunday finery also, and I took another picture of him, then the whole family together. The simplicity and grace with which they posed touched me. For them it was indeed a magic instrument, never before seen in the mountains. When Jesse moved around the group with his camera they paid no attention, assuming he was pretending, since nothing came out of his box.

After the picture-taking, Lupe's wife fed us. She moved about her open hearth gracefully, slapping the tortillas into shape. The fare was simple, beans and tortillas and coffee, but we ate with relish. After lunch we continued on to Lupe's field, which was hidden away in a remote arroyo.

One of the things that surprised me when I first set eyes on the marijuana fields was their size. I had expected big fields, plantations really, but what I found were small plots, most of them encompassing less than half an acre, cultivated in arroyos and along rivers. Obviously they were kept small so they wouldn't be detected. Lupe's field was typical, a long, thin patch of weed growing in a steep arroyo. The slopes above the arroyo were covered with corn, and tall corn plants

even grew among the marijuana. From the distance of a few meters the field couldn't be detected. Most of the farmers in this particular mountainous region kept the location of their fields secret—even from their neighbors. Still, there was a loose pattern of familiarity among the growers, the unspoken commandment being that no one visited another grower's field unless specifically invited to do so. Most of the fields were one-man, or more correctly, one-family operations, being cultivated jointly with a crop of corn or beans or melons. The farmer would work his food crop during the morning and then spend the afternoon caring for his marijuana plants. When the two fields were together, as in Lupe's case, the hazards of cultivating marijuana seemed remote to me, it all seemed so natural, so distant from the paranoia and tension of the city. Still, I could not get over Lupe's precautions as we approached his field. Half a mile from his field he had us tether our mules. Jesse and I stayed behind as Lupe and Jorge left the trail to approach the field. After Lupe examined his field, he returned and beckoned to us. As we walked I asked Jesse what that was all about. "It's simple security," he said. "Even up here the growers aren't one hundred percent sure that their fields haven't been discovered. Every time they visit their fields they take a different route; they want to make sure there're no strangers present. That's why no farmer ever visits another farmer's field without being invited. In the first place, it's none of his business, and in the second place, he might get shot."

"It seems to me they wouldn't have much to worry about up here. Hell, we're days from any heat hassles."

"It's not only the heat that worries the farmers," Jesse said. "There are a whole lot of complex things going on in the mountains all the time, things you don't even know about unless you're part of the area."

"What d'you mean?"

"You don't see it because you're a gringo and a lot of the subtleties of the language are lost on you, but back in the village when Sanchez was hiring our mules, there was a conflict. Some of the campesinos

were pissed that their mules weren't hired. We're bringing a lot of bread into the area and the campesinos know it. Everyone wants some of it and it's up to Sanchez to see who gets it. It's a problem for him too."

"Shit, we can't hire everyone," I said. "What do they expect Sanchez to do?"

Jesse shrugged. "What he's doing, I suppose. He'll pick his friends and not his enemies. I don't know what kind of feuds the mountain people have going among themselves, but I do know that it's not as easy as it looks."

"What about the grass then? How come José didn't want us to take pictures of his fields so he could make some bread?"

"I don't know. Maybe Sanchez wanted too big a commission. It's all very tangled when you get into the hills, everyone has to have his little piece. You notice how he talked to José for a couple of hours when we first got to his field—and then the next day Lupe showed up. Lupe wouldn't have come unless he had been invited. Sanchez is working his angles just like we're working ours."

"Well, you can't blame him for that," I said.

"No, you can't," Jesse said. "It's difficult making people who aren't familiar with Mexico or the mountains understand the dangers involved. Most gringos have a romantic idea about the whole marijuana game and that's why they're in it. There's nothing romantic about it in the mountains, however, it's deadly serious to the people up here. You notice that the fields are built at least a couple of hours away from the growers' homes. . . ."

"Why's that?" I asked.

"So if any troops do come into the area, ownership of the field can be denied. Obviously if you plant a field in your back yard, you can't deny it."

"I don't even see how the heat could get up here," I said.

"Yeah, and the farmers couldn't either until a few years ago. Now the heat comes in helicopters. Last year a helicopter was snooping around some fields south of here and the farmers shot it down. Shooting down a helicopter is bad business, though, because the next thing

they know, a company of troops is in their midst, shooting, pillaging, raping. Most gringos think I'm bullshitting when I say this, but when Mexican soldiers come into the mountains no one's safe, no home, dog, mule, garden, or daughter. To protest is useless because campesinos are not allowed to protest. The only thing they can do is what they have always done, stand up and fight. If that fails, then it's a run further into the Sierras."

Jesse's view was sobering. I knew that what he said was true, however. I had newspaper clippings to prove it. In 1971, government troops entered the rural village of Realito in search of marijuana. In the process of turning the town inside out, twelve people were killed, including one soldier and a twelve-year-old boy.

"I don't know what gets into the soldiers when they come into the mountains," Jesse said. "They seem to go insane. Maybe it's because they have to tramp all over the hills looking for marijuanos they can't find. Maybe it's because they know they'll get shot if they don't shoot first. It's all part of the Mexican trip though, no compassion and no restraint."

"God, it's amazing to me that anyone grows marijuana," I said.

"What do you expect them to do?" Jesse said. "These people are rooted in poverty. There's no money in the mountains except in weed. For the growers it's a way of life, their daily bread on the table. What amazes them is the hassles involved in growing marijuana. There's nothing wrong with the weed to them. They've been using it for centuries. Hell, their fathers and grandfathers used it. The mystery for them is that a bunch of crazy gringos will go out of their way to pay a lot of money for weed, and an equally crazy bunch of soldiers will go out of their way to keep the gringos from getting it."

"And they're caught in the middle," I said.

"They're not only caught in the middle between soldiers and gringos, but they're also caught in between official policies that change from one moment to the next. Hell, a couple of years ago there was no danger in growing weed, all they had to do was give the local general his bite, pay off the troops down on the roads, and deliver their loads. Now that the heat's on in Mexico City, the generals have to

clean up their act, so they bring the heat down on the villages. Military patrols that used to accept bribes and let weed go through now they shipments and rip them off. If the farmers protest, they get shot. They anyone squawks, the helicopters provided by the United States government come in. It's a crazy business."

When we reached Lupe's field he conducted us through it with obvious pride. He was a careful farmer. Each of his plants was well trimmed, and the earth cleared away around each stalk. The plants were seven to eight feet high, and very leafy. Without testing I could see the resin gleaming on the foxtails. Lupe's dog, Noche, rubbed against the stalks and nibbled at the lower leaves. "He likes it," Lupe said. "It makes him *muy contento*."

While Jesse accompanied Lupe and Jorge through the field, I climbed a small bluff and looked back over the trail. It wound in and out of the canyons and finally disappeared behind a ridge. The corn stalks surrounding me rattled in the breeze. It was the only sound I could hear. To the west the mountains receded in ridge after ridge toward the sea. Below me a hawk circled slowly, his shadow rising to meet him as he swept toward the ground to strike at a gopher or rabbit. The mountains had a prehistoric quality about them, silent, austere, beautiful.

We spent two hours in Lupe's field and then returned to his home. Jesse and I were excited by the field. We wanted to use it for our story. Jesse asked Lupe about it. He smiled and shrugged. "A man makes no money from pictures," he said. "If you want to buy my mota, I will sell it to you."

Jesse explained to Lupe what we wanted to do. We would pay him for the use of his field, then he could sell the grass to other buyers. He could make money both ways.

"Other buyers are not here now. If you want my field you can buy it. Then you can take pictures."

Jesse and I looked at each other. It had not occurred to us to buy a marijuana field. I asked Lupe how much he wanted for the whole field. Lupe spoke rapidly with Jorge. After some calculation he looked up. "I will sell my field to you for twenty-five pesos per plant. And Jorge and I will harvest it for you."

Jesse and I figured there were approximately 2,000 plants in Lupe's field. At 25 pesos per plant, the whole field would cost us \$4,000. If we could get the price down to 15 pesos per plant we could afford to buy it. Either that, or we could buy half the field.

"Lupe," Jesse said, "we have \$2,500. If you will sell your plants to us for 15 pesos each, we will buy the whole field."

Lupe and Jorge figured again. There was much talk of burros and men to move the marijuana. Jorge wanted to make it clear that moving the grass was not included in the purchase price. If we bought the field, they would harvest it but we would have to pay extra to move it out of the mountains.

"How much will it cost to move the marijuana out of the mountains?" Jesse asked.

"Each man must be paid sixty pesos per day," Lupe said. "And each burro costs fifty pesos per day. Besides that, two or three *pis-toleros* must be hired as guards. They cost seventy-five pesos per day. If there are any delays or losses along the trail they must be borne by you, that is the way it is done."

"How long does it take to move a load down?"

"If we move the whole load at once we must plan to take at least one week, perhaps more. Loads can only be moved at night, it is very tedious and there are many risks. Things are very difficult in the mountains now, there are many soldiers camped in the villages along the coast."

"How many burros and men will be required?"

"We will need ten burros and five *muleteros*, plus the *pistoleros*."

Jesse and I figured that the men and burros would cost \$800. A cheap per day, about \$80. Ten days on the trail would cost Lupe.

price for what we were getting. I turned to Lupe. There are a few problems

"Lupe, we would like to buy your field. There are a few problems involved, however. We have another friend, a photographer, who has to come down from up north. It will take him a week or so to get here. Will it be possible to harvest the field and move it down from the mountains at that time?"

"My field will be ready for the first cutting in ten days," Lupe said.

"After that it depends on you. As far as hiring the men to move the

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load, I will take care of that. If you want your friend to take pictures though, he must be here within two weeks."

Jesse clinched the deal that night. He gave Lupe 10,000 pesos as a down payment on the field, the rest to be paid when the field was cut. I was giddy. Jesse sat calmly in the corner talking with Lupe. It seemed incredible to me that we had solved our major problem as easily as we had.

The only hassle would be what to do with the weed we had purchased. Neither Jesse nor I had made any preparations for smuggling a ton of weed. The logistics involved in such an operation are considerable. We could, of course, give the weed back to Lupe once we had our photographs. That would ease our burden, but it would also be giving up a considerable amount of bread. The trip was going to cost a lot more than we had figured originally, therefore it behooved us to consider contacting some people in the States who could help us. The professional thing to do would be to move the weed out of the mountains, store it someplace until we could contact friends, then smuggle it into the United States. That would take time and money though. We could also move the weed out of the mountains and sell it to some of the young smugglers who were operating in and around Acapulco. However, neither Jesse nor I wanted to get involved with anyone we didn't know. In the end we decided to solve the problem one step at a time. First we would contact Gene and get him down. After he got his photos, then we'd decide what to do next. The important thing was that we had a field; everything else was gravy.

That night, we slept at Lupe's and then returned to Rafael's big house the following day. Jesus wasn't going to return for another week, so for a week Jesse and I stayed with Rafael helping around the house and visiting other marijuana fields nearby. Two days before Jesus was to return, Jesse and I thanked Rafael for his hospitality. Jesus was to return, Jesse and I thanked Rafael for his hospitality. Jesus gave him 500 pesos for his services, and started down the mountains. Sanchez led on his mule and Jesse and I followed. Raul brought up the rear. The trip down was uneventful. When we reached the village we went to Señora Sala's place to eat. It amazed me how the rhythms

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seemed to work out in the mountains, for just as we rode up in front of Señora Sala's place, the doors opened and she welcomed us in. On the table were bowls of hot *mole* and tortillas, black coffee, and ripe oranges. Jesse said there was nothing surprising about the food being ready, the people of the village had seen us coming for hours. We ate a beautiful meal and then at what seemed an appropriate time I searched out a place to throw down my sleeping bag. I was dead tired. As I was preparing to unroll my bag, an old man came in and gestured to me. "*¡Venga! ¡Venga!*" (Come! Come!) he said. I looked at Jesse questioning. "*Yo tengo mota buena*" (I have some good marijuana), he said.

Word had spread through the village that Jesse and I were looking for marijuana. The old man had a patch he had grown and he wanted us to come with him to sample it. We followed him through the square and up a narrow alley to a dimly lit hut. When we entered the hut, two women stepped outside. There were five men inside sitting in a circle on their haunches. Spread out before them was a large sack of marijuana, all colas, thick as small wrists. Jesse sniffed the weed, then bit off a piece and chewed it. "It looks good," he said. "Why don't you try some?"

I rolled a joint and lit it, taking one long toke. I offered the joint to the other men and they all refused, their eyes intent on me. For a minute I felt nothing, so I took another toke. I felt slightly embarrassed in front of all the people, the hulking gringo sitting on his haunches smoking weed. I had the sudden feeling that if I didn't like the grass, they would shoot me. Waves of paranoia swept over me and I actually felt frightened. Each of the men wore guns, and two of them actually held their weapons between the hut sounded like rebukes. I was able to understand Spanish perfectly clearly when I was stoned, a fact that always seemed remarkable to me, and I knew the women were just gossiping, but I felt threatened by their voices anyway.

As the power of the weed rolled over me, I felt a sense of vertigo and almost tumbled to the ground. I put out a hand to stop myself from falling and it seemed to take an eternity for my hand to reach

the ground. I realized I was bombed. I felt a great desire to get out of the hut. I wanted to smell the fresh air and see the stars. Jesse was talking with the old man though, discussing the availability and price of the weed. Suddenly he stopped talking to the old man and pried dressed me. It took me some time to realize that his voice was directed to me. "How is it?" he repeated a number of times. For a minute or so I didn't know what he was talking about. Then I remembered the weed. "O, *está bueno*," I said, rather glibly I thought. My paranoia was such that I was beginning to question the sound of my own voice. I was suddenly worried that I hadn't okayed the weed forcefully enough. I wanted another chance to elaborate on what I had said. "It's great!" I blurted out.

Everyone looked at me. Jesse had often rebuked me for speaking English in the mountains, and when I spoke his head shot up. I sensed anger in his face so I stood up and walked outside. In a minute Jesse joined me. We walked back down toward the square. The old man followed us. I said nothing as we walked. My feelings of paranoia were being replaced by giddiness. I was concentrating on walking, noting where I placed each foot on the cobblestones, dodging the manure and chuckholes, daintily tripping out in an awkward dance.

When we reached the square, Sanchez was waiting for us. Our gear was tied on a giant mule and he motioned for me to get on. "Where are the other mules?" I asked Jesse. "They've been returned to their owners," he said. Sanchez motioned me up again so I cocked my leg over the animal and settled into the saddle.

The mule was a magnificent animal, as big as a horse and beautifully caparisoned, the usual wooden saddle replaced with a tooled leather one. The owner of the animal obviously took pride in it. When I mounted I towered over Sanchez and Jesse. I flashed that I was going to be riding down a narrow trail at night while I was stoned out of my mind. The thought was both appealing and frightening. I was frightened because my experience with mules was minimal and the path was narrow and dangerous. The idea was appealing though, because I knew that whenever I got stoned and tried something, it inevitably worked out fine.

The minute I mounted the mule a sense of excitement rushed over me. I was no longer in a small village in the mountains of Mexico, and I was no longer on a mule. I was transplanted back into the eighteenth century and I was mounted on a gigantic horse. It is difficult to explain the sensations I felt while stoned, but I was no longer imagining my feelings. I was living them! The horse hoofs rang out on the cobblestones. The narrow street twisted and turned. The towers of the small church loomed over me as magnificently as any towers of Chartres or Notre Dame. I felt in complete control of the animal, prodding him forward, reining him to stop. He was impressive in his strength and balance. We danced, horse and rider one, down the narrow streets toward the river. The path was only five feet wide and it was a forty-foot drop to the river below. Boulders as big as houses lay in the river bottom, but I felt supreme confidence in my animal. When we reached the narrow bridge that I was especially worried about, I guided my animal across at breakneck speed just to test him—and me. In seconds we were on the other side, reining up to wait for Sanchez and Jesse. I was impatient, wanting to dash ahead.

It was pitch black and all I could see were the glows of two flashlights behind me as Jesse and Sanchez walked down the trail. One of the lights hurried toward me. It was Raul, the boy we had hired to care for the mules. There were tunnels along the trail where one had to duck to pass through, and he was running forward to shine the light for me. I knew this instinctively although I had never thought of it before. I remembered the tunnels from the time we had entered the canyon on our way up into the mountains. Raul ran ahead of me into the first tunnel, shining the light on the heading. I had no need for the light, however. When my animal reached the mouth of the tunnel, he paused and snorted. I ducked and he entered. Ahead of me Raul's light flashed on the roof.

As I emerged he ran forward to the next tunnel, three or four hundred feet down the trail. Outside the tunnel my eyes adjusted to the darkness. I could see everything clearly. The stars were bright; the moon was not yet up. I had the strangest sensation while riding alone. I felt as if I were floating along in a universe and a time so perfect that

I wanted it to continue forever. I consciously thrust out my hand and grasped at the bushes growing along the trail. I grabbed handfuls of leaves and rubbed them on my face. The animal and I were united. I was amazed that I had never before imagined the sensation of being part horse, of floating over the ground, of the sheer speed and power my new form assumed. Occasionally the brim of my sombrero brushed overhead branches, causing me to duck. The rocking motion of my body as I rode along was comforting. I could feel every bone and muscle working in place, as if I were an infinitely complex machine whose every part was functioning perfectly.

The ride down the trail took an hour. I emerged from the last tunnel and rode on to the group of huts surrounding the dirt landing strip. Beyond the strip on the edge of the bluff was a large adobe house. I had seen it when we first landed ten days before. We were to spend the night there.

I waited at the edge of the strip for Jesse and Sanchez. When they arrived, Sanchez untied our gear from the mule and released the animal to Raul. We continued on to the house, carrying our gear. On the way we passed a small hillock, with a structure on top. I asked Sanchez what it was. "A cistern," he replied. "It used to hold water for the big house." I dropped my bag and ran up the hillock to the cistern. It was round, with a flat top. Standing on it, I could see all around, the landing strip, the big house, the mountains rising on all sides. I ran back down and continued on to the big house with Jesse and Sanchez. As we approached, a half-dozen dogs came out to greet us, barking furiously. The barks flashed in my head like explosions, destroying my feeling of tranquility. The caretaker of the big house came out and quieted the dogs, and said we were welcome to sleep on his veranda. "I'd like to sleep on the cistern," I said. "*¿Como no?*" the old man replied.

While Jesse and Sanchez talked with the old man, I trudged back up the hill to the cistern and spread out my sleeping bag. My footsteps echoed in the well, a hollow booming sound that reverberated in my head. I could hear water dripping inside. When I lay down I noticed a small structure a few yards away, like a small hut. I got my flashlight

out of my pack and climbed down to look. It was a grave. I flashed my light on the headstone: "Otilia Clark, esposa de Floyd Clark, año 1926. Dead at the age of thirty-seven years."

The house whose cistern I was preparing to sleep on used to be the main house for the silver-mining operations in the area. Otilia Clark was the wife of one of the American engineers. Her first name was Spanish so I assumed she must have been a Mexican girl. As I stretched out in my bag I thought of Otilia, dead over thirty years before. I wondered if she loved these mountains. I wondered if she had chosen this place to be buried. Maybe she and Floyd used to climb up here to watch the sunsets. It was a nice place and I felt comforted having Otilia near me.

Inside the cistern the water dripped and echoed. Inside the grave, the bones of Otilia Clark metamorphosed into the mountains she loved. On top of the cistern I snuggled deeper inside my bag. Above the mountains I saw the Big Dipper, so bright and clear that I imagined nectar dripping from it. For the first time in my life I lay still enough under the stars to see them wheel across the heavens. Just before I went to sleep, Jesse and Sanchez came up and spread out their bags. The old man from the big house was with them. Then Jesse did an insane thing. He pulled out his battery-operated slide viewer and started showing slides to the old man, Kodachrome transparencies of Puerto Vallarta and Guadalaajara and other odd places. The old man looked intently into the projector as the stars slid over his head.

Jesus returned the next day and we flew down from the mountains. I called Gene from Acapulco and told him that everything was ready. He said he'd meet us in Acapulco in a week. I then took a plane back to San Francisco to make arrangements for the ton of weed we had bought. I also wanted to straighten out my probation officer. Jesse and I had decided to go for broke, we wanted Gene to get photographs of every aspect of a smuggling trip, from the field on down. I had some friends in Berkeley who were into smuggling and I wanted to see them to arrange for a boat. As luck would have it, when I did contact them they said their boat was already in Mexico. It had never carried weed