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Jay Raman

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# I Am Amaru

Jay Raman

April 18, 1997

College Scholars Program

University of Tennessee, Knoxville

## Acknowledgments

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Monday, October 5, 6:00 p.m.

I've never kept a diary before. It makes me feel uncomfortable. I think that I'd probably rather not remember everything too clearly. I'd like to have license to exaggerate without bothering my conscience about what the true story really is. I would prefer to give my mind the latitude to remember things the way that it wants to and to maybe add whatever details it wants to as time goes by. That's not entirely true. A diary just reminds me too much about what I've done in the past and I'd prefer to be concentrating on the future.

That's why it's funny that I'm writing this diary now. But then again I've never been able to stay with one project for very long so I might as well try at least something new. I mean I've taken I don't know how many of these trips before and except for my story, my notes, and a couple of snapshots, there isn't much to remember it by. (I already don't like how this sounds. It doesn't sound like me. It's like when I hear a recording of my voice and it sounds much too nasal).

My plan, I remind myself here while cruising at 30,000 feet en route to Lima, is to keep all of my notes for the project in this notebook and to also record other details of the trip. I want this to be the time that I finally turn an article into something more substantial. I really want to become more a part of what I am researching. Not too much of a part, though. I don't actually want to run into the Shining Path. I just want to see the places that they've been. To do anything more would tempt fate. They don't exactly like foreigners. They dislike capitalists. They definitely don't like reporters. They hate technology— and I've got a micro cassette recorder. Come to think of it, I'll probably be the person that they would most want to kill in all of Peru.



Later, 8:00 p.m.

We've been circling the airport for about half an hour now. This is particularly unnerving to me because of the frequency that AeroPeru planes have the misfortune to end up splattered on a hillside. I don't want to spend any more time tempting fate than absolutely necessary. Besides, Jaime is waiting in the airport and the longer he waits, the more drinks he is going to have, which will make the ride into town worse than it already has to be.

I can't figure out why we're not landing. I can clearly see the lights of the city through the thin nighttime clouds. The paper predicts clear weather and no wind so I'm sure it must be some sort of minor mechanical problem, like having left the landing gear in Miami. I guess it's okay with me. I don't want the pilot to attempt landing until he's sure he's ready. What he is waiting for I can't say, though.

Minutes later.

Having started our descent, I can see in retrospect the cause of our delay. A quick glance up the fuselage of the plane (over some luggage and a couple of sleeping passengers on the floor) afforded me the view of our esteemed pilot stepping boldly and confidently out of the front lavatory. I can only assume from this that the bathrooms up here offer some advantage over those down below in Lima. And I hope never to find out what that might be.

Tuesday, October 6, 8:30 a.m.

Forgot to write any more last night. Jaime duly met me along with his five year old daughter after getting my luggage through customs. We had a quick celebratory drink and his daughter gave me a cute little bead necklace that she had made. I put the necklace on, but while I was carrying her, since

Jaime had my luggage, she took more interest in my old gold pendant than her own handiwork. She kept grabbing a hold of it to get a closer look but the necklace is pretty sharp and was digging into the back of my neck. It probably left a mark. Eventually we got to the car and made our way through a roadblock at the airport towards the center of Lima at speeds probably equivalent to those of the ancient 737 I had just arrived in.

I've never been here before so of course I had no idea where I was. To make it worse, there was this fog that descended on the whole city. Jaime drove on with unabashed enthusiasm but I was prevented from getting any of my bearings or from seeing anything at all beyond the oncoming headlights that had to swerve to avoid us.

Jaime's got this thing well organized. He's always been reliable when I've worked with him. He told me that he had to learn to be organized when he worked as a foreign correspondent in D.C but he wasn't always that way. He said that he has made most of the arrangements to travel to an Andean city with some connections to the Shining Path. He dug the place out of some old military press releases. The agenda is to go up there for a few days or maybe a week. We'll get some interviews and a nice photo spread, if the scenery is nice enough. Then Jaime thinks we should go into the jungle to some villages there, including some oil operations headed by foreign corporations. Finally, we can come back to Lima and try to talk to some government and military officials. This way we can get rural and urban perspectives, domestic and international perspectives, and Indian and *mestizo* perspectives. It's not the whole gamut but it should turn out a pretty thorough article, especially with Jaime's investigative journalism skills and his knowledge of his country.

The interest in this story is in the human element. I want to show the human costs of terrorism and the experience of Latin America and not just statistics. I hope that we can get a lot of personal interviews. The real problem with the story is that it's impossible to interview an actual guerrilla. We can only hope to find people that have witnessed firsthand their activities or have some special knowledge of the fight between the Shining Path and the government. Otherwise I could just quote terrorism or Latin American experts back at home. I told Jaime that I came down here not just to see places but to talk to people and he assured me that there would be plenty of people willing to tell us their stories and opinions.

The hotel here is pretty nice, but bare bones. No carpet or TV. Just a bed and a little table but pretty clean. The shower has only tepid water at best. We got here pretty late so I just went to bed. I felt a little bit dizzy from that drink I had earlier but it wore off with a good night's sleep.

I still think that my first morning in a new place is always the best. The new sights and smells and sounds all hit me at such a furious pace that I can barely get anything done until I've had time to absorb them. I took a good look out of my window first thing after I got up. Lima is not a gorgeous city by any standard but it does seem to have some colonial charm. There is a small park right near my hotel and typical Latin American architecture lines the two avenues that form a V shape in front of this island of trees. At the entrance of this small park is a towering statue of a military leader mounted on a horse. Its head is completely covered by scaffolding so I can't see who it is. Probably Bolivar. Every country down here has a statue to Bolivar, I bet. Speaking in that vein, my hotel is on George Washington Boulevard. I don't know why, but in all of the places I've been to, countries large and small, rich and poor, democratic and authoritarian, and everything in between, the one

feature that they have all had in common is a street or some statue or monument dedicated to Washington, FDR, JFK, or MLK. Usually to all four. I can't be absolutely sure, but I think that I bypassed the Juan Perón Parkway on my way to the airport.

Incidentally, if push comes to shove here, unless I'm actually working on the story, I'm going to pretend to be Canadian. I'm not sure that there is that much anti-American sentiment here but just in case I've sewn a couple of maple leaves to my vest and practiced saying any word that includes the sound "out" with a slightly lengthened and more rounded "aoot" in its place.

Later, 4 p.m.

We did some sightseeing after Jaime showed up for a late breakfast. I don't have time to go over the details, though, because I just remembered what I wanted to write down this morning. Since mom always has dreams that are very detailed and based at least somewhat on reality, I've always wondered why mine were so incoherent and rare. Well last night I had probably the most vivid dream in recent memory. And even though it didn't mean a thing to me I still think that it is worth recounting simply for its amazing clarity.

The dream was in first person and I remember only being able to see what I could from my position. I understood what was going on around me even though now I cannot say what in fact that was. I was sitting down, very comfortably, and things were going on busily around me. I was positioned higher than everyone else, in a seat up on top of a short ramp. I know that I was outside and the force and intensity of the sun forced me to bow my head for a moment until I became accustomed to the glare. While most people were not looking directly at me, I seemed to be the center of attention.

Although I knew that there were many people doing things, I could neither identify them nor see what it was they were doing. In fact, besides being humans, there is nothing about them that I can remember. One of them gave me a goblet and I drank something that was very thick and frothy. Someone else came out and set a number of empty clay pots on the ground next to my chair. This seemed to indicate the commencement of a game of sorts. The players, as I'll call them, had long staffs that were wrapped at one end by string in a criss-cross formation. At the end of this stick was not the sharp point of a spear but the petal of a flower—, a beautiful, large, white flower. The players were using the sticks to launch the flower into the air and I could see that the flowers and poles were connected by a thin string wrapped around the pole. As the flower floated through the air, the stick was used to control the flight and act as a balance to its trajectory. It was a beautiful scene with all sizes of objects fluttering through the air and setting upon the earth only to be rewound on the sticks and relaunched.

It finally dawned on me that the goal of the players was to advance to my position. I watched the progress of the participants as the flowers took different twists and turns while in flight. They moved frustratingly backwards or sideways as often as forward. Eventually, with extreme gracefulness, and in slow motion, a petal floated to the foot of the ramp. The other players did not stop their movements but the one who had just reached me climbed up the ramp. He reached down to a pouch wrapped around his belt, which he gave to me. I looked inside the pouch and saw that it contained beans. I reached my hand inside to get a closer look at them but I immediately drifted away from this scene and awoke.

That was about all of the dream that I can remember. Come to think of it, I think that the contestants, maybe like me, had some sort of native dress

on. I couldn't see myself but I think I was wearing something fancy. Actually, there was one more thing. As the dream was ending, I heard at first a quiet and then a progressively louder and more insistent buzzing or hum. I had just turned around to see what it was when I woke up. Then I realized I was in my bed and I looked at the window behind me and what did I see but a hummingbird busily moving around the little flower box on the sill outside.

Wednesday, October 7, 1:00 p.m.

I was talking with Jaime over breakfast about my dream last night and he thought that it sounded suspiciously like some sort of Inca ritual. I think I'll head to the national library this afternoon and look it up, just for my personal information.

We've gotten all the equipment that we need to head out tomorrow. It will be Jaime, a Quechua interpreter, a guide, and me. Apparently the locals don't like to talk much to foreigners, especially about the Shining Path but our guide is well known up in the mountains and they should trust him enough to talk to us through him.

I committed a major blunder of Spanish earlier today. We were in a restaurant and I knocked my beer over onto the floor. When the waitress came over to clean it up I tried to tell her how embarrassed I was. Instead of using the right Spanish word I used the false cognate '*estoy embarazado*.' In reality I told the waitress that I was very sorry and extremely pregnant.

Thursday, October 8, 5:00 p.m.

We arrived in the Andean highland city or, more accurately, the village of Picaflor about 9 hours after leaving Lima. It would have taken about an hour and a half to fly here, if there was a landing strip, but since we

had to weave our way through the mountain passes and valleys, it took considerably longer than the distance would have indicated. The drive was spectacular, though. It took some time to get through the urban sprawl of Lima. In the U.S, the urban areas are generally the seediest and the suburbs are where the wealthy move out to raise their kids and have their swimming pools and tennis courts. It's the exact opposite in Lima. The middle class and wealthy live close to the center of the town, ensconced behind their private security systems and walls with sharp shards of glass protruding out of the top. Out of the city, and not very far out at that, are the shanties and slums of the silent majority. (Kept silent through repression and illiteracy among other things). Children run around barefoot and there is dirty, scummy water running through the streets. It is too difficult to even describe the conditions that these people live in.

Once we mercifully left this behind, we started to climb towards the rising sun. The skyline is dotted with majestic mountains that are the same as when the conquistadors first saw them five hundred years ago. At first there is a lot of livestock and the scenery is quite verdant. The rolling hills look very fertile and there is a moist dew covering everything and feeding the clear running streams that make their way through the bottoms of the gentle valleys. As we continued to climb our way through the mountains, the grass became more and more sparse and the land more and more rocky. There was a definite chill in the air and the roads became significantly bumpier.

This was of particular concern to me because not only were the roads thinner and more slippery, but the penalty for sliding off the edge was significantly stiffer than it had previously been. I had been absorbed in some reading until it became impossible and whenever I looked out the window, I just saw clouds. I took a closer look, though, when there was a brief break in

the fog and saw that there would be little to stop us from plunging down a few thousand feet if our guide, who was driving, missed a turn. In fact, the paper I was reading mentioned a story in Chile where a bus careened off a mountainside killing all 35 people aboard. Rescuers didn't even reach the crash site until two days afterwards it was so remote.

This probably explains the occasional clearings that we would suddenly come upon as we drove. We would usually reach a small village of some sort along the route which would be little more than a few huts surrounding a simple looking church. Just outside these little settlements would be a small, outhouse-sized hut with a little statue in it. These are all little shrines that bus drivers stop at periodically where they give a few coins and say a few prayers for good luck. I noticed that we weren't stopping at any of them and I mentioned as much to our driver who indicated that he had made his peace with God in Lima.

However, we stopped at the highest point of elevation on our journey, about 15,000 feet up, where they had yet another of these shrines set up. I figured our driver felt that it was time to have a few more words with the Virgin but instead he went off behind the rocks to use the bathroom. I got out of our jeep to stretch my legs and the chill of the air hit my whole body like drinking from a cold soda so fast that it makes your whole body recoil and leaves a burning trail down into your stomach. I actually felt the pulse in my thumb start to throb in an attempt to supply more blood to my finger. I stubbed my foot on a rock and I didn't feel anything so I went back into the truck. Needless to say, I didn't envy our driver one bit.

The approach to Picaflor was visually stunning and emotionally significant, considering how hungry we all were. We were descending rapidly while we were inside of a low-lying storm cloud. Just as we broke out



of the cloud and into a hazy late afternoon, the village lay to our left down across a steep chasm. It seemed like it would be impossible to get there, short of an air lift but we swooped left and right, went through a couple of short tunnels (one lane of course), somehow avoided having to run into or off of the cliff, and we found ourselves driving triumphantly into the village.

The festival of San Esteban is tomorrow, so both hotels are pretty full of revelers from more remote(!) and less cosmopolitan areas. Jaime managed to get me the last room in town and went off to some long-lost relatives' house or something. We're due to eat dinner in a few minutes, whenever they come to pick me up. My guidebook tells little about the village except that it is a potential day trip from some thermal springs a couple of hours away. Because we are located in a bowl shaped valley, there are some beautiful hiking trails up into the hills but, according to the book, the lack of facilities makes it better to move on for lodging.

They're here. I'll finish later.

Later, 8:30 p.m.

Interesting culinary adventures abound in Latin America. We perused the market for a few minutes and then found a little stall to eat in. The specialty of the house was an Andean specialty called *cui*. This is guinea pig roasted while stuck lengthwise on a spit. It tasted more like cardboard than chicken but the burnt parts on the outside were pretty good. Guinea pigs look big, but there is very little meat so we had three of them for the four of us.

The market, by the way, is not usually open during the evenings, or Saturdays for that matter, but because of the festival they're pulling a marathon to handle the flood of potential customers. Andean markets are usually open once a week so that people from outside can bring their goods in

for just one day and then work on their crafts or their farms the other six days. It makes for a more concentrated and diverse selection on market days and is also good for the customers. Market day here is on Wednesdays usually. Wal-Mart has nothing on these people this weekend, though. It looks like they might be open 24 hours and the selection is probably just as vast as any Megastore.

I found out a little bit about this festival while we were eating. This is one of the most important months in their calendar. In Picaflor they have combined the influences of Christianity with ancient local customs. Today is the big blowout to celebrate the Christian Saints' Day. San Esteban is the patron saint of the village. (He's the patron saint of lost wayfarers, Jaime informed me). It promises to be an orgy of feast and drink and music. Then there is to be a period of contemplation that will last for two weeks. During this time people are supposed to pay homage to their ancestors and to their history. At the end of two weeks, the town celebrates the Inca festival of *Ayamarca*, the procession of the dead. It seems a little like in Judaism where the Day of Atonement follows a week after the festive New Year's celebration. I don't know anything about *Ayamarca* but doubt I'll be here for that festival anyway.

Before I forget, though, we are here on business. Or at least I am. This little town, peaceful as it looks, was the target of two short occupations by the *Sendero Luminoso*. (Or more specifically, "The Communist Party of Peru by the Shining Path of José Carlos Mariategui and Marxism, Leninism, Maoism and the Thought of Presidente Gonzalo," as Jaime was so kind to point out). They have always had a strong presence in the hills around this area because it is, frankly, impossible for the government to track them down. We guess it was because of the Wednesday market that they chose to come out of the hills

on Tuesday evenings in February and June and hold the town hostage for about ten to twelve hours. It wasn't hard to do it. There were government soldiers here for a couple of weeks after each incident but they were soon relocated each time. The only security I have seen here are three or four sleepy teenagers resting in doorways with some 1950's rifles lying at their feet. They're probably not loaded and even if they were I bet they wouldn't fire. The only thing that the teens seem ready to do is quickly blend into the crowd in case of something serious. They do watch me pretty closely. It's interesting that they view me as more of a threat than the terrorists that I can only assume will be coming back eventually. There's no chance that they'll be here tomorrow, though. There are simply too many people and there will be too much revelry. When people are drunk, they become more gutsy. It is safer for the terrorists to come here when people will be sober enough to worry about their safety and that of their families. It is not that they don't discourage this festivity in the strictest possible terms. It is just that the sentiment of self-preservation will keep them at bay. Thanks to the efforts of our guide, Horacio, we'll be able to get some of the details of those incidents tomorrow.

I found an extremely large cockroach in my bathroom when I checked in. At least the bathroom has good ventilation. There is a shaft that goes from directly above the toilet straight up to the roof so that I can see the sky when I use it.

Friday, October 9, 4 p.m.

Very productive day today. And extremely interesting. The people here are so friendly. Apparently I am now known throughout town as "*el escritor*," and everybody expects me to come in and talk to them. The first

thing that we established was that the only investigators to come here after the incidents were military types and an AP guy once. They only interviewed the principals in the story and a couple of officials so there is an untapped bonanza here of perspectives and opinions. I've got a pocketful of short notes and it's going to take some time to work it all out on paper. We originally planned to move out of here in a day or two but I think that I want to stay and do this story some justice. I have been able to talk to a number of *Picaflores* and the older ones especially were far more insightful than I would ever have imagined.

This town sent a few of its sons (and daughters) to join the *Sendero Luminoso* in the late 1970's. The *Sendero Luminoso* takes most of its recruits from the disaffected ranks of young intellectuals and pseudo-intellectuals. There was no plethora of those here, admittedly, but there was a small university that some students went to about an hour's trip away. The rector of the university was something of a fascist so when a professor there tried to establish a communist organization, he was shut out. A lot of the interest in the group was expressed by the students from Picaflor. I attribute this to a number of factors. This teacher, one Ramón Ruiz de la Riva was a die-hard member of the group and was sent out to recruit especially for that purpose. He was a professor of philosophy well known for his attention to his students, especially in forming study groups where he would expound on his own personal beliefs. He used this forum to establish which of the students were most open to Marxist ideas. The students from here were very susceptible to his ideas. They were completely unpoliticized for one thing. They had no leanings or pre-conceived ideas to overcome. They were also used to an agricultural existence that meant sharing and bartering. It wasn't such a big step to the ideology of the Path. Also, the only experiences of these

young people with the Peruvian military and governments were when they came for strategic occupation of the village or to run military exercises nearby. The officers would come into the village, have sex with the young women, and leave. In some cases they left bastard children behind. (I definitely know the right word in Spanish for 'pregnant'). A few of the students at the university were children of such encounters and harbored deep resentment of the military and the far-away government.

Ruiz established a more explicit communist group which met for discussions but had plenty of free time for dissemination of anti-capitalist and anti-government propaganda. This all went on at the same time that the Shining Path was instituting its first serious attacks on the government and other targets. The action was far away and not very well known by distant communities, if at all. So while the group was discouraged by the rector and the university community, it wasn't seen as a potential breeding ground for terrorists. The rector finally took serious action when his own daughter started to attend Ruiz' secret sessions. He formally banned the group and put Ruiz on essentially permanent probation. He would have fired him, according to the rumors, but they were already short of professors and couldn't afford to spare anybody. The meetings went on clandestinely for a while at the university but this became difficult as more and more interest was generated. They decided to move the meeting to Picaflor, where they could operate more freely. Once a week, from then on, Ruiz and his followers made the trip by bus, proselytizing all the way. In this environment, the group became more militant and aggressive. The speeches became vitriolic and the rhetoric anti-establishment, especially with a target as obvious as the rector. Within a few months, Ruiz disappeared along with twenty-two of his students, a few of whom were from Picaflor, to train at

some distant, hidden *Senderista* camp where they would continue to be "educated."

A lot of this stuff came from Armando, one of the few students from here at the university that didn't go with Ruiz when he left. He went to the meetings and was on his way to becoming one of them but his father passed away at that time so he stayed behind. He is not communist and is anti-*Sendero Luminoso*. I was introduced to him by the mayor of the town. We were out in the plaza and he was introducing us to some of the residents when Armando walked by. The mayor called him over and he introduced Armando as a student. Armando shook his head just a little from side to side and then thrust out his hand in greeting. Armando asked me a lot of questions about who I was and what I was doing. He told me that he once intended to be a journalist but got sidetracked. He offered to help me as much as he could and the mayor agreed that it was a good idea. The mayor resumed his normal duties and Armando walked around the village with me, giving me some background information. He soon had to return to his home so I asked him to come by my hotel sometime soon and I could interview him.

It's time to get ready for the first evening's festivities. Jaime is standing over my shoulder now, dressed in a hilariously loud pullover and a huge straw hat. All he needs is a stick in his hand and he would be a shepherd. He now has me in a headlock and is making me officially rescind that statement.

Later, 11:00 p.m.

We're back at the hotel for a few minutes. The weirdest thing just happened to me a while back. We've been drinking pretty heavily so far. This local alcohol is very strong. It has the taste of bad zucchini or some other vegetable, yet its bouquet is somewhat intriguing. The women who make it

dig up a root that looks like a potato and they mash it with a wooden mortar and pestle. In order for it to ferment, they have to chew it up and spit it back out into another bowl. It looks off-whitish and a little bubbly and has the consistency of yogurt.

So I was sitting in a corner of a crowded tent drinking previously masticated beer while the others left to dance or take a whiz or something. I was trying to clear my head when this old lady comes and sits down next to me. She looked like a shar-pei, only more wrinkled. She was whispering in some weird language so I tried to ask her what she was saying. She pulled this tangled rope out of her bag and the next thing I know I'm wearing it around my neck. She got up and brushed her hand over her head and then turned and left. I haven't gotten a good look at this thing yet and I just put it in my bag (so I won't forget tomorrow). Maybe it's valuable.

This place is going crazy! We're heading back out.

Saturday, October 10, 11:30 a.m.

Feel awful. Can't work today. I vomited all over the hall. It wasn't so much the drinking as the altitude, I think.

Later, 6:00 p.m.

I'm not any better. Can't eat. Going back to sleep.

Sunday, October 11, 3:00 p.m.

Still feel like complete crap but at least I can move around a little. The human mind is an amazing thing. We can remember the most delicate flavor or smell or touch if it was pleasurable. I can remember with great clarity the taste of a tenderloin or the smell of the ocean. But if I try to

remember pain or misery, I find that I have blocked it out completely and I can only summon up a vague, dulled reminder of it. That's why I want to record for posterity the misery of yesterday.

Altitude dehydrates you. Alcohol dehydrates you. Activity dehydrates you. I combined all three into some sort of moisture sucking triathlon. It started off with a headache, which the alcohol then proceeded to numb. So then I danced and danced which made me thirsty, which I tried to quench with mixed drinks. When we came back to the hotel the first time, I was feeling on top of the world. When I came back the second time I was being carried on Jaime's back. The first thing my body did was to purge itself of everything bad I put into it. All I could think of was that guinea pig we had eaten earlier, which made me gag even more. When this agony was over I lay in bed shivering for at least a few hours. Then I started to sweat profusely. Then I shivered, then I sweated, *ad infinitum*. I dipped into sleep only to wake up with my head pounding so hard that it had detached itself from my shoulders. Forget it. I can't even begin to describe it well. I just hope I can erase this from my memory soon so I can begin to eat again.

Monday, October 12, 11:00 a.m.

Doing nothing but sitting in bed, I've at least had the chance to read some of the materials I borrowed from the *Biblioteca Nacional*. There are some astoundingly remarkable coincidences. It took me a long time, but I finally came upon a brief reference to an activity of the Incas in Peru that required the use of sticks and objects resembling the shuttlecock in badminton. This could easily be the flower-like objects that I thought I was seeing in my dream but instead of petals, the white plumes were feathers. The authors of the book didn't know for sure why the Incas went through



this ceremony but they believed it had to do with fertility of the earth. I then read in an older text that one of the Incan symbols for fertility was beans or seeds. Maybe the reward for winning the competition was that the seeds of the victor would be those planted. Or maybe the competition was a way for the gods to let the Incas know which seeds would be the best to plant. Or maybe the beans represented human fertility and it was some sort of marriage ritual. It could be just about anything having to do with birth or rebirth. The clay pots that were empty must have represented the lack of something, like stored food. Maybe there was a drought and food was scarce or perhaps there was some sort of blight or disease.

What I can't figure out is how I dreamt of something that really existed but I had never heard of before today. I must have come across a story or an account of this earlier in my research but the reference to it even in primary sources is so scant that I can't imagine having done so.

I've gone to sleep trying to pick up on the dream where I left off but I haven't been able to so far.

Later, 9:00 p.m.

I talked all afternoon with Armando. He had a lot to tell. He is extremely bright and very enjoyable to talk to. His brown eyes look intelligent, which I always think is very important. And he held my gaze with his narrow eyes while he talked. He has a very stiff jaw and high cheekbones with a mop of unkempt hair coming down to his forehead and over his ears on the sides. His wrists were small and his hands were large and strong but still delicate. He clearly has a good deal of Indian blood in him but how much I did not ask. I was impressed immediately by his presence and as time went on by his erudition and lucidity.

His family, namely his mother and four sisters, weave cloth into poncho style over-garments. His routine was to take the garments to Lima by catching a ride on a truck going there and sell them to a dealer once a week on Mondays. He had a part time job in a factory in the city for the next four days and stayed with a cousin. Then on Friday afternoon he would catch a ride back to the village. He has been doing this ever since his father died, a few weeks before many of his friends went off to become guerrillas. Armando feels strongly that it is because of this arrangement that he is still alive today.

When the *Senderistas* came for the first time, they rounded up the whole town into the little square. Even the tiniest baby was there on its mother's back. Included in the congregation, then, were Armando's sisters and mother. The guerrillas had brought, besides their guns, a loudspeaker with which to address the residents. They announced that they had come to liberate the village from the corrupting influences imposed on them by the government and, by extension, the conquerors of the native land of their ancestors. Two of the *Senderistas* were from that study group and they pointed out the market stall owners who had assembled. They were lined up in a row on the other side of the plaza. The leader of the group, a female (they could tell from the voice but couldn't see because she was wearing a ski mask), was doing a lot of yelling and directing. The others addressed her as Comandante María. In this kind of community, it was probably the first time that a woman had given orders to these men. It added even to the shock value of having automatic weapons pointed at their faces.

This all started late in the evening, around 9 p.m., when most people would have been getting off to sleep for their early start the next day. All the market owners that had been separated were forced to stand stiffly or be beaten, even those in their pajamas. The rest of the group were allowed to sit

on the cold stone plaza. The comandante stood up on a makeshift platform, took out a portable loudspeaker and began to speak. It was a rambling speech. She spoke of how the villages and small towns of Peru were the first step on the way to a people's Peru and equality. She expounded on the virtues of the collectivist economy where the village could be self sufficient and not have to prostitute itself to the goods and services of far away places. She spoke at great length then of the "swords of Marxism." She listed the contributions first of Karl Marx. Then Lenin. Then she talked on and on about Mao. She spoke of how he fomented revolution in the countryside, unlike the others. She talked of Mao's pure communist thought which was the only way to establish true communism. The words, according to those listening, began to blur into themselves and the message became indistinct. Then, with great emphasis, she spoke of the "fourth sword of Marxism," Presidente Gonzalo, the group's nickname for founder and leader Abimael Guzmán. She spoke of this comrade with great reverence and devotion. She began to talk of "Gonzalo Thought," which were Guzmán's personal adaptations of communism to Peru. She began to use more technical language, which was impossible for the people to understand and they couldn't remember.

When this was over, Comandante María gave the loudspeaker to her male lieutenant. At first he spoke softly and with much more feeling than the mechanical comandante. He told the group that was sitting down that it was not their fault that they acted as they did. He told them of a time when Peru was truly free. When there was a society of great harmony, which "Gonzalo Thought" sought to restore. Then he suddenly became angry and nervous. He began to shriek loudly about the invasion of the Spaniards into their ancestral home. (Never mind that this lieutenant had the grammatically correct speech of an educated man from the city and a pale skin

tone that lacked any trace of indigenous blood). He spoke bitterly of the imposition of colonialism and servitude. He began to speak of the government of the country that continued to perpetuate these "imported" ideas. Finally, he spoke of a time when the people of the village could join them in the struggle for equality. But they would have to learn more first. This was their first step on the way to "joining the righteous on the shining path of the revolutionary." This was the first and only time that the *Sendero Luminoso* mentioned their own name. The lieutenant then took his rifle from Comandante María and gave her back the loudspeaker.

The comandante stepped off of the platform and came up to the tired and cold group as the morning began to dawn. The children that had been sobbing and crying most of the night had either mercifully gone to sleep or sat glassy eyed as if in a trance. Everyone was hungry. They had been sitting there for almost nine hours. Comandante María began to speak about a systematic and brutal inequality in the village. She spoke of women that labored all day while their husbands lounged around. She spoke of men impregnating women and then leaving for more exciting places while the women bore their burdens alone. She spoke of the gap between the market owners who enriched themselves on the labors of others and of the poor and innocent laborers who toiled just to survive. She emphasized this point again to the group that had been standing the whole time, guarded by a couple of the guerrillas who had also been standing the whole time. This was the first time that these men had been addressed directly during the whole ordeal. This group looked much worse for the wear than anybody else. It didn't help that they surely had the best idea of anyone what could happen to them, being the ones that could read the newspapers and afford radios.

Turning back to the group that included their wives and children, the comandante began to list the so-called crimes of these men. They were convicted as she spoke. They were capitalists who preyed on the innocents. They were living off the sweat of others and were responsible for the inequitable distribution of wealth in the village. They received favors from the government. Their children opted out of military service and went to school in the cities, where they often stayed. This went on for some time. Slowly, the tired and weary group's feelings began to sway. At first they were skeptical but the rhetoric made them disturbed, then aggravated, then angry. Eventually, some of them even wanted revenge for the crimes of these men.

Comandante María seized on this sentiment. She spoke of her obligation to protect the innocent villagers from this oppression. She spoke of necessary steps that must be taken in order to truly change society. Her lieutenant walked down the line counting aloud, very slowly. "*Uno, dos, tres, cuatro, cinco, seis, siete, ocho, nueve...*" After he got to the number ten he pointed at the lieutenant mayor, who was tenth in line and pulled him out in front. Starting where he left off, he counted again up to ten and grabbed the owner of a hotel/restaurant (the hotel has since been razed) and dragged them both over to the fountain in the middle of the square. The lieutenant then took his pistol out of his belt and shot them in the front of their foreheads, their lifeless bodies falling into the empty concrete basin behind them. Some of the men in line fell to their knees. Others began to weep. The families of the executed men cried out but others silenced them. Everyone was horrified by what they had seen but those who were convinced that it was justified or feared further retribution kept the others quiet.

The *Senderistas* immediately vanished off into the hills. Needless to say, no one followed them. They had literally 'decimated' the market owners

(Armando told me that the word stems from the Roman tradition of killing every tenth man in a legion that had misbehaved in order to enforce discipline— it was very effective). The families of the murdered men plus about 10 others left almost immediately for other parts. The rest seriously debated leaving. People in the village began to mistrust each other.

Unfortunately I didn't get to hear the rest of the story because Armando had to leave for Lima, on the last pick-up truck out today. He loaded all of his ponchos on the truck and then settled himself on top of them. As they drove off, I saw him huddled in his own warm poncho, with his head down, already trying to get some sleep. Since they will stop to pick up other passengers along the way, it will take them until dawn to reach Lima. What a way to travel. It will be some time before I can talk with him again. I feel even more strongly that I have to stay here to hear his story. I can tell that he has more to tell me.

Jaime also has to go back to Lima for a few days or maybe a week, because he has another deadline to meet. He'll be leaving tomorrow morning. The guide and interpreter have asked to go back with him so that they can visit their families. Jaime and I agreed that I was getting along fine up here and even with the language barrier, there were always enough helpful people around to translate from Quechua. I'll just hang around until they get back and by then I might be ready to move on. Maybe Jaime can bring me a paper. I haven't read the news in a long time.

Tuesday, October 13, 9:00 a.m.

I feel exceptionally good today. It must be the crisp mountain air. I woke up early, about 7:30, and I went outside to say good-bye to Jaime and to have a good look around. There was a lot of activity but I couldn't see

anything because of the thick fog. It looked as if a cloud had just parked itself over the village and it only burned away when the sun peeked out from over the surrounding hills.

Today I've arranged to head out with a local guy on a hiking tour of the surrounding hills. The *ama* of the hotel fixed me up with a packed lunch of roasted something-or-other on bread with some fruit. I've run out of the bottled water we brought but there are tons of water purification tablets left so if I need to drink from a mountain stream, if I drop a couple of them in the bottle and shake it around a bit, it should be okay.

This guy I'm going with, Gustavo, looks to be about 80 but I bet he'll be running circles around me when we start heading into the hills. He is very compact and I can see that age has robbed him of his once stocky build. He shook hands with me and they were very rough. He wasn't wearing any shoes and I could see that his feet were not unaccustomed to hard work. He seems so far to be pretty clever. Maybe he knows some old legends or stories. We'd better head out now.

Later, 3:00 p.m.

It has been very hard hiking so far— not because of the difficulty of the terrain but because it has been entirely uphill. As I suspected, Gustavo is not even breathing hard though I'm wheezing and coughing some. I find that it helps me a great deal to drink a lot of water. In this rarefied air, my heart rate is about 120 beats a minute when I exert myself, but when I take a few swigs of water, it stops pounding enough for me to continue.

We've just finished lunch at this rocky outcropping overlooking a steep valley on the other side of the ridge that surrounds the village. The valley descends much further than the one that contains Picaflor and is

shaded from the sun so the clouds haven't yet lifted. I can't even see the bottom, just the slope of the hill descending into the white clouds. I have a bizarre urge to leap out into space, like the clouds are pillows that will catch me. If I didn't have to hike back up later, I would seriously consider going down there but what would I see anyway? Just a white opaqueness. I'm much better off staying above the clouds. It makes me feel a bit like a conquistador or perhaps Alexander von Humboldt, the great explorer who named the great stretch of the Andes known as the "Avenue of the Volcanoes." Gustavo, in his typical faded heavy wool poncho, does little to snap me back into the 20th century.

I imagined that I would be talking up a storm but I've been so out of breath (and so awestruck) that we've been walking in virtual silence. We're planning to walk along this ridge for a while and then take another route down into the village, which Gustavo promises will be the highlight of the walk.

I just noticed that rope thing in my bag that that old woman gave me a few days ago. I really forgot about that in my misery. I don't think I've seen that woman since. Maybe Gustavo will know who she is if I describe her to him. Maybe he'll know what this thing is if I show it to him.

Later, 8:30 p.m.

I see that I had written earlier about that cord necklace, or whatever, so I wouldn't forget it. Then that's exactly what I did. I asked Gustavo about it and he mentioned something about it that sounded something like "Oh kee poo." I thought he was singing the Mikado or something. Well, he refused to talk about it, insisting only that he and I take it to someone in the morning. Gustavo did turn out to be quite talkative, however. He went on and on



about his life story. He was born in Picaflor and lived through many of the changes it has endured. He has never been out of the mountains, though when he was younger he claims that he once followed a bird all the way to the ruins of Macchu Picchu. When he got there he said good-bye to the bird, turned around, and went home. It seemed odd that he told me this.

The neatest myth that he told me was about the founding of the village. Apparently the city is as ancient as the Inca. A boy and a girl were in love but he was a minor prince and she was just a peasant and they were destined for different fates. The advisor of the prince's father was concerned that the son would run away from his duty to lead part of the army. He knew that the boy and girl would be saying their good-byes that day and it was the most likely time that he would choose to run away. Without informing the father, the advisor put a sleeping potion into the sack that he thought was the food for their llama. That way the llama would get sleepy and they would not be able to go very far and couldn't possibly run away. Just as the advisor thought, the two of them did indeed head out over the hills, riding their trusted llama. (It wasn't common to ride llamas but was done on occasion). What the advisor didn't know, though, was that he had put the potion into the sack that contained the lunch of the lovers and not the food for the llama. When they stopped to eat, the prince decided that his destiny was to follow his father's footsteps and to do as he said. The girl was very obedient and tearfully agreed. Then they ate the sleeping potion, without knowing, and got on their llama for their final ride back to the city. When they mounted the llama, though, they suddenly became very drowsy and fell forward onto its withers in a deep slumber. The llama was very gentle and did not move. Then, out of one of the saddlebags flew a hummingbird that had smuggled itself aboard back in the city. It flew around for a moment and then headed

off over the hills. The llama, making up its mind, began to follow the bird, but very gently so that the couple would not fall off. The bird flew on all day and all night and the llama continued as well. The terrain was inhospitable and the bird was unable to find any place to eat. Still, the two animals continued along as the lovers slept. (It appears that the advisor put enough potion in the sack to knock out a llama which really did a number on the humans). Finally, after an indeterminable time, the little group descended into a fertile valley and the hummingbird raced towards a very tall flower that had been growing since time immemorial and began to feed upon it. The llama, too, dipped its head to the ground and began to eat the lush grass. This tipped the couple off onto the ground but since it was so soft from the moisture and dew, it was like falling onto a cushion and it did not disturb their slumber. The hummingbird became concerned after a while about the couple, so he began to buzz around their heads to awaken them. When the prince opened his eyes, the little bird was the first thing that he saw and he exclaimed "Q'enti," the Quechua word for hummingbird. The girl woke up then and exclaimed the same thing. Then the couple realized that they had been taken far away from home and had been given their freedom. They expressed their love for each other and built the village that still stands today, naming it after the noble hummingbird, now going by the Spanish word for it.

Gustavo claims that all of the members of the village descend from those two lovers of long ago. Either the story is a fable, or everyone in the town is extraordinarily inbred. It also explains why they chose San Esteban as their patron.

He finished telling me this just as we started to descend into the little Valle de la Llama, as I now know that it is called. The descent into the village

was, indeed, the most stunning part of the trip. The wily Gustavo had taken me around the valley so that we descended westward, directly into the gorgeous sunset. The deep blue melted before my eyes into a radiant orange and then into a crimson red before metamorphosing into the most beautiful dark purple color just as we arrived in town. I could imagine clearly, just then, how the ancient Inca could have revered so the ancient Sun God, Inti, the one who supposedly gave life to Manco Capac and his sister, the first Incas, on the Isle of the Sun of Lake Titicaca and led them to the Cuzco valley in order to bring civilization to the Indians (and to whose service a number of temples and hundreds of virgins were constantly dedicated). It is truly a glorious history, if a mythical one.

Wednesday, October 14, 8:45 a.m.

I spent the past hour trying to find a decent cup of coffee in this town. I figured I was coming to the fertile mountain soil of the Andes. It's the same mountains as they have in the highlands of Colombia but here I am back at the little hotel restaurant (just 3 tables) drinking some watery Nescafé. If it's watery it's my fault. There was some black sludge in a container at the table which was very concentrated coffee. I was supposed to add water to taste but it looked so thick and viscous that I was liberal with the water. There's some syrupy gunk at the bottom of the cup that I refuse to drink. I think I'll try to find some tea.

Later, 11:30 a.m.

Gustavo came to get me about 9:30 (he had said he would be there at 9:00 and he seemed surprised that I was sitting waiting for him). He had me bring the cords and led me across town to the house of what I suppose is a

village elder– and that’s saying a lot considering how Gustavo’s getting up there in years.

The man preferred to speak Quechua or, to be more accurate, spoke that language and gave no indication of knowing Spanish, so Gustavo had to translate, which I believe he did with significant embellishment. I handed him the mess of cords which had twisted themselves while in my bag. The elder gingerly undid the mess. He was extremely deft, especially considering his wrinkled fingers and his age. Gustavo told me that it looked a great deal like a *quipu*, an ancient recording device used by the Inca. He knew of nobody in the village who would have made such a thing. At the beckoning of the old man, I looked closely at the cords. They looked ancient to me. I could see that the cords had once been colored but had faded over time. When it was stretched out along the floor, it was very long. There was one long, thicker cord stretching across the top. The elder curled up the ends of this cord so that they almost met at the top in a circle. In that way, the many cords emanating from the main one made it look like rays coming from the sun. The smaller, thinner cords coming off of the main one were the ones that were colored. They often had other threads coming off them, like smaller branches coming off a larger one which was connected to the trunk. All these other cords had little knots tied to them, whether there was a smaller string attached or not. These knots varied in size, length and style. All the strings stretched down to approximately the same length. I had assumed that it was some sort of ceremonial object that had been made for the festival but the way that the old man was concentrating on it, I could tell that it was something more.

The old man began to quietly speak aloud to himself in Quechua, which Gustavo declined to translate. I think he was just mumbling to

himself. He was tracing the secondary cords with his fingers, looking very closely at the knots and comparing strands with their neighbors. Gustavo began to tell me, of his own accord, something of the object that we were looking at. He told me that the *quipu* was a recording device used by the Inca to remember numbers and certain events. There is no written history of the Inca, as they possessed no alphabet, so for a moment I thought that I had stumbled across a great discovery that would bridge the gap between the centuries and open up the world of the Inca to historians. But alas, the *quipu* does not really present concrete ideas. It is mainly an object used to serve as a mnemonic device for those entrusted to remember and recite history. The knots and their locations stood for numbers. The *quipu* could represent certain abstract ideas, the meanings of which were derived from the varying colors on the strings. Sadly, any attempt at deciphering them was conjecture. Most *quipu* were probably destroyed by the Spanish invaders or the ensuing missionaries and the *quipu* makers soon died out. Unless a historian found them in a context that led them to guess their significance, the *quipu* became a lifeless, meaningless mess of rope, rather than being part of a living, breathing history.

The old man scribbled a few things down on a scrap of paper and turned his attention to me. He began to ask me about the woman that had given the *quipu* to me in the tent. The two men would have a short conversation, then out of that Gustavo would ask me a question. 'Where were you sitting?' 'Whom were you with?' 'What was she wearing?' 'What language was she speaking in?' When I told them for that question that I did not know the answer they paused, and the questions began to focus on it. They gave me short sentences in what I assume were all different types of dialects but none sounded familiar. Then they stopped. Gustavo told me that

I had to see someone else, but he could not take me there. He simply could not go. They led me to believe that it was too far. For a man that had just walked laps around me on the ridge, this seemed odd but the man looked so honestly disappointed that I truly believed that if there were any way he could go, he would. The two men consulted for a moment or two more. Gustavo said that they had seen that I was friendly with Armando. He was a strong youth. When he came back, he would surely escort me where I needed to go. They wouldn't answer any of my own questions about where exactly that was.

The prospect of going with Armando is, of course, appealing, but I protested because of his economic importance to his family. Gustavo took me by the arm and we left the house of the old man. That, apparently, was the end of the conversation. He led me directly to Armando's house. We were invited in by Armando's mother, whom I had met briefly before. Her daughters were working busily behind her. Gustavo began to converse with Armando's mother in Quechua, her preferred language as Armando had told me. She mostly nodded, stiffly at first but then more smoothly and without the trace of a frown that had originally been at the corners of her lips. (I find that when I don't understand what's being said, I pay much more attention to body language. It's a very interesting exercise. And people from different cultures, I've noticed, have remarkably similar, or at least understandable, body movements when they talk).

Gustavo finally began to explain to me that the mother had agreed to let Armando go with me but, since they would be missing his labor, he had suggested that I would be happy to work in whatever capacity I could for them until his return. That way they wouldn't fall too far behind in their work. Because the factory where he works is shut down next week for a renovation, he would be here anyway and he wouldn't be missing work. It's an altogether

agreeable compromise, although I wouldn't have minded his asking my permission first. I don't think that's how it works up here. It will be two full days before Armando gets back very late Friday or Saturday, depending on his transportation. I've got an early start tomorrow, so I'd better get off to sleep.

Thursday, October 15, 12:30 p.m.

I'm amazed already at the work ethic in the Andes. Armando's family makes their ponchos much as they have been made for hundreds of years. It is very labor intensive. And what's more they start around 5:30 a.m., when the sun peaks over the ridge and into the little windows of their house, providing just enough illumination to work.

The small house is divided into five rooms. Coming in from the front door is the equivalent of a living room which also serves as the work room, although they work outside when the weather is nice enough. Going straight through this room leads to a small eating room which is connected to the kitchen on its left. Through the primitive kitchen and heading back towards the front are the two small, plain bedrooms that they all share. Their thin mattresses are neatly organized, some on the floor and others elevated. The last bedroom also connects back to the living room. There are no doors in the house aside from the front door and one in the rear. The bathroom is in the back as is the water access. They use their small plot of land in the back to grow a few vegetables. It is an unremarkable place but very homey. There is a little staircase on the outside leading to the roof, which offers a nice view of the whole town.

Market day is when they buy the materials to weave with. It all depends on availability but they almost always use and prefer the wool of the alpaca (like the llama wool but softer and less greasy). They don't possess the

means to dye the wool, so they've got to work with whatever natural colors they can find. The original, neutral, off-white color is most often available. They keep this stocked in the back, with a tiny roof over it to protect it from the rain. Since the market was yesterday, they had their new stock stacked up. I was able to do a job that would otherwise have occupied one or two of the children. The two daughters that are older than Armando stay at home with their mother and they weave the ponchos primarily. The two younger ones go to school part of the day and then do chores and some work when they get home. This is one of the jobs that they have to do. There are many types of imperfections in the wool, like burrs or small pebbles or other foreign objects. There is no easy way to get them out, just by hand or a small metal comb and with patience. Once these objects are removed the wool can be washed and hung to dry. Then it can finally be spun and put onto the loom for assembly into a poncho.

The two smaller looms they have don't stand upright on the floor like I expected them to. The loom itself consists of a wooden frame without any legs or supports on it but, rather, a thick woolen strap. To work the looms, the women first have to kneel on the ground with their knees resting on a blanket. They then put the strap around their back like a sash or the strap of a guitar. Finally they rest the bottom corner of the loom on the ground and the top corner on the same side is attached to a peg on the wall by a thick rope. The strap and the connection to the wall hold the loom steady and upright while both of their hands are still free to weave. While I was working outside and looking in at them moving their hands swiftly across these looms, it didn't look to me like they were laboriously producing a garment. Instead, it looked as if they were musicians, softly stroking the strings of their golden harps to an ancient melody.



We're in the middle of a long lunch break now. In fact they take off much of the afternoon to eat and do assorted other things, like tend to their tiny garden. The younger girls come home for lunch from the small three or four room schoolhouse. They tell me that it is best to weave the ponchos during the early morning hours and after the sun has gone down, especially when the moon is full. This is partly because during the day the air gets very dry and their fingers get raw from working with yarn without much moisture. They say it is more important that the final product is improved because the cool air helps to make a tighter weave which in turn makes the poncho thicker and warmer. I don't know if this is true or just something passed down through the generations, but when I went outside, I noticed that their neighbors who are also weavers have also stopped working for the time being.

These people are very friendly but I sense that they feel a little uncomfortable with me around. It's not that they're suspicious of me specifically, but it's a general reaction whenever there is a stranger around. I certainly wouldn't feel comfortable asking them any specific questions about the *Sendero Luminoso* or about what they have seen. I think it's much better to wait until Armando gets back and just ask him. I can only suppose that it has been his exposure to the city and life there that makes him much less reticent to talk with me. The two youngest girls here have never gone much outside the surrounding area and the older two have been to Lima just a few times in their lives. For my questions about daily life here, though, they are all extremely helpful.

My hand is starting to cramp up from all of the work. I'd better stop writing so I can make sure that I can finish my job. I don't think they'll commiserate if I start to claim carpal tunnel syndrome.

Later, 11:00 p.m.

I ran into some Peace Corps volunteers when I came back to the hotel. They are staying here for the night before they move on so we had a few drinks down in the restaurant. They were pretty animated. I think they're really big on comradeship and that sort of thing. There were two of them. One was really tall and thin with a mop of blond hair and a quirky smile. He's been in Peru for all of three weeks. The other, much shorter and thinner than the first, was getting ready to go home in a couple of months. He didn't smile much, even when he told a joke. He was most grateful that I didn't make any comment about it being "the toughest job they'll ever love."

They were driving cross-country in a small jeep in order to get to a tiny village in the Amazon just over the side of the Andes. The three grand divisions of the country are the coast, the Andes and the Amazon (*la costa, la sierra, y el oriente*). They were going to teach these villagers techniques in subsistence farming. I never figured that there would be much trouble growing things in an environment like the jungle but it's quite the contrary. The soil is actually extremely thin and not very conducive to growing crops. The rain that sweeps through very often wipes away the planting that is done. The volunteers have to teach them how to avoid this kind of erosion and show them which crops have the best chance of survival.

The Indians that they will be teaching this to are a very interesting segment of Peruvian society. The borders drawn up in the Amazon are just about as arbitrary as those in post-colonial Africa. These simple people don't care, and often don't really know, whether they are in Peru, Ecuador, Colombia or Brazil. It's of little matter, too. In the extreme Northern part of the Peruvian Amazon, the citizens are much closer to Quito and Bogotá and even Panama City than Lima. It's not as if the Peruvian government does

much to help these people. They rarely ever go out there, except when they have the occasional war with Ecuador over a sizable patch of otherwise worthless jungle that both sides think has decent oil deposits on it. That's why the volunteers don't treat the jungle as part of Peru but more like a separate entity. This group of Indians is particularly lucky living on a tributary just off of the Ucayali River. They do not live in a contested part of the jungle and there are few natural resources to fight over. Even more importantly, they do not live near any of the coca growing or processing facilities in the jungle. If they did, it would not only mean that there was a significant threat from drug dealers, but very likely from the *Sendero Luminoso* in particular.

The volunteers were very well versed in the cocaine situation and shared a lot of their information with me. The Peruvian jungle is probably the biggest starting point for the cocaine that eventually reaches the streets of the United States. This is where the coca leaf flourishes and where some of the early processing is done. The farmers of Peru do not make much money growing cocoa bean, sugar cane, or other tropical foods. They can make as much in a week growing coca as they can in two or three growing other things. The remarkable thing is that they are still only paid around 200 dollars for 400 pounds of coca leaves (which results in one pound of the finished product worth 10,000 dollars). These farmers also often have to participate in the dangerous processing of the coca leaf. They put the leaves in a pit and then dump gasoline or kerosene on top of them and then throw on some lime or cement. Then, barefoot, they stomp on the leaves, crushing them and releasing the psychoactive chemicals in them. Needless to say, it is not the most healthy thing to do to be stomping around all day in a carcinogen but not only are they doing that but they are also inhaling

concentrated vapors in the poorly ventilated pits. Once the coca leaves reach this stage, they are smuggled into more sophisticated laboratories in Colombia where they are converted to powder form. Then they leave that country by the path of least resistance and enter the United States and other countries by any number of methods.

The farmers, actually, are relatively innocent in the whole scheme of things. They have to support their families and coca growing offers a relatively good way of doing it. They don't use the cocaine. They probably don't even know who is using it, or the problem it causes in the United States (I almost wrote 'here' instead of 'the U.S,' because it's almost automatic. It feels like I'm talking about myself in the third person). All the farmers know is that they have something growing in their plots of land that helps them to live a lot better than otherwise. I dislike the drug trade as much as anyone but I'm glad I'm not the guy that has to try to convince them that they're doing the wrong thing. Still, it's not even the relatively exotic cocaine that's hitting the streets. It's all crack now. And the jungles of Peru are where it all starts.

One of the worst problems of the whole situation is who controls the drug traffic, in many cases the *Sendero Luminoso*. It is the obscenely wealthy drug cartels, to be sure, that are the masterminds of the whole trade. But they have to get the coca leaf into their laboratories before they can make their product. To do this, they depend on groups like the *Sendero Luminoso* to control the transportation of the mush that the farmers produce. They put it into trucks and simply drive it across the sparsely defended border between Colombia and Peru. For this, they are paid quite handsomely. And they use this money to fund their cause. They use it to buy weapons and to produce

propaganda. The drug dealers don't care about the cause of the guerrillas. They just want a steady supply of coca.

It makes me wonder. Right now, in New York, some kindly old lady is having her purse stolen. In her wallet is twenty dollars of social security money which she received from the government earlier today. The robber is a young man who uses the money to buy crack from a small time dealer who works for a small time middle man who works for a big time middleman. That money supports a system that directly supports the *Sendero Luminoso* who have killed people in this very village. Indirectly, my money is helping to support these idiots. My taxes, that is. The social security money that was in the old lady's purse purchased a couple of bullets for the *Sendero Luminoso*, perhaps. I guess that's one way of looking at it. It goes to show that there are so many unknown effects that result from our actions. Things are linked to each other in every which way and every little thing I do has the chance to cause any number of other things to happen— even half a world away. To be sure, even if one individual did not buy that crack, the people from Picaflor would still be dead and that's what is truly important here. The blame for that is almost entirely on the *Sendero Luminoso*, but there is certainly a little bit of blame left over for the drug cartels, the dealers, and the users. We don't live in a vacuum, though that is often what people have between their ears, and it won't be until we all begin to take note of the damage we are helping to cause that things can start to get better.

I really admire these Peace Corps guys. They do so many good things without causing a lot of the side effects of people like zealous missionaries. They have to make such a commitment for very little in return, monetarily that is. It's probably not something I could ever do. I wonder if it's because I'd miss the big city too much or if it's because I have trouble sticking with

anything for a long time. I certainly like it here in Picaflor and even though I've only been here a short while I know in my heart that it's more of the latter. Maybe being a reporter is the best thing for me. Moving from story to story all the time. Not spending too much time in one place, or too much attention on one subject. This means that I'm like the criticism I once heard somewhere about a former Soviet minister. "He knows a little about everything and everything about nothing."

Friday, October 16, 2:00 p.m.

Armando's family took pity on me today. I think it was because I wasn't doing such a good job, though. My fingers are long and slim but not small enough to really get everything out of the alpaca wool. Instead of working, one of the older daughters, Yolanda, and a younger daughter, Carolina, went with me to a larger market, a Friday market, held in a town a few hours away. Depending on the availability of a ride home we will possibly stay the night. This town, Armay, is the tourist spa listed in my guidebook. It is so named for its heated thermal springs which start as snow fed streams from the mountains but are super-heated when they run through the earth. Armay, it turns out, is the Quechua word for baths (like the Spanish *baños*).

More interesting for my purposes is that there is a fairly heavy presence of Peruvian soldiers stationed in Armay. Not only is it a popular tourist spot, which they feel the need to protect, it is the strategic and economic center of the area. All of the main roads to Lima from this region pass through Armay, so roadblocks help to a small extent to control the flow of traffic. However they didn't stop our pick-up, with four in the front cab and eight others huddled in the back sitting on what could have been a ton of cocaine or guns

or plastic explosives. Despite this lax security and the overall festive atmosphere of the place, when I looked in the right places, it seemed little more than a garrison.

Carolina and Yolanda got off the truck when we arrived at dawn and headed off with some of their finished ponchos to a few of the distributors known to them. On good weeks, they produced enough ponchos to sell some here on top of what goes to Lima. Though there is less demand for them here, Armando's family gets more per poncho because the stalls sell directly to the gullible tourists rather than to large corporations for shipping back to North America or Europe. The girls will take some time because they will barter for the best price. They cannot sell directly to the tourists but they might also manage a few deals on the side if they are discreet.

I headed to the first restaurant I could find for some *café con leche*. It was very cold earlier but I was wearing one of Armando's warm ponchos and if I kept my hands inside, I was toasty. The coffee was hot, creamy, and delicious, and I just watched the tourists mill about the various stalls. The market was centered in a square plaza, which I was on the outside of. It then branched off down the various streets, lining them with tables and small booths. Each stall tried to maximize the space they had fought for by getting to Armay as early as possible in the early morning darkness. There were a few notable exceptions, I saw, like the smattering of Americans who set a few marijuana associated items (like pipes and such) out on a little blanket in front of them while they sat cross legged on the sidewalk. They must be trying to bankroll their little adventures, I guess. One section of the square was devoted to food, where *cui* was already roasting on spits, rinds were being deep-fried over small fires, and vegetables were being poked and prodded with not the cleanest hands. Another distinguishable section was devoted to

clothing and blankets and the like. Those were the quickest to unload their prime products so even though it was very early, the tourists were up and about and buses from Lima that had left at dark-thirty were making their way through the congested streets. The section of plaza that I was nearest to was the artwork. The majority of artists were painters but there were some sculptors as well. Many were working on their next piece while potential buyers browsed through their offerings. The whole atmosphere (except for the pungent smell of roasting guinea pig) reminded me of Montmartre, under the shadow of the Sacre Coeur in Paris, where easels hung everywhere and, even in the bitterest cold, views of the Seine and Notre Dame, and the Tuilleries were coming to life on the canvases.

When I finished my coffee, I strolled through the nearby streets. There was one where the predominant product was leather goods like bags and wallets. These gave way to stalls of trinkets and beads of astonishing variety. Then there was a collection of hat makers all grouped together. It occurred to me that, except for a few late-comers and strays, most people with a particular product for sale were next to someone else selling the same thing. Not only that, but they had the same designs for their products and had them set up the same way on their tables. I've seen this before across the third world. There is an amazing continuity among, just as an example, snack food item vendors in developing countries. I will see one pushing a cart with peanuts on the left, cashews next to it, pistachios next to that, and then banana chips on the right. Then, fifty yards further there will be a duplicate cart not only selling the exact same products, but also having them arranged in the exact same order. Here in Aramay, it is obvious that people are imitating each other as much as possible. I would think that someone would take the initiative and do things differently (the exception being the artists who are already



producing very unique works). But I suppose if they do, they will just be copied the next week. Perhaps it's because they are more comfortable just being on equal footing with each other. These people have generally been exploited for centuries; by the Inca rulers, by the Spanish invaders and the colonial governments, by their own authoritarian governments, by foreign powers, and just about everyone else they have come in contact with. I really can't fault them for preserving any measure of equality that they can find.

I had almost failed to notice all this time that overlooking the proceedings were heavily armed members of Peru's finest. The doorways of most businesses, especially banks and jewelry stores, were guarded by private security personnel with bullet-proof vests and shotguns. Patrolling the streets and roof-tops were armed-to-the-teeth, hard-looking teenagers in full fatigues. They tried to remain unobtrusive but it's tough to blend in when you have an automatic weapon strapped around your shoulder. I tried first to visit with the commanding officer, Colonel Hashimoto... Juan Carlos Hashimoto. Peru is not a nation well known for immigrant success stories like the United States but there certainly are a number in powerful positions. Just like the president of the nation, Hashimoto is the descendent of the many Japanese who immigrated to Peru early in the century and who have made successes of themselves. Their children, while growing up Peruvian and Spanish-speaking, have maintained some of their cultural heritage, especially those who still have Japanese last names. I have to wonder whether Hashimoto is a skilled commander or if his appointment here was out of favoritism. Or maybe it was a jab at the *Sendero Luminoso* who want a Peru for pure Peruvians, not some half-breed, corrupted foreigners. Regardless, his staff officer told me that he was indisposed at the moment but if I returned late in the afternoon he may be able to see me, depending on his

schedule. I originally thought that this was a brush-off but I think I'll head back in a couple of hours just on the off-chance that he'll be free. I don't have anything particularly interesting to ask him but my bet is that he'll be impressed enough by my United States press credentials and a chance to be quoted in a famous publication that he'll give me some of his time.

I have no idea how many troops are out here and I have no way of guessing because there could be any number back in the barracks just out of town or on patrol. The soldiers I talked to (which I did while they walked and lunched) gave me the impression that this was one of the least desirable large barracks postings in the military. Hashimoto is renowned as something of a dictator and a harsh disciplinarian. In the town, they are happy enough but when they have to patrol deep in the mountains, which is something their old commander never had them do, it really becomes dangerous. Hashimoto believes in active engagement of the enemy, even though they employ guerrilla (obviously) tactics and work in small, difficult to catch bands. The Colonel sends out a convoy of three or four jeeps on the patrols along navigable roads or groups of around twenty into areas less accessible down in the nearby edges of the jungle and they patrol for anywhere from two days to a week. Their true purpose is to find drug traffickers and this is where the soldiers encounter the enemy, very often the *Sendero Luminoso*. The guerrillas have nowhere to hide in the mountains, save some caves and rocky areas. Attacks around there would only help to pinpoint their hiding places. Instead, they go down into the jungle, suitably far from their cocaine processing locations and near some small civilian village. There they set up an ambush and, with the element of surprise, take out a couple of soldiers, usually the most inexperienced ones, and then, without pushing their luck, blend back into the jungle and make their way home. True, they didn't make

many attacks but they had done it enough to put the fear of it into every soldier that left the base. More often, down in the jungle, the troops would stumble accidentally across those farmers working the coca plantations. The soldiers would simply cut down the coca and burn it along with all the chemicals and such that were there. To a man they all expressed some compassion for the farmers. They said that even if it was worth arresting them, they wouldn't because all of the farmers had families to support and to take them into custody would be to deprive the families of food. Instead, they are sent off with a warning of the dangers of what they are doing and a plea to grow more benign crops.

Every once in a while, it would seem like more often the way they talk about it, they come across the cocaine traffickers at their processing plants. These traffickers are heavily armed and the ensuing firefights are the gravest dangers that these soldiers face. This type of criminal does not give himself up— when faced with the potential punishment and the Peruvian justice system, I would fight to the death, too. The traffickers, whether the *Sendero Luminoso* or some other less ideologically based group, have more advanced weaponry, often including ground-to-air missiles which means that none of the American helicopters given to Peru for support can be flown in to provide cover for the soldiers. Neither can there be a blanket bombing because there are civilians, namely the farmers, being used as cover. Instead, the army has to retreat and wait for backup, which gives the traffickers every opportunity to get away. (This is exactly what the soldiers want to happen). While many soldiers have been wounded, not too many have actually been killed in duty. Still, for a country in peacetime, it is a high toll for its armed forces to suffer, especially with so little appreciable progress being made.

To make it worse, everyone here except Hashimoto, it seems, feels like it should be someone else's responsibility to deal with the drug dealers. Obviously the local authorities are absolutely no help but the soldiers here have to go so far just to engage a shadowy enemy that they can't help but feel like it is out of their domain. They are resigned to the fact that they will continue to perform these missions. Peru desperately wants to continue to be certified by the United States as a partner in the war on drugs so that they can continue to receive aid and trade packages. Even if what they do doesn't help to actually stem the flow of drugs into the United States, they will have to keep pressing on, making so many seizures of coca and so many 'raids' on processing laboratories so that the Colonel can report back to Lima with his statistics and everyone can pretend like they are making progress in the war—except for those that happen to be fighting it.

Later, 5:30 p.m.

I've just had a short meeting with Colonel Hashimoto, though I wasn't able to take notes (I can't listen and write and respond in Spanish nearly fast enough for this interview) and I had no recording device with me. I was kept waiting for about half an hour while the Colonel was 'urgently detained,' but to my surprise I was then ushered into a well lit, poorly decorated office with the Peruvian flag limply wrapped around a not very straight flag pole. Hashimoto seemed like a prototypical military professional. For some reason I kept thinking of the School of the Americas training academy during the interview. Hashimoto was distinctly Japanese, even sitting behind a vast wooden desk in a tall, padded chair, and even though he wore silver, reflective sunglasses during the whole interview (which prevented me from ever seeing his eyes, most likely slanted as a result of his East-Asian heritage).

His accent was Peruvian with all of the slang and dialect that would be expected of any educated military officer from Lima.

It was immediately apparent that he saw himself as Peru's last line of defense against pretty much every conceivable threat— drugs, terrorism, Ecuador, and everything in between. He was polite in the sense that he was not insulting but he did make every attempt to control the content and direction of the interview. He told me that his time was limited but gave no indication of those limits, which of course meant that he could end the interview on that pretext whenever he saw fit. I made some desultory comments about his soldiers or the garrison or something to hopefully grease his wheels just a bit. Then I asked him directly whether he considered the *Sendero Luminoso* to be his greatest threat. He responded by telling me that the *Sendero Luminoso* were just a scant remnant of what they used to be before the Peruvian army crushed all but an insignificant portion of the guerrillas, including the famous capture of their leader at the beginning of the decade. I told him that it was true that many had considered the group to have been reduced to ashes but a number of recent attacks, both in the country and in Lima, had shown that they were still more than just an occasional nuisance. To this, Hashimoto rattled off a number of statistics, which he had likely done many times to his superiors. There were this many tons of coca burned, that many rounds of ammunition confiscated, and, though he didn't directly attribute it to his forces, a few captures and kills. He continued to tell me that the Peruvian people were safe. There were only isolated pockets of violence and that the villages should be able to defend themselves. I told Hashimoto about what I had heard about Picaflor, when the *Sendero Luminoso* invaded them. He did not reply right away and when the pause became uncomfortable, he began to rummage through his desk in

search of something. He emerged with a folder which he began to read but never showed me. That was fine because it gave me a chance to scribble some notes about what he had just said. Eventually he told me that he had spared as much of his investigation team as he could, considering he had been ordered to participate in live ammunition exercises in a classified location. I asked him about the results of the investigation to which he responded with another long pause. He began to look at his watch every minute or so from then on so I figured I didn't have much time left. Hashimoto said that his investigation determined that the village had participated in reckless behavior which provoked the attack. He said that they had harbored the rebels for a time and they had operated from the village. I guess he's referring to the meetings that the university group held in Picaflor. It's a very unfair assessment since it wasn't the fault of the villagers that the *Senderistas* came to their town but it does give the military enough justification to assign Picaflor a very low priority.

Hashimoto concluded the interview by telling me that his troops had to concentrate on areas known to be harboring the *Sendero Luminoso* and other drug traffickers. If they struck outside of those areas, the army could mobilize quickly but the threat was so small that occupying every village with troops would give a false sense of danger. He then stood up and I noticed that he was not even five foot six. I also saw that his shoes enhanced an even shorter stature. I wonder if he has a Napoleon complex? Hashimoto ushered me to the door with an obtuse warning about my activities in Peru, that the army would be unable to protect my interests out in the countryside and perhaps I should stay around in some of Peru's more well known sites. He did not extend his hand to me as I left.

Yolanda and Carolina tell me that they have organized a ride home with their bounty tomorrow in the early afternoon. I'll stay in a hotel tonight and the girls will stay with some friends of theirs. I get the distinct feeling that they are not disappointed that we have to stay the night here.

Saturday, October 17, 11:30 a.m.

We're all back at my hotel after lunch, waiting for an hour or so until our ride is ready to go. I decided to spring for a nice place to stay, mostly for the idea of two or three long and hot showers. The Hotel Armay was probably not particularly pleased to see me straggle into the lobby with only a small bag over my shoulder and some dirty clothes and three days of facial growth. Their opinion changed when I took out my credit card, unused since I left Lima, and made it clear that I wanted the whole 9 yards (or somewhere around 9 meters in the metric system). I had a couple of drinks and a small dinner in the hotel bar, where a group of Andean musicians were skillfully playing native music. There were six members of the band. One was on regular guitar, one was on a slightly larger bass guitar, one was on a tiny little guitar which he was constantly and speedily playing, one had a string bass, and the other two were on different pan flutes. They would switch off instruments during songs and they would alternate singing and playing. They were a very multi-talented group.

I decided to call it an early night because we would be starting early so I bought a couple of toiletries to beautify myself and some shorts and a t-shirt to sleep in from the gift shop and sent all of my clothes to be washed in the hotel laundromat. I wasn't really that dirty but I never feel like I'm clean unless I have hot water, which the Hotel Armay has in abundance. I went right to sleep.

The girls came by and woke me up at 5:30. We had to get an early start if we wanted to beat the crowd to the thermal baths. I asked for my cleaned clothes to be put in my room and I went downstairs. I admit I was a funny sight with a t-shirt, shorts, a towel over my arm, and hiking boots on without socks. After laughing rather hysterically for a moment, Carolina produced some flip-flops that they had borrowed from their friends so I went back up and gave my boots a break. We had a quick breakfast at the restaurant, which opened at that hour to serve early risers. Then we headed out of the city to one of the more remote baths.

There are about five main baths in Armay. One is public so it is very crowded and not so good. Then there are others with varying degrees of modernization and distance from the center. The girls had decided to take me to the one most visited by the locals, who felt that the baths gave them long lives and exceptional virility. It was very cold out that early in the morning so we walked quickly. We first had to go up a paved road and later a dirt road in the pitch blackness. It's not easy to walk in flip-flops under any circumstances but up and down hills is worse. And when a dog came out to chase us I just pulled them off my feet and ran barefoot.

Just as the sun began to warm the earth we got to the baths. Even though I hadn't seen a soul while walking, just an occasional truck, the springs were already starting to fill up. We paid the entry fee and then headed to the most distant pool. There were some people there and they protested very angrily when I tried to get in the water. Apparently I hadn't showered before getting in with them. I tried to protest because I was much cleaner after last night's shower than I had been in a long time but they scrutinized me very closely as I went over to a little spigot and half-heartedly splashed the tepid water on myself. By then I was shivering and I made my



way gladly to the pool. The water, because of the high sulfur content, was a rich, exotic vomit color. I put my foot in and discovered that this was also the hottest pool of the bunch. A searing pain ran up my foot and directly into my brain and I recoiled, splashing the people in the pool with a fine spray. More cautiously I managed to slowly immerse all but my head in the water. I felt myself start to cook. It simply can't be healthy to stay in water that hot. At least when I take a bath the water starts to cool down as soon as I turn off the tap. This super-heated water was like being in an extremely moist sauna. I began to sweat profusely and it began to run into my eyes. The locals didn't seem to mind it much— they had all but fallen asleep. After about ten minutes I couldn't stand it any more so I made Carolina and Yolanda take me to a more comfortable pool.

I had read in my guidebook that for those with masochistic tendencies, this particular set of baths had a unique thrill. There was a waterfall whose cascading effervescence was the perfect complement to the warm and soothing mineral baths. I imagined this tall waterfall pounding the rocks with its spray so I told the girls I'd like to see it. On the way I saw some brave souls diving into an obviously unheated swimming pool and then getting out and heading to the thermal baths. I stuck my toe in the frigid water and it immediately shrank back into my foot for warmth.

The waterfall was not what I had imagined. It was only about four feet high and six feet wide and while the water was rushing over it, it was no more than a fast flowing stream. The only remarkable thing about it was that its path from the nearby mountains failed to heat it in any way at all. It was just run-off from melting snow increasing in volume as it moved down the stream. I saw a middle-aged woman get under the waterfall and start to wash herself. She didn't seem to mind it very much, though it never occurred to

me that she had more insulation to cold than I did. The girls were practically begging me to try it out, telling me that this was the whole experience; that it was the most Peruvian thing to do. The woman was still in the stream, her legs braced against a wooden log that prevented her from losing her footing in the rushing water. I reluctantly stuck my foot in the stream and immediately lost feeling in my toes. I was past the point of no return, though, so I took the plunge, immersing myself entirely in the flow of the snow fed stream. It was not a good idea. Perhaps it was just water– it looked the same, sounded the same and probably weighed the same. But it felt as if an iceberg had fallen out of the sky directly onto my back. It knocked the wind out of me and I started to hyperventilate. I could have taken a dry ice bath and scarcely been as cold as I was at that moment. The worst thing was that I couldn't get myself to move. Carolina and Yolanda were literally rolling with laughter on the ground– something about my expression was making them giggle uncontrollably. I tried to ask the lady next to me who was calmly washing herself for help but no words came out. I was afraid that my blood would soon harden and even if I survived, I would end up toeless and fingerless from frostbite. Suddenly, my eyes fixed on the nearest thermal pool. I saw the steam rising from the warm embracing waters. It thawed my mind just enough for me to leap out of the stream and I found myself running stiffly on autopilot towards the pool. The girls were following me, laughing all the way. I had no entry problems this time as I just jumped straight into the water. It was like I landed onto the softest, most comfortable pillow after running a full marathon. I suddenly understood why the waters were thought to be curative.

We stayed in the pools for a few more minutes but I felt my skin start to wrinkle up like I was being shrink wrapped. I left Yolanda and Carolina to

soak while I walked around the grounds for a while. The crowds had begun to make the spa a little too full. I noticed, to a large extent, the groups coming to bathe were large ones. The people ranged from infants to elderly. I'm pretty sure that entire extended families came up here together. They would find a pool without much of a crowd and just take it over.

We headed back to the hotel so I could get my stuff together and take another shower before we had to leave. The hotel did a nice job with my clothes. I hardly recognized them. I also picked up a few batteries— especially the one for the camera. I don't think I'll have another chance to get them in the near future. I never thought that I would consider a town like this to be civilization but it certainly seems like that now. I am surprisingly anxious to get back to Picaflor. I have more than enough material to write a decent piece. I would typically either head home or move on, depending on my ambition. But I feel like I've left something unfinished. I usually don't bother listening to my instinct but I think that there's something else I've got to do up there in the mountains. I suppose it's this whole *quipu* thing and the chance to talk to Armando some more, but I can't ignore the nagging feeling that I am supposed to go. Not that I have to go, but I'm supposed to. I guess I'll find out soon enough. But I'm certainly excited.

Later, 11:45 p.m.

I slept remarkably well on the ride back to Picaflor. I slept so soundly that I was even able to dream. It was another dream, as vivid as the one about the game, which seems like it happened so long ago. This time, I was moving in my dream, which makes sense because in reality I was in the open back of a pick-up truck. I was running swiftly and not being carried by anyone or anything. I was definitely in some kind of hurry. I was running over a

defined road that was very wide, paved with stone, and walled on both sides. It wasn't like a normal road, though. Actually, it was me that wasn't normal. I was wearing sandals and a short cloak. I think I looked a lot like Mercury speeding across Mount Olympus.

This segment of the dream went on for a long time. Eventually I reached what seemed like the end of the road— a deep chasm stretching out thirty meters or so. I ran parallel to this chasm, still on the road, until I reached a long bridge. Without hesitation I ran onto this bridge. It wasn't a type of bridge that I was used to, by that I mean a sturdy, strong looking bridge with its lowest point being no lower than either of the two sides that it extended from. This bridge hung down from the side I was on and followed a curve, a sort of inverted arch, before rising and connecting with the opposite bank. The bridge was made up of a long series of wooden slats held together by rope. On either side of the bridge there were two long, thick ropes that extended the length of the bridge, one down at the base and one to use as a hand rail. The two ropes on each side (top and bottom) were lashed together by smaller ropes in a rather haphazard manner.

I ran out onto the bridge and it began to sway, slowly at first and then much faster. I saw that the bridge was only connected to the earth at its two ends, the far one of which seemed to be getting further away as I ran. I remember this because the ropes were pulled first over stone towers before they were anchored in the ground. The towers formed a sort of a gate at the entrance and exit and though I was running, the exit became more and more distant. Then, to my dismay, as I ran, the slats starting at the end that I had entered on began to fall into the chasm and into the rocky stream running through it. I've never read more than the first few pages of the famous novel, *The Bridge Of San Luis Rey*, but those few pages were enough to know

that people were prone to fall off of bridges such as this. I began to run faster but the slats behind me fell faster as well, as if they were chasing me across the bridge. The structure itself was waving in the wind, making it difficult for me to run, but it was holding up in general. In other words, the cables were staying in place, anchored on either end, despite the fact that all of the boards were falling out of the bottom. I glimpsed someone waiting for me at the end of the bridge but they were getting no closer, no matter how fast I ran. I looked behind me again and I saw that the falling boards were just under my heels. Although I kept running, I was suddenly overwhelmed with a great feeling of confusion. It was definitely not a feeling of fear or a fear of death. It was disgust at not having reached the other side of the bridge and the figure waiting there for me. Just as I began to fall through the space which had just opened up underneath me I woke up.

We jostled, for lack of a better word, back into Picaflor a few minutes later. I heard some music coming from the plaza. It was like the music I had heard earlier in the hotel but without the benefit of microphones or more than the basic equipment. There were six musicians in the group and in the middle was Armando, deftly strumming his six string to the insistent beat of an animal skin drum. Their music was a bit out of tune and the two guys playing the pan flutes (*un rondador*) were huffing and puffing a lot because much of the air they were blowing was not going into their instrument which gave it a very airy and wispy sound. Still, it was even more captivating than the group in the hotel, probably because much of the town was gathered around them in the plaza. It was the crowd that was the show. Most were up and dancing to the music. Those that weren't dancing were clapping (approximately) to the beat. I could hear the squeal of guinea pigs being chased around the pens for roasting and I could smell the unlucky ones who

had already been caught and put on the spit. The atmosphere could hardly have been better. I can barely believe that just hours before the most important thing in my life had been to shower. While I was so concerned with that, the people in Picaflor were already having great fun. I gave myself a little sniff– all nice and floral and scented. I felt right then that I smelled all wrong for Picaflor and I wanted to roll around in the dirt like mom's dog does after a bath in order to wash off the smell as quickly and thoroughly as possible and take on the scent of the land.

Carolina and Yolanda ran to the crowd and began to swing around wildly, like everyone else. I hate dancing and resist it with all my might but even my foot began unconsciously to stomp the ground where I was standing. I rarely get very contemplative but all I could do right then was look up at the sky and the stars which were out in abundance that evening. It was one of those moments when everything seemed to be in focus, even if it really wasn't. I didn't have any great moment of inspiration. I didn't have any monumental thoughts. I didn't really think of much of anything. But I did feel as if I belonged in Peru and Picaflor, at least right then.

If I was in danger of getting too deep into myself I need not have worried. Carolina and Yolanda dragged me out into the plaza with them and I began to twirl around (rather foolishly) along with them. Though the low point for me, apparently this was the high point of everyone else's evening– watching me try to dance. The effort proved to be not without benefits, however. For the rest of the little fiesta I was plied with drinks and *cui* from just about everyone in the town.

Gustavo informed me at the end of the evening that Armando (who continued to play energetically all evening– I never did talk to him) has agreed to take me wherever it is that I need to go. I still have no real idea

about the whole thing, except that it is about the *quipu* which I am to take with me and take good care of and that we will be walking. We will be leaving very early in the morning. The hotel manager has very thoughtfully agreed to let me put all the stuff I'm not taking in a storage closet so I will carry as little as I think is absolutely necessary for seven days, to judge safely from what Gustavo has told me. He will also tell Jaime to wait for me in Picaflor, should he get back here anytime soon.

I forgot to ask Gustavo if my newest dream meant anything. I'll ask Armando instead. We'll have plenty of time to talk while we are hiking.

Sunday, October 18, 1:00 p.m.

I've been too out of breath to do anything but listen. Armando, like everyone born and raised in these parts of the Andes, has different lungs that don't care about certain things—like whether there is oxygen or not. That's another legacy of his heritage, I think.

He came to my hotel and woke me up at 4:30. I had no idea what was going on. I figured it was another dream or something. I was lying comfortably in bed, wrapped in my blankets because the air temperature is really cold. All of a sudden there was a soft rap at the door and it slowly opens. In the doorway was a shadowy figure, just an outline because of the backlighting. All I could see without my glasses were the shadows of a hat and a poncho sloping down the sides of a person. It took me a few seconds to realize it was reality this time. Armando thankfully brought me one of his best ponchos. It's a thin one that's warm in the morning but is now keeping me cool by shielding me from the sun. I also picked up a hat late last night. It's green with a brown band running across the front and made of a very sturdy cloth. It is tight on my head and rather tall. It is also waterproof,

Armando says, so it will keep my glasses from getting wet. They haven't invented a hat yet that will keep glasses from fogging up, though.

We're having a cold lunch right now of bread and *cui*. Armando told me to get used to it. He did bring along some leather flagons full of a pungent, fruity, new red wine. They're just leather bags with a spout on the end which you hold up high in the air and then squeeze until a little stream of wine spurts into your mouth. The back of my mouth is a little raw but the wine is surprisingly refreshing— and uplifting. It is Peruvian and he brought it back from Lima, though the containers were made in Picaflor.

We've been walking northwest, Armando tells me. The trail that we are following is well marked. He says we will be following it for some time. I have seen a couple of towns from a great distance but we were walking in clouds until a couple of hours ago. Now, in the direction we have been heading, there are thick, dark, menacing, low-hanging clouds below our position but covering the ground and preventing me (mercifully) from seeing how much territory we have to cover. Behind us, though, there is nothing but green open space. The sky is a very pale blue in all direction, as if it did not expect to be seen today and didn't put on its make-up. Actually, I think it is the lack of oxygen that makes it look so pale. It's probably working the same effect on me.

Later, 7:15 p.m.

We have camped under the protection of some rocks and I am writing with the illumination of my pen light. The wind is really whipping things around but we are relatively well-sheltered. I'm wearing everything I brought, especially over my head, so I should be warm enough. We covered a lot of ground and I'm pretty sore because of it. Two more hard days should



put us where we need to be. Tomorrow will be the most difficult, according to Armando. In order to avoid an exceptionally long detour down into a deep valley, around a roaring river, and then out of it, we will be going straight up. If I feel nauseous or light-headed, I am supposed to tell Armando and we will descend immediately. We're at something like 13,000 feet now and already I want to throw up and I have trouble thinking clearly but I think I can make it. I have all night to try to acclimate.

Armando has told me that we are heading towards some ancient Inca ruins but he wouldn't tell me anything more about them. I think they haven't been telling me anything because they are afraid I won't believe them and I won't go. Because it has to do with the *quipu* I'll bet there are some old legends involved. I think to them it is very important that I do what I'm doing now. I wish I could convince them that I want to finish this journey as much as they want me to. Maybe then they would have more confidence in me.

Armando was willing to talk more about the experiences of Picaflor with the *Sendero Luminoso*. We went back to the period just after the *Sendero Luminoso* came for the first time. As Armando had indicated, there was a lot of mistrust among the residents. Many of the people had been swayed by the rhetoric. Even though the mistrust ebbed after when the guerrillas left, it was unavoidable that some of them had just been clamoring for the death of others. Those market and store owners that did stay did so only after a couple of town meetings where a bishop came and instructed the people in brotherly love and God's plan. They also stayed in part because of a promise by the military to eliminate the threat of the guerrillas in that region. That was, of course, quite an empty promise.

Things returned to normal pretty quickly, at least as normal as could be with so many of its residents either gone to Lima or become part of the *Sendero Luminoso*— or recently deceased. The next time the guerrillas showed up was not for show but for supplies. The former university students had completed their indoctrination and some of them came along this time, though none of the former resident of Picaflor were among them. It was the first time that they had been heard from since they left with the professor many months before. It didn't mean that they were any less dangerous than before. They seemed to be using some substance, most likely cocaine, that made them look half-crazed and made their speech nearly unintelligible. They swept in after dark, again on a weekday, but this time in trucks. They didn't cause any kind of scene this time. They didn't collect everyone and put them in the plaza. They just drove around, collecting mostly from businesses whatever it was they wanted. One of the places they went was Armando's house. Armando was again in Lima but the rest of his family was busy working. At least they had been until the guerrillas showed up. One of Armando's former classmates from Picaflor, a girl named Susana, entered their house armed with an automatic weapon. She had a wild look in her eyes. Her shoulder-length hair was disheveled and very dirty, like she had been sleeping with her head on the ground. Despite this, he described her with some fondness. Perhaps she had been his girlfriend. She was short but muscular, and her skin was very pale, like she had very little Indian blood in her although she really did.

Susana seemed to recognize where she was all of a sudden and her eyes became focused and clear and she asked if Armando was in. His mother did not reply. Susana's face suddenly became emotionless again, as if whatever it was that had brought her back from where she was had left as quickly as it had

come. She became extremely agitated and started thrashing around. She started to scream about how Armando was such a traitor and a worthless pawn of the enemy. Susana demanded to know where he was and swore that she would kill him. She threw all of their furniture about in a vain attempt to find Armando despite his mother's frantic insistence that he was gone. Susana was swinging her gun around wildly as she did this and the butt of it hit Armando's mother in the forehead, making a big gash right above her left eye. This seemed to be enough for Susana and she immediately left the house. A few minutes later a couple of other guerrillas came in and took a dozen or so ponchos. The family busied themselves with trying to stop the mother's bleeding and never saw the *Senderistas* leave the village.

When Armando returned from Lima at the end of the week, he found a shell-shocked village. His sisters told him about Susana and her cohorts. He insisted that they leave Picaflor immediately but his mother refused. She had been born and raised in the village and she was determined to raise all of her children there, too. She was right, but not for that reason. As long as they lived in Picaflor they could meet their basic needs. As soon as they left for Lima, which is where they would surely have to go, there would be little chance of living comfortably. There weren't nearly enough jobs to be found and the cost of living was so much higher. They couldn't continue to weave, not with the expensive cost of material in the city. Without the added income of the ponchos they would be reduced to begging in order to augment Armando's minimal salary, assuming he could even keep his job. He knew that they had to stay.

Once again the military told the people of Picaflor that they had nothing to fear from the guerrillas and for a short time it seemed like they might live up to their promise. There was a permanent military presence in

the village— they took over the hotels as their bases. When after two weeks they declared the guerrillas contained, they themselves packed up and got out of town. The town held a meeting at which they decided they had to defend themselves. At first they had short patrols and took all-night shifts but as the memory of the last event faded, support for this dwindled to the sleepy security I came across my first day in the village. Throughout his narration, Armando maintained vigorously that the *Senderistas* would have killed him had he been in the village either of the times that they had been there.

He told me all of this while we were walking side by side along the faint trail. He stopped all of a sudden and looked out over the hills. Then he turned back to me and gave me a hard look. Then he made me swear to keep secret what he was about to tell me. He told me that it was fear of the *Sendero Luminoso* that kept him out of Picaflor most days of the week. There was no job in Lima, not one to speak of anyway. He did take their ponchos to sell on Mondays and he did stay with his cousin but he had been let go from his job months ago. Some days he found temporary work, maybe it would last for a couple of days if he was lucky, but for most days he wandered around the city looking for whatever part-time work he could find. He delayed his return trip home as much as he could and he left Picaflor as soon as possible— not because he wanted to but because he was afraid if the *Sendero Luminoso* came and found him in Picaflor then they would kill him and his family as well.

I asked him why he thought that he was in so much danger. He didn't reply right away. With a lot of people that I interview, I have learned that pausing so much indicates that they are not telling me the truth, at least not exactly. With Armando, though, it was the other way around. If he ever answered me right away, then I would think that he was probably hiding

something. He was too pensive for that. Eventually he said that from what he knew of the *Sendero Luminoso*, to them he would always be a betrayer, a turncoat. It didn't matter to them his reasons for staying in Picaflor. It didn't matter to them that to leave would mean abandoning his family. Armando had been accepted into the group. He had learned what it was to be a *Senderista*. And he hadn't gone through with it. That, it seems, has made him something of a target.

I want to ask him so many questions. Why did he want to join the *Sendero Luminoso*? What did they teach him that was so appealing? What did he do when he was in those meetings? I'll have to ask him some other time. He doesn't look like he wants to talk any more about it right now.

Monday, October 19, 2:00 p.m.

Walking in these hills takes more than just a supreme physical effort, it takes a little something extra. We started off before dawn and headed straight up into the hills. I had a pounding headache and my stomach was turning somersaults. I had to keep all of my attention focused on my feet in order to walk straight. At first it was bearable but soon the constant pounding and the elements took their toll. I started to lose my focus and my train of thought and I had to stop— actually I just sort of fell down. Armando came up to me and gave me a drink and suggested we head back down. I didn't want to waste all that time so I told him I wanted to stick it out. Then I vomited on his shoes. This didn't bother him too much, I don't think. He reached into a pouch on the side of his belt and pulled out a pinch of green leaves and put them into the side of his mouth, a lot like putting in a plug of chewing tobacco. Then he told me to do the same and he handed me some of the leaves after warning me not to swallow them or chew them. They didn't

smell like much to me when I brought them up to my nose so I just nestled them in between my teeth and cheek. He then told me that it was coca leaf– it was the best thing for helping with the altitude and would get rid of the nausea and headache. He could have given me heroin at that moment and I would have taken it if it would have done the same. I didn't feel it working at first and he told me that it had to be activated. Thanks to the Peace Corps I knew what this entailed. From a smaller pocket on the pouch Armando took out some activating charcoal and placed it in his mouth next to the bulging bubble of leaf. He motioned for me to do the same and I did but not before letting a greenish drool escape all the way down my chin. The addition of the mineral made me immediately begin to salivate uncontrollably. I didn't know whether to swallow or spit out the liquid so I spit it out and lost some of the leaf as a result. Armando gave me some more coca along with some more charcoal, which was extremely bitter. I was waiting for some grand effect to happen– to all of a sudden be able to run a marathon or climb a mountain (the latter being the more desirable at the time). All that happened, though, was that my mouth became very numb, starting with the side that held the coca. I was about to ask Armando what I was waiting for when I realized that I felt a lot better about the trip. I felt a lot better about walking. The nausea went away. I could think again. I pondered for a few moments on the historical value of the coca plant to the people of the Andes. Then I noticed that my mouth hurt terribly. My legs were killing me. But I didn't care. Even though I still hurt, I had just been disassociated from my pain.

Armando told me that we would arrive at our destination a few hours after we started in the morning, assuming we continued to walk for the rest of the day. He has been telling me a little about the place that we are going. I

guess he figures we're too far out of Picaflor for me to ever find my way back so I'm stuck with him anyway. It is called Incatambo and it used to be an important stop just off of the Inca road. I asked him why we were going there and he told me that there was the tiniest of villages adjacent to Incatambo, called by the same name. It wouldn't even count as a village by most standards, it's not on any maps. The two dozen or so people living there are considered to be nomadic farmers by the government. Even though the village has been there for countless generations it is not considered a permanent settlement. The residents of the village are all very old, even more so than the old man of Picaflor. They concern themselves simply with subsistence farming and prayer.

It seems like it would be a dying village. Only a couple dozen people, all very old and on their last legs. But apparently Incatambo lives on as elderly people come to repopulate it at the same rate that they die off. It's like a bizarre type of retirement community. Somebody passes on and a new couple comes and takes over their adobe home.

What is the purpose of this village? Armando replied curtly that they come here to live and die close to the only remaining active Temple of the Sun. I take it that this particular Temple of the Sun lacks the Virgins of the Sun that were the hallmark of the temples back in Inca times. But if there is a temple, there must be a priest. And this is who we are going all this way to see.

I told Armando he had absolutely no reason to be secretive. I would have traveled for months to get to see this village. The ruins are too far away and too difficult to get to for all but the most serious academic to reach (we couldn't have driven even if we had wanted to). And since the ruins have long been duly explored and charted, there is little need for further study. In

short, the people of Incatambo are left alone, as they like it. As for the secrecy, Armando told me that he was just doing as he had been instructed. It wasn't that he didn't trust me, it was that his elders, Gustavo and the older man, had insisted it be this way for some other reason.

All I keep wondering about is how all of these old people can make it to the village when I'm about to cough up a lung.

Later, 8:00 p.m.

I finally had the chance to ask Armando about the dream I had coming back from Armay in the back of the truck. He had no idea whether the collapsing bridge was symbolic of anything but the whole scene, as I related it to him, sounded a lot like something that would have taken place in ancient times. Again, I must have read about it somewhere and filed it away in my subconscious. Armando said that it seemed related to the Inca method of delivering messages and mail via courier, or *chasqui* as they were called. The Incas had an amazingly extensive road system, anchored by two exceptionally long ones, the Royal Road of over 3000 miles and the coastal road of more than 2500 miles. Branching off of those two in every conceivable direction were numerous smaller ones. (It reminds me of the design of the quipu.) Because, as I've seen through experience, the inhabitants of the high altitude Andes have acclimatized lungs, they were able to exert themselves despite being above 15,000 feet. This meant that they could easily spirit messages, much like the Pony Express, by passing them along to fresh runners, no matter where the road went. There were way stations on the main roads about every mile and a half so each courier was responsible for running the message to the next one at a fast clip. If they ran a six minute mile, which their descendants are more than capable of, they could cover 10 miles in one



hour, 240 in one day, and almost 1000 miles in four. The sort of messages that they would carry would be such things as news of rebellion or strife so that the Inca could respond quickly with force. It was this system of communication more than almost anything that allowed the empire to extend as far as it did (from up into Ecuador and down into Chile) and yet maintain order and control.

The roads usually weren't paved unless they were close to a city so in my dream I must have been approaching one. The bridge was of the style of the times. For long crossings, a hanging style bridge had to be used. Armando promised me that we would see one as we approached Incatambo. I asked him how he knew this because he said before he has never been there. He told me that everyone from Picaflor knows all about Incatambo from stories they heard as children. They know everything about it, without having actually seen it. Maybe Incatambo is to the children of Picaflor like Disneyland is to the children of small town United States. Even if kids have never been there, they can still describe Sleeping Beauty's Castle in pretty good detail.

This whole dream thing has made me a little unnerved. I really don't think that they symbolize things. Dreams can't predict the future like some kind of soothsayer. I guess that your mind (the subconscious) can use past knowledge in order to determine a likely future event but I happen to think that dreams are little more than unconscious speculation. It's just strange because I have no idea where I've had exposure to the things I've dreamt about. If it's my imagination then it has been remarkably accurate. If it's something else then I'm quite sure I must be hallucinating. Maybe I should see a shrink when I get back home.

Tuesday, October 20, 1:30 p.m.

I'm now having a look around Incatambo. It's exhilarating to finally be here. I've been thinking about this forlorn little village for the better part of the last three days but it didn't disappoint when I finally set eyes on it. We walked pretty much in silence since about six this morning. I knew enough that if I asked Armando how close we were he would say, "We are almost there, friend," as he did every time I asked. I think he is telling the truth when he says that. In other words, according to his concept of time and space he is really almost there. Three days to someone used to riding hours on end in the back of a truck is not much at all. To me, it is abysmally long and far away. If Armando has nothing else in this world, he certainly has great patience.

All of a sudden we cleared a particularly high hill and Armando pointed down into what seemed to me was just one more of the innumerable valleys found in abundance in the Andean landscape. When I shifted my gaze towards where he was pointing, I could see that this wasn't an ordinary valley. The hill we were walking on naturally took us down with it and to the west, away from the rising sun. It was very difficult to see, because it was well hidden by a very tall obelisk shaped hill. The first sign I saw that there was more than just grass behind it was two small streams of black smoke that floated out from an unknown source. Upon further inspection there were also some low-lying buildings. It was very difficult to see because the glare from the sun put almost everything on that side of my vision into shadow. If Armando had not pointed it out, I would have continued to walk on in total ignorance.

We left the path we had been following and had to pick our way towards Incatambo very gingerly, going against the grain of the hill and over

sharp rocks and uneven earth. The path to Incatambo, at least this one, was not well trodden (*à la* Robert Frost, "Two paths diverged in a wood and I, I chose the one less traveled by..."). We finally made our way around the obelisk hill and both the ruins and living villages of Incatambo lay stretched out before us, the former being much larger. The current village was actually just a small extension at the far end of the ruined buildings and consisted simply of a dozen small huts. The streams of smoke that I saw were surprisingly not emanating from that grouping of buildings. They were coming from the building that really took caught my eye, as it would to any visitor approaching the city. It was a pyramid stretching much higher into the sky than all of the other buildings. It was the only structure in the ruined city that was entirely intact. I could see none of the features of the building because the sun cast such a glare when I looked at it that all I could make out was the dark outline. It was an aptly named Temple of the Sun.

The whole city had been laid out on a flat oval-shaped plot of land, surrounded on two sides by nearly sheer walls (including the obelisk hill), one side by a steep cliff going down, and one side by a sloping hill that looked like a huge staircase leading up into the clouds. This land had been terraced by the Inca and was still being used at the lower levels for agricultural purposes. That was the Inca secret for building well-defended cities, they could find just about the most inhospitable places and yet have thriving agriculture because of their amazing farming techniques, especially in their ability to create arable land out of nothing.

The city was magnificently nestled in the landscape. From the village they could keep an eye on aggressors advancing from most directions and if they put a sentry to watch the route we had just taken then they would have sufficient warning to defend themselves. The scenery was amazing. Looking

out over the cliff into the distance were craggy, cloud-capped peaks standing like soldiers at attention to guard the city.

To get there, we had to cross a bridge that spanned an area sheared away by landslides. It was a hanging style bridge, like the one in my dream. Armando pointed at it and told me that he had promised me that we would see one. I didn't know that he meant that we would actually be crossing one. Some of the boards sounded a little bit loose so I made my way across without spending too much time on the view.

We made our way through the ruins towards the inhabited huts. The ruins generally consisted of open-faced buildings whose roofs had long ago been sheared off by the elements. The layout was simple and well-planned according to the topography. We followed the main road straight past the temple and reached the villagers within a few minutes.

As Armando had said, the inhabitants were indeed old. We came across a few of them at the first hut. They were standing outside, as if they had been expecting us. Armando introduced us and they welcomed us to their village. We went into one of the extremely simple huts and had a quiet little lunch, washed down with a little bit of the yogurt-like beverage I'd had earlier, which they told me was called *chicha*. Armando then told me I should have a look around the ruins, which I'm doing now, while he has a few words with the villagers, namely the priest.

It's extremely quiet and peaceful here, though it is also very cold and a bit damp. There is lichen and moss on most of the rocks and the ruins. The buildings themselves seem to be well maintained. Unlike many ruins I've been to, there are very few bricks and rocks scattered over the ground. The walls are complete for the most part as are many of the features within them, like hearths and chimneys. It looks to me like all I would have to do is put

up a little roof and these places would be inhabitable again. I wonder why this city died? Was it just abandoned as the Inca empire fell or was there some sort of aggressor (human or viral or something else) that wiped it out? Hopefully I'll find out when I talk to the residents.

Later, 1:45 p.m.

I found a really interesting feature of the ruins. I was wondering how they got water for drinking and cooking and bathing. I was looking down into the valley below the city and there was a stream flowing at the base. I walked along the rim wondering how they got down until I reached the place where a sheer wall blocked my way. Just at that intersection, hidden among some loose rocks, was a narrow stairwell carved into the side of the hill. I started to follow the weaving stairwell and after a long time I found a part of it that was cut straight through the rock. I felt my way down into the blackness and finally I found myself in a sort of doorway. There was a slab of rock directly in front of me and I had to go to the right in order to get out from behind it. As I emerged squinting in the rediscovered daylight I found myself right on the bank of the little river. I looked back towards the stairwell I had just come out of and saw that it was ingeniously disguised. From where I was just a few feet away, it appeared like the wall in front of me was completely solid. The slab I had seen coming down was positioned in such a way as to thoroughly disguise the hole behind it. In addition, I left no footprints because the whole area around the entrance was solid granite. Until I walked right up to the entrance there was no way to tell it was there. I looked up and sure enough the place where the stairwell was out in the open wasn't visible from the ground. The approach to Incatambo from below was

essentially unassailable for an invading force. Even if they found the narrow stairwell, they would be dead meat trying to come up out of the tunnel.

As I was looking at the river, I heard a little shuffling noise behind me. I turned to see an extremely old woman with a smile from ear to ear and a wooden bucket over her arm. She looked familiar to me, like someone grandmother knew, but I couldn't quite place it. She didn't say anything to me but instead went over to the river and filled up the bucket. Then she went back to the stairwell and headed up. I know I had a hard time getting down there. She must be more nimble than she looks if she can get herself down and then back up with a full bucket of water. I looked around for a couple of minutes and then turned to follow the woman so I could have a word with her. I jogged up the stairs but was quickly winded so I just walked as quickly as I could but I couldn't seem to catch the woman. I figured she had somehow taken a different way up the stairs because I couldn't imagine how I didn't catch up with her but as I rounded a curve well below the lip I saw her just reaching the top, bucket still in hand. It took me another five minutes to reach the top and by the time I got there she had disappeared. She must have the endurance of a *chasqui* in order to climb the stairs like she did.

I have a good view of the Temple of the Sun from my position near the top of the steps. The layout of the ruins is fairly simple. The main road runs down the middle in a straight line except for a detour when it flares around the temple and the little square in front of it. The pattern of the streets is grid-shaped, spreading out from the main road for about three 'blocks' in each direction. After that, the roads meander and curve a bit more as they extend to the outskirts of the city. The larger buildings are near the middle, probably the reason for the neat grid, and the smaller ones are on the perimeter.

The temple sits down in a small depression so it is actually even taller than it appears. It is a pyramid but like many things in the Inca empire it was terraced. They didn't build a pyramid like the Egyptians that was smooth on the sides. This temple had levels stacked on top of one another but each level progressively smaller so that the final form was pyramidal. It is made entirely of stone blocks that fit together in such a way that it held together without mortar or nails. I have not been able to look inside it yet. There are no windows on the lower levels of the pyramid. Instead, as I could see when I approached the ruins, there are windows on the higher parts of the temple that let in the sunlight. The shape of the windows is trapezoidal, the mark of the Inca architects.

I can see Armando walking this way with another fellow. I hope he's got everything arranged.

Later, 3:30 p.m.

Armando and I are busy preparing for a ceremonial dinner, after which will be a religious ceremony. We are at the house of one of the community members, a gentleman with gray hair and thick white eyebrows that come together just above his nose. He lives alone in a small hut and we will be staying the night here. Armando assures me that after the service we will meet with the priest so he can give us information about the *quipu*. We have to wear ceremonial dress so we are borrowing some from the old man, whose name I do not know. First we went out back and bathed in a couple of buckets of freezing water and then we started to dress.

I'm wearing a decorated wool tunic that reaches down to my ankles. It has designs on the waist area and is fringed with a gold colored thread. I've also got to wear hard cloth sandals and a cape, held together in the front by a

golden pin. The old man whose clothes I am wearing is putting the finishing touches on my cap. It fits snugly over my head and down to my ears. The headband is made of soft, elastic wool. To this is attached a skullcap made of thicker, formed wool. On the front is an elaborate cloth addition, folded into a knot and held to the cap by pins. Out of this addition will extend three or four long feathers. When I add some gold bracelets and anklets my outfit will be complete. They wanted to give me thick, heavy earrings but found to their dismay that my ears aren't pierced. The old man went to the fire to stoke a thin metal rod but Armando realized that he wanted to use it to eliminate that obstacle and convinced him that I would be fine without earrings.

Nobody here, except for Armando and me, uses Spanish. I'm dependent on him for translation but fortunately he speaks and understands Quechua well. He is wearing basically the same costume as I except that he has shell shaped earrings and his clothing is embroidered in silver colored thread rather than gold.

In a few minutes we will head to the temple where we will meet all the rest of the residents of Incatambo and finally encounter the priest.

Later, 9:30 p.m.

I have to write by candlelight but I want to put down the details of the evening while they're still fresh in my mind. We headed towards the temple after a short frenzy of photo taking. As we approached the temple, I noticed that there was no moss or grass growing on it like there was on the rest of the ruins. We went past the temple to the other side, where the square was. It was clear that the rest of Incatambo radiated from the square and the temple. The doorway to the temple was tall but not very wide and was also a trapezoid. It wasn't ornamented but stood in relief from the temple. It was



formed by a small doorway elegantly framed by a slightly larger one around it. There was a short stairway leading up to it which was smooth and buckled in the middle from ages of use.

Because of the shadows I couldn't see anything until I stepped inside. There was no artificial light although there were holders for torches along the walls. There was a small anteroom which emptied into the main room, which took up most of the space within the temple. Behind me, along the walls next to the anteroom were small cubicles with narrow doors leading into them. These cubicles continued from the wall behind me down the walls on either side of me. I couldn't see inside them either.

The large room was dominated by an altar set in the middle of the far side of the temple. It was a fairly plain stone structure elevated above the rest of the room and it absorbed much of the light streaming in from the windows. In front of me was a long table surrounded by benches at which were seated the members of the community. The old man who was our escort took us to three empty spaces at the middle of the near side of the table. All of the food was already set on the table but everyone sat quietly waiting. Just as we sat down, a very short gentleman emerged from behind the altar. He was hunched way over and walked with a short, shuffling gait. He wore a brown and gold tunic with a heavier cloak than everyone else. His hat was also more elaborately designed with plumes of feathers on all sides. Armando whispered that this was the high priest, which wasn't altogether surprising. After he made his way to the narrow end of the table and sat down, everyone began to eat.

At first it was completely silent. After a while people began to talk softly in Quechua to each other. On my right was the lady who had fetched water from the river. She kept entirely to herself. Armando was on my left

and he was translating for me the narrative of our host with the one large eyebrow. He had declined to speak much the entire time that we were getting ready in his house and alone with him but now that we were together with everyone he began to tell us, of his own accord, some information about Incatambo. The ruins were discovered in 1910 but was overshadowed by the work done by Hiram Bingham at Machu Picchu the next year. It is much smaller than its famous counterpart and though the buildings are in excellent shape there was little to be found in terms of artifacts or objects of daily life. The main interest of scholars was towards the Temple of the Sun, which was overwhelmed by people making casts of the stone carving and photographs of the architecture. These scholars soon found more interesting sites to study and very few more of them came back.

Almost completely ignored in the whole excavation and documentation process were a small group of Indians living near the ruins. They were asked by the explorers who they were and why they were there. Eventually it was established for history's sake that the twenty-two aged residents of Incatambo were the last surviving residents of a village established sometime after the independence of Peru. This was established through examination of the buildings and facilities and the age of the residents rather than any concrete evidence. The truth is that while the buildings were indeed from around 1850, there had been a continuous presence in Incatambo for at least the last 400 years. The previous residents had continued to live in the ruins until they fell apart beyond repair, when they built new homes. As for the age of the residents, it relates to the general abandonment of the city in the 1530's. News of the kidnapping of the chief Inca Atahualpa by Francisco Pizzaro and his eventual execution reached Incatambo swiftly by way of courier. The elders of the village decided that to

preserve the relics of the temple, all but the most senior citizens, including the main priest, would leave the city for other parts. In this way there was a chance that the city would remain hidden from the invaders but the temple could remain holy and thus dedicate itself to the memory of the executed Atahualpa.

As the residents were preparing to leave, they were called together by the high priest who told them that they must keep alive within themselves the memory of Incatambo, and they must ensure that it passed down through the generations. When they became old and wise, as they approached their final chapter of life, if they felt a call to return to Incatambo then they should cut their earthly ties and return to their city. This, too, was to be passed on to future generations. Inti, the Sun God, would ensure that those who were meant to serve him would receive their message. It wasn't easy to send away the residents. The Inca were very community oriented. Everyone belonged to an *ayllu*, the basic social unit of the Indians, composed of extended families forming a commune. They were governed by elected leaders and advised by a council of elders, the *amautas*. These *amautas* were always men, but the service of Inti had no gender restrictions and so women had other roles to play. Within a day, virtually all of the inhabitants, along with their animals and other possessions, were off to various parts of the disintegrating empire. With that, the city of Incatambo entered its next phase of existence.

The elders that remained worked hard to honor the fallen Inca and to maintain the temple. They were old and would die fairly soon. But never would their numbers dwindle much. As residents perished, others would sense a call to return to Incatambo to take their place. The call of the high priest was faithfully passed on and as time rolled by, Incatambo remained steadfastly rooted in the sixteenth century. They knew of outside

developments, of course, from the influx of new residents. But their traditions remained the same and they stuck to them. There are exactly the same number of residents now as there were on the day that all but the very few left the *ayllu* of Incatambo.

At about this time we finished up our meals and washed them down with one more round of *chicha*. I looked at Armando and wondered whether one day, far in the future, he would receive that call to serve the Sun God. I realized that the whole time that the man had been talking, I didn't doubt for a minute the authenticity of his story. After the events of the rest of the evening I have no reason to doubt it even now.

I think I need a short walk around outside before I finish recounting today's events.

Later, 10:30 p.m.

The sky is so clear outside. This kind of Andean location is ideal for stargazing. Besides the high altitude there are no street lamps or city lights to take away from the splendor of the night sky. I've never seen the stars quite so bright and radiant. I could see some of my favorite constellations but they were in different places than I'm used to. It took a while to get used to. It was strange to see the very same stars in the same order but from a much different perspective. It's a lot like my whole trip. I've read a bit about the Indians of Peru but now that I've been here a while, I see things so differently. The only thing I can compare it to is just a few moments ago when I saw the belt of Orion with its starry dagger hanging upside down. It's the same constellation as always but I never realized I could see it from this perspective.

If I seem 'star struck,' it's because the beauty of the sky seems accentuated by its privileged location over Peru. In the daytime the clouds

move very quickly across the horizon, not like at home where the clouds hang, heavy and immobile, in the sky. And the sunsets here are prolonged. The deep purples and reds persist in the horizon for a long time, not just a fleeting moment. But the pristine night sky is what really makes me stop and stare. It's not the only thing that seems different down here. It's just something that continues to amaze me night after night.

To continue where I left off, dinner was followed in short order by a religious service. It was nearly sunset, one of the two important events of the day at the Temple along with the sunrise. It was time to pay homage to the benevolence of Inti and to ask him to return again tomorrow. The trapezoidal windows were designed to make full use of the final rays of the sun. The color of the light streaming through them towards the altar was a deep gold color. The sun gave off such a glow that the walls and everything within them seemed gilded by the aura. I imagine it was much like being in the great sun temple of Cuzco, the *Coricancha*, whose walls were literally decorated with gold.

The service ran like a well-oiled machine. It was clearly a matter of routine but it was taken seriously and done with great passion. A mainstay of Inca religion was sacrifice; not to appease the gods but just to please them. They rarely made human sacrifices but often sent llamas and other small animals to their dooms in order to win goodwill from the heavens. There were no sacrifices tonight but Inti was ceremonially presented with some food and plenty of *chicha*.

The priest would start a chant and the others would repeat it. He stood in the middle of the large altar, bearing the full force of the sun. His voice was husky, raspy, and atonal. The responses came back together but with the same lack of tune. This went on for quite a few minutes. Armando was

giving me running commentary. First the priest was absolving the congregants of their misdeeds. Then he absolved the misdeeds of all Inca in their name. The second was obviously adapted for the purposes of this temple, serving as the only one for all of the people. Then the priest raised a large number of objects into the rays of the sun, asking Inti to consume them if he wished. Besides food and *chicha*, he held up jewelry, clothing, and plants. Finally, the priest offered himself as sacrifice to the god. He stood with his arms outstretched, reaching towards the sky. His head and eyes focused on a spot just above the windows high above him. The rays of the sun, moving down the horizon, cast their gaze slowly down his body. Starting with his head, the glare crept down his supplicating body leaving the upper parts in shadow while still illuminating the lower parts. I felt the same rays warming the back of my head and body but my eyes were riveted on the altar. Eventually, after standing motionless for a long time, the last sun beams had abandoned his body as well as the temple and left it in almost total darkness. The priest put his arms back to his sides. There was a quick prayer to welcome the arrival of the moon goddess, another local addition to the standard function of a sun temple. Then a few torches were lit and the ceremony was over.

More *chicha* was drunk, although I noticed that the food and drink offered to Inti were left on the altar and not touched. It wasn't like a reception, though. The drinking of *chicha* was more like a form of religious expression. Inti had been offered his share and now the people could share in his bounty. It was thus taken in contemplative silence. I myself thought about how this temple and all of the adaptations it had made. The temple in Cuzco was long the main temple of the empire. It was charged with official ceremony and the other temples followed its lead. But now this temple, the

only one remaining, was by default the most important. And it kept alive the gods and traditions of the Inca. By the way, the name of the temple in Quechua, a word used many times during the ceremony, is *Sapanchasqa*, meaning isolated and alone.

After this, the service was officially completed. The people looked very happy and contented. They were full from the superb dinner and had completed their spiritual and historical duties. With their daily duties done, ranging from farming to making and repairing clothing, the residents returned to their homes to pursue other activities. Some days they had a council meeting, as they traditionally did, to determine the course and direction of the village. Other days they discussed the temple, something that remained the sole prerogative of the men. On the days left over, some continued to work to record the history of the Inca, others prepared the *chicha* and stocked food items, and others wrote poetry or painted.

Armando and I waited by the altar as everyone but the priest filed out of the trapezoidal door. He then beckoned us to a room behind the altar that I had not seen in my cursory inspection of the temple. He carried with him a small torch which offered the only light. This room was very small and unadorned but the priest led us to a stone chest the size of a small coffin. He opened this up and I saw that it was empty. He handed me the torch to hold and with great effort he and Armando were able to lift up the bottom of the chest up, which concealed a secret opening. The bottom of the chest had no seams and seemed rooted to the floor. If it occurred to someone to try to lift the whole chest, it was far too heavy to move. Even the bottom took much more than a casual effort to hoist. And the mechanism to lift up the bottom was well hidden also. There were two tiny metal rings embedded in little carved-out circles in the stone on either side of the chest. To release these

rings from the resting places, the priest and Armando used the hard quill of a feather to thread a strong cord around them and then pull them out. To the rings they attached very strong wool ropes and then they had to brace their feet against the chest in order to give themselves enough leverage to pull up the false bottom. The priest lifted himself into the chest and started to walk down a little stairway that was below it. Armando beckoned me to follow and he took up the rear. As we walked down the dozen or so steps I couldn't help but think that if the bottom were to close or be closed on us it would be very difficult to lift it up again. This secret area could become our sarcophagus.

A little hallway led to a room that was much bigger than any of the cubicles lining the walls of the temple. When the priest lit the torches hanging around the room, I could see that it was richly decorated. There were tapestries and decorated clothing hanging from the walls. There were scattered relics, primarily broken vases and urns, resting on wooden shelves. There was a bookcase at the far end of the room, overflowing with Incan tomes and texts from the outside world. And there were a number of *quipus*, both on the wall and spread out on the floor at one corner of the room. There were also a number of chests, containing gold, perhaps, or other relics. The priest explained, through Armando, that this room was how the temple had kept its altar relics and other valuables safe. It was originally built to evade the Spanish but served instead to shield it from historians and archeologists. I have little doubt that these objects are of much more use here than in a stuffy museum exhibit half a world away.

The priest led Armando and me over to a couple of thick blankets spread on the floor and sat himself directly on the stone floor. I noticed that there was no dust in the room. It was well taken care of. The gold objects were sparkling and the books were well organized. My attention was focused



on the large number of *quipus*, though. Seeing this, the priest went to one of the chests and showed me that it was full of many more *quipus*. Their cords twisted around each other like snakes confined in a box.

We sat down again and the priest began to talk to me, in Spanish this time, though he did not look at me. Without any pleasantries, but very politely, he told me that I had been summoned here and it was his purpose to try to explain to me why. He had me hand him my *quipu*, which was in my small bag. He spread it out on the floor between us, the large number of cords stretching towards him. The *quipu*, he told me, is not a lifeless, indecipherable tool. In the right hands, it is part of the living history of the Inca. All of the *quipus* the room contained were from the ancient *quipu* makers, who died out shortly after the conquest of the Inca empire. Before a certain point, the content of the *quipus* was relatively benign. They told legends and eulogized great warriors and princes and generally served to aid the Inca in selectively writing their history, which, in turn, helped to subjugate other tribes and keep order within their own empire. When the seriousness of the invasion and the betrayal of the Spaniards became apparent, the priests scurried to record on the *quipu* more important content. The priests of the Inca empire had the ability to prophesize, much as they once prophesized that the white man would come to their land. Many *quipu* were designed for this purpose. Priests would read, for example, the inflated entrails of a llama and give their findings to the *quipu* maker who would incorporate them into the cords and knots. Others concerned themselves with preserving their views of history. Many of both types of *quipu* did not survive the invasion. But the *quipu* makers never betrayed their secret. From accounts made by explorers and conquistadors alike, they had been convinced by the Indians that the *quipu* was a form of accounting. The

conquerors were told that they kept track of livestock and population and distances, for example. This was a brilliant lie. The sequences of the knots seemed to serve this purpose and gave future historian serious trouble in trying to decipher their meaning. It was true that some *quipu* did express these kinds of statistics, and these were offered as examples to the invaders. The myth was propagated and the secret of the *quipu* protected. As long, that is, as the residents of Incatambo continue to maintain them. If they were to die as a group, before they could teach the mysteries of the *quipu* to others, the living histories of the Inca would wither and die with them.

The priest began to trace the cords of my *quipu* with his short, stocky fingers. He must have very sharp eyes if he was able to see the faded colors in the poor lighting of the underground room. This particular *quipu* was made to record a prophecy, he informed me while he kept his gaze on the small, thin, radiating strings. He never explained how the strings told a story of words out of knots but instead began to divine its message. This *quipu* tells of the arrival of one from far away to the land of the hummingbird, which the priest knew as Q'enti, or Picaflor. This stranger would be unknown to all and would have circles around his eyes. The priest paused to look up and point at my glasses which I felt the need to take off of my face and look at. He would carry with him the echo of the people, he continued. I immediately thought of my micro cassette recorder which mesmerized the children of the village. Most importantly, though, the priest went on, he would wear the mark of the *chasqui* around his neck. Armando explained to me that this referred to the conch shell that the couriers used to announce their arrival to the next station or destination. I looked down at my father's old pendant that I have worn since he passed it on to me when I turned twenty-one. The circular curves of the gold never looked like a shell to me before but it sure does now.

I began to feel a little bit sick to my stomach. My father told me he didn't know how it had come into the family but I had the suspicious feeling that I would find out from this priest.

The priest told me that when I arrived in Picaflor he knew that I might be the one mentioned in the *quipu*. He didn't explain how he knew this but spoke of it as matter of fact. He sent one of the residents to take the *quipu* to me, both because I needed to possess it and because it would lead me to Incatambo. I experienced a remarkable epiphany as it suddenly became clear to me that I had indeed previously seen the old lady who sat next to me at dinner and had earlier followed me down to the river. She was the old lady in the tent at the San Esteban festival who had mumbled something and put the *quipu* around my neck. I was a little too inebriated at the time to remember her clearly but the whole scene rushed back into my mind as sharply as if it had just happened. She was sent to summon me. She was probably saying a prayer as she gave me the *quipu*. It explained a lot about this whole trip to Incatambo and the behavior of Gustavo and the old man who sent me here as well as Armando, who was sitting by calmly, as if all of this came as no great surprise. I was even more shocked when I heard a quiet noise behind me and I turned around to see the old lady of *quipu* fame seated on the ground to the side of the entrance. Next to her was our host for the evening. I had no idea they were even there, much less how long they had been there.

I didn't have time to reflect on what the priest had said, though, because he hardly paused. The *quipu* went on to say that this stranger must be brought before Inti, along with the *quipu*, and be judged in front of the altar. Apparently, though Armando had declined to inform me, the Sun God was indeed passing judgment on me at the same time that it was making its

way down the body of the priest. Since I was facing the altar, I didn't notice the way in which the sunlight came upon my body but the priest informed me that it fell on me very favorably. It was only then that he was truly convinced that I was the person that the *quipu* spoke of. That was why he had to wait until now, until he was absolutely sure, before he could divulge the meanings of the *quipu*. He cannot simply read through the *quipus*. He has to interpret them in the setting for which they were intended. In this case it was only after I was judged that he could begin to interpret the message.

The priest got up and went over to his bookcase. He drew out a thick volume and thumbed to a page, which he studied for a moment. Then he put the book back in its space and returned to his seat on the floor. He told me that the *quipu* said something of my history but that he should ask me whether I wanted to hear it before going on. I told him that I was very curious and that he should tell me everything that was in the *quipu*. He examined the strings very carefully, like he wanted to be doubly sure of the message. He began to speak in Quechua again and paused to let Armando translate. Armando said that the stranger spoken of in the *quipu* was not a complete stranger to the land of the Inca. His blood, though thinned over time, was part Inca. I assumed that this was a figurative description, but he told me that the *quipu* said that the stranger's ancestors, meaning mine, once toiled the land here, bled for the Inca here, and were buried in the earth here. The 'here' did not necessarily mean Incatambo and it didn't say where these ancestors lived but it did establish that they worked in the service of Inti, and therefore somewhere in the empire of the Inca.

Although the blood became diluted by the conquerors, the ancestors of this stranger retained part of the Inca at their core. Even when this no longer became recognizable and was forgotten, there still remained the persistent

urge to see that the last remaining symbol of Inca ancestry be passed on. This was the pendant that I now wear around my neck. I told the priest that my parents did not come from American ancestry. As far back as we knew, all of my relatives came from Europe or Asia. The priest looked for a long time at the *quipu*. He found a knot of particular interest and rubbed his fingers across it for a long time. Finally he told me, through Armando again, that it was indeed true, and that when one of my ancestors came from across a great expanse of water, they came upon one whose blood was more Inca than not and who possessed the symbol of the *chasqui*. The stranger of the *quipu* was a direct descendant of their union and that of many others. I tried to work it out on paper. Assuming twenty-five years between generations, the priest might be talking about my great-great-great-great grandfather, or grandmother I suppose, give or take a generation. That ancestor supplied me with 1/64 of my genetic makeup. Considering that they were only part Indian that makes me even less of an Inca. Still, it's a lot more of a part of me than I ever would have imagined a day ago.

Despite having gone on for some length, the priest had not yet gone into the message of the *quipu*, only who it was meant for. He shifted his position so as to have a better view of the middle of the knotted cords. He continued in Quechua as Armando translated. The priest also began referring to me as *Hawa Runa*, or foreigner. The *Hawa Runa* would come to his ancient homeland at a time of great distress. I didn't point out that this could be interpreted as pretty much any time in Peru's history. Though the *Hawa Runa* would come to serve another, the true purpose of his mission would be revealed to him with the help of those that were already part of the land. The priest didn't look at Armando as he said this but I turned to him. Armando's brow was furrowed in concentration as he listened to the old priest speak and

carefully translated his words. As he continued to translate, the furrow became progressively deeper and more defined.

The priest restated that the *Hawa Runa* would come during a time of grief and worry. The *Hawa Runa* would arrive to help alleviate the distress, although he would not know it. He would rediscover his connection with the land and reestablish contact with Inti. The *Hawa Runa* would rediscover his sense of purpose in the land of the Inca. All of this can be in some sense true. The village was very troubled over the occupations of the *Sendero Luminoso* and it was threatening the life of the village. I have felt at home while in Peru, but that's mostly due to the hospitality of people from Jaime to Armando's sisters. I have become much more focused on this project than usual. I've been thinking that it might make good material for a novel. That could be the sense of purpose he was talking about.

On the other hand, nothing the priest said was ironclad. It could all be interpreted in a way such as to make it fit the scenario. It's like the psychic phone networks that tell the callers such general predictions that they hold true for just about anyone. I wouldn't believe so strongly the words of the priest, then, if I didn't have such a gut feeling that he was talking about me as the *Hawa Runa*. I've had the feeling for a long time that there was something down here in Peru that I had to find. Like there was some kind of fate at work. There wasn't any lightbulb above my head about it, just a kernel of intuition held deep in the pit of my stomach. The kernel was not always obvious but it was ever-present. Until this point in the conversation, that is. I really don't believe in destiny, but as the priest read the *quipu*, I truly felt, and still feel, that I had somehow known it all along. And the kernel of intuition, my proof, was gone from the pit of my stomach.

Then the priest shifted his position once again. He began to examine the far right end of the *quipu*. At that end were the worst-preserved parts of it and there seemed to be some difficulty as the priest had to hold it right up to his face. Without being asked, the old lady appeared at the side of the priest with a lit torch, affording him better light to read by. The priest continued on, this time in Spanish. The *Hawa Runa*, though providing some relief, would unwittingly bring previously unknown strife to the land of ancestors. Then the priest changed his interpretation and said that the *Hawa Runa* would be present in the land of his ancestors during time of greater strife than had ever been known. I was a little relieved to hear that it wouldn't necessarily be me that was bringing this strife to Peru but he gave no indication of what type of conflict or distress it would be. Armando seemed glad to be relieved of the burden of translating and was listening intently.

The *Hawa Runa* would then face a decision, and a great one at that. He must choose to remain in the land his ancestors once knew or return to the life he has always known. This was not something that I wanted to hear. Just because I have a distant connection with this land doesn't mean I have any stake in staying here. If there's some kind of natural disaster, like an earthquake, I'd like to stay to help as well as cover the event. But I'm not going to be choosing to stay here in the 'land of my ancestors.' There's surely some other meaning for the message of the *quipu*. Armando seemed to take this part of the message much differently than I did. I think that something that was said meant a lot more to him than it did to me. He was still staring hard at the *quipu* although the priest had already begun to move about. That was all the priest had to say about the *quipu*. The old lady put down the torch and gently collected the now-read *quipu* and rested it on top of the many others in the chest. She closed the lid of the chest and began to put out some

of the torches. The priest then looked at me directly as he spoke for the first time. The room was much more poorly lit and there were shadows cast across his face. I couldn't see his mouth move as I heard his words. I could only see his eyes. He told me that it was his purpose only to read the *quipu*, not to interpret it. It was up to Inti to see to it whether the message of the *quipu* was followed strictly or with great latitude. He told me that if I needed guidance, it was Inti that I would have to ask because it was only He that could give it to me. The priest then turned and went up the stairs without another word.

Armando stood up and beckoned me to go up the stairs as well. The old lady and old man finished putting out the torches and followed us out. When I stepped out of the stone chest, I felt a rush of cool air hit my body. I had no idea how stuffy and hot it had been down below until after I had left it. I walked back out to the altar. I couldn't hear or see the priest anywhere. Armando led me towards the main entrance of the temple. I heard the slam of the stone slab being replaced as the bottom of the chest. We made our way in silence across the ruins and back to the house of the old man.

Wednesday, October 21, 7:00 p.m.

We packed up and left Incatambo early this morning. Armando said he wanted to get back for the *Ayamarca* holiday, the procession of the dead. I think he's also very worried about his family. Some of the things that the priest said to us made him very uncomfortable, though he won't admit it to me. I get the impression that the suspicious feeling that was in the pit of my stomach has made its way to Armando. He still walked very patiently, at my slow pace, but there was a sense of urgency in his attitude. He was very pensive and quiet. We both were. We kept pretty much to ourselves the



whole day, except for lunch when he told me that he was very lucky to have had the chance to show me the real residents of Incatambo. I realized I wouldn't have gotten to see any of it without Armando. I also realized that I hadn't really thanked him.

Thursday, October 22, 1:30 p.m.

I'm in much better shape now and better accustomed to the altitude so we should be arriving in Picaflor late tonight, if we keep making good time. I did have to chew more coca leaf this morning, though. Armando has been telling me about some of his favorite stories and poems. Where I can tell stories of actual events from my heritage, he depends on myths and fables. Still, he spoke of them as if they were as real as Paul Revere's Ride (or George Washington and the cherry tree, if I look at it from a different perspective). His favorite hero is actually much more accurately defined historically than most because his life was documented by the invading Spaniards. Armando talked for a long time about this hero, Amaru. He was referring to Tupac Amaru I, the last true leader of the Inca empire when it still was one, rather than the rebel leader, José Gabriel Condorcanqui, a direct descendent of Tupac Amaru, who adopted his name during a failed rebellion in the 1780's. Tupac Amaru was in line to be sovereign but was usurped by his half-brother, Titu Cusi Yupanqui. He was sent to live in exile with the Virgins of the Sun, perhaps in Machu Picchu. When Titu Cusi died (of excess vomiting actually, thanks to a tonic given to him by a priest ostensibly to cure him of pneumonia), the youthful Tupac Amaru was called upon to take the reins of power. This was the last time that the Inca succession ceremony was ever held. Some days later, a Spanish ambassador of the viceroy was killed by Inca warriors, though without the knowledge or approval of Tupac Amaru. The

viceroys, who did not even know that Titu Cusi had passed on, declared war on the Inca in revenge and captured Tupac Amaru, thus putting an end to the Inca dynasty, but not the Inca people, to be sure. Tupac Amaru was taken to Cuzco and tried by the Spanish. His words were misinterpreted by a malicious interpreter and he was falsely convicted of many charges. He accepted his fate with great courage and dignity and was beheaded in the Plaza of Cuzco. Armando admired Tupac Amaru for his life and his death, both ordained for him by others but carried out with a fine sense of obligation and nobility. Armando talked of Amaru as one talks of the setting sun; sadly gone in a burst of color but destined to return soon, as bright and as brilliant as before.

The vistas have been a lot less extraordinary in this direction. Everything is shrouded in gray, dull clouds. Even the grass, which was remarkably green going towards Incatambo, is dulled by thick fog. The fog also makes everything damp. I've gotten used to blurry glasses because I've run out of dry clothes to wipe them with. The worst thing is probably the bread. It was on the outside of our sacks so it wouldn't get crushed but the moisture got to it very quickly. Some of it went bad right away and what's left is soggy and mushy. I've had to use my water-tight bag to hold this diary and a couple of other essentials. In fact, I'd better put this book away now before the pages start to curl.

Friday, October 23, 10 a.m.

Our return to Picaflor was a great relief. We had just finished making our way down into the valley just after sunset when Armando's four sisters came charging at us. They insisted on carrying our bags the rest of the way into town. Our arrival had been tipped off by some farmers working up on

the ridge that had seen us approaching while we were still some ways out. Armando's mother had plenty of time to whip up some food and the *chicha* had already been prepared. I had no idea that so many people had noticed that we had left, but just about the whole town came out to welcome us back from our trip. We were just outside Armando's house and the townspeople just stood around shouting out questions for Armando. Some of them brought more food and drink. I didn't see Gustavo or the older man who had sent me off to Incatambo but the mayor was there as was the hotel owner and just about everyone else that I had met in Picaflor.

While I was busy eating, Armando, between bites, tried to answer all of the questions. All of the villagers want to go to Incatambo but they are not allowed to go just to visit. In order to go, they have to have an explicit purpose and be sent for. So very few, if any, had ever made the trip. They all wanted to hear about what it was really like; the children were especially interested. All this time I had no idea that it was such a big deal for Armando to have gone with me. He was so calm and patient the whole time that he made it seem routine.

The older people in the crowd wanted to know what condition the temple was in, how many people lived there, what we saw, and other things like that. The kids were asking whether the priest really had the head of a lizard, if the sun ever dropped below the horizon or stayed up in the sky all the time, and whether we really had to be taken to the city on the backs of owls. Incatambo was like the tooth fairy to the children. It was like a fairy tale land that they were told stories of and had wild myths about. One small boy with a high voice asked, after everyone else was done, whether the priest had told us our future. I almost choked on my *cui* thinking about the *quipu*

but Armando just told him that our futures are determined by god and known only to him.

It occurred to me to ask Armando whether he was referring to Inti or the Roman Catholic god. While we were in Incatambo Armando gave every impression of worshipping his ancestral gods but from the items in his home I took it for granted that he was a Catholic. We went to bed soon after eating, I was extremely tired, but I had the chance to ask him about it just before we went to sleep. He told me that, like everyone in the village, he had reconciled the two sets of beliefs. Their belief was that Inti had sent Christianity along with the missionaries and church members to their land in order to afford them a way to continue to worship him. It allowed them a new outlet for worship, and helped them to adapt to life after the conquest, but they still believed in Inti and that after their time on earth they would be subject to his will. They were only allowed to worship him directly at a true temple, so few ever did. So, in other words, they worshipped Inti through the institutions of Roman Catholicism, the only institutions they could have, probably with the blessing and help of the Catholic priest of the village. Instead of sacrifice they now had sacrament. I don't think the Pope would be too pleased to hear of this village.

Despite not being able to worship directly without a temple, Picaflor does follow the substance and tone of the Inca festivals when they occur in order to appreciate their heritage and show their devotion. And they usually take the opportunity to eat and drink and dance as well. The procession of the dead is actually the only Inca holiday they celebrate that isn't entirely a festive celebration. The whole town is very subdued this morning in preparation for the festival. The normal bustling of activity in the plaza has been reduced to a few dogs lazing about and some men putting together some

very long tables for a community feast. I was originally worried about the weather but although it's likely to be cold I'm pretty sure that it won't rain. There is also the smell of cooking food coming from every conceivable direction. I have been promised that there will be no *cui* tonight. There are particular foods that are traditional for this festival. For the life of me I can't figure out what they are by the smell.

I've sort of gotten used to *chicha* in the morning after my little expedition and since the coffee situation is still miserable I've given in to local custom and that's what I'm drinking here in the restaurant of my hotel. The owner had a message for me this morning from Jaime. He returned the day after I left. He has been given the go-ahead to conduct a formal interview with Colonel Juan Carlos Hashimoto, of all people, on the subject of the resurgence of violent acts by the *Sendero Luminoso*. It will be a cover story for his paper but he promised in the note that he will give me any material that I might want. He'll be shocked to find out that I've already had some words with the Colonel. I just hope that the Colonel mentions me in their meeting. That would be the best way for Jaime to find out. Anyway, Jaime says he'll be back here on Monday and after that we can move on to wherever I want. I haven't given any thought to that. It's strange but I've gotten so used to Picaflor and the residents that it will be hard to fit another location into the article. But in all honesty, there is nothing going on here that will be of great interest to the outside world. There are many other places that are right now, at this moment, involved in terrorism and the drug trade. These are the places I need to write about. But I'm not at all sorry that I've stayed here for so long. Listen to me. I'm already talking about Picaflor like I've left it. It's like when a person is terminally ill and their relatives prepare in advance for life after they're gone, forgetting the whole while that the person

is not yet dead. I should just enjoy the festival tonight and worry about what to do next when Jaime returns in a few days.

Later, 6:00 p.m.

We're waiting at the grand tables in the plaza now. Part of the procession has already taken place. The residents marched in bright clothing and with great festivity to the cemetery, just outside of town, to ceremonially fetch the dead. For each person in the ground, if they had no surviving relatives then someone else took up this task, a homemade clay pot was brought and some of the dirt on top of the grave was scooped into it. The clay pots reminded me of the ones in my dream my first night in Peru.

The pots were carried back to the plaza amid great fanfare. Some people had to carry two or three of them to accommodate all of their relatives. This journey back to the plaza was supposed to symbolize birth and the journey from the earth to life. Then each of the pots was taken to a small basin and dipped into the water. This recreated the baptism ceremony. I didn't realize until then that even this Inca festival was going to have some measure of Christianity in it.

After all of the pots had undergone their baptism, each of them, still being held by the person that carried them from the cemetery, had a drop of wine spilled on them. This symbolized holy communion and ascendance to adolescence. After this, they were all arranged in an oval on top of another table just to the side of the long ones. On this table were platters and dishes of every variety of food. These were never touched by the humans. They were only meant for consumption by the pots with the dirt in them.

The pots having been taken care of, food was brought out to the rest of us. The menu was sumptuous and very traditional. The main course was a

very rich stew, called *yaguar loco*, or blood soup. It consisted of a rich stock boiled with sheep tripe and powdered potatoes garnished by the dried blood of the animal. (There was no frying in the ancient Andes, incidentally. Usually they just boiled). On the side we had popped corn and sweet potatoes. There was bread made of baked, ground corn paste. And, of course, the *chicha* was flowing. Now we are waiting for some pastry desserts. The mood has been very jovial and I'm beginning to wonder why they consider this festival to be more somber than any of their other ones.

Later, 8:00 p.m.

I'm sitting again at the dinner table in the plaza. The dogs that live in the plaza are stuffed on food that spilled during the long meal. I would like to note that my previous skepticism has been redressed. After the dessert, which was delicious, the crowded plaza became very quiet. People slowly wandered back to their homes and changed into dark and shrouded clothing. If the first part of the ceremony had been full of joy and life, the second was already on its way to being somber and full of death.

All of the people in charge of pots went back and got them from the table. They then formed into a very long line. Everyone else, including the young children, followed along behind. The earth from the grave of Armando's father and other relatives were carried by his mother and sisters so that he could walk with me. We began to follow the leader. The line would move in a straight line for a time and then shift direction suddenly and twist and turn, emphasizing that life's path is not always straight. Eventually, we had covered most of the town and turned back to the cemetery. I noticed that we were heading due west, towards the setting sun. Everybody piled back into the cemetery and took the pots back to the graves.

One by one they dashed the clay pots against the gravestones, shattering the pots and scattering the dirt within them back upon the ground.

After that we went back to the plaza where the people would gather to remember their lost ones. At first there will be no festivity of any kind. No music or dancing or drinking. The festival was intended to provide a time to be contemplative and serious. But after a while, Armando said, it slips into more of a celebration of life and the living as well as the lives of those who have passed. Then they will break out the instruments and play. I'm waiting now while people go back to their homes once again and dig up long faded photographs and relics to share with everyone else. That's all fine while my food is digesting but I'm looking much more forward to the celebration than the contemplation.

Later, 10:00 p.m.

I'm back at Armando's house for a few minutes. I've been carrying my diary around all day so I wouldn't have to wait so long to write stuff down. He and I have been sent to fetch the large quantities of *chicha* that his mother and sisters have spent a good portion of the last week preparing. It's also been really cold outside since the sun set, so I'm putting on one of their especially warm ponchos.

The last couple of hours were pretty depressing so I'm looking forward to a little bit of drinking. I just circulated around the crowd, listening to stories about the lives of some of the residents of Picaflor. Some of them fought with Bolivar, others farmed their whole lives, and a few people told of relatives that had heeded the call to Incatambo. The most depressing, by far, were the mothers of children that had left with the *Sendero Luminoso*. Since they had neither seen nor heard of their children for many months they



talked of them as if they were dead. And perhaps the worst thing, especially for this holiday, was that the parents had no grave to visit. Even though their children probably weren't dead yet, they also knew that their children would never return, even when the parents passed on. That meant that their children would never carry them through the ceremonial procession. I looked at some of the photos of these lost children. They were mostly class pictures and not very recent ones, because the military had taken the most recent photos with them and never returned them. The young people in the photos looked content and happy. I wondered what it was that turned them into terrorists and potential murderers. There must be some kind of hatred that I cannot understand that made them abandon their homes and everything they knew for something so terrible. And I hope that they feel some remorse about the amount of collateral damage they left in their wake when they left, but I doubt it.

Saturday, October 24, 12:30 a.m.

I again find myself writing an entry from my hotel room during the middle of a party. I had to come back to try to dig some gloves out of my luggage. My hands are just too cold to continue outside. Most people are in a pretty good mood by now. Armando and his musicians are busy playing and all of the young people are busy dancing. Some of the older people are still talking but most are busy drinking *chicha* and some stronger bottled stuff. I've had a little too much but I think I'll go dance it off.

Monday, October 26, 3:00 p.m.

Jaime just found me at the hotel. Now that he's helping me take care of things I can finally start to pull myself together. I'm in the worst shape I've

ever been. I haven't slept for two days and I haven't been able to eat either. I haven't even been able to write. I can't think straight. I have to try to put it down on paper. I know it's important.

I had just gotten done making my last entry when I heard loud noises from the plaza. Since I can see the square from the window in my hotel, I looked out and at first I thought it was the Peruvian army. There were jeeps and soldiers standing around. I almost shouted to Armando to ask what was happening. I was interrupted by a single woman's shriek. I shudder to think of what would have happened if I had actually shouted out. One of the armed people made his way out of the shadows and I could see that he was wearing a ski mask and carrying an automatic weapon. I immediately shut off the light in my room. I sat on the ground, looking out the window, and I prayed that it wasn't the *Sendero Luminoso*. I hoped that it was the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement or some other group. More than anything I couldn't believe that the happy scene had been so brutally interrupted. I didn't know how I could tell. All I knew is that I had to stay out of sight.

I saw the armed men move from door to door, checking for occupants. One of the masked terrorists pointed towards the hotel and two of his accomplices ran towards the entrance. There was nowhere in my room to hide. The bureau wasn't big enough to stand in and they would check it anyway, as they would under the bed. It was too late to go out into the hall. I could already hear them kicking things over on the ground floor. I thought about getting to the roof but that would require leaving my room. Then I remembered the bathroom.

I threw my stuff under the bed as a reflex and locked the front door but didn't chain it, as if I had locked it from the outside. Then I ran into the bathroom. I closed the toilet seat and then stepped on it so I could get to the

back part of the toilet that was the tallest part. It was very shaky and I was shaking some more myself. From there I could see up into the shaft that I had made fun of before. The construction was wood and there were a lot of pieces that weren't flush with the sides of the shaft. I was able to grab the bottom-most of these pieces of wood and I was relieved that it held my weight. The piece I had a hold of was on the side of the passage that faced the wall. I jumped up from the top of the toilet as high as I could. I braced my feet up against the wall and managed to grab a piece of wood slightly higher up. I used my feet to sort of walk up the wall while I pulled myself up the protruding boards like they were rungs of a ladder. I heard the noises from the hall getting louder but the shaft was hardly bigger than I was and I had trouble pulling myself higher. Finally I pulled my feet out of sight just as the terrorists burst into my room. I could hear them throwing stuff about and I didn't dare move any higher because I was afraid I would give my position away. Fortunately I had been able to rest my feet on that first board I had grabbed so I didn't have to rely on my upper body strength. My heart was pounding so loudly that it sounded like a telltale heart to me but the intruders no more than glanced in the bathroom and I was safe.

The terrorists quickly moved on but I was too afraid to move myself. I wanted to go back down into the room but if they came back to the hotel I doubted that I would be able to hoist myself up again. I started to climb up, then, to see if I could get to the roof. It wasn't far to go, just a few meters, but I kept catching my clothing and skin on nails and splinters of wood. Soon I was able to poke my head out of the top of the shaft. The roof looked pretty solid so I pulled myself out and onto it, stepping quietly so that if there were terrorists in the rooms below they wouldn't hear me. I looked around but it was too far to jump to another roof. There were some other shafts but if I was

going to be in the hotel I might as well be in my room and not climb onto someone else's toilet. Instead, I got down on my stomach and inched my way to the edge of the roof.

I had an even better view of the plaza from two floors up. I figured I was taking a risk of being seen but I had to know what was going on. There was a small group of armed people at the place where Armando's band had been playing. I didn't see Armando anywhere. One of the terrorists had their ski mask off. It was definitely a female and she was much shorter than the other three standing with her. Somebody turned on a light in the building behind her and cast some illumination on her face. I could see then that she had very fair skin, almost white, and brown, shoulder-length hair. I figured that this was the terrorist Susana that Armando had described to me. I felt my heart sink when I knew for sure that it was the *Sendero Luminoso*. From my secure position on the roof I no longer felt like my life was in danger but I felt even worse because I knew that Armando was somewhere down there.

The residents were being corralled in the middle of the plaza. The women were sitting on the benches of the tables while the men were standing around. Every couple of minutes the armed men would bring someone back from their searches, but none of them was Armando. Some of the terrorists were loading up jeeps with food and supplies. Only a couple of them were guarding the residents. I saw Armando's mother crying on the shoulders of her daughters but still no Armando.

Somehow the terrorists knew that Armando was indeed in Picaflor and just missing from the assembled group. Susana picked up a megaphone and called for Armando to come out and show himself. She paused but there was no movement. She talked for a second to a man next to her who then grabbed one of Armando's sisters. He reached to his waistband and pulled out

a revolver which he held to her head. Susana spoke very quietly into the megaphone, considering she was issuing a threat and an order. She told Armando to reveal himself or she would kill his sister. After a moment, I saw out of the corner of my eye a movement from the far side of the plaza, from the church. The door swung open and out came Armando and two other men who had managed to stay hidden along with him but had decided not to abandon him when he had to leave. Armando was grabbed by his shirt and dragged to Susana. He stood as she walked past him and to the small table which had earlier held the clay pots. She and several of the other *Senderistas* began to eat the food that had been prepared to ceremonially serve the pots. I saw one of the guards shuffle over to a shaded corner and hold out his hand like a shopper asking for change while he arranged some cocaine on it with his other hand. He bowed his head over his outstretched hand for a moment and then turned around quickly, wiping his nose with one hand and rubbing his gums with the other. When he returned, another guard went over to the same corner, shielded from the wind, also to snort cocaine.

I entertained the thought of hijacking one of their jeeps and racing to Colonel Hashimoto in Armay. I wish I were brave enough to have tried. But I was frozen in my position. I hate to say it but I was riveted to the scene below. I couldn't have looked away even if I had wanted to. I couldn't help but stare at Armando. I concentrated very hard, hoping that he would look up and make eye contact, so he would know that I was safe and still around. But he just stood, staring at the church, with an indecipherable expression on his face.

When the group of terrorists was done eating, they got up and walked out of my eyesight. I hoped for a moment that they were leaving Picaflor but

they soon returned, though three of them had taken off their ski masks. I could see only that all three were men and that they had unkempt beards and long hair. One of the men took the megaphone that had been left on the table and stood on one of the benches. He began to address the crowd. He told them that many of them had not behaved like true Peruvians, despite their persistent warnings. He said that many in the town still exploited their countrymen and went against the will of the people. These people would surely and finally be punished. I saw the owner of my hotel sit down on a bench with one hand over his eyes and one hand on his heart. He had been one of the men called to stand apart the first time the *Senderistas* came and he knew that the same thing could happen again, and this time it might be he who was tenth in line.

The speaker, probably the lieutenant of Susana, let his words have their intended effect before he went on. He said that the judgment of these people would come, but not this day. They had come to Picaflor instead to charge only one of the citizens, but to charge him of crimes against the people of Peru. The lieutenant claimed that their methods would not be without mercy. There would be a trial, to be heard by true patriots who were entitled to pass judgment. He turned to his left, to where Armando was standing stoically alone. Putting the megaphone down, the lieutenant formally accused Armando of treason, a crime punishable by death.

The lieutenant began to speak again to the crowd. He told them that this was the beginning of a new type of just society for the people of Peru. He said that if the accused had been charged by the Peruvian military, he would have already been found guilty without due process. This trial was the first step towards more justice for the people of Picaflor.

Within a few minutes three chairs were set up just in front of the church with a table in front of them. In these chairs sat two men and between them was Susana. Armando was led to a place in front of the table and forced to sit on the ground. His family had also been made to move to the front of the crowd, though they obviously did not want to watch. Armando was addressed only as the accused, not by his name, as if he were not a person. I could barely hear the voices of the judges but when they spoke loudly it was audible from my position. He was asked whether he considered himself to be guilty of the crime of which he had been charged. I couldn't hear his response but it was clear that he had said that he was not. The man to the left of Susana was a short, round man who wore thick rimmed glasses. He shouted out, in much more of a statement than a question, that the accused did indeed participate in the exploitative market economy. The accused refused to become self sufficient as Presidente Gonzalo had shown was the true path. Then the man asked him whether it was true or not that Armando took trips to Lima in order to sell the sweat of his family to the upper class. Armando tried to reply that he had to sell ponchos in order to support his family, but he was swiftly cut off by the man on the right of Susana. This one, the lieutenant who had spoken earlier, was much taller and thinner, with a long scar along the left side of his face just above his beard. He began to talk about what a capitalist the accused was to be living off of the money of the oppressors of society. The ponchos he took to the city ended up in the stores of Europe and America, not on the backs of fellow peasants. Armando stood by tacitly. To interject or interrupt would invoke the wrath of the terrorists. I didn't hear all that the man with the scar said because I had to shift my position and I had to focus all of my attention on not making any noise.

When I refocused on the plaza, Armando was saying that he had no choice but to travel to Lima. There was little market for his products in the surrounding areas. The man with glasses said that where he sold his products was not the issue. He was abandoning the needs of the other villagers who deserved more than others far away to wear the ponchos of the accused. I knew that the *Sendero Luminoso* was committed to eliminating internal as well as external trade. In their system, people like Armando would be producing their products for the use of their community and no one else.

Armando decided to take a more active approach to his 'defense.' He asked the terrorists how it was that they were able to purchase weapons and arms without trade. They were violating their own standard. The answer of the man with the scar was that on the road to a new society, the revolutionaries had to make exceptions at times. They were committed to the cause of Presidente Gonzalo and would not seek other paths. The villagers had not proven their devotion and must show it by not contributing to the abusive effects of capitalism.

Armando tried calmly to demonstrate that without trade the village of Picaflor could not have access to things like food and books that could not be produced locally. The man with glasses exploded saying that reading was unnecessary. It was the tool of the government to coerce the peasants. Everything people need to know can be told to them. Armando seemed about to rebut again when Susana stood up out of her chair. She pointed her finger at Armando and yelled out that he was not addressing the true causes of his deception. She asked him whether or not he had formerly been a recruit of the party. He replied that he had explored the possibility of joining but had made no commitment. I could see now that there wasn't even going



to be the pretext of a trial based on facts. The motive was revenge pure and simple, based on ideology. The *Sendero Luminoso* felt betrayed by Armando and felt the need to reassert their dominance over him.

Fortunately for Armando, he had studied somewhat the writings of Presidente Gonzalo. He was able to counteract their charges with specific contradictions. That's because much of the *Sendero Luminoso* itself is a contradiction. The population was expected to be self-sufficient while the *Senderistas* themselves depended on pillaging villages and selling drugs to support themselves. They held that communism was to be established through stages yet they have no plans for an interim stage before a direct plunge to a New Republic. They wanted a joint dictatorship of workers and peasants but would retain central control of the government. Armando attempted to use all of this to support his arguments. He pointed out that his actions could be interpreted as a stage of communism where the village was preparing itself for self-sufficiency. He claimed that according to their vision of a collectivist system he should be judged not by the *Senderistas* but by fellow villagers. The *Sendero Luminoso* was establishing jurisdiction over areas that they claimed should not be controlled. Many of Armando's fellow villagers were swayed by his arguments. They began to shake their fists or their heads but they were prevented from taking action by the armed guards.

Finally Susana shouted out that the accused was in fact a traitor because he refused to take up arms against the government. She was yelling near the top of her lungs but still felt it necessary to stand up on top of the table. She began to tell the forcibly assembled villagers how their histories have long been shaped by violence. The Inca society was made prosperous through violent repression of opposition. The Spaniards came and dominated the Inca through violence. Peru achieved independence through violent

revolution. Peru has had to struggle through its whole existence through the mechanism of violence. Yet never had significant change been brought about. (What do you call the virtual eradication of an entire race then?) Susana went on to say that armed struggle is a universal fact that cannot be avoided, cannot be run away from. It is the duty of society to take up arms and help to guarantee the inception of communism. She stopped screaming and looked down from atop the table at Armando. She told him that he knew of the call to arms by Presidente Gonzalo. He had heard that call and failed to heed it. This made him a traitor to the cause of revolution. With that Susana turned and sat down, obviously pleased with her performance and convinced of her own argument.

Armando, who had been standing with his arms down at his sides, put them out in front of him with his palms turned upwards. He brought up the words of Presidente Gonzalo since his capture by Peruvian authorities in the early 1990's. He pointed out that Abimael Guzmán, the real name of Presidente Gonzalo had not previously been used, had retracted his call to arms and instead called for peaceful political participation. He gesticulated forward towards Susana and the two men with his hands. He said that it was they who were disobeying the words of their leader. They were following a path not ordained by the sword of Marxism but rather a revisionist path.

The word 'revisionist' struck a discordant note with the *Senderistas*. They hated with a passion what they considered to be revisionist communism, like Kruschev's Soviet Union or post-Maoist China. To be called revisionists implied that they had fallen from the grace of true communism as others had done. This incited a passion in Susana. She leaped out of her seat and around the table to face Armando directly. She shouted that Presidente Gonzalo had been duped by the authorities. Only his

words while he was among his own truly reflected the thought of Gonzalo. The true path was pre-ordained, it could not be altered. And the accused was standing in the way.

As Susana turned to sit down, Armando said that it was she who was the traitor— not to the *Sendero Luminoso* but to her true people, the ancestors of the Inca. Susana swiveled back around and slapped Armando across the face with a gloved hand and spat on the ground near his shoes. This was no lady that I saw in front of me and I wondered if she ever had been. She had been transformed into an animal, whether by the *Sendero Luminoso* or drugs I don't know. As she turned again to return to her seat Armando shouted after her again. He told her that she had originally promised to serve her people at the university. She had wanted to become a social worker. Now she was scaring them, and killing them. He asked her if she had forgotten what it meant to truly serve the cause of the peasant, not just her own fantasy; her fantasy that there was a simple solution to the problems of Peru. Susana gave no indication that she was listening to Armando and she indicated that the man with glasses and the one with the scar should follow her into the church.

The farcical trial having advanced to deliberations, Armando's mother was able to run out to her son and throw her arms around him. Seeing that the guards were allowing this, his sisters also went over to hug him. He reciprocated but his eyes never wavered. He continued to look straight ahead at the crowd and at the guards. If I were in Armando's position, I would have been begging for the villagers to try to overpower the guards and save me. But I think that Armando's stare was a warning to the crowd not to try any such thing. The guards were trained, hardened killers and not easily

overcome. There would just be useless bloodshed, and this Armando would not tolerate.

After a while, at his mother's insistence, Armando and his sisters turned to face the church, knelt to the ground, and began to pray. After what seemed like an interminable wait (probably around five minutes), the door of the church swung open and out walked the three terrorists who were to decide Armando's fate. Armando sent his family back to the crowd and turned to face his accusers. The three moved back to their chairs but did not sit down. It was Susana who spoke. She told the crowd that as true revolutionaries and protectors of the vision of Presidente Gonzalo, they were authorized to put to death the accused for the crime of treason. I know that Armando knew that this was going to be the unavoidable result, but his body still shook as his former classmate, and I think former friend, pronounced the sentence.

The lieutenant, the man with the scar on his cheek, seemed eager to be the executioner. He stood up and grabbed a pistol out of his belt and walked around to the other side of the table. He pushed down hard on Armando's broad shoulder to try to force him to the ground but Armando would not be moved. He walked slowly and non-threateningly over to the table where Susana was seated. The man with the scar rushed to stop Armando with his gun pointed directly at Armando's head but Susana held up her hand to indicate that he allow Armando to approach. Armando put his hands palm down on the table and leant over it to whisper something into Susana's ear. He spoke to her for no more than a minute and she said nothing in response, but when he had finished Susana stood up and directed her lieutenant to let Armando address the crowd. Susana then got up from her seat and walked alone down one of the darkened streets towards the outskirts of town.

Armando turned to the crowd. At first his eyes were downcast like he was in deep thought but he slowly raised his head up until he was staring directly at the villagers. As he addressed the crowd he made no gestures with his hands, which he kept stiffly at his side. Instead, though I couldn't see it from my position, Armando used his piercing gaze as his sole expression of body language. He called aloud for the crowd to come closer to him. Then he asked them rhetorically what they saw. Armando had been thinking all the time that his family was praying, I believe, about what he wanted the villagers to see when they looked at him. He told them, and I remember his words exactly, "I am Amaru, the last Inca sovereign, beheaded by the Spaniards, and whose only crime was in trying to help his people out from under the thumb of tyranny. I am Atahualpa, imprisoned for a supposed sacrilege and executed on the orders of the same invaders. I am José Gabriel Condorcanqui, leader of the last Inca uprising, who was tortured and executed by those who wished to silence him. I am the embodiment of them and of all other martyrs who lived on and died for this soil."

He told the villagers that like those that have preceded him, his death must have meaning. The people of Picaflor must not give up the ways and the land of their ancestors. Never must their spirit be conquered, the spirit of Inti and Atahualpa and Amaru. They have never been able to have a history. They have only been able to survive as myth. Too many outsiders have conspired to wipe them off of the earth yet they have persevered, through this myth. Like the legends of Manco Capac and the hummingbird of Picaflor, there is comfort and consistency in a history, whether fact or fable. If that is how it must be, then he, too, must become a part of the myth.

I knew what Armando was doing, just as he did. He was turning himself into a modern Tupac Amaru. And like Tupac Amaru, who was

unexpectedly called upon to rule the Inca dynasty in its waning days, Armando was called upon unexpectedly to save his village. And like Amaru, who made a speech before he was executed in the plaza of Cuzco by the Spanish, in the tiny plaza of Picaflor, Armando was making his final appeal to his people. I feel a little selfish now but I began to think of myself just then. I didn't know if I could stay any longer in Peru. I felt the need to run back, to be away from this complicated mess. But then I made contact with Armando's eyes. I am sure that he looked up at me, though only for a brief moment, as if to tell me both that he knew I had been there all along and that he included me as one of his people. I knew then that in many ways I would never leave Picaflor. Whether I returned home or not, Picaflor would remain with me, as unshakable and inescapable as the Inca blood in my veins.

My mind raced over the things that Armando had told me while we walked together across his land. So much of it seemed inconsequential as I watched him below me playing out his final act. But I remembered especially the last lines of his favorite poem, a sad epitaph written of the conquest of his people. They are words that I know that I will never forget but come sadly as I write them now:

'Then all fell down: the birds in headlong droves,  
The realm divided, taken prisoner,  
The gold brought in to fill a room or more  
To please another one back home,  
Bird-self sent underground, bird-blood  
In harness, bird-blood taxed  
To pay an invalid thing, and stillness came-  
The thing they'd learned to dread, and reigned.' \*

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