In essence the U.S. government was nabbing small fry and letting the big boys go. Aside from disrupting the economy of Mexico, straining relations between the U.S. and Mexico, and hassling thousands of tourists, the intensive border checking did nothing but stop a few college kids and hippie longhairs with a few ounces of weed and some pills.

Operation Cooperation was greeted just as derisively by the pot industry, because it also was based on a fallacy—two fallacies, in fact: the first one being that the weed industry is a problem in Mexico.

Mexico has reasoned all along that marijuana is a gringo problem because it's the gringos who are after the weed. What the Mexican politicians fail to say, however, is that many of them are involved, either directly or indirectly, in the weed industry. Which brings up the second fallacy behind Operation Cooperation—that any money funneled into Mexico to fight the weed industry is actually going to find its way to the weedfields.

The U.S. government policy feeds large amounts of money and equipment into the hands of Mexican officials, acting on the assumption that there is a large, organized weed industry to suppress. If such an industry does exist, it exists with at least the tacit approval of many of the officials who are receiving the money, and who don't see weed as a Mexican problem. When one considers the methods the U.S. government chooses to deal with the drug problem in Mexico, one can only conclude that the American officials who jet back and forth between Washington and Mexico City for international drug conferences are completely ignorant of the realities of Mexico. No amount of money and equipment delivered into the hands of Mexican politicians to fight the "drug menace" is going to be effective as long as the people who receive the money and equipment are involved in that industry. True, the helicopters will scout the mountains and a few already-picked-over fields will be burnt, and a few squads of soldiers will be bivouacked in some obvious weed-growing areas, but most of the money and equipment sent into Mexico will end up in the pockets of generals and politicians, governors and businessmen whose sole operating policy has always been *take care of me first.*

The only really effective club the U.S. government holds over the Mexican government to curb the flow of illegal drugs is the threat of curtailing the tourist industry. The U.S. government can say to Mexico, stop the drug traffic in Mexico or we'll put sanctions on U.S. citizens visiting your country. Even that threat is hollow, though, for the tourist industry is controlled almost entirely by Americans. The planes that fly gringos down are American, the hotels in which they stay are American, and most of the stuff they buy is directly or indirectly controlled by Americans. Mexicans know their economy enriches already rich gringos, and helps Mexico very little. In the long run the tourist industry that so many Mexican officials gloat over actually hurts Mexico's economy; it takes young men and women who might become teachers and turns them into waiters—because waiters make much more money than teachers. It also deprives campesinos of their land, and any reason for working that land because the big gringo outfits, in consort with a few rich Mexicans, buy up all the land for their hotels. So to curb the tourist industry is a move that will end up hurting gringo businessmen more than it will Mexico. When Operation Intercept was initiated the gringos along the border screamed the loudest. The unholy yell put up by the Mexican government was on account of all the rich Mexicans who are partners with gringos in the big hotels and businesses that line the border and inundate the resort areas of Mexico.

The initial derisiveness expressed toward Operation Cooperation didn't last. There were enough dedicated politicians and government officials to cause serious disruptions in the weed trade. Not that Operation Cooperation has stopped the traffic. No government operation will do that, but it did create new problems.

Because of Operation Cooperation Mexican entrepreneurs have had to change their *modus operandi.* Smugglers used to go directly to warehouses to choose their weed; now loads were suddenly being stalled in the mountains, sometimes for weeks, while the transporters waited for soldiers to leave the area. Also, not only were soldiers guarding the trails leading out of the mountains, they were also being dispatched into the mountains themselves, searching out fields and

burning them. Increasing numbers of shootouts involving marijuanos and soldiers were occurring, shootouts that brought tremendous heat down all over the areas in which they occurred. When marijuanos shot down helicopters, as they sometimes did, large platoons of soldiers were immediately dispatched into the area and bivouacked there, sometimes for months at a time. Farmers refused to move their weed out of the mountains unless paid in advance, and once they did agree to move a load all responsibility for the journey was placed on the purchasers. Many loads that were moved prematurely fell, victim of either the soldiers, or a new hazard of the industry, *bandidos,* who roamed the mountains in search of marijuana caravans.

On the Mexican roads smugglers ran into additional problems; unexpected roadblocks manned by new people, and troops who had not been paid off. Even the *mordida* was no longer a sure thing along the road. Luis Echeverria, who was elected President of the republic in 1970, instigated a new policy of punishing bribe takers, a policy that, while far from completely effective, did instill a certain sense of patriotism in many of the younger officials. No longer could a smuggler drive down the road with the assurance that even if he were stopped a simple payoff would get him through.

Many of the changes wrought by the cooperation between the Mexican and American governments made the marijuana industry stronger, however. Whereas before it had been an industry composed of many separate operators, including innumerable fly-by-night newcomers, now the amateurs were sifted out. For the professional smugglers, it was a simple matter of survival—organize and help one another, as the Mexican and American governments were doing, or perish. And the organization was not limited to smugglers alone; it also involved dealers and entrepreneurs and eventually the farmers themselves.

The structure and organization of the weed industry has evolved as the industry itself has, and can be broken down into definite links that form a chain leading from the mountains of Mexico to the streets of every city in the U.S. Starting with the farmer who grows the stuff, weed goes through the hands of the entrepreneur, the Mexican connection, or dealer, the gringo smuggler, the buyer, or dealer, the middleman, and finally the user. Often one or two links in the chain will perform more than one function, as some entrepreneurs will act as dealers and some dealers will also be smugglers.

When Jesse and I started out, we were not only smugglers but also dealers and middlemen. Like all amateurs, our first few runs were accomplished on the street, utilizing the equivalent of the Mexican middleman. We didn't have to score cold like a lot of amateurs, but we did buy our first few loads from Mexicans who were in the same position on their side of the border as we as smugglers were on ours. After a few trips though, Jesse and I wanted more weed than our street connection could handle, so we moved up the chain and came into contact with a dealer. Mexican dealers can provide more than just a few kilos and therefore most gringo smugglers never progress past the dealer link in the chain. However, since our dealer was also an entrepreneur, that is, a dealer who bought direct from the farmers in the mountains, we were able to progress up two and eventually three links in the chain simply by being in contact with him. As the weed industry matured and more people got involved, it became dangerous to perform more than one function. The links then separated, putting as much space as possible between them. By the late sixties almost every professional gringo smuggling operation was manned by people who performed a specific function within the organization, one man copping the weed, a second man smuggling it, a third man dealing it out to middlemen who in turn peddled it to the actual users. In Mexico the industry structured itself around the entrepreneur, the individual most responsible for the organization of the weed trade on the Mexican side of the border.

"Entrepreneur" describes the top-echelon weed dealer in Mexico. He can also be called *jefe, contrador, fuerto,* or any other term that implies top man. Entrepreneur means a little more than just top man, however, it implies a certain expertise and organization that goes beyond just being a big dealer. Many big dealers prefer only to be middlemen. Some middlemen are actually bigger dealers than many entrepreneurs, but the one thing their organization doesn't have is

control in the mountains, a necessity in order to be an entrepreneur. Entrepreneur means a big dealer who has farmers growing for him in the mountains. Many entrepreneurs supply their growers with money and supplies during the off season to keep them going; they also contract for most of the grass grown in one particular area or by one group of farmers.

The entrepreneur acts as intermediary between the farmers who grow the weed and the gringos who buy it. No industry can succeed without this connnection. In the early days it was often difficult for farmers to link up with buyers. Every connection was haphazard, consequently the farmers planted only as much weed as they thought they could get rid of that season. When the weed revolution occurred and the demand shot sky high, often there just wasn't enough weed around to satisfy the demand. During these early days dealers perspicacious enough to recognize what was happening went into the mountains and to the growers, often hiring farmers who had never grown grass before to cultivate it on an organized basis. Many of these first marijuana entrepreneurs ended up controlling the finest grass-producing areas of Mexico. Between the birth of the weed revolution and the implementation of Operation Cooperation, a period when a lot of big bread was made in the industry, these powerful entrepreneurs consolidated many of their holdings, creating channels of delivery and a series of connections that funneled hundreds of tons of marijuana into the United States. When the heat came down, this network was disturbed, and many entrepreneurs and smugglers were forced out by a series of busts and accidents. The remaining ones linked up in a cooperative effort that forms the basis for the industry today.

Since Operation Cooperation, marijuanos have found that they could no longer afford to operate independently, so they began to assist one another with information, equipment, men, dope even, especially if one dealer who was short needed some to make up a load. One practical way this cooperation began manifesting itself was in the changing attitudes on the part of entrepreneurs toward the gringo smugglers. Before Operation Cooperation, an entrepreneur would

make his delivery, grab his money, and split, leaving the gringo to face the road alone. Because Operation Cooperation resulted in so many smugglers falling even before they reached the border, however, and the entrepreneurs began losing customers, they started taking a more active interest in the smuggling operation as a whole. No longer was a gringo abandoned on the highway with his load; the man who sold him his weed assisted him to the border, and in some cases even got his load across for him. Many entrepreneurs entered into partnerships with gringo smugglers, providing them with credit for large amounts of weed; in this way they are paid closer to retail prices for their kilos instead of the wholesale prices they charge when buyers pay cash.

The hierarchy of entrepreneurs which operates on a more or less regular basis in Mexico is fluid, with different echelons of dealers dealing with one another at some time or other. The whole industry, while élitist and controlled in the higher echelons, among the government officials, diplomats, and wealthy businessmen who deal in dope to make their real money, is still open and responsive to novice experimenters and even part-time dealers in its middle and lower echelons. Through necessity the industry has a self-governing network of information and communcation, developed so that entrepreneurs on all levels can keep abreast of who's buying what, how much, and where it is going. Because of the nature of the organization, and the fact that new blood is constantly entering and dropping out, the industry is almost impossible to control in any Mafia sense. It is made up of individuals and small organizations that operate together and separately, depending on the circumstances, which explains why the industry can absorb so many busts and still keep on functioning.

The high-level figures who take over a complete segment of dope traffic, controlling distribution and supply and prices, operate primarily in the heroin/cocaine field. They avoid marijuana because of its bulk, which makes it difficult to smuggle in any great quantity, and because of its profit level, which is relatively small compared to hard drugs. When a smuggler can turn ten kilos of heroin into the same street profit that 500 kilos of marijuana will bring, why bother with marijuana? Heroin and cocaine are more easily controlled be-

cause there is less of it around and supply is restricted. Marijuana grows everywhere, and anyone with a little cash and a connection can buy and peddle his share.

As for those involved in marijuana entrepreneurship in Mexico, they fall into every category, from powerful businessmen to politicians to campesinos who have made it big. For many years one of the biggest weed dealers in Mexico was governor of a state. As far as I know he is still active in the industry, along with his extensive family and connections. Most of those involved in the weed industry are not politicians, though. Many entrepreneurs are successful businessmen who started out in dope and have financed a legitimate business behind whose façade they operate. The financial character of free enterprise in Mexico is somewhat bizarre, by American standards. The country operates almost solely on foreign investments and investments on the part of the government. Mexicans who have money—and when a Mexican is rich, he is usually very rich—are reluctant to invest in their own country. Most of them invest it in foreign banks, although this habit has changed somewhat in the last decade. Middle- and lower-class Mexicans who have nothing to invest must be consummate hustlers to survive in a society that pays its minor officials a weekly wage about equivalent to that paid an American laborer for a day. In Guadalajara a traffic cop, paid only about twenty pesos per day, is expected to supplement his salary by stopping traffic violators and biting them on the spot. Certain corners in each city are awarded to various cops by their value, such and such a corner worth 500 pesos a day, etc. The cop is expected to bite enough traffic violators to produce the estimated sum, and part of it goes to the captain. Without this everyday practice the traffic cop would not be able to live. The consequences of this practice are that on every street corner you have deals, in marijuana, appliances, typewriters, cars, or whatever. I went to a dentist once who asked me after ten minutes in his chair if I was interested in buying some marijuana. When I said no, he told me he also dealt in appliances, guns, amphetamine, and hot cars. The hustler who is able to acquire a car and turn it into a taxicab is well on his way to becoming a minor entrepreneur with his own business. Lesser

officials with access to forms, licenses, stamps, and documents can extend their favors, the basics of success in Mexico. With these tools they can establish stakes and influence with which they can branch off into other enterprises. It is common knowledge that the lucrative posts along the border are changed regularly so that every official has his chance to make some money, and also to keep any one official from growing too rich and powerful. Inevitably in his rise to stature and position, the Mexican bureaucrat, be he policeman, agent, border guard, or whatever, gets involved in dope. This is because dope is so much a part of Mexico, there is so much money in it, and the biggest customer lies right across the border.

I was exhausted as I lay down on the bed. Outside my window I could hear the sounds of the city. Beyond the traffic noises the sea beat up against the *malecón*. Jesse and I were going to wait until after dark before venturing out. We knew that we would look suspicious to a lot of idle Mexicans the minute we set foot on the street. Neither of us dug the realities of the street situation in Mazatlan, but since we were in the weed trade we had to face them. As I listened to the sea, I thought of all the changes I had gone through since my first trip to Mexico, changes that manifested themselves in the way I approached the country, the streets, and the people. Mexico was no longer the carefree land it had once been for me; now every move I made was thought out in advance, and people on the streets were no longer just people, but potential finks and informers, police and dealers and coconspirators. Before getting involved in weed I roamed all over Mexico at will, completely oblivious to the possible ramifications of my presence. Nowadays Jesse and I avoided many areas of Mexico, and visited others only at night. We never entered strange towns before finding out something about them; if they were even remotely known for handling, storing, growing, or moving weed, we avoided them unless specific business took us there. We did not establish this habit out of any arbitrariness but on the recommendation of Mexican entrepreneurs who knew the danger to strange gringos who snooped around their territories.

Many gringo smugglers ignore this basic rule, which suggests that Jesse and I display an unrealistic paranoia, considering the setting in rural Mexico. One of the weaknesses of many gringos in Mexico, however, is an assumption that most Mexicans are rather dumb, and don't fully realize what's going on. This has often proved a fatal misconception.

There is no one more closed, taciturn, lonely, and sorrowful than the Mexican—and he is also friendly, charming, quick, and deadly. The Mexican never exposes himself; he keeps locked within all secrets of the self. He won't be ridiculed. It is unmanly to need, therefore stoicism is manly. The Mexican uses language as a weapon; words can wound him—the wrong words can kill. Attitudes and mores are important to the Mexican; they are foundations upon which he has established himself. When changes occur he is unsure of himself and therefore dangerous. The Mexican personality is complex, alert, and suspicious, and while a gringo may think he is moving about the country completely unnoticed, in actual fact a hundred eyes are on him, casually watching, noting his mannerisims, eyeing the stranger simply because he's a stranger. This is not to imply that Mexico is a country of spies, far from it. It is simply to say that out of a natural inquisitiveness and curiosity, little gets by unseen in rural Mexico.

For this reason, Jesse and I adopted another rule while on a smuggling expedition in Mexico. We never carried a stash or smoked any weed while we were getting a scene together. Many smugglers stay stoned whenever they're not out actually scoring, and many are stoned even while scoring. This is stupid, not because I think a person can't operate while stoned on weed, but because most of the fuckups that occur in any weed-smuggling operation are usually attributable to small things like ounces left on dressers where maids can see them, or the smell of marijuana smoke reported to the heat. Many runs have been aborted because the big-time dudes running them couldn't wait until they got their shit together before lighting up.

Whenever Jesse and I scored it was important for both of us to have clear, unstoned heads so that we could properly sample the marijuana being offered. Our method was to take one good toke off *one* joint; if

that didn't get us off fairly well the grass wasn't worth buying. Many times I've seen buyers come into warehouses so stoned they couldn't tell righteous shit from cow manure. The Mexican entrepreneur spreads his samples out and the gringo heavyweights light up and nod conspiratorially at one another and agree that they're really smoking loady stuff. When they get their shit back to the States nobody but squares in the avenues will buy it because it's Culiacan garbage, so bad that some dudes have even smuggled it back *into* Mexico so they wouldn't have to look at it.

One of the reasons Jesse and I were so anxious to get into the mountains was so we could find and record the cultivation of really righteous shit. We weren't interested in Culiacan garbage or any run-of-the-mill weed. We wanted to find the *primo* that grew on the slopes of the west-coast range in the state of Guerrero. We knew it was up there. As far as I knew, no other gringo had ever visited the mountains where the rancheros were located, especially on a mission such as ours. A few years previously, Luis had invited me to go into the Sierras with him, but that had been a spur-of-the-moment invitation and involved nothing more than accompanying him and his men on a negotiating run. I had declined because I was due back in the States in a few days, and I had regretted my decision ever since. When Jesse got out of the shower I expressed my enthusiasm at the prospect before us. "I can't wait to get up into the Sierras," I said.

"Well, we'll see what happens when I talk to Luis. I'm going to call him this evening."

"He seemed pretty confident in his letter. Do you think we'll have any problems?"

"I don't know. I didn't tell him about taking pictures. That might cause us some problems."

"How are you going to broach the subject?"

"I don't know. We'll just have to take things as they come. The important thing is to get up into the mountains, then worry about the cameras."

I lay on my bed thinking of the mountains. Unlike the United States, which has few areas left that aren't accessible by automobile,

Mexico is dominated by Sierras that in many places are completely inaccessible except by mule or helicopter. The people who live in the mountains seldom leave them. They are mountain people, alone, aloof, remote, cut off from the rest of Mexico by time and distance and the canyons and valleys where they were born. It is in such inaccessible valleys and canyons that marijuana is grown. The people who grow it are suspicious, silent, unused to visitors. They are also wary of any authority, especially as it manifests itself in Mexico in the dull-green uniform of the Federales.

Looking back, I realize that I imagined (rather naïvely, as it turned out) that our trip into the Sierras would be a gentleman's camping trip, a short jaunt on horse and muleback up into the mountains so Jesse and I could survey the scene and prepare it for Gene to come down later and take pictures. What eventually happened was far from my preconceived scenario. I was filled with boundless gringo enthusiasm, however, and the realities of Mexico do not announce themselves on public bulletin boards. What I was to learn is that Mexico speaks through her silences, and the silence of the mountains is a language one can understand only by going there.

That evening Jesse and I left our hotel room. While Jesse called Luis, I walked along the *malecón.* From one end to the other it was crowded with promenaders, girls and guys, arm in arm. There were a number of gringos strolling along the sea's edge. Mazatlan looked like a suburb of Newport Beach. After completing a circuit of the *malecón* I entered a restaurant to meet Jesse. "How'd it go?" I said.

Jesse shrugged. "We've got problems. Luis can't take us into the Sierras."

I was dumbfounded. "What happened?"

"Do you remember Nacho?"

I nodded. Nacho was one of Luis's men. I had met him three years before. He was a likable dude, immense, happy-go-lucky. He controlled Luis's operations in the mountains.

"He was ambushed last week in Rosa Leon. Federales are bivouacked in the area. No one can go near the place until the heat dies down."

"Jesus," I said. "How'd it happen?"

"No one knows. All they know is that Nacho and two other campesinos and four soldiers are dead. The heat's all over the place."

"Is Luis involved?"

"Only peripherally. It was his stuff being moved but he's not giving out any details. All he'll say is that we can't go near the place."

"What are we going to do?"

"Luis is going to introduce me to a dude who has some ranchos in Jalisco. We'll see him tomorrow."

Jesse seemed undisturbed. I was concerned how this bad news was going to affect our trip. Whenever a shooting occurred that involved soldiers, troops were immediately moved into the area to investigate and to quell any further disturbances. Often a number of areas within a state will be shut down, areas that are not necessarily the scene of the shooting but are shut down anyway just so the heat can die down. Luis's operation would probably come to a complete standstill for three or four months—or until Luis thought it okay to resume. The problem with a shooting is that the disturbance doesn't stop in the mountains. Troops would visit Nacho's home and the homes of his friends. Some of Nacho's friends would be as upset by his death as the soldiers were by the death of their friends. It wasn't uncommon for a disturbance to snowball, leaving many campesinos and soldiers dead before it ended. To prevent just such a thing, Luis would move all his men out of the state, or send them underground. When the soldiers showed up at the homes of the marijuanos, all they would find would be the women—and Mexican women are as silent as the mountains themselves.

Jesse wasn't particularly worried about our stroke of bad luck, nor was I for that matter. We both understood the nature of the weed business. The hangups and incidents and aborted beginnings are as much a part of the industry as the weed itself.

Consider: When Jesse and I entered Mexico, it was as reasonably knowledgeable operators. We knew all the names, could go in a minute to an entrepreneur and negotiate for a ton of grass to be delivered in Tucson, Arizona, for $30 a kilo, one ton minimum, $30,000 cash on the car hood. Or we could pick up our load in a

cornfield on the outskirts of Chilpancingo for $20,000 and worry about the border later. Jesse and I had negotiated many cornfield rendezvous and weigh-ins surrounded by M-16–carrying campesinos, our own .38-Supers lugging heavily in our belts, everyone smiling but cautious, sharing tequila from the bottle—as necessary to any negotiation as the money itself; then paying off, slowly counting the bills, the mad, dark eyes of the Indios reflecting a mountain sadness only Toltecs understand.

Jesse and I did not want a ton of marijuana delivered in Tucson or in a cornfield outside of Chilpancingo, however. We wanted to go into the mountains and see the grass in the fields, touch each leaf with our own hands, and then have Gene come up and take pictures for *Life.* Try to explain that to the Indios. Try even to explain it to a sophisticated entrepreneur like Luis, whose daily bread comes from plane flights to the fields carrying seeds and fertilizer to the farmers and back with sixty-kilo sacks of marijuana. Especially try to explain the camera, whose cyclopean eye looms more ominous to marijuanos than the muzzle of a Mauser.

Luis, our long-time associate, could not understand our mission. "You want mota?" he asked. "How much, *mano?* I'll deliver it for you. . . ."

"We want to go into the mountains, Luis, we want to see it growing, take pictures. . . ."

"Ay, mano . . . los Indios . . . son locos!"

We were crazy too, because for the next six weeks Jesse and I roamed all over Mexico searching for the connection who could and would take us into the mountains. Despite our close association with Luis, and others like him in the business, we found that a cactus curtain had been drawn across the mountains that was to prove almost impenetrable.

A Mexican will never refuse a stranger advice and directions. Stop a Mexican on the road and ask for instructions to find a particular place and you will be given them fulsomely—even though your informant has never heard of the place. To the Mexican it is discourteous not to know, so he tells even when he doesn't know. It is an infuriating

experience to be guided down a dozen different false roads.

Such was the case with Luis. After he had expended all his possibilities, introduced us to all of his friends who might possibly help, all to no avail, still he led us on. He was determined until the last to lead us into the mountains. Jesse and I were helpless victims of Luis's courtesy. After seeking his aid it would have been discourteous to insult him by implying that he wasn't helping us. So for three weeks we blasted around a crazy Mexican wagon wheel, Mazatlan being the hub and the roads to a hundred small villages throughout Mexico the spokes that we thundered to and fro on.

No experience on this earth is quite like a Mexican auto ride. Like most entrepreneurs, Luis's life-long ambition had been to own *un Galaxie,* as they say in Mexico, that is, a Ford Galaxie especially equipped with heavy-duty springs and General Popo tires that are fit to do battle with the roads. Luis owned his Galaxie, and when he came by our motel to drive us out into the campos, both Jesse and I gaped in amazement. We were going fifty kilometers into the country where roads are a thing of the imagination, and his Galaxie was packed full of campesinos, crazy Mexicans waving tequila bottles and wearing sombreros as big as bullrings.

Luis threw open the door of his car and beckoned us in. "Get in, hombres! *¡Ándale!*" he cried. "There's no room, Luis, it's packed," I said. "*¡Ay, mano, mira!* Plenty of room!" He pushed a campesino and made room on the seat for a midget. Jesse and I shrugged. "Chuy! Ponce! Get out!" Luis shouted to two of his men. They fell out of the automobile. "Now, compañeros, there's plenty of room, get in!" Jesse and I got in. "*¡Ándale, cabrónes!*" Luis shouted to Chuy and Ponce. The two piled in on top of us and off we shot.

Three weeks after commencing our search with Luis, we still hadn't found the connection who could take us into the Sierras. We sat down in a café one morning to discuss the matter. "There is one further possibility," Luis said. "I know of one man, unfortunately he doesn't live here, who might be willing to take you into the mountains."

"Where does he live, Luis?" Jesse asked. Luis was silent. He sat for some time and ordered another beer before answering. "This man is

an old friend of mine and he owes me a favor. If you like I will write him a letter."

"Where does he live?" Jesse asked again.

Luis waved his hand. "South. In the mountains. Guerrero."

Jesse and I looked at one another. Guerrero was where we both wanted to go, but dared not hope to get there. The state was the wildest in Mexico, dangerous, rife with bandits and Federales and marijuanos. "Write your friend a letter," I said. "If we have to go to Guerrero, we'll go."

Although we were tremendously excited about the possibility of going to Guerrero, Jesse and I still had to consider alternative places in case Luis's letter led us to another blank wall. At one point we considered returning north, to Tijuana, and looking up Roberto and Juan Hernandez, whom Jesse had known from his prison days.

Los Hermanos, or The Brothers, are big-time dope dealers in Mexico, especially along the border. Getting involved with them, however, had its drawbacks. The advantages were obvious: immediate access to almost any connection in the industry. Both Jesse and I knew, however, that that kind of carte blanche treatment tended to have its drawbacks. If we utilized Los Hermanos to get into the mountains, we knew we'd be marked in a peculiar way, cast as part of an organization that, despite its power, perhaps even because of it, would taint our mission, color it in such a way that we would find confining and eventually regret. I felt that if we utilized The Brothers, not only would the organization expect more from us than we were prepared to offer but also we would come on with credentials that in the long run we couldn't back up. I did not want to get involved with The Brothers. I felt that even if we had to blunder through Mexico for another three months looking for our own connection, it was better than being taken under the wing of a heavy syndicate dope operation whose influences and power might eventually cause us more grief than benefits. Plus both Jesse and I knew that The Man was as familiar with The Brothers' operations as we were, and the possibility of there being an undercover narc in the organization was more real than we wanted. Once before when Jesse and I had had difficulties on a run we had

linked up with an organization that came with heavy credentials and seemed to have all their shit together—big-time boats and lots of money and electronic communications equipment, plus a crew of dedicated and experienced dope smugglers—and when the whole number came down we found out that we had loaded a ton of weed on a boat crewed by an undercover narcotics agent. Fortunately for both me and Jesse, we were far enough removed from the actual action on the beach that we couldn't be incriminated, although we did lose a ton of weed and $35,000.

Despite the risks, however, we had to discuss the possibility of utilizing The Brothers, simply because we couldn't afford to ignore any possibility. "We could make it back to Tijuana in two days and probably save ourselves a lot of time in the long run," Jesse said.

"Man, I don't like Tijuana. I get the creeps every time I pass through that place."

Jesse shrugged. "We're not getting damn far with Luis. Maybe his letter will work, maybe it won't. We may have to go back."

"Who's to say we'll be able to find The Brothers? Shit, they may be in Mexico City for all we know. I don't think we should go back."

Jesse and I were agreed on one thing. Neither of us dug Tijuana. There's an aura of evil over TJ, a malignancy that seems to cover the place like poison gas. Crossing the border from the U.S. into Tijuana is like stepping into a foul-smelling sewer which both countries are contaminating, and every time I stand on the streets I feel like a maggot scurrying along with a hundred thousand other maggots, each of us after our own little piece of shit. And it's not that the town is bad, it's just that a certain lurking evil seems to prevail there because of its juxtaposition with the United States. Every time I approach Tijuana a chill goes through me; the place is hustle city, and everyone there is on one scam or another, they have to be in order to survive.

Making it across the border to work in the U.S. is the goal for many Mexicans, and a lot of U.S. Immigration officers are willing to help them—for a price. Mexican women are considered trash by most of the thin-lipped, hard-edged cowboy types who seem to predominate in the Immigration Service, and a little present to the boys on the

border is often the price for a green card that enables a woman to work in the U.S. I've been told hundreds of tales of Mexican women being raped, manhandled, or molested in the course of crossing the border to work. Often the Mexican women who have legitimate green cards are obliged to suffer humiliating skin searches every time they cross. In fact, one of the reasons why so many gringo tourists are now suffering indignities and hardships at the hands of Mexican officials within Mexico is because of the treatment accorded so many Mexicans at the U.S. border.*

However, the hustles and scams along the border don't bother me as much as the genuine desperation of so many of the people in Tijuana and other border towns, campesinos and country people by the thousands who have hitchhiked and bummed their way up through Mexico from Central and South America, peons from Peru and Indians from Chiapas who've come to the border to grasp the chain-link fence that separates them from the United States, and to stare across the lush farmlands of *el otro lado,* the other side. The fact that the great majority of them make it no further than Tijuana, and then are left broke and homeless in a strange town, contributes to the sense of desperation prevalent in the place. It's not without reason that so many deals are constantly going down in TJ. Every scam on the board has a hustler playing it, including all the dope scams. In fact, the dope scams along the border are among the worst of the lot, and if I have one rule to impart to potential dopesters it's this: avoid Tijuana.

Because of our shared feeling about the border, Jesse and I preferred to deal in central and southern Mexico. Also, neither of us wanted to turn north from Mazatlan. Once on the road it's difficult reversing your forward rhythm.

That afternoon we went back to see Luis, and he wrote a letter of

*Recently the U.S. government has instigated an investigation of the Immigration Service and a number of officials have been arrested, not only for some of the offenses alleged above, but also for collusion in marijuana smuggling. The investigation touches only the tip of the iceberg, however, since it is patently obvious to anyone who has spent any time at all on the border that corruption and dishonesty are rampant, among even the highest officials.

introduction for us—and promised to write a letter to his friend in Guerrero that same day. Jesse and I had made up our minds. Even if the letters didn't work, we would go to Guerrero anyway. Neither of us knew what would happen, but the magic of the road and of Mexico lay before us.

The next day we checked out of our room and said goodbye to Luis and his family. As we drove out of Mazatlan, I peered across the mudflats to the shipping channel where three large freighters were tied up. It was on this same mudflat ten years before that I had had my Mexican vision, the one of the small girl and the tarpaper shack, the vultures and the bloated dog, and outside in the channel itself, the gleaming white yacht. There were fewer shacks on the mudflats now, uprooted perhaps, so the channel could be widened to make room for the big, oceangoing ships. A radio-station antenna rose out of the dike where before only gloom and detritus lay, and along the road leading out of town were bustling hovels and tin-roofed huts where Pepsi and beer, tortas and enchiladas were sold.

A few kilometers outside of town the road, which had been running east, turned right and headed south, straight into the heart of Mexico. As our car picked up momentum I looked up and saw a giant jet airliner gliding over the fields to the right of the road, drifting in for a landing at Mazatlan's new international airport. The old airport was right downtown alongside the *malecón,* and it had been abandoned because it was too small, and the new jets made too much noise and the big new hotels complained. The giant jets floated in over fields where beasts of burden trudged along with wooden plows piled high with stones to make them bite into the earth, and men walked along behind prodding the animals with sticks. I tried to imagine what the campesinos thought when they stood still to watch the large planes drift over them and roar to a stop beside their fields. To many of them flying must have been as strange and unknowable as it was to that tribe of aborigines in the mountains of New Guinea whose totems were monumental re-creations of the silver birds they saw winging thr[illegible]he air above them.

As we drove south down Highway 15 the heavy diesel rigs and automobiles thinned out and the late afternoon light began to soften. Huge cumulus clouds looking like the soft white underbellies of cows piled up on the horizon. Further away, toward the sea, the sky darkened and turned a deep majestic purple. In the far distance occasional lightning flashes lit up the sky. We passed cars and men on bicycles pedaling along the road, some of them holding flashlights against the dark. We were in the tropics, and even with the lightning flashing and the darkening sky it was still warm. Outside the car the air was heavy, though it began to cool as it got darker. When I could no longer see any details alongside the road my mind traveled back to all the times I had driven down this road, first in 1957 and every year since that time, sometimes four or five times a year. A lot of changes had occurred in Mexico, dramatic and overwhelming ones that I had not noticed, or had noticed and not paid attention to. Perhaps if my visits had been fewer I would have noticed the changes more, like one notices the differences in a friend after not seeing him for many years. As it was, I suddenly was struck by how different Mexico was now, beyond even the changes one would ordinarily expect. Where were the white-suited campesinos? old men with backs bent over carrying firewood, or leading burros loaded down? I knew they still existed somewhere off the road, in the small hovels and villages, back in the foothills, in the wide-open spaces. Along the highway America marched rapidly south with its jet planes and automobiles, its sharp-pointed shoes and plastic sports clothes, and somewhere out there the old men still carried their wood, bent over and alone, standing still among the mesquite and silence while the gringos and the rest of Mexico hurried by.

Later that evening we crossed the Rio San Pedro bridge. Jesse pulled the car to a stop in a rocky parking lot full of diesel buses, motors fuming and stinking. The bus passengers were streaming into a restaurant. Jesse and I pushed in after them.

The restaurant was a familiar one to us. Built alongside the river, it was a rest stop for all the trans-Mexico buses making the run up and down Highway 15. A road cut off Highway 15 on the south end

of the bridge, heading for Tuxpan, and around the intersection was spread an informal market, vegetable and fruit stands, small shops, and laden tables where local people from the small villages in the hills sold their poultry and grain, watermelons, etc. When the buses stopped, small children hawking goods ran up to the windows, holding their wares high so that the passengers not wishing to alight could poke out their pesos for morsels which they ate in their seats.

In 1958 I stood at this intersection waiting for a ride. A beautiful young gringa in a new Jaguar roared around the bend and spotted me, reversed her car, and picked me up and took me all the way into Mazatlan. On the way we stopped at a river and swam, dove nude under the water while Mexican ladies beat clothes out on the rocks and watched us from the other side. It was one of the really fine rides of my life. When we reached Mazatlan we walked on the beach and I showed her some of my favorite places, a small seafood restaurant, and a spot on the hill from where you can see all of Mazatlan spread out below you. We spent the night in a hotel. The next day she drove away in her Jaguar and I never saw her again.

The crossroads restaurant was a large one, divided into two dining areas, in front an enclosed one jammed full of chrome dinette tables and tin chairs, and in back an open area overlooking the river furnished with metal cerveza tables. The kitchen, in the back and open to view, was occupied by half a dozen laughing mammas slapping tortillas, stirring great bowls of soup, squeezing fresh oranges into juice.

Unlike restaurants in the U.S., most eating establishments in Mexico are social places, especially the less expensive ones along the roads and in the small towns and villages; they reek of communication and activity and life shared at the tables. Sit down at a roadside restaurant in Mexico and you are immediately deluged by children, peddlers, bystanders from other tables, waitresses, dogs, parrots, even goats; it's like a big family gathering for dinner, people table-hopping and yelling, in one corner a musical trio playing, a drunk *vaquero* reeling from wall to wall in another part of the room, bus drivers and passengers slapping and joking, dogs barking and chickens and cats mingling.

The typical gringo who sulks in a corner aloof from this activity is soon brought out of his lethargy by the warmth and friendliness emanating from every table.

For Jesse eating was a ritual and he enjoyed playing elaborate verbal games with the young señoritas waiting on the tables. He seemed to get a perverse delight out of kidding them, speaking in broken Spanish, pseudo-Tarascan, a broad Texas accent, or in just plain playing dumb.

"What would you like, *señores?*" a dark-skinned young lovely asked us when we sat down.

"What do you have?" Jesse asked.

"We have *mole, carne, frijoles, sopa, blanquillos,* whatever you'd like."

"*Blanquillos,* what are those?" Jesse asked.

The señorita did not want to say "*huevos,*" the Mexican word for eggs, because she knew she would be leaving herself open to laughter and jokes from the men in the room for whom *huevos* always means balls, specifically, the man's balls.

Huevos has such covert implications in Mexico, especially in rural parts of the country, that most women will not use the word at all. Instead they refer to eggs as *blanquillos,* or "little whities." If they mention the word *huevos* and there is a man present, more often than not he will make some sexual innuendo, as if it were his balls the women really wanted. Jesse knew this, and his little verbal trap was designed to get a few laughs.

"*Blanquillos* are . . . you know what they are, *señor,*" the young girl said.

"I don't know what *blanquillos* are," Jesse said. "Do you have any *huevos?*"

"If you would like some *huevos, señor,* I am sure your *compañero* could provide you with some. However, if you want *blanquillos,* I will bring them."

The crowd roared with laughter. In the kitchen the women were congratulating the waitress for her sharpness. Everybody had enjoyed the show and even Jesse admitted with a rueful grin that the chick had outsmarted him.

After eating, Jesse and I serviced our car and continued south. It was past midnight and we were beginning the long climb into the mountains that lead to the Nayarit Plateau. Out of the soft night air the smell of bananas and corn came to me as we drove through the fields planted on the steep, rocky slopes on each side of the road. Still higher, in fields miles distant from these, marijuana grew. As our car twisted through the night I felt close to the farmers who lived in the small huts on the high mountain ridges. Each kilometer Jesse and I traveled took me closer to them, each curve and each whiff of growing corn reminded me that the journey whose preamble had taken so long was really about to begin.

For those who travel the roads and highways and dusty back trails of Mexico extensively, time becomes abstract, unreal. Each road leads to another road, each individual leads to another individual. Every experienced marijuano knows that the pace cannot be altered, nor can the destination be reached before the time is right. Each rendezvous is like a scene in a play; act impatient and the play falters, the characters miss their cues, everything falls apart. Above all else in Mexico, and especially when dealing with any aspect of marijuana, a man must have patience.

Jesse was well suited for this Mexican aspect of smuggling, while I, the hulking gringo, preferred the moment of truth at the border. Together we successfully combatted the forces that usually defeat the freelance smuggler. Gringos operating together cannot help acting as gringos, a fatal mistake while dealing in weed in Mexico. A gringo and a Mexican operating side by side balance one another, one pushing and prodding, the other holding back and deliberating. Thus we traveled south to meet Jesus, the entrepreneur Luis had told us of. In each town and village we stopped in, Jesse would talk with the people, sound them out. He liked to get the feel of the place, sense the land and the people. I was always eager to get on, intent on the next goal, the entrepreneur who would take us into the mountains.

For the next three days we drove through Mexico, across the Grand Barranca between Tepic and Guadalajara, past the ruins and volcanic graveyards, through canyons and over mountains on the way to Guerrero. When I drive the roads of Mexico I fall into a reverie, brought

on by the movement of the car perhaps, but also by the realization of the startling dichotomy that exists between the Mexico of my imagination, an image engraved indelibly in my mind and reaffirmed on every crossroads corner, children and animals standing mutely still, watching as our car sails by, and the real image of sad, poignant, thunderous Mexico that exists behind the mountains, behind the silence, behind the stillness of the faces staring at me. There are many Mexicos, and the one you choose is the one you are bound to get. The one I chose was the one of silences and the sweet sad stares of children, of the campesinos, the people of the fields, of the countryside and the aloneness that makes so much of the Odyssey in Mexico a combination of bitterness and ecstasy. It has been said many times that Mexico is a country of contrasts. This is true of many countries, but nowhere is it more true than in Mexico. Born of conquest, the nation behind the mountains still struggles in the conflict, each drop of blood reeks of rebellion and deprivation, misfortune and contempt. On the surface much of this is hidden, but once inside the true character of Mexico, a startling hostility and violence emerges, violence left over as part of the afterbirth of the Revolution, but inherent, really, in the blood of the people since before Montezuma.

I ask myself when I'm in Mexico, why am I here? The almost physical lust I feel when I enter the country is soon curdled into something else, disgust perhaps, as if I were a disappointed trick who had paid for the services of a provocative whore. Yet something always brings me back. The same conflict that rends the country rends me. I am attracted and repelled, fearful and bold, energetic and slothful in turns. The road in Mexico brings all of this out in me, a strange wistfulness and excitement and dread, an insistent yearning for some undiscovered secret, and fear that the secret, when discovered, will be more than I can bear.

Three days after leaving Mazatlan, Jesse and I arrived in Huatamaquilpa. The town was small, spotlessly clean around its central plaza, and alive with a jumpy energy accentuated by the music from loudspeakers set in the trees. The plaza was full of people so we chose a side street to park the car. We entered a small restaura[illegible]

square. If you dig watching people, Mexico is the place to be. I can sit for hours in Mexican plazas watching the parade, have my shoes shined over and over again, observe the patterns, note the habits and rituals every Mexican indulges in. Huatamaquilpa was an ordinary Mexican town, a little livelier than most, with the aura of Guerrero hovering over it. The aura of Guerrero is one you don't forget. The state is alert, independent, and aware of strangers.

Guerrero bears the scars of the history of Mexico in every village and crossroads campground. This wildest state in Mexico still remembers the independence and courage of those days in 1910 when the campesinos rose up out of their fields with hoes and sticks and machetes to protect their land. The state is the most violent in Mexico as far as shootings and knifings are concerned. Revenge shootings and vendettas are part of the everyday violence, undisturbed and uncontrolled by government edicts and troops and police. The state is rich in marijuana and the farmers who grow the stuff are these same people, at home in the mountains like they never are on cobblestones and city streets. Fierce defenders of their fields, they don't sit idly by when government troops invade their mountains. They fight openly and bravely for what is theirs. They nurture their fields and tend their crops, and few strangers disturb them. They also grow some of the best marijuana in the world!

Many parts of the mountains have become the private domain of the growers. No one not part of the scene dares go into them, especially without a good connection who is familiar with the people and the area. Federales seldom venture far into the mountains of Guerrero, for when they do inevitably a few of them remain "to help the plants grow," as the saying goes.

Jesse and I had no illusions about our trip. The fact that we wanted to photograph the fields added to our problems. If it was simply going into the mountains and observing, our task would be relatively easy, but we had to be able to get pictures. For that reason we decided to take it easy, just roll along with whatever breezes and personalities fate and our friends dealt us. Fortunately, Jesus solved the problem of getting into the mountains.

Jesus [illegible] a rancho fifteen kilometers outside Huatamaquilpa.

When it was sufficiently dark we headed for his place. The road leading to the rancho was unpaved and our car bumped and swayed with the ruts. Twenty minutes along the road we saw the lights of another vehicle approaching. We turned off the road to allow it to pass. When the vehicle drove abreast of us the driver stopped and stuck his head out the window. "*¿Qué pasa?*" he yelled.

"*Ola, hombre,*" Jesse said. "I am looking for Jesus Jaramillo, he has a rancho around here."

Two men in the pickup talked rapidly with one another and then the passenger opened the door and stepped out. He stood on the opposite side of the pickup, behind the hood. The underbrim of his large sombrero reflected the light from inside the truck. "Why do you want to see Jesus Jaramillo?" the driver asked.

"I am a friend of Luis Montoyas in Mazatlan," Jesse said. "Luis told me to come here."

The man standing beside the pickup spoke in rapid Spanish to the driver. Then he walked around and stood beside our window. "I am Jesus Jaramillo," he said. "Are you Señor Jesse?"

"*Sí.* And this is my *compañero,* Jerónimo. I have a note from Luis."

"No matter. I knew you were coming. Luis sent me a wire." Jesus gestured to the driver of the pickup. He got out and stood beside our car. He handed an object to Jesus, who in turn thrust it through our window. It was a bottle of mescal.

Jesse and I both drank from the bottle and then Jesse handed it back. Jesus and his companion drank from it. Jesse and I got out of the car.

"It's good you arrived today," Jesus said. "I was just leaving for the frontier. This is Eduardo, my driver."

We shook hands all around and then stood beside the road for ten minutes drinking and talking. Suddenly Jesus and Eduardo jumped in their pickup and beckoned us to follow. They whipped their truck around on the narrow road and took off. Eduardo drove like all Mexicans, the pickup careening from one bump to another as it flew down the dirt road. Jesse followed as close as possible, both of us nearly blinded by the cloud of dust. Ten more minutes along the road

and we turned off onto another, bumpier road that led to the rancho. Jesus jumped out of his pickup and opened the gate for both vehicles, then jumped back after we'd passed through. When we reached the rancho I saw that it was composed of a number of buildings, half a dozen or so structures built around a plaza. The main house fronted on the patio, where a number of vehicles were parked. There was a small grove of trees behind the main house. I couldn't see the rancho distinctly because of the darkness, but the next morning I had a chance to wander around the place and I discovered it to be extensive, with outbuildings and small sheds to house the dozen families who worked for Jesus.

We entered the main house when we arrived. Two women immediately rushed into the kitchen and started preparing food. The bottle of mescal was replenished with a second one and we sat down at a large table to talk.

I was curious about Jesus' house. More than anything else, a man's home denotes his "place" in Mexico. Jesus obviously had a lot of recently acquired money, for not only was his house being expanded (workmen were building two new additions to the main house), but the main living room was crammed full of new-looking furniture, most of which looked like it had been boosted from the foyer of the Hotel Plasticano. The large, angular, overstuffed couches and chairs were covered with the clear plastic Mexicans so dearly love, and a nine-foot-long color-television console dominated one corner of the room. It was perched on a dais two feet higher than the rest of the furniture. The set was on full volume and a number of women and children and two old men were gazing at it. Jesus paid it absolutely no attention, conducting his conversation below the rumble from the set. There were bright wool rugs on the floor and the red tile gleamed from constant mopping. From my corner at the table I could see into the kitchen; a bright-chrome dinette set dominated that room.

I have a wealthy Mexican friend named Salvador whose home is the standard by which I judge all other wealthy Mexican homes. As I sat at Jesus' table I thought of the differences between his home and that of my old friend Salvador. To me, Salvador's home epitomized a

certain attitude and temperament that seems indigenous to many wealthy Mexicans. This attitude manifests itself not only in the house and the furnishings in the house, but also by the aura which dominates such places.

The first time I entered Salvador's house I was impressed by the sense of wealth, but it seemed to me that it was wealth spent unwisely, squandered with little of the taste and feeling real money is capable of serving. The television set sat on its altar in the corner, and in a semicircle around it were four incredibly large "American-style" couches and chairs, covered with the inevitable clear plastic. The room reeked of chill and impersonality. Salvador's house reminded me of a hotel with large public rooms used as buffer areas, greeting rooms where the formalized life styles of wealthy Mexicans can be displayed. Later, Salvador took me through the house to a back patio where coffee was served on a glass-topped chrome dinette set. The patio was beautiful, surrounded by caged parrots and other birds. The coffee was brought in a beautiful sterling silver serving set by a mestizo girl, and served in plastic cups. There were at least half a dozen mestizo servants bustling and cleaning around the house, mopping, ironing, serving the coffee, etc.

What struck me in Salvador's home was the fantastic conflict that exists in the wealthy Mexican—and all of Mexico for that matter. Plastic cups beside silver serving sets; exotic caged birds in beautiful patios next to rooms crammed full of plastic-covered furniture; dark-skinned mestizo girls from mud huts across town polishing chrome dinette sets. The two cultures that are rending modern Mexico were manifesting themselves before my eyes; the one Indian, dark and silent, imbued with a natural good taste, the other one ersatz gringo, plastic and tasteless, shiny and cheap. The modern Mexican denies the one and attempts to emulate the other. I remember thinking when I first walked into Salvador's house that there was no sense of the Indian tradition at all, no handwoven rugs, no Indian pottery, no decorations suggesting the Indian heritage in Salvador's blood. I saw Catholic icons and pictures of the Virgin Mary, but nothing Indian, nothing from the land. It was as if that part of Mexico were buried,

forgotten. The only reminder of it was the whisk-whisk of the long rag mops the mestizo girls moved across the floor.

In Jesus' house things were different. Despite the chrome dinette set which I saw in the kitchen (chrome dinette sets are ubiquitous in upward-moving Mexican households; I believe that after the first major, conspicuous purchases, the automobile and the color television set, the Mexican family on the way up buys a chrome dinette set; it's the first large utilitarian purchase), an Indian aura pervaded the place. There were handwoven rugs on the floor and Indian pottery to drink out of, and in the kitchen the women were making tortillas over a brazier. The tortillas themselves were an indication of Jesus' Indian legacy, for they were not served in Salvador's home.

Many books have been written about the Mexican's denial of his roots, and none has adequately explained it. It is inevitable, I suppose, in a stratified society like Mexico's for the upper levels of society to forget their blood. The consequences are manifested, however, on every level of Mexican society. In Mexico City the women refuse to shave their legs, sure that hairless legs are a sign of Indian blood. All Mexicans are imbued with Indian blood—indeed, the Indian blood is what makes Mexico Mexico—a fact to which many Mexicans can't reconcile themselves. Indian roots are denied, foreign influences praised and emulated, and tradition and history abandoned. As Octavio Paz says in *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, "It is astonishing that a country with such a vivid past—a country so profoundly traditional, so close to its roots, so rich in ancient legends even if poor in modern history—should conceive of itself only as a negation of its origins."

Almost every Mexican of any social standing is sure to mention in his first conversation with you that his grandfather or father or some distant relative came from Spain. If you point out that he is denying his true birthright for the elusive snobbery of an ancestry in one of the most backward European societies, he doesn't listen. This shortcoming of the Mexican character is exposed on all levels of society, but is most apparent in the treatment accorded the lower classes, the campesinos and lower-class mestizos and Indians, the people who bear the weight of the country upon their backs.

The lower-class mestizos and Indians are the children of conquest, misfortune, denial, and contempt, completely ignored in the contemporary life of Mexico. On all sides the media scream for every Mexican to take part in the rapid industrialization and commercialization of the country, but the campesino is nonplussed because none of the media acts as though he exists—at least in his dark-skinned form. It's like the refusal of American advertising to recognize until recently that there are Blacks actually living and purchasing and consuming in our own country. When a campesino goes to a movie he doesn't see anything relating to himself or his own life—save in a few antiquated Zapatista movies where he's relegated to the back of the crowd; what he sees are people and lives and advertised products and a whole world relating to things he cannot imagine existing. The blond, blue-eyed creatures staring out at him from movies and advertisements and billboards might as well be from another planet. Things non-Indian are constantly advertised and purveyed in contexts that are incredible to the people of the fields. This does not leave the Indian unaffected. Who is he? Where does he live? What does he live with? These are all questions the advertisements and billboards and movies not only ignore; they don't even hear them.

The evidence that Mexicans deny their Indian heritage is available on every street corner. The mestizo, product of the mixture of Spanish and Indian blood, abandons his huaraches and struggles for months in order to purchase a miserable pair of cheap, badly designed imitation gringo shoes, pointy-toed contraptions that pinch and bite his feet and cost upwards of 150 pesos a pair. In the meantime, the beautifully designed and functional huaraches that can be had in his own market place for 25 pesos are ignored. The gringo-designed shoes are what's advertised though; they are "American" and therefore add to the wearer's status in the streets. That they are uncomfortable and impossible to work in and wear out in two months is beside the point, the fact that the wearer has graduated up from huaraches to foreign-style shoes is what's important. The pointy-toed shoe syndrome is now driving the Indians and campesinos to the supermarket instead of the market place.

This hostile, negative attitude on the part of Mexicans toward their Indian heritage receives a jolt when young gringos visit their country. Struggling mightily to lift himself by the huarache straps out of a violent and poverty-stricken past, the average Mexican is shocked to see the young gringos from the richest and most powerful nation in the world emulating Indian ways and denying the middle-class Mexican's. This is difficult for the Mexican to understand because he has been indoctrinated to believe that the Indian is culturally and spiritually inferior. This belief is not Mexican alone, but is held in all Latin America. In Latin America the attitude is that the aristocrat must always remain the aristocrat and the servant the servant. People are grouped and identified by birth in a way that creates a chasm between those with light skin and those with dark skin. The fact that so many of the longhair gringos, when they arrive in Mexico, emulate the bottom half of society, abandoning their $40 shoes for the $3 huaraches of the Indian, literally blows the Mexican's mind.

Once I visited the state of Chiapas with some wealthy Mexican medical students. The students were amazed that I would bother to take pictures of the Indians. They would thrust themselves in front of my lens, eager to have themselves photographed in their new clothes and gringo shoes. The one student with a camera spent all his time taking pictures of the group's new car. To them it was incomprehensible that I found the Indians worth bothering with.

To me Mexico's denial of its Indian half and the inevitable and inexorable Americanization of the country is a sad thing. The loss of the Indian personality, indeed, the complete denial of it by most of the middle and upper classes of Mexico, will eventually force on the country the same straitjacket of conformity and rootlessness so many Americans wear today. I don't think of Americans as being an especially happy people, in the sense that they have much of a feeling of fulfillment in their daily lives. Whatever personal identity individuals have is programmed out of them at a very early age. To me, Americans are the pioneers of the rootless 1984 society. Divorced from the land, divorced from tradition, divorced from one another, divorced from any concrete reality, they march to the beat of an increasingly

alienated, mechanically monitored claptrap society. Sold a bill of goods, subsequent generations of Americans have sought to justify it, creating a fantastic plastic mechanized culture that takes for its fuel the lifeblood of the land and the people.

It is a lesson in alienation to walk down the average American street: eyes that see but do not meet; faces that look but do not speak; voices that sound but are not heard. It's not surprising that increasing numbers of American youth are abandoning the "American way of life." When their journey toward freedom and fulfillment takes them to Mexico, a hegira thousands of them are undertaking with almost religious fervor, their presence and deportment affect Mexico as much as the fact of their leaving affects the country they left behind.

Alienation partly explains the drug revolution taking place not only in the United States but all over the world. Young people recognize that their parents have made a mess of things, that they have denied reality for a plastic unreality, and that's one of the reasons why weed has become so important in their culture. Marijuana acts as a detoxicant, giving the youths a more relevant reality. Then again, perhaps weed just makes some kids more able to live in a completely fucked-up world without going completely insane.

The constant denial of the Indian heritage on the part of the Mexican creates a tremendous schism in his psyche, and the insecurity of so many Mexicans—and the country itself, for that matter—is partly a result of it. Indian blood surges through the veins of Mexico today, and it is noble and vital blood. That educated, aware Mexicans put down the 90 percent of their blood that is so rich and powerful in favor of the weak drippings of a dried-up European spring is a fact that can be understood only in the larger framework of history. It is the mixture of two bloods, Spanish and Indian, that has made Mexico what it is today. Perhaps it's simply fashion that dictates which face will peer out of the screen and sell Coca-Colas. In the years since the emergence of the mestizo as the power in Mexico, Indian features have come to dominate the country. More and more the two races have merged into one, and more and more it is unlike the blond, blue-eyed stereotype. Until the Mexicans realize and live with this—

the fact and glory of their Indianism—there will be strange, violent encounters, overtly brought on by some insult or affront, but in reality brought up out of a cauldron of mixed and mixed-up blood.

Happily, and partly, I believe, because of the influence of gringo youths and marijuana, this attitude toward their Indianism is undergoing a change among many Mexican youths. In 1968 I went to a party in Mexico City with a number of architectural students from the university. I was surprised to see more than half the students wearing ponchos and huaraches—and smoking grass. Of course, most of the students were part of the élite and were semi-Bohemian to begin with, but the very fact that they are beginning to recognize their Indian heritage is important.

The reason Jesus was still linked so closely to his Indian culture was because he had only recently acquired his wealth and had not yet had time to enter into what I call the gringo-emulation phase. Jesus had not been born to money like Salvador, but had made it through a legitimate business which he later turned into a marijuana entrepreneurship. Originally Jesus started out as a farmer, possessor of a few *hectarios* of land on which he planted maguey, the spiny cactuslike plant that's used for the manufacture of tequila and pulque. His maguey farm thrived, and when he got enough money together to acquire more land the drug revolution hit Mexico. Instead of purchasing more land for maguey, he went into the mountains and hired some farmers to grow marijuana for him. He still maintained his maguey farm, and even increased his acreage after his weed farming began to pay off. He was an excellent administrator and his business prospered. When Jesse and I met him he had over forty farmers growing for him in the Sierras of Guerrero and Michoacan—plus his regular workers who lived on his rancho and worked his maguey land.

Jesus, a wire-thin, taciturn man, had four wives in various small villages in Guerrero. Each wife had a house and a number of children, and Jesus rotated among them weekly. He had a wry sense of humor which Eduardo complemented by making great fun of his tired, hangdog look. "Each of his wives is pregnant right now," Eduardo whispered. "He has twenty-two children and he loves them all." When

Jesus smiled, his face opened up in a skeptical dark leer. When I looked into his eyes I could see ten thousand years of suffering. Despite his look of pained exhaustion, it was enjoyable to be around Jesus. He spoke in a slow monotone as he described his business, calmly sipping from the bottle of mescal each time it came past. While he was self-deprecating when he spoke, I sensed in him a great strength.

While we talked he held his smallest child on his knee and bounced her up and down. The child was a dark, fierce-looking girl of about eighteen months, when she glanced at me out of her well-deep black eyes, she looked like a Zapotec princess.

"What is it you want of me?" Jesus asked after we had eaten.

Jesse and I looked at one another. We both knew we had to be out front with Jesus and tell him exactly what we wanted. It was up to him to take it from there. Jesse spoke: "We have been smuggling marijuana for a long time, Jesus. My *compañero* here has been arrested for smuggling marijuana and right now he is in a very delicate position, in Mexico illegally and subject to arrest and imprisonment if the authorities find out. But he is here for one reason, and one reason alone. We have been offered an opportunity by a very large magazine in America to show what marijuana is all about. If we can show the people in America what marijuana is, who grows it and how it is grown, who smuggles it and how it is smuggled, then we believe that many of the misconceptions and lies told about marijuana will be forgotten. We have come to Mexico to tell the truth about marijuana. We want to go into the fields and talk to the farmers; we want to take pictures of the fields, the plants, of the people who work in them. That way we can show the people in America that what we are doing is not bad. We can show the truth about marijuana."

"The truth about marijuana is money," Jesus laughed. "It is the best crop we can grow in the mountains now, because of you gringos."

"Marijuana is more than money to a lot of people," I said. "Many gringos feel that it is a gift, one that can help many people."

Jesus shrugged. "Mota is many things to many people. For the people in the mountains, it is a livelihood, a source of income. For

others, it is more, a panacea for their many problems. For still others, it is an excuse to abuse people. For me it is an accident, a happy one I am glad to say."

"An accident?"

"Sí. I did not go out of my way to cultivate marijuana, it came to me accidentally. I was a simple farmer growing maguey. Maguey is a good crop. For each peso I invest, the next year I can make seven pesos. When I saw friends of mine going into the mountains, however, and paying los montaños to plant mota on their slopes and between their rows of corn, I asked a few questions. The people in the mountains cannot grow maguey, for that you need relatively flat land—and one peso to buy each maguey plant. The people in the mountains do not have pesos, but they do have land—and time. My friends told me that for the cost of a few seeds, mota can be planted almost anywhere. And if a man cares to get industrious he can make a good living growing mota. So by accident I got into mota. For each peso I invest, the next year I can make 500 pesos."

"Can you take us into the mountains to see the mota growing?" I asked.

"I can take you into the mountains," Jesus said. "Whether or not you can take pictures is up to the farmers."

"If we can get into the mountains, I am sure the farmers will be sympathetic," Jesse said.

"We'll see," Jesus said. "When I get back from Juarez we'll go up there, I have to deliver some supplies to the farmers anyway."

Jesus was leaving in the morning for the border. He was going to ride shotgun with a ton of marijuana he had sold to the Texas Syndicate. El Sindicato Texas is made up of a group of Mexican-Americans who operate one of the biggest weed-smuggling rings in Texas and the southwest. Most of those involved in the organization have family connections in Mexico. It was through the family connections that they had linked up with Jesus, who was known for his ability to deliver high-quality weed regularly. One of the interesting aspects of the syndicate weed-smuggling operation is that the people involved in it are interested not in the quality of the weed they smuggle but in the

act of smuggling. The Texas Syndicate people are into weed in such bulk quantities that quality is secondary; their primary concern is getting ton loads of weed into the States, and Jesus was helping them.

Jesus explained that before Operation Cooperation he did not usually accompany loads to the border. Now, however, there were so many soldiers on the roads that it had become difficult moving large shipments, so he rode shotgun with loads he had sold to ensure their delivery.

And the new *aduana* stops on the highways were not the only problem. Roving gangs of bandits operating in rural areas of Mexico were eager to knock off unprotected marijuana shipments and were becoming a menace. The *bandidos* piqued my sense of the comic in much that goes on in Mexico. For a bunch of outlaws to go through the whole illegal scam, raising the money, planning the run, making careful anti-cop considerations, and then having the whole trip clobbered by a gang of equally rascally *vatos locos* who were just as illegal and probably even more desperate seemed humorous to me—and even appropriate. My head has always been on the side of the outsider, and in a weed-smuggling operation it seemed to me that the *cabrones* trying to rip off loads moving out of the mountains were even farther outside than the marijuanos doing the moving. However, the *idea* of bandits knocking off a load of weed and the *reality* of it are two different things. Jesse and I had once lost 400 kilos of mota to a group of bandits in Zacatecas, and there had been absolutely no humor in the situation. In fact, there had been a death.

Because of a mechanical fuckup I was late in arriving at a certain spot with our truck to pick up our weed. The campesinos guarding the load got worried and attempted to move it back into the mountains. They were ambushed by bandits and a young farmer named Alphonso was killed. Although both Jesse and I felt partly responsible for Alphonso's death, there wasn't anything we could do about it except make token payments to his family. The rest of the growers involved in the shooting were philosophical about it and matter-of-factly went about running the bandits down and killing two of them. Later, Nostromo, one of the growers involved in the shoot-out,

showed me the hole in his side where a bandit's bullet had gone clean through. Needless to say, the experience colored my dealings in Mexico, giving them a sense of reality I hadn't felt before. My romantic idea of the comic nature of the conflict between marijuanos and *bandidos* wasn't so romantic after all.

Once Jesus had solved the bandit problem in the mountains, the border was nothing; the Texas Syndicate had the whole border wired and it was no hassle getting a load through Juarez into El Paso and beyond.

Jesus' organization is reasonably sophisticated. It is controlled entirely by himself and one partner, and is connected in a loosely organized series of link-ups with other entrepreneurs throughout Mexico. Jesus has his own area in the mountains where he supports the farmers and buys all their crops, and his connections with other entrepreneurs are used primarily to keep track of what's happening in the industry, how much weed is available, where it's moving to, who is moving it, etc. The connections also serve as a mutual-protection society. If a big order comes through that Jesus is unable to fill from his own sources, he can contact another entrepreneur in another area. The federated dealers also keep one another informed as to the movement of soldiers in the mountains, and new roadblocks and *aduana* checks that might have been set up. On the other side of the coin, the mutual-protection society also keeps itself informed of large busts, fingers, informers, and government figures who are notoriously prone to accepting bribes, and when they will accept them. One of the facts of life is that government officials change their minds and their alliances; officials who take bribes occasionally get honest, and other officials who never take bribes sometimes get into financial difficulties. The marijuana game requires keeping yourself informed. The man who knows the most is the safest.

Jesus' organization is more sophisticated than most because of his equipment and connections. He has two airplanes and a large fleet of trucks to move his stuff. His maguey rancho justifies so much equipment, and also makes it easy to move loads along the Mexican roads. As far as his weed fields are concerned, Jesus is blessed with some of

the finest ones in Guerrero. He also has a brother-in-law who operates in the state of Michoacan. Together the two of them are able to utilize one another's resources. The fact that Jesus was connected with El Sindicato Texas was also important. This established Jesus as a big entrepreneur, who could be counted on to deliver big loads when and where they were wanted. Entrepreneurism in the weed industry requires expertise, capability, and dependability. An entrepreneur who can't deliver, or can't deliver in certain areas, is decidedly less valuable.

When Jesus accompanied a load of marijuana to the border, he occasionally stayed there for a few days of fun. Jesse and I had to find out how long Jesus intended to stay at the border this time. As the evening progressed, however, we got too drunk to discuss business. We spent the night at the rancho and got up the next morning for an early breakfast.

After breakfast Jesus informed us that he was going to be gone for a week. "You can stay here at the rancho, or you can drive over to Acapulco for a few days and enjoy yourselves," he said.

Jesse and I decided on Acapulco. I hadn't seen the place for seven years. That afternoon we saw Jesus and Eduardo off for the border, and we left for Acapulco. We were to return to the rancho in five days. From there, Jesus would fly us into the Sierras.

My first visit to Acapulco was in 1957. I hitchhiked down from Mexico City and spent two weeks on the beaches, saw the divers leap from the rocks, met a girl, got busted for sleeping on the beach, and discovered the real Mexico in the back part of town.

My trip was fortuitous from the start, beginning with a ride out of Taxco in a '48 Chevy packed with thirteen young Mexicans heading for a picnic on the river. They stopped for me, refused my protests, and crammed me in the car. Just like Luis crammed Jesse and me in his Galaxie when we were hunting connections in Mazatlan. Off we went, shooting down the canyons and barrancas out of Taxco, heading for the river. When we arrived at the riverbottom the Mexicans piled out, pulling me with them, and began spreading blankets on the

ground, and started gathering firewood. The girls spread heaps of delicious food on the blankets while the men broke out bottles of beer and tequila. I helped gather firewood until the music and food started, then jumped in and started eating and drinking with the others. While guitars played and men sang, I fell into my first tequila drunk, stumbling and laughing along the river's edge, happy to be alive and in Mexico. Pepe, the leader of the gang, wanted me to return to Taxco with them, offering to put me up and show me the town. I said no, I had to get to Acapulco, and as the crew was packing I staggered across a field to a road where Pepe said a bus heading for Acapulco would stop for me. It was one of those magic days that happen occasionally, and the minute I stepped out on the empty road a dilapidated bus wheezed around the corner and rumbled to a stop. A sign on the window said Acapulco, so I aimed myself for the door and stumbled aboard.

Inside the bus were pigs and fowl and Indios and children and cages and birds. I lurched to the back of the bus and an old Indian who looked like Zapata's grandfather stood up and offered his seat to me. He was carrying an ancient shotgun, and his toothless smile bid me sit down. I was too drunk and too happy to argue. All night I talked and laughed and spoke pidgin Indian as the bus swayed and lurched on its way to Acapulco. The campesinos sat quietly and made room in the back for the gringo *borracho,* who alternately rambled, sang, smiled, shouted, and moaned. The honesty and grace and simple dignity of the rural people of Mexico, a profound strength, seem to be missing in the people born into higher levels of society.

Acapulco, like no other city in Mexico, points out with an explicitness the two faces of the country. The three faces really, for although Acapulco is in Mexico, and its Mexican poverty and wealth exist back to back, the city has an American face too. In 1940 Acapulco had less than 6,000 inhabitants. Today there are over 250,000. Of the more than one hundred large luxury hotels in Acapulco, only a few are owned by Mexicans. The United States so dominates Acapulco that it can be considered an American resort, save for the back part of town, where most of the original inhabitants live, crammed into dingy

hovels and lean-tos, subsisting as they have always on the horse meat and tortillas and leftover fish that doesn't make it to the kitchens of the fancy hotels. The explosion in building has been so frenetic that developers have raced over *ejido* land, land that is the communal property of the campesinos, and built their American-financed and controlled hotels and highrises. Naturally this was done without the consent of the campesinos, and only recently has anyone suggested that it might be proper to pay the poor people for their loss.

During my first visit to Acapulco in 1957, there were no highrises extending south down the beaches on *ejido* land, and when the second-class bus labored up over the final hill I moved up from my rear seat to one in front (most of the passengers had long since left, gone into the hills to their huts and shacks, toiling slowly away down some dark path with a passel of chickens or a pig on a rope). I was not surprised to see spread out on the bay below me a jewellike resort, with a dozen or so large hotels along the shore of the bay, but mostly it was a small town with golden lights along the water, the crownlike heads of cliffs across the bay just beginning to catch the rays of the sun coming up behind me.

That first day I walked through the town getting my bearings. I visited the beaches and strolled along the *malecón*, probed the back parts of the town, visited the market, saw what the town was made of. Acapulco throbbed with a rustling, incipient energy that I could sense in the streets. Kids and campesinos swarmed over the rocks and beaches, bustled through the town, hawked their wares and stared at the giant ships in the bay that were disgorging passengers from Los Angeles and Great Britain. In the big hotels camera-toting developers discussed sites and plans, exchanged gossip with wealthy Mexican tourists. In the early afternoon I hitchhiked down the south coast and got a ride with a rich Texan who hoped to develop the coast; the crazy Mexican chauffeur he had driving his new Chrysler almost killed us twice, but in the late afternoon we ended up at the Hotel Pierre Marqueses, the fancy place owned by J. Paul Getty, consisting of separate bungalows and a private pool for each room, locked gates, and guards to keep the peons out. Over cocktails and crab the Texan

described with sweeping arms how the whole coast clear down to Salina Cruz would eventually be one long resort, hotels and people, modern roads and yachts, etc. I shuddered over my cracked crab.

Now, over a decade later, driving down the road with Jesse, Acapulco was not the same. The first modern highway in Mexico was constructed between Mexico City and Acapulco, and we were on it now, a toll road equipped with all the modern conveniences. The road had diminished the curves and grades, straightened out the landscape, and dissolved all the points of reference that might have evoked times gone by. The new highway was a concrete artery connecting the working and watering places of rich Mexicans and gringos, the commerce and life and meaning and silence of the Indians and campesinos in the hills and valleys beyond the road meaning less than nothing to the roadbuilders and politicians and engineers. To me the new highway manifested Acapulco, and the city was not now one a person who truly loved Mexico could respect. Acapulco and the new highway were all straight lines and high buildings and displaced campesinos and Colonel Sanders fried-chicken shacks and hamburger heavens and a jangling dinero-oriented jukebox madness that had no inkling of the little stops at night along the old road where girls sat at tables with comic books under gas lamps, where the coffee was served in pottery cups on flyspecked tablecloths, a radio playing in the background tuned to a station in Chilpancingo, a fan whirring overhead one revolution per minute, and calendars on the walls picturing, for me, the true magic of Mexico, the arrival or departure of the *vaquero* at his wife's door. It was this memory, the memory of nights on second-class buses riding down the now-abandoned road, that made me, when I thought of the Acapulco I was heading toward, shudder slightly under my blanket.

My disappointment met expectations when Jesse and I reached Acapulco. The town had blossomed into urban sprawl that clung to the edges of the bay, spread over the hills, and climbed the mountains behind the town. Everything had a price on it, even a spot of beach on which to stand. The Americanization was almost complete in the ticky-tacky roadside stands that blurted out their neon messages

twenty-four hours a day. Things were so bad that even the Mexicans were beginning to cringe; they had just passed a law that all new gringo enterprises must adopt Mexican-sounding names. They were also considering a law that would ban the Indian hawkers who peddled their wares around the town to make a few pennies a day. Bad for business, the people in charge said, having those ragged folk around our beautiful new hotels. New visitors to town must have wondered what all the famous stories were about, the ones of the beauty and peace, the silence and drama of old Acapulco, for all they found when they arrived were the same claptrap joints they'd left behind in Los Angeles and Miami Beach. The old Acapulco had died and no one but a few old-timers mourned its passing, for on every street people hurried and scurried on their hustles and scams, beggars and beautiful Indian babies selling jewelry from fists no bigger than peas, carting, hauling, bicycling, motorscooting, running, walking, yelling, screeching, all to the tune of car horns and bus roars, shrieks and blasts and moans as the city throbbed and grew almost visibly in front of your eyes. What could possibly bring people here any longer? Surely it wasn't the peace of the place nor the beauty, for the peace and beauty had been buried. It must have been the myth, the myth that now belonged to some other part of the coast. Jesse and I spent a day in town and then drove north toward Zihuatanejo, the town where Timothy Leary tried to start his LSD colony in 1963.

When Leary was thrown out of Harvard he decided the best place for him was Mexico, so he came to Zihuatanejo. Zihuatanejo lies about 250 kilometers north of Acapulco and is a sleepy little village between the sea and the jungle. Zihuatanejo is what Acapulco must have once been. The reason Leary chose to settle in Mexico was because at the time it was one of the few countries where one had access to the chemical LSD-25, which was manufactured in Switzerland under the Sandoz drug label. Sandoz LSD-25 was the first acid available in any amount in the United States. It was also some of the best that has ever been available, including Augustus Owsley III's famous acids. Leary hoped to start a drug-experiment colony in Zihuatanejo, and actually had one going for about six months. When

the Mexican government found out what he was doing, however, they ran him out. Leary's hassles with the Mexican authorities were, in fact, the first rumbles signaling the birth of the hippie-longhair invasion that was to come later. When Leary was asked to leave Mexico, a contingent of his colony under the leadership of a thin, messianic dude named Thad moved to Ajijic, the small resort town on the shores of Lake Chapala in Jalisco. Ajijic and Chapala, the town from which the lake gets its name, are havens for middle-aged Americans who flock there to retire. The towns are controlled, in fact, by American Legion and mid-America types who have settled in the communities along the lake because of the low cost of living and the abundant and cheap booze. By the late fifties and early sixties quite a few beats had left their North Beach and Greenwich Village pads and also settled around the lake. It was this thriving community that the Zihuatanejo expatriates wished to join.

When Thad and his followers arrived in Ajijic, they set up shop in a place called The Mill, an abandoned granary that became a center for LSD experimentation for the next few years. This was during the hiatus between the death of the beat movement and the birth of the hippie-longhair movement. Neither the death nor the birth occurred spontaneously, however, and it is interesting to note that the small town on the lake near Guadalajara was one of the more important wombs of the worldwide drug culture.

Shortly after his arrival in Ajijic, Thad talked the University of Guadalajara Medical School into conducting experiments with LSD-25, using members of the beat colony and some Mexican students as guinea pigs. These experiments were shortlived, however, because the scene was beginning to get out of control back in Ajijic and Chapala. Thad, like Leary himself, had an insatiable desire to turn everybody onto LSD, and was gathering more and more kids around him at The Mill. Word had spread in the underground back in the U.S., and hundreds of kids were descending on the area. This, combined with the increasing demand for marijuana, created a lot of heat. The old crowd of retired boozers had never gotten along with the Bohemian crowd that lived along the lake, but at least they had tolerated one

another. When the LSD freaks started traipsing into town, the scene changed from tolerance to intolerance. Many of the beats were into marijuana, and it wasn't unusual for their homes to be used as warehouses for shipments of the weed going up to the States. When kids wearing weird hair (the Beatles were just getting popular) began falling out in the streets while stoned on acid, the lush-head legionnaires began complaining to the Mexican authorities. After receiving numerous complaints the Mexican police started rousting *los existentialistas,* as the Beats were called, the word meaning in the Mexican sense, "those who, when night falls, make that their home." When the heat came down a lot of homes were busted and some weed was found. In 1963 I rented a house in San Nicolas de Ybarra, a small village on the lake south of Chapala. In 1964, a few months after I left, the house was busted for being the center of a drug cult. The Mexicans arrested over forty gringos, drug freaks and occult nuts, according to a report printed by *¡Alarma!,* the Mexican shock newspaper. By now Ajijic had become a hotbed for longhairs, and it was dangerous walking the streets of the town if you looked slightly beat or Bohemian. The roundups that were to become commonplace in every Mexican resort town started occurring weekly, primarily at the instigation of the older gringo legionnaires who ran the town.

Jesse and I avoided Ajijic and Lake Chapala now, and as we drove into Zihuatanejo I thought of the changes Leary's little expedition had spawned in Mexico. Not that the changes wouldn't have occurred without Leary, undoubtedly they would have, but the sensibility that demands such wholesale turning on without regard for conventions or manner or traditions always seems somewhat perverse. It seems to me that a lot of gurus attempt to exorcise their own devils with the minds and bodies of others. This book is not about LSD, but it strikes me as strange that the leaders of such experimental groups, be they Timothy Learys or Thads, always seem to desire a group of people under their thumb. I don't believe they start out like this. I believe that at first they want to let others know of the fabulous possibilities that hallucinogens offer, possibilities of seeing themselves and others as unique parts of the universe, all together, none separate, none unequal. Unfortunately, few kids who enter into these relationships are adequately prepared for the experience, nor are their teachers.

attacks LSD dealers

Zihuatanejo was still unspoiled, still beautiful, a few more shacks now, but not yet taken over by the tourist plague. Jesse and I camped out on the beaches for a few days and then packed up and headed back to Huatamaquilpa. It was time to go into the mountains.

Jesus was at the rancho when we got back from Acapulco, preparing for the flight into the mountains. That evening we drove into Huatamaquilpa in his pickup to meet Sanchez, the man who would be our guide. On the way into town, Jesus asked me where my sombrero was. "Back at the rancho," I said. He reached under the seat and pulled out a sombrero. "Put it on," he said. "All Mexicans wear sombreros around here."

I put on the sombrero.

"If someone sees you in my truck without a sombrero, they'll remember it. Three Mexicans with sombreros is nothing."

I was silent the rest of the way into town. I knew I had goofed. I could feel the tension between me and Jesse. I was pissed off. A forgotten sombrero isn't the end of the world. It was as if Jesse had been reading my mind.

"It's the little fuckups that do a scene in," he said. "You can plan for the big fuckups and avoid them. The little ones you have to know subconsciously so you can forget them."

A carnival was in progress in town. The square was full of townspeople and campesinos from the surrounding villages. Jesus skirted the square and drove to the opposite side of town. He parked in a deserted side street and went to find Sanchez. Jesse and I waited in the pickup.

I could hear the sounds of the carnival. Jesse was quiet. The street we were parked in was dark except for a small patch of light cast against an adobe building at the corner. This was a poor section of town and the electricity was turned off early. I couldn't get over how much time we spent on this trip waiting, waiting in cars, waiting in trucks, waiting in motel rooms—now sitting in a pickup at night in a deserted street in a strange town waiting for a man I barely knew to bring another man I didn't know who would guide us up into who knew what at what price. At times I felt insane to be there, masochistic in the trusts and times and alleys and darkness I put myself through.

Jesse lit a cigarette, and the glowing tip illuminated his face. He used to buy chicle from the kids on the streets and when he got nervous he popped four or five pieces in his mouth and chewed furiously. His mouth was full of chicle and I watched his jaws moving up and down. He had one foot propped on the dashboard and he tapped his toe in rhythm to his jaw. Jesus had been gone forty-five minutes.

"Maybe Sanchez isn't home," I said.

"If he wasn't home he'd be back by now," Jesse said.

Sometimes on the road together Jesse and I got edgy. Little things that ordinarily wouldn't bother us started to grate. Now I was infuriated by Jesse's jaws clacking up and down. "For Christ's sake," I said, "can't you get rid of that gum?"

Jesse continued chewing. I looked down the street at the spot of light. Too many days on the road, too many hours in the car. I felt like opening the door and bolting down the street.

"Goddammit, sit still," Jesse said. "Here comes Jesus."

Jesse removed his foot from the dashboard. Jesus was standing beside the pickup door before I realized it.

"Sanchez was at the carnival," Jesus said. "I had to find him. He's waiting for us."

Jesus and Jesse took off and I followed, stumbling over the cobblestones of backstreet Mexico and along dung-covered footpaths. The carnival noises and the sound of a church bell beckoned from across

town, an out-of-tune call to Mass. Then it was quiet, just the sound of our walking, Jesus' form dark against the darkness. Sanchez' house was across a gully. "He's in the process of building it," Jesus said. "The fee you pay him will help." There was a light in the house. I could see the tile roof and white columns supporting it, like fingers holding up the top edge of a cliff. We stumbled across the gully and climbed the path to the house. Jesse and I stood back in the darkness and Jesus knocked. He didn't have to. Sanchez stepped out of the darkness and spoke. His voice was low, soft, complementing his appearance; quiet, deceptively soft, limp handshake, .38-Super stuck in his belt, huaraches on his feet. Sanchez and Jesus talked and Jesse joined in, low, subdued, the voices like the sound of nature, the brush of a dry leaf against the house, a mule rubbing against a fence post, a woman coughing somewhere behind a wall.

We moved off the porch to an alley beside the house. I sat on the hard, dusty ground with my back resting against a wall. A strip of light illuminated Sanchez' forehead. The three sombreros bobbed and moved in the darkness. The next day when I saw Sanchez clearly I saw his eyes, very clear but with a perpetually pained or sad or perhaps innocent look in them. Standing still, his belly pooched out. Later, when walking in the mountains, he would leave me far behind.

After talking for twenty minutes, the arrangements were complete: Sanchez would guide us for $250. He didn't know if we could take pictures; that was up to the farmers. Yes, there were good fields, but hard to reach. We would meet in the morning and Jesus would fly us up into the mountains. "*Gracias, señores, hasta mañana.*"

We walked back down the hill to the truck in the darkness. On the way the church bell struck ten. We walked through narrow passageways between stone walls. When we reached the truck, Jesse and Jesus talked quietly. Three campesinos trudged by, laughing and drunk. One of them stumbled against the truck and then all three of them stopped and pissed against a stone wall at the end of the alley.

We drove out of town back to the rancho with our sombreros pulled down. Behind the dark mountain shapes lightning glittered.