

NOT TO COME

Forward by Dr. Julio Vargas

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FORWARD

The author, his wife, Juanita and family lived and worked for a number of years in the Departamento de San Martín, Perú in the late sixties and seventies of the last century. They continued to live, serve and work among Quechua/Quichua (Kechwa) speaking peoples until the turn of that century. This, his novel, is based on notes and life experiences at that time and can be read on two levels:

The first level can be described in “art-deco” terms as a “rattling good yarn”; while the second is a serious attempt to describe the tensions and tragedies of First Nation Peoples throughout the world, whose world-views, land and language come under threat from socio-economic change.

As a close friend and fellow academic, I have never doubted the author’s sincerity and Christian holistic commitment to the Amerindian world and though I believe his use of this Quechua dialect may be a little “creaky”, it gives a flavour of a dialect that may well disappear, as so many others have done in the world. I am happy to commend it to you, ‘gentil lector’ (dear reader).

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IN MEMORY OF THOSE...

*Who walked and loved a land
they never owned.....*

*Who speak a language of the heart,
but known to a few...*

*Who live the vision of a dawn
that is 'Beyond the Andes'...*

And for our own Lamista, Ruth

THE BEGINNING...

I noticed that the old man was weeping silently. He stood there alone, shading his eyes with one hand, gazing across the valley to the blue-green mountains, and into the golden sunset, just as I had seen in that picture all those years before.

He turned away from me and I barely caught his words in that quaint musical dialect of North-east Peru:

If I had read the future, I'd have asked them not to come...

I was about to go over and speak to him, when a young woman appeared, it seemed from nowhere, and touched his arm and whispered softly,

Acu, tatiytuyuni, ña horana samanayquipaca. Sham', yaycúm', sham'... (Listen, my dear father, now it's the time to rest. Come, let's go in, come...)

I realized that she must have been speaking to him in his Indian language. She turned and smiled shyly at me as she led the old man off.

Si quieres conversar con mi abuelito, has de venir mañana a mi casa a la vueltita no más. De don Hildefonso su casa es. (If you would like to converse with my grandfather you must come tomorrow to my house that's just round the corner. It belongs to don Hildefonso).

I was still haunted by the unexpected vision of the way the old man had been standing there, so I nodded dumbly and turned towards the *Hostal Dorado* across the *Plaza*. It was growing

dusk now and the *chicharras* (*crickets*) with their shrill reverberations were announcing the fact. I began, almost unwittingly, to slap my neck and hands as the mosquitoes came out for their evening's entertainment under the flame trees surrounding the square. I was surprised that they could even bite me through my London safari shirt.

What was I doing here in this town of Lamas, in this remote Province of San Martín, Perú? As I look back now, I have often asked myself that. Why had I decided on that year's trip round the world? Was it because I was tired of life and work at home; was it because of a failed marriage; was it because of a shrinking world economy that made it a now or never thing; was it because it would be a once-in-a-lifetime experience to bore folks later in a bar and office with colourful anecdotes; or was it because I always had needed some sort of project in life...? Only the Lord knew!

Yes..., I suppose it might have been all and none of those things combined. Yet it seemed to me in that quiet late afternoon that it had been something deeper, something to do with a photo that I had seen in my younger days... Had it been in a magazine in the dentist's or doctor's waiting room; in the Uni' students' common room; in a newspaper left in the corner of Manchester commuter train on a dismal Monday evening, somewhere inconsequential in itself at any rate?

Yet that picture had always lain there among the windmills of my mind. The vision was of a South American Indian, standing on a hill-top, shading his eyes and gazing over the mountain ranges into the sunset. That vision had haunted me all my life. In times of quiet, in moments of jubilation, even in the hurly-burly of everyday existence, that man would be there – always watching, always looking...

And now, I had actually seen him, this very afternoon, doing exactly what was in that picture in my mind...!

So, who was he? What had he, if anything, to do with me? And, most of all, why was he weeping?

To make matters more curious still, how was it that I had ended up being here, way off the beaten tourist track, in Lamas, in the *Montaña* of Perú, of all places?

You see, I'd been doing the regular touristy-sort-of-thing one does in the world, just as one does to get a flavour of a place, yet avoid difficulties, hazards, etc. In fact, well, to avoid any real contact with the place itself and its people, just to obtain that sort of "plastic" version of reality that most tourists experience. So, of course, in Peru I did things like Lima with its gold museum, its Cathedral and the *Plaza de Armas*, and a well structured evening *peña* (*national dance-bistro*); then, on to a quick flight over the Nazca lines (bit pricey!); Arequipa and the monastery; off next day up to Lake Titicaca and the floating islands (photos of the Urus - they wanted to charge me!); popping over to Bolivia to see La Paz and the Tiahuanaco ruins; back via Cuzco and Macchu Picchu (got the usual postcards sent off!); back down to Lima, laden with llama rugs and dolls, and pan-pipes (for the relations and kids back home); and the next morning that horribly early flight to Iquitos (*Ick-quick-toss*, as my English friend pronounced it) for a night or two in a jungle, native "village" sort-of-thing, to round the experience off, thus making me the "expert" on Peru on returning home!

But I hadn't planned on this unforeseen and unscheduled stop at the foot of the eastern Andes' slopes, at a place called Tarapoto.

Se ha presentado un pequeño desperfecto en el avión, Señores y Señoras, que nos obliga pernoctar aquí en Tarapoto. (A small technical hitch, Ladies & Gentlemen, that requires us to stay overnight here in Tarapoto).

The captain's voice had crackled over the loudspeaker of the aircraft as we came in to an unexpected landing on the dusty tarmac of an airport some forty minutes short of Iquitos. What I would come to understand later, much later, was that his "apology" was his metaphorical language for:

My niece, who lives in Tarapoto, is fifteen today and the family are having her quinceañera, (Fifteenth, coming-of-age, birthday party) to which myself and the crew are invited.

And so I found myself stepping out on the baking soil of Tarapoto air-field to be soon surrounded by motor-tricycle rickshaw drivers offering to take me to the town or to see the "city" of Lamas nearby.

Lamas, más fresquita es y hay chunchus para ver. (The air is fresher and there are "Chunchus" - a derogatory term for Indians - to look at.)

So I had chosen to come to Lamas, along some thirty kilometres of dusty highway, passing the villages of Morales, with what appeared to be a shiny new concrete bridge, and later climbing up through Cacatachi and Rumisapa on the way. Proper conversation with the flamboyant driver had been impossible due to the shaking, dust clouds and open exhaust of the sprightly machine. Hanging on for dear life while being directly behind the driver, I thought I did hear him shout something about Rumisapa being called that because in the local Kechwa language it meant 'Lots of stones' and certainly

the maize crop was being challenged numerically by the number of boulders in the field.

The driver finally deposited me in the *Plaza de Armas* (the main square) before a tired-looking, three-storey building called the *Hostal Dorado*. He grudgingly accepted, with little grace, my two tatty dollar bills, and turned to a large florid lady, standing next to me. After some lengthy haggling, the pair charged off to some other destination with a sack of what appeared to be pineapples balanced precariously on the handlebars of the motor-tricycle.

The *Hostal Dorado* (lit. *The Golden Hostel*) was no better or worse than other places of refuge that I had stayed in around the world. It had received its name from the peeling yellow-orange paint that was liberally daubed on its ceilings, walls, and shutters. That contrasted strangely with odd pieces of faded blue colonial furniture that “graced” the entrance area.

I was given a room that fared little better in design and content. The twin shutter-type doors met grudgingly for some of their length and were held together by a large iron hook and clasp. The en-suite facilities were literally that! The toilet in the corner of this upstairs room was discoloured and cracked. It had neither seat, nor a lid on the cistern. A piece of wet string hung forlornly from one corner of the tank and I perceived that by hauling fiercely on it, it caused the toilet to flush. A liberal supply of neat newspaper squares hung on a hook and the old cooking-oil tin below suggested that one should not flush such paper down the toilet. The sink carried a small section of carbolic washing soap and a thin cotton towel. The one tap dripped half-heartedly until the town supply of water went off from 6 p.m. until 6 a.m. I did not

have the courage to enquire if there might be a bath or a shower around.

Sitting on the edge of the bed that evening, I read the tattered copy of the *Guía Turística de Lamas (The Lamas Tourist Guide)* that I had found lying in a corner of the room. It boldly portrayed a picture of the Church across the square, although I had a feeling that the picture was not quite right and saw later that the *Guía* had been printed in the late sixties, before the last big earthquake in the eighties. It proudly stated that the city's full name was *El Triunfo de la Santa Cruz de los Motilones y Lamas (The Triumph of the Holy Cross over the Motilone and Lamas Tribes)* and had been established around 1650 by a group of Spaniards. I was to find out later that there was more to it than that, much more. The city appeared to be also nicknamed "*La ciudad de los tres pisos*" (*The city on three levels*) due to its topography, being built on three ridges of the hilltops, on the last range before two thousand miles or more of the Amazon basin stretched eastward to the Atlantic Ocean.

The fly-blown forty-watt bulb dangling on a wire from the ceiling did not encourage reading or other pursuits. So, after glancing at my watch and seeing it was eight-fifteen, I lowered myself carefully on to the wafer-thin mattress and the creaking bed-frame, and covered myself with the thin cotton sheet provided. Would tomorrow bring the answer to the riddle of the vision of the man with the shading hand? Sleep prevented me from reflecting more on these strange coincidences.

It was still quite dark in the room when I awoke, although I could see the outline of the dawn round the edges of the closed shutters.

I did what I had to do, though the string snapped in my hand, and I had to grope around in the cistern for the plug to release the water. I then realized that it must be six-o'clock at least, for the tap began protesting, as if it had indigestion. Sure enough, when I turned it fully on it burped and spat out a mouthful of brown, oily water and then slowly began to stabilize itself and run clear and tepid.

There were sounds of activity below in the square. On opening the shutters, I was confronted by a ragged, spotty youth perching precariously, at balcony level, on the roof of what appeared to be the local bus. He was, as I had seen before in Bolivia, in the plaza in Cochabamba, the *ayudante*, the driver's mate and conductor, and general whipping-boy. This one was on the roof of the bus, busy stowing away sacks of coffee and bales of cotton; together with gargantuan bunches of cooking bananas and three roosters tied up in bags with just their heads protruding.

He grinned at me and shouted: *Hola, gringo, ¿cara de papaya!* (*Hi there, gringo with a face like a pawpaw!*)

He was probably right. *Gringo* was a derogatory term for white-folks and my face had been burned and blistered in the ride up from Tarapoto. I smiled back, not knowing what to say, as my Spanish was fairly rudimentary, and I was not at the level of trading jokes or insults. I had yet to learn magic words like *Acaso...*, *'stás loco ché...* or *no te pases, cholo*, (*Do you really think..., you're off your head, mate, watch it buddy*) so I retreated through the bedroom door and went down to look for breakfast.

There were pleasant cooking smells wafting through a door at the rear of the hall and I ventured out into a small patio where

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