



AMERICAN HOLOCAUST

BOOK ONE MOCTEZUMA

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American Holocaust

By
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Prologue, 2015

The men who once lived free like us called it *Wipazuka waste Wi*, ‘the moon of the good berries’ because the small red berries that cover the ground when the moon is full are fresh and tasty. Some say it is the strawberry moon. The season of the fruit is short. They are sweet, the berries are, and when they ripen, the ground is as red as the blood of my brothers. We once covered the land like the great salt water that no one has seen for so long that many doubt it ever existed. Still, when the moon of the good berries is full in the night sky on those days when the sun is highest, we come together and tell the stories of those who came before us to keep them alive. To forget our brothers, and the bronze-skinned men who lived with them, is to dishonor them, and that is not a good thing.

I am called Runs Swift because when I was a young bull, I could run faster than the others. I am old now and not so fast, but my brothers honor me by not changing my name. We were once more numerous than the stars that fill the heavens, and their number is beyond reckoning. Now we are few, and that is why remembering is so important. If we forget, we will vanish like the dry leaves in autumn, stripped from the trees by the cold north wind that blows hard one day and is gone the next. The trees, however, remember and the leaves return with ‘the moon when streams are open.’ We learn from the trees and every living thing the Creator sends, leading us to knowledge. We will not forget, so we gather on these special days when ‘the moon of the good berries’ is full and the days are long. We tell the stories and we remember.

Golden light fades as the sun falls behind the mountains. The moon watches her from his perch in the sky and sends his own light, gray and dim, but enough to cast shadows that move slowly toward me from the edge of the forest. For the next three days, I am the center of the earth for my brothers. No one sleeps. No one eats. Each listens and remembers.

“*Grandfather Runs Swift,*” the voice of a yearling calls from behind me. “*It is I, Listens Well. I come to ask a favor of you.*”

“*Tell me what you want, young one.*” I laugh inwardly knowing that Listens Well had to muster great courage to approach me, the eldest of the herd with the intention to speak rather than listen!

“*I have seen all thirteen moons twice. I learn quickly. My father has told me the stories many times. I know them all. You are wise, Runs Swift, and you are old, but I think you were wise before you were old!*”

Despite his youth, Listens Well speaks with confidence, and he does not speak without thinking. That is good. “*Perhaps I was,*” I mumble as the mass of gray shadows moves closer. “*And what is the favor you wish of me. The others will be here soon.*”

He pays no attention to the approaching herd. *“I want to be the storyteller when you are gone, Runs Swift. That is what I want, to remember the stories I have learned from you through my father and to tell them to my brothers when you are gone.”* He falls to his knees and lowers his head. He is so young. He has no horns, yet there is a passion about him that draws my interest. I like him.

“Rise, Listens Well. I hope that this will not be the final time I tell the stories, but the future, we are not meant to see. As a calf, you were not allowed at the assembly. A yearling now, this will be your first hearing. Listen well. Three sunrises from now, when it is time for the final story, I will invite you to do the telling.”

He is pleased. *“That will be enough, Runs Swift. You have given me the chance to do what I want to do, and to prove to you that I can do it well.”*

The herd is here and encircles me. The yearling steps back and becomes lost among the mighty bulls pressing forward to hear what all yearn to hear whenever the moon of the good berries is full on the day the sun lingers longest in the sky.

Once, the telling was only for the bulls, but over time, the storytellers invited the young adults, the spike-horns. Now, I invite the yearlings. Wisdom is not meant only for those with many years. The cows and the calves are not allowed. They must stay in the forest for the three days that I stand to tell the stories. This is a bad rule, and I strike it down.

“Brothers,” I begin, *“it is time for the telling. It is time to bring the stories back to life. In this way, the memory of our ancestors will never perish despite what the men with white skin tried to do long ago. Today, the men with white skin helps us. Word comes from the four winds that our number grows. How many we are, I do not know, but we of this herd are pure and the men with white skin let it be so and do not attempt to change us as they have the others.”*

“Two decisions I have reached. The first I declare now, the second in three days. Hear what I say. From this day forward, all shall gather as a family. The telling is no longer for the bulls and their sons, but for their mates and their daughters, too. If any object, speak now for we will never return to the old way of exclusion. There is no reason for it.”

My decision is met with bobbing heads and grunts of approval. I would have expected nothing else.

“Listens Well,” I call out. *“Go to the forest and bring your mothers and sisters. Give them the good news that the telling is meant for all to hear. Go now.”* The yearling races toward the trees. His high-pitched grunt sounds almost like the squeal of a young calf. He is excited to be the bearer of the good news.

The mothers and grandmothers, the daughters and sisters come, as if they are not sure that I have indeed invited them to the telling. I wait in silence until the last one, a feeble calf not one year, joins her mother on the edge of the circle. The calf is called Three Legs because she was born with only one front leg. I have come to know that what matters most to a leader is not how he treats the bravest and strongest, but how he treats the weakest, so I have waited patiently for her.

Three Legs is startled when I call her forward. *“You, child will sit with me as I tell the stories.”* The herd parts, and Three Legs hobbles forward. She nuzzles my chest and then lies down. The herd follows her example. I alone stand.

The moon is full and so bright that it dims the stars that twinkle in the sky around it. The night is warm and still, so quiet that I can hear rustling in the nearby forest. I glimpse movement. It is not one of us for we are all here in the pasture.

“Who is it?” I call out, and the bulls rise to their feet and turn toward the trees.

A large shadow moves from the woods and lumbers into the pasture. *“It is I, Brother Bear and my sloth. Will you allow us to hear your telling, Brother Bison?”*

We have no quarrel with the bear. *“I will allow it.”*

As soon as I speak the words, another cries from the opposite side of the pasture, *“I, too am here with my own gang. It is Brother Elk.”*

The trees rustle and shadows emerge in the gray moonlight. *“Who else?”* I ask more as a command than a question.

“Brother Fox and my skulk.”

“Sister Rabbit and her warren.”

“Grandfather Wolf and his pack. We are here to listen and nothing more.”

“And Cousin Coyote with his family. We’ve no tricks to play and come only to hear your telling.”

We suddenly find our herd surrounded by every creature with which we share this land. Even Brother Eagle and his convocation sit atop the tallest fir trees. His hearing and his sight are the best of any of us, so he is able to remain at a comfortable distance.

“If you come in peace, you may stay in peace. We have lived together and shared this land without struggle. We have offered our flesh to the bronze-skinned men, and even shared it with each other. This we have done willingly. None holds grudge toward the other.”

“Our story is your story, too. Come in peace and listen in peace. Rest with us on the soft grass of this pasture. Mitakuye Oyasin.”

Each lies down among his own, and as the moon rises, I begin.

Chapter One, 1520
Moctezuma

His name was *Ehekatl Meztli*, Wind Brother because whenever the wind blew through the grassland, he would turn to face it. Wind Brother most enjoyed the wind from the north. *Mictlampa*, the bronze-skinned men called it. In their songs, they sang of the cool breeze, which caressed the sun-baked earth. The hard clay felt like rock, beneath the hooves of Wind Brother.

His father told him that the ones who came before us came from the north, running with the cold wind that brings snow. The dark-skinned men came, too, but they could not run with the wind as *tatanka* could. That is what they called us *tatanka*, the white-skinned men, buffalo. It makes no difference. We are the children of *Wakan Tanka*, the Great Mystery who created everything, even men, though I often wonder why he did it. I think he sometimes wonders why he did it, too. That was long ago, even before our ancestors came with the north wind.

When Wind Brother was a spike bull of three years, he ranged with the great herd in the grasslands far to the south. No one goes there anymore. The last we remember, the land became desert. It was too hot there and after a long while, *Mictlampa* told the Great Mystery he no longer had a desire to roam so far from the land of snow and ice. *Wakan Tanka* said, "Okay" and left the land to *Anpetu Wi* to do with as he wished. The people of that land spoke to *Anpetu Wi* with their own word, *Tonatiuh* because he was the sun and the leader of *Tollan*, their heaven. We learned these things from Wind Brother.

Men confuse me. They use too many different words that mean the same thing. It is not the same for animals. We do not often use words because we know the thoughts each has on his mind, and we respect each other. Respect requires few words. Our bronze-skinned friends, who no longer rule the plains that once were ours, have the best words for it. They say, "Mitakuye Oyasin. We are one family." It is unfortunate that the white-skinned men do not believe it.

One summer day while the herd rested in the tall grass, the young Wind Brother wandered off, curious to know what was beyond the end of the land. As *Anpetu Wi* poured heat from his cauldron in heaven, Wind Brother came upon a small pool of water. Amid the scrub brush that surrounded the pool, a single, ancient tree had managed to plant its roots firmly into the sandy soil to claim the place as its own. Trees and bushes talk, too, even cactus, but the thoughts of plants are not as easy to hear as the thoughts of animals. This tree was a happy tree. He had learned to flourish in the heat with the pool of water as his neighbor and he was grateful to the Great Mystery for giving him such a long life.

Sitting beneath what shade the small leaves of the tree offered was a young boy clad in loincloth. He held his head between his knees and whimpered as a calf might cry for his mother.

The southern breeze blew softly through the leaves and the tree spoke to Wind Brother. *“You are alone and have traveled far,”* the tree whispered. *“You must be thirsty. Come drink from my friend, but be aware of the boy who sits with us. He cries.”*

The boy lifted his head as if he had heard something. He was startled to see Wind Brother staring at him from the opposite side of the water. The boy raised himself quickly from the ground and leapt to the far side of the tree thinking it could offer him some protection from the beast that waded slowly into the shallow water for a drink.

Wind Brother had never seen a boy before, nor had he ever seen a man. The boy had never seen a creature like Wind Brother, so they stood and looked at one another, the boy with fear, Wind Brother with innocent curiosity. The mesquite tree – for that is what he was, a mesquite tree – chuckled and when he did, a seedpod fell from his branches and landed at the boy’s feet. The boy stared at it dumbly and then raised his eyes hoping that the beast would have disappeared as if it had been a desert mirage. It was still there. Wind Brother held his ground and cocked his head to one side.

“He is afraid,” the mesquite tree said rustling his thin, green leaves in the soft breeze.

“I mean him no harm,” Wind Brother replied. When he lowered his head to drink from the pool of water, the boy gripped the tree as if the mesquite could protect him from the bad intentions the boy felt certain were in Wind Brother’s mind.

“The boy doesn’t know that,” the tree strained to speak as the boy held him even more tightly.

“What is a boy?” Wind Brother asked.

The tree chuckled again through the boy’s chokehold. *“A boy is a young man. Have you never seen a man?”*

When Wind Brother shook his heavy head, the tree explained, *“A man walks on two legs as a bird, but a man cannot fly. Where the bird has two wings, a man has two arms with hands and fingers. A man can hold things like our Brother Squirrel can, but a man is much stronger. Even this young one holds my body as if his life depended upon it.”*

“They come from where the south wind blows, often enough that I know they are not like we are. They can only talk with their mouths and hear with their ears. Let us wait and see what this young one will do.”

Tonatiuh climbed high in the sky and as he did, the boy’s grip loosened and he slowly slid down the trunk of the tree so that he was sitting on the ground. His eyes never left Wind Brother. For his part, the only movement the spike bull made was to twitch his right eye when Brother Fly remained too long in one place. It was irritating, but Wind Brother allowed it.

The boy’s crying subsided, but he remained fearfully frozen at the base of the tree having no idea what he might do to escape his predicament. After several hours, Wind Brother told the tree that he would try to speak to the boy, and the mesquite tree agreed that was a good idea.

“Boy,” he said not too loudly. *“Do you have a name? What do other boys and men call you?”* Wind Brother waited, but there came no response from the boy.

“Boy,” he repeated in a louder voice. “Do you have a name?”

This time, the boy sat up and looked around him. Seeing no other man, he put his head in the crook of his arm where he held the tree.

“Let us call him together,” the tree suggested.

“That is a good idea,” Wind Brother said. They called out loudly and slowly, “Boy, do you have a name?”

The boy sat up, startled. The leaves rustled above him. He looked up and shook his head, ‘no, it cannot be,’ and then he looked straight into the eyes of Wind Brother.

Wind Brother smiled. The smell of fear was not as strong as it first was.

“Yes, it is I who call you, boy. Do you have a name?”

Not knowing what else to do, the boy stood up and stepped away from the tree. He pointed to his chest with one of his fingers and said aloud, “Is it I to whom you speak.” He raised his other arm and pointed to Wind Brother. “Is it you who speaks to me?”

The mesquite tree chortled again as his leaves twisted and turned on their slender stems, and Wind Brother answered, “Yes, boy. I am the one who speaks. I am pleased that you can understand me. Can you answer my question? Do you have a name?”

Sensing that the creature meant him no harm, the boy crossed his arms on his slender chest and announced, “My name is Moctezuma. My home is Tenochtitlan. Some day, I will rule there, but at this moment,” he began to sniffle and wipe the tears from his eyes, “I am lost.”

“No, little brother,” Wind Brother gently answered. “It is a time to rejoice. Because I have found you, you are no longer lost. You have no need to shed more tears.”

Moctezuma felt safe in the presence of Wind Brother and he stepped into the water and approached him with extended arms. “We shall be friends. The tree tells me you are from the land of the south wind.”

The boy glanced quizzically at the tree. “I cannot say,” Moctezuma responded. “My home is called Tenochtitlan, but because I am lost, I cannot tell you where it is.”

Wind Brother raised his face to the wind and smelled the warmth from the south. “That way,” he said. “We will find your home and return you to your family.”

Wind Brother thanked the pool and the tree for their kindness to the boy and him. After a long and deep draft of water, the two set off in the fading light where the land rises.

They walked for many days, always able to find food and water to keep them fresh and strong. Moctezuma ate the fruit from the low-lying cactus, and sometimes, he even ate the paddles. Grass was plentiful, and there was enough sedge to keep Wind Brother happy. All of the plants were gracious to share what they had with the wandering buffalo and the boy. However there were times when the distance between places of water was great, and at these times, the boy struggled to keep up with his companion. Whenever Wind Brother sensed the boy’s pace was slowing, he would invite him to sit on his back and rest. Moctezuma was very glad, and expressed his joy with heartfelt embraces as he held Wind Brother’s spike horns for balance or grasped his shaggy

mane. Each day of the journey, Moctezuma became better at speaking without words and hearing without the use of his ears. Their hearts and minds were becoming like one.

Moctezuma told his new friend that he was the only son of the king of the great lake. His people believed that to become a man, a boy must capture an enemy. Although he was very young, Moctezuma was sent from the city at an early age because his father was sick and believed he would die soon. Moctezuma had to become a man so he could rule the people when his father died. Despite his mother's protests, a band of warriors accompanied the boy to the northern wasteland and abandoned him after many days. "Do as we have done," the leader of the band told him. "Make your father proud and return home with a prisoner."

"I have failed my father," Moctezuma concluded, *"for I return without a prisoner, and when the king dies, his son will still be a boy and a boy cannot sit on the throne and rule the people."*

Wind Brother gave much thought to the boy's predicament. *"I can help you,"* he finally said. *"I will be your prisoner and your father will be proud."*

"You would do this for me?"

"Why not? Are we not friends?"

"You are a wise creature, Wind Brother."

Wasuton Wi, the moon when all things ripen was full and high in the sky when Wind Brother and Moctezuma reached the top of a high hill, which they began to climb when *Tonatiuh* went to sleep many hours earlier. The boy bent over and braced his hands on his knees. He breathed hard from the long ascent.

"Look," Wind Brother said. *"There are two moons, one above us and one below us."*

The landscape before them was soaked in silvery moonlight, and lights twinkled in the distance. Wind Brother was confused. What strange place had they reached, he wondered, where two moons grace the night sky and stars blaze everywhere? Perhaps they had reached the end of the earth as he hoped he would when he wandered from the herd two moons ago.

"I think we have reached the end of the world," Wind Brother mused from his high perch atop the hill that now seemed more like a mountain. The south wind blew stronger here, and the single braid of long hair that grew from Moctezuma's otherwise bald head trailed him like the black tail of a coati.

When the boy recognized what he was looking at, he raised his out-stretched arms and rejoiced. *"This is not the end of the world, friend buffalo,"* he cried out. *"This is my home! This is Tenochtitlan! You have done what you promised to do at the pool. I will soon be with my family. That is no twin moon you see beneath us, but the reflection of the one that rules the night sky. My city rises in the center of a great lake we call Texcoco, and Metztli sees his face in the water."*

The boy's happiness pleased Wind Brother and they began their long descent to the valley below. As the eastern sky lightened to the color of the lavender flowers that the

honeybees liked so much, the lake took shape in the dawn light. It was huge. The spike bull had never seen so much water. On top of the water was the boy's city that he called Tenochtitlan.

When they reached the valley floor, they came upon a road. *"This avenue will lead us to the northern causeway. Tonatiuh will be directly above us before we step from the land onto the walkway, but at least I know I am going home!"*

The morning was cool as the two unlikely friends walked down the dusty road toward the city that was built on the lake.

When *Tonatiuh* sent his first rays streaming over the mountains to the east, the travelers encountered a man who carried a large basket of flowers on his back. He was so bowed over that he did not see the companions approaching him. He heard their footsteps and while staring at the road before him called out hoping they could hear, "Hello friends. Will you not walk with me to the city? I bring flowers for the king and his beautiful queen. There are no other flowers like these, but I am sure you know this as you stare at the heavy load strapped to my back. My wife is a good woman and she secures my load with confidence. I have never lost a single petal."

Wind Brother had never seen a man before. He glanced at Moctezuma and then back at the man. *"He looks somewhat like you,"* he whispered to the boy. Of course, the man could not hear what Wind Brother said, for what passed between the buffalo and the boy now passed without words.

"We have a way to go before we reach the city," Moctezuma said to the man. "Perhaps I can ease your burden. Look! I have taken a prisoner and am returning him to our city. I will have him carry your basket."

The man tried to straighten his back as he wiped his brow. "I could use the help. *Tonatiuh* has just climbed over the mountain and I am sweating already." He stopped and turned around to see who might be accompanying him. His jaw dropped at the sight of Wind Brother for he had never seen a buffalo, but when he recognized Moctezuma, he fell to his knees and nearly lost his hold on the cargo he carried on his back. "Great prince," he pronounced, "I am not worthy to walk before you, but only to follow your footsteps. And what type of prisoner do you hold captive? I have never seen a creature like this one!"

Moctezuma took the man by the arm and commanded, "Rise. When I am king, I will require no man to bow before me." With the boy's help, the man regained his feet, and together they managed to remove the burden from his back.

"My prisoner comes from a large herd of beasts that roams the grasslands far to the north. I know of no one who has seen such an animal, so I have taken him prisoner to present to my father."

The man placed his hands on his hips and twisted his waist from one side to the other to work out a crick that had developed in his back. "He is a wondrous creature and I have seen none like him. He will make a fine gift to your father."

The boy looked at the buffalo and asked if he would mind carrying the basket of flowers to the city. Wind Brother said he would be pleased to help and that it would further prove the story of his capture and servitude to Moctezuma. The boy and the

man were careful not to damage a single flower as they hoisted the load to Wind Brother's back and fastened it safely in place.

"If he runs for freedom, he will lose the cargo," the man said.

"He will not run," Moctezuma replied. "He is my prisoner and he has accepted his fate."

Wind Brother, Moctezuma and the man with the flowers continued their journey to the city on the lake. More and more people and even some dogs – who reminded Wind Brother of coyotes – joined them so that by the time they approached the causeway at the edge of the lake, they were a grand parade led by Moctezuma and his prisoner.

When they reached the water's edge, Moctezuma announced, "We will wait here. News of my return will spread quickly and my father will send a royal guard of eagle warriors to escort us to the palace."

"*Am I to go with you?*" Wind Brother asked.

The boy laughed. "*You will soon learn why I will not let you out of my sight until I have made my wishes known to my father. You have agreed to be my prisoner, but I will care for you as if you are my brother, because you are.*"

The boy's words pleased Wind Brother, and he soon learned why the boy insisted that the two stay close together. The royal guard came as the boy said they would. The warriors were a colorful group who wore headdresses adorned with long, bright feathers. They eyed Wind Brother warily. None had seen a buffalo before. Two warriors walked in front and the other six walked behind the prince and his captive. A large crowd lined the avenue and cheered wildly as Moctezuma led Wind Brother to the royal palace.

When at last they arrived, the crowd swarmed the palace courtyard and pressed the boy forward. The king wore a long, feathered robe, and bright stones hung from his ears and nearly blinded Wind Brother when they reflected the sun's brilliant light. While the king stood on the stone steps with his arms crossed, the queen could not restrain herself, and she ran to take her son in her arms.

"A lifetime has passed since you left me," she said.

"Four moons, mother. I have been gone four moons."

She held him tightly. "I think it must have been longer for you have grown so much in so short a time. You are nearly as tall as I am," she exclaimed.

The king descended the steps slowly and as he did, a smile passed over his face, but it was gone as he approached the queen and her son. The boy fell to his knees and bowed to his father. The king coughed loudly and a thin trickle of blood appeared at the corner of his mouth. Several men rushed toward him, but he waved them off.

Moctezuma looked up. "Are you okay, father?"

"I am better now that you have returned, son, but you left on a quest for manhood. Have you succeeded?"

"I have."

The king raised his arms and looked around. "Then where is he, your prisoner?"

Panic gripped Moctezuma when he turned to present Wind Brother to his father, for the crowd had swarmed around the boy and was so thick that it blocked Wind Brother from his view. He flailed his arms at the people behind him and they slowly parted to

reveal the flower man who held Wind Brother with the rope he had fashioned when they met on the road.

Moctezuma took the rope from the flower man and confidently led his captive forward. The queen raised her arms in fear and the king pulled his wife closer to him. No one had seen such a creature before, so large, so broad and with such a thick, shaggy mane.

“What is it?” the king said with an unsteady voice. He coughed again and more blood appeared on his lips.

“It is a buffalo,” Moctezuma answered proudly.

“And how did you manage to capture this beast?” the queen wanted to know.

The boy told his parents he had searched the grasslands far to the north to find an enemy worthy of capture. “When I spotted this one, I was very frightened because he is so large and powerful. I followed him for many days,” the boy lied. “I spent many hours weaving this rope. I knew he would tire at some point, and this was the only way I could imagine taking him as my prisoner.

“Two moons ago as he lie sleeping by a pool of water beneath a mesquite tree, I surprised him and put the rope around him. I dragged him many days until at last, he decided to come willfully with me as my prisoner.”

Of course the flower man knew better. The rope was his, but he would not betray the boy who was trying to please his father who was visibly ill.

“Is it safe to be near him?” the queen wondered.

“It is safe,” her son replied.

A group of men with stern faces walked into the courtyard, and the people bowed respectfully, some even fearfully. The one in front carried a staff. He looked fiercely through the dark, green circles painted around his eyes. He wore many jewels and baubles in his ears and nose, and his headdress was so tall that Wind Brother believed the slightest breeze would topple him.

The spectators hushed in his presence as he slowly and cautiously approached Wind Brother.

“*He is Tlamacazui, the giver of things,*” Moctezuma said to Wind Brother, but of course, no one else heard the words. “*He is a priest and it is best to be wary of him.*”

Tlamacazui stood before Wind Brother and the two locked gazes, as Brother Elk will lock horns when it is his season to win a mate, but Wind Brother soon learned that there was more at stake here than creating offspring! Even as a spike bull, Wind Brother was large, and he and the giver of things stood eye-to-eye, although the man kept what he hoped was a safe distance.

Tlamacazui slowly walked around Wind Brother, afraid to move close and touch him, yet curious about this large creature. He leaned forward and sniffed. When Wind Brother turned his head and snorted, the startled priest jumped back and fell unceremoniously into the arms of his nearby attendants who quickly returned him to his feet.

“It stinks whatever it is,” *Tlamacazui* pronounced as he covered his nose with the palm of his hand. “But that is of no matter. The gods accept your prisoner.” With these words, the crowd, which continued to grow, joyfully raised its voice to acknowledge

Moctezuma's achievement. The boy was now a man and worthy to assume the duties that would one day be his when the ailing king died.

The king managed a weak smile. "You have done well, young prince. The gods are pleased. *Tlamacazui* has said it is so."

The people roared their approval.

Amid the excitement, the king fell into a violent fit of coughing. Doubled up and with his head bent forward, blood dripped more freely from his mouth and a crimson pool gathered on the stones at his feet.

"He needs help," Moctezuma cried out, but no one knew what to do.

Tlamacazui raised his staff and quieted the crowd. The king wiped the blood from his mouth and stood to his full height. His face was as pale as the temple blocks that reached to the deep blue sky behind them.

"Be still, people of Tenochtitlan," the giver of things spoke loudly, and the people responded with silence. "All will be well tomorrow, for when *Tonatiuh* stands high above the altar, the gods will show their pleasure with the king's son as they accept the heart of Moctezuma's prisoner. We have never offered such a sacrifice before. Surely the gods will smile on the king and return his health."

Wind Brother grunted loudly and everyone stepped back even further, everyone except the flower man and Moctezuma who walked to the buffalo's side and placed a comforting arm on his friend. "*As you told me many moons ago not to be afraid, Wind Brother, so I tell you the same. Do not be afraid. I will not let this happen.*"

The king raised his arm and agreed with the priest. "He who gives things will sacrifice your prisoner to the gods as all prisoners are privileged to meet their deaths in honor of those who give us life and everything we need to support it. So let it be written So let it be done!" The king coughed again, this time more violently, and he braced his hands on his knees. Drops of bloody sputum dripped from his lips.

Wind Brother did not like the words that the priest and the king spoke, that the prisoner would be sacrificed. He was the prisoner. Had the boy tricked him?

"No father!" the boy cried out. "The prisoner is mine and his fate should be in my hands, not in yours or those of the giver of things."

Too weak to respond, the king turned his head to the priest and hoarsely whispered. "It is for *Tlamacazui* to tell us what pleases the Lord of Mictlan, for he is the only one who knows. If *Mictlantecuhtli* demands the prisoner's life, then it shall be so. I say it again. So let it be written So let it be done."

The king staggered into the arms of nearby attendants, and his son ran to his side. Wind Brother tensed his powerful muscles preparing to bolt, but before he could take a step, a giant net soared through the air and landed atop the flower man and the buffalo. They were trapped, but flower man did not panic and Wind Brother gained strength from the humble man's calmness. A dozen strong warriors secured the net that held the two fast and dragged them away.

Wind Brother cried out, "*Help me!*"

Moctezuma replied, "*I will! Somehow, I will!*"

The night passed slowly. Wind Brother and the flower man shared the same, dirty cell, but neither seemed to mind. Wind Brother tried to talk to the flower man, but the flower man could not hear him. There were other captives as well, all men, hundreds of them, and amid the murmurs, Wind Brother knew that they all awaited the same fate. Each would be sacrificed to the vicious gods the men of the city worshipped. If only they knew the Great Mystery, Wind Brother pondered in his miserable predicament. The Great Mystery demanded no sacrifice from any of the countless things he created, and the Great Mystery gave freely to all creatures. When the rain came, it was sent to all, not just one or the other, to the two-leggeds and not the four-leggeds, to those who fly in the air and not to those who swim in the water. Wind Brother did not like these gods whose names he could not even say.

The following morning, *Anpetu Wi* was slow to bring light to the world. Perhaps he wanted to teach the people of Tenochtitlan that their gods did not crave the blood of sacrificed men and animals. The guards were confused in the dim light when word reached them that the king had died during the night watch, and that meant that Moctezuma was no longer a prince, but now ruled the land.

Had the boy not returned with me as his prisoner, Wind Brother thought, then the boy would not be considered a man, and the king would have died without a successor. Wind Brother was pleased. He had done well for the boy and for the people he ruled.

For six days, the mist never rose from the lake, nor did anyone, priest, soldier or citizen come to the prison to demand sacrifice. The city mourned. On the seventh day, before the mist vanished and the clouds disappeared, Moctezuma entered the cell. He was alone and looked no differently than he had when he and Wind Brother first entered the city.

"Do you fare well?" he asked Wind Brother.

"I will not complain," Wind Brother replied. *"I am sorry that your father has died, but I know he has returned to the Great Mystery and no longer feels the pain that was a part of his ailing body."* Moctezuma had cried all of his tears and had none left to shed. He nodded his understanding. Wind Brother continued, *"While I am concerned with my own fate, I have but a single request, that you release this flower man. Although he cannot hear me, nor you and I when we talk to each other, I consider him my friend, and he is not here of his own account."*

"It shall be as you wish, Wind Brother."

"Guards!" Moctezuma commanded. "Release this man." Without hesitation, the large, burly man in charge of the cellblock opened the door and respectfully led the flower man from the cell.

"Goodbye, my friend," he said and bowed to Wind Brother as he backed through the door. Then turning to the new king, he said, "Bless you, great king. May you live long!" Moctezuma politely returned the gesture as the flower man walked into the returning light a free man.

"I am pleased for him," Wind Brother said, *"but where does my fate lie? This talk of sacrifice is not good."*

“We have mourned as a people for seven days. It is time to move forward, but my subjects continue to cry for blood, your blood because they believe as Tlamacazui tells them, if your heart had been offered to Mictlantecuhtli only one day sooner, my father would still be alive. They have no reason to trust me as their new sovereign. Today when Tonatiuh ascends above the temple altar, the priest will sacrifice you and these others, praying that your beating hearts will bring good things to the city under my rule.”

What Moctezuma told Wind Brother did not surprise him. He could smell the blood lust of the priest even as the giver of things smelled his own skin. For seven days, he sought a way that he could escape death at the hands of the priest and gain the trust of the people for the boy who was now a man and their king.

“This sacrifice you speak of is not the way of the Great Mystery. Your priest is wrong. I will give them reason to trust you.”

“What do you propose, Wind Brother?”

“When I stood before your father, I saw a great eagle high above us. He called to me in his way and asked if I was well. I told him I was. ‘I do not trust these men,’ the eagle called. ‘I will watch out for you.’

“I will leave this prison on my own free will without warriors dragging me tied and bound. You must see to it. As you and I stand in the plaza before the temple, you should tell the people that you have received a message from your gods telling you they do not demand the blood of Wind Brother. To show the people that you speak truth, the gods will send their messengers to protect me.

“I will summon Brother Eagle and he and his mate will come, one to perch on my heavy mane, the other high atop the altar. That is what you will tell your people and your priest. That is the sign the gods will send to protect the life of Wind Brother.”

And so, it happened exactly as Wind Brother had explained it to Moctezuma. The one came to rest on his shaggy hump, and the other called from the altar at the top of the temple.

“And what will you do with your captive?” Tlamacazui asked haughtily to keep his honor unblemished.

“I will build him a special garden where he may dwell for as long as he wishes and where we will bring other animals from the farthest ends of the land to live with him and keep him company. This is what the gods have told me to do.” The crowd approved of Moctezuma’s plan and believed that he had received it in a dream from *Quetzalcoatl* who long ago frowned on the way of sacrifice.

Wind Brother was spared, but the four hundred captives who shared the prison with him were led up the steep steps to the temple altar. One by one, the giver of things ripped their beating hearts from their bodies, and those climbing the steps watched the severed heads rolling back down.

Moctezuma was true to his word and built a beautiful garden not far from the royal palace. He sent men deep into the jungles of the southern land and they returned with new prisoners, the jaguar, the monkey, large snakes ... all came to live in Moctezuma’s garden with Wind Brother, and they lived in peace.

The seasons came and went. Wind Brother remembered the herd and often longed for the companionship of his fellows, but Moctezuma came to visit him often. There were times, however when the king would leave for many days. When he returned, he would tell Wind Brother of the battles he won so that he could unify all of the cities of the south into a single, united empire.

Wind Brother's beard grew long and quite luxurious. Moctezuma was no longer a boy, but a true man who ruled his people wisely. He fathered many children, and those times when he left the city for many days, one of his queens would bring the children to the garden where they would sit in fine greenery surrounded by the animals and birds Moctezuma had collected from all over the kingdom. They abided as friends with no animosity of one toward the other. The garden was a place of harmony. Only the king and his queens and their children were allowed to spend time in the garden. The citizens of Tenochtitlan and visitors from faraway lands were permitted to walk the promenade Moctezuma constructed so that he could share the beauty of his menagerie and the wisdom a man can learn from the simple act of observing the creatures that dwelled within it.

Once each month when the moon was at its fullest, Moctezuma would leave his royal garb in his quarters, and dressed only in loincloth as if he were a common citizen, he would lead Wind Brother from the garden and sneak from the city. The king and the buffalo would wander the land alone and return on the second day. Although the royal consorts knew the king's practice, it was never discussed. Moctezuma and Wind Brother would return under the cover of darkness and no one asked questions.

On one such foray into the wilderness, the two experienced an encounter, which would forever change the world of the people who lived in the city on the lake.

Word reached the king from the eastern provinces that watched over the vast salt water that never ends that a large group of strange men had come from the water in eleven giant boats. It was reported that the one who leads them "glows like the sun."

Moctezuma decided he must see this wondrous thing for himself, for he thought that it might be more than a man. It may be the god who returns as he promised.

Wind Brother enjoyed his treks into the open land with his friend of countless years. He invited Moctezuma to ride on his back in the manner he did when he was just a boy. Wind Brother was a bull now, and Moctezuma was no heavier to him than the feather of one of his colorful friends in the garden. As they walked toward the rising sun, Moctezuma told Wind Brother the story of the feathered serpent ...

Quetzalcoatl was angry when the other gods created the world because men were not treated as equals and had to worship the gods. Quetzalcoatl, whose name means 'feathered serpent' took the form of a man so that he might walk among us and share the knowledge that the gods hid from us. Quetzalcoatl was a good god and much loved by the people.

When he came upon the first city, the people who lived there were making sacrifice to Quetzalcoatl's brother, Tezcatlipoca who some called Possessor of Sky and Earth. Quetzalcoatl was not pleased and demanded that the priests halt the executions.

The priests became very angry. They turned their faces to the sky and cried for Tezcatlipoca to intervene. The sky filled with angry clouds that shook with thunder and cast bright bolts of lightning as the darkness approached the city.

Quetzalcoatl told the people not to be afraid. He raised his hands to the sky and a great wind blew the clouds away. "While I am with you," the feathered serpent proclaimed, your city will be strong and the land will be bountiful." What he said was true.

Then the people wanted to worship him as they had worshipped his brother, but Quetzalcoatl would not allow it for he was humble and only trying to do good by men. He taught the men of that city many things that allowed them to prosper.

When they wanted to sacrifice to him, he forbade it. "No longer shall you sacrifice men to the gods," he told them. "They do not want that, but only that you be good to one another. If you feel the desire to sacrifice, sacrifice yourselves by pricking your finger with the maguey thorn. Even that is more than the gods want."

The people were very pleased and happy, but his brother Tezcatlipoca was not. Tezcatlipoca came to the city disguised as an old man and gave his brother a secret drink that made Quetzalcoatl very drunk. Not knowing what he was doing, Quetzalcoatl took a woman, a priestess and had relations with her thereby breaking his vow of celibacy.

Quetzalcoatl was betrayed by his own brother and so humiliated that he no longer felt worthy to rule the city. He journeyed to the salt sea where he built a boat and sailed away, but not before he swore to return and avenge the betrayal by his brother.

"That was a long time ago," Moctezuma told Wind Brother. "Now you know why the people still sacrifice to gain the favor of the gods. The priests are very powerful and the people do whatever Tlamacazui tells them to do.

"I have seen signs that foretell the return of the feathered serpent. The heavy rains that flooded the city have never before happened, and the lights in the sky are not natural. We have seen stars tumble to the ground, but not as many as have fallen since the great flood. These are omens, and when they tell me the leader of these strangers glows like the sun, what am I to think?"

Wind Brother had no knowledge of this feathered serpent that Moctezuma told him about, but from the garden, Wind Brother and the other animals endured the frequent screams of human sacrifice that filled the city on days of execution. If this Quetzalcoatl that Moctezuma talked about could end this vile and pointless practice, it would be a good thing.

The sun was high in the sky when they reached the summit of a mountain facing east. The day was pleasantly warm, not hot. Moctezuma's eyes were sharp and far in the distance, he could see Cholōllān, the second largest city in his kingdom. Suddenly,

Moctezuma told Wind Brother to stop. He climbed from the buffalo's back and dropped to his haunches with his hand above his eyes to shield them from the glare of the sun. A flash of light. This time, Wind Brother saw it, too. He grunted and sniffed the air.

"What can it be?" Moctezuma asked more to himself than to Wind Brother.

An eagle cried and Wind Brother turned his head to spot the grand bird soaring high above them. "*Brother Eagle,*" he called out. "*Will you offer us your help? We need your eyes.*"

The bird swooped low and settled upon a pile of jagged boulders. "*If you wish it, I can help you. My eyes are yours.*"

Moctezuma had become so good at listening to all created things that he heard every word that Wind Brother exchanged with Brother Eagle. He stood atop the highest boulder and stretched out his arm. "*There,*" he pointed. "*Beyond the city of Quetzalcoatl, I see a light flashing far away on the distant plateau. See! There it is again. I would like to know what makes this light. I think it is moving, but I cannot be certain.*"

Brother Eagle flapped his wings and soared into the wind. "*Wait here,*" he called back, "*And I will find the source of this strange light and return to tell you what it is.*"

Moctezuma and Wind Brother waited for a long while. The sun had moved behind them and was approaching the distant western mountains casting shadows before them as they stared into the eastern sky awaiting Brother Eagle's return.

"*I see him!*" Moctezuma cried out rising to his feet.

"*Your eyes are better than mine,*" Wind Brother answered.

"*I have news,*" Brother Eagle called swooping towards them. "*They are men, but not like you. They attract the rays of the sun, and their skin glows when it caresses them. It can be so bright that it can take away my sight unless I turn my eyes away.*"

"*They travel with animals such as I have never seen. I kept my distance but asked the four-leggeds who they were. 'Horses,' the one said. 'We are horses and these men call us beasts of burden. We carry their baggage and pull their cannons.' I asked them what a cannon was and they told me a cannon is a big gun.*"

Moctezuma rubbed his chin and asked, "*What is a gun?*"

"*I do not know,*" Brother Eagle answered. "*I must leave, but I have a final thing to tell you. A bronze-skinned runner, a man just like you Moctezuma will arrive here in the morning. He is well in front of the glowing men. If I were you, I would wait here and see what he has to say. Goodbye, my brothers. If you should need my help again, I will always be with you.*" Brother Eagle leapt from the rock pile and flew west toward Tenochtitlan and the setting sun.

"*I believe it will be wise if we wait and talk to the runner,*" Wind Brother advised the king.

And so, throughout their sleepless night, Wind Brother and Moctezuma remained on the mountaintop looking for the runner that Brother Eagle told them was coming. Neither spoke a word. They sat and waited, watching the stars dance across the night sky.

Wind Brother gave much thought to the story Moctezuma told him about the feathered serpent. He had never seen a feathered serpent, and according to his friend,

this one changed into a man. He did not like the living sacrifices the people of the lake made to their gods. The Great Mystery would never ask for such a thing. As he stared into the blackness, another star fell from the sky. He hoped that the stranger who was coming was the god-man Quetzalcoatl who once banished the bloody practice.

The veil of night was just beginning to rise, and the eastern sky breathed deep lavender in the color of many of the desert flowers. They heard his heavy breathing before they spotted the man, and he had no idea that the buffalo and the king awaited him at the top of the mountain. Moctezuma did not want to startle the man and so he called softly, "Brother, do you come in peace?"

The man stopped below them and searched the ridgeline. It was easier for him to spot their silhouettes against the starry sky than it was for them to see him climbing up the hill in the dim light. "I am a runner and not a warrior," he replied. "I come in peace and bear a message from the people on the coast and from a visitor who came from the sea. The messages are meant for Moctezuma. How far to the city on the lake?"

"One day's journey for a runner."

"Are you from the city?"

"I am and perhaps my beast and I can help you."

When their silhouettes finally emerged, the man was scared and he hesitated to come forward. "What sort of beast is it? I have never seen an animal so large."

"Do not be afraid. The animal is my friend and I ride him. He is a buffalo."

"I have never been to Tenochtitlan, but those who have tell the story of a horned animal such as the one you ride." The runner decided he was too tired to fear Wind Brother, so he sat with Moctezuma as the purple sky turned pink, then orange. Moctezuma did not tell the runner who he was, and even if he did, the man probably would not have believed him.

"What message do you have for the king? My beast and I can deliver it much faster than you can. You can trust us."

The man did trust them. "Large ships carried a man out of the sea and with him many warriors. Their bodies glow in the sun and they carry sticks that roar like thunder and spit lightning and death to any who do not please them. I have seen it with my own eyes."

"Is this man the god who promised to return, for this is the year of Quetzalcoatl?"

The man shook his head uncertainly. "I cannot say for sure. While he frowns on our ways and our gods, he sends death from his lightning sticks. He says he claims the land in the name of his own king and the one god he worships."

"Who is the god he prays to? If he worships a god, he cannot be a god himself," Moctezuma concluded, "but I must be sure."

"I know nothing about his god, only that he carries him on crossed sticks. He must be powerful to give them the lightning sticks."

Moctezuma thought about this and then asked the runner what was his message.

"The people say 'Tell your king the glowing man is coming to the city on the lake to meet him. Prepare yourselves. He finds value in the golden trinkets our people wear and our leaders have told him there is much more in Tenochtitlan than anywhere else in

the kingdom. First, he stops to see the grand temple of Quetzalcoatl in Cholōllān.’ That is what the people say.

“As for the glowing man, he says, ‘Tell the king I am coming.’ That is all. I have no knowledge of what he intends to do, but I think bad things are about.”

As the sun broke over the horizon, Moctezuma saw the first glint of the glowing man. He had not moved during the night. “Consider your mission done, my friend. You may return and tell the glowing man that you have delivered his message and that Moctezuma looks forward to greeting him in Tenochtitlan.”

“I do not wish to return to him and his army. I do not like them. They do not approve of our sacrifices, yet they kill with no regard to men, women, children or beasts. They lust for what we have that they do not have. May I return to the city on the lake with you?”

“If that is your choice. My friend and I will move quickly. If you cannot keep up, follow the sun. The sun will lead you to the lake. You will be able to see it from the other side of the mountain.”

With a final glance to the east, Moctezuma leapt to Wind Brother’s back as he had so often done. Wind Brother ran as fast as he could, and they made the city by nightfall. The runner was well behind them.

Two days later, Brother Eagle came to the garden and perched on the low branches of the large Cypress tree that stood sentinel near the edge of the causeway where it entered the city.

“I bring sad news,” he announced, and this is what he told the creatures in the garden.

When I departed the mountaintop where we met, I heard the call of the Great Mystery. “Go to Cholōllān to bear witness,” he beseeched my soul, and so I did his bidding.

Moctezuma has received blessings from the Great Mystery. He has a good heart and so you and I can speak to him, and he to us. The man who leads the strangers is an evil man, so evil that I cannot hear a word that his black heart speaks. There is only one among the strangers who I can hear, but he cannot hear me. The men call him Father and he does not glow like the others.

The temple to Quetzalcoatl in Cholōllān is the highest building that any man has made. It pleases me because in its largeness, it is dwarfed by this cypress tree and by the mountains that the Great Mystery has created for our pleasure. I took my place on the altar at the top of the temple even though I could still smell the fresh blood of the men who died there at the hands of their priests. I did as the Mystery bid me, I waited, I watched and I listened to bear witness as I was told to do.

The noble men of the city, the chief priest and his priests gathered to welcome the strangers. The man Wind Brother and the king say is the glowing man rides the four-legged beast called horse. He rides Brother Horse just as we have seen Moctezuma ride Wind Brother. The man is stern and his face is not welcoming. His name is Captain because that is what Father calls him. Father does not ride a horse but walks beside Captain.

The people gave Captain and his men the best houses in the city. At night, they held a big meeting, the Captain and his men. Although I could not hear the Captain's words or thoughts, Father said many times, "We have done enough damage to the people who dwell in this land. You cannot do any more. This is not 'New Spain' as you call it. This land belongs to these people."

Captain responded with a wave of his hand and gruff words.

Father raised straight branches that formed a cross. There was a figure of a sad, suffering man attached to it. "What you call chastisement is murder," Father shouted, "and what you claim for the Spanish king is theft for it is not yours to claim. Jesus knows." I have yet to learn what chastisement, murder or theft are, nor do I know who Jesus is.

The men laughed at Father, and he bowed his head and said no more.

The next morning, I returned to my perch on the high altar. The noblemen, the priests and all the people assembled in the courtyard before the temple. There were so many more people of Cholōllān than there were strangers, I wondered how Captain could get the people to do what he wished.

Captain raised his arm and many men turned toward the noblemen and pointed their lighting sticks at them. When Captain quickly lowered his arm, thunder roared as clouds rose from the sticks, and lightning flashed. Many of the noblemen fell to the ground dead, and blood flowed from their bodies. No man had touched them, but there they were, dead in a pool of their own blood.

The people were very frightened. I hoped they would turn on the strangers, but they cringed like terrified children.

Captain waved his sword from atop his horse and pointed to the small temple at the end of the courtyard. He raised and lowered his arm again, and the thunder roared louder, the cloud rose higher and the flash of lightning was blinding. Suddenly, the small temple turned into a pile of rocks and the people who were close to it were on the ground, some dead, others struggling to escape whatever death Captain had directed at them. Many lost arms and legs. All screamed.

A woman stepped forward from Captain's group. Her name was Malinche and she spoke the language of the people. Another man with the same dress as Father was with her, and together they explained to the people what Captain wanted. They told the people that Captain needed six thousand strong men to carry his baggage.

When the people protested, the big lightning stick roared again, and a second building fell to the ground as a pile of pebbles mixed with the blood of the people who were near it.

"You need wear nothing but a loincloth and carry a small bag of food. If you will be among them, come forward," Malinche said. As men stepped forward, rightly

fearing worse if they did not, the strangers moved them into large houses, so many in each house that no house could hold another man.

When the strangers had the number Captain wanted, they locked the doors and the strangers turned on the people outside, killing them with swords and spears. They wanted to kill them all so that none could escape and tell other people in the kingdom what happened to them.

I watched nervously as the people who sacrificed other people had now become victims of the sword. Time would pass and the thunder would roar again and another building would fall. The slaughter continued for three days. The priests and noblemen were forced to watch, chained to stakes in the ground before the temple. Somehow, the king of the city and many warriors who were sworn to guard him escaped and fled into the temple and climbed to the top. No one noticed me. Their eyes were focused on the ones they left behind chained to the stakes.

When Captain saw what had happened, he angrily gave new orders and his men brought sticks and wood. They put fire to the prisoners still attached to the stakes while the king looked on from the top of the temple.

As the acrid smoke of burned flesh wafted upwards, Captain shook his fist at the king. He screamed more orders, and his men brought more wood. Running through the lower rooms, they set fire to the temple. As the flames rose higher, I knew I must leave.

I circled the city many times, and as I did, I heard the sorrowful voices of the priests as they sang to the Great Mystery,

*O wicked men, how have we injured you,
That you should thus torment us.
Away, away to Mexico,
where our chief Lord Moctezuma will revenge our quarrel.*

When there were no more voices but those of the bloodthirsty strangers, when the screams and chanting faded into the air with the smoking remains of the temple and the people who once worshipped there, I looked a final time on the devastated city. None of the people survived. I had born witness as Quetzalcoatl bid me do.

Days passed while Wind Brother and his companions waited for Moctezuma to visit them so that they could tell him all they had learned from Brother Eagle, but the king was too busy making preparations for the impending visit of the glowing man. If no one escaped the slaughter, then no one at the city on the lake could know what happened. The animals were restless. Wind Brother told himself to be calm so that the others might draw strength from him. They waited

Flower man was old now, but he still brought flowers to the city. Whenever he did, he would stroll the promenade that surrounded the garden hoping to catch a glimpse of Wind Brother. He could not hear Wind Brother, but Wind Brother could hear the flower

man. He knew his thoughts and his moods. Flower man did not regret his years. He was sad when his mate died. They had no children. He regretted that. He was pleased on those occasions when the king invited him to the palace to dine with the royal family. Moctezuma never forgot a friend, and that is why he and Wind Brother were so close.

Early in the morning, Brother Eagle swooped low to tell Wind Brother that the man who glowed would arrive soon. That is what brought flower man to the city. Moctezuma had ordered that the entire causeway from the shore to the edge of the city be covered with flower petals. Hundreds of men brought flowers and spread them in different colors according to the directions of the priests.

After he delivered his petals, flower man went to the garden. He was worried because the birds did not sing, and it was such a beautiful morning for singing. The creatures that lived in the garden were tense, not at ease as they normally were. It was the same way with the city. Despite the beautiful display the people had devised for the visitors from the east, they were unusually quiet. Something was indeed floating on the wind, and it did not bring good tidings.

Flower man waited on the promenade beneath the shade of a large cypress tree that was very tall with a gnarled thick trunk as wide as three men standing shoulder to shoulder. He fell asleep but woke to the noise of the murmuring crowd that suddenly became very lively.

"What is it?" Wind Brother called to the tree. *"Can you see?"*

"Can I see?" A gentle breeze from the lake rustled the soft leaves as the cypress laughed. *"Look at me, Wind Brother. I reach so high into the sky that I can see over the mountains. Can I see? Of course I can see!"*

"Why do the people begin to murmur?"

"A large parade of men has reached the end of the causeway at the edge of the lake. I have been watching them for a long while. I've not seen men like this before. They blaze like sunlight."

Wind Brother was confused. He expected the one, glowing man, not several.

"I know you have a place near the low bushes where you stand and watch the causeway," the Cypress tree suggested. *"I have seen you do it. Go there now. You will see them in time. The king sends his ambassadors."*

Wind Brother lumbered to the spot that gave him the best view of the causeway. Drummers accompanied the ambassadors who were led by Tlamacazui, the giver of things. The pounding rhythm was loud and frightening in its furious pace. He could barely hear the flute players who walked with the drummers. Dancers costumed like jaguars followed the priests and leapt and tumbled, and as they did the flower petals rose in a colorful commotion. When the entourage had passed and Wind Brother could no longer see it, the flower man joined the other laborers to lay a fresh path of petals. The six large cats in the garden paced nervously and uttered guttural sounds, *"Beware!"*

Suddenly a loud noise that tasted like metal pierced the air like a scream and startled Wind Brother. The drummers and flute players silenced their instruments and the people who crowded the causeway grew more restless. *"What can it be?"* Wind Brother asked.

“I do not know,” the Cypress tree answered. “Perhaps it is their way of speaking. Several men raised long things to their lips and the noise resounded. I have heard nothing like it.”

“Nor I.”

The monkeys were most unsettled and scampered into the upper branches of the Cypress tree to seek refuge from whatever strange thing this was.

Time passed and the drums began to play again in the distance. The animals supposed as the Cypress tree told them that the giver of things and the men with him had reached the edge of the lake and were standing face to face with the visitors. The music grew louder as the group returned to the city and Wind Brother waited to glimpse the strangers who everyone said glowed.

Tlamacazui led the procession with the other priests, the musicians and dancers. The strangers followed, and leading them was the glowing man riding a horse. The sun shone brightly above them, and Wind Brother and the others could see that the man himself did not glow, rather what he wore, whatever it was that covered his body glowed. His clothing reflected the sunlight much like the jewels and trinkets that the people wore. No, this man did not glow.

“Brother Horse,” Wind Brother called out. When the beast upon which the leader – who he supposed was Captain – sat and turned his head toward the garden, the creatures knew that this four-legged that they had never seen before was the horse that Brother Eagle told them about.

“Who are you?” the horse asked.

“I am Wind Brother and these are my friends. We are prisoners in the king’s garden, though he treats us well.”

The horse neighed a brief, shrill cry of laughter. *“We are prisoners, too, but the men do not treat us so well.”* Before he could say more, the glowing man who did not glow yanked hard on the rope tied to the horse’s mouth and jerked his head to the front.

Men on horses carried flags that fluttered in the breeze from the lake. They rode directly behind Captain. A man in a brown robe with no hair on the top of his head walked beside the leader carrying sticks upon which the lifeless form of another man was attached. It was an image and not a real man, probably the one Brother Eagle said Father called Jesus. Many men on horses followed, fifteen horses in all. They were privileged because behind them, marched many more men. Most carried the lightning sticks about which Brother Eagle told them. Near the end of the procession, Indians not of the city pulled the heavy lightning sticks, more than ten, and four Indians worked hard to pull each one. The six thousand Indians from Cholöllān were with them, and they carried the baggage. They sweated heavily. Many wore scars on their backs, some still bleeding. They were not happy men. By the time the final man trudged by, the sun had moved a great distance, such was their number.

The denizens of the garden were quiet, even the monkeys who normally had much to say in their chattering voices, even the monkeys were quiet. When the sound of the parade faded, Wind Brother said to the Cypress tree and the other animals in the garden, *“They are no gods. This man who rides the horse is not the one the people have awaited.”*

“If he were a god,” the Cypress tree explained, “He could speak to us and we to him. He would not even acknowledge my presence when I tried. He is just a man as are they all, most with hair on their faces as if they want to look like Brother Monkey.”

For several days, the city on the lake was very quiet. The animals continued to wait for Moctezuma.

One morning, runners were dispatched from the palace to every corner of the city. In time, people filled the streets, moving in the direction of the plaza carrying with them baskets filled with the glittering objects Wind Brother so often saw them wear around their arms, their necks, their heads, even their ankles. On this day, no one wore their finery, but carried it in baskets. Late in the day, the people returned to their homes with nothing but empty hands. Wind Brother wondered why.

He also wondered where his friend Moctezuma could be. The others asked him, “Where is Moctezuma,” but he had no way of knowing. Brother Eagle used his sharp eyes from high above the city and watched everything closely, but he could not answer the unspoken question, “Where is the king?” Since Captain had entered the city, Wind Brother had not seen the king or any of his family. He was bothered by their absence, but he stayed calm to comfort his friends.

Two mornings later as *Wojupiwi Wi*, the planting moon was rising in the sky, Captain and half of the men who walked behind him marched out of the city in the early morning light. “*Where are you going?*” Wind Brother asked the horse, but this time, the horse did not turn his head to answer. Wind Brother hoped that all the strangers would depart so that everything would return to the peaceful days they enjoyed with Moctezuma and his people before the intruders came to the city on the lake. It was not to be, and the strangers Captain left behind still walked among the people in the streets.

With the glowing man who did not glow and many of his men gone, the people were relieved, and later that day, Moctezuma came to the garden. He was not alone; many strangers were with him.

Even though the king told them it was safe, the strangers were afraid. The big cats could smell their fear, and the jaguars purred threats, which they could no longer contain deep in their throats. The strange men observed from the safety of the promenade as Moctezuma entered the garden. The king walked directly to Wind Brother, and he lifted his arm to the buffalo’s back and placed his head on the side of Wind Brother’s head and breathed deeply. “*I have missed you and longed to speak with you,*” he whispered to Wind Brother even though he could have screamed as loud as he could and the strangers would not have noticed.

“*And we have missed your presence among us, too, great king,*” Wind Brother replied.

“*I truly hope that I am a better friend than I am a king.*” Moctezuma sat upon a large boulder near the edge of the pool in the center of the garden. He was gloomy. The creatures gathered around him. The strangers on the promenade were amazed that Moctezuma feared none of the creatures in the garden. “*I have failed the people and*

now find myself a prisoner in my own palace. They call their leader Captain Cortés. I do not like him. ”

The wind blew stronger and the Cypress tree said to Wind Brother, *“Tell him.”*

The others waited, even Brother Eagle who perched in the lower branches.

With a heavy sigh, Wind Brother told Moctezuma all they had learned of what had happened at Cholōllān. When he finished, the king’s heart was saddened and he said, *“Like Quetzalcoatl, Cortés frowns on our ancient practice of sacrifice, yet he kills our people in a way far more savage than how our priests end the lives of the chosen on the temple altar. He is not the god we first thought him to be.”* He leaned forward, buried his head in his hands and wept.

Not knowing why he cried, the men on the promenade laughed and one called out, *“It is time to leave. We have given you more than the time you pleaded for. Leave these animals to their shit. Come now.”*

Moctezuma rose to his feet like an old man. He was ashamed to look into the eyes of his friends. *“I am sorry you are here to witness these days of evil,”* he said. *“I am most sorry for you, Wind Brother, for it is you and I who established this garden many years ago only to see it and this city on the verge of destruction. No longer should you, Wind Brother or any of you consider yourself a prisoner. I am sorry that you, Brother Cypress have no way to flee. As for the rest of you, if you have the chance to leave this place, I beg you to go.”* He lowered his head and left with the strangers.

From his years in the garden, Wind Brother knew this was the time when the people celebrated the festival of *Toxcatl* in honor of *Tezcatlipoca*, the brother of *Quetzalcoatl* who caused him the trouble that forced the man-god to leave the land. With Cortés and half of his men away from the city, the people seemed more themselves even though they remained suspicious of the ones left behind. Brother Eagle came to the garden and said, *“The people are gathering in the patio of the gods for the festival. Can you hear? They raise their voices joyfully. It is the first happiness since the strangers arrived. I will go to watch!”* Brother Eagle flew off.

The jubilant cries and prayers of the people were loud and could be heard from the farthest corners of the city. The drums beat and the flutes whistled while the people sang and danced. The inhabitants of the garden took great pleasure in the uplifting sounds that had not been heard for many days and nights. All was well, at least for a short while, but soon the sounds of celebration were corrupted by the noise of chaos and confusion. The music stopped and the laughter gave way to terrified screams of confused people.

Wind Brother and the others awaited word from Brother Eagle. What had happened?

“People are running through the streets,” the Cypress tree reported. *“Fear masks everyone’s face.”* As soon as the words were spoken, the air burst with the thunder of the lightning sticks that Brother Eagle told them he saw in Cholōllān. And then a

frightening sound ripped the air above them and one of the Cypress tree's branches shattered into tiny pieces and fell haphazardly to the ground.

"Ayieeee!" Brother Cypress cried out in deep pain. *"What have they done? It is the lightning from the large lightning stick. It has no mercy."* Another roar of thunder, and a house near to the garden crumbled into dust and collapsed to the ground.

As panic filled the streets, it rose in the garden like a deadly lump in the throat that threatened to choke every breathing beast. Wind Brother's thoughts were muddled, and before he could make sense of anything, Moctezuma raced into the garden and jumped to his back.

"Hurry! We must flee!" He guided Wind Brother with his knees and begged the others to follow.

"What has happened?" Wind Brother asked as he ran through the open gate and into the street that was filled with men, women and children racing toward the causeway.

"After much pleading, the man who Cortés placed in charge while he was gone gave me permission to celebrate Toxcatl. Now I know it was a trap and only an excuse to kill as many of our people as these strangers could. They want our land and they want our gold. When the patio was filled with the priests and other celebrants, strangers blocked the exits with their lightning sticks while others entered the courtyard with their metal spears and swords. They butchered the people, all of them, men, women and children. To run a blade through a man's heart is one thing, but to cut off his arms and legs is quite another. We know no such butchery. We treat life with more dignity."

"I watched as my queen and my son were savagely cut down, drowning in their own blood. Before I could run to them, a small group of my jaguar warriors – unarmed because that was one of the conditions imposed upon us – came to my side, surrounded me and forced me through one of the gates. 'Flee,' they cried out. 'We will hold them back.'

"As I ran, I grieved the slaughter of my people, my wife and my children. In my anguish, I thought of you, Wind Brother and how I can save you. I cannot let these murderers destroy you and the other innocents who dwell in the garden. So run, Wind Brother, run to the causeway. You will be free when you have fled the city."

Wind Brother's hooves pounded the stone road, and he ran faster than he had ever run. As he took his first steps onto the causeway, another crack of lightning shot through the screams of the fleeing people. Within two heartbeats, Moctezuma fell from Wind Brother's back. Wind Brother hesitated. As he turned back, his friend lie on the ground with a contorted face. He waved Wind Brother on and drew his last breath as his lifeless body tumbled from the causeway and sank beneath the waters of the lake.

When he reached the land at the end of the causeway, true to his name and nature, Wind Brother turned his face to *Mictlampa* and charged north. Before he even knew it, *Anpetu Wi* had disappeared behind the western mountains. For all that time, he ran,

never stopping for rest or water. He ran and he ran until he could run no more, and then he collapsed to the ground where he laid panting and gasping for air.

Wind Brother did not fear the white-skinned strangers, but he did not want to be around them. They brought only one thing to the land death. The strangers had betrayed the people whose land this was from the beginning of time.

Wind Brother slept through the night, and when he woke, he was certain the strangers had given him no thought, intent as they were on killing the people of the lake, just as they killed his friend, Moctezuma. He traveled at an easier pace. He had escaped.

After wandering north for two moons, he came upon the mesquite tree and the pool of water.

"I remember you," the tree said. *"You are much larger and much older than you were when you left here with the boy."*

"And your voice is more ancient than it was, and even then I thought you had few years left in your limbs."

The mesquite tree laughed a tinkling laugh in the light breeze that came from the north. *"Did you find his home?"*

"I promised I would," Wind Brother mused, *"And I did."* Wind Brother waded into the pool and drank long from the cool, clear water.

"Where are you going?" the mesquite tree asked.

Wind Brother lifted his face into the north wind. *"That way. I will return to the herd."*

"The Great Mystery will guide you."

When *Canwapegi Wi*, the moon of brown leaves rose in the sky, Wind Brother had returned to the great southern herd.