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THE TALKING STICK

Virginia Sorensen

THE WAGON STOPPED before the gate, two small gray burros in front of it twitching in the dust they had lifted.

"Here! They have come!" cried the child, Jolana, who had been watching. She opened the gate and stood staring at two Indian children in the wagon box. Seeing her look at them, they crouched downward, then rose, crouched, in the manner of children's pleasure.

"Hello! Boo! Are you hiding?" Jolana called with laughter, and her father, Jolan—Yaqui for John, which was his English name—came from the compound, a brief case in his hands like a professor, and lifted her in his arms so she could peer into the wagon. "They don't know what you are saying when you say 'hello,'" he said.

Behind him, the white woman, Lora, heard what he said and recalled that he had told her he had no intention of teaching Yaqui to Jolana lest she cultivate a taste for dirty playmates. "I can't greet them any better than Jolana can," she said wistfully to him now. "You must say something for me. They are so kind to let me go."

He shrugged. "They were going anyway. And they'll be paid; they know it."

Jolan's wife came from the house and to the gate, a child in her arms. "Here, Lora," she called in a loud voice. "You'll need this. It's going to be all day." She handed Lora a small roll of toilet paper, a precious article here. She spoke without modesty, for in a house without windows if one blushed at such things one would bleed away into blushes.

"Thank you," Lora said humbly. "I would have forgotten everything."

Jolan—a missionary not supposed to be a missionary at all but a linguist willing to spend many years making a grammar and primer of the Yaqui language—smiled at Lora after he spoke to the Indian man on the wagon seat. “I’m sorry, but it’s customary—you’ll have to sit in the wagon box with the women and children.”

“But I’ll like that,” Lora said, and thought: “I will see them very closely at last.” She had come a long way to see them, having hoped since she first heard that there was one tribe left in the Americas which believed itself unconquered, whatever the truth might be, that somewhere an ultimate pride and simplicity still existed. She had convinced herself that she must search these out, knowing she ran away to ease her own confusion.

It was ridiculous to be wearing skirts so short; she had to lift her legs high to clamber into the wagon. But she leaped quickly, and the two women did not watch her, only sat with eyes on the long cotton skirts which spread before them in the box, covering them completely but for brown dusty feet. The driver did not even turn enough to look at Jolan, now beside him, but sat hunched forward in his washed-out shirt, his neck looking hard and burned against his black hair, waiting for all these squirming ones behind him to settle. One of the children, a boy of six or thereabouts, smiled shyly and quickly at Lora and then turned his face against the side of the wagon, shaking with laughter. A tiny girl, in a dress of brilliant orange cheesecloth, stared at the white woman with unblinking eyes.

“But she is a doll,” Lora thought. A special doll, the kind one found in specialty gift shops, of course. The particular one which sprang to Lora’s mind was Chinese; she had bought it in San Francisco’s Chinatown. This child with perfectly round face and eyes, her small brown ears pierced and decorated with silver beads, her hair cut straight all around and shining as solid fabric, seemed completely unreal. Even her small sandals seemed artificial—mere sole and thong, like those on the feet of the women—and orange dress, red petticoat, green sash, all of cheesecloth like a costume for a theatrical production. She was like the wreath-flowers in the Mexican cemetery over the tracks from Vicam Station. She leaned against her mother’s cotton blouse and looked at Lora with that clear undeviating gaze.

As the wagon started, the mother spoke to the child. The other woman, apparently the grandmother, spoke also.

"They tell the child it isn't good manners to stare so," said Jolan to Lora, "even though the white lady is very pretty."

Lora wished to say something polite in return—that she did not mind in the least—but the odd disapproving way Jolan passed on the compliment disconcerted her. It was the whiteness of her skin the child found fascinating, she knew, as many older Indians and Mexicans had. Love was made to whiteness of skin all the way down from the border; she had been surprised and puzzled, at her age, to hear right on the streets: *Muy bonita, Señorita!* She thought now of her reply, trying to laugh when she made it though heaven knew it was no laughing matter: "*No! No! Vieja!*"—meaning to say but having neither verbs nor courage to say: *I am too old for love now; can't you see it is over with me?*

It was true that she had become old. Only recently it had happened, and perhaps this was the reason she must escape from a country perennially young making everything of youth. Youth was cruel and it had come to sicken her. She was puzzled, however, for she believed youth must have its way and could surely do no worse with the world than had already been done, yet herself remained, without function any longer. And what she was doing in desperation countless others had done, searching out where simplicity might still exist, thinking there might be something which could be found and said in a new way, perhaps even understood.

She held herself firm with an arm along the side of the wagon, smiling back at Jolana by the gate. Even as the burros began to walk, the dust of the street rose about them and she could smell it at once, was at once choked by it. She hoped she would not sneeze all day; sneezing was ridiculous and humiliating. In California she had sneezed a great deal this time of year; there was something which ripened in November, perhaps, or it might have been simply rain which oppressed her. She laid a finger to her nostrils and breathed for a time through her teeth.

The wagon moved through the dusty spread-out pueblo, past the *paneria* where Lora had seen the great stone oven and had tasted delicious *pan dulce*, shaped like snails. Past the corral where Jolana loved to peep through the pole fence and watch the ponies drink. From Madre Blasa's much smoke was coming, some curious currents of air sending it this way and that before it wandered into nothing;

Madre would be cooking breakfast for Mexicans from the garrison. Several of her dogs came after the wagon, barking, and Lora shivered when one leaped close; their great black wrinkles, without hair! At the garrison, a guard walked and yawned, lifted a hand idly when Jolan greeted him. The wagon rumbled and Lora felt the boards already, under her, and knew by night she would suffer beneath the shoulder blades where the top of the wagon struck each time the wheels turned. Her legs were stretched out straight, as were the legs of the Indian women and the two children; she wondered if theirs already tingled.

Jolan and the driver were talking, or rather Jolan was talking and the Indian nodding and looking straight ahead. Lora longed to say something to these two quiet women and tried not to stare at them—they themselves had said staring was not polite. The child's eyes continued upon her, and occasionally the mother turned the little head away, her long brown fingers moving under the chin; her nails were pink and filled with earth. Whenever Lora met her eyes for a second, she smiled shyly, as if she herself might be a child. There was a sweetness in the faces of these women, Lora thought, a sad and yet comforting expression. The seams of their full lips were definite, their eyes tilted and far apart.

Lora noticed several tortilla baskets and clay pots under the wagon seat, beside Jolan's brief case and paper bags. The Yaquis too had brought their lunch. Tortillas, perhaps a small pot of coffee, frijoles, of course, and some of the short bananas which had been auctioned from the slow train yesterday. The bananas she smelled in the heat when she took her hand from her nose. There—she was not going to sneeze, after all. She was becoming accustomed to breathing the dust.

A horseman was coming closer behind the wagon. He was a very young Indian, perhaps fifteen, and Lora smiled to notice that although he was dressed shabbily in jeans and straw hat, the gear on his pony was extremely beautiful, with much decoration on the saddle and the silverware. At the rear of the wagon, which was open, the pony stopped, though the road was wide enough to pass here, and began to walk at the burros' pace. Its nose nearly touched Lora's arm, and moved up and down with the gait. To withdraw would be cowardly, and then she would have to crowd the older woman who sat next to her, on her side. She sat still, and found with relief that the pony had

no interest whatever in biting her. Presently she even dared to lift a hand and stroke its long forehead, noticing the heavy-lashed beauty of its eyes and the strong animal smell among the dust. The rider smiled. The younger woman spoke to him, and he answered and continued to ride close to the wagon. A member of the family, then? Lora asked Jolan and he asked the driver and the driver said something and then Jolan said: "He is the eldest son."

The small boy had begun to clamor, and the father turned and looked at him with a curious indulgent expression. The wagon stopped. Oh, what a grin for the boy, then, as he clambered over the side of the wagon and rushed through the dust to the pony where the young man leaned down and lifted him up behind. The wagon started again. Jolan said, shouting back to Lora, "He wanted to ride on the horse with his big brother. Only women and babies ride in the wagon box."

He repeated what he had said, in Yaqui, and the father and the women laughed. The mother lifted the edge of her brown reboza over her mouth to catch her laughter. She said words to the woman opposite. The older woman answered. They both laughed, very gently. This strange talk, thought Lora, seemed to have a constant sigh in the syllables, and often when a sentence ended there was truly a sigh, a deep-drawn breath which seemed to say, "Ah, well, what can be done?" "What would the frightened Guaymas Señora say if she saw me now?" Lora thought. The Señora had been like the others up there. To Rio Yaqui? To Los Ochos Pueblos? *In my own time, those Yaquis have stopped the train and killed everybody aboard. Women and children—all. For over two hundred years they have been fighting; they teach their young men to be cruel.* Lora smiled, looking at the rider just behind her, at the long gentle face of the pony nuzzling into her very lap, and at the face of the small boy with his straw hat a bobbing halo as he peered around the body of his brother.

Sky was intensely blue, sun a blasting brightness above them. Deep dust rolled steadily from the hoofs of the burros and the wheels of the wagon. These were ancient ruts; Jolan had told her on one of their walks, that these ruts were so treacherously deep and old, horses knew enough to step carefully on the high places when rain flooded them. Mesquite trees crowded the path, sent it winding, and cactus were huge and straggling everywhere. Great black and white birds sat balefully

on branches of saguaro, and far over the valley hung strange abrupt mountains. "This country is mad," Lora thought. "And beautiful—oh, beautiful. One would come to love it as they have loved it."

Jolan turned. "Do you see the buzzards?" he asked. "The Yaqui name is *choa-awe*." He said it with a glottal at the center, with that curious depth all Yaqui seemed to have.

"Its name sounds as evil as it looks," she said. "What is the name of that small orange flower? From a distance it's like California poppy—but it isn't—" The women and the children and the big boy all looked where she pointed. The older woman spoke, and under the edge of her reboza Lora saw a thick silver ring in her ear.

"She says it is the Flower-of-Sore-Eyes," Jolan said.

The boy on the horse was pointing. On the edge of a ploughed field—the father said it was newly planted to garbanzos, the Spanish bean—stood a white heron, unearthly white, immovable. As the wagon approached it lifted its great wings and floated away without sound. It seemed to merge in sky, in mad trees. A little later the boy pointed out a parrot, and later a profusion of pink flowers blooming on vines which covered bushes alongside the road. Nobody knew the name of this flower, and all seemed sad and ashamed not to know, shaking their heads.

"A student at Guaymas told me it was *antigonon leptopus*," Lora said to Jolan, and he repeated this. She expected them to laugh, but they did not. They nodded seriously and looked at the flower with deeper respect as it brushed past. Now it had a good long name of its own.

The driver lifted his arm to a hill which loomed ahead of them, on the left of the road, and spoke to Jolan.

"I have told them you are looking for stories," Jolan said to Lora. "There is a story about that hill, he says. They call the hill 'The Man Who Was Angry.'"

The Indian began to speak. The women listened, and the man's words were rich and full through the dust. Whenever he paused, Jolan turned and repeated what he had said.

"There was a Yaqui governor who was called Omteme, which means 'he is angry.' He was very wise. He knew that the Conquest would come and all the things it would bring with it. He knew that it would come with two words, would be both good and bad. All of this

he knew from a stick that talked. He was standing on top of his hill here when Christopher Columbus came into the port at Guaymas."

Lora burst into laughter. "Columbus at Guaymas?"

The rest were not laughing, and she blushed. They wished the father to go on with the story.

"Omteme was angry because he knew the Spaniards were coming with treachery."

The women were soberly nodding. This story they knew well, Lora could see; it was an old story and later she understood it contained pride and carried the reason for an old battle.

"Columbus climbed a hill near Guaymas, which is now called Takalaim, and he saw Omteme in the distance. Omteme wanted to know what the conqueror intended to do; so he asked: 'On what conditions do you want to make the conquest?'

"Since Columbus did not have a good heart, he became angry. He took his big gun and shot at Omteme. The shot fell far short and Omteme asked again, 'What do you want? What are you doing?'

"Columbus shot a second time, this time coming closer, but not quite reaching Omteme. The chief did not understand guns. He still kept asking the conqueror how he intended to make the conquest.

"Then Columbus shot a third time and the ball reached the foot of Omteme's hill. When Omteme saw the shot he said, 'Oh, so you want war!'

"He took his bow and arrow and shot. The arrow hit the top of the hill on which the conqueror stood, splitting the mountain in two. Since that time it has two sharp points, and the Spanish have called it 'The Teats of the Wild Goat.' The Conqueror fell into the sea and drowned. Perhaps he still lives there, but he never came up.

"Then Omteme, who was very angry at this Conquest because as the talking stick had said, it was coming with treason, spoke to all of his people: 'You who wish to, may stay. I am leaving now.' And he descended into the heart of his hill.

"Most of the people also went into the mountains or into the sea; for they could not accept the Conquest with all confidence. Like their chief, Omteme, they said, 'I am leaving now!'"

The Indian paused for a long moment, and then made a brief phrase with that sound of resignation in it. Jolan said, "He says the story ends here."

I am leaving now. There was nowhere to go, thought Lora sadly, but into the mountains or into the sea. Over three hundred years, and all that remained of the old happy days were the stories, music, songs, dances. And one did not know whether the happy days had really been happy; perhaps later troubles only made them seem so. When the Jesuits brought the story of Jesucristo and his death upon the cross, something of pity must have received it, some understanding that the good are often troubled and killed without justice. Death had always been present, and so Lazaro, who was lifted up from death, remained in the stories. And the wicked governor, Ponso Pilato, remained. Bethlehem, city of hope, remained here in the name of one of the Eight Sacred Pueblos, Belen, and some even believed that here, in the mesquite and cactus, here where the cactus came down to the sea, Jesucristo had been born. Only records of peace existed for the time of the Jesuits, and their heavy stone churches and bells which still rang for the ceremonies. Some of these Lora would hear today. But the Coyotes would dance, also, and their dance was older than the bells.

The wagon had passed through the wilderness which the Indians called *monte*, and entered a great thicket of giant reeds, *carrizo*, which bordered the Yaqui River. It was the time of high water or the river would have had no water at all; Obregón's canal had changed its course, and the land the Yaquis had fought for so bitterly was not rich as it had once been. In our country, Lora thought, we did not bother to remove the rivers from the people, but removed the people from the rivers.

The *carrizo* grew tall and close and was so heavy with sandy dust, one wondered where the swamp water might be. Here the Indians cut reeds for their fences and their houses. Lora had admired their manner of weaving the split canes into mats, and the fences were beautiful and intricate, seeming to grow from the ground. Now she must stoop to avoid boughs which whipped close to the wagon; the road was scarcely more than a path. Through these dense thickets and through the *monte*, she had been told, Yaquis walked from village to village for ceremonies, carrying bright and various masks and rattles and head-dresses so that, meeting them suddenly, one wondered if one might be dreaming.

The wagon moved in silence as heavy as the dust. The child was staring again. "I'm sure it can't be because I'm pretty now," Lora thought. She could scrape dust from her cheeks with her fingers and

make small rolls of it on her fingers by rubbing them along her hair. The horse continued to plod silently, touching Lora's arm occasionally with the cool bit. Sun glittered and drew sweat which rolled and cake the dust. A sore place reminded Lora of itself every time the wagon jolted under her shoulder blade.

At last the wagon came to the river. The solid thicket opened and great white sandbanks stretched ahead, the water, narrow and brown, moving slowly among them. Air began to move, and Lora jumped when the horse whinnied suddenly. One could see where other horses and wagons had gone along the sand, where they entered the shallow water. In the center of the stream the wagon stopped and children and women knelt and leaned over the sides. They were chattering and gay as if the very sight of the water had revived them.

"Will you have a drink?" Jolan asked, and laughed at her look of distaste. "Ah, you are too civilized." And he drank.

There were more *carrizo* thickets and a stretch of *monte* before the pueblo of Potam appeared, stretched out bleakly with many adobe ruins to commemorate former garrisons. Everything seemed crumbled and brown, without life, only the pale green of mesquite and willow to relieve it. But as the distance lessened people could be seen moving toward the stone church. Overhead burst *cajetes*, rockets which burst in air like firecrackers, going in all directions to send the spirits of the dead to heaven again. All during October the dead had been visiting their relatives in the villages, eating with them, sleeping with them giving them advice in whispers. But now it was time for the dead to go. Ceremonies would give them a fitting farewell today from each village—in Cocorit, Bacum, Torin, Vicam, Potam, Rajum, Huirivis, and even in Belen where nobody lived any longer since the river did not flow near enough. Only the church remained in Belen and its many old dead.

The family clambered from the wagon; the son tied his horse at the side and removed its saddle. The women carried their pots and baskets of food toward the cemetery in front of the church which was a bouquet of most wonderful color and motion.

Jolan said with distaste, "I suppose they're going to put all that food on the graves for the dead ones."

Lora brushed at her skirt, and dust flew up wherever she laid her fingers. "May we go closer?" she asked eagerly, for just then the bells

began to ring and she could see them, three great ones of different sizes, hung from a pole, side by side, in the churchyard.

"I never show any interest in their ceremonies," Jolan said, suddenly severe and cold. "It is my duty to make them see how mistaken all this is. You see that. And I can't afford to make compromises—like the Jesuits."

"But I came to see!" Lora cried in disappointment.

He shrugged his shoulders, something she felt he must have learned from the Mexicans. "I brought you because you wanted to come," he said. "Do as you like."

She stood hesitant, for he did not move. Then she turned from him and began to walk slowly toward the colorful square where ceremonies were moving bright among an almost solid mesh of crosses standing in the ground. As at Vicam Village, one burial was made directly on another, so only the newest graves remained separate.

"You might look for the name 'Taichino,'" Jolan called after her, relenting a little. "She lived here in Potam. She was the wife of Cajéme."

Lora smiled back gratefully. After all, it was his work here and he was making it his life. But to give these people the New Testament without compromises—! This he meant to do. He would give them the True Christ, their Jesucristo being hopelessly mixed with sun and animal and bird. At this very moment the Coyotes were dancing for the dead ones on the day of All Saints.

She tried not to be conspicuous as she picked her way forward through tall and prickly weeds, feeling deeply now that she did not belong here. She did not have even the excuse of the antiquarian, not finding pleasure in the merely quaint; and she could no more enter here than she could pass through the eye of a needle, she thought wryly. Yet when she was close enough to see what was happening, she sat down and was instantly absorbed. Two flag ceremonies were taking place simultaneously, flag wavers and drummers performing over graves laden with food, over one grave and then another, the motions of the flags and the beating of the drums accompanied by groups of singers. There were repeated motions, intricate crossings-over, so that the flags were waved in every direction. By the church, which was of pale stone and open in front with great wooden pillars, three Coyotes were dancing, their bows between their legs, their feet moving rapidly, the

feathers of their headdresses bobbing. The headdresses were made of single skins, the tails hanging down over the back, tipped with red. Legs also were tipped with red. Around the heads of the dancers were red bands decorated with small white objects in pointed designs. The drum beat in strange complicated rhythms which no counting Lora knew could place into a pattern.

The bells rang. A young man sat on the ground ringing them with ropes in his hands, over and over, the three tones. In the air *cajetes* continued to burst. On many graves, today tamped firm, the clay watered and shaped and neatly bordered with small stones, food lay in pots and baskets and cheap tin cups. Women walked freely, legs moving forward the full cotton of their skirts, a pretty motion. Nobody seemed puzzled or hurried or sad. Age and accustomedness had given the ceremonies ease. There was no feeling of anything being scheduled or arranged; the whole simply continued like the light of day. Nobody paid any attention to the flag wavers or drummers or to the bell ringers or to the dancers when they rested and then danced once more. Lora remembered something she had heard about the Yaqui religion and its constant ceremonial pattern, so involved with daily life, with obligations and duties, that even in the United States settlements a Yaqui could not earn a respectable living and remain a "good Yaqui." In Pascua, near Tucson, where Yaquis had made the necessary concession of speaking Spanish to outsiders, there was a saying: *Es muy trabajos la religión de nosotros*. This religion of ours is very hard work. God and men must work constantly together to keep life going as it should.

Lora watched and listened, knowing it would go on for hours and hours. Yesterday she had watched the cantoras and maestros at Vicar Village, had listened while they went from ramada to ramada to perform ceremonies before tables which each family had built and covered with food for their visiting dead relatives. The tables had been built of mesquite sticks, canopies of cloth floating over to keep the birds away, the legs very high to protect the food from innumerable bony dogs. All night long she had heard in her mind the plaintive singing of cantoras, strange and high, and the voice of the head maestro chanting from the Books of the Dead.

Jolan had come closer now, having tired of walking through the deserted pueblo. He was speaking with a young man, and when he saw that Lora was looking at him he beckoned to her.

"This boy has lived in Arizona," he said when she came up to him. "He has just come back to Sonora to live. I asked him why, wasn't Arizona a good place to live? and he said all Yaquis come back to the old country when they can."

The boy only nodded to Lora and looked another way, speaking with that strange resignation, an age on his face all out of proportion with what Lora supposed his age to be. He was giving Jolan a Yaqui phrase which Jolan wrote carefully in print. *Inim buam biapo.*

The boy repeated it several times, looking with curiosity at the writing, and Jolan said to Lora, "It means, he says, *this unhappy land where we suffer all together.*"

"Perhaps," she said, struck by the words, "the Talking Stick said that after the conquest."

Jolan laughed. "It sounds like something a Talking Stick might say."

"But it's a statement this time, not a prophesy. It's terribly sad. Isn't it?" She looked at the boy who did not understand what she was saying, and saw that he looked puzzled and uncomfortable as if he thought they might be talking about him. She felt suddenly the loneliness which had lately become familiar to her. Between her and others, even those whom she loved, were so many barriers, language one of them even when it was the same language. She felt a familiar desire, now hopelessly galling, to understand somehow, to enter others and to be entered. What was this boy thinking behind his strange words and his dignified ageless face?

If there was one to know, she thought, and drew herself apart, looking at the ground as she listened to the strange phrases moving between them. Jolan asked questions and received answers, occasionally turning to her and translating what was said. He had asked how much the boy received for cutting carrizos. Well, it was hard work—fifteen pesos for a thousand. Four pesos for each thousand oysters he brought from the sea and carried clear to Guaymas. At the great hotel there four oysters on a plate would be ten pesos! But then, we suffer all together, after all.

"Old Potam," Jolan reported when the boy walked away, "had another name. It was called Ko'obuabuaim, which meant Village of the Cranes."

In the wagon again at last, after many hours, Lora gave a great sigh. The woman beside her smiled and sighed also. The older woman sighed.

Jolan said something in Yaqui, and then to Lora: "We are all tired."

Now the road again, through the dusty carrizo. Lora had not noticed before how the road wound along; she was thinking of the road with its whole length as she had not in the morning when everything was new. The boy rode far behind now, the small one still behind him, and she saw him strip a piece of carrizo as he rode; presently he made a piercing whistle, and Jolan said, "He has made a flute for his little brother."

"Will you ask him to make one for me if it isn't too difficult?" she asked. "I could take it home with me."

But he shook his head after speaking to the man beside him and having an answer. "When it dries it won't make a sound," he said.

The tiny girl, sleeping in her mother's lap, was dirty enough to seem real now, her bright unnatural colors rumped. The sun, sinking, shone full into the women's eyes when they emerged from the thicket.

Carefully, clucking her tongue impatiently, the old woman turned herself into the other side of the wagon; she smiled at Lora and indicated a place beside her. Both Lora and the mother moved. But after a moment the road turned once more and there was the sun, full in their eyes again, hurting in a level evening brilliance. Once more the old lady turned herself around, spreading her hands with significant disgust. Once more Lora moved, and the mother. They looked at each other and burst out laughing. Their laughter said: "Oh, the sun!" They understood each other perfectly.

The man was talking to Jolan, Jolan laughing. Presently he turned and said: "The sun is named Ta'a. He has told me a story of the time it was named. It seems that, long ago, when they still did not know the name of the sun, a large *junta* was held. They gathered to talk about the matter of that sun coming up every day and they not knowing what its name was. . . ."

Beyond the river a short distance, the boy on the horse came close to the wagon again. He began to call to his father, and the wagon stopped. It seemed that the boy riding behind him was very sleepy and had nearly fallen off. But when it became clear to the child that

the wagon had stopped to receive him from the horse he set up a terrible uproar, his mouth wide open. His grandmother reached out her arms, however, and he was handed to her without ceremony. She gave him a smart little rap on the cheek, and he turned from her and lay face down, sobbing on the floor of the wagon. The mother looked at Lora and said something with a smile, shaking her head and lifting a hand over it. Lora nodded, understanding. The woman had said in any language: "He wants to be a man already." Almost before the wheels had turned over, before he had time to sob a half dozen times, Lora saw that he was asleep and she and the mother smiled and nodded together.

Lora called eagerly to Jolan, "Tell her I have two big sons of my own!"

Jolan made the words, and the woman's white teeth shone beneath her full lips, happy and approving. The sun was understood. Children also. These were alike everywhere. She reached up and touched Jolan, saying something to him in a low voice, and he looked at Lora and said gently, "She says it is sad to have sons, however, for they grow up very soon and go away."

Again the women looked at each other, smiled, nodded.

I could tell her, thought Lora, that we too have had war for more than a hundred years. If it is more complicated than simply a fighting for the land we bring our food from, still it is war. Our sons go, that is the important thing, and when they return they are not ours any longer. We are more complicated in all ways, really quite mad of complications, but underneath we know what we are and suffer a great sickness for simplicity. People who are confused, as I am, come here or to other villages—to deserts—to mountains—anywhere but together again. She saw how clear were the skin and eyes of the old woman who nodded and let her mouth wobble with the wagon. Clear, both eyes and skin, but heavy. Her hands were creased with labor. The mother sat stroking the hair of the child in her lap, and presently leaned forward and untied the thong between great and second toe and slipped the sandals away.

Lora closed her eyes, thinking of women, thinking of herself. Poor sick things, she thought, we all suffer after being needed, here or anywhere. Perhaps my kind are a little sadder. Having pushed ourselves up to the wagon seat, we are afraid to look forward over the

swamp and the narrow path. We would rather sit and look at the strong back of our husband and at our son riding protectively behind us. But these women came to the same sorrow another way.

She had seen them sitting in their ramadas all day long, grinding corn with *mano* and *metate*, patting tortillas endlessly, cooking them endlessly. One day she had seen two of them combing each other's hair with cactus burrs, dividing their scalps into little lands, turn by turn, and snapping lice with their thumbnails, laughing. She and Jolan had gone to a ranch where a woman was making medicine for two sick children, wrapped in blankets on the floor. The woman reported to Jolan: "They vomit yellow," and said she was beating molanisco root to a pulp to make medicine. Jolan said children were adored here because so many of them did not live.

Now Lora felt tired and puzzled; her shoulders ached and her stretched legs. We keep our children most carefully alive, she thought, so they will go away and fight in order to permit us to remain the same. We keep them carefully alive to hate us when they are mature enough, wise enough. Now the words the young Yaqui had given Jolan came back to her clearly, perhaps because she had watched Jolan printing them. This unhappy land where we suffer all together. How much alike our laughter, our love, our loss. It is all an unhappy land, everywhere, and we suffer together everywhere. Loneliness swept over her again, as always at dusk, wherever she might be, whatever she might be doing. What were they doing, those she loved? Where were they? She felt now that wherever they were, they were lonely and puzzled too. Yet she had found nothing to comfort them.

In the village again at last, she saw that sunset hung late in the sky. The sun made a glorious thing of going away in this country; perhaps, she thought very practically, because of the dust.

Jolan asked the driver to stop at Ysidra's, where they would get a plate of gorditas to take home for supper. Lora climbed down and stood in a helpless silence after appealing to Jolan to say something for her. She had given him the money for the journey and he had paid it. But there should be some way to say goodbye. To say thank you. To say to the mother, We are friends.

Jolan spoke, what she did not know, and the Indians nodded in silence. The mother continued to pat the hair of the child in her lap. The wagon moved away.