

The Spy In Love

John Hoopes

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While the characters in this novel may have individual qualities of many people I have known, both in Mexico and the United States, the novel's characters themselves are completely fictional creations, and do not correspond to any persons actually living or dead. All events in this novel are completely fictitious, though the light of truth will shine upon them where it will. No harm to anyone intended. Good will toward all.

This novel is dedicated to Alejandro Grattan,
the eye of the lake himself,
my friend and sometimes mentor,
and mentor 23 years to all aspiring lakeside writers.

In gratitude.

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1. SHIFTING LOYALTIES

Several times that day Fonzo regretted having dressed so thoughtlessly. Clothes that morning had seemed the least of his concerns. He'd put on the tan denim pants he'd worn all week and a favorite red and blue checked shirt that he would as usual not tuck inside his belt, to conceal the well fed stomach. He'd slipped on the black loafers he'd been wearing every day the last year. He'd shaved, combed his hair and brushed his teeth.

Thus attired, he'd climbed aboard the second class bus and rode it with the peasants and their poultry and produce. The bus had rumbled and chugged through Ajijic, where so many thousands of the gringos lived, and then along the lakeshore to San Juan Cosala, a mere forty minute ride of many, many stops from his aunt's house in Chapala. Disembarked in San Juan Cosala, he had walked a rutted dirt road past fragrant cow pastures and alongside fields waist high in corn.

The surprise at the end of this road was the newly completed million dollar mansion of the americano businessman Alfred Ulster, where today Fonzo's recent good fortune would either be multiplied, or it would be rudely smashed. And he was not optimistic. Clothes and appearance would have nothing to do with it. Probably nothing he did or could do would have anything to do with it.

However, when he saw Senor Alfred Ulster open the ponderous front doors of his great house, Fonzo had that day his first moment of regret. He had never seen Alfred looking so stylish. He wore a silver-gray coat and matching pants that had an expensive sheen to them. Fonzo had never seen material like that in any stores he'd ever shopped. He gawked at the

lustrous sky-blue shirt, open at the throat, and at the pointy-toed, black shoes, shined to brilliance. Alfred's face shined also, with a smug, rich smile. The longer Fonzo stared at him, the more he felt like a fat little wretch. The cards were already all against him: he would likely go down without a fight.

As Fonzo walked inside the palace, he stopped to behold the five meter tall windows which exhibited the sculpted and groomed gardens beyond, awash in green and every color of tropical flower in bloom. Fonzo's curious, round eyes both lingered and drifted. No doubt the opulence entranced him.

Yet even so, his attention was a fragile and flighty thing; it soon wandered away to more personal concerns, as it often did. He wondered again, as he had all morning, whether this mysterious invitation portended ill for him or good. Or how much of either. And would Fonzo's secret partner be there, the tough little Senora Allen, who also worked with Alfred Ulster?

Alfred graciously guided the young man by the elbow toward the palatial living room. The lord of the manor extended a hand to show him that he might sit his peasant's bulk on the creamy leather upholstery of the sofa. Fonzo sat self-consciously, unsure if it would be proper to let himself relax into the sumptuousness of it. He could not indeed finally believe it, and so he sat with back straight, glancing repeatedly at the vault of ceiling that made him feel as if he were a mouse in an auditorium.

Alfred reclined in the luxury of the Allizon fainting couch nearby, stretching his legs out before him, fingers interlaced upon the pretty blue silk of his chest. He nodded several times, just slightly, as if bestowing a gentle benediction on his guest, before he spoke. "Now, dear Fonzo, I'm

sure you'll see this interview will be beneficial to you. May I ask a few questions?"

Already realizing that any stratagems of his would be infantile and useless against this obviously superior man, Fonzo could only say, "Yes, sir, you may."

At that moment Alfred's partner Ramon entered the room and stood silently beside Alfred on his divan, deferring as he always must to his elder and greater. Ramon was also dressed smartly, in fine pressed white slacks and green silk shirt with little black stripes. He smiled brilliantly. That seemed to Fonzo to be the way with these genteel persons of the upper castes: always smiling, as if there were no end to the good news arriving daily.

Alfred blessed Fonzo again, this time with a little smile. "Very, very good. Now Fonzo, you get along well with Polly Allen, don't you? I hope so, because as you know she's my partner too."

Fonzo was taken aback by this. He'd believed his own relation with Polly Allen was a secret no one must know; at least Polly Allen had always insisted that was so. But this Senor Ulster was knowing things unaccountably, and Fonzo realized then that this might be a trick question, so he resolved to tell the truth. "Yes, sir."

"Good. I thought so, and I'm pleased to hear you verify it. Now—we know you've been helping us all out with the water permits, and I want to take this opportunity to thank you. Personally. Very, very much."

Fonzo brightened at all this comradery and graciousness. Yes, this might be profitable after all. He thought to lean back at last, for the comfort; but then he thought it still too soon. He remained sitting upright and said. "I do my best. I'm glad you're happy."

“How much does Miss Allen pay you? For each permit?”

Fonzo’s eyes widened, a little alarm flaring in him. He wasn’t sure how much a true answer would betray the senora. But then again, could he lie to the man who owned all this? And then, which side most deserved his loyalty? Once more he decided he ought to speak the truth, though he was unaccustomed to this strategy in crucial showdowns like this one. He said in a subdued voice, “Twenty dollars US, for each one.”

Alfred hmmm’d agreeably: the master seemed pleased with this figure. Alfred continued interrogating. “These permits come because of your Uncle Sebastian—am I right?”

Fonzo twitched: how could he know this about the uncle? However, there was no time to hesitate, to ponder; so Fonzo nodded. Yes, a nod was better. How could anyone hold him to a nod?

“Does your uncle expect to be able to continue providing the permits?”

Fonzo hesitated a moment, but knew he had committed himself already beyond recall; he must nod again.

“Well, that’s fortunate. And my last question. Does your uncle know the Frances brothers?”

Fonzo’s fleshy brow furrowed, puzzling this unexpected question. Fonzo answered, “Yeah, I’ve heard of them. So I guess my uncle has too. But I don’t *know* if he knows them or not. He probably does.” Then he smiled, the sly provider. “But I can find out for you. I can find out *anything*.”

Alfred smiled, pleased with that. “Yes, I just bet you can. Well then Fonzo—I propose we make a radical change in all our dealings. The first thing I want to do is to give you a substantial raise. Henceforth, you will receive forty dollars US for each water permit you deliver to *me*.” Alfred

paused to let this hook penetrate and take hold. Fonzo's astonished and happy smile told him that this had been immediately accomplished.

"Secondly, henceforth you will report directly to *me*—not to Polly Allen. I will tell her myself that I have made contact with someone in Obras Publicas who can get me all the permits I need. All *you* need say, when and if she asks you, is that you have no more influence, that someone new has taken over giving out permits. Do you understand that? *You have no more influence. And someone new is in charge of giving permits.*"

Fonzo chewed the corner of his lip and agonized.

Alfred from his silk jacket pocket drew forth a thick fold of money and extended it to Ramon, who knew to take it and then hand it with a gracious, sly smile to Fonzo. Astounded, Fonzo stopped chewing. He was unsure if he might count it or not; but the wad enchanted him irresistibly and he did count it.

Alfred anticipated him, saying, "Two hundred dollars US, Fonzo. A little gift to inaugurate our new arrangement. This will be *apart* from any permit payments. *And—*" he added, sounding the grand note—"I have another, *bigger* gift for you. *If you introduce me to your Uncle Sebastian.*"

Turbulent emotions of great happiness and great fear confounded Fonzo utterly. He knew this could be fabulous, or it could mean the end of everything. He knew his most valuable asset was Uncle Sebastian. Not to be sold. To be milked. And milked. Fonzo feared the loss of this fabulous resource. But he feared this cagey gringo too. And most of all he feared giving up this splendid bundle of cash Alfred was tempting him with.

Reading his mind precisely, Alfred withdrew another, thicker fold of money and extended this also to Ramon. His confederate rose again, took it, walked to Fonzo, smiling even more grandly than before, and handed it

to their new ally. Without scruple Fonzo counted it. Five hundred US more! So be it then. He would have to take the chance that this gringo would not steal his uncle the cow.

Fonzo slid the additional fold of bills into his pants pocket where the other had gone. He leaned forward, elbows on his thighs, his hands enjoined hanging limply between them. He spoke softly, solemnly, for he knew it was momentous. He hoped he would not regret it.

“Alright,” he said, “I’ll introduce you. I’m your man.”

2. THE POWER ROOM

Fonzo was put to service immediately, for two hours later he and dapper Alfred were at Tamarindo Tamales, after Fonzo had arranged by telephone with Uncle Sebastian for the meeting. Fonzo knew that at this encounter he would increase his recent windfall, or all windfalls would be lost forever. The more he thought about it, the less optimistic he became.

Yet as they entered the tamale factory, the friendly way Alfred shook his hand and spoke his name and remarked about the beautiful day were all meant to make him see their relationship otherwise. Yes, it did seem now that Alfred and Fonzo were equal partners, making new contacts, enhancing their already flourishing association.

So it was that as Fonzo pushed open the arched door to the tamale factory he had regained a small portion of hope. And after all, this factory did belong to his family. *His* family. And Uncle Sebastian was *his* uncle. It also made Fonzo feel more at ease to be in the factory, which had been like a second home to him, than in the Power Room, which was the domain of all the great senors. Fonzo knew it was likely they would all three go to the Power Room eventually of course, after Uncle had shown off his grand operation.

Fonzo and Alfred walked inside and Fonzo closed the door. Suddenly they were engulfed by the clang and rumble and buzzing of machinery and the noise of eighty humans propelling the busy, complex world of Tamarindo Tamales. Fonzo knew it well, for Uncle Sebastian had been grooming him for big things. Uncle Sebastian had made him work in this room a year and more, till he knew most of the workers, had worked the

filthy rendering room, the cook vats, the assembly lines. He had tended the machine that wrapped the filling in masa and corn husks. He could operate the canning and seaming machines. Uncle Sebastian had even insisted he experience the heat of the pressure cookers, isolated in their own miserable room, where all the newest, least capable workers began. The loading dock, despite the heavy lifting, Fonzo had enjoyed, which had both surprised and encouraged his uncle. But that of course had been Fonzo's downfall, the loading dock, what had got him fired last November. He'd not been back to the factory since that unfortunate severance.

Fonzo looked fore and aft for the slim, still energetic figure of his uncle, who would be easily distinguished from the others, who all wore regulation white cotton sanitation caps. He checked his watch, exactly on time. Alfred was taking it all in. "Very impressive," Alfred said pitching his voice above the roar. Fonzo smiled, the proud insider.

"Yes," said Fonzo, turning toward him, "*we* are the biggest employer in Chapala. *We* always have been." Yes, this might turn out well after all.

"And *we* ship to thirty cities in the United States," said a voice behind them, which was of course Uncle Sebastian, speaking his good English in his earthy, rasping voice. Both Fonzo and Alfred turned to greet him.

Fonzo opened his mouth to make the introduction, but the opportunistic Alfred was too quick, speaking the first words. "You must be Senor Sebastian Suarez. I'm Alfred Ulster." His uncle quickly accepted Alfred's hand and replied, "At your service, Senor Ulster. I already know of you. I hear about all the important people." And Fonzo knew from then on he would be merely the tagalong, hoping for crumbs.

Uncle Sebastian would be in no hurry; he would have to show off. Fonzo saw that he had already begun, for he wore his fine brown vest with

the gold stars, that he might also display his half-century dead grandfather's gold chain, pocket to pocket, the old patriarch's antique watch snug in one of them. The uncle's thin remnants of hair today were not haphazard over his ears as usual, but were slicked back precisely, and his little moustache trimmed. The uncle and Alfred smiled a mutual admiration at each other and walked along side by side. These two knew what they were up to, each one a confident hound stalking a fat rabbit, both probably thinking it might be fat enough to share. Between the two of them anyway.

Fonzo followed, listening to their light chatter, to Alfred's occasional chuckle at Uncle Sebastian's old jokes. The workers had time only to glance up quickly to see the elegantly dressed visitor and the chief passing. Uncle Sebastian knew most of these workers by name, but today he acknowledged no one. Now Alfred had his paw on the shoulder of Uncle Sebastian. Already they were such good friends.

Once beyond the noise of the food processing and into the quieter sector of seamers and pressure cookers, Fonzo heard Alfred ask, "How long have you been shipping to America?" His uncle, for whom this was the happiest question imaginable, answered, "Oh, only these last fifteen, sixteen years. It was the great dream of my deceased brother, Ricardo, our little Fonzo's father." At that he crossed himself, then turned a brief benedictive smile toward his nephew, letting him know that he was not forgotten in all this, and might yet be tossed his own little scrap.

Uncle Sebastian continued. "Ricardo worked ten years to make this happen. We were small, we sold then only to mercados here and in Ajijic and Jocotepec, oh and a few in Guadalajara. A small company. But Ricardo knew the United States was the mercado ultimo and he was determined to make this company great, the company that his own father had given him.

But there were many obstacles, and I will not tire you with the details. Enough to say that he made things go his way. He knew how to make friends, I think you call it. Yes, making friends. Of the right people. To get what he wanted. Zoning laws changed. Exemptions from taxes. Permits that were not possible.” Then he laughed and Alfred laughed with him, for on this ground of outwitting bureaucracies they were communicating perfectly. “Politicos helped him. Officials of transito helped him. Yes, he knew how to make friends. He courted the Governor, who became his good amigo. It is a great Mexican art, making these friends.” At this only Uncle Sebastian laughed; though Fonzo could see that Alfred was learning this Mexican art rapidly now himself.

At last the two hounds and the pup went outside onto the loading dock, which was empty, where only a security guard now sat in his folding chair. The guard nodded gravely, respectfully at the boss of bosses. The guard then touched his pistol, ready in its holster, to indicate his vigilance.

This was something new, this security guard, someone who had not been part of the staff during the time Fonzo had worked there. Only when Fonzo looked from the guard to his uncle did he see that the sly uncle was privately grinning at his nephew. Uncle Sebastian caught Fonzo’s eye and winked; then made a motion with his hands and arms as if he were throwing something heavy from beside him to some place nearby. Then the uncle winked again, the hound become the fox. Fonzo blushed: for this mime was an exact re-enactment of the moment Uncle Sebastian had caught Fonzo that November night heaving cases of tamales into the waiting taxicab of his accomplice Enrique.

Uncle Sebastian turned again to Alfred, who had seen none of Uncle Sebastian’s fun. “Pues, enough of these tamales. Let’s go to my office and

enjoy ourselves, maybe have a little fine tequila-no?" Then, without looking at Fonzo, he added, "Come along, nephew."

As Fonzo trailed obediently behind them, Senor Alfred and Uncle Sebastian walked side by side the narrow sidewalk of Calle Zaragoza away from the loading dock. They crossed the street midblock and continued passing featureless drab residences whose metal doorways lined the sidewalk. Several on the block had made themselves into timid storefronts with cheap signs in the window to announce their service or product. The stucco building at the corner, unlike all its neighbors, was freshly painted, burnt orange, but otherwise showed no sign that it was the executive offices and sometimes residence of el presidente of Tamarindo Tamales.

Uncle Sebastian unlocked and swung open the iron gate. He unlocked the mahogany door and held it open so that Alfred, then Fonzo, could enter and climb ahead of him the carpeted stairway to the Power Room at the top. A finely-carpeted hallway led away from the Power Room's closed double doors to further rooms that Fonzo had rarely been permitted to see. He knew that sometimes Uncle Sebastian, like Ricardo his father before him, had slept there. Others also, names and relations alike unknown to Fonzo, had also sometimes occupied these forbidden rooms on special occasions.

Uncle Sebastian held open one double door for his guests, beckoned them to enter, and then closed it behind them. Two steps inside, Alfred stopped to look about him at the old world elegance. He had seen nothing like it in whatever quarters he had visited in Chapala or Ajijic in the four years he had lived there. Old sumptuous leather chairs and sofas, red and black, were arranged in friendly groups at either end of the long, tall-ceilinged room, each group upon its own large and identical Persian carpet with intricate patterns in red, black and green. The floors between carpets

showed varnished terracotta tiles, and in that ample tiled space was a large carved oak table with matching chairs, cushioned seats and backs dark green, to accommodate twelve. An elaborate and delicate crystal chandelier hung above the table from an oval relief of white vines and flowers in the white ceiling. Walls were dark green wallpaper with alternating columns of white scrolls and white diamonds. Two tall arched windows, side by side in the middle of the long wall opposite the double doors, were adorned with heavy red drapery to the floor. They'd been drawn back to frame the windows and flood the sanctum with summer light. Certainly more than a few hundred framed photographs and a few paintings were upon all the walls.

Uncle Sebastian enjoyed watching Alfred see it all, especially the photographs and paintings, for these to Uncle Sebastian were the essence of this room. He pointed to the large painting that dominated the end wall and said, "That is my grandfather, Gonzalo Suarez, who began this business. We owe everything to him." Alfred might see the resemblance; more to fleshy Fonzo than to his uncle, however, which was a secret, spiteful pleasure to the nephew. Uncle Sebastian then led his distinguished visitor to a large, gold-framed photograph, before which Alfred uttered the sound, "Ah."

Alfred had noticed exactly what Sebastian had wished his guest to notice, that this was indeed the former President of Mexico, Salinas Gotari, whose arm enwrapped the shoulder of Ricardo Suarez, Fonzo's father. El Presidente in the photo smiled at Ricardo as if he were his best friend.

As Alfred continued admiring, Uncle Sebastian said, "Yes, our grandfather began this, but it was my dear brother who made us great. He wanted tamales in America, the real tamales, and he made it so. He was presidente of our company for twenty-three years. He was a genius. He

showed us all how important to have the good friends.” He winked at Alfred. “And now we have them, many of them. And I know you are an hombre inteligente, señor, so I know you know that it is because of those friends that I am able to help you with these permits. May I offer you a tequila?”

Alfred, perplexed at times by Mexican society, said water would be enough. But the uncle would not allow him his careless manners. “Oh but señor, I mean no ordinary tequila. I have a blue agave that is more than a hundred years old. To me it is like milk from the Virgin, a sacrament.”

Hearing that tequila might have such a pedigree, Alfred knew to change his mind. Uncle Sebastian poured three precious samples into slim, short-stemmed tulip crystal, and gave one to each of them. Fonzo had not expected to be so honored. Uncle Sebastian lifted his own to eye level and said, “To friends. And good business.”

Alfred repeated the same words and knew to smile. Uncle Sebastian drank his off completely. Fonzo tried to do the same but it required three swigs. Alfred merely sipped and let his attention wander elsewhere. He said, “You probably know everyone in the village.”

Uncle Sebastian beamed. “And their parents and grandparents. And all the stories and scandals. Yes, Ricardo taught us this also, that even the gossip is important, and can be used to make the good business, if you know how to use it. Yes,” he went on, turning and surveying his domain, “brother Ricardo gave us much.” This thin, seemingly frail man gestured with a hand that was meant to encompass everything in the room. “Especially Ricardo gave us this room. This sanctuary. He bought every piece of furniture, everything; bought the paintings, framed the photographs. He was a man of style I think you call it. He dressed like no other in those days, and he gave

grand parties in this room. But not like other parties, no. These were only for business, only for men—excepting rare occasions when a pretty lady or two was specially invited. But such business! Ricardo made fiestas, comidas deliciosas, everything to drink, every Friday afternoon, the finest blue agave and French wines. He was famous for his Friday afternoons. Twenty years of them. All the important men in the village would come, and important people from Guadalajara as well. He knew the Governor—*he* came to the afternoons, the Governor did, and they became friends. Oh yes, there was nothing like it in those days.”

Uncle Sebastian then turned to Fonzo and smiled. “You and I inherited none of that style—eh, Alfonzo? No, you and I are simple people.”

Struggling against the mystification of his brain by the powerful tequila, Fonzo nodded yes, of course; though he was barely aware of his Uncle Sebastian’s question. The uncle saw that, had expected as much, and turned his attention back to Alfred, who still sipped.

Uncle Sebastian said, “But I learned the lessons. I inherited all the friends, and I still bring them here for little drinks and coffees and conversations. We have our Friday afternoons still—but now only once a month—and that only to honor the memory of my brother. But no grand affairs like the old days. But I’ve seen that’s not so necessary. It is the little favors that are necessary—am I right, Senor Alfred?”

Alfred smiled; he understood the truth so spoken, though he was but yet an amateur practioner of the art, doubtless a fault of his American social education. He watched the old general of so many political and economic skirmishes and battles move toward the window and look out. “This is my window, my advantage,” the uncle said, speaking the last word with particular relish.

Alfred, sensing that perhaps courtesy required it, went and stood beside him and looked out also. He saw below the plaza on a summer afternoon: children, parents, the old, mostly dark-skinned peasants, some selling, some buying, most merely enjoying the leisure of the day with each other.

The uncle spoke again. "I watch them, but they don't watch me. I see who comes and goes, and poco a poco I learn what is happening. For example—see those two there? The man with the fancy suit talking with the poor farmer." Alfred replied that he did. "They have met several times this week, the same time of day. The man in the suit is Carmelo Delavaca, nephew of my wife, her brother's son, and therefore—such is my fate—a nephew to me. A lawyer. I avoid him. The other is Adalberto Lopez. I know from gossip that Senor Lopez has a little property that his brother Luis is trying to take from him. This should have been settled long ago, in the brother's favor. But Adalberto has fought him hard, and now I see that Adalberto is desperate, for he has gone to Carmelo for help, to ask for the services that only lawyers like Carmelo can provide. No one has told me any of this—I learn simply by standing here and watching. I know everyone and everyone's business. And I add up the two and two, as you Americans say."

Uncle Sebastian turned his guest away from the window that they might browse again among the photographs that covered the Power Room's walls. No doubt Uncle Sebastian would have wished the conversation to perambulate around the room all afternoon and dwell on pictures and memories and the glories of his family's connections; but Alfred, American in most essential things, did not understand this kind of sociability preceding, sometimes eclipsing business, and so he spoke instead his own personal preoccupation. "So I suppose you know the Frances family. I mean Alejandro and his brothers."

Uncle Sebastian was a gentleman and would indulge this American his lack of social grace. “Oh yes, and their deceased father, and his father. They are of even older generations than my own family. Great property owners, which you probably know. And fine men. Everyone respects them. Probably our Fonzo does not even know that it was Alejandro’s father Eugenio who first brought water to the village of Ajijic.”

The patriarch continued, not bothering to see if Fonzo knew this odd fact or not. “Thirty–no, forty years ago. Everyone in the old days took their water from the lake, in buckets and cans. The lake was beautiful then. So sad to see it now receding year by year, perhaps dying—who knows. But Eugenio paid to have a great well dug near the plaza, and he made faucets there so that everyone could get their water more easily. It was later that pipes were laid from this well, and the water was made even more convenient, as it is today. All that because of Eugenio Frances.”

Gradually the cloud began lifting from Fonzo’s brain and he became unexpectedly happy. His more and more apparent uselessness in this meeting was suddenly a trivial matter to him. He wanted another tequila, but had not the courage to ask or to help himself. Only with great difficulty was he able to keep his attention on what had now become to him a dull and certainly profitless time.

Alfred said, “No, I didn’t know any of that. I’ve met Alejandro only once. But that brings me to another question, Senor Suarez. It’s about the permits. As you know, we still need many, many more water permits to complete Mexico Limpio. I’m sure you know it is only because of your good will and your fabulous connections that we have the permits we have. So I ask you—What if...what if the Frances brothers wanted to build a large development, such as my own Mexico Limpio, and what if they came to

Obras Publicas for water permits? For many, many water permits. Would there be any way to prevent them from getting permits that *I* should be getting?”

As Fonzo watched the fox’s sly smile reappear, it frightened him, as it always did. His uncle said, “You ask if the influence of Suarez or of Frances would be the stronger—is that it?” Alfred nodded yes. Uncle Sebastian became thoughtful, serious. Then he said, “The Frances family is old and influential. And they are all old friends to the Suarez family. They would certainly receive their share of permits. And there would never be a question of one against the other, a fight. I like them and respect them too much.”

Alfred frowned. Uncle Sebastian suddenly seemed amused; he said, “But I think your concern is unnecessary. I know this family, as I say. I know Federigo, the brother who is the architect. His experience is making office buildings and factories, he knows nothing about houses. And none of them know anything about the americanos—what *they* like. The Frances brothers are very, very conservative in business. They don’t like to take chances. They could be no rivals to you.”

Fonzo thought this would be good news to Alfred, but the americano continued frowning. He said, “I have heard that same thing from others. But recently they have made allies, with two Americans, who are building very attractive houses, and selling them. Alejandro sold them property, and I think he will sell them more. I suspect they are going to join forces.”

Uncle Sebastian said, “Are you sure? Wait—I think I’ve heard of these americanos.”

“They call themselves Bellacasa Construction.”

“Yes,” said Uncle Sebastian, “that is the name I heard. Building in Rancho del Oro.”

Alfred nodded yes and continued speaking. “But you asked me if I was sure—and no, I’m not *sure* they’re joining forces. But all the signs point to it.”

Uncle Sebastian showed him a little doubt. “I too heard they sold property to those Americans. Still it would surprise me that they would collaborate. What you need, Senor Alfred, to know for certain, is a spy. That is what you need. To tell you what are the plans of your opposition, so you can know what to do. That is what my brother Ricardo would have done, pay for a spy. Am I right, Alfonzo?”

“Without doubt,” Fonzo answered, though he was barely relating to the conversation now. Uncle Sebastian went to pour more tequila, Alfred his new amigo right behind him.

The conversation then shifted to the trivialities that Uncle Sebastian enjoyed, and fifteen minutes later when his uncle suggested that Fonzo’s presence was no longer necessary, that he had done well in bringing Senor Alfred for this visit, but that he could now excuse himself and go make whatever diversion he wished, Fonzo was ready and willing.

Fonzo had expected the dispossession. He knew he would probably never carry to the tough Senora Allen or to Alfred another water permit again, nor would he likely be receiving any more nice packages of folded money. But he still had eight hundred twenty dollars US to spend. And already he was thinking where to buy new clothes, some *nice* clothes.

And there was always a new opportunity waiting. Always.

3. WHIRLWIND ROMANCE

Fonzo hurried down the stairs and came outside and felt suddenly like a free man. His first act would be to have a limonada at the Paris Café on the main corner. And a cigarette. Or two or three. Then, oh yes, go buy some new clothes.

However, after Benito the waiter pointed Fonzo to an empty table and he went to it, Fonzo turned and thereby experienced his second regret of the day about his clothes, that they doomed him: for he saw at the table beside him as he sat down, a tan, sexy gringa in a white blouse off her shoulders, with a pretty red, red mouth. Yes, a little older-how much older he couldn't say-but those older ones were probably his best chance anyway, until he lost a little weight. Even before he'd picked up the menu, she glanced at him. He tried to smile; he would have done better if he'd had a better shirt.

Benito Murillo came to take his order, a grandfather and half-owner for all its twenty-six years of the Paris Café, dressed in the same drab style of unpressed shirt and pants he'd worn all those years. The Murillo brothers didn't believe in paying money for help, so they did everything themselves, even to washing the dishes. Fonzo had known them both since Fonzo had come there begging candies as a boy. Benito stood beside him now without greeting or impatience, exactly as he treated all his customers, new or old. Fonzo decided he needed more than limonada, and he ordered a coca. And a coffee. No, an espresso, a double, remembering that recently they had installed the new machines.

Benito put away his order pad in his shirt pocket without writing anything on it and went back inside. Fonzo fished out of his shirt pocket a

cigarette and lit it with little stick matches. Then he glanced again at the colorful senorita, for surely senoras would not dress this way, even gringa senoras. He saw no ring on the left hand.

She seemed to sense his attention and she looked at him again and smiled. He saw the long eyelashes and rosy cheeks. He saw that behind all the flouncy platinum curls piled on her head was a long, happy ponytail that liked to bob and swing. Her ruffled red skirt billowed over the chair, a perfect match to the lipstick. Two little white sandaled feet, crossed at the ankles, peeked from beneath the pink lace hemline.

She spoke first; it startled him. “Habla ingles?” This was gringospeak at its hobbling worst, and those words had been no doubt a large portion of her Spanish vocabulary. All the better.

He gave her his most confident LA street patter. “Of course, doesn’t everyone? I lived in the ‘hood, I hung out on Hollywood Boulevard with the homeboys, I surfed with the technos. You betcha I speak English.”

“Well!” she said, obviously impressed, but, fortunately for Fonzo, ignorant of most of his meanings and their implications. “And what do you do in Mexico?”

She was making it easy for him. He eased back in his chair, settled his arms on the armrests, let the cigarette dangle in his fingers so the smoke could curl up and away suggestively. “Oh I have *several* occupations. My family owns the tamale factory here, Tamarindo. I’m a troubleshooter for *them*. And I do a little private work here and there, for certain clients, that I can’t really talk about.”

“Well!” she said again so vivaciously. She drew a cigarette from her own pack of boxed Benson and Hedges and leaned toward him with the cigarette between her fingers and said, “I need a little fire, young man.”

Fonzo fumbled with his matchbox, unsure if she'd used an expression he had never heard, or if she were being boldly suggestive, as he'd heard these gringas so often were. He struck the match and extended the flame across her table, his hand just perceptibly quivering; he hoped only he had seen that quivering. She took his hand gently in her own and guided the flame to her cigarette tip and consummated the union in a little flareup that as quickly flared out. Then she drew back her lit cigarette, smiling, and relinquished his hand, more atremble than before.

She seemed intent on continuing this, and Fonzo adjusted his chair so he could face her directly. She was drinking something that looked chocolatey, in a tall glass with ice. She sipped, holding the straw delicately in two fingers, holding the smoking cigarette away from her with the other hand; all the while smiling, looking at him.

He was still confounded by her and he could only ask, "And what do *you* do in Mexico?"

She looked as if she were about to laugh, but didn't. "Oh I do *whatever* I please, you know. Why be in Mexico if you have something to *do*? The idea's to come and enjoy the sun, drink margaritas, sleep late-isn't it? And of course the handsome men. I enjoy all of it."

He would like to think she might be referring to him, but he recalled the tasteless shirt and pants he wore, and was shamed again. Then, as if this ill-fate would pursue him all day, he noticed further embarrassment approaching in the form of his dapper uncle, ten years his senior, Carmelo Delavaca, who had just turned the corner and seemed to be looking for an empty table for himself on the sidewalk. Fonzo's luck worsened, for Carmelo saw him and acknowledged his presence with a courteous nod. Carmelo an instant later saw the colorful *senorita*, who had not as yet seen

him. The sight of this *senorita* brought the little smile to Carmelo's face that Fonzo knew well, the one Uncle Carmelo saved for his frequent encounters with the delights of life.

Carmelo then walked to Benito, spoke an order to him, and made his slow elegant way among the sidewalk's tables toward Fonzo, the suave little smile now a fixture that would likely remain as long as the *gringa* remained. Fonzo rose to greet his dashing uncle. They shook hands and Carmelo sat in the chair beside Fonzo, from which he would have an easy view of the pretty *senorita* of uncertain vintage.

Fonzo was humbled by the fabulous ensemble his uncle wore: suit and pants light gray with a dark blue pinstripe, a pale yellow shirt with long collar points, a matching yellow silk handkerchief in his breast pocket, black patent leather shoes. A thin moustache reminiscent of Uncle Sebastian, but this one curled a little at the ends. And how did he keep his hair slicked back and so perfectly in place all day? Carmelo would be seen as never hurrying, never being in a sweat. But Fonzo knew that was the opposite of the truth.

Carmelo spoke in Spanish, "How goes it, nephew? Still working at Obras with Andre?" Fonzo could see Carmelo straining to look at the *senorita* without seeming to do so. The *senorita* was definitely looking at Carmelo, and what could Fonzo do?

Fonzo answered, "No, I didn't like that job. Actually..." and he paused to let his uncle know that what followed was significant. "I've been working for the owners of the new project out the other end of Ajjic, they call it Mexico Limpio. They pay me very, *very* well."

"Never heard of it," said Carmelo as he nodded to Benito, arrived with his iced tea. "But I'm glad at least that you're not working in the tamale

factory anymore. Menial work is not for you, Fonzo. You're a clever boy. You should be in the law, or in politics, that's where the good money is. You know what I mean?"

Fonzo did know. And these remarks recalled to him his most recent dis-employment. "Maybe you have something good in mind for me, Uncle."

Carmelo looked briefly at him, long enough to say, "I thought you were already working. And being very well paid."

"Pues, that may not be much longer. But I have skills that might be good for you. I'm clever, like you say. Maybe I could work for you. I can even be tricky."

Carmelo glanced at his nephew's shirt and pants for the briefest moment, causing Fonzo to add in a voice that showed only a little of his anxiety, "Oh these clothes! I have a new wardrobe, honestly, a suit and tie even, two suits and ties. And very nice shoes. You should see me! No—of course I couldn't work for you looking like this. Hah!" he finished, to show how preposterous that idea was to him too.

But Carmelo shook his head, dismissing the idea completely. "I think no, Fonzo. Our Uncle Sebastian would never approve you working for me. He doesn't like me. And even if he does treat you roughly—and I hear about those things—I know beneath it all he likes you and still has hope for you. No—this work of mine he doesn't like. And soon—when I start off my political career—and that will be soon—he will like me even less."

Fonzo was puzzled. "Why? Because you will go PAN?"

"Why else?" he said smugly. "But PAN is where all the money goes nowadays in Jalisco. I suppose you did not know that even our Uncle Sebastian has changed over to PAN. I'm no fool, I follow the money. Just like our uncle." And then he leaned toward Fonzo; for the first time since

joining him he looked directly, intimately into his eyes, and said, “Who is the lady at the next table? I thought I saw you talking to her.”

“A gringa. Too old for you, Uncle.”

Carmelo snorted. “Then *much* too old for *you*, nephew. But introduce me. Como no? If only for the practice.”

This rude counterfate seemed woven into the fabric of Fonzo’s day: here he was again, watching the prize slip away. And Fonzo had absolutely nothing in his meager arsenal of social etiquette to prevent this happening.

Fonzo turned back toward the senorita, who quickly shifted her eyes away from Carmelo to the nephew. Fonzo said in English, “Senorita—I don’t know your name, but my name is Alfonzo Suarez—they call me Fonzo—and I’d like to introduce you to my uncle, Carmelo Delavaca, a lawyer.”

She glanced at Carmelo and her sudden smile for the sophisticated uncle was brighter than any she had given poor Fonzo. “Well, so glad to meet you, Fonzo. My name is Gwendolyn O’Connor. And I’d be delighted to meet your uncle.” Carmelo was already standing, so tall, so suave, so ready to swoop. He bowed and offered his hand like a frenchman, to take, not to shake. Fonzo, with regret amplifying, watched her possess the offered hand like it was a gift, watched her hold it a tender moment, feel it, weigh it, then slowly let it go, probably with a little regret of her own. To Fonzo, the happy ending of this grim romantic story was already inevitable.

Fonzo sat enshrouded by his predictable doom. However, very soon he knew it was time to give in to it, as he always must, and always did. He was adept at letting go promising but spoiled situations, and he let this one go, and so became free to let his attention wander away.

Yes, it would be a great diversion to buy some new clothes. No telling how all these disappointments might have turned out if he’d had the snazzy

clothes. He thought he'd like something different, some foreign look. Fabulous clothes could change his life. There was still the wad of money. There were still new opportunities everywhere. Everywhere.

Meanwhile, Carmelo leaned back in his chair, unbuttoned his coat, showing how easy it was for him. Gwendolyn admired. Much as he wished it otherwise, Fonzo knew no way discreetly to make the escape he now longed for. He sat, smiling pathetically as these two models of romance talked. He seemed to follow them as he tried to nod and tried to make the smile better. But he was conniving the escape. And dreaming of new clothes.

Nonetheless, Fonzo saw a tall woman cross the street at the intersection, a gringa with long, loose auburn hair, in knee pants and a simple blouse, in cowboy boots, carrying a zipped leather folder. She seemed familiar. He tried remembering where he might have seen her. It could have been anywhere. Or perhaps he was mistaken, but he thought not. She walked past without looking at them and stopped before the large community bulletin board in front of the pharmacy and studied it.

Suddenly Uncle Carmelo was standing and ready to go and saying to Senorita Gwendolyn that he was sorry that he must leave, that he had important appointments. Before Fonzo could even imagine how this sudden good fortune of Carmelo's departure could be befalling him, Carmelo leaned down confidentially to Fonzo and said in Spanish, "I must leave. You see that tall woman over there? She is a client. I took her retainer to investigate for her a property that was falsely sold. But it is a hard case, so I gave it up. But now she wants her money back. And you know what I say to them *then*." And with that Carmelo bowed courteously

again to the senorita and hurried off undetected in the direction from which the tall woman had come.

Fonzo resat himself. He settled in, perhaps once more in command—a miracle!—and he said to Senorita Gwendolyn, “What can anyone say? He’s flighty. And he’s married. But not happily.” He leaned forward to speak his own confidentiality. “And they say he beats his wife.”

He thought this would shock her but she merely raised one eyebrow and said, “Ohhh,” as if she found that interesting. She looked where Carmelo had gone but he had already disappeared.

Fonzo felt his confidence rising. He said, “May I join you?” Inhaling deeply from her cigarette, she waved her hand at the chair opposite her. Fonzo moved coffee and cola to the spot she’d indicated, and a little clumsily moved himself into the seat. Remembering Carmelo’s suave pose, Fonzo settled back in that chair and dandled a spoon in the tiny espresso cup before looking to her again and saying, “The truth is...I work for my uncle. He’s a lawyer. He gives me special assignments. You might say, yes, you *should* say, we’re associates. My cousin and I are the same. The truth is...I wear these awful clothes because I’m doing undercover work for my uncle. I’m spying you might say. I can’t say all I’d like to say, but I can tell you it is with *politicos* high up, and much, much money is involved. We suspect there are...big crimes being committed. I’m on the edge of finding out everything. That’s the real reason my uncle had to leave suddenly. Our chief suspect passed by and Uncle Carmelo and I can’t be seen together. Or else.”

This indeed astonished her; even more than he’d hoped, for her mouth held open in a perfect little O, and her long cigarette ash drooped

precariously. He made a sly smile and gave her time to react. Finally she said, “My, my. I never would have guessed.”

“Yes,” Fonzo said in a deeper, softer voice of great mystery, “I’m not exactly what I appear to be.”

“Well Fonzo!” she said, eyes aglitter, “I’m so *impressed!*”

As she should be. A new opportunity. Things were indeed looking up. He became bold. “Gwendolyn, what do you say we go for a little walk? Over by the pier. You know—where all the vendors are. They sell so many pretty things—I’d like to buy you a little something. Or how about a nice lunch in the Lido Hotel? I know the owner, he’ll give us a nice table. He won’t think a thing about my sad clothes—he knows all about my spy work. He’s seen me in lots of disguises. What do you say? Let’s go spend some money.”

Gwendolyn preened and fluffed her ponytail. Her smile was rich, he knew he had her. So confident he became that he rose without waiting for her answer, and he offered her his hand. Certainly Uncle Carmelo could not have done it better. She rose too and took it and they walked away arm in arm as she cooed, “Oooh Mr. Fonzo, I *like* your *style!*” And that was the first time anyone had ever said those words to him.

At the corner was Chapala’s principal intersection. Traffic policeman Carlos Santos, in uniform, who had known Fonzo all his life and had always called him youngster, saw the extravagant woman on his arm. Although the traffic light was contrary for the romantics, the policeman held up a prohibitory hand to the oncoming traffic and insisted that all give way to this lad who seemed suddenly to have come of age. Fonzo glowed with happiness and gratitude, and held his chubby face up that all might regard him, contradicting a lifetime habit of downcast countenance. From the

corner of his eye he knew that his Gwendolyn noticed the special regard of the policeman, because he felt her snug her playful body closer to his arm.

On the opposite corner the colorful couple turned toward the lake and would have to cross the intersection once more, and this too against the light. In that direction the traffic was negligible and policeman Santos smiled and waved them on, the young local prince and his lady on parade.

As they passed the shoe shine stand, Tomas, who had once worked at Tamarindo, though busy with a customer, looked up and smiled at Fonzo's good fortune. A teller in Banco Bital, who had gone to school with Fonzo, through a plate glass window saw him passing with his lady and looked back a second time, and a third, then waved. Two old gringos standing inside Bing's Ice Cream, eating off their cones, recognized Gwendolyn. They spoke a simple greeting, which she acknowledged with a smiling nod, but no more.

Approaching the Hotel Lido, Fonzo said to her, "How about dinner? Order anything you want, I'm buying."

Her sweet grip tightened on his arm. "Oh Fonzo, it's too early for dinner. But I'd love a nice dessert. Would you?"

"Oh yes," he said, for desserts were always welcome. They went up the steps and into the quiet lobby that opened onto the spacious dining room beneath twenty foot ceilings. Fifteen or more tables were already laid with linen and china and silverware. These were all, however, vacant of late afternoon customers; this fancy dining room a lonely elegance in this otherwise old and rustico hotel.

"Oh goodness," she said, "look at all that water!" Fonzo turned to see what she saw: a dozen framed photographs on both foyer walls, documenting a legendary high water mark of the lake in its greatest

plenitude, covering the streets of downtown Chapala, halfway up the steps of the iglesia grande. One largest photograph showed the water lapping at the doors of the Hotel Lido itself, and a boatman and a child rowing past.

“Oh that,” said Fonzo. “That was fifty-one or so years ago, the same year my great grandfather died. The great flood. You can bet that won’t happen again.”

As she continued studying the photographs she answered, “I would *hope* not.”

From nowhere the host Emmanuel Corona came to them, dressed in fine black pants well creased, and a white long-sleeved shirt. He too had once worked for Tamarindo, and nodded a slight recognition to Fonzo; then something larger, warmer to the *senorita*. He seated them and handed them both menus and remained beside them, invisibly waiting.

“Oh I can’t decide if I want the cherry pie or the cream pudding with chocolate sauce,” she effused.

Pudgy Fonzo grinned at her. “Have both then. You see, cost is no object. Not when you’re with me.”

“Oooh Fonzo,” she tittered. “Well I guess I will. But you may have to help me. I eat like a little bird you know.”

“No problema,” he said. “I think I’ll have the flan and the peach pie. *Ala mode*. Two for you, two for me-huh?” Fonzo gave their orders in Spanish.

The waiter departed and Gwendolyn looked to her escort coyly and asked, “And where do you live, Fonzo?”

He should have anticipated this question, but had not. It would doom him to admit living with his aunt. He must have a small interruption of coughing into his napkin while his mind raced away into the cluttered closet

of possibilities, which must also be probabilities. His mind was agile, swift and clever at such high speed searches, but nothing he discovered in the intervening eight seconds of coughing seemed quite right. There would be holes in the story he now chose in desperation, but hopefully she would not perceive them. Or could be confused away from implausibility's, if she did discover any.

"I live here in Chapala, at a private club, for men only, no women allowed inside. I have my own room, very nice. It has a great view of the plaza. Only a few other men live there. There's a communal sitting room that's very, *very* ritzy."

"Oh ritzy! Well, I always like *that*, Fonzo. My, my, you *are* the one."

Yes, he would like that very much, to be the one. It would be the first time.

Waiter Emmanuel returned with a tray of their desserts, set it on the little chrome utility stand beside the table, and set before them each their choices. Then he turned to go, but as he did so he made a sly wink to Fonzo that only the young man could see, before departing again.

Each one ate with obvious pleasure. Gwendolyn nipped at both pudding and pie with alternate nibbles of her teaspoon. More quickly than his birdlike lady, Fonzo used his fork to gouge out and feed himself chunks of the pie and the ice cream till both had soon vanished. Then he replaced his fork with a tablespoon to consume the caramel covered flan in four prodigious mouthfuls. The conversation lagged, but there would be time for that later. Whenever he looked to her she rolled her eyes with the guilty pleasure of it. Still, she only nibbled and half of both her desserts remained when Fonzo had finished everything before him.

She sat back and laid down her little spoon. “Oh I just can’t eat anymore! You’ll have to help me, Fonzo. Please.”

He nodded knowingly. He was beginning to think like a gentleman: for his lady he would do it. He reached and drew the pie, then the pudding, toward him. A minute later when Emmanuel came to refill their water glasses Fonzo had finished both. “La cuenta por favor,” he said, already thinking of the impression he might make among the vendors at the pier.

Fonzo didn’t bother to inspect the charges, but pulled a fold of hundred peso bills from his pocket, drew off two, and laid them on top of the bill with a flourish, and a private wink of his own to Emmanuel. Fonzo said in Spanish, “Keep the change.” Then he looked to her, who’d watched all this smiling, and said, “Let’s go shopping, my dear.”

They walked away again arm in arm out the door. Now hardly remembering the shame of his blue and red checked shirt, Fonzo turned right and walked the sidewalk leading to the pier. Dozens of vendors behind their tables of wares, lazy in the slow-selling late afternoon, watched them coming. It was a perfect day. Rain the night before had softened the late summer heat. The sky was clear. Fonzo recalled in all his life no day like it.

Arm in arm they walked. At the table of a small brightly dressed Indian and her daughter, the seniorita stopped and let her fingers play upon several silver bracelets. “Try them on,” Fonzo encouraged her. “Pick any one you like. Or as many as you like.” Her appreciative body leaned into him, and she said so intimately that only he would hear her, “Oooh Fonzo.”

She tried on several at once, holding up her forearm so the sunlight sparkled off them. She admired them immensely. “We’ll take them all,” Fonzo told the vendor in Spanish. He pulled out several more bills and gave them to the happy lady who slipped the pesos instantly into her skirt pocket.

Gwendolyn squeezed his arm, a very private intimacy, then lay her head more publically upon his shoulder and seemed to be nuzzling there.

They strolled on. She continually admired her new silver. She slowed and stopped beside a table where shirts, purses, and all things of bright Guatamalan cloth were displayed. A long fringed shawl in bright red and gold caught her eye. She looked at Fonzo, expressing her delight. Ever more the gentleman, he lifted up the shawl and laid it around her bare shoulders. She snuggled into it and purred, "Oooh it's so, so soft, Fonzo. Just like you."

Fonzo liked that very much. He paid the old man, and would take no change. They walked on. Near the pier's end they came upon a vendor selling copper pans and bowls and kitchen utensils arranged on a colorful indian blanket laid upon the concrete of the pier. She bent to look, saying, "Oh Fonzo, such beautiful copperware! My kitchen's such a dingy place. Oh-I can just see all these beautiful pieces hanging on those walls! Oh someday I'll have to have these."

But a gentleman does not make a lady wait. "Pick out all the ones you like. I want you to have them."

She stood and looked at him, astonished. "But Fonzo, they're so *expensive!* A whole collection! I couldn't do it!"

But he insisted, and so she must do it. She chose a pair of long-handled saute pans, a double-boiler, a baking pan for turkeys, a cute nesting of half a dozen sauce pans. Mixing bowls. A variety of stirring spoons, a ladle, a funnel, a measuring cup. The overjoyed dark Mexican lady who'd owned these articles moved each one aside as Gwendolyn bespoke it, the vendor letting out a little excited puff from her cigarette with each choice.

Soon the pile seemed more than Fonzo and Gwendolyn both could carry away.

Yet Fonzo, because it was the ultimate challenge of a gentleman to bear all things for his lady, attempted to do so alone. Mixing bowls he cradled in one arm. Bake pan and bundled utensils cradled in the other. Like warrior's armor his arms and chest were bursting with copper. Finally he bent and slipped both hands through handles of the remaining pots and cauldrons and he lifted them all. They hung in his hands like gigantic copper cufflinks. He staggered forward three steps, but then his knees buckled beneath the great weight, and he stopped, lest he topple. He gasped for breath and had to set all of it down.

Gwendolyn stood for a moment hands on hips, laughing. "But how will I get this all home, Fonzo? Do you have a car?"

Another question he had not prepared himself to answer. But one suddenly came to him like easy money. "My car's in the shop. I can't use it now anyway, because of the undercover-remember? I have to use taxicabs until my investigation's finished. So it's really no problem. We'll just load you up in a taxi-alright?"

Such a smooth, unentangled conclusion to her romantic adventure Gwendolyn had not foreseen. "Oooh Fonzo, you're such a gentleman, you think of everything. A taxi would be just the thing. But when would I see you again, my dear?" With this unexpected but welcome question, she settled her face again into the hollow of his neck and shoulder. This time he felt it certainly, her lips nipping at his neck, perhaps a kiss. His heart fluttered wildly. It had all happened so fast. Now he knew she was his, and no way would she be able, or want, to forget him. There would of course be

more. And better. The winds of his fate had changed, he was sure of it. No, no need to worry, no need to show himself desperate.

He looked down upon her adoring eyes. “When would you like to see me again, Gwendolyn?”

“Would tomorrow be too soon, Fonzo, my dashing little spy?”

His confidence rose again. “Tomorrow would be perfect. Where? We can’t meet at my rooms, you know, they’re for men only. Maybe I could go to your place.”

Her eyes danced with delight. This was too easy. “Oh *that* wouldn’t be good. But we could meet again at the café, where we met today. I’ll be there same time tomorrow. We can’t rush things now—you naughty latinos are all alike!” It thrilled him that she called him that; also thrilled him the way she’d spoken the Spanish word. OK, he could wait, because he could see she couldn’t resist him. He waved to a driver who’d been standing one foot outside his idle cab, a quarter block away, watching them. The man rushed in his taxi to them.

“The *senorita* would like all these copper pans put in your cab, and then for you to drive her to her house.” But he realized he knew not where that was, and he asked her. “And where *do* you live?”

She laughed. “In the village, Fonzo, where do you think?” Her ravishing, triumphant frivolity overwhelmed and diminished him so completely he dared not ask a further question.

After the taxi had been loaded and Gwendolyn made ready to enter and sit in the back seat, she turned to Fonzo with her most brilliant smile and she kissed him on the mouth. The kiss was long enough that when he peeked he saw her so closely he might have been an astronomer through a telescope examining desiccated Mars: seeing millennia of dried river beds

crossing and crisscrossing around her eyes. He could also see the fragrant cosmetic sands of time partially obscuring, partially filling these filigreed arroyos. He also saw his beloved's eyes suddenly open wide, staring strangely back at him, in the midst of their great kiss. But none of this could diminish her or the moment.

At last she broke away, and with a flounce she settled herself in the seat and waved a pretty hand out the window. The cab reversed into the street, and drove away. The ponytail bobbing was the last he saw of her.

Fonzo stood silent a moment to feel the great glow of his triumph. What a day!

Fonzo began walking back from whence he had come. Like a smug director reviewing the brilliant work of the shoot, Fonzo let the scenes of his meeting and courting and winning of Gwendolyn unroll once again in his mind. As he watched he chortled and congratulated and let his great satisfaction tumble through him. When he crossed streets, he nodded hello to strangers. He imagined tomorrow afternoon, and further, more eventful scenes.

When he passed by the farmacia, however, he noticed the community bulletin board and the mundane concerns of the day returned to him with a crunch. He needed a job. He needed more money. Lots of it. He spotted a posting in English. Help Wanted. Must be bilingual. Great opportunity for advancement. Excellent starting pay working for new construction company. Call Carlotta at Bellacasa Construction. A phone number.

Bellacasa. Had he heard of them? It seemed so. But he couldn't recall when, where. Or maybe not at all. It didn't matter.

He tore the notice free of its thumbtack and put it in his shirt pocket.