WHERE COLOTES HOWL
COLOTES HOWL
AND BLOWS FREE

GROWING UP IN THE WEST

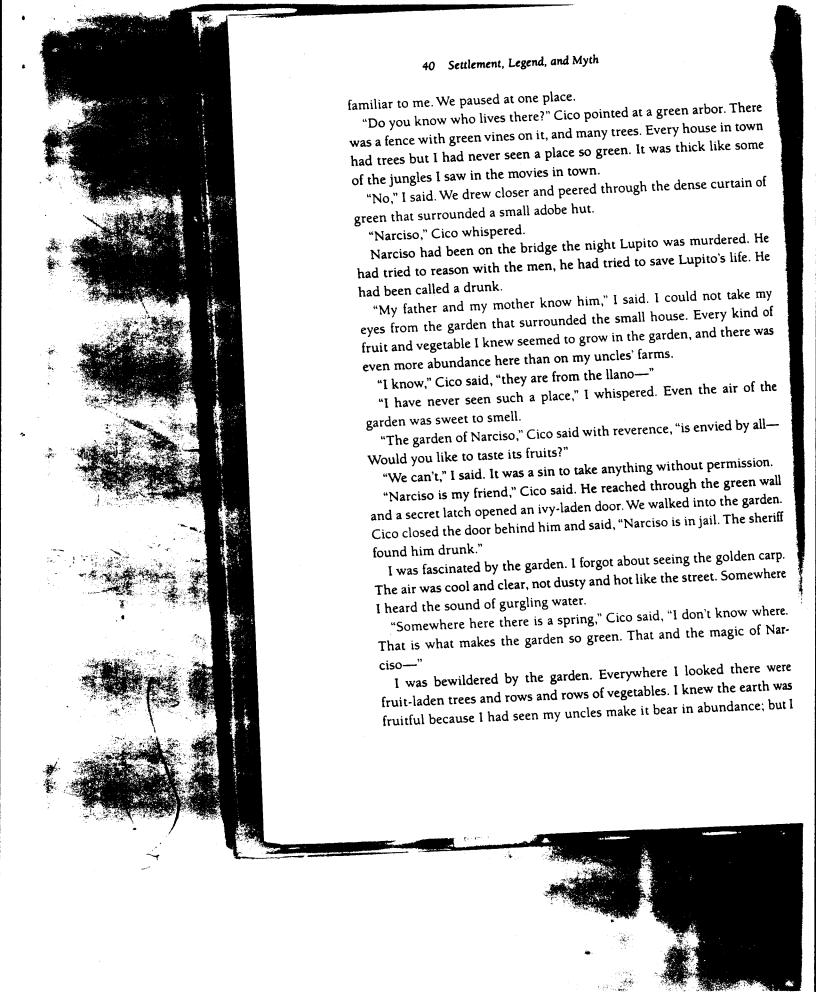


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"Cico reached into a clump of grass and brought out a long, thin salt cedar branch with a spear at the end. The razor-sharp steel glistened in the sun." Se filement, legend, and Myth
THE GOLDEN CARP
RUDOLFO ANAYA
"Hey Toni-eeeeee. Hulooooooo Antonioforous!" A voice called. At first I thought I was dreaming. I was fishing, and sitting on a rock; the sun beating on my back had made me sleepy. I had been thinking how Ultima's medicine had cured my uncle and how he was well and could work again. I had been thinking how the medicine of the doctors and of the priest had failed. In my mind I could not understand how the power of God could fail. But it had. "Toni-eeeeee!" the voice called again. I opened my eyes and peered into the green brush of the river. Silently, like a deer, the figure of Cico emerged. He was barefoot, he made no noise. He moved to the rock and squatted in front of me. I guess it was then that he decided to trust me with the secret of the golden carp. "Cico?" I said. He nodded his dark, freckled face. "Samuel told you about the golden carp," he said. "Yes," I replied. "Have you ever fished for carp?" he asked. "Here in the river, or anywhere?"
THE STREET MADE AND ADDRESS OF THE STREET, AND A

The Golden Carp 39 "No," I shook my head. I felt as if I was making a solemn oath. "Do you want to see the golden carp?" he whispered. "I have hoped to see him all summer," I said breathlessly. "Do you believe the golden carp is a god?" he asked. The commandment of the Lord said, Thou shalt have no other gods before me . . . I could not lie. I knew he would find the lie in my eyes if I did. But maybe there were other gods? Why had the power of God failed to cure my uncle? "I am a Catholic," I stuttered, "I can believe only in the God of the church—" I looked down. I was sorry because now he would not take me to see the golden carp. For a long time Cico did not speak. "At least you are truthful, Tony," he said. He stood up. The quiet waters of the river washed gently southward. "We have never taken a nonbeliever to see him," he said solemnly. "But I want to believe," I looked up and pleaded, "it's just that I have to believe in Him." I pointed across the river to where the cross of the church showed above the tree tops. "Perhaps-" he mused for a long time. "Will you make an oath?" he asked. "Yes," I answered. But the commandment said, Thou shalt not take the Lord's name in vain. "Swear by the cross of the church that you will never hunt or kill a carp." He pointed to the cross. I had never sworn on the cross before. I knew that if you broke your oath it was the biggest sin a man could commit, because God was witness to the swearing on his name. But I would keep my promise! I would never break my oath! "I swear," I said. "Come!" Cico was off, wading across the river. I followed. I had waded across that river many times, but I never felt an urgency like today. I was excited about seeing the magical golden carp. "The golden carp will be swimming down the creek today," Cico whispered. We scrambled up the bank and through the thick brush. We climbed the steep hill to the town and headed towards the school. I never came up this street to go to school and so the houses were not



The Golden Carp 41 never realized it could be like this! The ground was soft to walk on. The fragrance of sun-dazzling flowers was deep, and soft, and beautiful. "The garden of Narciso," I whispered. "Narciso is my friend," Cico intoned. He pulled some carrots from the soft, dark earth and we sat down to eat. "I cannot," I said. It was silent and peaceful in the garden. I felt that someone was watching us. "It is all right," Cico said. And although I did not feel good about it, I ate the golden carrot. I had never eaten anything sweeter or juicier in my life. "Why does Narciso drink?" I asked. "To forget," Cico answered. "Does he know about the golden carp?" I asked. "The magic people all know about the coming day of the golden carp," Cico answered. His bright eyes twinkled. "Do you know how Narciso plants?" he asked. "No," I answered. I had always thought farmers were sober men. I could not imagine a drunk man planting and reaping such fruits! "By the light of the moon," Cico whispered. "Like my uncles, the Lunas-" "In the spring Narciso gets drunk," Cico continued. "He stays drunk until the bad blood of spring is washed away. Then the moon of planting comes over the elm trees and shines on the horde of last year's seeds— It is then that he gathers the seeds and plants. He dances as he plants, and he sings. He scatters the seeds by moonlight, and they fall and grow— The garden is like Narciso, it is drunk." "My father knows Narciso," I said. The story Cico had told me was fascinating. It seemed that the more I knew about people the more I knew about the strange magic hidden in their hearts. "In this town, everybody knows everybody," Cico said. "Do you know everyone?" I asked. "Uh-huh," he nodded. "You know Jasón's Indian?" "Yes."

"Do you know Ultima?" I asked.

"I know about her cure," he said. "It was good. Come on now, let's be on our way. The golden carp will be swimming soon—"

We slipped out of the coolness of the garden into the hot, dusty street. On the east side of the school building was a barren playground with a basketball goal. The gang was playing basketball in the hot sun.

"Does the gang know about the golden carp?" I asked as we approached the group.

"Only Samuel," Cico said, "only Samuel can be trusted."

"Why do you trust me?" I asked. He paused and looked at me.

"Because you are a fisherman," he said. "There are no rules on who we trust, Tony, there is just a feeling. The Indian told Samuel the story; Narciso told me; now we tell you. I have a feeling someone, maybe Ultima, would have told you. We all share—"

"Hey!" Ernie called, "you guys want to play?" They ran towards us.

"Nah," Cico said. He turned away. He did not face them.

"Hi, Tony," they greeted me.

"Hey, you guys headed for Blue Lake? Let's go swimming," Florence suggested.

"It's too hot to play," Horse griped. He was dripping with sweat.

"Hey, Tony, is it true what they say? Is there a bruja at your house?" Ernie asked.

"¡A bruja!" "¡Chingada!" "¡A la veca!"

"No," I said simply.

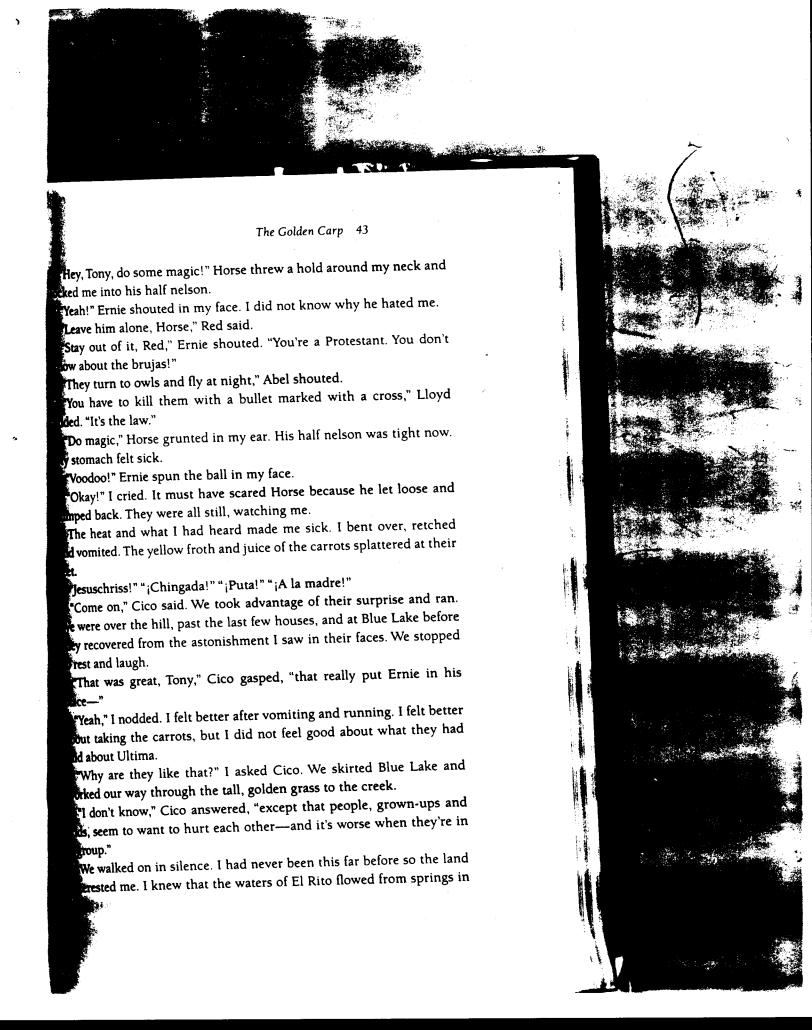
"My father said she cursed someone and three days later that person changed into a frog—"

"Hey! Is that the old lady that goes to church with your family?" Bones shrieked.

"Let's go," Cico said.

"Knock it off, you guys, are we going to play or not?" Red pleaded. Ernie spun the basketball on his finger. He was standing close to me and grinning as the ball spun.

"Hey, Tony, can you make the ball disappear?" He laughed. The others laughed too.



the dark hills. I knew that those hills cradled the mysterious Hidden Lakes, but I had never been there. The creek flowed around the town, crossed beneath the bridge to El Puerto, then turned towards the river. There was a small reservoir there, and where the water emptied into the river the watercress grew thick and green. Ultima and I had visited the place in search of roots and herbs.

The water of El Rito was clear and clean. It was not muddy like the water of the river. We followed the footpath along the creek until we came to a thicket of brush and trees. The trail skirted around the bosque.

Cico paused and looked around. He pretended to be removing a splinter from his foot, but he was cautiously scanning the trail and the grass around us. I was sure we were alone; the last people we had seen were the swimmers at the Blue Lake a few miles back. Cico pointed to the path.

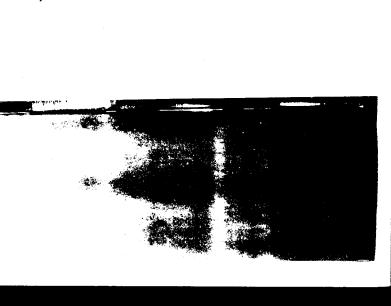
"The fishermen follow the trail around the brush," he whispered. "They hit the creek again just below the pond that's hidden in here." He squirmed into the thicket on hands and knees, and I followed. After a while we could stand up again and follow the creek to a place where an old beaver dam made a large pond.

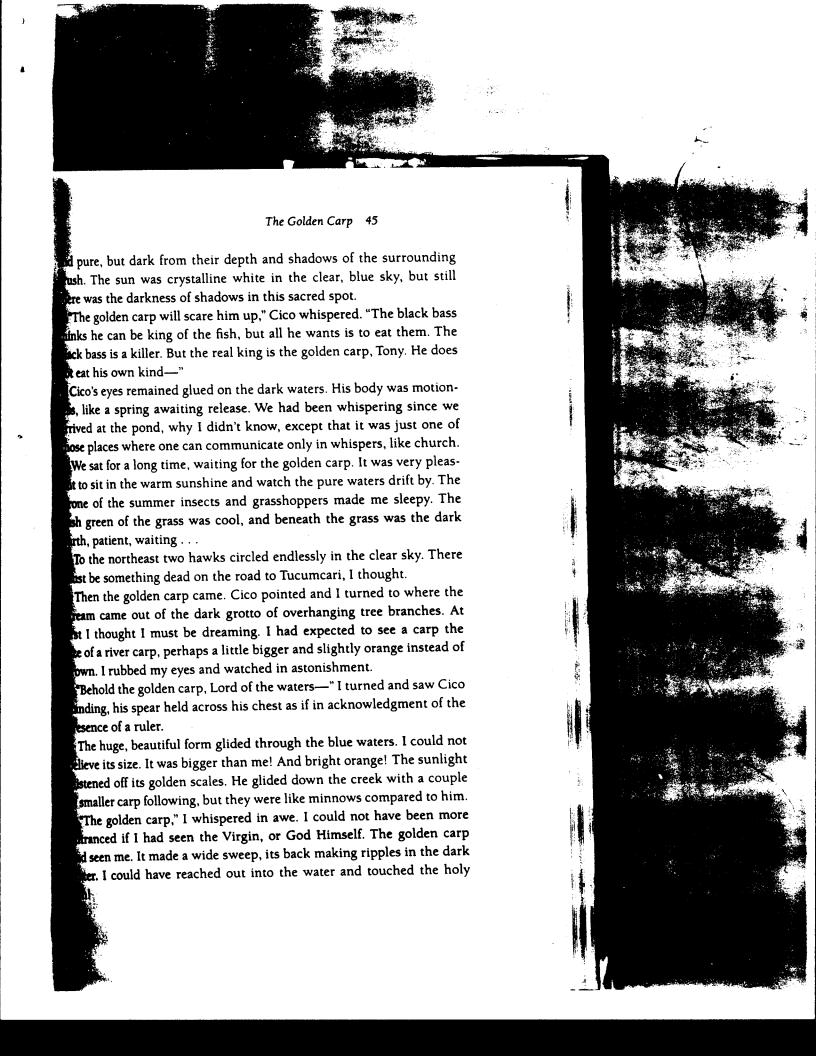
It was a beautiful spot. The pond was dark and clear, and the water trickled and gurgled over the top of the dam. There was plenty of grass along the bank, and on all sides the tall brush and trees rose to shut off the world.

Cico pointed. "The golden carp will come through there." The cool waters of the creek came out of a dark, shadowy grotto of overhanging thicket, then flowed about thirty feet before they entered the large pond. Cico reached into a clump of grass and brought out a long, thin salt cedar branch with a spear at the end. The razor-sharp steel glistened in the sun. The other end of the spear had a nylon cord attached to it for retrieving.

"I fish for the black bass of the pond," Cico said. He took a position on a high clump of grass at the edge of the bank and motioned for me to sit by the bank, but away from him.

"How can you see him?" I asked. The waters of the pool were clear





"He knows you are a friend," Cico whispered.

Then the golden carp swam by Cico and disappeared into the darkness of the pond. I felt my body trembling as I saw the bright golden form disappear. I knew I had witnessed a miraculous thing, the appearance of a pagan god, a thing as miraculous as the curing of my uncle Lucas. And, I thought, the power of God failed where Ultima's power worked; and then a sudden illumination of beauty and understanding flashed through my mind. This is what I had expected God to do at my first holy communion! If God was witness to my beholding of the golden carp, then I had sinned! I clasped my hands and was about to pray to the heavens when the waters of the pond exploded.

I turned in time to see Cico hurl his spear at the monstrous black bass that had broken the surface of the waters. The evil mouth of the black bass was open and red. Its eyes were glazed with hate as it hung in the air surrounded by churning water and a million diamond droplets. The spear whistled through the air, but the aim was low. The huge tail swished and contemptuously flipped it aside. Then the black form dropped into the foaming waters.

"Missed," Cico groaned. He retrieved his line slowly.

I nodded my head. "I can't believe what I have seen," I heard myself say. "Are all the fish that big here—"

"No," Cico smiled. "They catch two and three pounders below the beaver dam. The black bass must weigh close to twenty—" He threw his spear and line behind the clump of grass and came to sit by me. "Come on, let's put our feet in the water. The golden carp will be returning—"

"Are you sorry you missed?" I asked as we slid our feet into the cool water.

"No," Cico said, "it's just a game."

The orange of the golden carp appeared at the edge of the pond. As he came out of the darkness of the pond the sun caught his shiny scales and the light reflected orange and yellow and red. He swam very close to our feet. His body was round and smooth in the clear water. We watched in silence at the beauty and grandeur of the great fish. Out of the corners of my eyes I saw Cico hold his hand to his breast as

The Golden Carp 47 be golden carp glided by. Then with a switch of his powerful tail the olden carp disappeared into the shadowy water under the thicket. I shook my head. "What will happen to the golden carp?" What do you mean?" Cico asked. "There are many men who fish here—" Cico smiled. "They can't see him, Tony, they can't see him. I know very man from Guadalupe who fishes, and there ain't a one who has ver mentioned seeing the golden carp. So I guess the grown-ups can't e him---" "The Indian, Narciso, Ultima—" "They're different, Tony. Like Samuel, and me, and you—" "I see," I said. I did not know what the difference was, but I did feel strange brotherhood with Cico. We shared a secret that would always ind us. UDOLFO ANAYA is a native of rural New Mexico, which is the etting for "The Golden Carp," an excerpt from his famous novel Bless le, Ultima (1972). In this segment, Tony encounters a mystical fish. hat book is one of the few Chicano literary bestsellers. Among his ther publications are The Silence of the Llano: Short Stories (1982), he Legend of La Llorona (1984), and Lord of the Dawn: The Legend of uetzalcoatl (1987). Anaya is a unique writer who recognizes that "a oryteller tells stories for the community as well as for himself."