

Anaya, Rudolfo - Shaman Winter

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## **Shaman Winter** by Rudolfo Anaya

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**S**onny awakened with a cry tearing from his throat. "Aaowl Wooman!"

He reached for her, feeling she was within his reach, just beyond the luminous light of the doorway, but the dream was already fading.

"Híjola," he muttered, rubbing his eyes and struggling to sit up. A dream, but it seemed so real.

He shivered. His bedroom was cold.

He looked around, half expecting to see the desert scene of the dream; instead, he was enveloped in the soft aura of a December dawn flooding through his window. He had startled Chica. She peered from the blankets where she lay snuggled, looking at him with an understanding expression.

"Qué pasa?" her seal-like eyes seemed to ask.

"It's okay, Chica, just a dream," he said, petted her, and lay back into his pillow.

Chica was the red dachshund that had appeared in the neighborhood. Don Eliseo, Sonny's neighbor, took her in and fed her, but she insisted on making her home with Sonny.

"She's lost," the old man said. "I fed her, but she keeps coming to your door."

"Let her stay," Sonny said. Don Eliseo had set up a box for her to sleep in, but every night she jumped on the bed and burrowed beneath the blankets.

Sonny reached for the notebook on the bedstand. During the past few months his dreams had been very real, and don Eliseo had suggested that he record them. The old man was teaching Sonny how to construct his dreams.

"A person can actually be in charge of their dreams," the old man said.

Sonny doubted him at first. Dreams were supposed to be incoherent, random images that came out of nowhere. Symbols that needed to be interpreted. How could one order one's dreams?

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"When you enter the dream, you leave this world," don Eliseo replied. "The two worlds are connected by a luminous door. You are the master of your life in this world, so you can be the master of your dreams."

Sonny followed his instructions, and he had become adept at it. Dreams that used to come as **jumbled images** now came as stories that somehow Sonny **began to manipulate** even as he dreamed.

"Let's see," he whispered, wetting the tip of the pencil with his tongue, and then began to record the dream.

In the dream I was a Spanish soldier named Andres Vaca. I was with Oñate on the banks of the Río Grande just before he started his march into New Mexico in 1598....

He paused and saw himself again, standing on the sandy banks of the river, staring across the slow-moving, muddy waters. To the north lay the unknown province, that huge expanse of land the earlier Spanish explorers referred to as la Nueva México.

Oñate's expedition had come north from México to the banks of the Río Bravo, as it was called on some of the early maps, near a place called el Paso del Norte. From the valley of San Bartolomé in Nueva Viscaya, they had traveled, journeying north to the promised land, la tierra adentro, the land of Cabeza de Vaca, Coronado, and the other earlier Spanish explorers. Behind them lay the desert of Chihuahua.

Andres stood looking north, Sonny wrote, wearing a white shirt and black pantaloons, and the helmet and breastplate of a soldier. For the soldiers and families who had come with don Juan, this was more than a new adventure, it was a chance for a new life. They realized there were many more dangers to be faced as they crossed the desert called la Jornada del Muerto, but the explorers were eager and expectant.

The vision of what la Nueva México promised was a constant inducement for the weary members of the expedition. For the men the possibility of finding gold meant they could be hidalgos, hijos de algo. They could acquire land and a proper title, something they could never hope for in Spain or México. Yes, the life of a landed gentleman was worth risking one's life for. Even the Adelantado Oñate dreamed of finding rich mines to rival those of Zacatecas.

On the other hand, the goal of the Franciscan friars who accompanied the expedition was to save pagan souls, the souls of the many Indian tribes described by Cabeza de Vaca, Fray Niza, and Coronado. Already the friars had been busy

preparing the natives of the region for baptism.

Andres sniffed the clean desert air and smiled. Let the friars do their work, he had other things on his mind. Behind him, in the camp, he heard the sounds of the men preparing for the wedding ceremony. A smile lingered on his lips and lit his brown eyes. This evening he would marry a young woman, the one the tribe called Owl Woman. The friars would baptize her, give her a Christian name, and she and Andres would be married. He felt rejuvenated in his purpose for going north. Now he would have a wife by his side, and he would raise a family in those unknown lands.

Sons and daughters to populate the land. Sons and daughters to build villages and make peace with the Pueblo Indians of the north. He had had enough of the gold-induced carnage that had swept over México like a plague. He was a soldier, and he had done his share of murdering, but an apparition had come to him one day on the field of battle. A woman dressed in blue appeared and told him to go north to meet his destiny. He was to put away the sword and become a farmer. Andres resisted the apparition's words, and the next day he was wounded in battle. Near death's door he again saw the woman, and she repeated her message: Go north into the new land, put away your sword, and turn to the earth for your sustenance.

He had heard the stories of the great Coronado, and he knew that in the northern mountains lay meadows where cattle and sheep would thrive. Fields of corn and vineyards would fill the valleys. The woman's voice induced these images, and Andres Vaca said, Yes, I will follow this path. It is meant to be.

The horses in the remuda whinnied. Perhaps they sensed a desert coyote moving in the sandhills. A cool breeze drifted across the river, and on the branches of a cottonwood tree a large raven landed.

"In the dream I was Andres Vaca," Sonny said to Chica.

Don Eliseo had said, "Dreams are a journey into the world of spirits. Since it is your journey, you must construct the dream. Do not be at the mercy of other forces that come to tamper with your dream. With practice, it may be that someday you may become master of your dream. Many are masters of this material world and learn to manipulate it to their desire. But few become masters of their dreams."

The old man knows about dreams, Sonny thought and returned to his notes.

Someone approached Andres Vaca.

Buenas tardes, Capitán Vaca, the man called.

Buenas tardes, General, Andres Vaca replied, turning to greet Juan Pérez de Oñate, the newly appointed governor of New Mexico.

Forgive me for interrupting your reverie, Andres, Oñate said, addressing the young man informally.

Not at all, Andres Vaca replied. In my contemplation I was merely enjoying these last moments as a single man.

Oñate smiled. You are marrying an exceptional woman. With her at your side, I am sure destiny will treat you kindly.

I was looking to the north and imagining the great adventure that awaits us, Andres replied.

Yes, Oñate said. On an evening like this I also am filled with the desire to see the northern mountains. Following the Great River of the North, this Río Bravo, we will find a mountain range called the Sangre de Cristo. There in those valleys we will settle.

Andres nodded.

The journey has been long and difficult, Oñate continued. Now we stand on the banks of this river, the same river described by Coronado. To the north lies the province of la Nueva México. Land that His Royal Highness has commanded us to conquer and settle. We are to pacify and christianize los indios. The Crusaders who saved Jerusalem from the heathen Muslim could not have had a greater purpose.

The Spaniards? relationship to God was imbued with such a purpose. With the help of God only a century before, they had driven the Moors out of Spain, driven out the Jews, and in the few decades that followed, they had conquered the New World. Surely there was divine intervention in those historical events. The finger of God stirring the history of man. This faith in divine guidance had become part of the Spanish character, a driving force that pushed them recklessly and ruthlessly across the New World.

The Spanish crown now claimed the lands from Tierra del Fuego to this newly established interior province of New Mexico. Riches beyond the imagination flowed to Spain, and the crown thanked God. This belief that God approved their right to reap the rewards of ancient civilizations and to save the souls of los indios had become the manifest destiny of Spain.

This land to the north has been called the kingdom of the

fabled Seven Cities of Cíbola, Oñate continued. I feel in my blood the gold and silver mines of Cíbola will make us all rich beyond expectation. And just as important, thousands of native souls will be baptized and saved.

He turned to look at Andres. The young woman you marry will be the first native baptized. All bodes well for our adventure.

I am glad you are pleased, Andres replied.

He knew other Spanish soldiers had taken Indian women for their wives in México, but the love affair that had developed between Andres and the Indian girl was a surprise to all. The woman was not an Aztec princess, she had no rich father or uncles to provide a dowry, she was a native of the new region, a people the Spaniards had just met.

Yes, I am pleased, Oñate said. You are one of my finest soldiers, Andres, and if you permit me to say, you have been like a son to me. I have been able to confide in you while we waited for the expedition to be under way, and you have been loyal.

You do me an honor, Andres replied. My loyalty and my love for you is as deep as my vision to settle in la Nueva México.

Oñate smiled and placed his hand on Andres' shoulder.

It is our vision that brings us to this land, Andres. You are the first of many who will marry the Indian women. I suppose if we could bring more of our women from Spain, it would be different, but if we are to survive, we need to raise families. We need sons who will make good soldiers. And we need to be mindful of our purpose, to baptize the natives. As Father Bartolomé de las Casas has pointed out in his treatises, the Indians do have souls.

I never doubted that, Andres replied, thinking that in thousands of masses he had attended as a good Catholic, he had never felt his soul come alive as it did when he was with Owl Woman.

The captain general nodded. We also will need farmers. Men who can feed our colony. This is the beginning, and it is a stroke of luck. You gain a wife, and I cement friendly relations with these people. Our caravans returning to México with the gold of la Nueva México will have a friendly outpost here.

They were interrupted by someone hurrying toward them and calling Andres. They turned to see a soldier, one of the guards stationed at the Indian camp.

Someone has stolen the girl, he cried in Castilian Spanish.

Qué dices? Oñate responded.

It's true, General. Owl Woman is gone!

Worry clouded Andres' forehead. He realized why he had shivered in the river breeze. Evil was in the air, something that had haunted him in the tranquil village of Albuquerque in Spain long before he had decided to sail to the New World. Even in the pristine desert, at the edge of this new province to the north, the evil presence had finally caught up with him.

Stolen the woman? Oñate questioned. He looked at Andres. It's a game. Perhaps some of your friends have stolen the bride as is the custom. Or perhaps it's part of the Indian ceremony of marriage?

No! the soldier replied. The Indian women came out of the jacal where they had been all day with the girl. They were crying in the most terrible way, and when I went into the hut, the girl wasn't there! The fear in the eyes of the women assures me it's no joke.

We must go, quickly, Oñate commanded, and he and Andres hurried after the guard toward the Indian camp.

In his heart, Andres felt his dreams collapsing.

The expedition from Nueva Viscaya had come this far. Here they were met by a friendly tribe of Indians, men who appeared with bows, long hair cut to resemble little Milan caps, and colored with red paint. Manxo, they said, greeting the Spaniards in peace.

Here, while the expedition rested and reorganized itself for the final trek northward, Capitán Andres Vaca had fallen in love with a young woman of the tribe. He had admired the beauty of the Aztec women in México-Tenochtitlán, and like the other soldiers he had bedded with his share. But he had never felt the certainty of true love.

That's what he had felt when he saw the young woman the elders called Owl Woman. He had gone with Oñate to negotiate with the Indians; Owl Woman sat with the chiefs and the shaman. It was clear that even at her young age she was their equal. They turned to her for advice, and she interpreted for them. She had returned Andres' gaze, letting him know that she was interested in him.

He was surprised at the affection he felt, and more surprised when he realized she was returning the interest. But he knew

the young woman was special. She was the daughter of a shaman, and she had been sent to the land of the Aztecs to study. While in México-Tenochtitlán, she had learned the language of the Spaniards. The elders treated her with great respect, for about her were whispered the stories of a special destiny.

Andres learned from the tribal warriors that she was called a person of peace, one who carries dreams. She had in her possession a beautiful black bowl that was carved from obsidian.

One evening while the camp was finishing its supper, Andres had walked upriver to bathe. He entered the cool water and quickly and vigorously washed away the day's sweat and dust. When he looked up, he saw three women on the sandy riverbank. Two older women and Owl Woman. The older women spread a blanket on the sand, then disappeared. The young woman disrobed and entered the water.

Andres stood transfixed by her beauty. The women had seen him bathing, which meant they had chosen to be there. She was coming to him, her full beauty revealed in her nakedness, holding in her hands the black bowl he had seen.

Instinctively he covered himself. He felt like Adam looking at Eve in the Garden of Eden. Yes, this was truly Eden. This great river that flowed from el norte was the holy river that flowed through the garden. The pristine desert around them was still warm with the heat of the day. Birds warbled in the mesquite bushes and sang joyously in the cottonwoods along the riverbank.

Eden, Andres Vaca thought, I have come to the gate of Eden.

Owl Woman walked calmly to him, and they stood looking at each other without fear or guilt. In her eyes Andres saw an innocence he had never seen before. That attraction in his heart mixed with the sweet desert perfume of the evening dusk and blossomed into love.

Me llamo Mujer del Tecolote, she said. Her Spanish was faltering but understandable. She dipped the bowl in the water and raised it above her head, then let the water wash over her jet-black hair.

Baptism? Andres thought. She calls herself Owl Woman.

Me llamo Andres Vaca, he replied, and she dipped the bowl again and stepped forward to raise it over his head. She stood so close to him he could feel the curves of her breasts touch his chest. When the water splashed on his head, he felt a shudder go through him.

Dios mío, he thought, this must be a dream. No joy on earth could equal what I feel.

Three more times she filled the bowl and washed him, and he stood still, enraptured by her touch, hardly daring to breathe for fear of breaking the spell.

Con esta agua bendita, tu eres mi esposo, she said as she washed him.

It was more than a baptism, it was a marriage ceremony! She was becoming his wife, he her husband.

She handed the bowl to him. Los días del sueño nuevo, she said.

Sí, Andres replied, taking the bowl and filling it with water. He washed her as she had washed him, four times, allowing the water to splash over her head.

Tu eres mi mujer, he said, whispering the words, believing any moment the bubble of the dream would burst, his hands shaking from the silkiness of her skin.

When the ceremony was over, she took his hand and he went with her to the blanket on the bank.

Andres shivered, not from the water evaporating on his skin, but from the incredible lightness he felt from the young woman's touch.

She beckoned him to lie by her, encouraging him to touch her, smiling when he kissed her. She drew him close, and he entered her, feeling a consummation of the marriage bed in the warmth of her embrace. Her moans of love blended into the murmur of the river, the drone of insects in the bushes, the swirl of the end of day.

He felt fulfillment. The woman had given herself freely to him, picking time and place. He remembered the woman in his vision who told him to go north, and now he knew why.

Here on the bank of the river at the start of a great adventure, thousands of miles from his home in Spain, he had met his destiny, and it brought great clarity of purpose.

Voy con usted, Andres, she said.

Sí, he replied, accepting her. Te vas conmigo.

She smiled. Mi amor. Tu corazón.

She was giving her heart to him.



Niños, she said.

Sí. He nodded. Suddenly the thought of children was natural. It was part of her plan, and she was sharing it with him.

Aquí, she said, and reached for the dark tripod bowl and handed it to him.

He took the bowl and held it up in the light of dusk. It was the kind of bowl he remembered seeing somewhere, perhaps in one of the many mercados he had wandered through in México. Ah, but this bowl was special. He felt the energy of life pulse in the black bowl. She was saying it held their children, their future.

Sí, niños.

Nuestro destino. She nodded, searching for the words to convey the meaning of the gift.

Sí, nuestro destino. He smiled. Ah, the bowl held the dream. Their dream. Dreams of things to come.

She pointed north. Nuestra tierra.

Sí. La Nueva México.

Then she pointed south. Tula.

Ah, Tula, he repeated. He had been to Tula a few years earlier. It was the sacred city of the Toltecs, that civilization of ancient México that preceded the Aztecs. In dreams he often saw the ruins of Tula, and now he had met and fallen in love with a woman who carried a sacred bowl from there.

He looked at the symbols engraved on the outside of the bowl. There was a pattern there, he was sure, but he couldn't read the glyphs. He was sure that it must be a bowl the priests of Tula had once used in their ceremonies. A peaceful feeling emanated from the bowl.

He gazed on Owl Woman's lovely face, a classic face of Indian beauty. Was real love between a man and woman always like this? He felt he had entered her and remained in her. Perhaps it was the blood, the seed deposited, the soul of him already growing into hers. Now both were contained in this magic bowl. Perhaps it was her magic, the sureness in the way she had come to him and given herself to him. The way she spoke of their life together as if they had known each other a long time.

Mujer del Tecolote, he said. Owl Woman. The bird of wisdom of the ancient Greeks. For the Indians of México, the owl was the bird of the shaman. Only the shaman dared speak to the

owl. The shaman could take the form of a coyote, jaguar, or owl. This is the way they traveled, the way they came to power. The owl crying in the bosque could be a shaman.

Sí, she replied and pointed at the glyph of an owl on the side of the bowl. She moved her finger. Next to the owl, the horns of a bull.

Tu eres Vaca.

Andres laughed. Sí, Vaca! This was incredible!

Long before the Spaniards reached the New World the Toltec priests who carved this bowl had known he would come to join his blood to the blood of this woman. The bowl held their dream and destiny. Andres Vaca was destined to be here in 1598 on the banks of the Río del Norte, waiting with the expedition of don Juan de Oñate to travel north, joining his destiny to that of Owl Woman's.

But there were no bulls or cows in the New World before the Spaniards came, he thought. How could the priests, the ancient carvers of this calendar of dreams, have known?

Es un sueño, she said, reading his thoughts.

La vida es un sueño, he repeated.

Dónde aprendiste hablar español? he asked her.

Hablo sueños. I speak dreams, she replied, smiling and leaning close to him, touching her forehead to his. A current passed through them, a current as exciting as the physical love they had just shared.

What a gifted woman, Capitán Andres marveled as Owl Woman rose and slipped into her soft buckskin dress.

Calendario de Sueños y de Paz, she said. Together they held the bowl, their fingers touching.

She spoke dreams, she passed the dream to him, she was the keeper of the Bowl of Dreams, visions of the peace to come over the land and its people.

Her dark eyes carried a message of love as she leaned and kissed his lips softly, a kiss as warm and sweet as the juice of ripe prickly pears.

The bowl spoke, a silent language from the past, a dream of the ancients. Its artistry was as complete as the story it held. The finely polished Calendar of Dreams was a heart throbbing in his hands, a new time being born.

Then a vision of the vast land to the north swept over him.

He saw the weary colonists following the Río Grande to la Nueva México, and he saw himself, a sad and disillusioned man riding across the vast desert, alone. Why alone? he thought, and clung to Owl Woman.

No me dejes, he whispered, sensing something wrong.

Voy a preparar, she replied.

She was going to her people to prepare. The marriage ceremony had to be completed within the circle of her people.

Esta Olla de Sueños es nuestra, she said, and disappeared into the brush of the river, taking the bowl with her, the bowl holding the seed and promise of their dreams.

Andres felt a shiver as the sun set. A warning cry from a coyote cut the air. But he shook off the bad feeling. This was a time for celebrating. He had met and made love to a beautiful young woman, an enchanting woman. Something magical had happened between them.

I have a wife! he shouted. Niños to raise in la Nueva México! He dressed quickly and hurried back to the camp.

Early the next morning Andres Vaca sought out one of the Tarascan guides who had come with them from México. Juan Diego knew many of the languages of the Valley of México, and he had quickly added Spanish to his repertoire. He could converse with these natives of el Paso del Norte.

Juan Diego would help interpret for him. Together they went to the girl's pueblo, and Andres Vaca spoke through the guide to the girl's parents. There was no need to explain, the pueblo had already begun preparations for the wedding feast. All knew that Owl Woman had chosen the young captain as her husband.

The elders told Andres Owl Woman's story. When she was only a girl, Owl Woman had journeyed south with a shaman to the land of the Aztecs. She had visited Tula, the ancestral holy place. When she returned, she brought with her the bowl the ancients called the Calendar of Dreams.

The priests of Tula knew their time on earth was coming to an end and that their way of life would be ruthlessly obliterated. Their temples were desecrated, the ceremonies abolished by the Spanish friars.

The dream of peace was dying, but the elders of Tula knew a new dream could be born. Owl Woman was chosen to carry the Calendar of Dreams north. She was instructed to wait for the man who could take her north to the old pueblos. There

among the descendants of the Anasazis a new dream was to flourish. There she would give birth to a new people, and she would deliver the bowl to the priests of the pueblos.

So Andres Vaca learned that his destiny became part of Owl Woman's fate, and the two in turn were part of a greater destiny yet to be fulfilled in la Nueva México.

When he reported the proposed marriage between him and the young woman to Oñate, the entire Spanish expedition was glad to have something to celebrate. The journey to the banks of the Río Grande had been long and tiring. The Chihuahua desert especially had been cruel to man and beast. Already the colonists complained of the suffering they had endured, and there was still la Jornada del Muerto to cross before they arrived in the northern mountains.

Now we have allies! Oñate told his soldiers. Guides to lead us, men of this tribe to speak to the northern tribes on our behalf. Capitán Andres Vaca has done us all a great service. We will prepare a feast to celebrate his wedding. Like Cortés before him, he will wed an Indian woman and deliver sons and daughters to the lands of the north.

The wedding plans rippled like a fresh breeze across the tired camp. The women warmed water and bathed, and they removed gowns and shoes from their trunks.

Somewhere a fiddler tuned his fiddle, and the excitement of the coming fiesta filled the air.

The men went upriver to bathe and wash their clothes in the river. The barber trimmed beards, and the cooks baked corn tortillas from the corn flour the Indians brought as a gift. Even the blacksmith sang as he replaced worn-out horseshoes.

In the afternoon the Spaniards hunted along the river, and with their arquebuses they killed many ducks, geese, and cranes. The Indians brought large fish they caught in the deep pools of the river, and a feast was prepared. Cooked in mesquite wood, the fish and fowl were savory, and the Spaniards gorged themselves.

The Indians also brought honey, piñon nuts, and bread made from the paste of a desert plant. The cautiously guarded store of Spanish wine was consumed in great quantities.

All day the food arrived, delivered by the Indian women, and all day the Spaniards ate, sang, and danced. At the evening wedding they would give thanks to the Almighty for having delivered them to this kind people who lived on the banks of the river.

Oñate had given a speech during the meal. He asked the friars to bless the momentous event, then he spoke.

This is a day of thanksgiving, he said. We who come north to settle the kingdom of la Nueva México have endured a long journey. Our provisions are low, our feet are sore from walking. Some have allowed their spirits to sag, and I have heard there is talk of turning back. And yet the good Lord has answered our prayers and brought us to these natives who live on the banks of this great river. They plant corn, which they have shared with us. They fish the river for these succulent fish and feed us. In a few days we will leave this blessed spot that we call los Puertos, el Paso del Norte, for here indeed we take our first step into la Nueva México. But we will never forget these vecinos, los Manxos, who, though they are heathens, have shared the bounty of their land with us. Some will travel north with us and guide us, for they know the land. And the young woman who is to wed Capitán Vaca will also come with us. For this we give thanks.

A great cheer went up from the men; and the natives, sensing something important had been said by the bearded leader of the barbarians, also cheered. The first meeting of the Oñate expedition with the natives of the kingdom of la Nueva México had gone well. No blood had been spilled on either side.

But the celebration was short-lived. Now Owl Woman was missing, and Capitán Andres Vaca was hurrying to the Indian village. A stately bridal house had been erected from poles of the desert mesquite and covered with the green branches of the river cottonwood. A pine tree had been brought down from the mountains as soon as the wedding was announced, and the men from one of the clans peeled the bark from the tree and planted it in front of the jacal. From crossbeams at top of the pole hung sacks of gifts for the wedding guests, food in the form of bread, dry corn, vegetables. Even one of the Spaniards' slaughtered sheep hung there. During the ceremony the men the Spaniards called clowns would dance and frolic and finally shimmy up the tree to cut loose the gifts to distribute to the pueblo.

The women had tended Owl Woman all day, bathing her and covering her body with the luxuriant oil of the sunflower. They washed her hair with yucca roots and yerba de la negra, then tied the long, black glistening hair into the braids of marriage. Under their care and in the secrecy of the bride's house, the young woman had been transformed.

Now as Oñate and Andres Vaca approached the jacal, they found the women outside the hut, crying and filling the air with their keening.

Where is Owl Woman? Andres shouted. He didn't understand the cacophony of voices that answered him.

Andres entered the jacal and was met by Juan Diego. What has happened?

They say a spirit came, Juan Diego replied. They say an evil spirit came from the sky and stole her away.

What do you mean a spirit from the sky? Andres asked.

The shaman who stood by Juan Diego raised his hand. As he spoke, Juan Diego translated.

It is the one we call the Bringer of Curses. He came for Owl Woman, claiming her as his own. He came and he left his sign.

He pointed at the soft-tanned buckskin that lay on the ground.

Andres drew closer to the marriage bed and spied four black feathers on it. He bent to pick them up, but the shaman stopped him.

No, do not touch the feathers. The Bringer of Curses has taken the woman who was to be your wife. Now you must go in search of her and bring her back. She carries your children. If you do not find her, there will be no future for your children.

Who is this Bringer of Curses? Have you searched the village? She can't disappear into thin air! Perhaps she went to the river.

No, the shaman replied. She is not here. The Bringer of Curses has taken her soul to the land of misty dreams, there where we cannot see clearly.

Where is this land of misty dreams? he asked the shaman.

It is the underworld, the place of spirits. The Bringer of Curses came for the girl because he wishes to destroy you. Long ago you fought a battle with him. You have fought many battles with him, and now he has found a way to kill you.

Andres drew back. There it was, the evil that had followed him from Spain now came to steal away the woman he loved. He shuddered, feeling defeat in his blood.

Yes, he mumbled, I have fought many battles with him.

Owl Woman came to bring you the dreams of peace, the

shaman continued. This river is the center of our world, and from here in four sacred directions live the people. We have made peace with the earth and the universe. We have vowed to respect all life, for we are the children of the dream. She was to give birth to your children, so the great violence you have done to our world can be forgiven. Together you were to deliver the Calendar of Dreams to the north, and there your sons and daughters would learn to live in peace with the earth. But without the knowledge of the dreams, you are nothing.

Nothing, Andres repeated. Only last night he had dreamed the curse of violence that had followed him to the Americas had lifted. He had awakened with renewed energy, his heart singing. Suddenly the dreams of finding gold and becoming rich and prosperous seemed unimportant. It was not gold he desired. What he wanted was the dream of a new home in la Nueva México, of family, of the love Owl Woman brought. He was part of that dream, and it could come true.

There had been too much violence and death in the conquest of México. If that could be averted in la Nueva México, then the colonization of the region would not be written in blood, and the future would be one of peace and harmony.

Where do I search for her? Andres asked the shaman.

There! The shaman pointed at the opening of the bridal house. A luminous light filled the entry way. Andres Vaca squinted. Shading his eyes with his hand, he walked through the entry and its blinding light.

The shaman had said that he and the Bringer of Curses had fought this battle before. Now the future was at stake. If he didn't find Owl Woman, there would be no future.

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