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It is July 20, 1989, early afternoon, monsoon season in the Sonoran Desert, and I am going back to Bisbee. As I drive east out of Tucson, the temperature is 106 degrees and the humidity must be in the forties. Huge white thunderheads are building up in the south, drawing moisture from the Gulf of Mexico, but they don't look very promising yet. Too white and too far apart. Between them the sky is cerulean under a fierce sun. The heat doesn't seem to have anything to do with the sun. It comes up from the ground and just hangs there, almost solid. Perhaps the clouds mean a storm later in the afternoon, or perhaps they will just drift north like idle promises. No blue-black horizon yet. No thunder. But the breeze is from the southeast, what there is of it, and a monsoon can move in quickly at this time of year, especially late in the afternoon.

The desert could certainly use a storm right now to cool things off and lower the humidity. I am reminded of what somebody said about a fundamentalist fire-and-brimstone preacher. "It's not the heat so much as the humility." I've been on the road only a few minutes and already my backside is melting into the car seat. The sane part of me says "Stop! Roll up the windows and turn on the air conditioner!" The insane, masochistic part of me answers "No! You will be leaving the desert floor soon, climbing out of this furnace and into the rangeland where it will be cooler. Don't be a pantywaist." I engage in these dialogues with myself about the air conditioner quite often. They have as much

to do with the history of the van I am driving as they do with my own warped point of view.

The van bug bit me a few years ago when Rosalie Sorrels, the folk singer from Idaho, came to visit us, driving her elderly van which she had named Mabel Dodge. Rosalie and Mabel Dodge had been batting around the country doing concerts. In fact, Rosalie had been batting around the country so much that she was known as "The Travelin' Lady" from the title of one of her best known songs. The romantic notion of a home on wheels attracted me at once. Why couldn't I get a van and bat around the country doing whatever it is I do, and I wasn't exactly sure what that was, but the idea felt good. So my wife and I started looking for a used van. I didn't want any furniture or fancy trappings, just room to stretch out in. With a sleeping bag and an ice chest I would be fine.

And soon, on one of her trips to West Texas to visit her family, my wife found the almost-perfect van. She called me from Ft. Worth.

"Happy birthday. I bought you a van."

"Great! Wonderful! What color is it?"

"It's the color of your eyes." My wife can be a little romantic herself sometimes, especially when she has just driven a hard bargain.

"Good lord! I don't want a red, white and blue van."

"No, it's blue all over, inside and out."

It was a 1978 Dodge with one previous owner and a considerable number of miles on its odometer. It had front seats and a bench across the back and was otherwise devoid of furniture. But it was gloriously, decadently carpeted—floor, walls, and ceiling—with a deep shag, light blue carpet. Sleeping in it, I was soon to find out, was like sleeping in a blue womb. Otherwise its personality was masculine. I named it Blue Boy.

Other than a Rickenbacker owned by my grandparents, which was an elegant antique when I was a child, Blue Boy is the only automobile for which I have ever felt genuine affection, and we have had many adventures together from Canada to the tip of Baja California and from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Blue Boy is badly faded now, like my eyes, from years of Arizona sun, and he has a gash near the rear where my wife backed him into a paloverde outside our garage. (When asked how it happened, she said, "God moved a tree," and she sticks to that

story.) He is a little loose in the joints and has many rattles as the result of some of the worst roads on the North American Continent, but he continues to purr along like the perfect traveling machine he is.

But Blue Boy had one peculiarity which was linked to the fact that he had lived all his previous life in West Texas, although I didn't make that connection until years later. His motor ran cool enough, even with the air conditioner on, until the outside temperature rose above one hundred degrees. Then he began to overheat when the air conditioner was on. From the depths of my ignorance of automobile mechanics, I assumed that Blue Boy's engine was not powerful enough to take on the added burden of the air conditioner at such high temperatures, and I simply got used to driving without the air conditioner most of the time, and always when the outside temperature was very high. I took a certain macho pride in being able to "tough it out," as my father used to say, and had a tendency to sneer at the occupants of other vehicles as they rolled down the highway all sealed up in their air-conditioned capsules.

This went on for several years until last summer when we took a trip from Tucson to the West Coast, during which my wife wept, complained, and threatened to faint nearly all the way to Los Angeles. She flew home and announced that she was never going anywhere in Blue Boy again in the summer. My wife is resolute. When she makes up her mind, she makes up her mind; and when she issues an ultimatum, there is no getting around it.

The situation called for drastic action. So I decided to take Blue Boy to a mechanic to see if anything could be done about his peculiarity. The upshot was that my diagnosis had been wrong. Blue Boy's engine was quite powerful enough—how could I have doubted? But his radiator was all clogged up, and his circulatory system couldn't cool the engine properly. His radiator was clogged because his previous owner had put West Texas water in it, and West Texas water is loaded with minerals and alkali and God knows what, causing deposits to build up to the point that the radiator was functioning at less than half its normal capacity. I gave Blue Boy a new radiator and his peculiarity disappeared. Now he can go up the steepest hill in the Southwest in August and never overheat.

But I am a creature of habit and stubborn in my own way. I have

driven for so many years in the desert without an air conditioner that I still rarely use it unless I have passengers—one passenger in particular. I have the notion that in order to see the landscape properly one must experience the temperature as well. I agree with one of my dogs who keeps telling me, "What good is it to travel if you don't slow down enough to smell the country?" But right now, as my van pulls away from the sunset and my bottom slowly melts into the driver's seat, I would like to see and smell and feel a good slap-dash Southern Arizona monsoon storm. I think Blue Boy would enjoy it too.

I love the Sonoran monsoons when they finally arrive. They are usually brief, violent, and incredibly dramatic, with enough thunder, lightning, and hard-driven rain to make life exciting, even precarious. After the clouds build up into great white cathedrals, as they are trying to do now but without much success, the desert turns suddenly dark and still. The light is dim, green, and eerie. Everything seems to be holding its breath, waiting. The air becomes languid, palpable with humidity. Low thunder begins to roll around in the distance, almost comforting after the unnatural silence. Then somebody up there starts flipping light switches. Enormous panels of sheet lightning go on behind the clouds, hold for a few seconds, then go off. The effect is totally theatrical, as if some wizard lighting technician were playing bravura pieces on the control board offstage, never quite repeating the same brilliant display twice.

Then all notions of theatricality are destroyed and things get serious. The entertainment is over, but the show has just begun. And if you are in it, that is, if you are out in it and cannot get out of it, you will never forget it. Suddenly there is a wrenching, shrieking explosion as a lightning bolt connects with the ground nearby. It sizzles, pops, and sputters. The air smells strange, pungent with ozone. Another bolt strikes, and another. The desert has become an exploding mine field. Thunder breaks directly overhead, so loud and close you can almost see it, as if a huge chasm had opened in the clouds. The vibration makes you duck and nearly knocks you off your feet. Reverberations rattle away in the distance. More bolts of lightning strike—to the left, to the right, straight ahead. The temperature is plummeting. It can drop more than thirty degrees in a few minutes. In the flashes of lightning you see paloverde and ocotillo lashing in the wind, which seems

to come from all directions at once. Cottontails huddle at the base of a greasewood, ears down, noses twitching, black eyes huge and shining with terror. A young javelina, the peccary or wild boar of the Sonoran Desert, panics, breaks from shelter, and runs wildly down the arroyo, snorting at every step. The sharp crack of thunder, the spluttering pop of lightning, and the screaming of the wind are reaching unbearable levels. The world has gone mad.

Almost imperceptibly under all this, then growing louder, another sound like the tattoo of a million tiny drums rises to a crescendo. Rain. But "rain" is not the right word. Rain is what comes to the Sonoran Desert in the spring, if we are lucky. It is gentle and civilized. But this is neither gentle nor civilized—it is brutal. Huge drops in tight formation strike the earth with such velocity that they often bounce four feet in the air. Thunder and lightning continue, but now the dominant element of the storm is water, which seems to be almost solid, not so much falling in drops as poured from some vast container and driven by the fury of the wind. Water is everywhere. There seems to be no air left to breathe. And it is cold, the cold plunge after the steam bath. It comes down much faster than the earth can absorb it and runs in sheets over the desert pavement, the thin layer of small stones and gravel which holds the earth in place and without which the desert soil would quickly be carried away.

Within a half hour after the first real clap of thunder, the storm is usually over, leaving the desert bedraggled but the air soft and aromatic with the smell of wet greasewood. The danger, however, is not over so quickly. Flash floods can race down arroyos and across roads with a bore like that of the sea rushing into a narrow inlet at high tide. The floods reach their peak after the storm is over and often inundate low-lying areas far downstream. Midwesterners quote the old saw: "If you don't like the weather, just wait a minute." But we could change that to a more sinister desert version: "If the lightning doesn't get you, wait for the flood."

Both lightning and flood do get some of us every year. Prominent signs—DO NOT ENTER WHEN FLOODED—are posted where arroyos cross roads, but some people choose to ignore them, and often they drown. The water crossing a road might look shallow, but the current can be extremely strong. Many years ago a friend who was on his way

to our house for dinner in his VW Bug entered a seemingly shallow arroyo after a brief summer storm. He discovered that his vehicle had a watertight bottom. It carried him on a fast half-mile boat trip down a twisting, roaring arroyo before it bumped, like the basket carrying Moses, into a safe harbor. By that time the Bug was a wreck and so was our friend. One of the first things I remember seeing when I arrived in Tucson in the late fifties was a pickup truck stranded in about eight feet of water in a downtown railroad underpass. Three people were on its roof, screaming for help. Before they could be rescued, one of them was swept into the current and drowned.

According to Southwestern tradition and folklore, the *chubascos*, or monsoon storms, are supposed to begin two days after Summer Solstice, on June 24, or San Juan's Day. But they are usually late and some years seem to have great difficulty getting it all together, teasing for weeks and then finally materializing in late July, as they have this year. But how fitting that they should be associated with San Juan's Day, which isn't the day of St. John the Apostle, but of Señor Juan, John the Baptist himself, who said, "I baptize you with water." And he didn't mean he was going to sprinkle a little on. He went into the desert and lived on locusts and honey, but we associate him with rivers and with wrath, a fierce and dramatic wrath. I never witness a chubasco without thinking of him, of his cleansing fury and his promise for the future. And when I see a bona fide member of the "generation of vipers" beginning to crawl with all haste toward higher ground as a storm approaches, I chuckle to myself and say, "A wise move, Mr. Pharisee. A very wise move. Señor Juan wants to baptize you good."

Since few desert creatures like to swim, although a remarkable number of them can if they have to, most of them head for high ground before a summer storm. We live in the Tucson Mountains. Our house sits on the saddle of a low hill with an arroyo on either side. It did not occur to us when we built the house many years ago that the hill on which we built undoubtedly served as a place of refuge when the arroyos became torrential rivers. And so, without knowing it, we built a shelter for more than ourselves. It seems as though desert creatures must have a universal communication network. When a storm is approaching, I think they must drop all predatory inclinations. I can imagine the spiders telling the toads who tell the lizards who tell the

snakes who tell the rats who tell the squirrels who tell the rabbits, *"Arriba! Arriba! Vamos a la casa."*

And they come. Walking, running, hopping, and crawling, they come. Spiders of all denominations, shiny or shaggy, large or small. Iridescent beetles. Toads the size of salad plates. The little banner-tailed kangaroo rat and the big rock squirrel, whose front end is gray while his rear end is brown. And many kinds of snakes, mostly harmless, but some dragging their little noisemakers behind them. Some stay only until the storm is over, but others move in for more extended periods. In their attempts to stay in the house or in the courtyard just outside the kitchen door, some are incredibly, pathetically persistent. None more so than the tarantula.

I have a considerable affection for tarantulas. They are the victims not only of our aversion to spiders, but of a very bad press which portrays them as quite different creatures than they are. The mythic, and I'm afraid still predominant, view of tarantulas seems to have originated in Southern Italy, in the seaport of Taranto, whose citizens, between the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries, were visited with repeated epidemics of a strange disease that created frenzy. This came to be known as tarantism and was thought to result from the bite of a tarantula. From this comes the name of a somewhat frenzied folk dance, the tarantella. Evidently the spider was named after the town, the disease was named after the spider, and the dance was named after the disease. But at the bottom of all this, the spider was innocent. I don't think we know what really caused tarantism. Perhaps it was just a particularly potent wine in the stomachs of some volatile Italians with a natural tendency for body language. At any rate, the tarantula took the rap and has henceforth been thought to be a sinister, even deadly, creature.

But the tarantula is not significantly dangerous to humans. It almost never bites, even when tormented; and if it does, its bite is no more potent than the sting of a bee. It is true that the sexual practices of the female tarantula will not hold up to the close scrutiny of a moralist, but as far as I'm concerned, sexual practices are inexplicable throughout the entire phyllogenetic scale, and let those without sin get out their stones. Tarantulas are somewhat large and hairy, to be sure, but less so than many of the creatures we choose as pets. In fact, tarantulas

make excellent pets if they are given the full run of the house in order to find sufficient food.

So I have a considerable fondness for tarantulas, but my wife does not share this feeling. While she allows some varieties of large spiders to remain in the house and even refers to them as my "friends," she draws the line at tarantulas. I have explained to her that tarantulas are quiet, well-behaved house guests who pay for their lodging by eating flies and small insects. I have told her that they eat ticks, which are troublesome to our dogs, although I am not absolutely sure this is true. I have even hinted that a few tarantulas around the house would have a tendency to cut down on the number of other long-staying guests, including relatives. When she said she was afraid of stepping on a tarantula while she was barefooted, I told her that the possibility was very remote because they usually climb up the walls. This did not seem to comfort her very much. My wife is resolute. No tarantulas!

Consequently, when a tarantula lumbers in, lifting one leg at a time and lowering it with great care and deliberation, I am expected to put it out. But tarantulas are also resolute, and persistent. I have put the same tarantula out as many as five times in one evening, each time placing it farther from the house. And each time it would laboriously turn itself around and head back for the open door from which it had just been ejected, like a stray dog who has adopted a new home and will not be discouraged. On its third or fourth entry, it will even begin to take on some of the mannerisms of a stray dog unsure of welcome—tentative, cringing a little, trying to be inconspicuous. But a tarantula crossing the kitchen floor with its slow, stately, inexorable walk has difficulty being inconspicuous, and my wife notices it every time. Several times I have managed to keep one hidden for a day or two, but eventually it grows bold and strikes out across the floor or up a wall, and as soon as my wife sees it, expulsion is inevitable.

Tarantulas probably come in the house to avoid summer storms, but they are also attracted to light. I once thought that this was because light attracts some of the small insects on which they feed, but perhaps they are attracted to light for its own sake or for some reason we do not understand. Edmund C. Jaeger in his book *Desert Wildlife* tells about camping in the Sonoran Desert with two companions and being visited by a "number of tarantulas, which seemed to be attracted by

the firelight. They rapidly approached the fire, then suddenly about-faced when they felt the heat. Time and again they returned, only to repeat the withdrawal." Jaeger also mentions their astonishing longevity, which has been documented. Some female tarantulas live for twenty-five years.

There is another persistent creature who makes its appearance in large numbers at our house during the monsoon season, either coming inside or congregating in the small courtyard just outside the kitchen door, where I have seen as many as nine of them at a time. I call it Bufo, short for *Bufo alvarious*, the Colorado River toad. But I can manage very little affection for Bufo, partly because it is ugly by just about any standard one wants to apply, and partly because it is dangerous to our dogs, of which we always have several, usually several more than we should have. On the scale of natural beauty, I would have to place Bufo somewhere near the bottom as compared to other desert creatures. It presents an aesthetic problem I cannot overcome. Bufo is large, often seven inches long and almost as wide, olive-gray to nearly black-brown, with an amazing assortment of lumps, bumps, and wart-like protuberances all over its head and body. I am sure it would have these on its neck if it had a neck, but it doesn't seem to have one. Some of these lumps and bumps are glands. Others seem to be—and I hesitate to use the words—purely decorative. But Bufo's skin is not the real aesthetic problem for me. The problem is the casual relationship between Bufo's skin and everything it contains. The toad moves with a queasy, sloshing, rolling, jiggling motion, like a rubber bag only partly filled with some viscous fluid. When Bufo hops, and it can hurl this entire, loosely organized arrangement through the air with great force and cover more than three feet in a single hop, it lands with a loud, sickening plop, and everything sloshes around for a while before settling into repose. None of this seems to bother Bufo, who wears an expression of absolute equanimity, if not stolidity; but it is a real aesthetic problem for me.

Another thing which probably affects my judgment is that Bufo's skin is covered with a slimy substance whose chemical makeup closely relates it to cobra venom. This helps protect the toad from predators, such as coyotes, but it also has a devastating effect on any domestic dog foolish enough to lick or bite Bufo. The dog immediately has a

seizure, which in some cases can be fatal, and goes down head-first, splay-legged, gasping for breath. Evidently the toxin paralyzes the dog's respiratory system. The remedy is to wash the dog's mouth out with water, being careful not to drown the dog by letting water run down its throat.

We once had a Doberman who could never resist grabbing a Colorado River toad whenever she encountered one. She was unable to make a connection between the toad and the terrible things that happened to her immediately afterward. But our present three dogs, Big, Bigger, and Clydesdale, have sense enough to leave Bufo alone, in spite of the fact that only two of them were desert-raised. The third is probably just too lazy to be bothered, or else, like me, he has an aesthetic reservation about Bufo.

When I left the dogs about a half hour ago, they had all gone into an extended pout. They are pessimists. When they see me putting clothes into the van in preparation for a trip, they assume it is going to be a long one and do their dying-swan routine, which includes tragic looks from piteously drooping, glistening eyes. When this fails to impede my preparations, they go into a pout. They turn away and stare, fixedly, at the wall, uttering long, dejected sighs. One of them can sigh in such a way that it sounds exactly like a wrenching sob. The others encourage her to longer and deeper sobs. "Let him have it, Sadie. Break his heart."

Nevertheless, I and my stony heart got into Blue Boy and drove away. I am going back to Bisbee, and it feels good in spite of the heat and humidity. No storm yet, and I haven't turned on the air conditioner. I am only a few miles from the intersection of Highway 83, which will take me south and up into the grasslands where it will be cooler. I am driving over a fairly level alluvial plain, the desert floor, which stretches up from the Santa Cruz River. The river is dry now, as usual, but waiting to be transformed into a real hell-raiser if the storm materializes.

The basin I am driving through is almost completely surrounded by mountains. Behind me and on the other side of the river is the jagged, toothy outline of the Tucson Mountains, in the foothills of which is the house where three dogs are probably still pouting. The Tucsons are older than most of the large mountain ranges in the vicinity, and not as high, worn down to a kind of runic grandeur. Their foothills, which were almost untouched desert twenty-five years ago, have become the

suburbs of sprawling Tucson's west side. In spite of this, their higher peaks, protected from development by a county slope ordinance as well as Saguaro National Monument West and Tucson Mountain Park, are full of mystery and the play of shadows.

Because of their starkness and their science-fiction shapes, I think of the Tucsons as "the mountains of the moon." When a winter storm comes over them from the west, they are dramatic in the way the Alps are dramatic, but on a much smaller scale of course. Clouds and mist swirl and billow around their peaks, and their deeply eroded canyons become places of mystery. Once every few years they are even covered with snow, a brief but glorious transformation that usually lasts until about noon the following day. And in spite of their stark contours, their surfaces are pelagic, almost shaggy when seen in the slanting light of late afternoon, covered with a heavy growth of desert plants that includes thick stands of saguaros, a sizable part of the last significant saguaro forest left in the world.

I have wandered through the Tucson Mountains at all times of the day and night, have climbed many of their peaks and followed their arroyos for miles, and yet they remain a mystery to me. Some presence is there, some numen which I am aware of but cannot describe nor come to grips with. It is powerful, wonderful, and I fear it is dying. I have tried to write about the Tucsons and that presence many times, and have always failed. Years ago, when I did not know them as well as I do now, I wrote,

you could get here from anywhere
but once you are here
there are many places you can never go

That is from a failed poem called "The Upper *Bajadas*," a technical term identifying a kind of landscape that includes the foothills and talus slopes of the Tucson Mountains. I am fascinated with the term because it seems to be contradictory—upper lowlands, although *bajada* actually means "slope"—and includes words from both English and Spanish, suggesting two elements of the complex mix of cultures now living in this area. And somehow, for some reason I do not entirely understand, I have continued to live in the upper *bajadas* for more than

a quarter of a century, which is no time at all in terms of the life of the mountains, but it is the entire lifespan of a very lucky tarantula, and it is a long time for me.

Range after range of mountains as far as I can see and much farther. To my left, making up the entire northern horizon, is an enormous mass, dark blue now in the shadow of the thunderheads. It is actually three ranges of mountains extending from almost due north of Tucson to a point far to the southeast, the Catalinas, Tanque Verdes, and Rincons. The Catalinas are the most spectacular in terms of height and bulk. They are young, vital, awesome mountains. Their steep, treeless sides suggest nothing of what is above and beyond. It is hard to believe, as I drive across the oven of the desert floor, that up there about forty miles away is a large subalpine forest of pines and firs and a ski resort where the high temperature today is in the upper sixties.

Directly south of me are the Santa Ritas, which are much larger and more formidable than they appear to be from here. They too have a heavy growth of timber on their upper elevations and were the source of much mineral wealth in Spanish Colonial times, causing Tubac, on the Santa Cruz River just west of the Santa Ritas, to become the earliest center of colonial culture in this area. In 1752 the first non-native woman to set foot on what is now Arizona soil arrived in Tubac. Nobody seems to know who she was, but she was undoubtedly Spanish, probably *creole*—of pure Spanish descent but born in New Spain, now Mexico. I doubt that any contemporary women envy her her small niche in history. Her life, by our standards, must have been hell.

Range after range of mountains. To the east the Whetstones, and south of them the Huachucas. Farther east the Dragoons and the magnificent Chiricahuas where a couple of months ago I and one of the dogs climbed Silver Peak to an elevation of 7,975 feet. Fortunately it was the smallest of the large dogs—the largest weighs more than I do—because he collapsed near the top of the mountain and I had to carry him most of the way down. When we got to Cave Creek, I dumped him in, for which he has never forgiven me, but it cooled him down and probably saved his life. As my less-than-courageous dog found out just before he tried to crawl under my sleeping bag while I was in it, the Chiricahuas have a considerable population of black bears, wildcats, and javelinas. The mountains are also attracting a large population of

campers and tourists, nearly all of whom seem to be frantically searching for the same reclusive and very beautiful bird, the coppery-tailed trogon. Someone should start a rumor that the coppery-tailed trogon is a myth invented by the Bureau of Tourism, that there is no coppery-tailed trogon. It might save an entire mountain range from destruction at the hands and feet of hordes of binocular-carrying faddists.

This is pure basin and range country—mountain ranges of all sizes which once had deep and extensive valleys between them. But through the process of erosion, the valleys have filled in and leveled off to become vast basins that we refer to in a general way as the desert floor. A glance at the map shows Interstate 10, on which I am driving, twisting across Southern Arizona like a huge snake crawling from the New Mexico border to Phoenix. A closer look at the map shows why it takes such an indirect route. Range upon range of mountains, between which it must twist, trying to stay on low and fairly level ground. These ranges extend generally north and south or northwest and southeast, so that a road from east to west is doomed to encounter them broadside and must constantly maneuver around and between them. The section of freeway on which I am driving is heading straight southeast on its way to Lordsburg, New Mexico, considerably to the north.

I am moving down the length of a broad, relatively flat corridor bordered on both sides by extensive mountain ranges. From here it is difficult to tell where one range ends and another begins. Distances in the desert are tricky, where visibility is often more than sixty miles and mountain ranges thirty miles apart appear to be flat, tissue-paper collages with one range pasted directly on the range behind it. Human depth perception cannot deal with such distances accurately, especially in the brilliant light and usually dry air. Perhaps that is why many travelers along this road hardly notice the mountains at all. They will say it is "just flat desert. Nothing much to see." The mountains look less solid and real than the thunderheads above them and appear to be painted on the sky in colors ranging from the most delicate pastels to the darkest purple. At the moment, the lower slopes of the Santa Ritas are a soft yellow-green, fuzzy with vegetation.

This stretch of the desert floor is also much greener than usual, shockingly green in contrast with what it looked like a few weeks ago before the rains came. This area must have had several good soakers

recently. The predominant growth here is greasewood, a sea of greasewood with an occasional stand of jumping cholla or ocotillo and once in a great while a stunted mesquite. Most of the year this stretch has a faded, desiccated look, suggesting either severe overgrazing or the presence of caliche close to the surface. Probably both in this case.

Even at its most verdant, greasewood is not a lush plant, but it is the most commonly found plant in the Sonoran Desert and often seems to be able to grow where almost nothing else will. It is delicate and lacy, with bare, silvery-gray stems and bright metallic-green leaves. Along here it averages about three-and-a-half feet tall but can grow to be a very tall plant if it gets more water. When I first moved into the desert, I watered the greasewood near the house from time to time. Within two years I had a fifteen-foot-high jungle. At the moment, the foliage of the greasewood has distinct glints and undertones of yellow, indicating that many of the plants are in bloom, but the tiny yellow blossoms, each with five petals twisted like the blades of a fan, are too inconspicuous to be seen clearly from a distance.

The saguaro has come to be the plant which is most often used to symbolize the Sonoran Desert, and as much as I admire these giants, each with its individual style and personality, they are not nearly as widespread and typical of this desert as is the humble greasewood. Nor is the saguaro, except for its size, any more surprising. The unassuming greasewood is a truly amazing plant. It is an evergreen which often displays buds, blossoms and fruit on the same plant at the same time. The fruit is a small, furry, silver-white globe that can quietly stick to fur or fabric and hitchhike for miles. As a greasewood matures, it sends up concentric circles of new shoots from the same root. Eventually the central and original part of the plant dies and disintegrates while the peripheral "clones" continue to grow. Some of these individual plant colonies, shaped like doughnuts with the original portion in the center long since dead, are more than sixty-five feet across. The botanist Frank Vasek recently radiocarbon-dated one of these colonies in the desert of Southern California at 9,400 years old, making it the oldest living plant known to man, and bumping the bristlecone pine from that prestigious position.

And in another way, greasewood is the signature plant of the Sonoran Desert. Its leaves are resinous, slightly sticky to the touch, although not

unpleasantly so. This substance, called lac, gives the Sonoran Desert its distinctive smell, especially after a rain. Each desert in the United States has a distinctive smell, and that smell is usually caused by a specific plant. I always associate the Great Basin Desert with the bracing odor of sage. And everybody who has known the Sonoran Desert associates it with the smell of greasewood after a rain, a slightly medicinal but exhilarating smell.

Those who have lived in the Sonoran Desert for any period of time never forget that smell, and no matter how far away they go, many of them can never get over it. I meet them when I am doing poetry readings in many different parts of the country, when I am reading poems about the desert. They approach me after the readings and softly speak the magic words like a litany: "desert," "greasewood," "saguaro," "rain." Sometimes they have tears in their eyes as they tell me where they once lived in the desert and how they can never get it out of their minds. Each time I realize that I am in the presence of a kindred spirit and that we who love the desert speak a language whose significance others cannot entirely understand. And each time I am thankful that I, too, am not an exile, that the circumstances of life have not forced me to leave the desert.

Most botanists would probably raise at least one eyebrow at my use of the name greasewood to identify the plant which is technically known as *Larrea tridenta*, claiming that it should be called creosote bush to distinguish it from two other desert plants—one found in the Mojave and one in the Great Basin—called greasewood. But I stick to my guns and call it greasewood, as most of us who live in the Tucson area do. We prefer this name probably because of our proximity to the native Tohono O'odham people (previously called Papago), who refer to the plant as greasewood rather than creosote bush and rely on its medicinal properties for a wide range of ailments. In fact, in O'odham folklore, greasewood was the first thing that grew, and from its resin, or lac, Earth Maker formed the mountains. When the lac dried, the mountains stiffened and remained in place. There's probably a principle in that which could be used as a symbol of the basic difference between the Anglo and the Native American points of view. I would have a tendency to think that the plant was created from the mountains, but the O'odham believe the mountains were created from the plant.

The whole greasewood vs. creosote controversy reminds me of the subject of popular taxonomy and the way things get their names. This is the science of what-you-call-it, and I think of it as an absolute science because it often seems to make absolutely no sense. In the case of the greasewood and creosote problem, what you call it depends not only on where you are, but on who you are. People interested in or baffled by this science often ask me such questions as: "Does the jumping cactus really jump?" I have several answers to this question depending on what mood I'm in. Sometimes I say, "Only when your back is turned." At other times I answer with another question. "Does the weeping willow really weep?" And although they seem contradictory, there is a sense in which both these answers suggest the truth. That's the way it is with the science of what-you-call-it.

The popular, as opposed to the scientific, names for plants and animals are often based on figurative language, the language of impression and comparison, the language of poetry. These names are descriptive, concrete, highly compressed, and usually require some kind of imaginative leap. I am not a linguist, but it seems to me that the more "primitive" a language is by our standards, the more it relies on such names.

At the moment, looking south and back a little to the west, I can see clouds hanging in delicate long streamers like veils. The streamers do not reach the ground, and the clouds are moving steadily northwestward. It is a common phenomenon in the desert—rain which is falling in a localized area but evaporating before it reaches the ground. The name which comes into my mind is *walking rain*, an expression translated from the language of a Native American culture. It is descriptive, concrete, accurate in a metaphorical sense, and so highly compressed as to require a slight leap of the imagination. It is also beautiful. Somewhere rain is falling but never comes to rest on the earth, while at the same time it is moving. *Walking rain.*

The name jumping cholla, the official, nonscientific name found in all the respectable books, was arrived at in the same way and is based upon close observation of the plant's structure and resultant behavior. The jumping cholla is one of the great beauties of desert vegetation, and it is a true devil. Its trunk is a tube of intricately woven wooden mesh, very strong and very light, often found transformed into ugly

ımps in curio shops. Above the cholla's trunk it produces soft, fleshy reen segments, each connected to the one before it by means of a lelicate joint, and each covered with barbed spines. When you brush gainst the plant, even ever so lightly, the spines pierce flesh and the ıarbs hold them in place. As you pull back or move away, the joint ıeatly disconnects and the entire fleshy segment remains embedded n its victim—in this case, you. Only the slightest contact is required. 'hese large green spiny monsters seem to jump on you and hang on.

But this is only the beginning. The subtle lengths to which this plant will go in order to do you bodily harm are truly insidious and diabolical. If you should step on one of the fleshy segments which has already allen on the ground, and they often cover the ground around a plant ın great profusion, you will squash it, exposing its slimy, slick inner pulp. Its spines will often attach the segment lightly to the sole of your shoe. As you take the next step and your foot comes up behind you, the upward thrust of your foot will cause the spines to dislodge, and the lubrication of the slimy inner pulp will aid the segment in sliding easily over the sole of your shoe. The entire segment will fly up behind you, or jump up behind you, and impale you in the back of the lower leg, penetrating even heavy trousers.

When this happens, if you don't have a comb with you, you can be in considerable trouble. If you try to dislodge the segment with your hand, you will find that your hand is immediately attached to the back of your leg by means of the cholla segment, leaving you bent over in an awkward position while you slowly fry in the sun. The thing to do, while you still have at least one hand free to do it with, is to slide a comb between your flesh and the cholla segment and lift it away with one quick, hideously painful jerk. And it's a good idea to do this as quickly as possible because the cholla still has one more card to play in its diabolical game. Poison. It is the only cactus whose spines are coated with a slightly toxic substance which can cause severe festering and has been known to cripple horses when the spines are not removed soon enough.

And yet the jumping cholla is a beautiful thing, especially when seen as I am seeing them now, from a safe distance. Even more so when seen in the moonlight. They are about the height of a person, and moonlight turns the long pale spines which cover their tops to plati-

num blond. They look like many statuesque 1930s starlets standing out there waiting to be discovered. But drive on, drive on! To touch that glamorous creature even once is to know pain and learn the cruelty of a truly ruthless beauty.

About twenty miles out of Tucson I swing south off the freeway and onto Highway 83, which will take me up into the rangeland. I haven't turned on the air conditioner, and suddenly the heat seems unbearable, probably because of my reduced speed and because I know it will be a little cooler soon. The storm clouds seem to be stalled just above the southern horizon. "*Ven, Chubasco!*" I chant. "*Ven, ven, Chubasco!*" There is no immediate response.

I always talk to things more than I do to people. I talk to stones, plants, animals and even the weather, but I have a superstitious belief that when I address the natural things of this region, I must use Spanish. Their experience with Spanish goes back to the sixteenth century, while they have heard English for only about 150 years. I have a feeling that it takes the natural things of the world a long time to get used to a new language. And since I don't know any Pima or Apache, I try to use Spanish. But my Spanish is dreadful. I not only speak it very poorly, I hear it even worse. If I can ask the right question, I can't understand the answer. And to be asked a question in Spanish which requires more than a *si* or *no* is a nightmare from which I cringe. It's much easier to speak Spanish to things which cannot or do not reply. Also, the plants and animals are less critical. They do not correct my mistakes. And I'm sure the stones and mountains have heard much garbled and ungrammatical Spanish since one spring day in 1540 when the twenty-nine-year-old Francisco Vázquez de Coronado and his ill-fated band struggled down the valley of the San Pedro River past the point at which I will be crossing it in less than an hour.

I still blush when I remember one of my classic blunders in Spanish. Although it was only one of many, it stands out in my mind. I had just arrived in Cuernavaca after a three-day train and bus ride from Nogales. I was exhausted and sick. The taxi driver deposited me and my luggage in front of the house where I had rented a room from a Mexican family. My landlady-to-be, a truly gracious person, came out to the sidewalk to meet me and escort me in. Looking at my haggard face, she asked in Spanish, "Are you tired?" The word is *cansado*.

But I confused it with *casado* (married), and in my impeccable Spanish replied, "Yes, I have been tired for fifteen years and I have a twelve-year-old son." Her eyes opened wider for a moment, but she merely nodded, patted me on the shoulder with compassion, and led me into the house to rest after my long ordeal.

Historically, however, it seems fitting for me to speak in Spanish to the things which make up this landscape, no matter how bad my Spanish is, since the landscape was part of New Spain until 1821, when Mexico gained its independence, and then part of Mexico until 1854 as a result of the Gadsden Treaty, although the United States did not take possession of it until 1856. This 27,305 square miles of what is now Southern Arizona, plus 2,365 square miles of what is now New Mexico, cost the United States ten million dollars. It was not, as is generally believed, purchased from the Mexican people or from any duly constituted Mexican Government. It was privately and secretly sold by the one-legged dictator, Antonio López de Santa Anna, who had already played a leading role in Mexico's loss of another chunk of real estate now known as Texas.

Santa Anna became dictator of Mexico four different times before that infant country was forty years old. In his day, he was thought of by many of his fellow citizens as Mexico's savior. Most contemporary historians, looking back, see him as its nemesis, one of the darkest of the dark angels who ministered to that bleeding young republic. He must have been a fairly good general, at least he could raise an army when almost nobody else could, but he was treacherous, unscrupulous, vain, and childlike. He billed himself the "Napoleon of the West," and needed much money to maintain his army and his style. As a dictator, he had chosen the title "His Most Serene Highness," which was indicative of his style. He lived in gilded, rococo luxury, and loved parties and huge celebrations, especially when they were in his honor. And his sale of a large part of what was left of Mexico in order to make ends meet was not the most shameful transaction he engaged in. He also sold the natives of Yucatán as slaves to Cuban plantation owners at twenty-five pesos each.

When we look back on Santa Anna and the Gadsden Purchase, the recent outrage of the United States Government, upon discovering—lo and behold—that the Dictator of Panama was selling drugs, seems

strident and exaggerated. For Latin American dictators, such things have often been a matter of style. And for us, it seems to be a matter of whether or not we want what they happen to be selling at the moment. When it was the land through which I am now driving, we did.

The United States Government wanted a southern railroad route to the fabled land of California. California had just fallen, like a ripe avocado, into the hands of the United States in 1848, the same year large chunks of gold were found lying around in its rivers and streams. So we bought the strip of desert land from His Most Serene Highness, or "Old Santy Anny" as the Texans called him, who had found himself temporarily short of cash and was eager to sell.

But when President Pierce paid Santa Anna his ten million dollars—seven immediately and the balance upon completion of the border survey—a big page in history's book flipped over for this land which is now part of Southern Arizona. And although that page has subsequently become a palimpsest of notations, forgotten dates, and appointments with destiny, it is the page we still live on if we live in Arizona south of the Gila. Whatever our backgrounds, our foregrounds are shaped by the rip-roaring, boom-or-bust American Era, which arrived with the Gadsden Purchase and is still going strong all around us. What Faulkner said about the Deep South is true here as well: "The past is not dead; it is not even past."

The American Era arrived in Tucson, a one-story adobe town of about six hundred people, in the spring of 1856 when a detachment of United States Dragoons marched into town while the Mexican troops marched out. Even that quiet transition included a foretaste of what was to come. The newcomers just couldn't wait. Some of the Gringo residents, one of whom was later to become a judge in the Territory of Arizona, tied several mesquite poles together and hoisted an American flag over Miles' store, with loud cheers, while the Mexican troops were filing past on their way out of town. It was an insult. An ugly incident ensued. Fortunately, nobody started shooting. In that respect the incident was unusual.

The civilian Mexican population was quiet and polite. Some packed up and moved south across the newly established border. Many of the older residents stayed. They had already lived under two governments,

although on the ragged frontier of both, and they would wait and see if this one would be different. Certainly neither of the others had done much for them in their frontier isolation, danger, and poverty. Nobody had consulted them about whether or not they wanted to become part of the American Era. And nobody had asked the mountains or desert basins or plants or animals about it. But not since the mid-tertiary age, vaguely twenty million years earlier, had the landscape known such sudden and dramatic changes as it was about to undergo. And nobody had asked the native Pimas or Tohono O'odham or Apaches if they wanted to enter the new era, which would bring their cultures to the brink of annihilation and sometimes beyond. The Americans, the restless changers and movers, had come. In less than 150 years we have changed everything in the region except the weather, and during this, the hottest summer on record in Southern Arizona, we are beginning to wonder if we haven't changed that too.

As I drive through the heat toward the low hills which skirt the Santa Rita Mountains, much of what I see reminds me of how thoroughly we have changed this landscape. Layer upon layer of our discarded history lies everywhere around me, more obvious than the aluminum cans and broken glass along the road. I am a product of the American Era, of that dream of the endless frontier, of that push toward new lands to use up for my purposes, of that greed. And I am going back to Bisbee, where I will look down into a gigantic crater, an inverted mountain of empty space which was, seventy-five years ago, a real mountain. I will not be shocked. Along the way, I will see no antelope where once they were everywhere, and I will not be shocked. I will drive through valleys where grass once grew shoulder-high and where now only the ubiquitous greasewood is able to find a foothold in what is left of the soil, and I will not be shocked. I am a product of the American Era. It is my heritage.

And I am going back to Bisbee, not really knowing why. Perhaps it is because two years of my life were left there, put behind me, and now I have reached an age at which I cannot afford to forget even two years out of those allotted me. Perhaps I am looking for the spirit of a mountain I never knew, a mountain which became a crater on whose edge I lived for two years, happily, while the landscape and even the

earth around me was being destroyed. Or perhaps it is just nostalgia. I was happy there, while the destruction went on twenty-four hours a day, and now I want to go back.

We are starting to climb. Blue Boy feels it, and I feel a wave of something like euphoria. Sunflowers and brilliant white prickle poppies flaunt themselves beside the road. The storm is beginning to build more rapidly now, and I want to feel cold water on my face. Maybe I am suddenly happy just because I am going somewhere, anywhere. I have put down roots in the last thirty years, but I am still the child of those who kept moving, always westward. Did they ever look back? The record of the birthplaces of my mother, father, aunts and uncles reads like a trail map from the Mississippi River to Oregon. Once, when I asked my mother where one of her younger brothers was born, she said, "In a wagon. I think it was somewhere in Arkansas." I am the child of those who were born along the road, and it was a long, long road.

Blue Boy was raised in West Texas, so he likes flat country best. He's no mountain goat when it comes to climbing hills, but he's had plenty of experience since he came to Arizona. He's slow but steady. He puts his head down and takes the incline at his own speed. At first all the jackrabbits—the Datsuns and Hondas—pass him. Then, as the hill gets steeper, they begin to falter, but he keeps on at the same dogged pace. If it's a long hill, by the time we are near the summit he is steadily passing most of them. And when we start downhill, I can't hold him in. Even in low gear he tends to run away, careening around curves, tires squealing. I don't always enjoy the downhill part as much as he does. His center of gravity is a little too high for me to feel secure, although I appreciate the view from up here. Sometimes, when he leans at an extreme angle around a downhill curve, I have the sickening sensation that all four of his wheels are not entirely in contact with the road. Going downhill he reminds me of a horse, a big rawboned sorrel I had when I was a kid. As soon as we turned toward home, he would break into a wild gallop no matter how hard I tried to slow him down, and all I could do was grab the saddle horn and remember to duck low as we sailed through the barn door, which was just low enough to knock me off. It wasn't an act of aggression. At that moment he had his mind on something else.

Just now Blue Boy is starting a steady, winding climb. Not too steep, but enough to make him lean into it. We aren't into real rangeland yet, but these low hills, rising toward the Santa Ritas, are cattle country. The sea of greasewood is giving way to more varied, widely spaced vegetation. Ocotillo, yucca, and prickly pear are most obvious, each plant standing out smartly with plenty of space around it, guarding its territory. The ground is rocky and eroded, with here and there a pastel tint of green—new grass just coming up after the recent rains and not yet discovered by the cattle. It won't last long. There isn't a building in sight, and sight is a long way, but I can see a cattle pond near a dirt road, and I know there are a few ranch houses scattered miles apart off to the left, tucked away in the clefts of the low-lying Empire Mountains.

I should enjoy this stretch of the road, especially now when it is greener than usual. The view is expansive, and the shapes of the hills are intrinsically pleasing, like curves of the female body in repose. The growth is varied and dramatic. Soft greens, soft browns, soft grays, with here and there a burst of sunflowers or a prickle poppy waving brilliant white handkerchiefs. But all of a sudden this stretch of the road begins to get on my nerves. Bad memories. These low, rolling hills depress me, and the past isn't past enough as I drive through them.

There must be millions of people who live in the East who would look at this landscape and consider it paradise, who would give anything they have to live on one of these sprawling cattle ranches. The easygoing pace, the magnificent vistas, the hard, honest work close to nature. Haven't most of us dreamed of it at one time or another? Isn't this one of the dreams that drove our grandparents and great-grandparents across the plains and over the mountains, suffering and dying as they came west, always west. Unlimited sun and space. Land, and the opportunity to work on it, to be one's own boss. Air not breathed by anyone else. Some of the lucky ones, the tough ones, or the unscrupulous ones secured that dream and created a way of life that was to become the dominant idyllic symbol of American culture, translated through literature and film to all the world. And in spite of the fact that we know the translation was generally romantic and inaccurate, it is also somehow comforting to know that somebody, sometime, somewhere really did live on those cattle ranches in a man-

ner even remotely similar to the one portrayed in books and films. With the addition of a few more gadgets and technology, somebody still does. Right over there on the other side of that low hill.

I don't know exactly how many acres of this particular kind of country it takes to support one cow, but I know the ranches have to be very big in order to support a sizable herd. When I hear ranchers talking about hundreds of thousands of acres in a single spread, my mind goes blank. I cannot envision it. Years ago when I spent some happy weekends riding horseback on one of the larger ranches in Southern Arizona, I could never really fathom how big it was. I knew it was so big that the horses were kept mostly for pleasure because the cowboys had to use jeeps and walkie-talkies just to stay in touch. I knew I could ride north thirty miles from the ranch house and I would still be on the ranch, but I could never come to grips with all that land actually being part of a single piece of property.

And with the exception of the enormous land grants made by the Spanish kings and later the Mexican government, many of which were ultimately disallowed and split up by the United States government, it is difficult to figure out exactly how these huge ranches got that way. The Homestead Act of 1862 said that the maximum number of acres of public land allowed to a homesteader was 160, or 320 for a man and wife. Even if a homesteader had a wife and ten grown children, not an unusual size for a family in 1862, they could jointly obtain only 1,920 acres, small potatoes as compared with many of the cattle ranches in Arizona, then or now. And although some exceptions were made, the magic figure of 160 acres was never changed until President Franklin Roosevelt withdrew what was left of the public domain from homestead entry in 1934.

The Homestead Act of 1862 was a foolish, catch-all piece of legislation. It was part of the Jeffersonian plan to insure a nation made up of small, independent farmers; but in the West it didn't. East of the hundredth meridian, where there was rich soil and abundant rainfall, 160 acres was plenty of land to support a family, often more than one family could work. But in the West, especially in the Southwest, with little rainfall, no irrigation, and alkaline soil, 160 acres wasn't nearly enough land for one family to survive on. And the major loophole in

the Homestead Act was that it did not regulate transference of deeds and consequently could not prevent land speculation.

Yankee ingenuity in its most flagrant forms circumvented the Homestead Act and its corollaries—the Desert Land Act and the Timber and Stone Act. Homesteaders often built bird houses on their land so they could swear that the land had been improved. Or they dumped a barrel of water on it and paid a witness to swear that the land had been irrigated. Some claimed many 160-acre parcels under different names and using false identification papers. Historians have estimated that about 95 percent of the final proofs of land improvement under the Desert Land Act were fraudulent. But such fraudulent acquisition of public land represented a relatively small portion of the total land available. Enterprising land speculators acquired whole empires by obtaining, for a song, deeds to homesteaders' land, Spanish and Mexican land grants, and railroad land, often for European investors.

Many of the Mexicans who had settled in what is now Southern Arizona before the Gadsden Purchase, who did not speak or read English and did not understand Anglo ways of doing business, lost their land to Anglo homesteaders or speculators. Some were simply driven off their land at the point of a gun and fled south into Mexico, leaving no legal record of ownership. And the Southwest was won, for some homesteaders at least. The dream became a reality. But dreams which require such desperate methods to achieve often have a tendency to turn into nightmares somewhere down the road. One of them did, recently and right down that dirt road which cuts off from the highway and over the hill to a comfortable ranch house on a ranch which is not very large by local standards.

I know a young man who was raised in that ranch house. His name is Chad. He is well built and handsome, with a thick mane of dark, curly hair. Chad married the daughter of one of our neighbors in the Tucson Mountains. I attended their wedding. They settled on Chad's father's ranch and had a baby. It was all part of the Southwestern American dream—a beautiful young couple and their beautiful child on a ranch in a magnificent landscape. But Chad's father had had a long-standing land dispute with a neighboring rancher. I don't know how much land was disputed or why, but one day Chad's father took his gun to his

neighbor's ranch and killed the rancher. Then he killed himself with the same gun. Then I lost track of Chad for a few years, although he continued to live on the ranch and work it. But he wasn't living there the last time I saw him. He was in the state prison. When the Southwestern version of the American dream starts to turn back on itself, there is no end of troubles.

Safford is a small farming community on the Gila River in the southeastern part of the state. It must have been sometime in 1981 that I went to the state prison there to visit a creative writing class. I didn't know Chad was there and didn't recognize him at first. Somehow, you don't expect to run into part of the American dream in a state prison. In 1980 Chad had been tried for unlawful imprisonment, kidnapping, and aggravated assault. Because he had a very good lawyer and the case was tried in Tucson, Chad was found guilty only of aggravated assault, but that crime carried a mandatory five-year sentence because it involved the use of a deadly weapon which was, of course, a gun.

During the trial, Chad admitted that he had detained a twenty-year-old Mexican man at gunpoint, padlocked a chain around his neck, chained him to a toilet, and left him for a day and a night without food or water. The Mexican's name was Manuel, and he was an illegal alien whom Chad had employed to work on the ranch for seven dollars a week. Chad believed that Manuel had stolen three thousand dollars worth of tools from the ranch, although Manuel had denied it. Somebody else later admitted to having taken the tools from Chad to settle an outstanding debt. At the trial, Chad said he had chosen to place the chain around Manuel's neck because "it looked like the most comfortable place." He also said, "I liked Manuel. I liked him for a long time. He was a friend of mine."

Rural farm workers and cattle hands in Mexico are called *campesinos*, which translates, literally, peasants. Thousands of campesinos come across the border in search of work each year, and they are often employed by Southern Arizona ranchers. I have seen groups of them many times, tramping resolutely down some dirt road, carrying little but a plastic jug of water, the one thing essential to survival in this country. Often I have given them rides, being careful not to ask them questions that would give me unwanted information about their status, since it is against the law to transport an illegal alien. But they

usually speak little English, and my Spanish is so wretched that it isn
difficult to avoid finding out what I don't want to know. Blue Boy
commodious, and if people are willing to sit on the floor and scrun
up a little, he can carry a good many. I have sometimes wondered, id
what I would do if I were caught near the border transporting a v
load of illegal aliens, but it doesn't bear dwelling on.

The employment of illegal campesinos on ranches in Southern A
zona is traditional and has been a common practice as long as the
have been American ranches in Southern Arizona. Recently the fede
government has taken fairly drastic steps to try to stop this practice, b
my feeling is that the government is trying to bail out the ocean wit
tea cup. The attitudes of many Arizona ranchers toward these ragg
campesinos is strangely ambivalent. They want to employ them, sin
the campesinos are experienced and will work for little pay, but at t
same time the ranchers accuse the campesinos of slaughtering th
cattle and stealing from their ranches.

In Chad's case, the fact that he assumed his tools had been stolen
an illegal alien, rather than by one of his Anglo acquaintances, is s
nificant and fairly typical. And the particular nature of his treatment
Manuel is also significant. Some of the ranchers don't seem to feel t
the aliens are quite human. They seem to think of them as varmin
almost like coyotes, which most ranchers routinely exterminate. F
every case like Chad's that was reported by "an anonymous tip" to t
United States Border Patrol, there are undoubtedly many which a
not reported. And legal records would suggest that until quite recen
even reported cases were not usually prosecuted.

Chad's case did not receive very much publicity. I had not hea
about it before I encountered him in the prison. But one similar ca
received so much publicity that it monopolized the front pages of A
zona newspapers, off and on, for years. Seldom has the dirty laund
of the Southwestern American dream been so thoroughly exposed f
all to see. Legally, it was a complex proceeding, and much of its co
plexity arose from the attitudes of the people of Southern Arizo
quite a few of whom, before it was over, sat on one or the other of
three juries.

The original defendants were George Hanigan, a wealthy, politica
active rancher, and his two sons, Tom and Pat. All three were accus

of detaining, robbing, and torturing three campesinos on the Hanigan ranch. The ranch extends on both sides of Highway 80 between Bisbee and Douglas, but closer to Douglas, where the highway parallels the Mexican border about two miles away. Before the first trial, however, the father died. The two young sons—Tom was under twenty and Pat was in his very early twenties—stood trial three times, and each time with a different result.

The first was an Arizona Superior Court trial in Bisbee in 1977, at the conclusion of which both defendants were acquitted. The federal government then stepped in, basing its case on an interstate commerce act which it claimed had been violated when the three victims were detained and not allowed to pursue employment. The first federal trial took place in Tucson in 1980 and resulted in a hung jury. The second federal trial, necessitated by the hung jury of the preceding one, was held in Phoenix in 1981. Obviously, each subsequent trial was being moved farther and farther away from the cattle ranch area in the southeastern corner of the state in order to obtain an unbiased jury. Bisbee is less than 25 miles away from the Hanigan ranch, Tucson is about 120 miles away, and Phoenix is about 240 miles away. It is noteworthy, I think, that Phoenix is north of the Gila River and well beyond the land included in the Gadsden Purchase. It is surrounded by farming and industrial areas and has a distinctly different style and outlook from the predominantly ranching-mining communities farther south. In the federal trial held in Phoenix, Tom was acquitted, but Pat was found guilty and sentenced to four years in prison.

The next year, while Pat was serving his sentence in a Pennsylvania federal prison, Tom was tried in Tucson for possession of five hundred pounds of marijuana, which had been found in the Hanigan barn. He was acquitted. Apparently Tom's trial for possession had no connection with the preceding legal actions, but it does suggest another thread in the tangled social fabric of life on the great ranches along the Mexican border.

Perhaps I shouldn't be depressed when I see those low hills on my left that remind me of Chad and the last time we met. Perhaps I should see in all this some progress being made toward respect for the human body and the human spirit. Chad's arrest came after the Hanigan case had received so much publicity. Without that publicity,

the "anonymous tip" which resulted in Chad's arrest might never have been made. Without that publicity, whoever called the Border Patrol might not have had the courage to do so. Perhaps there is a force at work in recent years here in Southern Arizona that will make ranchers think twice before they torture or kill an illegal alien. Chad's lawyer admitted as much when he said his client felt that the trial came as a result of "Hispanic pressures." But in his closing statement to the jury, Chad's lawyer also said, "If the so-called victim was not a Mexican alien and this had not happened in the Southwest, this trial never would have happened." That means, I guess, that if you live in Lansing, Michigan, and you take your employee hostage at gunpoint, put a chain around his neck, chain him to a toilet and leave him there for twenty-four hours you will not be prosecuted. I don't know. I've never been to Lansing, Michigan. I'm sure the people there have problems of their own, but I doubt that they have this one.

Nobody knows how many unmarked graves are hidden in all those thousands of miles of the Southwestern American dream along the border. And nobody knows how many cases of murder, torture, or rape have gone unreported or unprosecuted in this beautiful country through which I am driving. The bones of dead bodies are soon scattered by coyotes in this country, and nothing is left to record what happened.

So I am depressed on this stretch of the road through lovely, undulating hills somewhere between grassland and desert. I keep thinking about the sparrows and wondering if God's eye is really on them. Maybe it's like the Messenger says about the sparrows in MacLeish's play *J.B.*: "Hardly ever see one dead." And a girl asks, "What happens to them?" The Messenger replies, "They get over it . . . over being there."

And I guess that's how I'll get over it, too, by getting over the next hill, and the next and the next.