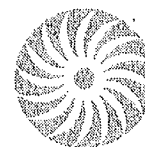


In the Village of the Weavers

by Ampara



I am Ampara, and it is I who will tell to you the story of Antonio and me. Antonio speaks in two languages, the language of Quechua and that of Spanish. I also speak in two languages, Spanish and English. Spanish is the first language for both Antonio and me, but it is English that you and I have between us, and that is why I must tell the story.

I am a guide. I guide the tours of the people like yourself, who come from the United States to my country to visit. My country is Ecuador on the continent of South America. The story of Antonio and me begins when I was in the final stages of training to become a guide. That was one year and a half before now.

A person in the final stages of training is called *la*

novicia, what you in English would call an apprentice. It is the duty of the apprentice in the final stages of learning to take the tours with a finished guide and to listen and to watch what the guide does. But it is not the duty of the apprentice to do anything or to say anything; it is her duty only to learn.

On my first day of the final training we picked up our tourists from the hotel in Quito, which is the capital of my country. The tourists boarded the bus, and the guide counted them. It is necessary to count the tourists after each time the bus stops because the guide is responsible for returning to the hotel all the people who started out.

We then drove on the Pan American Highway through our beautiful Andes Mountains. As we did so, the guide pointed out things of interest in our country and things of beauty in our countryside. She told the tourists the names of the mountains. Some of them have Indian names and some of them have Spanish names, for these are the two main languages of my country.

The guide stopped at a roadside stand and bought cherimoya fruit for the people of the United States to taste. The cherimoya fruit is also very wonderful to smell, and many of the tourists liked it very much and some did not like it at all, but all of them took pictures of the family that was selling the fruit by the roadside. I stood

outside the bus, and I thought to myself that the air of our Andes Mountains is like a fruit, it is that natural and that ripe and that full of the sun. But I said nothing, for it is the duty of the apprentice guide to say nothing.

We next stopped at the mark of the Equator. My country of Ecuador is named for the Equator, which passes through it. Everyone got out at the monument to the Equator, and they took very many pictures. Sometimes the guide took the pictures for them. When everyone got back onto the bus, the guide once again counted the people.

The first village that we stopped at is called the village of Calteron. The people of this village make the bread dough figures. They are brightly colored and all are made by hand, and the tourists got out and bought very many of them to take back to the United States to hang on their Christmas trees. Perhaps, you have been to the house of someone who has some of these bread dough ornaments. They are very colorful and very humorous. The guide again counted the people when they got on the bus.

Next we stopped at a hacienda of the Otovalo people. The Otovalo are Indian people who speak the language of Quechua. The men wear the dark blue poncho and the white pants and wear their hair in a braid that hangs down

their backs. The Otovalo women wear blouses which have beautiful and bright embroidery, and around their necks they wear many, many strings of beads.

This village is a village of weavers, and the first person who heard the motor of the bus as it drove into the small square ran to tell another. And the other told another and very soon everyone was telling everyone and even before the bus had opened its doors, all the people of the village were rolling straw mats onto the ground of the village square, and they spread their weavings on top of these mats.

What they weave is beautiful, really beautiful, to see. They weave small rugs and tapestries of wool. They use all the colors and all the shades of all the colors. Even the deep greens and the deep browns that they use in their weavings are as bright as when the Andes sun flashes on the dark bark of a tree. The designs are of fish and of birds and of the symbols of the ancient gods of the tribe of the Otovalo people.

On that day when I first went to the village of the weavers, I stood back and watched how the finished guide helped the people of the tour and the people of the village make business together. The men of the village are the weavers, and it is the men who sell the large weavings, the rugs and the wall hangings. The women

and children sell the small things, the shawls and the pocketbooks.

But there was in that village on that day one child who was selling the large weavings. That child was a boy, and even in this village where all the children have straight black hair and dark brown eyes and where all the boys wear the white pants and the navy blue poncho, this boy stood out. His eyes danced like pieces of polished stone under the surface of a mountain lake.

The weavings that he had to sell were very beautiful to see. I was looking at them very much when this boy said to me, "*Bonita, señora,*" and he pointed to his weavings that he had spread over the ground. He was telling me that they were pretty. I could see that he wanted to make some business with me. Since I was not yet a guide, and I was not yet wearing the uniform of the guide, he thought that I was a tourist from the United States. I told him in Spanish that I was a tour guide, a *novicia*, and I hoped that he understood.

He did understand because he immediately turned his bright eyes from me and picked up the small rug that he had just pointed to and carried it to a lady who had come from the bus and who was carrying a very large pocketbook. It was very clear to me that this boy wanted to make business, not conversation.

This boy made me very curious and I followed him. I asked him his name, and without stopping to look back he answered, "Antonio."

The reason that he answered me at all was because he knew that it was important to be nice to tour guides so that they will bring the buses to his hacienda instead of to another one of weavers. I thought to myself that this was very smart of Antonio. The brightness that I had seen in his eyes came from a fine fire in his brain.

"How old are you?" I asked.

"*Doce*," he answered.

The woman to whom he was showing the beautiful weaving shook her head and said, "No, no. Twelve is too much." (Many tourists from the United States have learned in Spanish the words for the numbers and for the restrooms.)

"Pardon, Madam," I said. "The boy was not saying the price; he was telling to me his age." Then I asked Antonio how much he was asking for the weaving, and he told me. I translated our *suces* into dollars for the woman, and she bought it. Antonio looked very pleased. As he walked back to his place to get another weaving, I followed him and asked him why he was making business instead of his father.

"My grandfather has cut his foot, and he cannot

run when the bus arrives," Antonio said. "He comes now."

I saw a man walking up the path. He was leaning on a cane. When he arrived to the place where we were, Antonio immediately handed to him the dollars he had received from the tourist woman.

"For the tapestry of fishes," Antonio said.

"Good," said the grandfather.

I looked down and saw the foot of the grandfather. It was cut very badly and was very ugly with pus. It was oozing all around the cut and the skin was stretched so thin from the swelling that I could see dark colors under the skin churning in the manner of the insides of an earthworm freshly turned up out of the ground. The foot itself was shapeless from swelling, and it was something ugly, really ugly to see.

I had to make myself very brave to look at his foot without becoming sick.

The grandfather noticed me studying his injury, and I became embarrassed that he should have seen me looking at his sore. "How long has it been like that?" I asked.

"Ten days ago he cut it," Antonio answered. "It is worse now than when it happened."

"It is infected," I said. "He should see a doctor."

The grandfather shook his head very hard, and he was shaking it in the direction of no.

"My grandfather does not like doctors," Antonio said.

"Then he must come with me on the bus. I will take him to the hospital in Quito. The nurse will fix his foot."

The grandfather forced himself to stand up to his full height, and the pain that caused to him was there to see in his eyes and in the torn of his mouth. When he stood thus, his face was level with mine, and he said to me, "If I go to the hospital, I will die, and I will hate you."

To hear him speak so was to cause in me a chill like sudden dusk in the thin air of the Andes. The grandfather was telling me that his spirit would hate me, and everyone in my country knows that it is dangerous to be hated by the spirits of the dead.

"Take me to your house," I said to Antonio.

Antonio looked to his grandfather, and the grandfather nodded yes. As we walked down the path to Antonio's house, I called to the tour guide that I would return before the bus would leave.

There was an old woman in the house. It was Antonio's grandmother. She spoke only Quechua, and what I told Antonio in Spanish, I had him translate into Quechua and tell to her. This is what I told Antonio, which I translate into English to tell to you: Boil some

fresh well water. Soak two very clean and very white cotton towels in the boiling water and wring them out. Place the hot towels, as hot as the old man can stand, on the festering sore. Do that at least four times a day. After each time, the towels must be washed clean.

As Antonio explained it to the grandmother, the grandmother nodded again and again. As Antonio and I walked back to the village square, I said to him, "You will do it to your grandfather as soon as the bus leaves." He answered that he would.

When we returned to the bus, the guide again counted the people and we went on our way to the next hacienda where everyone got out of the bus and had a very large, very late lunch.

I thought about Antonio and his grandfather a very long time. On the road back to Quito I decided that after we would let our passengers off at the hotel, I would myself go to the hospital and there I would ask what more I could do for the wound of the grandfather.

At the hospital they gave me two kinds of medicine. One kind was meant to be placed on the cut, right on it, and the other was meant to be swallowed. I put the last one away altogether because I knew that that grandfather would hate me if I asked him to take inside of himself white man's medicine.

On the following day we did the city tour, so it was not until the third day that our bus returned to the hacienda of Antonio.

"My grandfather waits for you," Antonio said to me.

"I will go by myself. I remember the way. You stay here and sell the tapestries."

The grandmother of Antonio was waiting by the door of their house, and she called to her husband when she saw me walking down the path. The grandfather came to the door and said, "*Buenos dias, se nora.*"

They led me inside their house, and the grandfather sat down on a fresh straw mat. He took the clean towel that was covering his wound, and I looked once again at the meat of his foot. It was not worse, and the fact that it was now clean made it easier to be looked at.

I took the tube of salve that had been given to me by the doctor at the hospital and I opened it very slowly. I very gently squeezed the tube from the bottom and put some on the tip of the forefinger of my right hand. I held my finger out for the grandmother to see, and she nodded to me to show me that she understood. I gently rubbed the medicine over the open cut, right on the place where the injury was first made. I very carefully and very slowly fastened the cap back onto the tube. I held the tube in both my hands while I told the grandfather that

now each time after the hot towels, he must rub on his foot some of this good medicine. I asked him to hold out his right hand, and he did so. I placed the tube in his hand and closed his fingers around it. You can see that I made a little ceremony with the tube of the medicine. I felt that it would be better that way.

When I returned to the village square, Antonio was selling a small rug and he asked me with his eyes to stand by him which I did. After he finished his sale he asked me how I had found his grandfather, and I told him that I had given him some powerful medicine. Antonio nodded to show me that he understood.

I must tell you that every time our tour bus came to the hacienda, the grandfather, the grandmother and I had a meeting in the house, and I examined the wound. Each time, it got better and better, I am happy to tell you.

It was to happen that the first day that I wore the uniform of a finished guide was the day that Antonio's grandfather ran into the village square with all the other men when the sound of the bus motor was heard. I can tell you that I thought it was a good sign for my career as a finished guide.

After all the tourists had come down off the bus and were busy examining the weavings, I walked over to the grandfather and I asked him, "Where is Antonio?"

"He comes now with the pocketbooks," the grandfather answered.

I looked down the path and saw Antonio walking so slowly that his hemp sandals made dragging marks from backward to forward. I called to him, and he raised his head very slightly, but he continued to drag his feet from backward to forward.

He arrived in the village square and began to sell the pocketbooks and the shawls without telling me hello.

"Antonio!" I called to him. "Hey! Antonio, look. I am a full guide now."

"I see," he said.

"Thank you," I said.

"Grandfather is well now, and I am back to selling the pocketbooks," he said.

"Are you not happy that your grandfather can now run and do business when the bus arrives?"

"I am happy that Grandfather can run, but I was very able to do the business of the rugs and the large tapestries." He smoothed the shawls that he was carrying on his arms and then he said, "Now, *señorita*, I must find my way between all those silly children to make business."

I can tell you that I was mad as I have not been mad for a long, long time. It may be said that I have saved the leg of his grandfather, for surely, he would have lost his leg

if the infection had not been stopped. It may be said that I saved only the foot, but surely for a foot a person can be thankful. I did not expect a large thank you. I wanted only a simple message with the eyes as the grandmother and the grandfather had given me. But Antonio had hardly even looked at me. I called out to him. "The words of *thank you* will not stick in your throat."

Antonio answered, "Everyone expects an orphan to be grateful."

"I did not know that you are an orphan," I answered.

Antonio appeared surprised that I had answered him so, but I did not give him a chance to say one thing more.

You are probably thinking that I was also mad that Antonio did not mention one word about my wearing the uniform of the guide. That is so. If I am very honest with you, the way I want to be, I have to admit that I would have liked it if Antonio had told me some congratulations on getting my uniform.

When I returned to the bus, I was very busy counting the people. The bus was already moving when I turned to pick up my microphone to make the announcement about our next stop for lunch. I saw a package on the seat where the tour guide sits. I knew that it was a gift from the grandfather of Antonio. I did not say anything, and I did not open it, for I did not want

the people on the bus to think that I had been paid by the people of the village. In the United States such payments are called *kickbacks*, and they are thought of as Water-gates, which no one in the United States likes.

I did not open the package until I returned to my house. The grandfather had made for me a tapestry with the design of Tumi, the god of medicine. He had made this Tumi look very happy. The color of the background was a blue, a deep, rich blue like the color of my uniform. There were no pale colors in it altogether, and it was something beautiful, really beautiful, to see.

I was next sent on a long tour to the Amazon part of our country, and that is why it happened that it was three weeks before I again was in charge of a tour to the village of Antonio and his grandfather.

As soon as I could make my way over to them, I did, and I said, "I enjoy very much to have a picture of Tumi." The three of us smiled at each other, and I wished that the grandmother was there, too, but I had no time to ask about her. It was a very active time for me, translating *suces* into dollars. It was not until the doors of the bus were closed and we were driving along the Pan American Highway that I remembered to count the people. I counted the tops of the heads to myself, "*Uno,*

dos, tres . . . diez y seis." There were sixteen tops of head on the bus now and only quince, fifteen, when we had boarded in Quito. This had never before happened.

I saw under head number sixteen, way in the back of the bus where the tourists never like to sit, a pair of eyes as black as obsidian. My eyes and those eyes snapped together, and because my eyes lingered on the back of the bus, the tourists all turned around to see what it was that held my eyes. "That is Antonio," I said. "He will ride with us to our next stop which is lunch."

"How will he get back?" one tourist asked me.

"After we finish our lunch, our bus rides this way back and we leave him out on the highway, and he will walk down the road to his house." I made a quick survey of everyone on the bus, and I understood from their faces that except for one man and one woman, who were a couple traveling together, no one seemed to mind. I did not want to make anyone unhappy with the way I did the tours. Whereas all the other people on the bus seemed pleased to have Antonio with them on the bus and were asking him questions in English, which he did not understand, this couple did not even turn around to look at him. I translated the questions such as, "How old are you?" and "Where do you go to school?" into Spanish. But when they asked him what

did his mother and his father do, I pretended that I did not hear the question over the rattle of the bus, and I said, "Antonio will sing some songs for you."

I didn't know if Antonio could sing, but I thought that if he could not carry a tune at all, I would blame it on the rumblings of the bus.

But Antonio did sing. He sat in his seat on the very back of the bus and sang one song, then two, then three, all of them in the Quechua language. The songs were lively songs, clear and bright, as if his notes had been made by the colors in the weaving of the god Tumi. When he finished, everyone clapped, even the couple who had not looked happy about Antonio.

Antonio waited with the driver while we ate. When he got out at the place on the Pan American Highway where there is the road that leads to his village, many people waved goodbye to him, and the couple who had caused me to worry took his picture with a camera.

The next time our tour bus stopped at the village of the weavers, there were ten children who wanted to ride the bus. I could see that Antonio had done some very good advertisements for himself. But my group this time was twenty-five, and I could not fit ten more on the bus even if they were children. Antonio himself solved the problem. He pointed to

three girls and said to them, "Come!" He then turned to me and explained, "They know the Quechua songs."

When we got onto the bus, I told my group that the children from the village of the weavers would entertain them with some songs. And the children did, and the people on the bus liked it very much.

The following week Antonio and his singing group boarded the bus, and once again they were very popular. When the bus stopped on the highway to let them off, everyone moved to that side of the bus and waved goodbye many, many times. The tourists took many pictures of them, too, and Antonio liked that very much.

Antonio was never long without surprises for me. The third week when he boarded the bus, he carried with him many weavings both large and small. "What is this now?" I asked.

"I decided that while you are at the luncheon hacienda, I can make some business with the other people from other tours who go there. The girls will sell the pocket-books and the shawls. I will sell the rugs and tapestries."

I said nothing, for it seemed to me that Antonio had a very good idea in that.

The singing of the children riding the bus between the two haciendas became a feature of my tours. Antonio placed himself in charge of the singing, and it was

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Antonio who decided which of the children could ride the bus. My bus tours became famous, and my boss in Quito would say to the visitors from the United States, "Our best guide is Ampara. You will enjoy her tour."

There was one song that the children sang that I loved more than all the others. It was a song in Quechua, and I asked Antonio to teach it to me. Antonio told me no.

"Why no?" I asked him.

He answered me, "If I teach you that song, you will then sing it, and you will no longer ask me to ride the bus."

"I never asked you even the first time," I said.

"That is true," he answered. "But now I am very popular, and I sell many weavings at the hacienda of the restaurant. I make good business, and it is not the business of pocketbooks and shawls; it is the business of the men."

I said nothing to Antonio, but I am here to tell you this in English—it is something that I learned from the tourists who ride my bus—I was pissed off with Antonio. I would have told him that he could not ride the bus at all anymore, but I have already mentioned that my tours were now famous, partly because of Antonio. You might ask, why did I not dismiss Antonio and allow only the girls to ride the bus? You might say, weren't they also singing? But I would have to answer you that I felt a

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certain attachment to Antonio, and I had the feeling that if I dismissed him from the bus, it would only make him more of the way he was. I wanted to show him that it is good to be smart, but it is also good to do unnecessary things like putting a design on the border of a rug just to make it more beautiful. It is sometimes necessary to use unnecessary words like *thank you* and *please* just to make life prettier.

After we had been making the tours for several months, I had heard the songs very often and I came to know all the words in Quechua, the words that I had asked Antonio to teach me. But about this I said nothing.

I was beginning to think that I had made a very bad mistake by not telling Antonio that I was pissed off with him, because as he and his singing group continued to ride the bus, he was becoming very swollen-headed and very bossy with the girls who rode with him. Part of the reason for this swollen-headedness was that many people asked to have their pictures taken with him to carry back to the United States for souvenirs. Antonio would arrange the girls in front of him, and he learned to say in English, "Cheese!" just before the picture was taken. Antonio loved best of all the Polaroid instant pictures that were in color.

Now I must tell you why I was glad that I held my

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tongue about the many things that made me mad at Antonio. It happened after I had been wearing the uniform of the finished guide for more than a year.

There came on my bus a man and his wife who were from Kansas in the United States. In Kansas in the United States there are no mountains and no ocean, and they loved everything about my country of Ecuador. And they had with them not only two cameras, one of which was the Polaroid kind, which I told you was loved by Antonio, but they had also with them a cassette recording machine. They occupied themselves with taking very many pictures of our Andes mountains and also with recording what I had to say into the microphone as I explained to them about our beautiful countryside.

As we were leaving the hacienda of the weavers, Antonio and his group began singing, and the man from Kansas gave to me the cassette and asked me to please make for him a recording of the children as they sang.

I went to the back of the bus and pointed the little microphone that was attached to the cassette machine toward the children. They had not before seen a cassette player, but they knew that it was special, and they sang very beautifully, and they smiled as they sang. They were in the middle of my favorite song when Antonio's voice cracked. His eyes looked up at me, and they were

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frightened. He tried once again to sing, but he could not. He could not control the sounds that came from him. His voice shot high when it should not have. I picked up the song and sang along with the girls until the song was altogether finished. Then I shut off the machine and took it back to the man from Kansas, who thanked me very much.

Then Antonio did an unexpected thing. He walked forward before the bus stopped and sat down next to me on the seat of the guide; "You know the Quechua song," he said.

"Yes," I answered. "I have known it now for many months."

"I do not know what happened to me today," Antonio said. "My voice is like a forest animal; it makes strange sounds from hidden places."

"It is the voice of your manhood that comes forth," I said to him.

"Yes," he said. "There will be a time now when I will not be able to sing."

"That is so."

"But I will continue to ride with you on the bus," he said. "My grandparents have come to depend upon the money from my earnings at the hacienda of the restaurant."

"You can continue to ride on the bus with me even if you do not sing."

"When the full voice of my manhood arrives, it will flow strong all the way to the front of the bus."

"Yes," I said. "I am sure the voice of your manhood will be loud."

"I did not say loud. I said strong."

"Strong?"

"Yes, strong," he said. "Loud was the voice of my childhood."

I laughed. "I do not believe that you will stop being loud."

"A stubborn voice is loud," he said. "A trusting voice can speak softly and still be heard. My new voice will be deep, but it will be soft, and it will speak the language of Quechua, and that of Spanish," he said. Then he looked at me very long and said, "And English."

"But you do not speak English," I said.

"Not yet, but you will teach it to me," he said. "Please."

"Since when have you wanted to learn English?" I asked.

"For a long time. But I did not ask. I thought that if I asked you to teach me English, you would say that you would teach me only if I taught you the Quechua songs,

and if I taught you those, I thought you would never again ask me to ride the bus."

"I would never think in that way, Antonio."

"I know now that you would not," he said. "I promise that I shall learn to speak English as Ampara speaks it." Then he hummed his Quechua song until his voice once again cracked, and he walked to the back of the bus laughing at himself.

And that is the story of Antonio and me. I told you that I must tell the story, for English is not yet within Antonio. But soon it will be, and then he will speak for himself, and his speech will be soft and polite, but firm. And I, Ampara, will feel proud that I was the guide who got him there.