

It was dusk by now and the *comisaria* was almost empty. A uniformed man with two gold teeth sat at a small wooden table in the lobby; he told me to wait on the bench. A few moments later, nothing having happened, he gestured me back to his side. "Sit here," he said, pointing at an empty chair. I sat. "*Mira,*" he whispered, like we were plotting a coup, "it's the major you want to speak with. In Bagua Grande they have a commandante, here we have a major. Same thing. Except he's not here now, so you'll have to come back tomorrow morning. I'd talk to you myself, but you being a journalist, I could get in trouble."

"That's fine," I said, "I just wanted to know when I might see the major."

He hunched closer before I could get up. "Now keep this to yourself, but all the bosses are coming up tomorrow from Lima. There's going to be a meeting about the Baguazo. If you're lucky, maybe you can get in." He leaned back and smiled expansively. "Hombre, you should have seen it here that day. They tried to burn the station down!" His pretense at a whisper was gone now. "We've fixed it up good since, but they torched a few of our vehicles properly, and city hall, too. We arrested most of the worst ones, but then forty-five people escaped. Can you believe it?!" He roared with laughter, exposing a brown tongue and black molars behind the golden grill. "They say it was the biggest escape in the history of Peru!"

"*Dios mio,*" I said.

"They all ran back to their villages in the jungle, I guess. Some even swam. Have you talked to any Peruvian journalists?"

"A few," I said.

"So you know what a pack of liars they are. They really fanned the flames that day.

Said we were shooting hundreds of natives. And then the natives heard it, and they'll believe anything, they're like little animals. They just went crazy!"

With a theatrical look over both shoulders, he pulled a small poster from his desk. It featured an image of four native elders in ceremonial headdress, with block letters announcing a regional meeting of Apus—the meeting I was hoping to drop in on.

"Have you ever seen a native?" he asked. "This is what they look like. They paint their faces up and live in the jungle."

"I see."

"Now tomorrow, you see here, they're also having a meeting in Bagua. Same as my bosses." He gave me his most ingratiating grin yet. "Could be an interesting day for you."

"I'm glad I stopped in."

"Did you bring a camera?"

"Sure."

"Maybe you could get your picture taken with some of the Apus; that way they won't suspect anything. And later you can bring the pictures to us."

"I'll get an Apu in each arm, like!"

"That's it!"

We were high school buddies now.

"So tell me," he said, "how much does a cop make in Canada?"

"I really don't—"

"Because here we only make nine hundred *soles* a month. Not much, eh?"

"Less than a teacher," I commiserated.

"Same as a teacher," he corrected me. "If I spoke English, I could get a job in

airport security. That's where the real money is."

I nodded.

"You haven't been to the jungle yet, but it's pretty amazing. You can buy a monkey there no problem."

"I guess that's illegal."

"Sure, but it's no problem. They're small enough to fit in a little box. You could take one back to Canada and show your girlfriends."

"Nice idea."

"Anyway," he said, putting his hand out for a farewell shake, "you come back tomorrow and ask to speak with the major. I'm not supposed to talk to journalists."