

## Tekut Xihuatl

By

C.J. Newton

He felt the heat holding his face shudder and lift itself on the dusty wings of a cool gust. For a moment the hot smell of the afternoon, made hotter by the pleasant but bitter aroma from the Café Maya roasting plant, fell away like a painted scene in a theatre and the reality of only a hundred and eighty miles distance to the Caribbean was revealed; he could smell the Sea. Ian Blake savored the fragile moment until it expired seconds later, shook out a Classico cigarette and lit it, and walked to the edge of the parking lot to hail a taxi.

The sun was high and pounded the top of his head as he stared to the east up the Boulevard de Suyapa. His favorite twilight vista, the gentle gold patina of the late sun on the National Shrine, and the mountainous backdrop going to green from almost brown in the direct sunlight, was not ready yet; it was one o'clock. He shaded his eyes to search for a taxi.

By now his American reflex—upon seeing two or more heads in a taxi and lowering his arm—had worn of and he only let pass those eager drivers who insisted it would be no hardship to stuff him into the cab with a family of five, their food sacks, their new parrot, their old dog, and their gardening implements. A blue Datsun came along now with only one passenger, however, and when it pulled over Blake followed the protocol. He asked how much it would cost to go to the Street Pedestrian, shook his head and began to turn away at the first price quoted, then smiled and accepted the second rate quoted, and laughed with the driver, as if a joke had been told. Both had played their parts well and were satisfied.

They passed the Stadium National and the Park of Youth. Blake asked the driver how the national team had done in the World Cup and the *taxista* replied that they had done well, eliminating Mexico, to that country's chagrin, and had tied the Belgians, tied the Italians, tied the Moroccans, and ultimately lost to the Salvadorans by a goal. "The wife of one of the arbiters is a Salvadoran. Also another arbiter had problems financial and was assisted by a priest. Afterwards he called penalties against us at every opportunity. The driver tooted his horn as he drove, saluting other drivers, warning away walkers along the shoulder, and continued tooting to punctuate his short pronouncements as he drove. He let the first passenger out at the Lazarus Edifice

overlooking the slow river between Tegucigalpa and its sister city Comayaguela, and Blake moved up to the front passenger seat.

“He is a doctor, saver of lives,” said the *taxista*, indicating the other man. “Therefore he works in the building of Lazarus.”

“Where does Lazarus work?” asked Blake.

The taxi driver looked at the American and saw the grin in his eyes, and then opened his mouth and laughed heartily. He gripped the large glass ball (in which was set a three-dimensional depiction of the Virgin Mary) of his gearshift and shifted into a noisy first, followed by a grinding second, followed by a humming third. Blake looked around the padded burgundy leather dashboard, the crucifix and the Datsun logo hanging from the mirror, and the flag of Honduras and the Royal Crown Cola stickers on the glove compartment. He knew that most of the drivers in the capital owned their own cars and spent over 12 hours a day in them; they also personalized them with much pride and individuality, although the religious glass-ball-gearshift handles appeared in almost all of the cars.

The knotted traffic tightened into gridlock in Street Morazan. Blake looked up at the balconies above the fruit store, the stationery store, the fabric store. Young girls in the brown and tan uniforms of the Institute Secretarial, and the blue and red uniforms of the Collegio Francesa, passed along the street faster than the crawling cars. Soon, Blake achieved the intersection at Avenida Bonilla and waited for the light to change. The light changed, but then a woman in a tight-fitting but tasteful white dress, sleeveless, stepped into the intersection. Four feet on four pedals froze and Blake’s driver, a truck driver, a Honduran soldier in a Japanese jeep and an executive in a large Ford all suspended time to watch her. The woman crossed in front of the truck, then turned right to cross in front of the jeep. Her hair bounced as she walked and her lips were full, her cheeks round and ending in the smoothly defined jawline unique to Honduran women. The heat of the exhausts of all the cars in the city center shimmered the air as she walked. She smiled to herself and turned right again to cross in front of the executive in the Ford and now she was going back the way she had come on the other side of the street. All the men came out of their trance but forgot about the traffic signal; the four vehicles shot forward, joined by a bank messenger on a motorcycle, and there was much honking, tooting, and backing up. Blake and his *taxista* were laughing again.

At last they arrived at the Street Pedestrian. “Where would you like to get out?” the driver asked.

“I am looking for the National Post Office,” Blake told him.

At this, the driver roared with laughter, and after his passenger alighted he roared away, tooting at the world.

Blake had been concentrating on his job so much that he had not heard the news. His company had sent him to assist BANCAHSA, a principal bank of Honduras, to set up a mainframe computer system and then to link the main office with the three largest branches in San Pedro Sula, Comayagua and La Ceiba. He had finished two days earlier and had requested some vacation time to get to know the country. Request granted, he wanted to see *el centro* and it was in the Room of the Blind Pianist in Don Pepe's Patio restaurant that he heard the news from a man, Edilberto Medina, Attorney, lunching at the table next to him: the National Post office of the Republic of Honduras had disappeared.

Nobody was missing; no people that is. It was just that one Thursday morning the workers had reported to the normal location, at the end of the Street Pedestrian and across from the Holiday Inn, to find that the blue edifice of the *Correo Nacional* was not there. Removed. All that remained was a vacant lot. The main lobby where stamps were sold, the central section where mail was sorted, the Customs Section where international packets were inspected, and the rear where the Chevy LUV trucks brought and took away the mail, were all gone.

It was a national sensation. The President ordered the Army to cordon off the area for an investigation by G-2, the Honduran equivalent of the FBI. Several retired generals from the days of the military government pointed to this obvious example of the inefficiency of democracy: not only letters were lost from time to time, but this time the whole *Post Office* was missing. The Liberal Party blamed the Nationalists; the Nationalists blamed the Liberals. The Christian Democrats were ignored, and that upset them as well. Several Turks and Chinese, whom the people always suspected of being up to something, were detained and questioned, but were innocent of any involvement and even knowledge of the affair.

And Julio Rival, painter laureate of Honduras, set up his easel and painted "Lack of Post Office-ness" (*Se Falta el Correo*) in one energetic setting. Within five hours, copies of his work in miniature were being bootlegged in the Street Pedestrian for five lempiras.

Some students at UNAH, the national autonomous university, demonstrated and called the disappearance of the Post Office a victory over the forces of bourgeois reactionism, but were at a loss to explain exactly why this was so. The Minister of Communications energetically explained to the President that he was doing everything possible to recover the mislaid building. He also presented an interim plan that would keep the mail moving through this sinister disaster. The American ambassador announced that he would request twenty million dollars in aid to build a modern air-conditioned post office, but he would have to wait till the next session of Congress. A rumor circulated that the Nicaraguans were responsible, and had stolen the post office as a provocation. A crowd gathered to demonstrate in front of the Nicaraguan embassy but dissolved when they realized that formal diplomatic relations had been ended several years before.

Meanwhile, the postal workers quietly erected tents, rather like a serious circus, on the site and resumed normal operations. Occasionally the *vendedores ambulantes* (street hawkers) would get in the way of the operations as they sold fried plantains or Colgate toothpaste to the sorters.

When word reached Miami and then the rest of the United States, however, the UFO trackers and fanatics flew down *en masse*. They mostly stayed at the Istmánia Hotel downtown and soon they reported many sightings of flashing lights and brilliantly lit discs floating above the Imperial Brewery, and creatures from a cigar-shaped craft kidnapping the *cipotes* who helped tourists with baggage at Toncontín Airport. The aliens [they said] fixed their teeth and shaved their heads. The boys sold their story to a sensational American weekly tabloid for a thousand lempiras (five hundred dollars U.S. at the official rate of exchange).

Blake wandered over to the Provisional National Post Office of the Emergency which was now under 24-hour guard. Inside the tent, he said no to the woman who tried to sell him lottery tickets, the man who hawked sunglasses, the boy who wanted to shine his shoes ("Later" he promised him), and the old woman who was serving fried chicken and Coca-cola to the mail sorters. He wanted to mail some postcards he'd bought on his first day to share his first assignment outside the States with his family and friends in California. He had only two days left before his flight home and his hotel had been without stamps. He didn't want to mail his postcards from the airport in the New Orleans on his way home; it would take the authenticity out of the thing. It was important to him to mail the cards from Tegucigalpa, especially now that he could pronounce it correctly.

So in the Provisional National Post office of the Emergency he approached a folding table borrowed from the Fountain Italian restaurant down the street. At the table stamps were sold. There was a very pretty girl with waist length black hair and she and a couple of friends were drinking iced tea and listening to a tape by El Puma. As in everything else in Honduras, the place had a casual, leisurely pace to it. The work was getting done; packets and packages were piled up in orderly stacks and young men carefully put them in burlap sacks marked "San Juan de Flores" and "Tela." Older men smoked and supervised the younger ones, and both of those groups admired the long-haired *muchacha* and her girlfriends. As had happened before to Blake in restaurants and offices (but never in the Bank) he was unsure who was working there and who were visiting friends.

He told the girl with the long hair that he wanted to mail his postcards and she was the stamp seller after all. She asked, "How many" and started to separate some stamps from the sheet, then stopped and asked, "For U.S.?"

"Yes," he said.

"Oh," she said, and set down the sheet. "It is that these stamps are for correspondence domestic. We do not yet have the international stamps."

“When will you have them?”

“Maybe this afternoon. You can come back,” she smiled, and her girlfriends started to giggle.

“I’ll come back,” said Ian Blake, and he smiled at her. Now she giggled too and started to whisper energetically when Blake turned to leave.

He had lunch at the Fountain Italian, which served Mexican food, and then bought a dessert at Dunkin Donuts, which sold only ice cream. It was cooler now as the afternoon progressed, and he decided to wait until tomorrow to buy stamps, so as to enjoy the pool at his hotel in the gentler sun of the late afternoon. He did that, took a light dinner of shrimp cocktail, sea bass soup, Imperial Beer and another Classico, and went to bed early.

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He woke up the next morning and had another Classico cigarette. He had quit smoking years before. As he watched construction of the Planificación Familiar headquarters on the hill a mile away outside his window, he reflected that in the temporary post office yesterday everybody had been smoking. Everyone in Tegucigalpa smoked. Everyone in Honduras smoked. He turned on his television. It was a commercial for Belmont cigarettes. He turned off the television. But he did not put out his Classico.

In the restaurant there were some American and Mexican businessmen having breakfast. Blake sat at a window table and watched some cars with their lights still on, going by along the Boulevard Suyapa. He ordered bacon and eggs but to be exotic also requested crushed beans and a glass of watermelon juice. The waiter also poured him coffee and milk, equal amounts of both. He tasted the mixture: it was still very strong and he liked it. He stretched back in his chair and contemplated having the whole day free to accomplish one task: to mail his postcards. He enjoyed a leisurely breakfast and lingered over *La Tribuna*. Written Spanish seemed more complicated than the spoken tongue, but he got the gist of most of the articles. There were some caricatures of political figures, and the rivalry between Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula in soccer continued unabated. The front page displayed the grisly aftermath of a collision of a truck and two cars, and two more pages were devoted to the accident inside the tabloid. Three editorials pontificated upon the “robbery,” “phenomenon,” and “miracle” (respectively) of the Affair of the Post Office. He signed for his meal and returned to his room briefly before heading to *el centro* of Tegucigalpa.

There were more cars going by now with lights on. It was nearly noon. Blake squinted and saw that the cars were forming a procession heading eastward. Many were taxis. He turned to the east and saw not one car coming the other way. He waited

fifteen minutes, then fifteen minutes more. A truck passed; two pedestrians, a moped. He ambled back to the lobby and asked why there were no taxis going downtown.

The girl with the silver eyes and gold skin told him she did not know but the bartender probably would know. Blake entered the Rendezvous and asked the barman what was happening.

“Interment,” he answered brightly. “They bury the mother of the mayor.”

“How long will the ceremony take?”

“I don’t know. The aunt of the cousin of my wife lives near the house of the mayor, and she said they are expecting many people to attend. They will probably wait until everybody is there before they commence. Would you like a drink, *señor?*”

“Waiting gives me thirst. Yes, I would like a gold rum and Coke.”

Blake chatted with the barman and learned his name was Armando. He passed an hour with Armando and then said he had to go downtown to the Provisional Post Office of the Emergency to mail some postcards. Armando sympathized and said that the government was planning to construct more post offices around the capital, that drawings had been approved and ground had even been broken in Miraflores, but patience was necessary. Blake said he understood. He signed for his bill and walked out into the lobby.

The sun was lower now and the golden skin of the girl behind the front desk glowed. Blake asked her if she had stamps today. As a cloud floated by the sun, now coming through the large front window, her silver eyes glinted. “This morning we had some but we sold them all immediately. We expect more later.”

Now Blake did not ask what “later” meant. He simply thanked the girl and headed out again. Now taxis were coming by but they were all full, even for Honduras. At times he had felt self-conscious about being from a richer country. Now, he felt a gentle irony that it was the Hondurans who had rides, taxis, mobility, and he was standing on the shoulder waiting.

A woman now appeared, walking along the shoulder. She wore a purple dress and lavender shoes and her eye shadow was blue. She was about thirty and she stopped a discreet distance from him. She too was waiting for a taxi. An old Volkswagen appeared. The woman waved to it and it pulled over. Blake felt irritation rise but just then she looked directly at him and graciously asked if he was going to Colonia Palmira. He said he was not and then she smiled regretfully and so did the driver and so did Blake. They drove away.

Eventually one of the larger taxis, one of the Yellows that served the Airport, arrived at the hotel with a new visitor. Blake followed it to the carport and the driver agreed to take him downtown.

It felt good to be moving. He wound down his window and once again caught an ephemeral whiff of the Caribbean, like the perfume of a woman passing you on the street. There was much less traffic downtown and that too felt good. Blake got out in Street Jerez and walked along briskly. He slowed at the Budget Rent A Car office and contemplated patronizing them but he only had one more day and anyway liked walking around in the downtown area. He passed La Marbella café where the Legislative Deputies relaxed between sessions and where the journalists interviewed them. He passed a cafeteria popular with young men who crowded the window seats to admire and compliment the passing young girls, young women, and even older women, if they seemed sympathetic. He arrived at the temporary National Post Office as it began to rain.

There was much activity. The workers gathered all the sacks that had accumulated outside from the protection of the tents, and brought them toward the center. The ambulant vendors were shooed out and the wind began to blow up. Many of the customers and visitors began to hurry out and Blake was buffeted by the crowd as he tried to enter. The sorters were becoming frustrated because the wind was disarranging the neat stacks of mail and the damp drizzle beginning to sift around was causing some of the letters, especially those from Mexico, to stick together. At last he made it inside. But he couldn't find what he was looking for.

They had moved the Desk of the Stamps. He asked a guard, who was keeping a cool head in all of the bustle, where to go and got directions. He hurried to the extreme rear where they had established the Desk of the Stamps and the Table to Send. The wind snapped the sheets of the stamps and the metal rings used as paperweights were not heavy enough. Some of the money from the change tray lifted up perilously and the young girl with the long hair was not there today, but rather a man with a black mustache and a black tie and silver eyes that glistened in the dimness of the overcast sky. Blake asked him if he had yet the international stamps. The young man said they had been sent ten sheets from the printing plant that very morning, but he ordered them returned because they were without gum; they would not stick and this was very very bad. He said he was certain that by the end of the following day, there would be pages and pages of stamps, and that the printers would be suitably reprimanded.

Blake began to wander out. He paused to read a tract that was taped to one of the poles supporting the central tent. It was official notice from the leader of the Union of the Workers of the National Post Office (of the Emergency and also of Normal Times) to the effect that the employees were as loyal and patriotic as any good Honduran, but that it was a risk to their health to have to work in the open air, pleasant as that may be, and during the winter it would be unjust to expose them to the elements, influenza and pneumonia. He demanded that the missing post office be found or else that permanent

temporary quarters be arranged. A strike was not ruled out, and indeed was the last thing that the union wanted.

Ian Blake bought a pack of Belmont cigarettes from one of the removed ambulant vendors who had ambulated across the street. The funeral of the mother of the mayor had ended and now the streets were clogged with empty taxis driving in circles, hurrying to no particular destination. Blake stopped at the airline office to confirm his seat on the flight out the next day. They didn't have any stamps either.

Back at his hotel he ordered two beers and some ice from room service and watched the evening news. The Post Office had been sighted by a fisherman off the coast of Cape Thanks to God; the Honduran Navy had dispatched a patrol boat but discovered that what the fisherman had seen was a capsized yacht belonging to a Colombian millionaire, who announced that he was so grateful to the Navy for saving his life that he would contribute two million lempiras worth of art to adorn the old Post Office, if it were recovered, or if a new one were to be built. In La Ceiba a rumor circulated that all of the town's discos were disappearing; this was an emergency and the mayor himself had to calm the fans of merengue and salsa. In further news a record crop of coffee was being produced that year. However, the pork had a strange taste to it, and consumers were advised to cook it thoroughly.

Ian Blake turned off the news and looked at his postcards. One was of the beautiful Italianate architecture of the Presidential Place, another of the modernistic Legislative Palace. A third was of the National Cathedral downtown, the plaster of which was said to have been mixed from two million eggs. For his mother, who liked sunsets, he wanted to send a seascape taken near Puerto Cortes with a magenta and orange sky and palm trees, and for his father, who liked mountains, he sent a postcard that was not a photo but rather an artist's rendering of the steeply inclined streets of the village of Santa Lucía. For his friend Mark who believed in peace, he selected the vista of Tegucigalpa with the Park of Concord in the foreground; his buddy Dan who believed in peace through strength would receive a view of the Statue of the Soldier Unknown.

Blake showered and put on a fresh shirt and headed out to dinner. He walked this time to a place he'd spotted and asked about earlier. It sported a thatched roof and the waitresses wore brightly colored dresses that fell off their shoulders and they also wore ribbons in their black hair. There was a band that played when they felt like it; tropical, happy music. The place was called The Jackal and it was very popular with locals. He ordered an *aguardiente* on the rocks as an aperitif and enjoyed the menu which came encased in a hand-carved mahogany frame. He chose a limey ceviche and as an entrée a sausage with rice, tortillas, beans and a salad. He salivated when he saw two hamburgers about to be enjoyed by two American girls (Mormon missionaries, he observed from the books they referred to occasionally). But he did a double take when he saw that the burgers were topped with carrot slices. He realized that he had been craving a hamburger most of the day; he was returning to the United States tomorrow.

Back at his hotel he found it difficult to drop off to sleep. He tossed and turned and realized he had found much to like in this out of the way country. He resolved to return and know it more, and soon fell asleep, dreaming that The Jackal had a floor of sand and that there were two suns in the sky above.

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By his last day in the Hotel Alameda Ian Blake was accustomed to the shrill voice of the *señora* who rapped on the door at six in the morning to screechingly ask if he had any valet laundry, and at six in the evening to offer, or rather demand that he take, ice. This morning, however, she was saying something different, rather in the manner of a town crier. "They have found the *Correo Nacional!* It is discovered! Thanks to God! Gentlemen, there is mail service normal again! *Atención!*"

Blake turned on his television but they were showing soap operas on both channels. He turned on his radio and soon found what appeared to be a live report from the recovered Post Office. The announcer said that the building had been inspected by the Ministry of Communications and the police and that everything was in order. Even the lights and water fountains worked, which meant that there would not be the problem of reconnecting all the electricity and plumbing. The workers arrived and marveled at the post office, glad to have it back and curious to know where it had been. One man who operated the machine that canceled the stamps with the postmark of Tegucigalpa said that although he formerly griped about how stuffy the old edifice was on hot days, he was grateful that it had returned from its odyssey.

He recognized the voice of the young girl who sold stamps as she spoke now. She said that it had been difficult during the time of the Provisional National Post Office of the Emergency, but now they knew that they could handle situations of difficulty; it had been an adventure good for their confidence in themselves. The Minister of Communications explained plans to attach steel buttresses to the exterior walls of the building to keep it from ambulating again. However, the *capitalinos* were not taking any chances; the newscaster said that customers were crushing inside already, to mail letters and packets and postcards to relatives telling them about the incredible event. They were also exiting rapidly since they did not want to be inside if the structure disappeared again.

The announcer gave way to the anchor-woman in the station who said the President would be making a speech before leaving for his delayed vacation to the North Coast.

Blake listened to the smooth tones of the President as he began his speech. He lauded the efforts of the Minister to recover the building, and although it seemed to have reappeared of its own volition, he was proud of the Minister's plans to keep it in place with buttresses of strong steel. He reflected that perhaps it would be appropriate to place a statue—a pair of wings—atop the building to indicate its role as a carrier of messages, and to commemorate its short trip and triumphant return. Buildings were not

to be encouraged to disappear, of course, but he recommended that the nation be grateful for its reappearance. There were not many countries who could say that their National Post Office had gone and then come back. Indeed, he had heard that in Guatemala in the 1880s a municipal palace disappeared and had *never* been recovered. He began to conclude with a statement that now it was necessary to proceed past the crisis, to return to normality, and to continue with the great work of the republic. Blake stepped into his shower feeling good about things as the President appeared to be wrapping things up.

He called his company in Santa Clara, California and had to wait some time, then spoke to several managers with questions. After that he was instructed to call two project managers on jobs in Falls Church and Tampa. At last he finished. He was looking forward to a week back at the home office writing his report and answering mail.

But that all seemed very far away, almost like a dream remembered in flashes the next morning. The sun was crisp and clear on the pine hills to the north and the green and brown undulating land around Tegucigalpa seemed to be stretching itself in the morning light. He stepped outside and smelled the sweet evaporating dew. He heard three distinctly different church bells ringing in celebration and several birds calling, their songs a bit husky already in the drying air, but clear.

He decided to skip breakfast and settled his bill with the front desk, cashing one last traveler's check. He put the yellow, blue and red bills in his pocket and looked into the silver eyes of the girl with the golden skin. He smiled at her and said, "There are stamps again."

She smiled, a little enigmatically, back at him and her eyes reflected the light back like a mirror. "I was thinking," she said, "Perhaps it is that the Post Office wondered where they were going, all the letters that pass through it every day. It had curiosity and now it knows."

"But we don't know where it went."

"Do we need to know?"

"No." They smiled at each other.

Ian Blake returned to his room and got his bag, double-checked to see if he had his passport, and then departed the hotel. He got a taxi immediately and was its sole passenger this time. Along the way downtown he stopped at a *pulperia* and bought a cup of coffee for himself and the driver and also a newspaper, *El Tiempo*. It was a special edition about the reappearance of the sorely missed building, and on the third page Blake read something strange: the National Post Office had returned but was situated two meters...he didn't understand. He pointed out the word to the driver.

“Clockwise,” that one grinned. “Two meters following the clock. Rotated, you know?”

Blake couldn't think of anything to say but nodded. He watched a group of little boys playing soccer in the Park of Youth and a group of little girls watching the little boys. He watched, passing, the Maya Health Clinic and the Maya Pharmacy and the Cinemaya and the Gymnasium Maya. The driver took a slightly different route through a hilly neighborhood and Blake admired the gracefulness of houses that, even though they were densely packed, had private patios where the residents could take meals, listen to music, or hang laundry. In one of them, four children played tag.

He got out near La Marbella and, since it was his last day, ordered an *aguardiente* neat with lime. He drank another and the pink walls of the Hotel MacArthur seemed to glow a bit more, and the blue stripes of the Banco Centroamericano building seemed to strike harder through the hazy air. He heard speech wafting near him. A conservative deputy in the Liberal Party was speculating darkly that the “repositioning” of the National Post Office two meters following the clock—or rather, to the left as you faced it—indicated leftist influence: a conspiracy. The boxer “Macho” Noguera entered with an entourage of friends and proclaimed that he had carried the Post Office on his shoulders to the Salvadoran frontier for exercise, to impress his female admirers, and to annoy the Salvadorans.

But there were already new sensations. The journalists, since the edifice of correspondence was no longer news, had moved on to the story of a group of blonde witches who recently dismembered a chicken in Santa Barbara department. To kill a chicken was not exactly a crime; poultry was a staple of the national diet, clearly, but the *manner* of the kill was sinister. There were interviews with young girls who said they knew nothing and old women who said they knew everything, and men who said that all women were witches and chickens were foolish animals, but to have killed a dog would have been scandalous. Tegucigalpa beat San Pedro Sula at *fútbol* and victory was in the air. And discussions moved forward to create a freeport zone in the Bay Islands.

As always in Tegucigalpa there was much talk. Blake had heard an expression from one of the bankers he'd worked with: “In San Pedro, one works. In Tegucigalpa, one watches the work. In La Ceiba, one dances.” He paid his bill and began to walk to the restored Post Office.

By now his postcards looked like they'd traveled already; some of the ink had smudged on two of them from either sweat or the dew of a glass. All of them now had white wrinkles from being carried in his jacket pocket or in his shirt pocket.

The early rush at the National Post Office had abated. Now, only a few ambulant vendors ambulated in front offering photonovels, rope, shampoo and Rice-A-Roni. There was a smell of frying and cigarettes. A white sheet of paper on the window of the front door of the *Correo Nacional* drew his attention.

“Notice,” he said. “In recognition of the bravery, loyalty and force shown by the workers of the National Post Office of the Republic of Honduras during the recent crisis, today is declared a paid holiday for those workers. Service will normalize itself next Monday.” The proclamation bore the signature of the President himself. He realized that was how the speech on the radio had ended.

He walked and bought a tortilla filled with melted cheese, tomatoes and lettuce from one of the more stationary vendors. In the window of a travel bureau specializing in tours to the Mayan ruins of Copán, he saw a display. Munching, he ambled closer.

Mounted on a board were photographs of various landmarks in Tegucigalpa and there was a framed article about this city. It noted that the name was a Spanish pronunciation of the old indigenous name for the place. In the language of its original inhabitants, they called it Silver Hills. Blake looked up toward the last street of the capital where the land rose to a promontory. In the gold light of the late morning, the earth glinted back, and its tone shone silver.