

**[From *Costa Azul* by C.J. Newton]**

Chapter 4: Justice Campos and the Quest for Elixir

His Honor, Chief Justice Alberto Campos, looked at the steaming mug before him. He lifted it to his lips and felt the texture of the cup, the heat suffusing it from the hot brown liquid inside. He granted himself a deep inhalation of the aroma through his nose, closing his eyes as he did so. At last he took a sip.

"Ah," he said, "I have returned to Paradise."

Coffee. Blood. Both necessary to the life of the esteemed judge.

Law of course was his career, and he had risen to the pinnacle of his profession. But his avocation, his passion--according to some, his obsession--was a good cup of coffee. "Why do we say, 'A good cup of coffee'?" he asked at restaurants, rhetorically, of the waiter who stood before him with a pot of heated milk and a pot of some mixture that alleged that it could presume the name of Coffee. Senhor Campos always brought his own vacuum jug with him whenever he dined out; he would trust the cuisine of any kitchen but the cafe had to be his, always. "Let us say, 'The best cup of coffee possible.'"

He himself had once employed the phrase, "A good cup of coffee." He had been punished for it with the tragedy of his life.

The estimable judge kept an apartment in Matarcarro but spent his weekends at his beloved solar, the word which equates to "manor house" in the English. The property lay about fifty kilometers north, in an area known as Bamboleo. A nearby town is the ridiculous village of Ilu; but we must leave that for another time.

His ranch was named Montezinho, or Little Mountain, and was very green and cool. The judge's favorite times of all were Saturdays after his morning swim, or Sunday after reading the Bible. At these times he would sit on his porch, ask for a cup of the best coffee possible, and then savor it looking down the green, gently curving Valley of the Left Boot. His vista included a glimpse on the horizon of the northern suburbs of Matarcarro, and to the east, through a gap in the hills, a sweeping view of the adjacent Valley, the Valley of the Right Shoe.

The judge could also see his own coffee trees on the southwest perimeter of his property. Since

coffee was not native to Costa Azul, he had visited a college friend who was now a director of the Cafe Indio Company in Guatemala City. the director had been happy to oblige him with some coffee plants, and through twenty years of crossbreeding with Colombian, Brazilian, Sumatran, and Ethiopian varieties, he had succeeded in producing his own blend which he named not after himself, as other men might have done, but rather, Elixir.

He smiled at the smoke rising from his roasting building. There, he knew the three agricultural graduate students would be monitoring conditions, temperature, calefaction rate, ventilation, air pressure, and relative humidity of the roasting process. He had patented the process, and had named it not after himself, as other men might have done, but rather, The Ascension.

He looked with satisfaction at the small graded road that led from the roasting building to the grinding building. He had experimented with everything from the most modern Swiss metal blades to an army of peasants with flat stones. Now, the army consisted of a quiet old couple. The man had been forced to retire from his beloved craft of making wooden miniature buildings because of a palsy. His wife had sold her profitable azulejo business in Olachoa and they had settled near the judge's ranch, where they lived austerely. Campos had heard of their plight and invited them to come and operate the grinder a couple of hours a day. His interview had consisted of only one question: "What does coffee mean to you?"

The woman let the man speak for them: "It is the beverage of the alert gods."

He had dispatched all his servants and workers, even the graduate students, to help the couple pack up and move in the next day.

He had registered his grinding apparatus with the Ministry of Technologies in the Bureau of Scissors, Saws, and Other Such Implements. He named it not after himself, as other men might have done, but rather, The Liberator of the Ascended Bean.

Visitors to Montezhino were admitted by blue-uniformed retainers. If a visit was official, personal, or business, then Justice Campos would receive his guests in a spacious and airy salon, a high-ceilinged parlor with Persian rugs and russet welcome. If, however, they were of the special class of pilgrim who had been invited to taste the ascended and liberated Elixir, he or she (never more than one at a time) would be led to wait in a special anteroom which he called the "antecafecuarto".

It was a small room without windows but which was, nevertheless, luxurious in an understated way. The walls were of dark green marble; the two chairs combined black leather and grey onyx to give a dark and cooling comfort. On a small teakwood table to the side a leather guest book lay open, and these special invitees were always required to sign it. Less than twenty names were registered there. After signature, the Justice gave the individual five minutes to calm himself from the journey to the ranch and to let the room take its effect.

When this interval had passed, the Justice himself would wheel in a cart of twenty-karat gold. After years of experimentation, he had returned to the Melitta pot and filter an older woman had given to him during his romantic student days. He had the filters now specially made from the trees in the northwest of the country, in the region known as Broken Sword.

A word now about cream and sugar: "We will serve milk, but only the best milk. We will serve sugar, but only from the finest cane." The Justice bought his milk for the coffee from a farmer thirty kilometers away; he had sworn to draw the milk only from cows of unquestioned honor. Sr. Campos served it at sixty degrees on the Fahrenheit scale (which he preferred to the Centigrade) in a porcelain pitcher. The sugar was from his special reserve on the plantation of Don Humberto Terceira, the largest manufacturer of aguahuezo in Costa Azul.

And so, with cream and sugar added (the Justice enjoyed his Elixir with either, both, or none, according to his calendar) the honored guest and esteemed Justice would partake of the libation of the alert gods.

In drawers in the teakwood coffee table between the chairs he kept several items: a box of tissues, because once a woman reporter had burst into tears, overwhelmed by her first sip; a small oxygen tank, because an elderly Deputy had nearly died of a heart attack after his first cup; and a fire extinguisher, because one of the more excitable guests (a poet) had forgotten his burning cigar on the table, transported by the flavors of the blend. To cover other contingencies the Judge kept a copy of the Physician's Desk Reference, a pen and paper, smelling salts, saltines, brandy, a Bible, and, he regretted, a revolver.

He thought back through the smoke-edged years to the blue-sunned afternoon when he had made the error of not offering a cup of the best coffee possible; he had, in the excitement of the presence

of his guest, offered her "a good cup of coffee". His solitude had begun that very day.

Long, long ago the judge had fallen in love with a woman: the woman. She had large eyes in a welcoming face; her name was Alegria. She was one of the daughters of a prosperous merchant in his home town. This woman, embodying joy, captivated the young Campos. He saw her one day in a long-armed white dress, laughing innocently as the coachman calmed her horse.

Campos was in love.

He dedicated the next three months to the preparation of the perfect cup of coffee. He supervised the picking, roasting, and grinding of the batch he called, the "Princesa".

At last the time came for her to be driven up to his beloved ranch of Montezinho. Campos had all of his servants stand at attention in the grand hallway while he prepared the culminating reception.

Alegria descended from her coach, assisted by her coachman. The young Alberto Campos asked her breathlessly, quite forgetting himself and his quest in the presence of the spellbinding beauty of her kind round face, "Would you like a good cup of coffee?"

"Not really," she said. "Do you have any iced tea?"

He had never married.