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TALES OF POWER

**CARLOS
CASTANEDA**



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*The conditions of a solitary bird are five:
The first, that it flies to the highest point;
the second, that it does not suffer for company,
not even of its own kind;
the third, that it aims its beak to the skies;
the fourth, that it does not have a definite color;
the fifth, that it sings very softly.*

—San Juan de la Cruz, *Dichos de Luz y Amor*



PART ONE

*A Witness to
Acts of Power*

AN APPOINTMENT WITH KNOWLEDGE

I had not seen don Juan for several months. It was the autumn of 1971. I had the certainty that he was at don Genaro's house in central Mexico and made the necessary preparations for a six- or seven-day drive to visit him. On the second day of my journey, however, on an impulse, I stopped at don Juan's place in Sonora in the midafternoon. I parked my car and walked a short distance to the house. To my surprise, I found him there.

"Don Juan! I didn't expect to find you here," I said.

He laughed; my surprise seemed to delight him. He was sitting on an empty milk crate by the front door. He appeared to have been waiting for me. There was an air of accomplishment in the ease with which he greeted me. He took off his hat and flourished it in a comical gesture. Then he put it on again and gave me a military salute. He was leaning against the wall, sitting on the crate as if it were a saddle.

"Sit down, sit down," he said in a jovial tone. "Good to see you again."

"I was going to go all the way to central Mexico for nothing," I said. "And then I would've had to drive back to Los Angeles. Finding you here has saved me days and days of driving."

"Somehow you would've found me," he said in a mysterious tone, "but let's say that you owe me the six days that you would've needed to get there, days which you should use in doing something more interesting than pressing down on the gas pedal of your car."

There was something engaging in don Juan's smile. His warmth was contagious.

"Where's your writing gear?" he asked.

I told him that I had left it in the car; he said that I looked unnatural without it and made me go back and get it.

"I have finished writing a book," I said.

He gave me a long, strange look that produced an itching in the pit of my stomach. It was as if he were pushing my middle section with a soft object. I felt like I was going to get ill, but then he turned his head to the side and I regained my original feeling of well-being.

I wanted to talk about my book but he made a gesture that indicated that he did not want me to say anything about it. He smiled. His mood was light and charming and he immediately engaged me in a casual conversation about people and current events. Finally I managed to steer the conversation onto the topic of my interest. I began by mentioning that I had reviewed my early notes and had realized that he had been giving me a detailed description of the sorcerer's world from the beginning of our association. In light of what he had said to me in those stages, I had begun to question the role of hallucinogenic plants.

"Why did you make me take those power plants so many times?" I asked.

He laughed and mumbled very softly. "'Cause you're dumb."

I heard him the first time, but I wanted to make sure and pretended I had not understood.

"I beg your pardon?" I asked.

"You know what I said," he replied and stood up.

He tapped me on the head as he walked by me. "You're rather slow," he said. "And there was no other way to jolt you."

"So none of that was absolutely necessary?" I asked.

"It was, in your case. There are other types of people, however, that do not seem to need them."

He stood next to me, staring at the top of the bushes by the left side of his house; then he sat down again

and talked about Eligio, his other apprentice. He said that Eligio had taken psychotropic plants only once since he became his apprentice, and yet he was perhaps even more advanced than I was.

"To be sensitive is a natural condition of certain people," he said. "You are not. But neither am I. In the final analysis sensitivity matters very little."

"What's the thing that matters then?" I asked.

He seemed to search for an appropriate answer.

"What matters is that a warrior be impeccable," he finally said. "But that's only a way of talking, a way of beating around the bush. You have already accomplished some tasks of sorcery and I believe this is the time to mention the source of everything that matters. So I will say that what matters to a warrior is arriving at the totality of oneself."

"What is the totality of oneself, don Juan?"

"I said that I was only going to mention it. There are still a lot of loose ends in your life that you must tie together before we can talk about the totality of oneself."

He ended our conversation there. He made a gesture with his hands to signal that he wanted me to stop talking. Apparently there was something or somebody nearby. He tilted his head to the left, as if to listen. I could see the whites of his eyes as he focused on the bushes beyond the house to his left. He listened attentively for a few moments and then stood up, came to me and whispered in my ear that we had to leave the house and go for a walk.

"Is there something wrong?" I asked, also in a whisper.

"No. Nothing is wrong," he said. "Everything is rather right."

He led me into the desert chaparral. We walked for perhaps half an hour and then came to a small circular area free from vegetation, a spot about twelve feet in diameter where the reddish dirt was packed and perfectly flat. There were no signs, however, that machinery had cleared and flattened the area. Don Juan sat down

in the center of it, facing the southeast. He pointed to a place about five feet away from him and asked me to sit there, facing him.

"What are we going to do here?" I asked.

"We have an appointment here tonight," he replied.

He scanned the surroundings with a quick glance, turning around on his seat until he was again facing the southeast.

His movements had alarmed me. I asked him who we had the appointment with.

"With knowledge," he said. "Let's say that knowledge is prowling around here."

He did not let me hook onto that cryptic answer. He quickly changed the subject and in a jovial tone he urged me to be natural, that is, to take notes and talk as we would have done at his house.

What was most pressing on my mind at that time was the vivid sensation I had had six months before, of "talking" to a coyote. That event meant to me that for the first time I had been capable of visualizing or apprehending, through my senses and in sober consciousness, the sorcerers' description of the world; a description in which communicating with animals through speech was a matter of course.

"We're not going to engage ourselves in dwelling on any experience of that nature," don Juan said upon hearing my question. "It is not advisable for you to indulge in focusing your attention on past events. We may touch on them, but only in reference."

"Why is that so, don Juan?"

"You don't have enough personal power yet to seek the sorcerers' explanation."

"Then there is a sorcerers' explanation!"

"Certainly. Sorcerers are men. We're creatures of thought. We seek clarifications."

"I was under the impression that my great flaw was to seek explanations."

"No. Your flaw is to seek convenient explanations, explanations that fit you and your world. What I object

to is your reasonableness. A sorcerer explains things in his world too, but he's not as stiff as you."

"How can I arrive at the sorcerers' explanation?"

"By accumulating personal power. Personal power will make you slide with great ease into the sorcerers' explanation. The explanation is not what you would call an explanation; nevertheless, it makes the world and its mysteries, if not clear, at least less awesome. That should be the essence of an explanation, but that is not what you seek. You're after the reflection of your ideas."

I lost my momentum to ask questions. But his smile urged me to keep on talking. Another issue of great importance to me was his friend don Genaro and the extraordinary effect that his actions had had on me. Every time I had come into contact with him I had experienced the most outlandish sensory distortions.

Don Juan laughed when I voiced my question.

"Genaro is stupendous," he said. "But for the time being, there is no sense in talking about him or about what he does to you. Again, you don't have enough personal power to unravel that topic. Wait until you have it, then we will talk."

"What if I never have it?"

"If you never have it, we'll never talk."

"At the rate I'm going, will I ever have enough of it?" I asked.

"That's up to you," he replied. "I have given you all the information necessary. Now it's your responsibility to gain enough personal power to tip the scales."

"You're talking in metaphors," I said. "Give it to me straight. Tell me exactly what I should do. If you have already told me, let's say that I've forgotten it."

Don Juan chuckled and lay down, putting his arms behind his head.

"You know exactly what you need," he said.

I told him that sometimes I thought I knew, but that most of the time I had no self-confidence.

"I'm afraid that you are confusing issues," he said. "The self-confidence of the warrior is not the self-confidence of the average man. The average man seeks

certainty in the eyes of the onlooker and calls that self-confidence. The warrior seeks impeccability in his own eyes and calls that humbleness. The average man is hooked to his fellow men, while the warrior is hooked only to himself. Perhaps you are chasing rainbows. You're after the self-confidence of the average man, when you should be after the humbleness of a warrior. The difference between the two is remarkable. Self-confidence entails knowing something for sure; humbleness entails being impeccable in one's actions and feelings."

"I've been trying to live in accordance with your suggestions," I said. "I may not be the best, but I'm the best of myself. Is that impeccability?"

"No. You must do better than that. You must push yourself beyond your limits, all the time."

"But that would be insane, don Juan. No one can do that."

"There are lots of things that you do now which would have seemed insane to you ten years ago. Those things themselves did not change, but your idea of yourself changed; what was impossible before is perfectly possible now and perhaps your total success in changing yourself is only a matter of time. In this affair the only possible course that a warrior has is to act consistently and without reservations. You know enough of the warrior's way to act accordingly, but your old habits and routines stand in your way."

I understood what he meant.

"Do you think that writing is one of the old habits I should change?" I asked. "Should I destroy my new manuscript?"

He did not answer. He stood up and turned to look at the edge of the chaparral.

I told him that I had received letters from various people telling me that it was wrong to write about my apprenticeship. They had cited as a precedent that the masters of Eastern esoteric doctrines demanded absolute secrecy about their teachings.

"Perhaps those masters are just indulging in being masters," don Juan said without looking at me. "I'm

not a master, I'm only a warrior. So I really don't know what a master feels like."

"But maybe I'm revealing things I shouldn't, don Juan."

"It doesn't matter what one reveals or what one keeps to oneself," he said. "Everything we do, everything we are, rests on our personal power. If we have enough of it, one word uttered to us might be sufficient to change the course of our lives. But if we don't have enough personal power, the most magnificent piece of wisdom can be revealed to us and that revelation won't make a damn bit of difference."

He then lowered his voice as if he were disclosing a confidential matter to me.

"I'm going to utter perhaps the greatest piece of knowledge anyone can voice," he said. "Let me see what you can do with it."

"Do you know that at this very moment you are surrounded by eternity? And do you know that you can use that eternity, if you so desire?"

After a long pause, during which he urged me with a subtle movement of his eyes to make a statement, I said that I did not understand what he was talking about.

"There! Eternity is there!" he said, pointing to the horizon.

Then he pointed to the zenith. "Or there, or perhaps we can say that eternity is like this." He extended both arms to point to the east and west.

We looked at each other. His eyes held a question.

"What do you say to that?" he asked, coaxing me to ponder upon his words.

I did not know what to say.

"Do you know that you can extend yourself forever in any of the directions I have pointed to?" he went on. "Do you know that one moment can be eternity? This is not a riddle; it's a fact, but only if you mount that moment and use it to take the totality of yourself forever in any direction."

He stared at me.

"You didn't have this knowledge before," he said,

smiling. "Now you do. I have revealed it to you, but it doesn't make a bit of difference, because you don't have enough personal power to utilize my revelation. Yet if you did have enough power, my words alone would serve as the means for you to round up the totality of yourself and to get the crucial part of it out of the boundaries in which it is contained."

He came to my side and poked my chest with his fingers; it was a very light tap.

"These are the boundaries I'm talking about," he said. "One can get out of them. We are a feeling, an awareness encased here."

He slapped my shoulders with both hands. My pad and pencil fell to the ground. Don Juan put his foot on the pad and stared at me and then laughed.

I asked him if he minded my taking notes. He said no in a reassuring tone and moved his foot away.

"We are luminous beings," he said, shaking his head rhythmically. "And for a luminous being only personal power matters. But if you ask me what personal power is, I have to tell you that my explanation will not explain it."

Don Juan looked at the western horizon and said that there were still a few hours of daylight left.

"We have to be here for a long time," he explained. "So, we either sit quietly or we talk. It is not natural for you to be silent, so let's keep on talking. This spot is a power place and it must become used to us before night-fall. You must sit here, as naturally as possible, without fear or impatience. It seems that the easiest way for you to relax is to take notes, so write to your heart's content.

"And now, suppose you tell me about your *dreaming*."

His sudden shift caught me unprepared. He repeated his request. There was a great deal to say about it. "Dreaming" entailed cultivating a peculiar control over one's dreams to the extent that the experiences undergone in them and those lived in one's waking hours acquired the same pragmatic valence. The sorcerers'

allegation was that under the impact of "dreaming" the ordinary criteria to differentiate a dream from reality became inoperative.

Don Juan's praxis of "dreaming" was an exercise that consisted of finding one's hands in a dream. In other words, one had to deliberately dream that one was looking for and could find one's hands in a dream by simply dreaming that one lifted one's hands to the level of the eyes.

After years of unsuccessful attempts I had finally accomplished the task. Looking at it in retrospect, it had become evident to me that I had succeeded only after I had gained a degree of control over the world of my everyday life.

Don Juan wanted to know the salient points. I began telling him that the difficulty of setting up the command to look at my hands seemed to be, quite often, insurmountable. He had warned me that the early stage of the preparatory facet, which he called "setting up dreaming," consisted of a deadly game that one's mind played with itself, and that some part of myself was going to do everything it could to prevent the fulfillment of my task. That could include, don Juan had said, plunging me into a loss of meaning, melancholy, or even a suicidal depression. I did not go that far, however. My experience was rather on the light, comical side; nonetheless, the result was equally frustrating. Every time I was about to look at my hands in a dream something extraordinary would happen; I would begin to fly, or my dream would turn into a nightmare, or it would simply become a very pleasant experience of bodily excitation; everything in the dream would extend far beyond the "normal" in matters of vividness and, therefore, be terribly absorbing. My original intention of observing my hands was always forgotten in light of the new situation.

One night, quite unexpectedly, I found my hands in my dreams. I dreamt that I was walking on an unknown street in a foreign city and suddenly I lifted up my hands and placed them in front of my face. It was

as if something within myself had given up and had permitted me to watch the backs of my hands.

Don Juan's instructions had been that as soon as the sight of my hands would begin to dissolve or change into something else, I had to shift my view from my hands to any other element in the surroundings of my dream. In that particular dream I shifted my view to a building at the end of the street. When the sight of the building began to dissipate I focused my attention on the other elements of the surroundings in my dream. The end result was an incredibly clear composite picture of a deserted street in some unknown foreign city.

Don Juan made me continue with my account of other experiences in "dreaming." We talked for a long time.

At the end of my report he stood up and went to the bushes. I also stood up. I was nervous. It was an unwarranted sensation since there was nothing precipitating fear or concern. Don Juan returned shortly. He noticed my agitation.

"Calm down," he said, holding my arm gently.

He made me sit down and put my notebook on my lap. He coaxed me to write. His argument was that I should not disturb the power place with unnecessary feelings of fear or hesitation.

"Why do I get so nervous?" I asked.

"It's natural," he said. "Something in you is threatened by your activities in *dreaming*. As long as you did not think about those activities, you were all right. But now that you have revealed your actions you're about to faint.

"Each warrior has his own way of *dreaming*. Each way is different. The only thing which we all have in common is that we play tricks in order to force ourselves to abandon the quest. The counter-measure is to persist in spite of all the barriers and disappointments."

He asked me then if I was capable of selecting topics for "dreaming." I said that I did not have the faintest idea of how to do that.

"The sorcerers explanation of how to select a topic

for *dreaming*," he said, "is that a warrior chooses the topic by deliberately holding an image in his mind while he shuts off his internal dialogue. In other words, if he is capable of not talking to himself for a moment and then holds the image or the thought of what he wants in *dreaming*, even if only for an instant, then the desired topic will come to him. I'm sure you've done that, although you were not aware of it."

There was a long pause and then don Juan began to sniff the air. It was as if he were cleaning his nose; he exhaled three or four times through his nostrils with great force. The muscles of his abdomen contracted in spasms, which he controlled by taking in short gasps of air.

"We won't talk about *dreaming* any more," he said. "You might become obsessed. If one is to succeed in anything, the success must come gently, with a great deal of effort but with no stress or obsession."

He stood up and walked to the edge of the bushes. He leaned forward and peered into the foliage. He seemed to be examining something in the leaves, without getting too close to them.

"What are you doing?" I asked, unable to contain my curiosity.

He turned to me, smiled and raised his brow.

"The bushes are filled with strange things," he said as he sat down again.

His tone was so casual that it scared me more than if he had let out a sudden yell. My notebook and pencil fell from my hands. He laughed and mimicked me and said that my exaggerated reactions were one of the loose ends that still existed in my life.

I wanted to raise a point but he would not let me talk.

"There's only a bit of daylight left," he said. "There are other things we ought to touch upon before the twilight sets in."

He then added that judging by my production in "dreaming" I must have learned how to stop my internal dialogue at will. I told him that I had.

At the beginning of our association don Juan had delineated another procedure: walking for long stretches without focusing the eyes on anything. His recommendation had been to not look at anything directly but, by slightly crossing the eyes, to keep a peripheral view of everything that presented itself to the eyes. He had insisted, although I had not understood at the time, that if one kept one's unfocused eyes at a point just above the horizon, it was possible to notice, at once, everything in almost the total 180-degree range in front of one's eyes. He had assured me that that exercise was the only way of shutting off the internal dialogue. He used to ask me for reports on my progress, and then he stopped inquiring about it.

I told don Juan that I had practiced the technique for years without noticing any change, but I had expected none anyway. One day, however, I had the shocking realization that I had just walked for about ten minutes without having said a single word to myself.

I mentioned to don Juan that on that occasion I also became cognizant that stopping the internal dialogue involved more than merely curtailing the words I said to myself. My entire thought processes had stopped and I had felt I was practically suspended, floating. A sensation of panic had ensued from that awareness and I had to resume my internal dialogue as an antidote.

"I've told you that the internal dialogue is what grounds us," don Juan said. "The world is such and such or so and so, only because we talk to ourselves about its being such and such or so and so."

Don Juan explained that the passageway into the world of sorcerers opens up after the warrior has learned to shut off the internal dialogue.

"To change our idea of the world is the crux of sorcery," he said. "And stopping the internal dialogue is the only way to accomplish it. The rest is just padding. Now you're in the position to know that nothing of what you've seen or done, with the exception of stopping the internal dialogue, could by itself have changed anything in you, or in your idea of the world. The pro-

vision is, of course, that that change should not be deranged. Now you can understand why a teacher doesn't clamp down on his apprentice. That would only breed obsession and morbidity."

He asked for details of other experiences I had had in shutting off the internal dialogue. I recounted everything that I could remember.

We talked until it became dark and I could no longer take notes in a comfortable manner; I had to pay attention to my writing and that altered my concentration. Don Juan became aware of it and began to laugh. He pointed out that I had accomplished another sorcery task, writing without concentrating. The moment he said it, I realized that I really did not pay attention to the act of taking notes. It seemed to be a separate activity I had nothing to do with. I felt odd. Don Juan asked me to sit by him in the center of the circle. He said it was too dark and I was no longer safe sitting so close to the edge of the chaparral. I felt a chill up my back and jumped to his side.

He made me face the southeast and asked me to command myself to be silent and without thoughts. I could not do it at first and had a moment of impatience. Don Juan turned his back to me and told me to lean on his shoulder for support. He said that once I had quieted down my thoughts, I should keep my eyes open, facing the bushes towards the southeast. In a mysterious tone he added that he was setting up a problem for me, and that if I resolved it I would be ready for another facet of the sorcerers' world.

I posed a weak question about the nature of the problem. He chuckled softly. I waited for his answer and then something in me was turned off. I felt I was suspended. My ears seemed to unplug and a myriad of noises in the chaparral became audible. There were so many that I could not distinguish them individually. I felt I was falling asleep and then all at once something caught my attention. It was not something which involved my thought processes; it was not a vision, or a feature of the environment either, yet my awareness had

been engaged by something. I was fully awake. My eyes were focused on a spot on the edge of the chaparral, but I was not looking, or thinking, or talking to myself. My feelings were clear bodily sensations; they did not need words. I felt I was rushing through something indefinite. Perhaps what would have ordinarily been my thoughts were rushing; at any rate, I had the sensation that I had been caught in a landslide and something was avalanching, with me at the crest. I felt the rush in my stomach. Something was putting me into the chaparral. I could distinguish the dark mass of the bushes in front of me. It was not, however, an undifferentiated darkness as it would ordinarily be. I could see every individual bush as if I were looking at them in a dark twilight. They seemed to be moving; the mass of their foliage looked like black skirts flowing towards me as if they were being blown by the wind, but there was no wind. I became absorbed in their mesmerizing movements; it was a pulsating ripple that seemed to draw them nearer and nearer to me. And then I noticed a lighter silhouette which seemed to be superimposed on the dark shapes of the bushes. I focused my eyes on a spot to the side of the lighter silhouette and I could make out a chartreuse glow on it. Then I looked at it without focusing and I had the certainty that the lighter silhouette was a man hiding in the underbrush.

I was, at that moment, in a most peculiar state of awareness. I was cognizant of the surroundings and of the mental processes that the surroundings engendered in myself, yet I was not thinking as I ordinarily think. For instance, when I realized that the silhouette superimposed on the bushes was a man, I recalled another occasion on the desert; I had noticed then, while don Genaro and I were walking in the chaparral at night, that a man was hiding in the bushes behind us, but the instant I had attempted to explain the phenomenon rationally I lost sight of the man. This time, however, I felt I had the upper hand and I refused to explain or to think anything at all. For a moment I had the impression that I could hold the man and force him to remain

where he was. I then experienced a strange pain in the pit of my stomach. Something seemed to rip inside me and I could not hold the muscles of my midsection tense any longer. At the very moment I let go, the dark shape of an enormous bird, or some sort of flying animal, lurched at me from the chapparal. It was as if the shape of the man had turned into the shape of a bird. I had the clear conscious perception of fear. I gasped and then let out a loud yell and fell on my back.

Don Juan helped me up. His face was very close to mine. He was laughing.

"What was that?" I shouted.

He hushed me, putting his hand over my mouth. He put his lips to my ear and whispered that we had to leave the area in a calm and collected fashion, as if nothing had happened.

We walked side by side. His pace was relaxed and even. A couple of times he turned around quickly. I did the same and twice I caught sight of a dark mass that seemed to be following us. I heard a loud eerie shriek behind me. I experienced a moment of sheer terror; ripples ran through the muscles of my stomach; they came in spasms and grew in intensity until they simply forced my body to run.

The only way of talking about my reaction has to be in don Juan's terminology; and thus I can say that my body, due to the fright I was experiencing, was capable of executing what he had called "the gait of power," a technique he had taught me years before, consisting of running in the darkness without tripping or hurting oneself in any way.

I was not fully aware of what I had done or how I had done it. Suddenly I found myself again at don Juan's house. Apparently he had also run and we had arrived at the same time. He lit his kerosene lantern, hung it from a beam in the ceiling and casually asked me to sit down and relax.

I jogged on the same spot for a while until my nervousness became more manageable. Then I sat down. He forcefully ordered me to act as if nothing had hap-

pened and handed me my notebook. I had not realized that in my haste to leave the bushes I had dropped it.

"What happened out there, don Juan?" I finally asked.

"You had an appointment with knowledge," he said, pointing with a movement of his chin to the dark edge of the desert chaparral. "I took you there because I caught a glimpse of knowledge prowling around the house earlier. You might say that knowledge knew that you were coming and was waiting for you. Rather than meeting it here, I felt it was proper to meet it on a power spot. Then I set up a test to see if you had enough personal power to isolate it from the rest of the things around us. You did fine."

"Wait a minute!" I protested. "I saw the silhouette of a man hiding behind a bush and then I saw a huge bird."

"You didn't see a man!" he said emphatically. "Neither did you see a bird. The silhouette in the bushes and what flew to us was a moth. If you want to be accurate in sorcerers' terms, but very ridiculous in your own terms, you could say that tonight you had an appointment with a moth. Knowledge is a moth."

He looked at me piercingly. The light of the lantern created strange shadows on his face. I moved my eyes away.

"Perhaps you'll have enough personal power to unravel that mystery tonight," he said. "If not tonight, perhaps tomorrow; remember, you still owe me six days."

Don Juan stood up and walked to the kitchen in the back of the house. He took the lantern and set it against the wall on the short round stump that he used as a bench. We sat down on the floor opposite each other and served ourselves some beans and meat from a pot that he had placed in front of us. We ate in silence.

He gave me furtive glances from time to time and seemed on the verge of laughing. His eyes were like two slits. When he looked at me he would open them a bit and the moistness of the corneas reflected the light of

the lantern. It was as if he were using the light to create a mirror reflection. He played with it, shaking his head almost imperceptibly every time he focused his eyes on me. The effect was a fascinating quiver of light. I became aware of his maneuvers after he had executed them a couple of times. I was convinced that he was acting with a definite purpose in mind. I felt compelled to ask him about it.

"I have an ulterior reason," he said reassuringly. "I'm soothing you with my eyes. You don't seem to be getting more nervous, do you?"

I had to admit that I felt quite at ease. The steady flicker in his eyes was not menacing and it had not scared or annoyed me in any way.

"How do you soothe me with your eyes?" I asked.

He repeated the imperceptible shake of his head. The corneas of his eyes were indeed reflecting the light of the kerosene lantern.

"Try to do it yourself," he said casually as he gave himself another serving of food. "You can soothe yourself."

I tried to shake my head; my movements were awkward.

"You won't soothe yourself bobbing your head like that," he said and laughed. "You'll give yourself a headache instead. The secret is not in the head shake but in the feeling that comes to the eyes from the area below the stomach. This is what makes the head shake."

He rubbed his umbilical region.

After I had finished eating I slouched against a pile of wood and some burlap sacks. I tried to imitate his head shake. Don Juan seemed to be enjoying himself immensely. He giggled and slapped his thighs.

Then a sudden noise interrupted his laughter. I heard a strange deep sound, like tapping on wood, that came from the chaparral. Don Juan jutted his chin, signaling me to remain alert.

"That's the little moth calling you," he said in an unemotional tone.

I jumped to my feet. The sound ceased instantaneous-

ly. I looked at don Juan for an explanation. He made a comical gesture of helplessness, shrugging his shoulders.

"You haven't fulfilled your appointment yet," he added.

I told him that I felt unworthy and that perhaps I should go home and come back when I felt stronger.

"You're talking nonsense," he snapped. "A warrior takes his lot, whatever it may be, and accepts it in ultimate humbleness. He accepts in humbleness what he is, not as grounds for regret but as a living challenge.

"It takes time for every one of us to understand that point and fully live it. I, for instance, hated the mere mention of the word 'humbleness.' I'm an Indian and we Indians have always been humble and have done nothing else but lower our heads. I thought humbleness was not in the warrior's way. I was wrong! I know now that the humbleness of a warrior is not the humbleness of a beggar. The warrior lowers his head to no one, but at the same time, he doesn't permit anyone to lower his head to him. The beggar, on the other hand, falls to his knees at the drop of a hat and scrapes the floor for anyone he deems to be higher; but at the same time, he demands that someone lower than him scrape the floor for him.

"That's why I told you earlier today that I didn't understand what masters felt like. I know only the humbleness of a warrior, and that will never permit me to be anyone's master."

We were quiet for a moment. His words had caused me a profound agitation. I was moved by them and at the same time I felt concerned with what I had witnessed in the chaparral. My conscious assessment was that don Juan was holding out on me and that he must have known what was really taking place.

I was involved in those deliberations when the same strange tapping noise jolted me out of my thoughts. Don Juan smiled and then began to chuckle.

"You like the humbleness of a beggar," he said softly. "You bow your head to reason."

"I always think that I'm being tricked," I said. "That's the crux of my problem."

"You're right. You are being tricked," he retorted with a disarming smile. "That cannot be your problem. The real crux of the matter is that you feel that I am deliberately lying to you, am I correct?"

"Yes. There is something in myself that doesn't let me believe that what's taking place is real."

"You're right again. Nothing of what is taking place is real."

"What do you mean by that, don Juan?"

"Things are real only after one has learned to agree on their realness. What took place this evening, for instance, cannot possibly be real to you, because no one could agree with you about it."

"Do you mean that you didn't see what happened?"

"Of course I did. But I don't count. I am the one who's lying to you, remember?"

Don Juan laughed until he coughed and choked. His laughter was friendly even though he was making fun of me.

"Don't pay too much attention to all my gibberish," he said reassuringly. "I'm just trying to relax you and I know that you feel at home only when you're muddled up."

His expression was deliberately comical and we both laughed. I told him that what he had just said made me feel more afraid than ever.

"You're afraid of me?" he asked.

"Not of you, but of what you represent."

"I represent the warrior's freedom. Are you afraid of that?"

"No. But I'm afraid of the awesomeness of your knowledge. There is no solace for me, no haven to go to."

"You're again confusing issues. Solace, haven, fear, all of them are moods that you have learned without ever questioning their value. As one can see, the black magicians have already engaged all your allegiance."

"Who are the black magicians, don Juan?"

"Our fellow men are the black magicians. And since you are with them, you too are a black magician. Think for a moment. Can you deviate from the path that they've lined up for you? No. Your thoughts and your actions are fixed forever in their terms. That is slavery. I, on the other hand, brought you freedom. Freedom is expensive, but the price is not impossible. So, fear your captors, your masters. Don't waste your time and your power fearing me."

I knew that he was right, and yet in spite of my genuine agreement with him I also knew that my lifelong habits would unavoidably make me stick to my old path. I did indeed feel like a slave.

After a long silence don Juan asked me if I had enough strength for another bout with knowledge.

"Do you mean with the moth?" I asked half in jest.

His body contorted with laughter. It was as if I had just told him the funniest joke in the world.

"What do you really mean when you say that knowledge is a moth?" I asked.

"I have no other meanings," he replied. "A moth is a moth. I thought that by now, with all your accomplishments, you would have had enough power to *see*. You caught sight of a man instead and that was not true *seeing*."

From the beginning of my apprenticeship, don Juan had depicted the concept of "seeing" as a special capacity that one could develop and which would allow one to apprehend the "ultimate" nature of things.

Over the years of our association I had developed a notion that what he meant by "seeing" was an intuitive grasp of things, or the capacity to understand something at once, or perhaps the ability to see through human interactions and discover covert meanings and motives.

"I should say that tonight, when you faced the moth, you were half looking and half *seeing*," don Juan proceeded. "In that state, although you were not altogether your usual self, you were still capable of being fully aware in order to operate your knowledge of the world."

Don Juan paused and looked at me. I did not know what to say at first.

"How was I operating my knowledge of the world?" I asked.

"Your knowledge of the world told you that in the bushes one can only find animals prowling or men hiding behind the foliage. You held that thought, and naturally you had to find ways to make the world conform to that thought."

"But I wasn't thinking at all, don Juan."

"Let's not call it thinking then. It is rather the habit of having the world always conform to our thoughts. When it doesn't, we simply make it conform. Moths as large as a man cannot be even a thought, therefore, for you, what was in the bushes had to be a man.

"The same thing happened with the coyote. Your old habits decided the nature of that encounter too. Something took place between you and the coyote, but it wasn't talk. I have been in the same quandary myself. I've told you that once I talked with a deer; now you've talked to a coyote, but neither you nor I will ever know what really took place at those times."

"What are you telling me, don Juan?"

"When the sorcerers' explanation became clear to me, it was too late to know what the deer did to me. I said that we talked, but that wasn't so. To say that we had a conversation is only a way of arranging it so I can talk about it. The deer and I did something, but at the time it was taking place I needed to make the world conform to my ideas, just like you did. I had been talking all my life, just like you, therefore my habits prevailed and were extended to the deer. When the deer came to me and did whatever it did, I was forced to understand it as talking."

"Is this the sorcerers' explanation?"

"No. This is my explanation for you. But it is not opposed to the sorcerers' explanation."

His statement threw me into a state of great intellectual excitation. For a while I forgot the prowling moth or even to take notes. I tried to rephrase his state-