

PEDRO P.
“THE COYOTE” (1994)

To tell you the truth, I would rather spend a month with the gringos in Pecos than one day in a Mexican jail. Other coyotes have told me some bad stories about beatings and other stuff that went on when they were in custody in the U.S. But in my case, the only thing I suffered was worry for my wife and my kids, who didn't know what had become of me and had nothing to live on while I was gone.

In the ten years I've worked as a *pollero*, I've brought thousands of people across – men, women, and children. And in all those years, no one has ever ratted on me. Mexicans are good people in this way. Besides, no one has any reason to finger a coyote who deals honestly with his customers.

The stories you hear about coyotes who rob the *pollos*, who collude with *asaltapollos*, the bandits who assault the *pollos* while they're in no-man's land – all these things really do happen. You hear about coyotes who rape the women they have promised to deliver safely to the other side, or who abandon people who have broken a leg or twisted an ankle jumping over the fence. These stories are true. But it is only a few *polleros* who do these things. This is a business like any other; you're going to find all kinds of people, good and bad, doing this work.

With the *migra* it's always a game of cat and mouse. You study their moves, you figure out how many men and what kind of equipment they're using that night. And you rely on the fact that you know that they know that they can't stop everyone who decides to cross on a given day. The trick is not to be one of the people they catch that day.

The *polleros* used to give a special rate to the women and the kids because they were crossing as part of a family. But now a lot more women are crossing. About a quarter or a third of the people I guide are women. And they're not traveling with their husbands or on their way to join husbands who are waiting in Los Angeles. These women are on their own, and they're headed to L.A. to look for jobs

Of course, I'm often afraid. Everyone who does this kind of work is afraid. I'm scared of the police on this side and the *migra* on the other, and the bandits who attack you in between. The worst thing is the bandits, because they carry knives and guns, and

they go after you when your're on your way back from San Ysidro and you have all the money you earned that night in your shoe.

I continue to work as a *pollero* because it is the only job I can get in Mexico where I can make really good money. My problem is that I don't want to live on the other side. I don't want to bring up my kids in the United States. I want them to live here, in their own country, where they can feel proud of who they are.

But I'll tell you what my dream is. My dream is to get papers: to get a real green card, not a fake. Then I could work in construction on the other side, and live here in Tijuana with my family. I'd like to operate the heavy equipment. I know how, and you make great money doing that in the U.S. I'd just go across every day to work, and then I'd come home to Tijuana at night. I could be really happy with that kind of life. Not just economically OK, but really happy, really content.

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