

I don't know in what year I was born, but my mother, María Concepción, told me that it was in the morning of the day they celebrate the Virgin Magdalene, there in Río Santiago, an *agencia* of the municipality of Huautla. None of my ancestors knew their age.<sup>1</sup>

My mother was born and raised in a place near Huautla on the way to San Andrés Hidalgo. My father, Crisanto Feliciano, was born and raised in Río Santiago. When they started to live together—they didn't get married—she was around fourteen and he twenty. My mother had lived three years with her man when I was born. I was baptized right away. My baptismal godparents were Juan Manuel and María Sebastiana, a campesino couple who felt a lot of affection for my father. My mother gave birth to María Ana, my sister, when I was two years old. We were the only two children born to them. I didn't know my father very well, since he died when I was three years old. I know that he was a very hard worker. He planted maize and beans on land he had succeeded in buying with his work. He sold what he harvested at the market in Huautla or in neighboring towns. Our home in Río Santiago was a little hut with walls of mud plastered over a bamboo

1. On August 25, 1976, the parish priest Arturo García issued a baptismal certificate for María Sabina, based on the original facts recorded in the archive of the Huautla church. One can see that the names of the baptismal godparents registered in the document don't coincide with those given by María Sabina. Nevertheless it should be pointed out that even today it is difficult to know the exact name of some Mazatecs because of their deficient pronunciation of Spanish names.

framework, and a thatched roof of sugarcane leaves. My mother made the tortillas and put the pot of beans, which she later served to each of us, on the fire. With our meals, we drank *pinole* water sweetened with cane sugar. It was drunk hot. At that time there was no coffee; few people grew it. We went to bed before it got dark. My father left to work the land very early, a little after the first rooster crowed. We slept on the ground, on mats, with our clothes on. That's how we all slept.

At the birth of my sister, María Ana, my father was already sick. There was no remedy for his sickness because the origin of his illness wasn't a matter of this world, but a punishment of the powerful Lord of Thunder who takes care of and gives fertility to what is sown. The thing is that my father, when he was still single, had aroused the anger of this great and powerful Lord. The story is as follows:

One dawn the young Crisanto Feliciano started for his field to clear it; it was necessary to get rid of the leaves and bushes on the land. He took his hoe and his machete. Like all the men of his time, he wore white pants and shirt of pure cotton. On festival days he put on a poncho that reached to his knees and was tied with a silk belt at the waist.

For two days Crisanto Feliciano worked on his land to gather together the leaves and weeds and all the garbage that impeded a good planting; then he formed a pile with it all in a place near someone else's field. Finally he set the pile on fire. The sticks, the dry leaves, and the weeds burned easily. It was late afternoon and the end of the day was near. The wind blew strong, the day had been very hot, and one could feel the dryness. But the flames of the pile got lively, and the wind played with them until they got near the neighboring field; so much so that they burned some corn plants. Seeing that, Crisanto rushed to put out the flames burning in the other's cornfield. Not much was burned, but Crisanto knew that to have damaged the field, even though the damage was slight, could cause his death. He knew that all

the crops were protected by the Lord of Thunder: if somebody robbed ears of corn he would die. If a donkey ate in a cornfield, it too would die. Where land was protected like that, neither rats, moles, nor birds hurt it. A crop protected by the Lord of Thunder grows pretty and abundant. Crisanto was condemned to death: he had burned a sacred cornfield. Only some plants, but it was enough to receive the curse of the Lord of Thunder. People who deliberately or imprudently harm a sacred crop suffer from lumps that come out on the chest and neck. The lumps burst when they've matured and turn into purulent and repugnant pimples. Then the people die. The damage that is done to a sacred crop can't be paid for with anything: neither by replacing the destroyed plants, nor by paying the damage in money to the owner.

Crisanto knew that he was lost but he had one hope. His grandfather and his father were Wise Ones:<sup>2</sup> they used *saint children*<sup>3</sup> to speak with the Lords of the Mountains. The Wise Ones can speak with the beings who are the masters of all the things in the world. And they could speak with the Lord of Thunder. They could ask him to pardon

2. This term is used frequently in the text. It is the name that is given to the Mazatec shaman. The native words are *chota chjine* (wise person). Among the Mazatecs are found three categories of curers. On the lowest level is the Sorcerer (*tji?e*), who is said to be able to transform himself into an animal (*nagual*) at night. He has a great capacity for doing evil and for turning other people into *naguales*. On the intermediate level is the Curer (*chotaxi v?e'nta*), properly speaking, who uses massage, potions, and devices such as his own language in which he invokes the Lords of different places, mountains, and springs. These two categories are well known in rural Mexico, but in Huautla there is a third and still superior one: that of Wise One and doctor (*chota chjine*), who doesn't do evil or use potions to cure. His therapy—or hers—involves the ingestion of the mushroom, through which he acquires the power to diagnose and cure the sick person, whom he also gives several pairs of mushrooms to eat. [The phonetic symbol ? indicates a glottal stop.]

3. "Saint children," "Little-One-Who-Springs-Forth," "little saints," and "little things" are four euphemistic terms for the mushrooms in Mazatec. María Sabina generally calls them *saint children* or simply *children*.

Crisanto who from imprudence had burned the plants of a protected cornfield.

So thought Crisanto and that gave him hope for his life. Meanwhile he didn't want to alarm his family. He preferred for the moment to keep quiet about his pain. "Later I'll tell them . . ." he said to himself.

Months passed and young Crisanto went on hiding his pain.

But on a certain occasion, his father, Pedro Feliciano, stayed awake to eat the *saint children*. There, during the night, the Wise One saw that his son would soon die from the pimples. The following morning, he said: "Crisanto, my son, I've had a terrible vision. I've seen you turned into a turkey. The *Little-One-Who-Springs-Forth* has revealed to me that you are condemned to die. I know the reason as well, the *Little-One-Who-Springs-Forth* himself has told me . . ."

In that way, Crisanto found himself obliged to tell his father about the burned cornfield.

His father consoled him, saying: "We will fight against the force of the Lord of Thunder. We will stay awake with *Little-One-Who-Springs-Forth*. We will ask the Lords that you be pardoned." Later the Wise Man, Pedro Feliciano, accompanied by his father, Juan Feliciano, stayed awake several times with the *saint children*, but they didn't obtain anything. They also called in Sorcerers and Sucking Doctors without achieving anything.

Later, one night, as Crisanto tried to sleep, he passed a hand over his chest, and his fingers stopped at the feel of little bumps above his nipples. "What can that be?" he asked himself. With a shock, he realized everything: they were the lumps from the curse that were beginning to break out. He felt fear and deep worry. That night he thought about his life. He thought that he was very young (he would have been around twenty years old), and worry didn't let him sleep for the rest of the night.

The following morning, Crisanto said decisively to his father: “I desire a woman for myself. I’ve seen a girl on the way to Huautla. She lives with her parents just beyond San Andrés. You could ask for her to come and live with me.”

With time the parents asked for the girl, and one day Crisanto went for his woman, María Concepción. He took her to live in Río Santiago.

My father suffered from his illness and my mother understood him. The first lumps burst, forming purulent pimples that later covered his neck and part of his chest.

With the passing years, my father got worse. When I was around three years old, I imagine, and my sister, María Ana, barely four or five months old, he died. Neither the Sorcerers nor the Curers nor the Wise Ones could heal him. Poor man, he died, turned into a turkey. Because the mortal curse of the Lord of Thunder makes one sick little by little. The cursed person lasts years suffering: it can be four, five, six, or seven, in which time the lumps turn into purulent pimples. Some persons condemned to suffer like that resign themselves to die, others fight against the curse of the Lord of Thunder. The Sorcerers speak to where the echo is, to the mountains and the slopes. There they ask for help from the Lord of the Holy Mountain. But little can be done against the curse of the Lord of Thunder. The neck of the sick person looks like that of a turkey. Exactly like that of a turkey. And that is because the Lord of Thunder has at his service a sacred turkey. This turkey is the one who is charged with punishing the persons and animals who dare to damage the crops. The turkey turns the people or animals into turkeys. That’s why they die with pimples on their neck. The Sorcerers sacrifice hens, they give money (cacao beans) and turkey eggs to Chicon Nindó.

My mother, upon being left a widow, seeing that there was nothing to hope for from her in-laws, decided to return to her parents. She had lived with Crisanto Feliciano for six years. At that time she was still young, somewhere around twenty. My father must have died at twenty-five or twenty-six; I don't know the exact age at which he died.

My maternal grandparents were very poor. My mother brought us to live with them and forgot Río Santiago completely.

My grandfather, Manuel Cosme, already quite an old man, worked as a peon for the landholders. My grandmother, María Estefanía, did the tasks of the house and took care of the land around the little hut, where corn and beans were planted. Gourds and chayotes grew there as well. The place where we came to live—and where I'm still living—is called Fortress Mountain, above the Mixtec section of town, very near Nindó Tocosho. My grandparents had abandoned the hut along the path to San Andrés to which, one day, Crisanto Feliciano went for his wife. Now they lived on this high place from where one could see, down there below, the little town of Huautla. There were only a few houses of thatch and shingle at that time. Trees and bushes covered everything, but the church was already built.

My grandparents told me that in their youth they had worked as servants for the priest, Catarino García. This priest lived many years in Huautla. He had children by several Indian women. At his death he asked—and it was granted—to be buried underneath the altar of the Huautla church.

Life with my grandparents was difficult. By custom we got up at dawn, when by the light of a burning *ocote* torch, Grandmother, my mother, and my aunt Juanita worked wool, silk, or cotton. The grandparents raised silkworms inside the hut; the worms took almost a year

to raise. First the little butterflies laid their eggs on mats, they laid them in the month of March. At five months, the little worms came out of their little eggs and we gave them food, *mora* leaves that they ate noisily. We picked out the little worms and separated them from the bigger ones so that those didn't do them harm. The worms grew to the size of a finger. Three months after having opened their eggs, they began to drool [to leave secretions—TN], sticks were fixed up for them against the wall of the house, and on that bed of sticks they deposited the silk. It wasn't easy to raise silkworms. They required a lot of care. During the day or during the night, the silk was cleaned, the leavings of the worms were gotten rid of. They had to be fed well; if not, the worms didn't give enough or good enough silk.

Finally the silk was cleaned and gathered together. It was used to make belts that the men used as part of their clothing. From the wool and cotton, fabrics were made with which we dressed. Our life was invariable. We would wake up when the light of day was still far off. When the first rooster of the morning crowed, we were already sipping our *pinole* water sweetened with cane sugar to alleviate our hunger and cold. From time to time we drank tea made from lemon or orange leaves and only rarely coffee. My mother made the tortillas and embroidered. My grandmother and aunt worked at the primitive loom. Grandfather always hired himself out as a fieldworker, the same as an uncle of ours named Emilio Cristino.

As my sister and I grew up, our chores in the house went on growing. We took care of the chickens in the woods or gathered sticks that were used to make the fire on which the food was cooked.

I must have been eleven and my sister nine when Grandfather took us to plant corn. He made little planting stakes for us, and with those stakes we opened the hole in the ground in which we clumsily deposited the kernels of corn. The whole family went to the planting.

Sitting on the ground, María Ana and I dug with difficulty. I think the kernels fell on the surface of the ground in disorder, we were so little. In contrast, the adults sowed in a perfect line, leaving the kernels at the right depth. When the harvest drew near and the corn was tall, taller than María Ana and I, it made us laugh with joy.

If it wasn't the time of working in the fields, we were sent to take care of the chickens in the woods or two or three goats, which were finally sold. We took advantage of this time to play with our dolls that we made ourselves. One of my dolls I called Florencia José. She was a rag doll and I made her a silk *huipil*. In the house we couldn't play because my Aunt Juanita and my grandfather were too strict. They didn't like to see us playing; everything was work, work, work.

If it was a matter of planting beans, they called us. If it was a matter of planting corn, they took us there. The same at planting as at harvest.

On ordinary days, we ate beans, if there were any, or we made do with plain tortillas splashed with hot chile sauce, but on the Days of the Dead one could eat *quelite*, *yerba mora*, or *guasmole*.<sup>4</sup> On festival days, Grandfather bought beef or goat meat that Grandmother prepared in a hot stew.

The little food that Grandmother served us at dawn calmed the hunger that we had held in for a long time. I think our will to live was very great, greater than the will of many men. The will to live kept us fighting from day to day to finally get some morsel that would alleviate the hunger María Ana and I felt. Aunt Juanita hid the food, and even if my mother gave us something, hunger soon bothered us again.

4. [Translator's note] *Quelite* and *mora* are greens like spinach that are gathered wild. *Guasmole* is a semitropical fruit that is cooked in *tezmole*. It is abundant only in autumn.

We made efforts to hold a single mouthful in our stomachs, every evening, every morning.

Several men knew that my mother had become a widow and arrived to ask for her. They proposed to her properly: as the custom is, they arrived at dawn with *aguardiente* and chickens as a gift that they gave to my grandfather, Manuel Cosme. My mother never accepted. “My only commitment from here on will be to raise my daughters” was her reply, despite having been married only six years.

She lived with me, single, for the rest of her life.

3

Once my uncle Emilio Cristino got so sick he couldn't get up. I was a little girl of five, six, or seven. I didn't know what his sickness was. Grandmother María Estefanía, worried, went in search of a Wise Man named Juan Manuel to cure Uncle.

The Wise Man Juan Manuel, who was not a very old man, arrived at our hut after nightfall. He had a bundle wrapped up in banana leaves that he treated with exaggerated care. I went up close to see what he had in the bundle, but rapidly the Wise Man Juan Manuel took it in his hands and prevented me from getting any closer, directing an authoritarian look at me. “Nobody can look at what I have here. It isn't good: a curious look could spoil what I have here,” he said. Curiosity made me stay awake. I saw how the Wise Man Juan Manuel unwrapped the banana leaves. From there he took out various big fresh mushrooms the size of a hand. I was accustomed to seeing those mushrooms in the woods where I took care of the chickens and the goats. There were many of that kind of mushroom; their brown color contrasted with the green of the pastures.

The Wise Man Juan Manuel had arrived to cure Uncle Emilio

Cristino; for the first time I witnessed a vigil with the *saint children*. I understood that later. I saw how the Wise Man Juan Manuel lit the candles and talked to the Lords of the Mountains and the Lords of the Springs. I saw how he distributed the mushrooms counting them by pairs and gave them to each of those present, including the sick person. Later, in complete darkness, he talked, talked, and talked. His language was very pretty. It pleased me. At times the Wise Man sang, sang, and sang. I didn't understand his words, but I liked them. It was a different language from what we speak in the daytime. It was a language that without my comprehending it attracted me. It was a language that spoke of stars, animals, and other things unknown to me.

A long time had gone by since it had gotten dark, and still I didn't feel sleepy. Seated very quietly on my mat, I followed the vigil attentively. One thing that I did understand, yes, was that the mushrooms had made old Juan Manuel sing. After midnight, the Wise Man lit a candle and stuck it in the ground. I saw that he danced while he said that he "saw" animals, objects, and people. No, I couldn't understand him completely. The Wise Man spoke without rest. He burned incense and rubbed "San Pedro"<sup>5</sup> on the forearms of the sick person.

By dawn my sick uncle, who didn't appear so sick anymore, began to sit up slowly. The Wise Man Juan Manuel animated him with his strange language. Uncle got to his feet. He hadn't done that since some days before because of his illness.

Two weeks later Uncle Emilio Cristino had recovered his health completely.

Some days after the vigil in which the Wise Man Juan Manuel cured Uncle, María Ana and I were taking care of our chickens in the

5. The name given to a ground-up tobacco (*nicotiana rustica*) mixed with lime and sometimes with garlic as well. Its use is ceremonial, and it is considered to have power against the evil influences of sorcery.

woods so that they wouldn't be the victims of hawks or foxes. We were seated under a tree when suddenly I saw near me, within reach of my hand, several mushrooms. They were the same mushrooms that the Wise Man Juan Manuel had eaten. I knew them well. My hands gently tore up one mushroom, then another. I looked at them up close. "If I eat you, you, and you, I know that you will make me sing beautifully," I said to them. I remembered that my grandparents spoke of these mushrooms with great respect. That was why I knew that they weren't bad.

Without thinking much about it, I put the mushrooms in my mouth and chewed them up. Their taste wasn't pleasant; on the contrary, they were bitter, tasting of roots, of earth. I ate them all up. My sister María Ana, watching me, did the same.

After having eaten the mushrooms, we felt dizzy, as if we were drunk, and we began to cry; but this dizziness passed and then we became very content. Later we felt good. It was like a new hope in life. That was how I felt.

In the days that followed, when we felt hungry, we ate the mushrooms. And not only did we feel our stomachs full, but content in spirit as well. The mushrooms made us ask God not to make us suffer so much. We told him that we were always hungry, that we felt cold. We didn't have anything: only hunger, only cold. I didn't know in reality whether the mushrooms were good or bad. Nor did I even know whether they were food or poison. But I felt that they spoke to me. After eating them I heard voices. Voices that came from another world. It was like the voice of a father who gives advice. Tears rolled down our cheeks, abundantly, as if we were crying for the poverty in which we lived.

Another day we ate the mushrooms and I had a vision: a well-dressed man appeared; he was as big as a tree. I heard the mysterious

voice that said: “This is your father, Crisanto Feliciano. . . .” My father. It was years since he had died, now it gave me pleasure to know him. The immense man, my father, spoke. Pointing at me he said these words: “María Sabina, kneel down. Kneel and pray. . . .” I kneeled and prayed. I spoke to God who each time I felt to be more familiar. Closer to me. I felt as if everything that surrounded me was God. Now I felt that I spoke a lot and that my words were beautiful.

María Ana and I continued to eat the mushrooms. We ate lots, many times, I don’t remember how many. Sometimes Grandfather and at other times my mother came to the woods and gathered us up from the ground where we were sprawled or kneeling. “What have you done?” they asked. They picked us up bodily and carried us home. In their arms we continued laughing, singing, or crying. They never scolded us nor hit us for eating mushrooms. Because they knew that it isn’t good to scold a person who has eaten the *little things* because it could cause contrary emotions and it’s possible that one might feel one was going crazy.

The next rainy season, when the mushrooms had returned, we ate them again.

Sometime later I knew that the mushrooms were like God. That they gave wisdom, that they cured illnesses, and that our people, since a long time ago, had eaten them. That they had power, that they were the blood of Christ.

Years later, when I became a widow for the second time, I gave myself up for always to wisdom, in order to cure the sicknesses of people and to be myself always close to God. One should respect the little mushrooms. At bottom I feel they are my family. As if they were my parents, my blood. In truth I was born with my destiny. To be a Wise Woman. To be a daughter of the *saint children*.

And I never went to school where I could have learned to read,

to write or speak Castilian. My parents spoke only Mazatec. I never learned another language. What's more, I didn't know what school was, nor did I know it even existed; and if there had been a school I wouldn't have gone, because there wasn't time. In those days, people worked a lot.

4

By the end of our childhood, the work load had increased for María Ana and me. We had learned to make tortillas, to cook the meals, to wash, and to sweep.

One dawn, some people arrived who spoke a long time with my mother and grandparents. The people went and my mother told me that they had come to ask for me. They wanted me to unite myself in marriage with a young man. The people came once or twice, but I didn't see any marriageable young man among them; nonetheless, I met the one who was to be my husband the day he came for me. There wasn't any wedding. My mother, without consulting me, ordered me to gather my clothes together, saying that from that moment on I didn't belong to them anymore. "Now you belong to this young man who will be your husband. Go with him. Attend him well. You're a little woman . . ." were her words. That is the custom.

I was fourteen. During the first days of my new life, I felt scared because I didn't know what was happening. Later I resigned myself. With the passage of time, I loved my husband very much. His name was Serapio Martínez. He was a young man of twenty. He liked to dress in clean clothes and didn't appear to be a wastrel. I found later that he was good-hearted. He didn't drink much *aguardiente*, almost none, and he didn't like to work in the fields. With pride I can say that he knew how to read and write. He dedicated himself to the commerce of the red and black thread that is used to embroider the hui-

pils that we women wear. He also sold casseroles, plates, and cups. He traveled to Córdoba, Vera Cruz, to Tehuacán and to Puebla to buy the merchandise that he sold in Huautla or in the nearby towns. He traveled on foot at the beginning and transported the merchandise on his back. It took him eight days to go to Puebla and back. With time he succeeded in buying some pack animals on whose backs he transported what he bought there.

When I told him that I was pregnant, he took it naturally. He didn't show any feeling, neither joy nor sorrow; he barely stammered: "Then prepare yourself to be a mother." Upon returning from his travels he talked to me about the conditions of the road or spoke of the new prices of the threads or casseroles.

One time he didn't speak as usual. Upon asking him why he was silent, he answered: "I know that in Huautla they're getting people together to fight with guns. Some call themselves Carrancistas and others Zapatistas. They're going around with rifles and horses. Soon they'll come for me. They'll give me my rifle; if they see that I'm good, they'll give me a horse."

Serapio's words were fulfilled. The men of war took him away. I didn't put up any resistance.

He went when Catarino, my first child, was hardly ten days old. "Don't worry, Sabi," Serapio told me. "I'll find a way to send you some money." I watched him until I lost sight of him along the path. He went with some men who came for him. I cried a lot. But with the passing of the days, I comforted myself with the idea that he would soon return. I stayed with my mother in my little hut. My grandparents had already died; Uncle Emilio and Aunt Juanita had died as well.

The new soldiers were quartered in Huautla for several days. Afterwards they left. Serapio was named bugler at first. A year later he

was a major and worked under the orders of General Adolfo Pineda,<sup>6</sup> who I know, Álvaro, was your grandfather. During the time that Serapio was at war, money reached me that he sent irregularly. A soldier went from house to house, leaving verbal notes, letters, and money. Serapio didn't write me because I didn't know how to read. He sent me a note only once. I looked for a person who knew how to read to tell me what was written in it. He sent to say that I shouldn't worry about him, that he was well. But on other occasions, there was neither note nor money, only the cruel news: "Serapio has died in combat." I cried. I cried on the little body of my recently born son, Catarino.

In that time the town lived in fear. We who had relatives in the war were in constant dread. A man arrived and said: "Sabi, don't afflict yourself anymore. Serapio is alive." In a little while the version changed: "Serapio is lost, nobody knows anything about him. We're confident he will appear soon." Later a hope: "Serapio has appeared." And then another disillusion: "No. He's dead." In the end I accustomed myself to this life of upsets, and there were moments when it didn't matter to me if Serapio was still alive or already dead. The rumors that arrived at my door only received a cold thank you.

But I felt my heart become big with joy when, after six months, Serapio appeared before me. At first sight I didn't recognize him. He had cartridge belts, a heavy rifle, and a military cap. He spoke very little to me about his life as a soldier, only that they had chosen him for a bugler and that when his superior died in combat, he had left the trumpet to take up the rifle of the dead soldier. What's more, they saw that he was agile. To test him they once made him run next to a horse, and they saw that he had a lot of stamina. The agile had more oppor-

6. Of Mazatec origin, Pineda was one of the leaders of the Carrancista movement in Huautla during the Mexican Revolution.

tunity to go up in rank. The agile and the valiant. Bravery came first. And Serapio was brave, his youth helped him.

Serapio went back to the war again and I didn't worry so much. He returned eight months later, not to go again. By that time my son Catarino was beginning to walk.

It's true that Serapio drank little *aguardiente* and that he worked a lot, but he liked women. He brought several loose women to my house. There were three of us under the same roof when that happened. The loose women left my house fifteen or thirty days after they arrived. I wasn't jealous because I felt myself to be Serapio's true wife. With him I had three children: Catarino, Viviana, and Apolonia. Each one of my children was born at intervals of a year and a half.

My husband's liking for women made our relations not as good as I would have liked. I loved him and it hurt me to know that he was in love with a girl in the Hot Country. He became more and more distant from me because he preferred the other.

Serapio caught the sickness of the wind [bronchial pneumonia] in the Hot Country and died after three days of agony. His pack animals and money stayed in the hands of the other woman.

Thus my marital life ended. I had a husband for six years, the same number of years that my father lived with my mother. The same as her, I became a widow at twenty.

5

I never ate the *saint children* while I lived with Serapio, since in accordance with our beliefs the woman who takes mushrooms should not have relations with men. Those who are going to stay up shouldn't have sexual relations for four days before and four days after the vigil.

Those who want to can complete five and five. I didn't take the *saint children* because I was afraid that my man wouldn't understand it. The condition should be fulfilled faithfully.

During my first years of widowhood, I felt pains from my deliveries. My waist and hips hurt me. I sent for a woman to massage me who alleviated me only a little. I also gave myself steam baths without much result. I called in a Curer and a Sucking Doctor as well but they didn't alleviate me at all. Finally I decided to take the *saint children* again. I took them alone, without recourse to any Wise One.

Those *little things* worked in my body, but I remember that the words I spoke weren't particularly good. I took them only to press my waist with my hands gently once or twice. I massaged myself in all the parts of my body where it hurt. Days went by and I got better. And I had decided to take them because I was clean. I didn't have a husband. At bottom I knew that I was a doctor woman. I knew what my destiny was. I felt it deep within me. I felt that I had a great power, a power that awakened in me in the vigils.

But in the house there was hunger. So I began to work to support my mother and my three children. Arduous constant work didn't scare me. I knew how to furrow the earth and split kindling with an axe, I knew how to plant and pick ears of corn. I worked like a strong man; sometimes I traveled to Teotitlán, where I bought pots which I resold in the market of Huautla. The raising of silkworms and the difficult work of joining wool and cotton together diminished when the merchants of Huautla began to bring cloth from the city. Since then we know muslin and colored fabrics.

In those years of my widowhood, I planted corn and beans. I also harvested coffee. On the days when I worked in the fields, I dug trenches where I deposited my little children so that they wouldn't

bother me. At other times, I sold bread and candles in the ranches and the neighboring towns roundabout like San Miguel, Tenango, or Río Santiago.

6

Some years, I don't know how many, after I became a widow for the first time, my sister María Ana got sick. She felt pains in her stomach; they were sharp stabs that made her double up and groan from pain. Each time I saw her she was worse. If she felt more or less well, she began her housework; but, without her being able to control herself, there came a moment when she fainted in the path.

Her fainting spells occurred more frequently later.

With great fear for her health, I contracted Curers to heal her, but I could see with anxiety that her illness got worse. One morning she didn't get up from her bed; she trembled and groaned. I felt preoccupied as never before. I called various Curers but it was useless; they couldn't cure my sister.

That afternoon, seeing my sister stretched out, I imagined her dead. My only sister. No, that couldn't be. She couldn't die. I knew that the *saint children* had the power. I had eaten them as a little girl and remembered that they didn't do harm. I knew that our people ate them to heal their sicknesses. So I made a decision; that same night I would take the holy mushrooms. I did it. To her I gave three pairs. I ate many in order for them to give me immense power. I can't lie: I must have eaten thirty pairs of the "landslide" variety.

When the *children* were working inside my body, I prayed and asked God to help me cure María Ana. Little by little I felt that I could speak with more and more facility. I went close to the sick woman. The *saint children* guided my hands to press her hips. Softly I mas-

saged her where she said it hurt. I spoke and sang. I felt that I sang beautifully. I said what those *children* obliged me to say.

I went on pressing my sister, her stomach and her hips. Finally a lot of blood came out. Water and blood as if she were giving birth. I didn't get frightened because I knew that the *Little-One-Who-Springs-Forth* was curing her through me. Those *saint children* gave me advice and I carried it out. I attended my sister until the bleeding stopped. Afterward she left off groaning and slept. My mother sat down next to her to attend to her.

I couldn't sleep. The little *saints* continued working in my body. I remember that I had a vision: some people appeared who inspired me with respect. I knew they were the Principal Ones of whom my ancestors spoke. They were seated behind a table on which there were many written papers. I knew that they were important papers. There were a number of Principal Ones, six or eight of them. Some looked at me, others read the papers on the table, others appeared to be searching for something among the same papers. I knew that they weren't of flesh and bone. I knew that they weren't beings of water or tortilla. I knew that it was a revelation that the *saint children* were giving me. Right away I heard a voice. A voice that was sweet but authoritarian at the same time. Like the voice of a father who loves his children but raises them strictly. A wise voice that said: "These are the Principal Ones." I understood that the mushrooms were speaking to me. I felt an infinite happiness. On the Principal Ones' table a book appeared, an open book that went on growing until it was the size of a person. In its pages there were letters. It was a white book, so white it was resplendent.

One of the Principal Ones spoke to me and said: "María Sabina, this is the Book of Wisdom. It is the Book of Language. Everything

that is written in it is for you. The Book is yours, take it so that you can work.” I exclaimed with emotion: “That is for me. I receive it.”

The Principal Ones disappeared and left me alone in front of the immense Book. I knew that it was the Book of Wisdom.

The Book was before me, I could see it but not touch it. I tried to caress it but my hands didn't touch anything. I limited myself to contemplating it and, at that moment, I began to speak. Then I realized that I was reading the Sacred Book of Language. My Book. The Book of the Principal Ones.

I had attained perfection. I was no longer a simple apprentice. For that, as a prize, as a nomination, the Book had been granted me. When one takes the *saint children*, one can see the Principal Ones.<sup>7</sup> Otherwise not. And it's because the mushrooms are saints; they give wisdom. Wisdom is Language. Language is in the Book. The Book is granted by the Principal Ones. The Principal Ones appear through the great power of the *children*.

I learned the wisdom of the Book. Afterward, in my later visions, the Book no longer appeared because I already had its contents in my memory.

The vigil in which I cured my sister María Ana I conducted as the ancient Mazatecs did. I used candles of pure wax; flowers, white lilies and gladiolas (all kinds of flowers can be used as long as they have scent and color); copal and San Pedro as well.

In a brazier I burned the copal and with the smoke incensed the *saint children* that I held in my hands. Before eating them, I spoke to

7. According to the explanations that old people in Huautla have given me, the Principal Ones are persons who head a municipal office or else it is the title that is given to persons who have important posts. With respect to the visions of María Sabina, the Principal Ones are the personification of the mushrooms she has eaten. The mushrooms turn into people who handle important papers.

them. I asked them for favor. That they bless us, that they teach us the way, the truth, the cure. That they give us the power to follow the tracks of evil in order to be done with it. I said to the mushrooms: “I will take your blood. I will take your heart. Because my conscience is pure, it is clean like yours. Give me truth. May Saint Peter and Saint Paul be with me.” When I felt dizzy, I blew out the candles. The darkness serves as a background for what is seen.

In that same vigil, after the Book disappeared, I had another vision: I saw the Supreme Lord of the Mountains, Chicon Nindó. I saw a man on horseback come toward my hut. I knew—the voice told me—that that being was an important person. His mount was beautiful: a white horse, white as foam. A beautiful horse.

The personage reined up his mount at the door of my hut. I could see him through the walls. I was inside the house but my eyes had the power to see through any obstacle. The personage waited for me to go out.

With decision I went out to meet him. I stood next to him.

Yes, it was Chicon Nindó, he who lives on Nindó Tocosho, he who is the Lord of the Mountains. He who has the power to enchant spirits. He who himself cures the sick. To whom turkeys are sacrificed, to whom the Curers give cacao in order for him to cure.

I stood next to him and went closer. I saw that he didn't have a face though he wore a white sombrero. His face, yes, his face was like a shadow.

The night was black; the clouds covered the sky but Chicon Nindó was like a being covered by a halo. I became mute.

Chicon Nindó didn't say a word. All of a sudden he set his mount into motion to continue on his way. He disappeared along the path, in the direction of his dwelling place: the enormous Mountain of the Adoration, Nindó Tocosho. He lives there, while I live on Fortress

Mountain, the closest one to Nindó Tocosho. That makes us neighbors. Chicon Nindó had come because in my wise Language I had called him.

I entered the house and had another vision: I saw that something fell from the sky with a great roar, like a lightning bolt. It was a luminous object that blinded. I saw that it fell through a hole in one of the walls. The fallen object turned into a kind of vegetal being, covered by a halo like Chicon Nindó's. It was like a bush with flowers of many colors; in its head it had a great radiance. Its body was covered with leaves and stalks. There it stood, in the center of the hut. I looked straight at it. Its arms and legs were like branches and it was soaked with freshness and behind it appeared a red background. The vegetal being lost itself in this red background until it disappeared completely. When the vision vanished, I was sweating, sweating. My sweat wasn't warm but cool. I realized that I was crying and that my tears were crystals that tinkled when they fell on the ground. I went on crying but I whistled and clapped, sounded and danced. I danced because I knew that I was the great Clown woman and the Lord clown woman. At dawn I slept placidly. I slept, but it wasn't a deep sleep; rather I felt that I was rocking in a reverie . . . as if my body were swaying in a gigantic hammock, suspended from the sky, which swung between the mountains.

I woke up when the world was already in sunlight. It was morning, I touched my body and the ground to make sure that I had returned to the world of humans. I was no longer near the Principal Ones. Seeing what surrounded me, I looked for my sister María Ana. She was asleep. I didn't want to wake her. I also saw that a part of the walls of the hut had fallen down, that another was about to fall. Now I believe that while the *saint children* worked in my body, I myself knocked over the wall with the weight of my body. I suppose that when I danced I hit against the wall and toppled it over. In the fol-

lowing days the people who passed asked what had happened to the house. I limited myself to telling them that the rains and winds of the last few days had weakened the mud-wattled walls and finally overthrown them.

And María Ana got better. She was healed once and for all. To this day she lives in good health with her husband and her children near Santa Cruz de Juárez.

From that cure on I had faith in the *saint children*. People realized how difficult it was to cure my sister. Many people learned of it and in a few days they came in search of me. They brought their sick. They came from places far away. I cured them with the Language of the *children*. The people came from Tenango, Río Santiago, or San Juan Coatzospan. The sick arrived looking pale, but the mushrooms told me what the remedy was. They advised me what to do to cure them. People have continued to seek me. And since I received the Book I have become one of the Principal Ones. If they appear, I sit down with them and we drink beer or *aguardiente*. I have been among them since the time when, gathered together behind a table with important papers, they gave me wisdom, the perfect word: the Language of God.

Language makes the dying return to life. The sick recover their health when they hear the words taught by the *saint children*. There is no mortal who can teach this Language.

After I had cured my sister María Ana, I understood that I had found my path. The people knew it and came to me to cure their sick. In search of a cure came those who had been enchanted by elves, those who had lost their spirit from fright in the woods, at the river, or along the path. For some there was no remedy and they died. I cure with Language, the Language of the *saint children*. When they advise me to sacrifice chickens, they are placed on the parts where it hurts. The rest is Language. But my path to wisdom was soon to be cut off.

Twelve years after I became a widow, a man named Marcial Carrera began to woo me. Really, I didn't have any need for a man because I knew how to support myself. I knew how to work; my family, at least, didn't suffer as much as I had. There was hunger, yes, but it wasn't as burning as what María Ana and I had experienced. My work helped each one have something to eat and something to wear.

Marcial Carrera insisted. In accordance with the custom, he brought his parents to speak with my mother. My mother persuaded me to accept that man. She said that a man in the house would help to make my work less heavy. The days passed and I thought about it because my suitor didn't appear to be a worker. What's more, he had the reputation of being irresponsible and a drunk.

But in the end I gave in. I stated my conditions: if Marcial wanted a woman, he would have to come to live in my house because I wasn't going to move my mother, my children, my mat, my pots, my hoes, and my machetes to his. It seemed to me that my house was better than poor Marcial's.

Marcial accepted my conditions and he came to live in my house. With time, I found that Marcial drank a lot of *aguardiente*. He was a Curer. He used turkey eggs and macaw feathers to do sorcery.

He hit me frequently and made me cry. He didn't like to work in the fields and didn't even know how to use a hoe with dexterity.

As I saw that Marcial earned little money, that it wasn't enough to cover the small expenses of the house, I was forced to return to work. I went back to retailing bread and candles.

In the thirteen years that I lived with Marcial I had six children. They died, all of them; only my daughter Aurora survived. My children died from sickness or were murdered. While I lived with Mar-

cial I never took the *saint children*. I feared that he wouldn't understand me and would spoil my Wise Woman's bodily cleanliness.

Marcial, the same as my first husband, Serapio, liked other women. The sons of a lady with whom he had relations beat him up and wounded him with a machete. Bleeding, he died sprawled in the path.

8

The fact of having become a widow for the second time made it easier, in a way, for me to decide to give myself up to my destiny. The destiny that had been fixed for me from before I was born: to be a Wise Woman. My destiny was to cure. To cure with the Language of the *saint children*. I determined to do this even though I had to go on working hard to support my family—now not as much, though, because my son Catarino was already beginning to work. He dealt in thread that he resold in the Hot Country, following in the footsteps of his deceased father.

I'm not sure, but I believe I was then more than forty years old. I didn't feel in a condition to travel to sell bread and candles in the ranches. During the time that I lived with my husband Marcial, I saved up enough to build a house seven arm-lengths long, with wooden walls and a thatched roof of sugarcane leaves. The house was alongside the path to San Miguel. In it I set up a store in which I sold *aguardiente* and cigarettes. Afterward I sold meals there to travelers.

In the days after my second widowhood, I wanted to practice curing as Marcial had done. I felt that I should cure and that I should cure with the *saint children*, but something made me hold back. As if it was fear to give oneself up to what has been given one, to what has been destined.

I tried being a Curer, yes, but it didn't satisfy me.

My feelings were that I was doing what I shouldn't do. I thought that the clean woman, the woman of Christ, the Morning Star woman, shouldn't practice being a Curer. I was destined to something superior. In curing I buried eggs as an offering to the Lords of the Mountains. I buried them at the corners of the house or inside, but I saw that worms came out where I buried them, and that caused me disgust and horror. I thought that this was not my destined path. I remembered my ancestors. My great-grandfather Juan Feliciano, my grandfather Pedro Feliciano, my great-aunt María Ana Jesús, and my great-uncle Antonio Justo had all been Wise Ones of great prestige.

9

For me sorcery and curing are inferior tasks. The Sorcerers and Curers have their Language as well, but it is different from mine. They ask favors from Chicon Nindó. I ask them from God the Christ, from Saint Peter, from Magdalene and Guadalupe.

It's that in me there is no sorcery, there is no anger, there are no lies. Because I don't have garbage, I don't have dust. The sickness comes out if the sick vomit. They vomit the sickness. They vomit because the mushrooms want them to. If the sick don't vomit, I vomit. I vomit for them and in that way the malady is expelled. The mushrooms have power because they are the flesh of God. And those that believe are healed. Those that do not believe are not healed.

The people who realized that I cured María Ana brought their sick children. One, two, ten, many. I have cured many children. Sometimes I give the children a little bit of *Little-One-Who-Springs-Forth*. I vomit for the children if they don't. Before beginning the vigil I ask the name of the sick person. In that way I search for the sickness and in that way I cure. If the sick person doesn't tell me the cause of his or

her malady I divine it. When the sick person sweats, that reveals that he or she is going to be healed. Sweat gets rid of the fever that comes from the sickness. My words oblige the evil to leave.

For a strong toothache seven or eight pairs are eaten, that is enough. The children are taken at night; the vigil is celebrated in front of images of the saints of the Church. The *saint children* cure the sores, the wounds of the spirit. The spirit is what gets sick. The Curers don't know that the visions the children show reveal the origin of the malady. The Curers don't know how to use them. The Sorcerers don't either. The Sorcerers are afraid of Wise Ones like me because they know that I can discover if they have caused an enchantment, if they have surreptitiously robbed the spirit of a child, of a man, or of a woman. The mushrooms give me the power of universal contemplation. I can see from the origin. I can arrive where the world is born.

The sick person gets well and the relatives come to visit me afterward to tell me that there has been an alleviation. They thank me with *aguardiente*, cigarettes, or some coins. I am not a Curer because I do not use eggs to cure. I don't ask for powers from the Lords of the Mountains. I am not a Curer because I do not give potions of strange herbs to drink. I cure with Language. Nothing else. I am not a Sorceress because I don't do evil. I am a Wise Woman. Nothing else.

Men come as well to ask me to help their women give birth. I am a midwife, but that is not my work. I am the one who speaks with God and with Benito Juárez. I am wise even from within the womb of my mother. I am the woman of the winds, of the water, of the paths, because I am known in heaven, because I am a doctor woman.

I take *Little-One-Who-Springs-Forth* and I see God. I see him sprout from the earth. He grows and grows, big as a tree, as a mountain. His face is placid, beautiful, serene as in the temples. At other times, God is not like a man: he is the Book. A Book that is born from

the earth, a sacred Book whose birth makes the world shake. It is the Book of God that speaks to me in order for me to speak. It counsels me, it teaches me, it tells me what I have to say to men, to the sick, to life. The Book appears and I learn new words.

I am the daughter of God and elected to be wise. On the altar that I have in my house is the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe. I have her in a niche. And I also have Saint Mark, Saint Martin Horseman, and Saint Magdalene. They help me to cure and to speak. In the vigils I clap and whistle; at that time I am transformed into God.

10

One day a couple came to my house. I was inside near the hearth, heating my tortillas. A dog barked and I went out to see what it was. I invited the visitors to come in. I interrupted my meal and attended to them.

“We’re family of old Francisco García,” said the man.

“The Francisco who lives in Backbone-of-a-Dog?” I asked. “What brings you here?”

“Yes. There is something, that’s why we’ve come to see you,” said the woman. “Probably you know that my father Francisco is sick.”

“What caused his illness?”

“We don’t know,” the man went on. “We can only say that he left for his field one morning, but he soon returned before it was completely daylight. His right shinbone was hurt. He said that he was hoeing when he felt a terrible pain in the shinbone that made him fall and lose consciousness. When he came to, he returned painfully to his house. He supposes that he hit himself with the hoe. To heal him we’ve contracted the young doctor who has just arrived in Huautla from the city. He is a Wise-One-In-Medicine who cures bloody wounds. He’s been

treating old Francisco for days, but Francisco doesn't appear to be getting better. We've decided that you, yes, would know how to heal him; you would contribute a lot together with the medicine from the young doctor. The *little things* will give strength to old Francisco and he will get well quickly. . . . You are a woman who knows, María Sabina."

"When do you want to do the vigil?" I asked.

"As soon as possible," the man ended by saying.

The couple went. I said that that same night I would go to old Francisco García.

At nightfall I arrived at their hut. They treated me with great respect. They took me to the bed of old Francisco who lay on a mat and groaned from pain. The old man saw me and made an effort to smile. He had circles under his eyes. I examined the supposed wound in the shinbone. It looked more like a bruise without serious complications.

I began the ceremony in front of the images of the saints that the family had. I gave old Francisco six pairs of mushrooms. I took thirteen pairs. Other people who were present also took their pairs. I let myself be carried away. I didn't offer any resistance and I fell into a deep, interminable well. I felt a kind of vertigo. Gradually the discomfort disappeared. I had a vision: I saw a tiger about to attack one of several cattle in a corral. It was night. The animal, crouched, chest to the ground, prepared to spring and pounce on its prey, when the strong blow of a stone in its right leg stopped it. The stone had been thrown by a man in a nearby tree. The tiger fled without having accomplished its purpose, wounded and frightened.

Next a woman appeared who covered her face with her forearm so that it wouldn't be seen that she was smiling. It was a smile of satisfaction. I recognized the woman. She was the wife of Faustino Méndez, a sorceress. The voice of the mushrooms said: "She bewitched old Francisco: she turned his spirit into a tiger. It is her."

Past midnight old Francisco started to sit up little by little. By himself, without help. Finally he got completely to his feet. Erect, he stood next to the altar where the images of the saints were. He made movements as if to relax. I asked, then, that they bring him clean clothes. What he had on was contaminated. He should change because the cure was approaching, and everything dirty should be shed.

I ordered old Francisco to sit down on the chair and I asked him: “The day that you hurt yourself, where was it? What happened? Didn’t you feel that your body didn’t have a spirit? That your body was empty? What places do you go to in your dreams?”

“Yes, Señora,” he answered, looking at the ground as if he felt ashamed. “For some time now, my dreams are regularly the same. No sooner do I go to sleep than I dream that I’m coming to a corral where I see bulls. I want to attack the animals to eat them.”

“What places have you arrived at?”

“I dream that I’m in Ojtlán. It’s there I want to attack the cattle.”

“Don’t be ashamed,” I told him. “There’s definitely nothing wrong with that. It’s not a lie. When we sleep the spirit leaves the body and wanders. It goes where it wants to go. The spirit returns if we wake up. But some people are born with their ‘fate.’ Their spirit turns into an opossum, a tiger, or a buzzard. Transformed into animals they travel to distant places. If you have a ‘fate’ don’t worry. It is not a sin nor anything to be ashamed of. There are people who are born like that; others can get to have a ‘fate’ by the artifices of sorcery.”<sup>8</sup>

8. Here María Sabina uses her own word *soerte* (a deformation of the Spanish word *suerte*, “luck”) for what students of pre-Hispanic and colonial Mexico call *nagual* (or a phenomenon related to *nagualism*: the *tona*). For María Sabina the *soerte*, translated here as “fate,” is the spirit of a person, capable of leaving the human body to turn itself into an animal, usually a tiger.

“Yes,” he continued, “I dream that I prowl around the cattle. I hear their bellows. It happens to me every night.”

The *little things* ordered me to light a candle. I took a little San Pedro with my fingers and ordered old Francisco to chew it. He did. He swallowed the San Pedro. I asked the people around me to bring a basin. They brought it. Then I asked them to press old Francisco’s stomach so that he would vomit. He vomited. San Pedro made him do it. The tobacco is called San Pedro because that saint created it.

I ordered old Francisco to change his clothes when he finished vomiting.

At dawn the sick man spoke: “I thank you for your cure, María Sabina. I feel better. I’m hungry. Very ...” They served him coffee, a little bit of roasted meat, beans, and chile sauce. He ate well and abundantly.

I spoke to him once more:

“The *saint children* have revealed that a sorceress has turned your spirit into a tiger. At night, while you sleep, your ‘fate’ goes to attack the bulls of Ojitlán. Don’t be worried anymore. The mushrooms have already cured you. You’ve vomited.”

Although I knew that the young Wise-One-In-Medicine continued to see the patient, I was sure that the mushrooms would remedy his malady. Within a month they let me know that old Francisco was completely recovered.

The wife of Faustino Méndez, the sorceress, began to go crazy the moment Francisco vomited. That way the “fate” came out and Francisco recaptured his spirit. The sorceress, crazed, would take off all her clothes and go out into the street naked. Her husband and her children left her from shame and fear. The family fell into misfortune. Finally the lady died of insanity. Her evil turned against her.

The following year a daughter of old Francisco came to see me. Once inside my house she said: "All my family send you greetings. The people who visit my father ask who cured him. He tells them he has a doctor, insignificant in appearance, named María Sabina."

"Is something the matter now?" I asked.

"Señora, you know how life is. Sickesses come and go. A child gets sick just as well as an adult. It's always happening. I've come because my nephew, Rodrigo, is sick. The young Wise-One-In-Medicine from the city has been giving him medicine, but he isn't getting any better. We're agreed that you, Señora, should cure him once and for all."

"What's the matter with him?" I asked.

"The priest Alfonso asked for him to be an apostle last Holy Week. Ezequiel, his father, accepted, because it pleased him that his son Rodrigo should be an apostle. In Holy Week the people and the apostles went in procession, but Rodrigo tripped at the door of the church and fell. It's been two months already that the child can't get up. The Sorcerers have gone with cacao and eggs to pay the places where the child was accustomed to play. We believe that he was enchanted by the master of some sacred place and that now there's no cure."

"Don't worry, woman," I told her. "I'll go tomorrow."

The following night I presented myself at the house of Ezequiel, taking enough *saint children* for six people.

I probed the body of the child with my fingers in the light of a candle. He didn't have any wound, but in a little while I'd know the true sickness.

The people of the house accompanied me in taking *Little-One-Who-Springs-Forth* ... and when it was working, I had a vision: I saw

Rodrigo walking in the midst of a crowd. He had a robe on. A purple robe like the one the apostles wear. The child walked solemnly. But his spirit wasn't with him, it was somewhere else; that's what the voice told me, and in that way I learned that a spirit who carried a rifle fired a shot and accidentally hit the spirit of Rodrigo. At that instant the child fell at the door of the church. His spirit was wounded, but his body wasn't.

When the vision had passed I lit a taper, lifted up the little shirt of the boy and saw in his chest, around the region of the heart, a hole the size of a fist. It was a wound without blood even though it was deep. When I looked at Rodrigo's face, he looked dead. So I asked for thirteen cacao beans, ground up and mixed with water.

I asked for thirteen cacao beans because my thought ordered me to. I asked as well for a recently born chick and a cloth to use as a bandage. I sacrificed the chick and bathed its still warm body in chocolate water and put it on Rodrigo's chest. On top of it I put the bandage, wrapping it around Rodrigo's body. The child didn't take *Little-One-Who-Springs-Forth*. By dawn the effect had worn off, and I took off the bandage together with the chick in the light of day. I didn't see the wound that I had seen in the sick one's chest while the *saint children* worked inside me.

The chick was buried near the house so that it wouldn't be eaten by birds of prey or by dogs. What is used in a vigil is sacred and shouldn't be spoiled by being eaten by an animal.

I slept in the house. When I awoke, they gave me food and I started to talk with the mother of the sick child. Someone came in and announced that the young Wise-One-In-Medicine, the same one who had tried to cure old Francisco, the grandfather of Rodrigo, was waiting outside to be received and to see his patient.

I saw the Wise-One-In-Medicine enter. I was seated on the ground

with my legs drawn up underneath me, leaning against the wall. He was dressed in white, clean clothes. He said the Mazatec greeting to everyone: *Nina'ti'?'ntali* ("In the name of God good day"). We responded in the same way.

We all kept silent while he went over the sick child with his metals. Nobody told him that that same night there had been a vigil in order for me to cure the child. He spoke in Castilian with Ezequiel, the father of Rodrigo. I didn't understand anything. He gave him some little boxes and a paper.

The young Wise Man had a white face and blue eyes. He took leave of everyone: "*Xt'alanca'*," he said to each one. He had learned to shake hands like the Mazatecs: he just grazed his fingers against the other person's palm like we do.

At bottom I didn't know what to think about the efficacy of his medicines. What I was sure of, though, was that he, with all his wisdom, ignored the true cause of the child Rodrigo's sickness.

I took leave of the sick one's parents. I told them that their child was cured . . . that by the end of several days the child would be completely healthy. As payment they gave me a pack of cigarettes, a little *aguardiente*, and five pesos.

A Wise One like me should not charge for her services. She should not profit from her wisdom. The one who charges is a liar. The Wise One is born to cure, not to do business with her knowledge. . . . One receives with humility the two or three pesos that are put in one's hand. Yes . . . one should not make money from the *little things*.

Time went by. One day I went down to the market in Huautla. I went by to say hello to Rodrigo's father. He greeted me, smiling. Very contented.

"How is the child?" I asked Ezequiel.

"He's all better. He's already playing with his little friends again.

Thank you for curing him. Because you know, you can. Thank you. Take two pesos to buy bread.”

“Don’t say that, Ezequiel,” I answered, “because the one who has healed your son is God who is raising all of us.”

From then on, old Francisco and Ezequiel, his son, had a lot of faith in me, and whenever there was someone sick in their house they called me to cure them.

12

During my vigils I speak to the saints: to Lord Santiago, to Saint Joseph, and to Mary. I say the name of each one as they appear.

I know that God is formed by all the saints. Just as we, together, form humanity, God is formed by all the saints. That is why I don’t have a preference for any one saint. All the saints are equal, one has the same force as the other, none has more power than another.

I know of other Wise Ones who use the *saint children* as I do. I remember Toribio García, a man of this same section, who lived along the path down below. He searched for light in the *children*, but he also sought the answer in thirteen kernels of corn that he threw on the ground. The final position of each kernel has a meaning. Like that he divined what he desired. I don’t practice that type of thing: I only trust in what the *children* tell me. For me that is sufficient; my only force is my Language. Toribio was another type of Wise One. He cast kernels of corn during the vigil. At dawn he repeated the throw of chance.

During the time that I was married I didn’t utilize the services of Toribio. The children of my first marriage grew up healthy.

And if I get sick now, I cure myself. The *children* cure me. I’ve been able to live many years . . . many . . . I don’t know how many.

In my vigils I can see how our little Christ is. I contemplate him. I

can have him very close to me, but I can't touch him. There are times when I want to catch what I see with my hands, but there is nothing there and on occasions that makes me laugh. I enter another world different from the one we know in the daylight. It is a beautiful world but an unattainable one. It is like watching the movies. I know the movies because one day a man came and took me to the center of Huautla to see a film in which I appear. In the movies one can see from a distance, but if one tries one can't touch anything that one is seeing. As in the movies, after one image comes another. Then something else comes out and afterward still something else. That is how I feel the effect of the *little things*.

In that way I see the saints. One appears and I pronounce his name; if another appears, I pronounce his name. If Benito Juárez appears, I pronounce his name. Sometimes the Principal Ones appear, then I see myself drinking beer with them; at other times we drink *aguardiente*. I see animals such as gigantic serpents, but I don't fear them. I don't fear them because they are also creatures of God. Strange animals appear such as have never been seen in this world. Nothing that the mushrooms show should be feared.

And all my Language is in the Book<sup>9</sup> that was given to me. I am she who reads, the interpreter. That is my privilege. Although the Language is not the same for different cases. If I'm curing a sick person, I use one type of Language. If the only aim in taking the *little things* is to encounter God, then I use another Language. Now, sober, I can remember something of my Language:

I am a woman who was born alone, says  
I am a woman who fell out by herself, says

9. In speaking of the Book she uses the Spanish word *Libro*.