

Dwight Worker - Escape From Lecumberri

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Chapter 1 Limping to My Apocalypse

I went to Peru to smuggle cocaine in November 1973. I also planned to do some mountain climbing and take a boat ride down the Amazon. But the purpose of my journey was to make a lot of fast money.

I had been to the South America before, in 1970 for four months. Then I went for adventure; backpacking across the Andes, hiking, canoing down the Urubamba River, camping out in Machu Piccho, and some mountain climbing. In the Andes, I began chewing coca leaves for the first time. They sold coca leaves in all the marketplaces and it was completely legal. I found it a mildly pleasant stimulant, good for an energy boost in the high mountains. But it was nothing to get strung out on. I went back to Lima, Peru to return home. There I bought a small amount of cocaine on the street for the first time. The first time I sniffed it, I remember thinking *'Where have I been my whole life?'* I did not know it then, but I was off to the races.

Back in the US, I sniffed enough cocaine to know that I liked it, despite my perpetually bloody nose, nervousness, and vague, lurking paranoia. I never seemed to have enough money to buy cocaine. Never enough. I still had the address and telephone number of a good, reliable source, so that I would not have to bother searching for a street connection. I would just buy the cocaine, hide it away, and then take it back to the U.S.A. Easy. Every detail had already been worked out.

I met René, my connection in Lima, and gave him the money. A week later he rapped softly on my hotel door and peered cautiously around the room before coming in. He looked careful but confident. He was well educated, spoke perfect English, and was honest. That last point was the most important, for had he wanted to, he could have already ripped me off. Trust like this was essential to good business.

We spoke briefly. Seeing that everything was safe with me, he quickly went back to his car. In a minute he returned with a bulge under his jacket.

The cocaine was pure, fine snowflake. With one small sniff came the fresh, cool, numbing clarity—the fleeting crystal illusion that the lady fools you with every time. I loved it.

I told René about my smuggling plan. With the cocaine under a plaster body cast, I would take a bus to Ecuador. From Guayaquil I would fly directly to Guatemala City. There I would disembark and pass customs. From Guatemala I would cross the Mexican border by land and travel north to the U.S. border. Near the border I would remove the body cast and hide the cocaine in the desert. I would return later with a backpack and the necessary gear and hike the twenty miles through the mountains into the U.S.A. with the coke. Safely within the U.S., selling the cocaine would be the easiest part.

René, approving my plan, warned me about the customs at the Panama City airport and, especially, the Mexico City airport. A partner of his had been busted in Mexico City. I had already heard about the tight customs there, so I agreed with him.

But only when I showed René the X-ray of my broken shoulder did he become truly interested. He nodded as he looked over the false newspaper article that I had had printed

in Spanish telling of how I had broken my shoulder while climbing Mount Chimborazo in Ecuador. The false hospital bill and phony doctor's letter, along with a suitcase full of mountain-climbing equipment, convinced René that any customs agent would believe that I had indeed been injured in a serious mountaineering accident.

René looked over the documents again and nodded. Then he asked if he could send several hundred grams of his own cocaine along with mine. We would split the profits fifty-fifty.

I thought it over for a moment. I had not planned to carry more than 600 grams of cocaine with me. Any more could create too big a bulge under my cast. René explained that there should be at least a \$6,000 profit on the 200 extra grams of cocaine, \$3,000 for each of us. And \$3,000 was \$3,000. Rushing on coke, wanting as much as possible, I went for it.

I reweighed the cocaine—800 grams in total. Not much, but then again, a lot. Enough to pay for my vacation, buy a complete camera system, and earn ten Gs on the side. I had made myself an offer I could not refuse.

We taped the three polyethylene bags of cocaine tightly onto my left arm. I then folded my arm against my body and told René how to apply the plaster rolls. At the time I was a licensed emergency medical technician in the state of New Mexico and I knew how to do such things. I showed René a xeroxed copy from a medical book of a Volpeau cast, and he applied the plaster rolls accordingly.

In thirty minutes I had a shoulder cast that covered my entire left arm and shoulder up to my neck and down to my lower abdomen, leaving no room to move my arm at all. The cast bulged slightly more than I had anticipated, but not too much more. René then took a pencil and pen and began writing inscriptions on the cast: *BUENA SUERTE*, BETTER LUCK NEXT TIME, GET BETTER, and a score of names in different handwritings and pen colors. We laughed heartily with each signature.

I deliberately cut my left hand with a razor blade and let it bleed for a while. Then I bandaged it and left some of the blood showing. As a final touch, I put a knee brace on my right leg. My injuries now appeared even more credible.

René and I discussed the plan. He felt the possibility of the customs agents breaking the cast off without prior information on me was too remote to consider. I felt good about René having a vested interest in the success of the scam, because he would now have no reason to turn me in. Of course I trusted him, but in matters such as these, with the stakes as high as they were, I should never trust anyone completely.

We sniffed more coke. Our optimism on the success of our smuggle fed our imaginations. We made arrangements to do more business in the future. We would both get rich. Then we gave each other an *abrazo* (hug), and said *adios*.

Two days later I caught a bus to Guayaquil, Ecuador. During the ride I sat next to a French girl. Since neither her English nor my French was adequate, we spoke in Spanish. She had arrived on a chartered Air France jet in La Paz, Bolivia, with several hundred other French students. When it was time for the jet to leave, she had decided to stay on in South America. In Cuzco, Peru, someone had stolen all of her identification and traveler's checks, forcing her to return to France.

In the course of our conversation, she mentioned that probably one-fourth of all the students on that chartered flight were carrying cocaine back to France with them.

Really? And where were they hiding it? She thought that most of the men had it in their platform shoes, but the *jeunes filles* had "special" places to hide things. She raised her eyebrows and stared at me.

We laughed.

She looked at my feet and, seeing my sandals, smiled and shook her head. I looked

at her and told her I had no way of knowing whether or not she was carrying cocaine. Her eyebrows lifted. We laughed some more. Then she rapped on my cast with her knuckles and laughed that I probably had a *kilogram of cocaine under there right now*.

That shocked me. Trying to keep my composure, I told her that I actually had ten kilos of pure heroin beneath it. She continued smiling mischievously. I sat there wondering if there was any possible way that she might know. No, not a chance. But still—I could be superstitious about such things.

When we came to the Ecuadorian border, everyone got a thorough personal baggage search. They had not done this to me three years ago at this border. Like a curious tourist, I asked the customs man if he was looking for guns.

"No. Cocaine."

The times had changed. He checked my luggage and then waved me through.

We rode into Guayaquil and I checked into the Hotel Boston. I would be staying there for several days, doing last-minute preparations before I flew to Guatemala. Just a few more days.

The next morning I said goodbye to the French girl and went downtown to a medical store. By now I was getting my act of being a cripple down perfectly. I was letting people carry my bags, allowing women to open doors, and even accepting minimal help when getting dressed. In my mind I was becoming what I was pretending to be. This was good. It would be important to be convincing when I passed the next customs points.

At the medical supplies store I bought a crutch. I planned to walk with a limp from then on, so I began practicing on the way back to the hotel. Never in my life had I needed or used a crutch. Now I had only a few days in which to cultivate a credible limp.

December 8, 1973. The route was clear and simple. That morning I would leave Guayaquil for Panama City. There I would purchase a previously reserved ticket for the flight to Guatemala City. That flight would be leaving fifty-five minutes after I arrived from Guayaquil. At the Panama City airport I would wait in the international zone without passing customs until my departure to Guatemala City. At Guatemala City I would disembark and pass customs, which was supposed to be especially easy for tourists. If I was approached by a customs agent, I would have him carry my suitcases. Simple as that.

But when I arrived at the Guayaquil airport that morning, something was wrong. There was an abnormally large crowd, and the place was swarming with military police. I walked up to a policeman who was cradling an Uzi machine gun and asked him what was happening. He replied that Princess Anne of England was arriving. She had just gotten married and was on her honeymoon. *Big Deal*, I thought, in the solid American tradition of disdain for royalty. But judging from the size of the crowds, the Ecuadorians were of a different opinion. The entire airport was decorated for the welcoming ceremony, including a red carpet stretched on the runway, which would later be lined with young girls carrying flowers.

I checked in with my airline and was told there would be a delay because of the arrival of the Princess. With the red-carpet ceremony prepared outside, no plane could take off until it was over.

Big Deal. All of this for one of George III's descendants. How long would I have to wait there? She would be arriving at any moment, they told me. No more than thirty minutes. Well, that would still give me time in Panama City to catch my flight to Guatemala City. I was getting nervous, so I took two Valiums that I had brought along with me expressly for that purpose. It was the first time in my life that I had taken Valium.

Two hours later the Princess finally arrived. She must have been sleeping late on her honeymoon—at my expense, for now I would miss my connecting flight to Guatemala City. I

asked the airline's agents if there were any other flights from Panama City to Guatemala City that afternoon. There were none. But I could stay in Panama City overnight and catch a flight the next morning to Guatemala City. That would be no good, because I would have to pass Panama City customs. What other flights were there? To Miami, New Orleans, and Mexico City. I did not want to go directly to the United States, because I could easily be caught at the airports. If I stayed in Panama City overnight to catch the Guatemala City flight the next day, that would mean I'd have to pass both Panama City and Guatemala City airport customs, and then the Mexican border customs at the Guatemalan frontier.

By now I was feeling very calm. The Valium must have been coming on. I had to make a decision on the spot, while they were clearing away the red carpet preparations.—All right, I'll fly directly from Panama City to Mexico City and go through just one customs—Mexico City—instead of three. Less risk that way.

My plane to Panama City left moments later and I boarded it feeling tranquil. Very tranquil.

The flight to Panama City was uneventful, the way flights are supposed to be. In Panama City I discovered that I had to pass through customs anyway. There did not appear to be a delineated international zone at the airport. But the customs was easy. cursory searches. If I wanted to, I could stay there and catch a flight to Guatemala City the next day with no additional risk.

But things had been going so smoothly and easily—and I was *so tranquil*. Everybody *knew* that I had been injured, so I decided to maintain momentum and get it over with—by staying with the flight. I played the slot machines until the plane was ready to go on to Mexico City.

On the flight to Mexico City I sat next to a young Chilean woman. A mustached American man of about thirty-five years then sat next to me. He was modishly dressed and spoke fluent Spanish to the stewardess. He reminded me of a dapper Errol Flynn. When he pointed to my cast, I related my mountain-climbing accident. We talked some more and he told me he was coming from Bolivia, where he and some friends had just acquired a 15,000-acre plantation. He was very happy about having it *in reserve* for an early retirement later on.

It sounded suspicious to me. Where did a youngish man get the money to buy 15,000 acres of land in Bolivia, the Cocaine Capital of the world? Or was I just projecting my thoughts? Maybe he was completely legitimate. Most people are. *Why did he sit next to me? Did he know something? Of course not. Was I paranoid? Calm down.*

I ordered a gin and tonic. So did he and the Chilean woman. After finishing it, I ordered another. They did not. I kept thinking about René's warnings about Mexico City. Well, it was too late now. We were already aloft—there was no stopping now. Once I'd been through Mexico City customs I would be glad I had done it this way. The only alternative I had was to cut the cast off in the bathroom and dump the cocaine—and that *would* be suspicious, and also wasteful and stupid. But when I went to the bathroom I actually did think of cutting it off. By now I was urinating every few minutes, or so it seemed. Nerves. Wondering if the Valium had worn off, I took two more, believing they would be the magic pills that would make me so inconspicuous I would pass through customs as if I were invisible. I wanted to believe that.

When I returned to my seat, the American suggested that the three of us have a drink together in Mexico City that night. He knew some good night spots. The woman and I both agreed. Chummy.

The plane was flying by Mount Citlaltepētli, 150 miles east of Mexico City. At 18,700 feet, the mountain towered over everything else on the horizon, magnificently snowcapped against the backdrop.

I had a whole suitcase full of unused mountain-climbing gear in the plane. I wished I were climbing that mountain right then. Suddenly the idea of climbing a mountain made perfect sense to me—simple and direct. I would know what I was doing, and why, too. No moral questions about it. . . . And what was I doing now?

Stop thinking like this. Later.

By the time the plane landed in Mexico City, I was numbed to semi-consciousness. Events appeared to be moving on a slow, blank screen in front of me. Whatever Valium did do, it did not help my mind function.

I had once read a customs report on the smuggler profile. It said that customs agents were suspicious of anyone who was overly friendly with them, so I knew to be silent. It also stated that smugglers tended to stand at the ends of the customs lines, hoping that the customs agents would by then be so bored that they would give only cursory searches to the remaining people. Well then, I would use some reverse psychology on them. I would go through customs as soon as possible. So I lifted my suitcases off of the luggage retriever with my one good hand and then, while balancing on my right crutch, I pushed my luggage with my feet to the customs table. I was near the front of the line.

The agent opened my suitcases and carefully went through the contents, feeling the clothes, opening the bags, and then checking the suitcases for false sides and bottoms. He was thorough. Then he motioned me to pass by.

I had made it. I shut the suitcases and waved a porter over to carry them for me. The porter lifted them up and began walking to the front of the airport as I limped behind him.

We had almost left the customs zone when a clean-shaved, stocky, well-dressed Mexican man stopped the porter and took my suitcases from him. The tag on his sports jacket said Agente Valdez. Valdez motioned for me to follow him and I did. I was led into a small room in back of the airport customs area. There I saw another agent finishing up a body search of the American man I had sat next to on the plane. He was pulling up his trousers. He told me that he would be waiting in the lounge for me, and then walked out.

Valdez told me to take off my shirt. Before I could get it off, he was trying to stick his hand down the top of my cast. There was no space for him to reach in from above, so he pushed his hand under the cast from below, pressing hard against my stomach. I kept my stomach and chest expanded under the cast so he would not have enough room to work his hand up to the cocaine.

"FLOJESE! FLOJESE!"

I had never heard that Spanish word before, but I knew it meant something like loosen up. I told him I didn't speak Spanish, and for him to be careful because I had a badly broken shoulder. He punched me in the stomach and pushed his hand up harder. I felt his fingers working up close to the extra bag of cocaine that René had decided to send along at the last moment. I shrieked as if I were in pain—as if he had pushed on the broken bones. I turned from him and tried to show him my file of hospital papers explaining my accident.

He did not want to see them.

The harder I resisted, the more determined he was to feel under my cast. From the table next to us he grabbed a pair of pliers with tips fifteen inches long and jammed them up the bottom of the cast. I was fighting him off when he punched me in the jaw and kicked my crutch out from under me. I fell in a clutter to the floor. He climbed over me and forced the pliers up my cast. The pliers pinched my arm and I screamed for real this time. He maneuvered and pinched the pliers again and again. And then I heard it, and so did he. He had grabbed one of the polyethylene bags of cocaine and the plastic was rustling.

"TIENES COCAINA! TIENES COCAÍNA!"

I made one last feeble effort to resist him, but he punched me hard, several times, in the

face. He shouted out the door for the other agents, and they came running in. I was panting and subdued, not believing what I saw happening to me through my own dulled eyes.

A Mexican doctor came in and opened his medical case. With a pair of surgical scissors he cut off my cast within a minute. There was the cocaine. Valdez smiled proudly at the three bags taped to my chest and left arm. They had me *flagrante delicto*. I sat there bare-chested, too shocked to say anything, with my worst horror fantasy—*getting caught in Mexico*—coming true.

Other passengers came in and out of the body-search area and passed by, looking at me. I looked up to see the Chilean woman staring at me as I sat there half-naked with the bags of cocaine lying on my lap, my face sweating and flushed, blood on my mouth. Her face was stunned too, but in a very different way. Despite the gin and the four Valiums fogging my brain, I could still feel the heaviest of shame and embarrassment, stripped and defrocked in front of her and the others. She looked for a moment like she wanted to say something to me, to console me or help me however she might, but the customs agents were glaring at her suspiciously. She quickly walked off before they got the idea of detaining her for interrogation. We would not be having drinks together that night.

The agents led me into a back room and pushed me against the wall as though I were the trophy of a day's hunt. All the agents stood around, telling me how bad it was going to be for me. They were congratulating Valdez, asking him how he had ever thought I was carrying drugs. Valdez was basking in the praise, recounting his story again and again. Then he opened one of the plastic bags and examined the cocaine. He stuck his finger into it and scooped some cocaine onto his fingernail. He walked over to me and in front of everyone there, he slowly and deliberately *sniffed* the cocaine. He grinned like a shark and the whole room burst into laughter, except for me.

A photographer came in and lined me up against a wall covered with photographs. While he was putting film in his camera, I turned around and looked at the photos. All of them were pictures of people who had just been arrested at the airport for drugs. In the photos they were holding the drugs in front of themselves. Most of them appeared to be Americans carrying a pound or so of cocaine, not so different from myself. There were photos of some Latins on the wall too, several of whom were carrying large amounts. But most striking about all the photographs were the expressions on their just-arrested faces. All of them looked as if they were in a state of shock—as if they had just been at the scene of a disaster. They had. *Their own*.

I wondered if I looked the same.

As the photographer took his pictures, he leered at me, laughing and telling me how badly I was fucked. Already I was beginning to hate him. I began looking around the room, wondering if there would be some chance to make a break for it, to take off running through the door, out the airport, into the streets of Mexico City. Maybe I could get away.

Valdez dragged me back to the main room and handcuffed me to a locker. Then another customs agent, older and smaller than Valdez, came up to me and spoke in broken English.

"You think you can break the laws of Mexico?" He punched me several times. I said nothing back to him. He was fingering my address book, which he had found in my luggage.

"Who was on this airplane with you? Who are you working for? Tell me."

I told him nobody was with me. He punched me and told me I was lying. Several other agents began punching me over. Occasionally the photographer walked over and punched me to make his point.

The chief agent wanted to know from whom I had bought the cocaine in South America, and to whom I was taking it in the U.S.A. I told him the truth, that I was working for myself. He did not believe me. He began reading names from my address book to me, asking me if this

or that name was the person. I kept answering "No" as they punched me. The man shouted that they were going to get the information from me one way or another, so I had better talk now. If I talked, they would go easy on me and have me deported in six months, maybe less—but if I didn't cooperate, he personally would make sure I got fifteen years *to serve*.

I had heard too many things about Mexican cops to believe him. But God, did I want to believe him, did I want to believe that *he himself* could arrange to have me deported.

"Sign the statement. Tell me who you work for and where you get your cocaine and we go easy on you."

I knew enough not to sign anything. I told them I wanted a lawyer. The older man turned around to the others and in an affected voice said in Spanish, "*The Norteamericano wants a lawyer.*"

They laughed. Then several of them closed in on me and worked me over good this time. My head was banging against the locker behind me from the blows—no recoil.

"A lawyer will do you no good here! We got you. Now talk. Sing!"

I was freaked out. They meant business. I saw them, I heard them, I felt the blows, but still *I could not believe this was happening to me*.

"I want to see the U.S. Embassy," I stuttered.

They really began swinging.

"THE EMBASSY WILL DO YOU NO GOOD HERE! YOU ARE IN MEXICO AND YOU HAVE NO RIGHTS HERE! FORGET ABOUT THEM AND COOPERATE, OR ELSE! WRITE DOWN THE NAMES OF WHO YOU WORK FOR!"

But I remained silent—from a combination of shock, terror, Valium, and fear of signing anything, not out of courage.

The old man barked some commands to his staff and they quickly took the handcuffs off me and led me down a narrow hallway to a bare cement room. One of the younger agents pushed me in and told me to undress. Numbly, I did as I was told.

The other agents came into the room together. One of them quickly threw a bucket of cold water over me. Valdez then came at me, holding a long, tubular, aluminum rod with two rounded points on its end and a cord attached to the rubber-coated handle. I thought he was going to start beating me over the head with it, so I covered my head and face. But instead, he poked it into my chest. In one reflex motion, I jumped and screamed.

It was an electric cattle prod.

He began poking it at my genitals. I turned away, covering myself with one hand while fighting the cattle prod away with the other. Other agents grabbed me while he jabbed me with the cattle prod. All the time I still could not believe this was happening to me. It was as if I were the victim in the worst horror movie ever made.

But the cattle prod was too much. While the electricity was going through my body to my brain, the only thing I could think of was to stop that electricity by whatever means possible, *stop the electricity*. STOP THE ELECTRICITY!

Whatever is to be said about Valium, it is not a pain killer. Just a few hours earlier I had taken Valium for the first time in my life, and now this was happening *to me*. I have never taken another since.

The older man continued shouting something to me. Only when I Finally understood him to be asking me if now I were going to talk, did I answer him.

"YES. YES. YES! I'LL SIGN ANYTHING YOU WANT!"

They gave me a few extra shocks just to let me know what they would do if I did not sign, and then ordered me to get dressed. The old man again told me that if I cooperated, they would go easier on me—"Like they do in the *States*," he leered.

I got dressed and went back to the main office. There the older man was poring over my

address book. He picked out a few names and asked me if they were involved. I said yes they were, without even bothering to see who they were. Somehow the fact that they were innocent of any involvement in my fiasco did not make any difference to me at that point. All I wanted them to do was to leave me alone and not give me any more electric shocks. I was telling myself that it was so obvious I was guilty anyway that it did not make any difference what I said, because *they had me*. They had already refused to believe the truth: that I was a small-time smuggler working for myself on my first cocaine run from South America.

I signed a lie of a confession that night at the airport. But what mattered about the signed confession was not that it was a lie or how it had been obtained, but rather that it was self-incriminating. The agents all smiled when I signed. Then they explained that, although it did not really matter, tomorrow I would have to sign the same statement in typed form, and they would be there to make sure I signed it. One of them waved the cattle prod again, smiling.

They had broken me. Later I would recall reading an article by George Orwell that stated that all men have their breaking points, and that any tyrant worth his chains and whips knows that. The weaker would break down sooner, while the stronger would take longer, but the only difference between the two was time. All torturers *knew* that everybody would eventually break down.

I had lasted less than one hour.

The way I conducted myself that night of December 8, 1973 at Benito Juarez Airport ranks among the lowest moments in my life—totally devoid of any traces of honor, or dignity, or courage. I have never completely forgiven myself for it.

Thus began my imprisonment in Mexico.

Chapter 2 The "Trial"

Late that evening, they took me to the *procuraduría* jail in the center of Mexico City. I would be held there for a few days while they processed my papers, then moved to a prison. At the *procuraduría* I briefly met Roger, another American of about my age who had also been arrested at the Mexico City airport for cocaine. Before we could talk very much, they locked us in separate solitary cells.

My clothes were wet and I had no blankets or mattress. It was impossible to sleep in the open, unheated steel and concrete cells. Already, although still in a stupor, I was looking for a way to escape. I kept pacing the cell, telling myself that if I could not escape, I would rather be dead than spend the next years of my life in a Mexican prison. There just had to be some way out.

Early the next morning, I heard Roger whispering for me. I put my head to the bars, and we talked. He too had received similar treatment until he signed a confession. We both agreed that the confession had to be worthless because of how it had been extracted from us. It just could not stand up in court. Roger remarked that we were really political prisoners. He felt that cocaine should be legal, and that they were holding us because they were just persecuting the "new culture."

I paused on that one. I asked him if he was smuggling cocaine to make it legal. He said yes—if not *de jure*, then *de facto*. Was he a coke dealer on the street? Affirmative. Was he campaigning to legalize coke? In his own sort of way, yeah. He tried to sniff it *every* day.

We laughed feebly.

I told him I had been smuggling cocaine precisely because it was illegal, so I could make a lot of money. The moment I said the phrase "a lot of money," it rang empty. Although

yesterday that money had been the only thing that mattered, now it seemed so very far away. It was a different game now. Hell, I didn't even know what kind of game I would be playing.

But I did know that first I would *have to get out of here*—and then worry about money. I told Roger that whatever we considered ourselves to be did not really matter. What mattered now was what they thought we were—and they probably considered us serious criminals: *Class A drug traffickers*. On that bad note, the conversation faded out.

After a sleepless night, three customs agents came to the *procuraduría* and took me to a small room. They set the cattle prod on the table but said nothing about it. Its presence was enough. They again demanded my cooperation. If I cooperated, I would soon be released, because they just wanted the *pescados grandes* (the big fish). But if I did not cooperate, they would make sure I got the maximum sentence. I swore that what I had told them last night—that I was an independent working for myself—was the whole truth. They did not believe me, but evidently they felt they had enough information because they didn't use the cattle prod again. They then ordered me to go with them to sign a copy of the same statement that I had signed last night—and no funny stuff.

I nodded. In view of everything else, my signing or not signing seemed irrelevant. I figured that I would eventually have to pay a large bribe and then wait to be deported to the U.S.A. Or something like that. I did not know what, but something would have to happen to get me out.

Blind hippie faith.

Four guards handcuffed me and drove me to the equivalent of the attorney general's office. They typed the statement that I had signed the night before and read it back to me.

I signed it.

All of the guards smiled at me victoriously.

One of them said, "And now, gringo, *your trial is over*. You are now going to spend six to fifteen years in *El Palacio Negro*, The Black Palace, Hotel Lecumberri, the most expensive hotel in Mexico."

They all laughed.

He was almost right. During the next two years, I would never see or enter a courtroom, or see a judge or a prosecutor, or even make a plea of guilt or innocence.

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