**Black Jesus**

I had written down all the numbers for my meager budget for the trip in a spiral bound notebook I had bought for 50centavos at Leonela Bowman’s store . I only had 100lempiras to my name . I needed at least 200 and so I borrowed 100 from Leonela , God rest her soul. I would have to dive everyday when I got back in order to pay it back. The trip was unexpected and there was sense of doom about it. I felt deep down inside that I would never come back to my wife and unborn child.

I had overstayed my Visa and although my permanent residence was in *tramite* the Immigration officer was having none of it as he slurped his fish soup while seated at his government issued metal desk , the kind that deafens you when a drawer is opened or closed. Montes was his name and although always affable with me on the occasions I had visited him previously but this day he seemed irritated. His eyes were red and face puffy so it must have been a bad *goma.* I could speak very little Spanish and so my mother in law had travelled with me to translate . ‘*Tenes una buena suegra’* , punctuated by a noisy slurp of soup , *‘pero igual , siempre tenes que salir del país por mínimo 24 horas’*

5 lemps for the dory to Oakridge , 10 lemps for the bus to Coxenhole , 42 lemps for the plane to La Ceiba it was all written down to the last mortadella and cheese sandwich , a line underneath it all to make the grand sum of 200 lempiras ( $100 in 1987 ) . In those days the bus trip from Oakridge to Coxenhole was an Odyssey in itself especially in rainy season since the roads were not paved ; it took 4 hours through winding roads and sleepy villages with brightly painted wooden houses on stilts and rusty tin roofs. The further I travelled from Helene the farther I felt I was from those I loved and the closer I felt to losing them.

The plane was a noisy old DC-3 ( Dak we knew them as in Africa ) that made the hop over from the island with the door open , the sultry hen on the lap of the passenger next to me did nothing but stare and blink. Leaving Ceiba and passing El Porvenir I counted my money for it must have been the 50th time while looking at my spiral bound text book , getting increasingly dogeared each time I thumbed through it. The bus was not comfortable by any means but it was within my 200Lemps round way to Guatemala budget. Seating was a thinly upholstered bench with a backrest. It was a novelty for the first hour seeing the mountains and then in the Lean valley miles upon miles of Banana plantations but the repetitive scenery was soporiphic and I found myself nodding off and banging my forehead on the metal piping on the backrest of the seat in front of me which provoked a grin from the snotnosed urchin sitting on his mother’s lap in the seat across the aisle. It took 6 hours to reach Ocotopeque close to the border with just 2 stops along the way to use the toilet and buy goods being peddled at bus stops in distant , dusty villages . “*Pan de Coco , Pan de Coco”* sold by solid *Garifuna* matrons in Tornabe , outside Tela and *“ Rosquillas “* from Lencas in Siguatepeque. I had my half dozen *Johnny Cakes* lovingly baked and packed in a muslin cloth by my wife of which I had calculated ( much in the same way I had managed my budget )at what time I would eat each one. The few remaining passengers got off the bus at the Border when we arrived late afternoon , luckily just as the sun was descending in a pink glow on the horizon. I crossed as a *Britanico* into Guatemala the only link to Honduras was the thought of my loved ones faraway which was bringing a lump to my throat. A 20 minute minibus ride took 3 of us into Esquipulas where we arrived in the dark and chill of early evening. I headed for the cheapest *pension* .