

## The Tianguis

Written by Catherine A. MacKenzie

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Early Wednesday morning transforms an ordinary street in Ajijic into a party among strangers.

Inside, the tight air tries to shed itself of the fused flavours of flowers and fried fat. My sweaty palms grasp my purse with the concealed pesos to my chest, in an attempt to protect it from possible snatchers, as my thumping heart hammers through my head. But my crisscrossing through the claustrophobic cacophony can be endured, because I know that a welcoming burst of breeze and sunshine wait for me at the end of this shadowy passageway.

The throngs of hard and soft bodies rub flesh to flesh, clothing to clothing, sharing their breath as they stroll down a colourful maze of trophies. I reach out to stroke the embroidered clothing,

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the soft shawls, and the woven tablecloths ablaze with orange, red and yellow. I'm fascinated by the gleaming pottery, the creative artwork, and the tiny *huichol* beadwork. I picture the carved, harshly painted angel faces watching over me in my home.

Filleted fish spill out their rankness. Chicken pieces lay exposed like naked body parts on an iced mortician's pad. Out of the corner of my ever watchful eye, I glimpse rows of tomatoes, peppers and onions, displayed like Christmas balls of red, green and white. Fanciful flowers wrapped in pretty paper wait for a few pesos and a new home. Overflowing cups of cubed fruit, topped with flapping flies swarming like birds of prey, lie in wait.

My hunger takes flight.

Hungry Mexicans line long tables, eating unfamiliar food that most of us Gringos would never sample. For the nerveless, there are glass cases shielding warm pizza. My growling commences again, as I eye the pepperoni and melted cheese. Should I exchange a few pesos for a slice?

Meandering feet in shoes, sneakers, and sandals trod gingerly over the uneven cobblestones, as they shun the squatting beggars with their outstretched arms, sidestep the lurking dogs, and dodge the hidden holes in the shadowed pathway. These stones, tramped over for centuries, harbour so much of our unknown.

Voices are a mesh of indecipherable words, until a familiar *buenos días* becomes a grateful greeting shouted from within the din. An exchange of fingertips, a hug's return, and I feel loved and alive. My unknown fear is gone.

The burst of sun and the cooler warm breeze welcome my soul when I reach the end of the shade. And then I'm on my way home, already contemplating next week's journey through the shadowy tunnel.

The bustle is the weekly *tianguis* - market day. I saunter there, alone, my straw hat shading my pale skin from the sun's torment. I begin at the carretera and amble down uneven cobblestones,

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shielded by the shading canopies.