they'll pay me, I know. And even if it's a thousand pesos they owe me, I know they will pay. But the Dominicans you can't trust like that."

Fifteen hundred miles away, Haiti's President was about to speak up, too late, for the rights of repatriated Haitians. On September 27, 1991, Aristide strode slowly to the front of the chamber of the General Assembly of the United Nations. A bevy of aides ushered the little priest to the podium and helped him climb up. Aware that his words would ring out across the world, Aristide paused, surveying the long wooden tables where the diplomats sat, looked up at the high banks of balconies above, and took in the gray-green color of the place.

He began to speak softly, in clear, lyrical French, pronouncing the necessary, proper salutations. The opening of his address to Haiti's "dear Latin American friends" was both poetic and political. "We share the same experience of struggle, struggle against the enslavement of men by men, struggle for the dawn of peace and full liberation of the Latin American continent and of the entire world," Aristide began in a quiet voice.

But quickly, in the dramatic style that earned him the attention and devotion of Haitians, he switched to a more lively tone, punctuated with exclamations: "Liberty won! Pride regained! Dignity restored!" Aristide soon took up Spanish, the first of nine other languages he would use.

The words in Spanish were stronger than the French ones of his hopeful beginning, and he aimed them precisely at Haiti's neighbor to the east:

> We must denounce, before the eyes of all humankind, the flagrant violation of the rights of Haitians living in the Dominican Republic. Though we recognize the sovereignty of the Dominican Republic, we must protest forcefully against this violation of human rights. Haiti and the Dominican Republic are two wings of the same bird, two nations that share the beautiful island of Hispaniola. Hearing the voice of all the victims whose rights are trampled, engaged in respecting human rights despite the social problems and financial difficulties created by this forceful repatriation, we must respect both wings of the bird . . . Never again, not ever again, will our Haitian sisters and brothers be sold in order to transform their blood to make bitter sugar. Blood made into bitter sugar is not acceptable; the unacceptable will never be accepted.



Slowly, deliberately, his voice rising, he repeated his words: *Never again, not ever again, will our Haitian sisters and brothers be sold in order to transform their blood to make bitter sugar.* The audience in the balcony cheered wildly. Aristide ended his speech with an anthem-like exhortation to the United Nations to defend human rights and to Latin American nations to defend unity. His chant slipped in and out of Kreyol, a jubilant rallying cry. The balconies cried out along with him the mantra of his Lavalas movement: *"Youn sel nou feb, ansanm nou fo, ansanm ansanm nou se lavalas."* Alone we are weak, together we are strong, together, together, we are Lavalas, the cleansing flood sweeping away everything in its path. Giant red-and-blue flags unfurled from the front balconies as the audience and diplomats gave Aristide a standing ovation in the normally staid General Assembly.

That night, New York's Haitian immigrants, giddy at the sight of the President they believed held out hope that they could return to their country, turned out by the thousands to hear Aristide speak at the massive Episcopal Cathedral of St. John the Divine. Haitians who had been in New York for years were talking about going home, even about setting up vacation time-shares for tourists. The cathedral overflowed, leaving hundreds of Haitians standing along Amsterdam Avenue in a torrential rainstorm. Holding up umbrellas colored Haitian red and blue, they danced and sang: *"Nou se lavalas!"* We are Lavalas, the flood, the cleansing downpour!

In the end, none of Aristide's beautiful General Assembly speech mattered. The plight of the sugarcane cutters was to bring Aristide down as well. The Dominicans had not liked him even before this embarrassment. But by the time he finished at the United Nations, their determination to see him gone was cemented. If the Haitian army wanted to rid itself of the President who had pledged to end corruption, it was assured of Dominican support. A high Dominican government official visiting the United Nations commented dryly to a Dominican reporter, "He won't be around long." Four days after Aristide's jubilant address at the United Nations, his words came true.

In New York, the Haitians who danced in the rain could hardly believe it when the sonorous voice of New York Consul Wilson Désir announced on his Kreyol-language radio program that Aristide had been overthrown shortly after his return to Port-au-Prince. Throughout the agonizing day of September 30, Aristide was held prisoner in the National Palace as the French, American, and Venezuelan ambassadors negotiated for his life. Finally, a midnight flight out of Port-au-Prince sent him into exile, first in Caracas, eventually in Washington. Unlike other former Haitian Presidents, Aristide did not make a stop at the Haitian Presidential suite of Santo Domingo's Dominican Concorde Hotel.

A month after the coup, as the sun eased its way up into the sky, tensions were high at Bon Repos Hospital, Michèle Duvalier's old pet project, which had been temporarily renamed Centre d'Accueil des Repatriés Haitiens (Welcome Center for Repatriated Haitians). The hospital, once a lasting monument to the shame of the kleptocratic Duvalier family, was now a symbol of the sugarcane slave trade too. The Haitians expelled from the Dominican Republic waited there, lost, their lives in Dominikani gone, their families split up, their possessions seized, and the future of their country uncertain.

Jobs were disappearing by the day. The United States had imposed an embargo on Haiti and asked the international community to join in to try to convince General Raoul Cédras and Police Chief Michel François to step down and allow Aristide to return. Soon oil deliveries would stop altogether, and the economy would rumble to a near halt. There is no way the workers expelled from Santo Domingo could make a new start in Haiti, a country many had never known or knew so long ago that it was only a mythical land in their childhood memories.

A *bracero* named Gaston lifted his feet, one at a time, to show the ragged green-and-white flip-flops he was wearing when soldiers burst into Batey Santa Rosada, where he lived, and arrested all the cane cutters. "They didn't even give me time to change into shoes," he said. "They almost didn't let me put my shirt on," he added, fingering its maroon cloth. The soldiers tore up his documents, including the newly issued residence card created the previous October, and rushed him to a bus that carried him across the border.



He looked at least fifteen years older than his forty-six, most of which were spent in the Dominican Republic. In Haiti, he knew no one. It had been thirty-two years since he left his country. In all that time in the Dominican cane fields, his Kreyol had slipped away. Spanish now came more easily to his tongue.

The Dominicans did not really care whether or not the dark-skinned men, women, and children they deported were cane cutters, or within the age range President Balaguer's decree had specified. The numbers that Bon Repos officials gave, only a month after the coup, are disturbing, though not surprising. As many as 14 percent of the adults who passed through the Welcome Center were born in the Dominican Republic, not Haiti. Of the children expelled, nearly half were born in Dominikani. Of the "repatriated ones" at Bon Repos, 41 percent had been expelled without their children.

Joseph, a twenty-five-year-old Haitian studying data processing at the Autonomous University of Santo Domingo (UASD, pronounced WuAHSS), was working his route collecting public bus fares in September in downtown Santo Domingo when the Dominican police arrested him at the busy commercial corner of Duarte Street and 27th of February Avenue. His dark skin had given him away. His passport and visa were at home, giving him no immediate proof of his legal status. He was sent back to Haiti and was still waiting at Bon Repos in early November.

Many more Haitians had escaped before the soldiers came. By the end of August, a month before the coup, the Haitian government had already estimated that as many as forty thousand Haitians fled the Dominican Republic. By October, the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights put the number at sixty thousand or more. More than seventeen thousand men, women, and children had passed through the Bon Repos Welcome Center, not counting the workers who fled through the mountains along the border rather than wait for Dominican soldiers to get them. The center had room for only six thousand residents at once, so by the end of October more than ten thousand had been sent out into the streets to fend for themselves.

This particular November morning, something had to give. Trapped inside the crumbling white walls of Bon Repos, desolate over the loss of everything he had managed to save in Dominikani, one man released the

pressure building inside. "Why do we allow this to go on?" he yelled at the other men waiting in the yard for nothing in particular. "We should demand to be given better treatment. They should find us jobs!"

At first the others just listened, familiar with this peculiarly Caribbean trait: like a torrential but brief afternoon thunderstorm, a man from time to time declaims loudly on some topic, releasing his anger in a dramatic display of rhetoric, gesticulation, and grimace; if you let the aggrieved person carry on, his anger, like the afternoon cloudburst, will expend itself.

Something about this particular morning, however, induced another resident to intervene. "Look, man, we're all just as unhappy as you. Nobody has any more right than the other to special treatment. Where are they going to get these jobs from?"

The first man's rage tore loose and set itself upon the man who disagreed. Before anyone knew what was happening, a machete appeared. By the time the group pulled the two apart, the first man's stomach was an ugly gash, spilling blood. The commotion attracted the attention of the authorities, and a white van pulled up to take away the injured man. Others, their shirts bloodied, watched from the shade along the wall of a small office building. Would each of them one day soon reach an explosion point and lash out at their equally unfortunate neighbors?

# The Cockfight

chapter

*Con rapidez asombrosa, le fue metiendo las agujas, sin darle un segundo de respiro, neutralizando así el manejo de las patas a su contrincante. El pico era el arma más poderoso de Juanito. Cuando agarraba era muy difícil desprendérsele, salve que el adversario dejara en tributo una gran cantidad de sangre.*

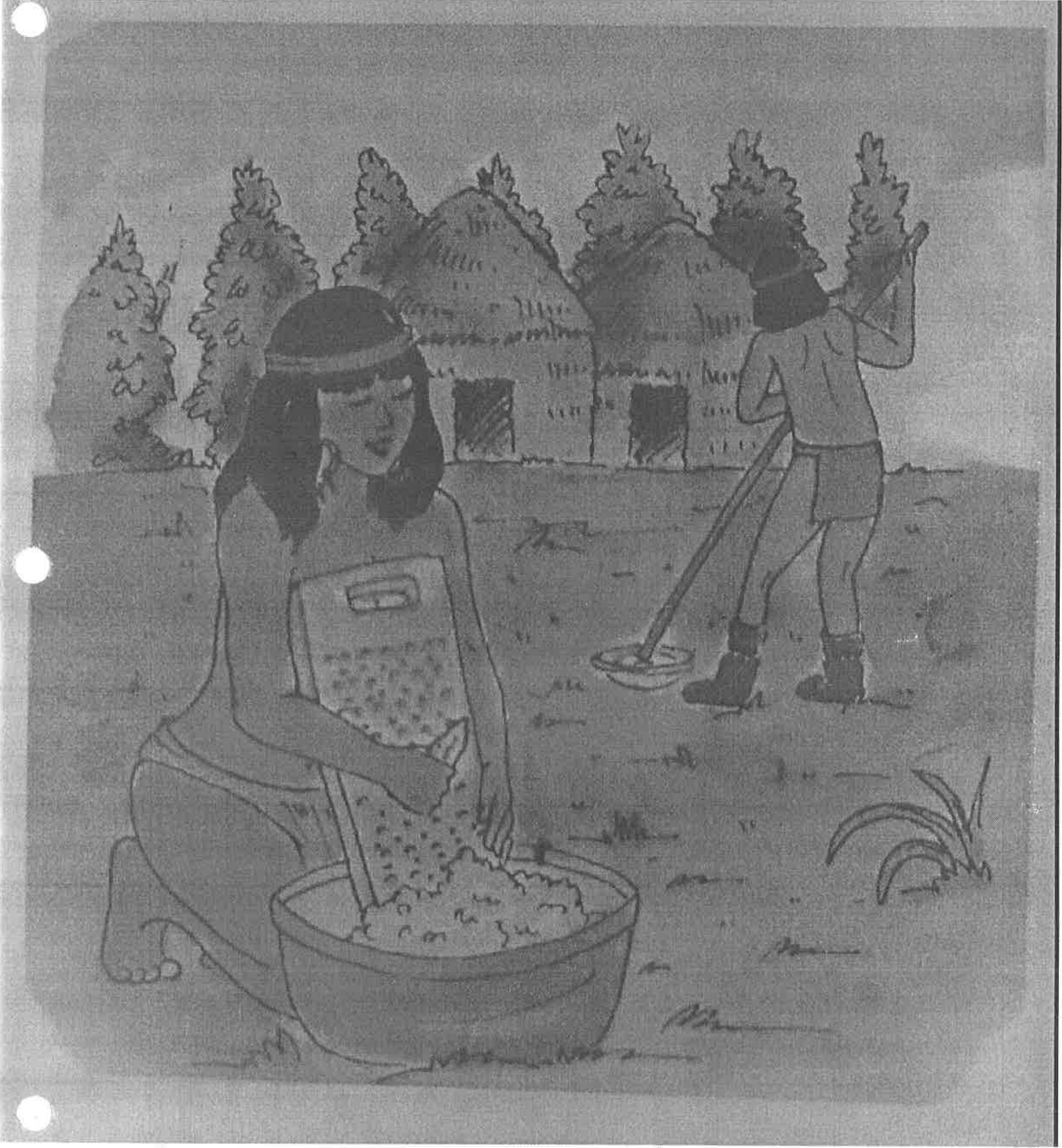
*With stunning speed, he struck with his spurs, without a moment's respite, thus neutralizing his opponent's control of his feet. His beak was Juanito's most potent weapon. When he clamped on, it was extremely difficult for his adversary to escape his grasp without leaving as a tribute a large pool of blood.*

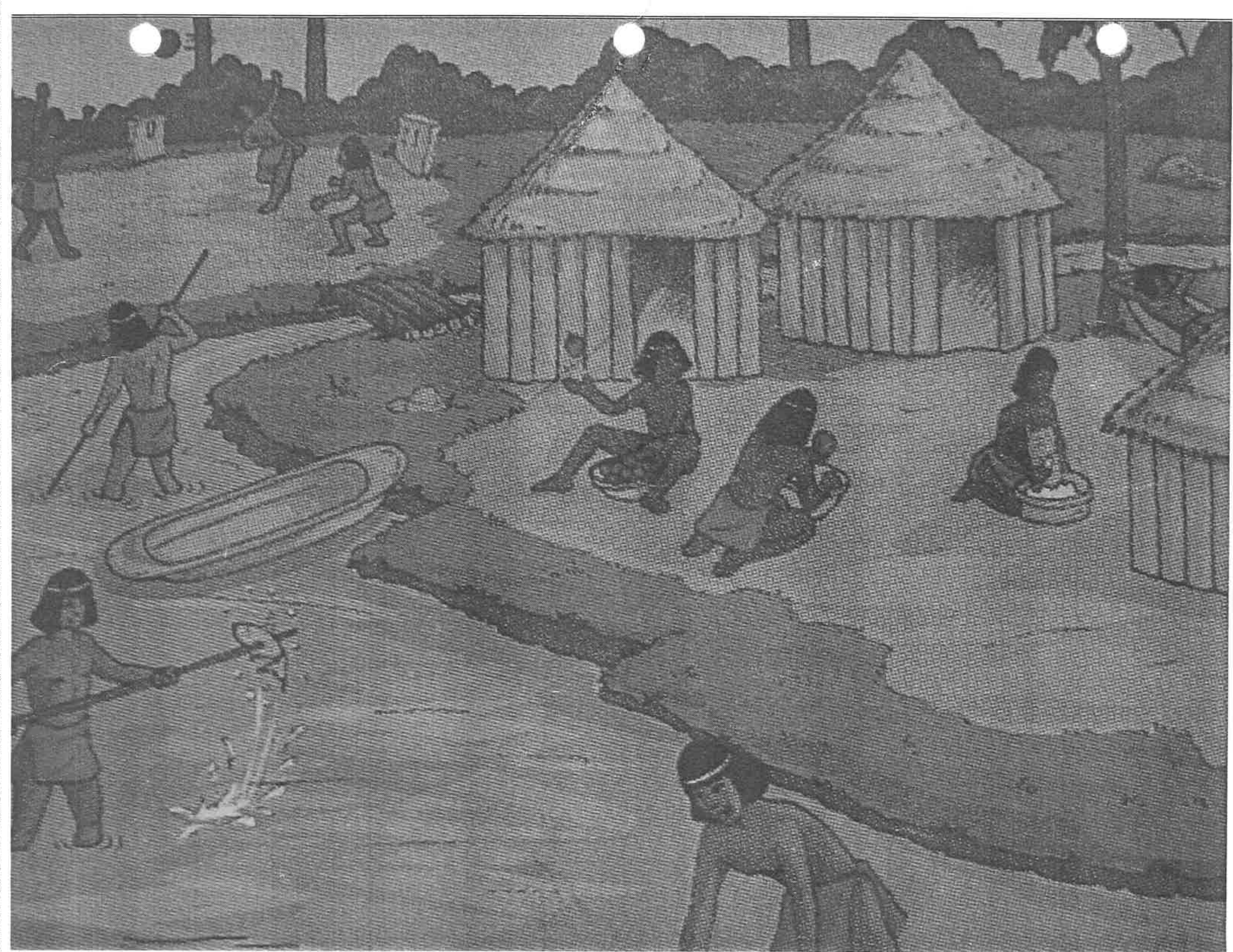
*—Viriato Sención*
*Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios*
*(They Forged the Signature of God)*

Three kinds of men go to the cockfight: breeders, players, and gamblers.

The breeders, the true cockers, get involved in every aspect of the lives of their roosters. They decide which hen will be matched with which cock, what mix of feed the birds will get, at what age a young rooster is ready to fight. Breeders supervise every aspect of the *traba*, the home of the roosters, as if it were their own home and the roosters their children. At the fights a real breeder puts himself in the ring with his bird. For him the cockfight is not a game.

Players appreciate well-trained birds and know more than a bit about the history of the sport. Though they do not let emotions carry them away, they enjoy the passion of the fight, the heat of battle. A player may keep a *traba* of his own, but it is not his main occupation. He passes by often to check on the roosters and the men who are paid to take care of them, but the *traba* does not consume his life





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