

Prologue

The captain of the Iberia flight from Madrid to La Paz via Buenos Aires had issued the usual warning about landing conditions in La Paz and the crew now took their seats. Among the passengers were four British students, backpackers on their way to campaign against the building of a dam in the rainforest of Bolivia. As the plane hurtled - or so it seemed to the four of them - towards the runway at El Alto, Tom Lewis, one of the group, clutched the armrests of his economy-class seat and thought he had never experienced such a hair-raising landing. At high speed the plane bounced uncomfortably along the runway until it seemed they must be nearly over the border and into the next country - Paraguay? Chile? Brazil? Whichever way they were facing! With the plane swaying violently, the landscape outside the cabin windows was nothing more than a brown blur until, after slowing and turning, another fifteen minutes of taxiing brought them to the parking bay in front of a pleasantly small and neat airport building where the words 'Welcome to El Alto, La Paz' assured them they had arrived.

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Some few hundred miles from La Paz, in the back room of a cafeteria, in the small town of Oruro, an 'Indian tribal chief' - as Freddy Tulmayo had been labelled by one London newspaper reporting his disagreement with the Home Office over the extension of his visa some months before - looked at his watch and remarked to his wife, "*Deben de llegar ahora mismo*: They'll be landing about now."

"*El pasaporte, Freddy*, give me your passport," she told him, "Now that you're back I'll put it with the others." And Freddy handed his wife the passport in which, to be accurate, the name Tulmayo didn't feature at all.

"Let's hope your students had a more comfortable journey than you did," she went on, referring back to Freddy's earlier comment and massaging the knots out of his shoulder muscles. "All the same, for you it was a good idea, to come through Paraguay where nobody was looking for you. If you'd flown into La Paz you'd be talking to customs officers still, evading the questions you don't want to answer."

"Including questions about *mi cara esposa*!" Freddy teased her. "I had things to see to down there in

any case. But it's good to be back!"

Pulling his wife towards him Freddy undid the carved wooden pin which held her hair severely back, letting the long black curls fall round her face. Alana Vasques de Tulmayo swung them alluringly to and fro before taking Freddy's face in her hands. She held it to hers, eye-balling him fiercely.

"This time, now that you're back, just don't call attention to yourself. Leave off your crazy games, Freddy. Think of what you have to do - for me also, as well as for you - and take a back seat." Freddy was making faces as she delivered her lecture but she was not to be put off. "Think the long term, Freddy, not just for tomorrow. And let Mario do his share of the work!"

Freddy returned her gaze intently now and smiled ruefully, stroking her cheek with his thumb. "For you, yes, I take the back seat, like the good supporter of the popular election candidate."

"You're right there," she assured him. "My support is building every day! Among the miners especially; not so much in the city where they think I'm subversive."

"In the city they don't understand you, *querida*. Why does this daughter of rich banker work against the companies that make her *papá tan rico*? Perhaps they think here is some dangerous rich girl and so they don't like to trust you."

"And I don't need you, with your reputation, adding to their distrust of me - believe me! So please! Meet your students, your campaigners, and take them somewhere else; anywhere but here!"

"But here is where they come, to meet the miners of Oruro and support them on the water campaign."

"Freddy no! Forget about Oruro! Your water campaign is fine and I'm in favour of it, but I don't want them - or you - here, drawing attention to yourselves and to me, when I need to increase my support for the election without that kind of complication. OK?"

Heaving a deep and dramatic sigh, Freddy conceded.

"OK. *Está bien*! But how to change my plan? You see? To make your life simple, for me is very complicated!" His resigned expression of exasperation made her smile.

"You'll think of something, Freddy, I know", she smiled, "You always do!"