

The Gift for DON GREGORIO

In the middle of the rainy season, Doña Alejandra and 40 followers take us up to Raspberry Hill where there are some 20 crosses in a circle, with three bigger crosses in the middle. Four men consecrate the circle with prayers and food: *mole*, tamales, beer, *pulque*, soft drinks, tortillas and fruit. "The spirits of people killed by lightning are hidden in the crosses. They also have to eat and drink; they get cold and hot, too," says one of the men.

A group attaches white flowers to the crosses, spreads incense and puts bowls of water underneath the crosses. The white flowers are meant to attract rainfall.

"Unfortunately there are ignorant or malevolent people, who leave colored flowers," says one believer. "Red flowers attract the heat, and yellow flowers, diseases."

After the preparations, the participants make the sign of a cross while Doña Alejandra, her eyes closed, begins to breathe heavily. She stumbles around her arms waving uncontrollably.

"Good afternoon," she says. "You all know me well. I'm the volcano and a Mexican," she begins. "Thanks to the strength of all of you, I am here; thanks to the power of your faith I can speak to you." Doña Alejandra continues in an incomprehensible language and appears to fall into a trance. Suddenly, she addresses our photographer.

"Where is our brother? The photographer moves closer. "Did you come here because of your faith or because of the money?" she asks. He answers, "For neither. I came here out of interest in your culture."

"Did you bring anything for me?" replies Pöpo, also known as Doña Alejandra. The photographer starts looking in vain for the bottle of Coke he brought with him, until someone puts a bottle of beer in his hand. "Here is the visitor's present," says one of the faithful. Doña Alejandra takes it and says, "You're accepted."

The weatherwoman puts the bottle to her lips and starts to suck air out of it, a gesture which allows the spirits to also partake of the offering. Doña Alejandra orders the bowls of *pulque* and water be brought to her and stirs them vigorously, later sprinkling the contents around. "I'm very pleased," she says jerking in spasms. "The clouds won't stop coming around my summit. It will keep on raining."

And as to the volcanic activity of the mountain: "You shouldn't fear. I won't do you any harm and I won't explode." The weatherwoman covers her face while the spirit is blown off her neck by one of her followers. She collapses near a tree, and the faithful fetch the food from the circle and begin a picnic in the shade of the trees.