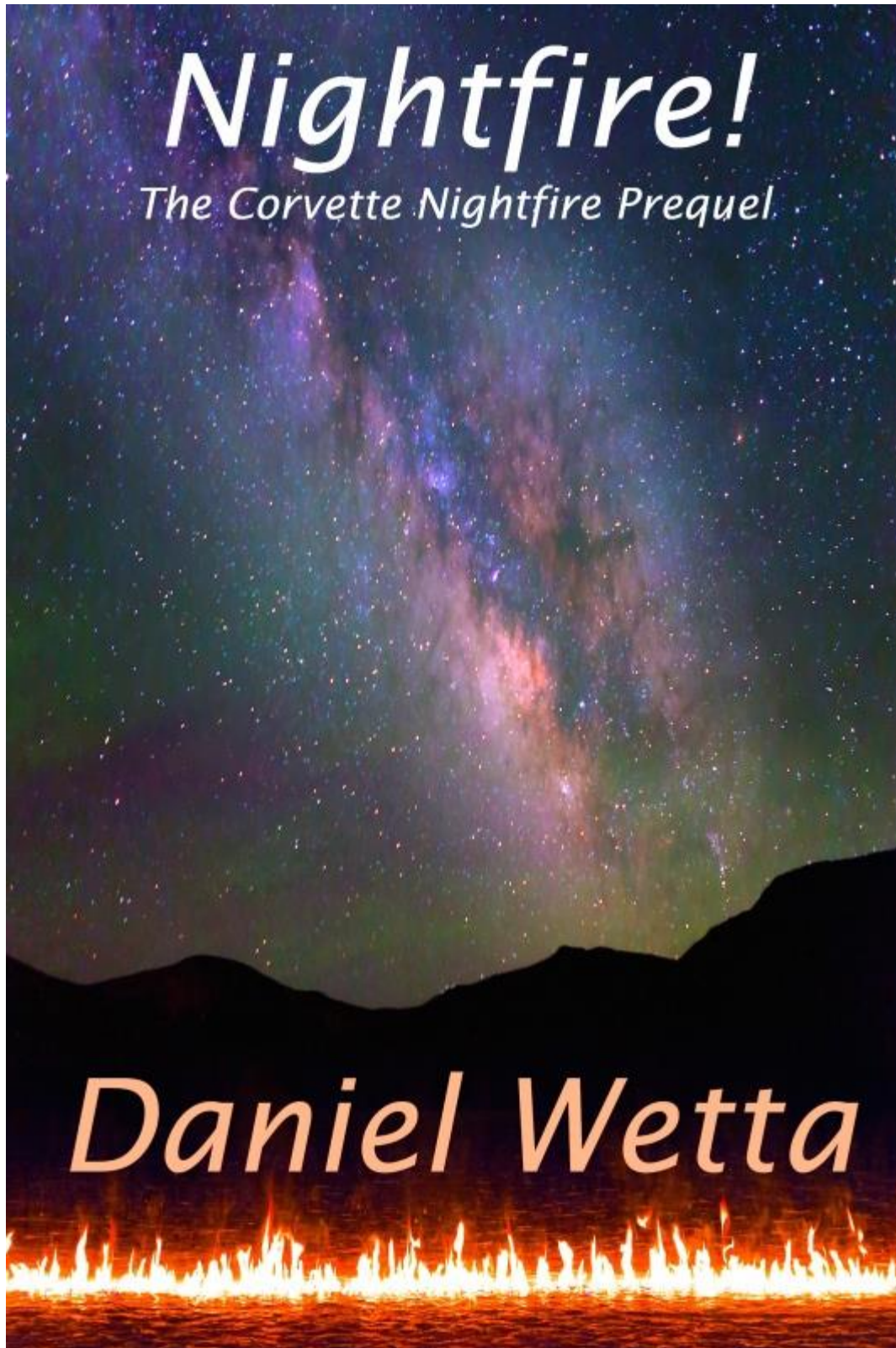


Daniel Wetta



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**Nightfire!**  
(The Corvette Nightfire Prequel)

By Daniel Wetta

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## Nightfire!

Slap-slap-slap-slap...the feel of this sound resonated throughout his body, even as a memory of years before. They were running on a level expanse of rocky path high on the mountainside before the trail took yet another descent towards the valley. Rahui took intense pride from the sounds of his huaraches (running sandals) on the rocks and dirt. He was ten years old, and already he could keep up with his mother. They had run for half a day, and he was still with her. They would be done before dark, because the weather was clear, and the crisp spring air refreshed them. His little brother lagged behind. Rahui and his mother stopped from time to time, until he was in view, and then they ran on, pausing again when they could no longer hear the boy, who was two years younger than Rahui. The father was ahead of them by far. Probably, he had just a short ways to get to the village of Rahui's cousins' family. His father was fast and had been on many winning teams of the rarajipari races, in which the males competed with men from various villages. From past experience, Rahui knew that by the time that he, his mother and brother arrived at his relatives' cabin, his father would already be feeling the effects of the "tesguino" shared by Rahui's uncle: The corn beer would have his father talking too much and looking sleepy-eyed.

"Watch out for chabochi," Rahui remembered his mother telling him for the first time on this particular run. The chabochi were the non-Indians, and since the great war had ended three years earlier, in 1945, the chabochi seemed to be encroaching at an alarming rate in the Copper Canyons. Rahui had heard his parents say that all chabochi were evil. They cared only about material things for themselves, and they did not believe in the sharing: the kórima.

*That would be so sad,* Rahui thought. *Happiness only comes from the sharing.*

He remembered thinking about the chabochi a lot on this particular run. Time and again, the chabochi had invaded the formidable canyons of las Barrancas del Cobre, the Copper Canyons, in the state in Mexico which his mother had told him was named "Chihuahua." The Spanish chabochi had conquered the Indians centuries earlier and had imposed their Catholicism upon the Rarámuri indigenous people. They had proclaimed a loving and compassionate son of a god who would save them, apparently in exchange for the land that the Rarámuri inhabited. The indigenous people had adapted the new beliefs into their own cosmology. These days, his mother had explained, the chabochi coming in were Mexicans who were claiming the resources of their land as their own. Some were especially bad people who were growing marijuana and poppy in the mountains.

"They have brought us a language that they want us to learn. They make us use words for which we have no letters. They are confused people. They name us in Spanish but use our Rarámuri names for places. They do not even call our people correctly. We are the Rarámuri, the running people, but the Mexicans and the outside world call us the Tarahumara. They are confusing even us. Our own people are naming their children with Spanish names. In Spanish, your name, my son, is Día," his mother told him.

He had to learn how to pronounce that because there was no letter "d" in his language. The Rarámuri had a pretty, lazy language that rolled with many colorful "r" sounds. Día was the word for "day." When Rahui first saw Luna, he connected the meaning of his name to the sun. The Rarámuri believed that the father-God was the sun. The moon represented the female-God. He was struck by a lightning bolt of love the moment in which he first saw Luna. He pointed to her when the families were arriving at the meeting place on this particular trip and asked his mother who she was.

"Her family is friends with your cousins," she answered. "The girl's name is Luna. She is called by that Spanish name. It means, 'Moon.' She is a beautiful child. She casts glances at you, Rahui." His mother laughed, expecting that he would be embarrassed.

But he wasn't embarrassed. He told his mother, "If she is called by a Spanish name, then I also want this. She is 'Moon' and I am 'Light of the Sun'. So I am the day. From now on, call me 'Día.'"

If his mother had examined his face at that moment, she might have seen the nascent glow of comprehension in Día's eyes: he was staring at Luna and instructing his destiny to steal her.

That year his father's team won the rarajipari race that lasted two days. The men bulked up on the corn beer and slept at intervals the day before the race, while the women cooked. The women's race started when the men's race began, but theirs lasted only a day. Their race day was merry and full of conversation and giggles among the teams. The men were intense because their race was important. The running was the primary distinction of life for the Rarámuri. It marked their identity. It was their means of communicating among their people so sparsely dispersed throughout the forbidding canyons, mountains, and hills. The running Rarámuri carried the Word.

Along the path to the village that hosted the finish line of the men's race, people set up torches to mark the way for the nighttime running. Each team of men kicked a wooden ball the entire route of the race. Día's father finished first. He walked to a tree stump and sat, and young boys came up to him and began to massage his legs and feet.

The previous day, the team of Día's mother also had won the women's race. So this was the special time that Día remembered until the day that he died: He was old enough to understand his coming manhood. He witnessed the triumph of his parents in their prime. He saw Luna for the first time, and he stole her heart by showing her the look in his eyes.

And this was the time that he received the most impactful warning about the evil of the chabochi from his mother: "There are those who come from Sinaloa. They climb into the hills and take the lands of our people. They grow poppy and marijuana, and then they enslave us and make us run the harvest across the border to the gringo country," she told her son. "If they approach you, run higher into the mountains. Don't let them fool you with their sweet words or scare you with their guns. Do not listen to a word they tell you. They will trick you, because they use bad or weak Rarámuri who have learned their Spanish and who speak to us in our tongue to infect our minds."

As she told him this, Día felt a stir of cognition in his soul, portending a dark destiny: Luna would be his light, and the chabochi were to be his night. His mother's admonishment when he was ten years old left him feeling privately terrified.

He grew up looking more chabochi than indigenous. When he married seventeen-year-old Luna at age nineteen, Día was strong and filled out, not skinny like many of his Rarámuri friends. He liked to wear his hair long and straight. In a few years he wore a mustache. His mother told him that, at sometime, one of his Rarámuri ancestors must have married a Mexican with Spanish ancestry. He didn't have European features like a Spaniard, but he was tall like some of the men from the north of Spain and like many of the gringos whom they had seen. As Día matured, his body and appearance grew to reflect the influences of the outside world of Chihuahua, in Mexico, and of Texas and New Mexico in the United States. It was because he got bit by the chabochi and traveled their paths. Luna clung to him and went everywhere he went.

The seduction of the roads was what had drawn DÍA into the foreign world. His family and generations of ancestors had run the often faint paths of the mountains and canyons. They had eluded the civilization that had kept coming their way. For one hundred years, the chabochi had been building the one passenger railroad through the harsh stoniness or verdant thickness of their vast land. It connected Chihuahua, the city, with the Pacific Ocean in Sinaloa, and it passed through dozens of mountain tunnels and bridges in the land of the Tarahumara (as the chabochi called DÍA's people). It was finally completed in 1962. It made stops in Divisadero, where the passengers disembarked to gawk at the canyon, and in Creel, which in DÍA's youth was a lumber village. The day that DÍA first saw Creel was as important a day as when he first had set eyes on Luna. The wide dirt boulevard in the middle of the town allowed the cars and trucks to pass to-and-from a world that the young man could not imagine well. DÍA stared with wonder at the broad flat road. He saw a running path that did not hide in the rocks and brush.

*Surely only goodness can be at the opposite ends of a road such as this*, he thought. He conveyed his opinion to Luna, who believed him.

Then, when he was sixteen, in Creel, he met the two older Mexican youths who affirmed what he had suspected: that the chabochi paths led to unimaginable wonders. The young men had arrived in a powerful black truck and were dressed in clean cowboy clothes and boots. DÍA made a quick assessment:

*Maybe the chabochi don't believe in the sharing and are selfish people, as my parents say. But maybe Luna and I can get good things for our people in the outside world and teach them how to deal with chabochi. If the outsiders see us strong, maybe they will respect our ways. We should influence the chabochi.*

The youths were from Sinaloa. DÍA saw that their eyes had been assessing his body. Through short sentences and gestures they communicated a teasing challenge: They wanted to race, and they pointed to a sign that could be seen about two kilometers from them on the road. Only one ran. The other leaned against the truck. It was hardly a contest. DÍA stopped half-way and waited for the older boy to reach him, and then he shot off ahead to the sign and remained until the youth arrived. The other boy drove the truck to them and indicated that he would race DÍA back to the town. But when DÍA started to run, the two jumped in the truck and gunned it past him, bathing him in a swirl of dry road dust. DÍA got the message: the Rarámuri might run for days, but the roads and vehicles of the chabochi sliced time and distance into moments of flying scenery.

While his father traded articles in the town and drank with friends, the boys put DÍA behind the wheel of the truck and taught him its operation on the wide road to the end of the town. At first the truck jerked and shook and cut off as DÍA missed gear shifts, but quickly he got the hang of it. The windows were down, and the rush of wind against his face as they sped pressed his skin stronger than any breeze that cooled him when running. The excitement of this made him feel the hardness between his legs that, until then, only Luna had given him.

Before they left him that day, the youths strapped a pack on DÍA's back.

"This for you," one attempted in his language. "To help you carry things. Keep this, but meet us here again. One day you run for us with this on your back. Then you have truck."

When he showed his father the backpack later, the man shook his head. "The boys gave you this because you won the race?" he asked. DÍA knew that his father did not believe his lie, but he felt a strange shame and did not want to tell the whole story. He had an intuition that the thrill of what he had felt in the truck should be private. He thought that he would only tell Luna. His father stared at him, shrugged, and handed him a beer.

It was months before he saw the young men again, and DÍA had turned seventeen. He had left his family to go on a run, he had told them, and to visit cousins. He wore the pack he had been given. But instead of going to see cousins, he went to Creel. He did not even confide this to Luna until after he returned days later. He saw the chabochi faces staring at him as he walked through Creel, and in just a couple hours a black truck pulled to the shoulder of the road where DÍA sat cross-legged. The two young men jumped out of the truck to greet him, as did a third, an older Mexican man whom DÍA judged to be about thirty years old. They fed him and then put him in the bed of the pickup and drove him north. They stuffed his bag and explained that he was running out of Mexico across the border. He met a man who took the bag in the middle of the night. When he ran back, they picked him up the next day from a hiding place in a roadside shrine, a wooden structure in which he squatted beside a battered statue of the Virgin of Guadalupe. It protected him from the sun and the cold wind. They drove him to a lumber yard on the skirts of Creel and showed him an old Chevrolet pickup truck with a flat tire under a lean-to. They told him that it was his and that he could keep it there. They laughed and gave him another bag to take home.

"You run like a demon," one said. His facility with the Rarámuri language had improved. "Come back in twenty days. We will show you more of the world. You like it a lot. We will have another run for you, and you can drive the truck. Do you have brothers and sisters?"

DÍA felt an instinctive leeriness in his heart. He heard faint echoes of his mother's warning about the chabochi. He didn't want them to know about his brother or Luna, whom he loved so deeply. So he answered them, "I only have a young brother, who is just a kid. Besides, I am the best runner of the Rarámuri. I can run for you. You don't need others." And they laughed again.

He ran for them sporadically the next couple of years. They showed him things: guns, which he didn't like, and "dinero" (currency and coins), which held little interest for him. Those were the obsessions of the chabochi. His obsession became speed: the running through flat desert or the acceleration of trucks and cars. These made his blood race. He met many chabochi. Most seemed mean and threatening to him. He kept them away from his people, and he told his family little of his absences, except that he explained to Luna about the speed of the vehicles and the vast expanses of the roads.

"I am caught up in it," he admitted to Luna one night. "My spirit soars to the heavens when the earth falls so fast behind me. My body feels like when we make love and I shout my joy!"

"You make love to danger," Luna told him. "I am a jealous woman. You will not leave me behind. Soon I will come with you."

"No!" DÍA protested. "That can never happen!"

"Yes," she answered him. "Or I will marry your brother. He is my age. You see his eyes for me. If I would lose you to the chabochi world, then I would at least have him."

DÍA was shocked. He realized that, during his absences, his handsome young brother could be with Luna if she allowed this. He did not let this worry stir long in his heart. He married Luna when he was nineteen and she was seventeen. It was 1957. From that time forward, he kept Luna by his side everywhere. She was beautiful and desirable, and he read the eyes of the chabochi who looked at her. He began to carry a pistol. He might need to protect her from the people who more and more revealed their treachery in a world colder than he had known could exist.

Luna began to run with DÍA across the border. She ran like all the Rarámuri women: in the long colorful traditional dresses of her people. She was a superb athlete who managed to carry a pack on her back more than half the weight of DÍA's. They learned more routes. They spent more and more time in the Mexican towns. DÍA picked up new skills. He learned the mechanics of the

trucks and cars that were provided to him to service. They were old, and they broke down often. He sometimes had to replace parts with some that he knew had been stolen. Then vehicles began to arrive for him on flatbed trucks. These had no keys. DÍA learned to start them by touching the starter wire to the ignition and battery wires that he had entwined together. He installed new ignition-key mechanisms. The Mexicans made him work on these vehicles in a hurry, and then they raced them away, sputtering smoke and dust. His joy in work came from what he desired most: fast cars and trucks that he could keep for a while, until something better came along for him.

Luna sat close by when he worked. She didn't trust the conversation of the chabochi women in the bars and places where the women of the men remained. In her heart, she wanted to return with DÍA to her old life.

He found out in this manner: One cold night, during one of their runs, Luna collapsed, and DÍA rushed to her. She was bleeding profusely from her vagina. She had lost a baby very early in pregnancy. He had known nothing of her pregnancy. DÍA held her tightly, and they both cried as she made a confession:

"We make love all the time because I have wanted to have a baby so badly! I thought that this would make you come back to our home with me and stay. I have lost two others, DÍA! You didn't even know. I think this running is not permitting me to develop babies." Then she sobbed a long time while DÍA's heart broke from the awakening to his selfishness. That night he vowed to himself that they would return to their people. He realized that he had not once thought about bringing chabochi wonders to help the Rarámuri, as he had once intended, nor had he made any impact on the chabochi to respect his people.

They were, of course, late delivering the packs that night. It was almost dawn before they met up with the men who awaited the bags. One rushed behind DÍA and grabbed him from behind, immobilizing his arms. The other seized his pistol and pointed it at him, while Luna screamed. He then pointed it in the air and fired all the bullets. The man holding him released him. Then, with ugly and menacing words, the men told him that they had killed Rarámuri runners who had failed them. DÍA felt terror, not by the threat of death, but by the way they cast pig-eyes on Luna.

But, in the end, the men walked them a distance to a road, just as it was getting light. They put DÍA and Luna in the front seat of a car and handed some papers to DÍA.

"You will take this car into Mexico," one of the men said, speaking to him in a combination of Spanish and the language of the Rarámuri. "In a short time, you will come to the border where they will stop you and ask for papers. You won't understand them. Just show the man these papers, and they will let you through. Don't speak. Keep driving until a couple of trucks come and signal you to pull over."

In the months that followed, DÍA witnessed more and more Mexican men from the cartel arriving in Creel and disbursing to plots of land in the mountains where they were growing marijuana and poppy. He and Luna began to learn Spanish, especially Luna, who had an aptitude for the language. She was good at putting words together, DÍA thought. They learned that demand for the products of the cartel was increasing, because in the United States a middle class with young, rebellious people who liked rock-'n-roll music enjoyed social activities and types of partying not occurring in Mexico. DÍA saw more men arriving with guns daily. He stopped looking for his family in the canyons. He worried about their safety and feared he might lead the cartel members to them. He didn't want his parents to know what he had been doing, and he didn't want his brother to become influenced as he had been.

*I run a fever in my spirit*, he thought.

And he worried incessantly about Luna. He had to keep his eyes on her to protect her from the chabochi men around, who were removed from their women and who looked with lust at Luna's beautiful body. In addition, he took to heart what she had told him. She was not having babies. She was losing them. Perhaps the running was taking its toll, as she had theorized. Nearly three years had passed since they married, and even more years since they first made love, and they still did not have a family.

The memory of Luna's bleeding in the desert haunted him. The spiritual wretchedness of their lives, totally his fault (he believed), evoked this thought: *How could we possibly have a family while living as we do?*

One day, when an important leader of the cartel showed up to discuss something with him, DÍA had the first intuition of a possible escape for him and Luna.

He was covered in grease and working under a truck when the man showed up in the crude, wooden shop off the main road running through Creel. A group of beefy Mexican men arrived with him, and a couple of them with rifles posted themselves by the door.

The man wanted DÍA to run stolen cars. "You are good with the cars and trucks," he said. He seemed to know a lot about DÍA. "You can start them quickly, and you drive fast. We have a shop in Texas where we change vehicle numbers and strip or prep the cars we get. We prepare papers for border crossings. We pay some of the border guys to look not so closely at the cars. Some of the trucks can be driven off roads to avoid border crossings. We take orders for vehicles in Mexico. So each car is chosen for a purpose. Some we keep for ourselves. You can have your pick at any time. Sometimes you will bring cash back to us from our sales and services up there. Sometimes weapons. We will teach you how to make hiding places in the vehicles for these things. Your wife...she can run for us still, or she can help you. It looks good at the check points to see a married couple in the cars. She can be with you. Your choice."

The choice to make was obvious.

And they did look handsome in the cars, even if Luna always seemed nervous and unsettled until they arrived at the border, where she managed to produce charming smiles for the border agents. It was a disarming tactic which DÍA told her would help them get through to Mexico. Luna could do anything that DÍA asked her to do. He had been the center of her world since she was a child. They would arrive at the check point, DÍA dressed like a Mexican cowboy, Luna in her beautiful, traditional dresses. DÍA's clothing was one practical use that they had found for the cash that the chabochi gave them. The Rarámuri women, knowing only poverty, wore their dresses for weeks before cleaning them. Many only had one. DÍA had Luna acquire more dresses at a roadside trading stand in Creel, so that she would always have something clean for the crossings. He had developed sensitivity for cultural differences in the north of Mexico and in the United States as a function of always needing his wits about him in his work. He worried that, over time, he might feel less Rarámuri and more chabochi. He wondered if Luna sensed that she was changing: At the border, when his Spanish failed him, Luna picked up the conversation with ease. He felt to blame for the dilution of her cultural identity. He felt shame. It was the reason that he liked to see her in the traditional dresses. It made him feel less bad about things.

The stolen vehicle shop was several kilometers north of the border at a small Texas settlement known as Presidio, where several hundred residents lived. DÍA and Luna often took vehicles from Presidio across the Rio Grande River into Ojinaga, Mexico by pulling a two-vehicle trailer behind a heavy-duty pickup truck. They had false papers identifying them as employees of a wholesale dealer who bought used vehicles in the United States for dealers and



customers in Mexico. Several of the agents at the Presidio crossing were receiving money from the cartels not to look closely at the vehicles and not to worry about DÍA and Luna. The Mexican cartel hombres hungered for the big American cars, especially Chevrolet, Cadillac and Ford. DÍA sometimes unloaded the vehicles in Ojinaga, and sometimes he took them all the way to the principle city with the same name as the state: Chihuahua.

While DÍA and Luna lived in Texas, as they heard rumors of Rarámuri lands being seized by the Sinaloa cartel in the Copper Canyon, as they learned about the deaths of Rarámuri people being murdered for resistance to the drug-running or for failures in the eyes of the cartel, DÍA increasingly considered plans for their escape from the dangerous life into which he and Luna had fallen. He saw the stolen cars as a way out. He dreamed that while he had the trust of the cartel, he and Luna might escape in one of the stolen cars that they were delivering to Mexico. There, he and Luna might find a place to build a secret life somewhere. He knew that the cartel would try to find him, so he and Luna would have to abandon any ideas of returning to their families. He would not lead the cartel to them! So whenever he was on the road to Chihuahua, he kept his eyes peeled for road signs that might give him ideas about where to go. At road stops, he conversed with strangers to learn where they were from and what their home communities were like. He sought a hiding place where he and Luna might begin a family.

But fate put into motion events leading to a different destiny.

One afternoon, DÍA was with Luna in a small community grocery in Presidio, when Luna grabbed her stomach and doubled over in pain. She fell to her knees on the floor. As DÍA ran to her, he saw a white woman rush to her aid. The woman was asking what was wrong in English, but Luna was answering in Spanish. DÍA heard Luna's distressful cry of "Bebe! Bebe!" The woman understood enough Spanish words to get the gist of Luna's responses, and with DÍA's help, she got Luna to her feet, and they took her to a bathroom in the back of the market.

This was another time when DÍA did not know that Luna was pregnant. He found out later in the afternoon that Luna had only spotted blood. After a long time in the bathroom, the woman consulted her husband at the door, who had come into the store, and then they decided to find Luna some medical help. They got DÍA to understand to follow them. They put Luna in the back seat of their car, a cavernous white 1960 Oldsmobile 98 sedan. They stopped at a house outside Presidio, where a general practitioner had his office, and he examined Luna. Finding her to be okay, but stressed, he ordered bed rest for her. The older couple collected Luna and drove to their ranch several kilometers north. DÍA followed. He smelled the onions and cantaloupes being grown on the farm as they approached the ranch house of the couple. He could smell the fragrances even inside the home as that afternoon and evening wore on.

Despite the scare that Luna had lost another baby, this day became for DÍA one that claimed a sweet corner in his heart. For years he remembered the gratitude on Luna's face and her bond with the Texas woman, who had come to her aid like a doting mother. DÍA turned to this memory often later, whenever he was feeling desperate and missing Luna more than he thought he could stand.

The baby did survive in Luna's belly. DÍA could see the bond developing between Luna and the kind rancher woman even that first night. The woman struggled to communicate with words of Spanish, and Luna, seeing the woman's comfort with English, began to learn and repeat English words that very evening. Luna's facility with languages and her cleverness were things that made DÍA yearn for her. He had always been in awe of her intelligence and quickness in learning. He often remembered watching Luna with the woman that night and recalling the heat

that he had felt for Luna in his body. He had wished that he could be alone with Luna in the ranch house. It made him smile to remember that.

Very quickly, by the next afternoon as DÍA recalled, it became settled among him, Luna, the woman and her husband, that DÍA and Luna would move from the small apartment that they had inside a rooming house in Presidio to a wooden bungalow in the back of the farm that was presently vacant. The ranchers offered that Luna could help the woman with the farm and household duties, and the woman would be able to care for Luna as her pregnancy came to term. The ranchers believed, as DÍA and Luna had told them, that DÍA worked on cars and occasionally sold some, which he delivered to Mexico. Hearing that, the woman asserted that it would be much safer for Luna and the baby not to travel with DÍA, as she had been doing. Luna would assist her as compensation for their new living quarters, she said.

The arrangement produced a brief period of stability, at least for Luna, and the sense that they might have a family after all. As Luna's belly grew in the months that followed, she and the older woman strengthened in their friendship. The baby was born in 1961. They considered Rarámuri names. Luna and the rancher woman exhausted many conversations discussing possibilities. Luna saw that the Rarámuri names were difficult for the rancher woman, whom she had come to love. The woman kept returning to the English name, Roger, but the Spanish name for Roger, Rogelio, sounded similar to a Rarámuri name that DÍA liked. So the baby was named Rogelio. He came out of Luna flailing and kicking, a beautiful boy in graceful motion, like he was dancing. The boy loved to dance as he grew. DÍA saw in the next couple years that no one could look at Rogelio without falling instantly in love.

DÍA let himself become lulled into calmness by feeling the domesticity of life on the ranch when he was at home. But the work taking cars into Mexico became increasingly risky. There was constant turnover in the cartel, and DÍA found himself repeatedly dealing with people whom he didn't know. Certainly, none of them were men to be trusted. He knew their homicidal natures. And every new man appearing in his shop already knew a lot about DÍA, where he lived, where he came from, his skills, and that Luna worked with him. They mentioned this information to him with painted smiles and murderous eyes. None had mentioned the baby yet, but as Rogelio grew and DÍA loved him more and more, he became increasingly apprehensive about his baby's future. At night in bed, Luna also whispered her anxieties to him that Rogelio was endangered by the lives of his own parents! She told DÍA that always she felt the presence of cold, invisible eyes.

Rogelio had been walking for about nine months when the complicities of DÍA's work intruded. He and Luna suddenly had to accept the inevitability of sudden life-or-death choices to be made with no time to consider them. The finality of things began with the theft of a fast silver car.

DÍA was about to go home late one January evening when a pock-skinned cartel leader appeared with a couple of his men. DÍA had dealt with him before, a rooster of a man who strutted back and forth wherever he was, usually belittling those with him. But this night he came with singleness of purpose.

"You are coming with us, cabrón. We have work tonight," the man told DÍA. "El jefe, the big man, is coming from Sinaloa to Ojinaga in a few days. He has business, but it is his birthday, and he wants to have a special fiesta because he will have fifty years of age. There is this singular gift that he wants to show off at his party. It is a car is made in the United States, a new model, very hard to get. It has caused me mucho fuego (a lot of fire) in my stomach trying to find him one. Finally, I found one not too far from here. You are the lucky hombre who is going to get it ready

for him. Serás muy jodido si metes la pata, cabrón! (You will be very fucked if you screw this up, you idiot.) Vámonos, let's go! Bring your tool kit."

They drove on nearly deserted highways about ninety miles to a ranch on the outskirts of a small community named Alpine. On the way, the man described the "gift" that DÍA was to steal: a 1963 Corvette that had double rear windows caused by a flow of the roofline passing down the center of the window. The car would be in the detached equipment shed of a ranch house owned by the prominent area farmer. "El jefe tiene huevos grandes por este auto," he told DÍA: "The boss has big balls for this car. It is fast. He wants the best."

Just before arriving at the ranch, a mid-size moving truck pulled ahead of them onto the highway. It led a few miles before pulling to the shoulder in the dark of the moonless night. As they passed it, the man told DÍA, "You will get the car started and drive it to this truck. Muy rápido. It is a straight drive to here. Just be sure no one is on the road when you make the short trip. Drive the car into the truck when you arrive, and then get in the truck with the driver. We won't be far. But if anything goes wrong, you are doing this all by yourself, chiquito. The truck will take the car to a place and leave it to be painted. When that is finished, it comes to your shop for the customizing that you will do. We will instruct you at that time. But tonight, this is your job alone, comprendes? (Do you understand?) Any word from you about us to anyone, we go to find your wife. She will not be too happy that you talked, I promise you that."

At the mention of Luna, DÍA felt his breath catch. He forced a calm composure. "I understand," DÍA answered, but inside he seethed with rage. In a flash, he determined that the time for a new life had arrived.

The theft was easy in this trusting community of rural Texas. DÍA had worried about dogs barking or the time required to break into the shed, but the night was quiet and still. There was no sign of dogs. The double door to the shed was not even locked. Inside were the car, a couple of tractors, a big generator and farm tools. The men had let DÍA out from the car just down the road from the ranch and had driven away. With his tools, DÍA skillfully unlocked the car. He observed that the Corvette had a manual transmission. He broke the steering column lock. With his body, he eased the car closer to the open shed door by pushing the frame from beside the driver seat. When he hot-wired the ignition, he got startled by a loud crack and a flame that shot from the exhaust pipe.

*Maldito!* he thought. *This carburetor needs adjusting!* He worried that the sound might have awakened the owners in the house, but in the seconds that followed, he saw no sign that anyone in the house was stirring. He hummed the engine as quietly as the Corvette would allow. The engine was a small block and relatively calm at low rpms, but DÍA worried that there would be more misfires creating explosive cracks of thunder in the cold, silent night.

When he got to the road, he gunned the engine and popped into gear, and the car's front end lifted slightly for a moment. He had rolled the window down. The gushing, roaring wind in his face and the growling acceleration of the engine caused his heart to pound. He had never experienced speed like this! It was that moment which validated for him that the time had come for freedom for his family. He would pay close attention to opportunities that would present themselves over the next days.

He covered the two miles to the truck in no time. When he decelerated, the brakes seemed woefully inadequate for the Corvette's speed. He noted that the car had drum brakes. He had studied the new disc brakes on a couple of the cars that had passed under his modifications in his shop. He made a mental note that these should be installed on the Corvette. The truck had turned around and had its rear doors opened with ramps down for entry. DÍA barely managed to stop the

car in time because of the brakes, but he did, and then he eased the Corvette up the ramp and into the truck.

In the three days that passed before he saw the car again, DÍA remembered something important: The car was silver. The Chevrolet Corvette vehicle identification numbering system would include a number to indicate the car's color. If it were to be repainted, a new vehicle number would have to reflect the new color.

When the man who had taken him on his mission reappeared with the car three nights later at his shop, the surprise wasn't that the car was bright red. The shocker was the special project that the man had for him to do: He had a box of cash, U.S. currency, that he wanted hidden inside the liner of the car's interior ceiling. DÍA was to tape the large denomination dollars to the metal frame of the roof and then re-install the liner so that no one would be able to tell that it had ever been removed. The car, DÍA realized, was not only a birthday gift for the leader of the Cartel of Sinaloa, but it would also serve the purpose of transporting cash to him for drug sales that had taken place in the United States. El Jefe would have double bragging rights: for the car and the cash inside it.

After he stole the Corvette, DÍA had prepared Luna that there might come a hasty escape opportunity for them. In the bed, they whispered intimately, as if the baby could understand what they were discussing if he heard them. Luna surprised DÍA with unyielding anxiety about Rogelio:

Por Dios, DÍA, if we run, we can't take the baby! Anything can happen. We could be killed! We'll be on the run forever! We can't take our baby all over Mexico! That is no life for our son!"

"We can't stay here forever, either, Luna," DÍA answered. "I'm going to be caught one day by the gringo police, or the cartel will kill us, or we'll be deported and then sought in Mexico by the cartel. We have to make a new life, with new identities.

"I won't risk Rogelio's life in the transport of this car," Luna said pointedly, talking about the Corvette. "If I have to go with you, we have to come back!"

The discussion wore on through the night. Finally, DÍA got Luna to agree on a plan that he didn't believe would ever come to pass: that they would find a hiding place in Mexico, and when the time was right, they would return for Rogelio. Luna seemed uneasily to agree to this, but DÍA believed that she also didn't think that they would be able to return.

The next night, Luna shocked DÍA with news that she had confided to the woman of the ranch that she would be making the trip with him.

Luna said, "I began to tell her that we would be back, but she interrupted me. It was as if she knew we were doing bad things. She told me never to worry about Rogelio, that she loved him as if he were her own grandson, and me as if I were her daughter! If anything ever happened to us, she said that she and her husband would raise Rogelio as if he were their own son!"

The night of the transport of the Corvette to Mexico, DÍA and Luna sat tensely in their seats as they approached the border. With so much cash being under the headliner of the car, and the car being a special birthday gift for the boss of the cartel, there were escorts for the young Rarámuri couple: A heavy-duty pickup truck cruised ahead of them, and a Ford Galaxy full of young Mexican men drove behind them.

"There should not be a problem going over the river to Mexico," DÍA explained for the umpteenth time to Luna. "They have made sure the border agents looking at the cars tonight are the guys on their payroll." But he was nervous.

Luna sat quietly, staring out the passenger window.

"So when it is time for us to get out of the car on the other side, when everyone is making a big commotion about the car for El Jefe, that is when we do what we always do."

Luna didn't say anything, so DÍA added, "We run. We run into the night. You stay with me. They won't notice us or care about us at first. They will just be interested in the car."

The inspection at the U.S. gate was, indeed, nonchalant. The young man who looked at their papers did not even look directly in their eyes. DÍA had seen him on the job before. The truck was ahead on the bridge over the river. In the rear mirror, DÍA saw that the Ford behind them also had passed through quickly, as if it had been waved through. DÍA did not expect that there would be anyone on the Mexican side stopping vehicles in the "Nothing to Declare" lane. There seldom was. Sometimes, a Mexican Army troop-carrier sat nearby in the darkness with men watching and pulling an occasional car over to question the driver, but this did not happen often. Once over the bridge, they would drive through the sleeping small town on the route to the city of Chihuahua, but they would turn off shortly to a rural road that would lead them to the place where El Jefe was staying.

It was precisely at that turn where some Mexican Army jeeps and trucks had blocked the intersection! DÍA got surprised suddenly by cracks of gunfire ahead of him, and he instinctively stomped the brake pedal. Luna bolted upright in her seat, and both of them stared ahead, trying to make sense of what they were seeing.

"I think the guys in the truck are shooting at the Mexican Army!" DÍA shouted. He glanced in the mirror and saw that the Ford was speeding toward them and catching up fast. When he looked ahead again, he saw the pickup truck moving backwards and then stop. His body tensed from the awareness that he would have to make a split-second decision. Suddenly, the truck aggressively began spinning its tires, and it lurched forward, accelerating directly towards two jeeps on the left side of the highway. DÍA glanced in the rear mirror another time. The Ford was getting closer. When he looked ahead again, to his amazement, the pickup truck rammed into the fronts of both jeeps, and all three vehicles flew askew, leaving an opening in the road.

While Luna screamed, DÍA floored it. He revved the Corvette's engine, shifted into second gear, took it whining to a scream, hit third, and sailed through the opening in the highway just as soldiers rushed forward trying to shoot at him and the Ford behind them.

But DÍA got through! A shot blew out the passenger side window, and Luna shrieked and threw her hands to the right side of her head. It happened fast, but, at the same time, DÍA saw her movements as if she were in slow motion. As his mind took in things at super-speed, it seemed like he was looking at Luna and in the rear mirror at the same time. There he saw that the Ford had stopped and that soldiers were running towards it, firing their rifles furiously.

"Luna! Luna! Are you okay?" DÍA shouted, feeling panicked that she was hurt badly. But his feet and hands fired the Corvette into the Chihuahua night. The car made a loud rifle shot of its own as an orange flame spumed from the exhaust and then extinguished. In a flash, they were in the pitch-darkness of Mexican countryside.

It didn't seem like a serious injury to her head at first, but Luna never was the same. As months and years passed, she became quieter. Her eyes stayed on DÍA as he fixed her meals or helped her dress in the mornings. She sat silently nearby as he worked. Every now and then, she brought him joy, because out of the blue, she would say, "Thank you!" or "I love you!" Once she said, "Look at the sky!" But then her cough developed and became worse with every passing month. She stopped speaking completely then.

They moved a lot. DÍA made a trusted friend who kept his Corvette in storage for him. Several times, DÍA went to visit it and he took Luna with him. He gave her rides in the night, which she seemed to love. He never disturbed the roof liner or told anyone about the cash taped to the metallic roof above it. He remembered that he had never changed the vehicle number because he had learned that there would be no inspection at the border. So a knowledgeable person looking at the vehicle tag mounted on the driver-side dash by the windshield would know that the Corvette was originally silver.

He told Luna, "We'll take this car to Rogelio when he's grown. It will be our gift from us to him. Or maybe one day he will look for his people, and he will come to Chihuahua and find us."

Luna's cough began producing blood. With the help of his friend, DÍA took her to receive medical care in the city, Chihuahua. The doctor admitted her to the hospital, and she died a couple of weeks later. It was 1968, and she was only twenty-eight years old.

It took DÍA weeks in the canyons, but he finally found his brother still living among the Rarámuri. His heart grieved the loss of Luna so painfully that there were days in the mountains and canyons when he did not have the spirit to walk and search for his brother or his family. He didn't find him until winter, when many of his people migrated to the warmer canyon bottoms. The brother was married at the time and had two small children.

DÍA didn't want his family to know much about the life that he and Luna had led. His heart wanted the memory of Luna to be what she was before she left the mountains with him: happy, young, beautiful...and a true runner. In the few years that DÍA spent with his brother's family, he said that he and Luna had been deported suddenly. They had left Rogelio with the ranchers in Texas to protect him, DÍA reported, and they had worked together in different cities to avoid retribution by the cartels. He didn't tell them how quiet Luna had been, that she had been injured, and that she had followed his every movement with her trusting eyes. He didn't say that he had stolen the only legacy which he might be able to leave his son: the car and the cash. He debated with himself to tell his brother that the cartels might look for the car because it had so much money inside it. DÍA was about to explain that, finally, to his brother, but before he could, he died in an accident in the mountains. The homeland that had nourished his spirit as a young boy betrayed him: a rocky point on a cliff crumbled, causing DÍA to slip and fall to his death.

After DÍA died, the brother inspected the box that DÍA had brought with him when he had returned to the mountains. Inside were the keys to the Corvette, a couple of Polaroid photographs taken of DÍA and Luna in Texas, a picture of the vehicle identification number of the Corvette, a paper with contact information for the man keeping the car, and a few random odds and ends: a whistle, some coins, a rosary...not things in summation that would explain the years away from home. The brother had a better understanding from a story that DÍA had told him once:

"I left behind this car, a crazy car that spits fire sometimes. I used to take Luna out in it in the night, and we would race through the dark countryside until the car would shoot its flame and make a big light behind us and a noise. Those were times when a smile would appear on Luna's face. I adored seeing her smile. Before we left the United States, I told her that we would have a last name, as is the custom of the gringos, in honor of our car, and we would say that we were Fuego de Noche, which in English means 'Nightfire.' One night in Mexico, when our car sputtered the fire, I reminded her of our gringo last name. She looked at me and laughed in a way that I will never forget. At that moment, a shooting star lit the night, and Luna said to me, "Look at the sky!"

And then DÍA broke into sobs, and his brother sat and put his arm around him.

Daniel Wetta

Remembering this story a few days after DÍA died, the brother said to his wife and children, "I want us to remember my brother and Luna in our hearts forever. They were great runners. Their names meant, 'Day' and 'Moon.' Their names honored the creators of the Rarámuri. They had the spirit of fire in the night. They called themselves by this name in Spanish. We have Rarámuri names, but we will remember my brother and sister-in-law by using this Spanish name when the chabochi ask our full names. Ours is the family, 'Fuego de Noche.' We are proud to be this."

The brother was old and his wife had long died when a young man appeared in the canyon with a woman and a Rarámuri guide. The brother was nearly blind, but when he stood close and looked at the youth, when he traced his eyes and face with his fingers, he could see that the man looked very much like DÍA had looked just before he died. He had always expected that DÍA's son would find his way to him, but this was not his son. This could only be a miracle of the Creator: The young man before him was DÍA's grandson. He said that his name was Corvette Nightfire!

In his body, the brother felt rushing wind.

It was DÍA telling him to give Corvette the box.

The End