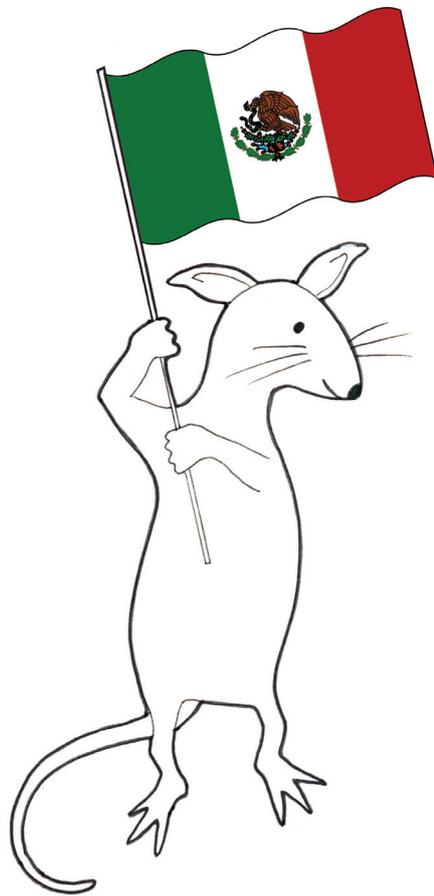
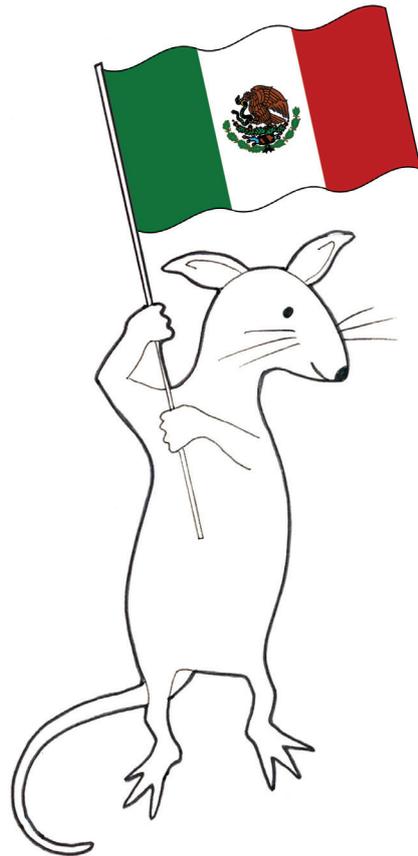


Moctezuma, Hernan Cortés and Raúl, a Hero Rat



by
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Colette Lambe



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Raúl had a sore chest so Robey and Rafa took him to the vet.

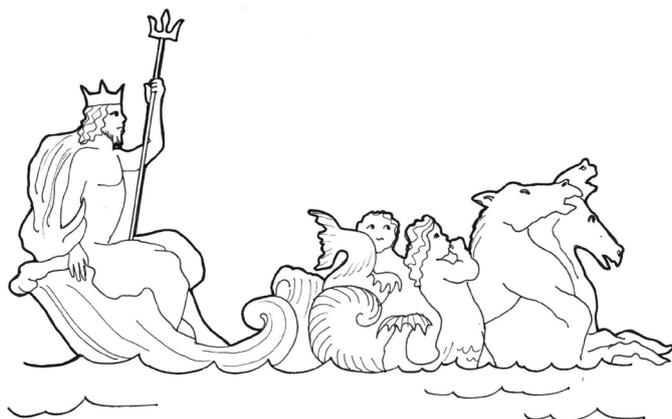
"It could be his heart," the vet said. "I'll do an X-ray."

"You'll feel a little scratch," he told Raúl. "Then I'll squirt in some coloured liquid and see if there are any blockages. You can watch it on the screen, Raúl."



The image on the screen swirled and pulsed and Raúl watched the slurp-slosh of his heart like a galleon on a vast, foggy sea. High waves crested and fell and monsters rose from the depths draped in seaweed, like

drawings on an ancient chart. A puff-cheeked cherub blew streaks of wind westward over an Ocean labelled 'Atlantic'. Neptune held his trident out of the waves in salute and the curling tail of a sea serpent thrashed at the bows of Raúl's racing heart-ship.



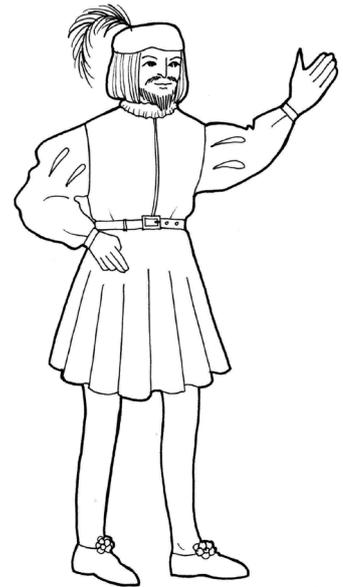
Robey, Rafa and the Vet were left behind ashore; Raúl sailed alone over the mystery seas.

The outline of an island appeared and copperplate lettering rushed forward screaming 'Cuba' as Raúl's sails billowed towards land - he wasn't sure if he was in the map, or reading the map . . . and then he landed . . . scraping over rocks onto sand and into a little harbour between palm trees.

CUBA

There were other ships there and a man was directing embarkation. Dressed in doublet and hose, he paced about complaining loudly.

"I came here to get rich, not to work myself to the bone for his lord high-and-mightiness the Governor of Cuba. I came for gold and glory. I came to suppress savages and impose the rule of God. I will claim territory and treasure for Spain's Majesty, King Charles V. I will not stay here in service. I will sail further west. I will conquer. I will plunder. I will ..."



He spotted Raúl.

"Have you come from Spain?" he asked him.

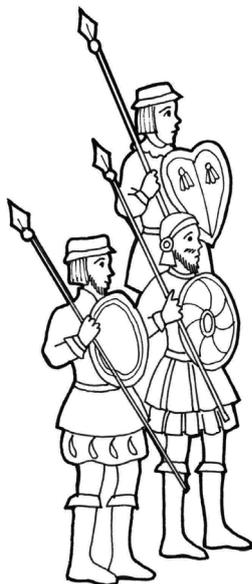
"I'm not sure," answered Raúl. "I was at the Vet's ..."

The man was impatient. "Are you a Spaniard?"

"I am a Rat," Raúl boasted. He quickly added, "From Madrid," as the man rolled his eyes threateningly.

"Extremadura is my home," bellowed the man, "but now we all fight for the one unified Spain. The marriage between Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile brought Christian Spain together. You and I are Christian Spaniards and we have no quarrel."

Raúl was relieved to hear this.

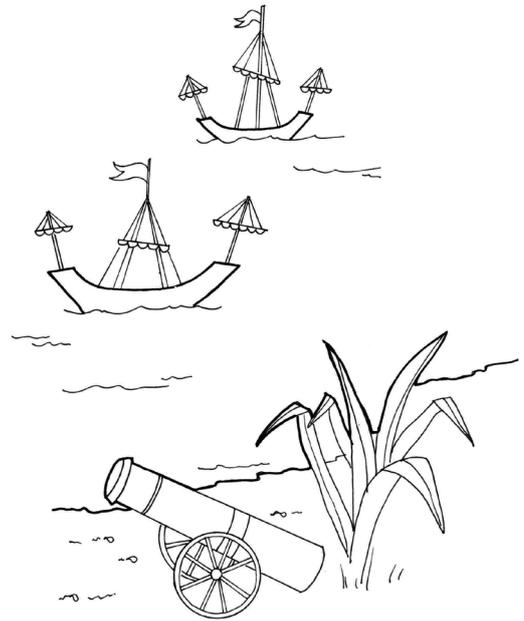


"Since Christopher Columbus reached the New World in 1492 Spain has been powerful. Spain wants gold. I want gold. I sail for the land of the Mexica to get more gold ..."

All around this excitable man the beach was a bustle of embarkation. Raúl could see strong horses being trotted up the gangways onto the ships. Artillery was hauled up after them and then soldiers marched aboard bearing guns, swords and shining armour.

"To the Land of the Mexica!" the excitable man cried, lifting his sword to the sky. "To Mexico! For God, Spain and ... gold!"

Announcing the departure a canon shot blasted across the water; great sails banged open and strained seaward, bloated with a fierce wind. Horses whinnied from the ships' holds and cheering men on the decks gazed forward into the unknown.



Over all the noise their leader shouted a challenge to Raúl,

"Come with me, Rat, if you are **STOUT-HEARTED!**"

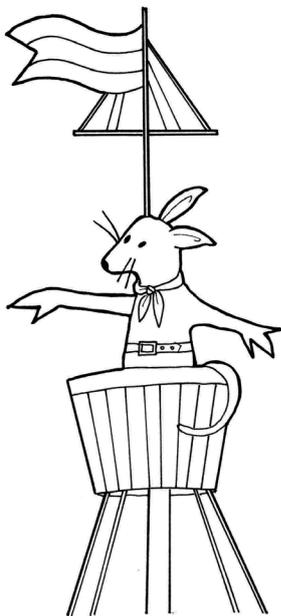
"I wonder why everyone is interested in my heart," Raúl mused.

But he went anyway with ...

"Who are you?" Raúl called as the ships took sail.

"Hernan. Hernan Cortés!"

The name ripped its way to Raúl over a gathering sea wind. . .



It was 1519 and Cortés had wrung permission from the Governor of Cuba to lead this expedition to Mexico. He was setting sail with 11 ships, 500 men, 15 horses ... and a rat called Raúl!

"Land Ahoy!"

After weeks at sea Raúl had spotted the coast of the land called Mexico from his lookout in the crow's nest. Cortes' little fleet was approaching a natural port.

From along the shore the Totonacs who inhabited this land watched amazed at the huge floating fortresses gliding over the waves towards them. Their amazement turned to fear when the ships discharged strange, prancing creatures that pawed at the beach and flung whinnying shrieks to the air. Men commanded these beasts and sat astride them becoming six-legged monsters never before seen in this world! Surely these were gods - or devils?



The Totonacs were used to fighting fierce Mexica warriors from inland. But the Mexica, despite their cruelty, at least came on foot and belonged to the world of men. These new invaders came out of the unknown.

Two worlds, strangers to each other, lined up face-to-face on the edge of this new world.

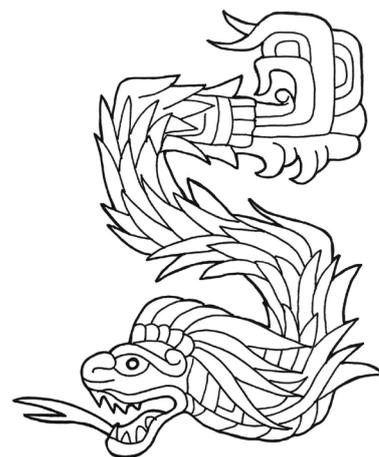


The steel armour, gunfire and horses of the Spanish shocked the Totonacs into stillness.

The Spaniards were surprised to see these men adorned with multicoloured clothing, necklaces, arm bands and quetzal feathers. They seemed to offer no threat to this invading force.

The Spaniards saw ... Conquest! They were to become known as Conquistadors.

As Cortés and his six-legged beasts approached across the beach, the native people dropped to their knees. Exploding fire from Cortés' guns terrified them; it had never been seen before. The Totonacs let Cortés pass and a rumour began that he was the Mexica god, Quetzalcoatl, returned in anger against the Mexica and their mighty ruler, Moctezuma.



This encouraged many of them to join with the Spanish in the hope that Quetzalcoatl would revenge them. They all hated the Mexica and they told Cortés,

"We have been treated badly by the Mexica and suffered in wars with them. Now we pay taxes and tribute to Moctezuma and this makes us poor. Moctezuma rules from Tenochtitlan, his city of gold and treasure set in a lake."

Cortés replied, "Follow me! Fight with me! We will take Mexica gold! Burn my ships behind me! Forward to Tenochtitlan!"

While Cortés shouted, a very small dog spoke to Raúl.

"I am a Chihuahua," he whispered. "It is too dangerous for me to go to Tenochtitlan because I am a tasty morsel there - we are bred as snacks."

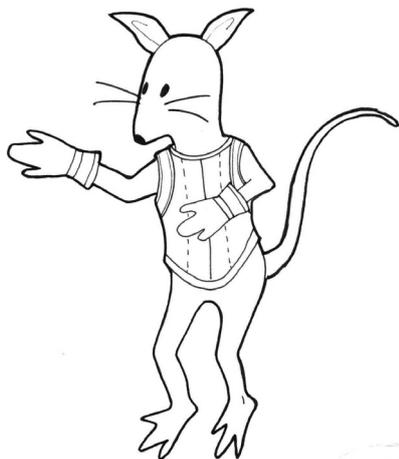


"That is very cruel," said Raúl.

"There are much crueller things than that," the Chihuahua hinted. "Like HEARTS!"

"What do you mean?" Raúl was worried by yet another mention of hearts.

"Tenochtitlan has a temple where humans are sacrificed and their hearts are torn out."

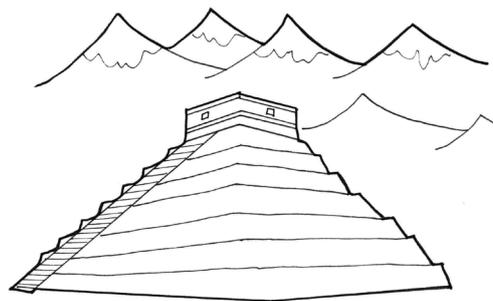


Raúl buckled on his strong steel breastplate when he heard this and he clamped his gauntleted hand firmly over his heart.

Just in case! He did this in fear but it gave him the appearance of a conquering hero.

The march to Tenochtitlan had begun. It was to be a long trek and Raúl was given a seat in front of Cortés on his horse.

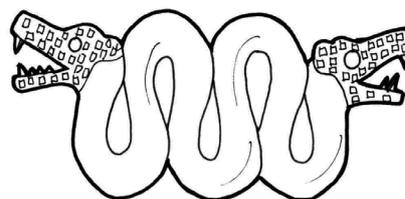
In November 1519, on the vast central plateau of Mexico a tiny, shiny figure in glittering steel rode before Cortés through a ring of snow-capped volcanoes and was the first to behold the island city of Tenochtitlan. The city hung before Raúl like a dream, its great towers and temples rising from the water and reaching higher than the encircling mountains and volcanoes.



Dazzling light blazed from Tenochtitlan, flooding the lake in gold. A majestic procession appeared out of this glory, crossing the water by a causeway and approaching Raúl and the Conquistadors. Moctezuma, crowned with the royal triangular diadem of gold and turquoise and dressed in emerald green feathers, was borne forward on a throne sheltered under a jewelled palanquin. All around him shone gold and brilliance.

Raúl shielded his eyes. Moctezuma, at the same time, was blinking against the sharp, pale light flashing from the steel armour and weapons of Cortés' men and the gleaming coats of their fearsome horses. This was a harsher light than the gentle gold of his ancient empire and it frightened him.

The brilliance of each world dazzled the other and in this radiance precious gifts were exchanged. Cortés offered fine Venetian glass and Moctezuma gave gold and greenstone and a turquoise double-headed serpent. The two leaders met as friends.



"Enter my city as guests!" Moctezuma commanded.

Cortés led his men into the heart of the Mexica empire but realised, once there, that the vast lake all around would imprison him if Moctezuma chose to close the bridges.

It was then that Cortés decided to make Moctezuma a prisoner in his own palace.

Moctezuma bore this outrage well and went on behaving like a perfect host. He was especially kind to Raúl, which was surprising as he could have taken him for a small Chihuahua and chewed him up.

"Come with me," he insisted to Raúl. "I will show you my palace and my temple and all my treasures."

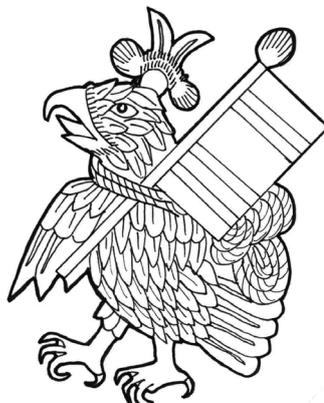
Raúl followed, but with his hand firmly over his heart!

He followed Moctezuma along precious jasper paths through beautiful gardens where every type of bird was cared for by hundreds of servants. They crossed marble halls beneath the palace where lions and tigers prowled in vast cages.

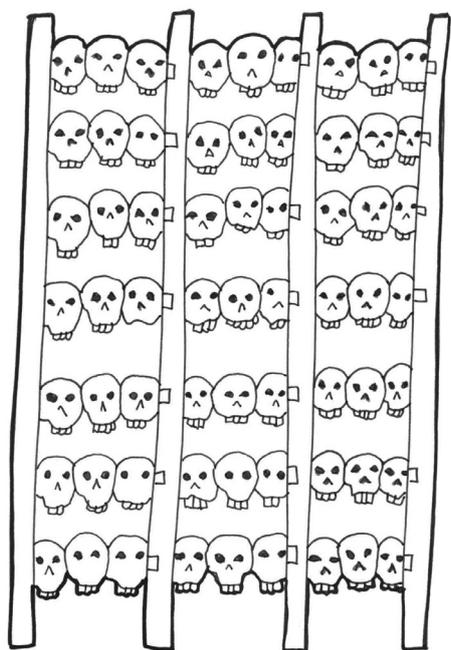
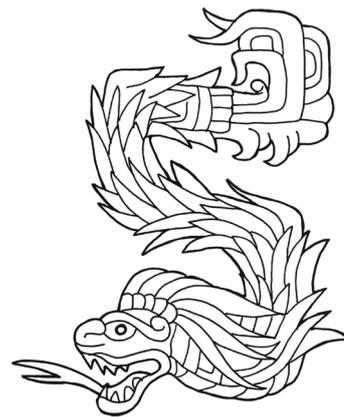
"Here are my favourite animals," Moctezuma said as they arrived at enclosures of jaguars and eagles. "My best soldiers are my Jaguar and Eagle Warriors who dress like these beasts to take on their fierce spirits."

At a signal from Moctezuma a drum began to beat and Jaguar and Eagle warriors thundered into line. Raúl trembled as they roared past.

"Look, Raúl, here are all my snakes. They are sleeping in their feather beds.



All we Mexica love snakes and we carve mighty stone statues of them. We have a god who is a feathered snake, a 'plumed serpent' called Quetzalcoatl. I wondered if your leader might have been him because he is due to return to us soon and may bring war if he is displeased with our sacrifices. I think your leader is too greedy to be a god, but I gave him a very precious double-headed serpent made out of turquoise mosaic, just in case ..."



"Here are the steps to my temple. The glyphs which are carved along the side tell the story of our great victories against our enemies and our devotion to our Gods. Do you like the skull racks? They are for the skulls of our victims. These big stone bowls are to put the hearts in. This is my best heart-bowl, it's carved as an eagle and a rattlesnake."

Raúl sensed that Moctezuma's people were disturbed by their ruler chatting in this friendly manner. Indeed it surprised Raúl that the mighty Moctezuma, once off his throne, was such a charming man and so unashamed at talking about sacrificing people.

"But, Raúl," Moctezuma continued, "Here am I chatting on and you are starting to look pale. Are you unwell?"

Raúl was white and trembling and asked,

"Why? Why do you do it? Why do you kill people?"

"Oh! We have to. We have to sacrifice blood to the gods so that nature doesn't die and we sacrifice humans captured in battle to thank the gods for victory. Don't you do this?"

"NO!" spluttered Raúl. "In my country we try to look after our hearts and keep them healthy."

"Really? That sounds very selfish. How do you do it?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I've just had an X-ray done of my heart and I was able to see pictures of it and the Vet could tell if it was healthy ..." Raúl began to remember and to wonder what the result was.

"You mean, Raúl, that the gods in your country can see a heart without first ripping it out?"

A murmur of fear ran through Moctezuma's people - this rat must come from a race of gods!



"Bring the Sacred Rat to my palace," Moctezuma ordered his guards. "We will talk of this over a drink of chocolate. He shall drink from my gold goblets."

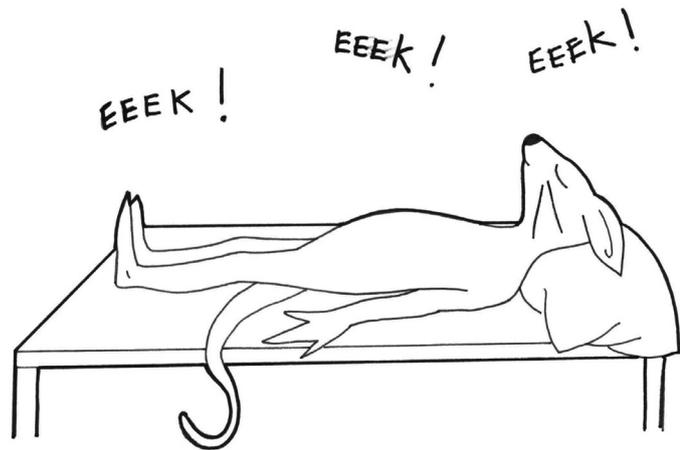
While Raúl described the swirling shapes that had looked like a sea-chart on the X-ray screen Moctezuma called for his own magic mirror, a double-sided, polished obsidian disk, black, deep and sinister. He examined its dark reflections.

"Is this like the image you speak of?" he asked Raúl. "It does not show a heart but it mirrors my face as though swirling in smoke. Sometimes I wonder who I am as my image swims in and out of view. I see disturbing omens in its depths - signs of strangers coming and premonitions of catastrophe."

Moctezuma became more worried as he looked into the smoky visions.



"It is not good," he said.
"Look, Raúl, the end of my empire is looming here in the shadows. I am being called to the balcony of my palace. My people are against me. They will throw stones. Look, Raúl, look ..."



"LOOK, RAUL ..." Robey was pointing at the screen in the Vet's surgery. "Your heart is fine. You are well enough to travel."

"What happened to him?" Raúl was muttering. "Did they kill him? Had the gods come to end his empire?"

Robey and Rafa could only hear eeks and thought Raúl must have been dreaming.

"Raúl, stop being silly. Have you been asleep?" Robey was shaking him now. "Didn't you watch the screen? Your heart is fine and you can come on holiday with us. We're going to Mexico City and we can visit the ruins of the old Mexica Empire."

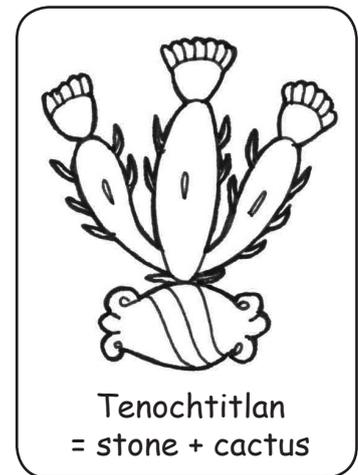
Rafa added, "Its temples and palaces were knocked down by Cortés but a Christian city was built so quickly that lots of the Mexica things were left in the rubble and just got built over and they're being discovered now."

The Vet told them, "The Spanish Conquistadors had a complete victory after Moctezuma's death. That ancient ruler could have had no idea what the future held."

Raúl thought to himself, "Yes he could! He heard about looking at hearts. He heard about the future. He saw visions. He met me!"

Robey had a question. "One thing puzzles me," he said. "Why did Moctezuma make it so easy for Cortés? Why did he invite him into Tenochtitlan? Was it because he thought he was the returning god, Quetzalcoatl? Or did he have a plan to trap Cortés in the middle of the lake by cutting off all the bridges and causeways?"

"He might have thought he could buy off Cortés by treating him well and giving him lots of gold," suggested Rafa.



"Or he may have realised he couldn't win," said the Vet. "Perhaps he was a wise ruler doing his best for his people by urging them not to waste their time against impossible odds. This did not make him popular, of course, and his people turned against him."

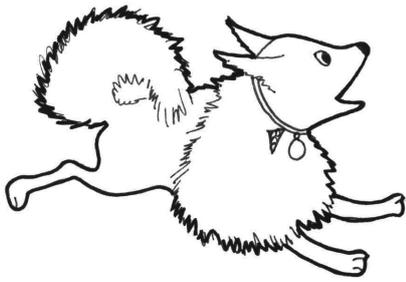
"One other thing," the Vet went on, "fighting was even more of a waste of time than he realised because the very arrival of the Spanish had already infected the Mexica with killer diseases like smallpox - and that alone ended their civilization."

"Oh!" thought Raúl sadly, "We could never have known this when we first saw Moctezuma in golden light descending from Tenochtitlan in 1519. He was a god then and his kingdom was glorious."

Raúl wondered if he himself had played a part in Moctezuma's downfall by making friends with him and disappointing the Mexica belief in savagery. "He may have really been a bit of a baby and wanted to have fun ..."

Or, being used to golden light, he may have been dazzled by the colder light flashing from the sharp steel breastplates and swords of the Conquistadors.

It was gold against steel. Steel won! Moctezuma's empire was strong and he held absolute power, but he had only stone-age weapons that were useless against the new technology of steel.



"It's time for my next patient," the Vet was saying, and a Chihuahua trotted into the surgery.
 "Where have I seen him before," Raúl wondered, turning to look as the little dog winked at him.

A polished black disc on the Chihuahua's collar shimmered and swirled with odd reflections; it was made of obsidian! Next to it hung a turquoise, triangular medal like Moctezuma's crown.

Raúl racked his brains as he hurried out to catch up with Robey and Rafa who were, after all, taking him to see where had once stood the mighty city of Tenochtitlan!

Where had he seen that dog before?

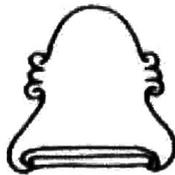
PICTOGRAMS



tree/forest
(quauitl)



teeth
(tlantli)



mountain
(tepetl)



stone
(tetl)



flint knife
(tecpetl)



rabbit
(tochtli)

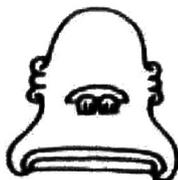
TOWN GLYPHS



Quauhnauc



Quauhtitlan



Tepetitlan



Tecpatepec

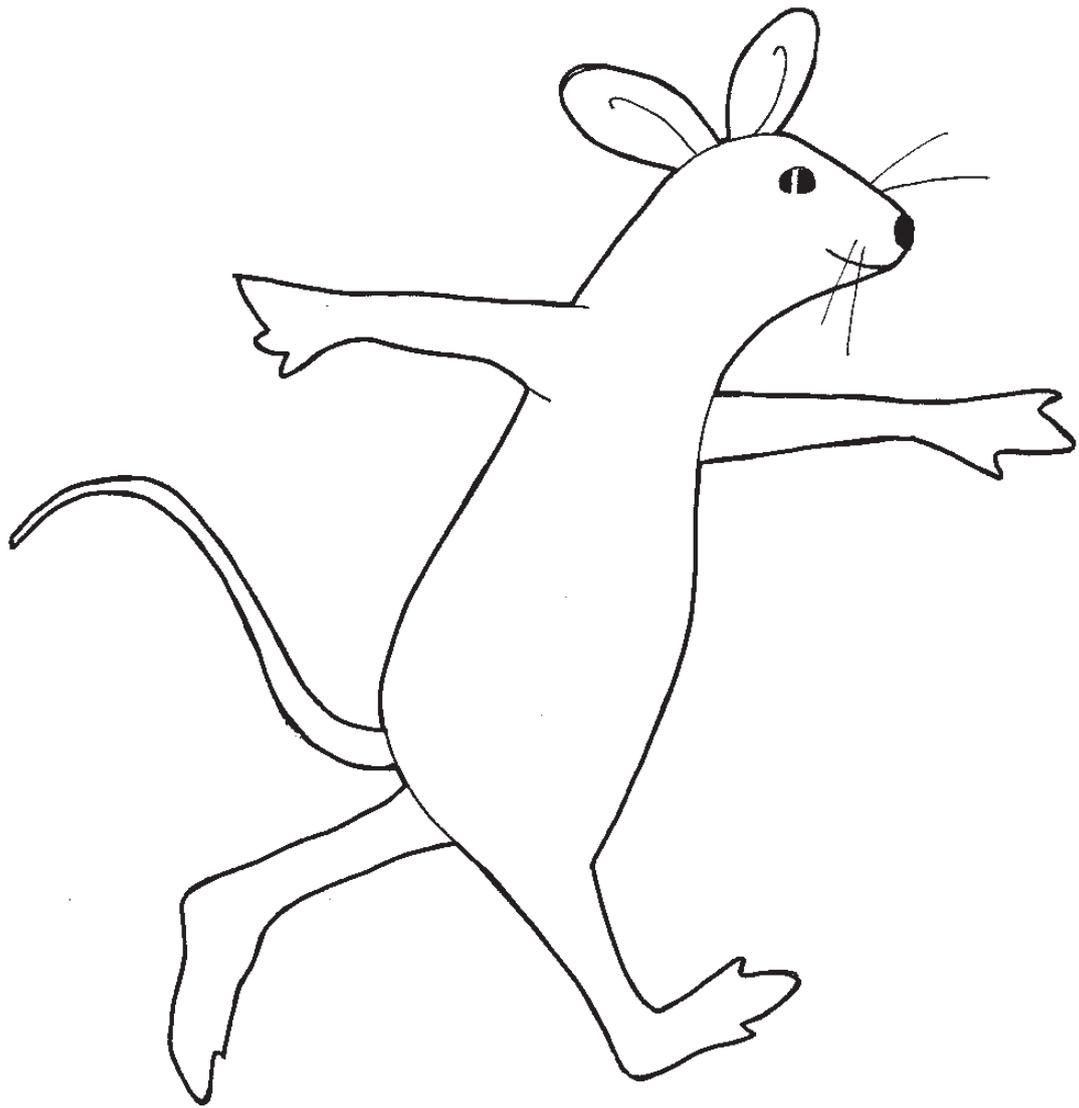


Tochtepecan



Tenochtitlan

Aztec writing. Formation of town glyphs from pairs of pictograms



"Hasta luego."

