

Storm and Shelter

by steve wing

The previous morning, she had stood at the window and watched a flock of radiant-pink flamingos flying gracefully down the beach to a different feeding site. She remembered them as she fixed breakfast, leftover fried fish wrapped in hot maize tortillas, and fresh coffee. As they ate, they saw a few fishermen motoring out into the gulf in their open boats, risking the coming weather.

She held his hand as they explored the sun-drenched shore, walking amid the cries of children and sea birds. They felt pleased that they had paused their journey there, devoting a few days to staying instead of moving on.

In the afternoon the winds picked up, bringing clouds, and the few fishermen who were out returned early. That night the wind blew so fiercely through the open window that the bedroom door slammed, shocking them awake. He could barely pull the door open against the pressure from the chill wind.

The window had no glass or screen, just two wooden shutters, which he pushed together and latched so they could stay warmer sleeping in their hammocks.

A strong steady wind blew all day without respite, keeping the **malecón, the paved embankment along the shore**, almost deserted under the gloomy sky. No one wanted to fight the cold blast coming off the Gulf of Mexico.

It was a fishing village, just a cluster of small houses and narrow streets. Fishing was all there was, except for a few coconut palm groves and people who sold goods and services to fishermen and their families. But though the village depended on fishing, not one boat went out that day, and the wind did not subside, so none went out the next day, nor the next.

The water was crowded with fishing boats, but they were so expertly anchored that none was damaged by the storm.

Walking to a tienda in a futile search for tea to go with sweet rolls from the panaderia, he came across a group of fishermen huddled together on the sheltered side of a building, passing a bottle. Their mood was not jubilant, not appreciative of an unexpected holiday from work - instead, it was a mood of anxiety and frustration.

On the last morning of their stay, they were awakened by a clock lent to them by the owner of the house they had rented, surprised when the alarm made the sound of a crowing rooster instead of a bell or buzzer.

Waiting with their bags in the dark for the 4:45 AM bus, he noticed that finally the wind had diminished.

As they rode toward the interior of the Yucatán, he knew the fishermen would be preparing their boats and heading out to sea.

