



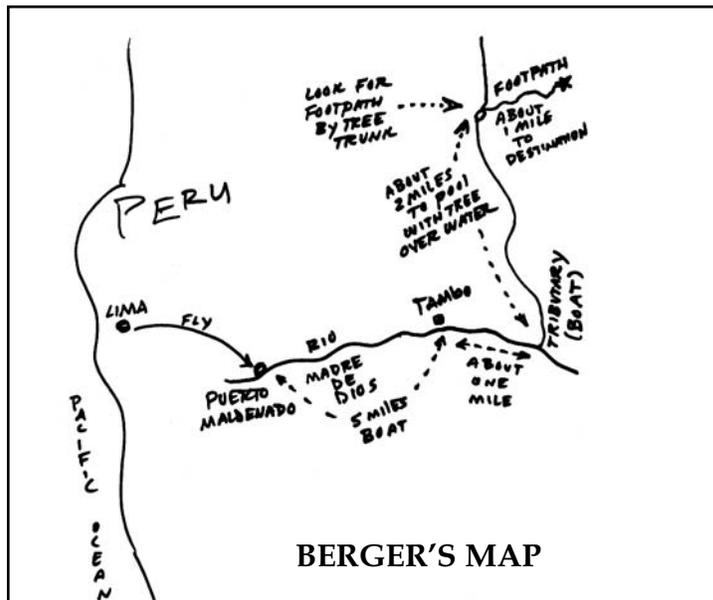
Berger's Map

IT WAS ONLY A FEW DAYS LATER THAT THE FINAL elements of this strange set of coincidences took place. Just three days after my dream, I got both a map in the mail from the mysterious Melissa Berger, and a totally unexpected phone call from my daughter Sarah.

Although the envelope had no return address, I knew the letter was from my aunt's somewhat malevolent friend in Montana. Not surprisingly, the envelope contained only a single sheet of paper with a crudely sketched map in heavy black ink. The map was sparse in detail and included no signature, no note, not even the name "Eduardo."

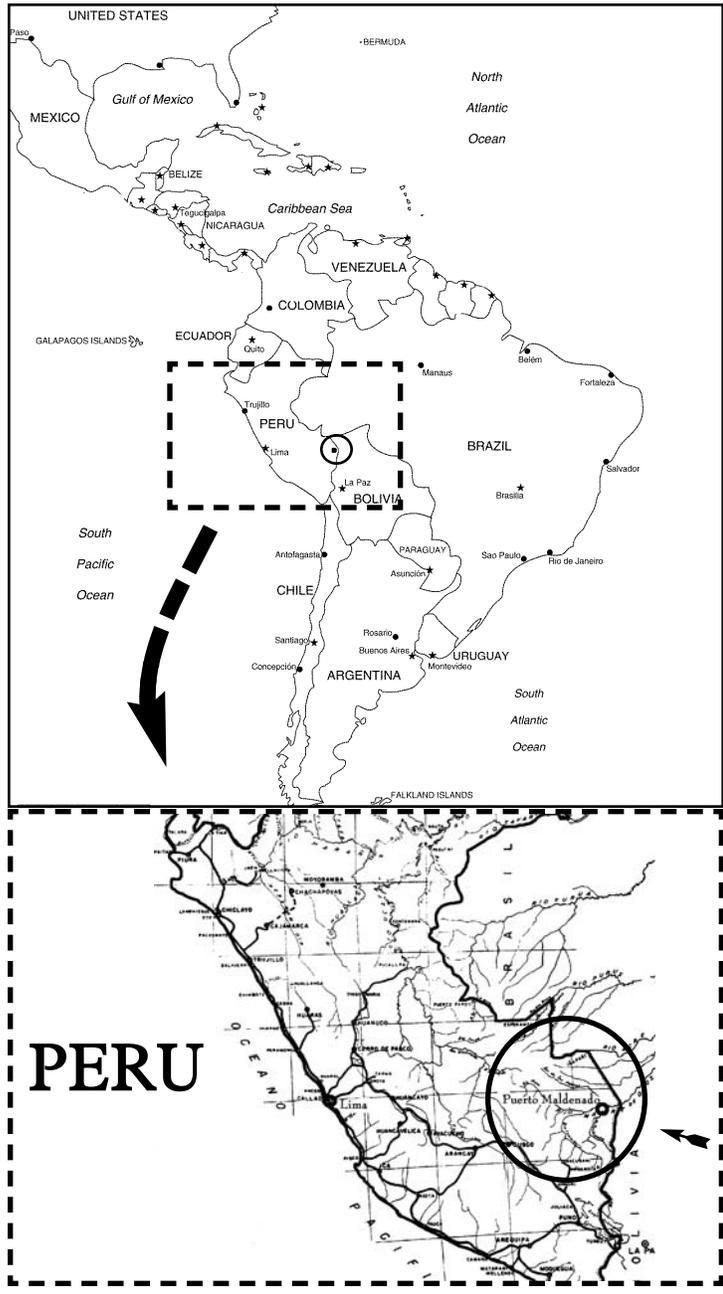
I pulled an atlas off a bookshelf and looked up Peru. About two-thirds of the way down the country's Pacific coast, lay Lima, the capital. The small village of Puerto Maldonado lay further inland near the jungle border of Bolivia, and had no principal road access. The village lay at the foothills of the Andes, nestled in the Amazonian rainforest on the banks of the Rio Madre de Dios, or Mother of God River, which flowed directly east into the Bolivian jungle on its way to the Amazon River. Berger's map led us toward a remote and uninhabited section of Amazonian jungle, an uncharted region straddling the border between Peru and Bolivia.

I had just set the map down, and was massaging my temples, wondering what the hell I was supposed to do with it, when the phone rang. I answered, joking to myself



that it was probably a collect call from the Peruvian witch doctor. I was almost as surprised, nevertheless, when I recognized the voice on the other end as Sarah's. A phone call from her was unusual enough. A senior ecology major at the University of Minnesota, it seemed she didn't have a whole lot of time for others outside her immediate circle of college friends, especially for her father. And, when school dismissed each summer, she returned to her seasonal employment in a Chicago greenhouse, or to her mother and stepfather's house nearby. So, my visits with Sarah, despite my urgings, were infrequent and usually limited.

Sarah had grown into a smart, capable woman. She maintained an "A" average in school and had earned a near perfect score on her college SATs. The previous year, she had taken the opportunity to study abroad, and had spent the winter in Madagascar. Although she was an adventurer, I wasn't sure how to broach the subject of South America to her, and I was certainly not expecting a phone call from her. I was still processing everything myself, and I needed it all to sink in before I approached her with the idea of



going to Peru with me. But I would not have the luxury of waiting.

“Hello?”

“Hi. Dad? It’s me, Sarah.”

“Sarah! I was just thinking about calling you. How’ve you been?”

“Well, for one thing, I quit my job at the greenhouse.”

I was surprised at this news, as she’d been working there for years. “Why?”

“The new guy who started managing the place was completely ignorant. He wanted us to spray toxic pesticides on the plants and use all kinds of synthetic chemicals, but I refused. I didn’t want to breathe that stuff, or even get it on my skin. We got into a rather heated argument over it and I quit.”

“Good for you. I’m sure you can get a better job than that.”

“Well, I was wanting to take some time off work anyway. And I was thinking...”

“Thinking what?”

“Well,” she asked hesitantly, “do you think I could come and stay with you guys for a while?”

“Sure. When?”

“I was thinking in a few days. I was going to bring my friend Michael with me when I came down. We’ve been spending a lot of time together lately. He’s really nice. I think you’ll like him.”

“Does he have dreadlocks?”

“Yes. How did you know he had dreads?”

“Just a wild guess.”

“A pretty good one, Dad.”

“Yeah. See you two in a few days. Don’t forget to bring your passports.”

“What on earth for?!”

“Just in case. I’ll tell you about it when you get here.”

Go to Chapter 21