

**Diving For
El Corazón**

Other Books by Charlie Damitz

The Giant Egg

The Shot Not Heard Around the World

Diving for El Corazón



Charlie Damitz

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Summary: After finding a legendary magic ring that allows him to breathe under water and
communicate with dolphins, Paco, a seventeen-year-old Mexican boy, designs a special net
that lets the fisherman of his village catch the ocean fish without harming any dolphins.

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For my children Meredith, Brad and Karl,
who often said, “Tell me a story.”
And for my wife Susanne, who said,
“You really should write your stories down.”

One



It was said by the elders of the village that, when the sun was right, and the water was clear, you could see it from atop the diving cliff. Others in the village said it was the foolish talk of old men, but the children, as well as the elders, had faith enough to believe in such foolishness. It was an ancient ring they claimed to see lying in a deep crevice at the bottom of the sea. Some said it held magical powers, while others claimed it was evil and should be left untouched. All agreed, however, that its value was as immeasurable as the number

of cliff divers who had searched in vain for its treasure off the coast of Mexico.

I was one of the children who had faith enough to believe the ring existed. As a boy, I dreamed of becoming a cliff diver and loved to listen to the elders talk about this ring they called *El Corazón*, for even at my young age, I was a strong diver capable of reaching the depths of the ocean floor. I lived alone with my mother and we were very poor.

When I would ask for my mother's permission to go diving, she would say, "Paco, my son, someday you will become a rich and famous cliff diver and forget all about me."

Then she would laugh and send me out to practice. As a child, I longed for things other children took for granted, like new sandals, books to read, and new clothes. I remember to this day that my fondest wish was a piñata filled with presents and candy. I also longed for the day I could rescue my mother from the poverty we had to endure. For these reasons, I would often dream of finding the ring and giving it to my mother. She would be so happy and proud of me be-

cause we would no longer be poor, and she would no longer have to work all the time. Sadly, I did not know my father, for he was lost at sea when I was only three years old, but I imagined my father would be proud too. When I was first starting to dive, I would often look for my father under the water. When I was told that my father was lost at sea, I naively thought that I would someday be able to find him and show him the way home. Perhaps that was why I was such a remarkable diver. I would practice daily and I would always try to touch the ocean floor before turning to start my ascent.

Unlike the famous La Quebrada, a cliff looming 180 feet above the shallow bay in Acapulco, our cliff boasted a 200-foot plunge into a deep hole in the ocean's floor. Searching the bottom for tossed coins was as difficult as the dive itself, and our cliff divers were among the best in all of Mexico.

It was the day of my tenth birthday and the sun was exceptionally bright as I climbed to the crest of the diving cliff. Once there, I surveyed the landscape as I caressed the small conch shell that I always wore

around my neck. It was on a gold chain, which was my father's. Off to the right, I noticed several pelicans circling high above the sea, as though they, too, were searching for El Corazón. I would watch them hesitate in flight then plunge into the water below in a big splash. They would hold still for a moment or two, then lift their heads up and swallow their catch.

Normally, I too would search into the sea below before practicing a dive, but I could see that a huge cloud was lazily approaching the sun and I knew the cloud cover would render my search fruitless. So, I decided to practice without looking for El Corazón. I touched the small conch shell around my neck and rubbed it three times for good luck. I concentrated on leaping up and away from the cliff as I started my dive. Suspended motionless, resembling a soaring eagle, I then headed toward the sea below. About halfway down a sudden sparkle caught my eye. *Perhaps it is a school of mullet being chased by yellow jacks. No, it isn't moving.* Its sparkle soon became blinding. My heart swelled for I believed I was seeing El Corazón. I took a deep breath knowing I would need as much air as pos-

sible to reach the depth of the ring's home. I hit the water with my hands clenched as fists to break the impact as my head went under. I immediately opened my eyes to see a rush of bubbles go by as I started looking for the sparkle. I also knew the cloud cover would soon make the ring invisible, and I cursed having waited so long to dive. Good fortune was with me, however, for the brilliance that caught my eye from the air seemed twice as bright under the sea. Now I knew I was seeing El Corazón and I wondered if it was somehow calling me to its resting-place. It seemed to take a long time for me to reach the crevice, but once there, I grabbed the ring and put it on my third finger. As soon as the ring slipped on my finger, the sea became dark and I realized I had beaten the cloud by only seconds. The darkness made me shiver as I realized that I had little time to reach the surface of the water. I pushed off the sandy bottom and headed straight up toward the sky above. I knew it was impossible to judge how deep I was or how far the surface of the sea was from me.

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