

The Idealistic Adventurer

by

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Effective Date: June 20, 2001
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This printing, 2010

Remembering my Father I dedicate this manuscript to his memory. He was my mentor, my inspiration, and mainly my friend. He taught me how to live a happy life counting only on myself, how to fight for human dignity, democracy and when reaching an old age, to be able to look at anybody in the eyes, without fear, having accomplished my man's duty and being at peace with my conscience. This book could never have been written if it weren't for the insistence and abiding love of my wife Birdie.

Descarte said that he believed only what he could understand.

Prologue

By Gabriel Jackson

Many times, in discussing the role of the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War, I have said that in my personal experience, the “brigadistas”, as a group, were the most politically active, the most energetic, and the most idealistic human beings I have ever had the privilege of knowing. In the American and French revolutions of the 18th century, in the Greek war of independence in the 1820’s, and in the revolutions of 1848, a considerable number of highly idealistic individuals, mostly from upper class families, took part in these struggles for human liberty. But the Spanish Civil War was unique in that some 40,000 men and women from more than fifty nations, mostly persons of modest economic and social backgrounds, came to Spain in a heroic but ultimately unsuccessful effort to stop fascism before a world war, with its immense death toll and its long list of crimes against humanity, would be necessary.

George Sossenko was one of those 40,000, and in this book he narrates the childhood and adolescence which led him, just short of his 18th birthday, and with the last year of secondary school left incomplete, to join in the defense of republican Spain. The defining trait of his style is its feeling of tolerance, nuance, sympathetic understanding, and solidarity in action with people of very different ideas and temperaments. His father was a convinced republican who had celebrated the overthrow of the Tsarist autocracy and placed his hopes in the formation of a democratic constitution under the leadership of Alexander Kerensky. When the Kerensky government was overthrown by the Bolsheviks, he withheld judgment of Lenin but felt that dictatorships, any dictatorships, end badly. During the few years of the New Economic Policy, which restored some private initiative in the economy, he hoped that the Communist regime would really bring substantial improvements to Russian life, but when, in 1926, it was obvious that Lenin’s successor, Stalin, was ending the NEP and establishing a personal dictatorship, he took his family to the Germany of the Weimar republic, and later to France.

Sossenko explains these things without rancor and without dogma. In Paris his parents become partners, and eventually full owners, of a successful Russian restaurant in the Latin Quarter. Here the young boy listens to political discussions among monarchists, Western style liberals, Marxists, and slavophiles, but is impatient of their constant reference back to a Russia which has disappeared. More interesting are the political arguments among his fellow students in the lycee. His friends are mostly communists or anarchists, with an occasional Trotskyite. The common denominator is that they are anti-fascist, that they think in terms of solidarity within the varied currents of the Left. When in the summer of 1936 he feels it a moral duty to join the defense of the Spanish Republic, his first choice is to go to the recruiting office of the communists; and when they refuse him as underage, he joins the less inquisitive anarchists. And in Spain itself, the greater part of his year-long service takes place on the Aragon front where, in his unit at least, there is solidarity between the communist and anarchist volunteers.

Introduction

Sitting comfortably in the hall of Miami's huge airport, I watched with delight how, on the side opposite, close to the counter of Paraguayan Airlines, people jostled one another to reach an attendant to confirm their flights and reserve their seats.

I couldn't take my eyes off a middle-aged man, rather slightly overweight, with white hair and a matching beard, who was shaking an American passport above his head in an effort to attract the attention of one of the three airline employees who were moving nonchalantly, in a premeditated gait, completely ignoring the throng of impatient passengers.

At first glance, this agitated traveler appeared to be very much American, and his cowboy attire seemed to confirm that impression, but I was surprised to hear him speak perfect Spanish. He spoke with the accent of an Argentine, and in particular of a porteno, the name applied to inhabitants of Buenos Aires.

Miami's airport is one of the most exciting places in the States, for it features a large number of people of different origins and races who move from one place to the next in an agitated, hurried fashion, as if they were lost.

The endlessly moving human wave and its intense noise led me to shift my attention away from this American who spoke Spanish like a porteno, for interesting people were appearing all over the immense hall, coming and going in their quest of departure and arrival gates; as usual, I enjoyed watching these people, because I love human beings.

Since early childhood, I have loved to watch people: observing the colorful parade of diversity within the flow of a crowd has invariably brought me enormous pleasure.

The loudspeaker soon announced that passengers could start boarding my flight, and once I reached my seat on the airplane that would be taking us from Miami to Buenos Aires via Asuncion, I discovered that my seatmate would be none other than the American porteno wearing the western attire.

He smiled at me, no longer agitated but completely relaxed now, and we never stopped talking during our nightlong flight to Asuncion. I ordered a scotch, but my new traveling companion declined a drink, saying "No! I don't drink!" Perhaps he thought that this response was offensive or too peremptory, for he added with an appeasing smile, "The Lord (that I don't believe in, because I am an atheist) gives to each of us a drinking quota. I have drunk my quota, my children's quota, and my grandchildren's quota, so I have no more quota to drink!" And he laughed at his own joke, making me believe that he told this story quite often to get rid of people who were insisting that he have a drink.

Thanks to my new traveling companion, the flight to Asuncion was one of the most pleasant I ever had. It amazed me that we could easily switch from English to French or Spanish—we had both mastered all three—and doing so increased the interest of our endless conversation even more.

We were delighted once we arrived at Asuncion's airport, where we could stretch our legs while we waited for the airplane that would take us on to Buenos Aires.

The departure of the continuing leg of the journey was set for a couple of hours later, and I took advantage of the time to walk around a little bit and look at the thousands

of different objects sold in stores in every airport in the world and called “souvenirs” by some.

Tiring of looking at the artisan products made by the Guarani Indians and sold in more or less the same form in every kiosk in this airport, I ended up sitting at the airport’s only café; so as not to change my habit, I ordered a scotch.

My traveling companion, who was also strolling around, followed my example by entering the café. He sat at my side, holding the briefcase with which he would not part at his side, and ordered a fruit juice from the indolent Paraguayan waiter.

Suddenly, becoming very serious and tense, almost rigid, my new friend asked me, “Are you going to remain at the airport until the plane’s departure, or are you intending to go into town?”

“Of course I will remain here!” I responded, surprised by his question. “We have only a couple of hours before the departure, and I don’t want to miss it and remain stranded here in the tropics.”

“Then could I entrust my briefcase to you while I go someplace not too far away?” the porteno cowboy asked. Detecting the surprise in my eyes, he added, more relaxed now, “Only papers are in the bag—nothing else. I know the old trick smugglers use by asking a stranger to hold a package that contains drugs.”

Before he finished his sentence and despite my protestations that I believed him, he opened the old, worn-out leather portfolio and showed me what was inside; it was completely filled with paper resembling files of a manuscript.

“You see?” the porteno repeated. “No drugs!”

Then, again becoming tense and rigid, he said in English, “I will be back in an hour. I can assure you I will be back before the plane leaves. But without delay I definitely need to see someone who lives close to the airport, and then I will be right back!”

He added, “When boarding time comes, please don’t wait for me if I’m not here, and don’t forget my briefcase. It is possible that I will be back at the last moment, but be assured I will return. I still have an hour and a half, and that is more than enough time to do what I have to do.”

The heat in the airport was nearly unbearable. Most of the passengers in the terminal were waiting, like us, for a connection with another flight to continue their trips.

Of course, the majority of the people present were Paraguayans, a beautiful people who are a mixture of Spaniards from Andalusia and Guarani Indians (the Guarani language is spoken as much as Spanish). It is perhaps a unique example of the conquerors, the Spanish, speaking the language of the conquered and subjugated people.

One could also see in the airport Argentines, Brazilians, German tourists, and a small group of American cattlemen who were established in Brazil and with whom I started talking.

I learned from these cattlemen that they were returning to their ranches in Goiaz, where they owned thousands of acres. They were pleased to learn that I knew the region. A lanky Texan among them told me, “It’s the old American Wild West from the 19th Century!” He had gone to the States to spend the holidays with his family.

It was quiet in the airport now. The only bar was very busy, and the patrons there were drinking whiskey, beer, soft drinks, and expresso.

Just as I was about ready to board the plane, I realized that I had forgotten my friend's briefcase, and I returned to the bar to retrieve it. It was still lying on the chair where I had left it, and I picked it up, keeping it with me as my friend had asked me to do.

The air inside the airplane was refreshingly agreeable, so much so that I felt comfortable at once. I opened the book I had bought in New York City and resumed the reading that I had interrupted when we arrived in Asuncion. Meanwhile, I occasionally looked around, expecting any time to see my traveling companion with his personable smile on his face.

The argument of the book dealt with politics, and it absorbed my attention to such an extent that only when we were already airborne did I realize that my porteno friend was absent, having missed the flight, I presumed. His absence created an impediment to my tranquility, but then I have dealt with worse situations in my very active life. I knew from several other incidents in my life that I was very slow in making decisions, and in this case I had not yet made up my mind whether to call the flight attendant to ask about my new friend.

At the same time, I wasn't too upset. Lunch was being served on the flight, and I knew from experience that Paraguayan Airlines had a reputation for offering good food and abundant wine of excellent quality during flights.

Still, I missed my pleasant traveling companion, and after the meal, I decided to ask the stewardess whether she knew anything about the fellow.

The answer was what I already suspected it would be—the foreigner with the porteno accent had missed the flight. However, the stewardess assured me that he would definitely take the following day's flight, which was scheduled to depart for Buenos Aires at the same hour.

Now a little bit more relaxed about my companion, I suddenly recalled that I had his briefcase, and I racked my brain to analyze the situation in which I found myself. I had not foreseen being left alone with the briefcase, and I didn't know exactly what to do about it.

I interrupted my reading of Naom Chomsky's book (he is one of my favorite authors) and tried to develop a solution to the problem. I needed to make a quick decision about the briefcase, mainly how to forward it to my friend. I hesitated to leave it in the hands of the stewardess. I thought it would perhaps be better to deliver it to the office of the airline in Buenos Aires. At the same time, it occurred to me that maybe the cowboy porteno would appear the following day, providing me with the opportunity to return it to him personally and see him again.

I remained a little nervous about the situation, and I had a strong impulse to open the briefcase to see whether I could find an address or any mention of a person who could help me return the briefcase to its rightful owner.

We were about two hours from our arrival at Buenos Aires, and I rationalized that it wouldn't be too much of an indiscretion to open the portfolio and look for some kind of identification that would help me resolve the situation, which was becoming increasingly confusing.

Because I hate to stick my nose in other people's business, I hesitated a while, but in the end, I decided to open the wrinkled bag. Inside, I found several folders filled with

sheets of paper covered by very close handwriting in French. It turned out to be my missing friend's autobiography.

After poking around in the scattered papers, still hoping to find an address but not seeing any, my natural curiosity impelled to start reading the manuscript. I was unprepared to learn so many profound facts about the author as I encountered from the very beginning of my reading. I was so deeply impressed by what I found that it was as though I was glued to my seat in fascination.

As I devoured the words inscribed in such small letters, my interest grew in the account of the adventurous life of the author. I was so thoroughly engrossed in the story that I barely heard the captain announce that we would very soon be landing at the Ezeiza airport in Buenos Aires.

Once we landed and went through the routine of checking passports, going through customs, and claiming our bags, I took a taxi to a hotel close to San Martin Square, where I had made a reservation.

As soon as I checked into my room and ordered a scotch, I sat down on a sofa and resumed my reading of the manuscript, without even unpacking. I learned that my traveling companion was Michael Kirilovich Burenko, who seemed to be living in Atlanta, Georgia. Still, I could not find among any of the papers any directions or other identifying information that could help me locate his present whereabouts.

The next day, I called Paraguayan Airlines, but the answer I received was that the passenger Burenko never returned to Asuncion's airport. In vain, I tried to find his name in the Buenos Aires telephone directory. On several subsequent days I called the airline, always getting the answer that the passenger Burenko never returned to the airport and had never contacted the airline.

I went to the Paraguayan consulate and explained what had happened, but without telling the people there anything about the portfolio, to which I had taken a liking and which I already considered mine to a certain degree. But the consular staff knew nothing about Burenko. It seemed as though he had disappeared from the face of the earth, without leaving a trace.

I spent an entire day at the telephone company, looking in the international section to see if I could locate a listing for Burenko, not only in other Argentine cities, but also in New York, Atlanta, Texas, California, and even several European countries. I searched the company records for France, Spain, Italy, and other countries at random, but to no avail.

I had already lost a full week in trying to trace Burenko's path, and it was about time that I took care of the obligations for which I had made a special, long trip on behalf of several people who were already becoming nervous about my inactivity.

When the patience of my American clients had reached its limit, I decided to take care of business, which was of extreme importance and which was the primary reason I had come to Argentina. I postponed the search for Burenko, deciding I would resume it once I returned to the States.

When my thoughts weren't on taking care of urgent affairs of the moment, I continued to be troubled by the manuscript. Every evening, when I returned to my hotel room, I resumed my reading of it; instead of going to the bar to have my customary scotch, I had it brought to me in the room.

I successfully completed the business that had taken me to Argentina. Upon returning to the States, I devoted an entire month to looking for Burenko. After exhausting all existing possibilities of finding him, and after thinking very much about what I had read, I decided to publish his autobiography.

Book One

Russia

Chapter 1

My name is Michael Kirilovich Burenko. Although my last name sounds Ukrainian, my father always considered himself Russian. My name has been written and pronounced differently in the diverse countries in which I have lived: Michel in France, Miguel in Latin America and Spain, and Michael in the United States. To my parents and my childhood friends in France, where I grew up, it was Michail or Misha.

I always liked having this variety of names and pronunciations, which seemed to give me different identities and enhance my imagination, as I was adapting to the many places where I lived and where my name was pronounced in diverse ways. For as long as I can remember, someone was always asking me if I didn't feel confused for having lived in so many countries, to which I always answered that I felt at home any place where I lived, for I love to feel the different personalities living inside me.

I was born in Odessa, now part of the Ukraine, late at night on December 8, 1918 by the old calendar, December 22 by the new. However, when our family moved to the West, my mother, in her confusion, entered my date of birth as December 20, and that is the date that has remained on all my identity papers and legal documents. My mother's mistake deprived me of the right to claim to be a Capricorn, the traits of which I exhibit to this day.

My childhood memories are very confused, for they go back to my early infancy. When I try to recover them, it is as if I am looking at an old family picture album. I don't see the past as a motion picture, but rather as a series of pictures without action—a large number of them, almost all static. A few of these pictures, but not many, exhibit some movement, but they move extremely slowly. It also seems that these memory pictures are without colors; they are like old black-and-white photographs. Even the most horrendous events in my memory, except in very rare cases, appear as colorless pictures without action.

I learned much later that we had to abandon the mansion and move into a very poor neighborhood called Bugayovka, in the outskirts of the city of Odessa. From dirt roads one crossed a yard filled with gravel to get to the entrances of dwellings, all humble houses laid out one after the other and almost all the same, in open desolation without pretense. At the time, I had the impression that a great number of people lived in this place where the three of us occupied one room—my father Kiril Andreyevich, my mother Maria Efimovna, and me.

A few houses further down was the dwelling of my father's older brother, Andrey Andreyevich, his wife Anna, and their two daughters, my cousins. Nadya was the older daughter, while Tanya, my playmate, was more or less my age.

Their house was roomier than ours, and I was under the impression that they owned better furniture. At least that's how I saw things through my child's eyes.

A lot of other people lived in this complex of buildings, and I remember that there existed only one common restroom, made of wood, to serve all the residents. The restroom consisted of a little house with several doors, with holes cut out on the inside to accommodate the users. There was no running water and no electricity, and the construction of this restroom was very primitive.

Quite often, a painful picture involving this restroom comes to my memory, in which a small puppy had fallen into one of the holes, and many of the neighbors tried to rescue it. The puppy was swimming inside the hole filled with excrement. Several people dropped buckets attached to ropes into the hole in an effort to rescue the little animal, which was howling in fear. But all the rescue efforts were futile. In the end, the puppy drowned in this rotten wooden structure, in plain sight of everybody.

Even now, I can see the pained expression on the faces of the people who saw the puppy drown. The children in particular were afflicted by the drowning, and we were numerous. It seemed to us that it was the worst thing that could ever happen in the world.

It was amazing how many children were living in the complex, running, jumping, or playing with all kinds of junk, for none of us owned a real toy.

In my memory appear pictures of the frequent times when my father's family and the family of his older brother got together, usually at my uncle Andrey's house because, as already noted, it was larger than ours. While we children played on the floor with a variety of trash, the grown-ups talked in very low voices, from time to time checking at the door to see whether somebody was listening to or spying on us from the outside.

I knew that times were tough, and often I heard people use the word bandits, who seemed to rove in bands all over. I once heard my uncle Andrey tell of how three of those bandits assaulted his uncle Grisha, who was lying in bed with typhoid fever at the time. In an effort to force his wife to tell them where she hid the family's money, the bandits beat her almost to death. "But Aunt Marfusha," said Uncle Andrey, "as a good, rough Ukrainian resisted all this punishment, without telling the bandits where she was keeping the savings. Uncle Grisha, shaking with fever, didn't know whether he should pull out the gun he was keeping under his pillow. He realized that he had only two bullets in the gun, and he was too weak to fight the aggressors, so he didn't move."

I learned much later that eight million Russians died in the 1918 typhoid epidemic, which claimed the lives of 40 million persons around the world.

Chapter 2

I have a hazy memory of a little boy, barely able to stand in his cradle but reaching out with the aim of hitting me. I learned that this toddler was my baby brother Sezya (Serge), not yet a year old at the time I was three. This little man made tremendous efforts to grab the cradle's bars with his little fists as he trembled with rage in frustration of being unable to strike me. Although I felt that I was stronger than the little boy in the cage, for some unknown reason I was scared of him. He was desperate in his efforts to reach and punish me with his diminutive fists, while an awful glare was coming out of his beautiful blue eyes.

Since tender childhood I have been unable to comprehend violence. I never understood the meaning of violence, and it took me a long time to accept it and even later to practice it, sometimes with accumulated intensity.

I learned later that my baby brother Sezya died of starvation a few months later, one of more than seven million who starved to death in the four-year period during and after the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia.

My mother never forgot that President Woodrow Wilson sent food to Russia in an effort to save lives during this period. She always talked about the good-looking American sailors who came to the port of Odessa to help alleviate the hunger that was exhausting the inhabitants.

I can still hear, as if it were right now, her praise of them: "They were handsome, blonde with blue eyes—such good-looking guys!" She continued to tell us that we didn't starve because of the American help. Odessa is a port, and a good part of the unloaded food remained there.

Many years later, when my parents owned a Russian restaurant in the Latin Quarter of Paris, four officers of the American navy came to eat there. Their warship had dropped anchor in Le Havre, and the crew had several days' leave to spend in Paris. I believe it was in 1932, at a time when Europeans still adored Americans. We kids followed the American sailors in the street, looking at them as if they were gods.

When these four American officers finished their luncheon and asked for the check, my parents sat down with them at their table, while a waiter brought a tray with a bottle of champagne. My parents told them that the food that Americans brought to the starving Russian people during the Russian revolution would never be forgotten. Not only would my parents not charge them for the meal, but in addition, my parents indulged the officers with champagne with which they drank to the health of the sailors and to the generous country America. In her Slavic effervescence, my mother kissed each of the officers as they left the restaurant.

Now, one more time so as not to change her "story", after the Americans left, my mother told us how the handsome, blonde American sailors in Odessa had unloaded bags of flour and how good-looking these men were—much handsomer than the four American officers with whom my parents had just shared several bottles of champagne.

My mother later told me that she always wondered how I could survive during the terrible period of hunger in Russia. She related that I would barely eat, while my brother Sezya, whenever she would remember him, always had a sad smile, was constantly hungry, and greedily devoured the small quantity of food that my parents could provide for him.

I have been haunted for many years by the memory of my mother's story about this terrible epoch in Russian history, especially her recollections of Sezya: "He was always hungry," she would say, then would repeat these words with emotion and sadness, more than once making me jealous of the love she felt for my deceased little brother. "Your father would sometimes bring a loaf of bread, a piece of horse meat, or half a glass of milk obtained through bartering pieces of jewelry—that's if he was lucky, for it didn't happen every day." Wiping a tear away, she would continue, "I would divide everything into four parts. And all of us were hungry! You would barely touch your portion of food, and when your father was with us, he was very angry with you for it. He was afraid that you would starve. Meanwhile, Sezya would have swallowed his ration and asked for more!"

Looking far away, perhaps absorbed in the haunting memories, my mother would continue, "Seeing that you didn't want to eat, we gave your portions to Sezya, who gulped them down instantly and still asked for more. He would often move his little fists, saying 'ma-ma-ma,' which for him meant that he wanted more. He would look deeply with his beautiful blue eyes into mine, and we would understand one another without exchanging words. Suddenly, he started losing weight, while you were getting fatter without eating. It's a mystery! A couple of months later, a few days before his first birthday, he died!"

I learned later that I was born the second child of my parents. Shortly before I was born, my sister Tamara died of meningitis at the age of two, the effects of the disease intensified by a lack of food. My mother sometimes talked about her, although not as often as she talked about Sezya. She told me that Tamara was extremely intelligent, with an adult personality. "When I asked her," my mother recalled, "why are you looking at me, Tamara?", she would invariably reply, 'I have eyes to look and that's why I am looking at you.'"

My mother was pregnant with me at the time, and when she asked Tamara whether she wanted a little brother or a little sister, Tamara would always reply, "Of course I want a little brother, because I am a girl and it would be much better to have a little boy to take care of." Tamara, like Sezya, had blue eyes. She was very much afraid of my father, who seemed not to like her.

My mother always insisted that it is a well-known fact that a father would never love a child he hadn't seen born. Tamara was born when my father was away fighting the Turks, who were Germany's allies in the First World War. When he returned and saw Tamara for the first time, she was already several months old. My mother added, "Tamara knew that he didn't like her, and she never expected any love from him."

"She was very smart," my mother would continue. "During her father's absence, she would never mention him with love. She was always asking when 'he' would come back, never using the word father." My mother too was blonde and blue-eyed, while my father had black eyes and black hair. Much later I came to believe that my father disliked children with blue eyes. Perhaps it was just a coincidence.

Considerably later, when we were in France, my younger sister Maya, listening to the stories my mother repeatedly told about Sezya and Tamara, observed, “Then the two prettiest ones with blue eyes died, and both of us ugly ones lived!” Maya said the two of us had lived because we had chestnut-colored eyes and hair.

The pictures in my memory of the great hunger in Russia are indelible. I often envision the image of a big two-wheeled cart, pulled over a dirt road by three completely exhausted skinny young men. On this open cart are piled several rigid corpses in various positions. Atop them all is the corpse of a big boy wearing long pants too short for him and an old, torn-up shirt. In his right hand he is still holding a loaf of bread as if he intends to put it in his mouth, which is wide open like his eyes; meanwhile, he remains rigid like a statue. Anybody would think that the boy’s strength had abandoned him at the precise moment that he was about to put this stale bread that could have saved his life in his mouth. Anyway, it was already too late for him. He died before his meal was consumed—at least that was my assumption at the time I saw the corpse.

My memory harbors another, very unfocused picture from that time, of a lady who was holding my hand. I am unsure whether the lady was my mother or whether it was perhaps somebody I knew—an aunt perhaps—but my recollection of the scene is definite. Another woman who was with us said something I could never forget: “They are so hungry, so hungry that when they can put their hands on a piece of bread, they swallow it too fast and die on the spot.” At that moment, I arrived at a conclusion that has remained engraved in my thought throughout my turbulent life: any hungry person could die from eating too fast.

It was the first time I had seen corpses, human at least, although I had seen many dead horses in the street, and I could not have imagined then that during my lifetime I would see many, many more human corpses.

I was afraid of those corpses then—afraid, but fascinated; I kept looking at them, because I couldn’t understand how they were not moving, and the sight of them terrified me.

During this period of hunger, I had the opportunity to see more corpses, many more corpses, but the memory of the big cart full of them came to symbolize for me the meaning of death itself.

Sometimes my mind was flooded by a series of images or perhaps short black-and-white motion pictures, which also have captured my child’s past in my memory. I could see entire quarters occupied by shabby houses along a dirt road, with numerous people walking back and forth ceaselessly, always in a hurry. Infrequently, a rider would appear, or a horse-drawn carriage, and in a very few instances, the appearance of an automobile or a truck would cause total commotion among the people.

I remember walking one day in the streets of Odessa with my cousin Kolia, who was holding my hand. Kolia was the only son of my aunt Grafa, my mother’s sister. He was holding my hand tightly, fearing that I would get lost. I think he was six or seven years older than I. Anyway, he was always posturing and adopting a paternalistic attitude toward me, and I liked it because I felt protected.

Suddenly, we heard screaming from a house in ruins. It must certainly have been a spacious dwelling, now reduced to rubble during the Russian Civil War. It had a huge open basement, from which the heart-rending cries of a boy about four years old—my age at the time—came. The boy was stumbling while walking among the debris. One

could see that the boy was blind, for as he advanced he moved his hands in the air, as if to open a pathway; meanwhile, he continued to howl and cry.

Several hoodlums surrounded him in the midst of the rubbish, jumping around him and laughing every time the little blind boy stumbled or fell on the broken stones between the ruins.

While we were watching from the sidewalk, glancing down into the basement at this horrifying spectacle, other people came along, attracted by the screams and our growing throng of curious onlookers.

Everyone was looking at this pathetic scene, but nobody said a word or made a move to help the boy; only a fragile little old toothless woman in a dirty and worn-out dress, looking like a beggar, shouted her loud indignation at the hoodlums. That was all she could do, for she appeared so frail that the gathered crowd looked at her with amazement, surprised that she was still alive.

It was out of the question for this poor old woman to go down to the basement to help the little boy. While she cursed the hoodlums—that was all she could do—the rest of the crowd approved her words in silence.

One more time, I felt my throat getting drier and drier. I was making an effort to understand what all that was about and what was going on over there. I had a crazy desire to ask Kolia, but guessing my intention, he put his finger to his mouth, and said very angrily, “Quiet!”

I desisted. It is possible that at the time I couldn’t express my feelings in words, or maybe I didn’t know enough to convey the profound emotion that I was feeling inside myself to my cousin. In either case, I remained silent. To put an end to this embarrassing situation, Kolia pulled me by the hand and resumed our walk in silence, without looking back.

I could see that he was furious, perhaps a little ashamed because he might have been able to help but couldn’t do anything for this blind little boy. Then, talking to himself more than to me, he said, “You are sorry for the little boy, you try to help him, and suddenly without warning these bezprizornis (orphans) pull a knife on you without a word. You never know what is going on over there. That’s why everybody over there was looking, without saying a word. No one wants to try to help, then become a victim. I have seen it many times before.”

I learned afterward that as a result of the First World War following the Revolution, Russia inherited nine million orphans who were scattered all over the country but preferred to try to survive in the big cities. They were living, sleeping, and dying on the streets, and during this turbulent period they were already considered a nuisance, an epidemic afflicting the country in this historical desolation. Many of these displaced children, in ages ranging from 7 to 15, were organized in gangs for survival, engaging in the most vile and repugnant of practices and vices, such as drugs, prostitution (some of the prostitutes were less than 10 years old), theft, assaults, and armed robberies.

I learned about all that years later, when I was already grown up, and I trembled with anger at the thought that all this had happened during my childhood, while I was living in Odessa, but at the same time, I was happy that circumstances had eventually allowed me to live far away from the life that had developed around me.

The problem created by the bezprizornis that the Soviet Union inherited came to be regarded as a national disaster, one that must be addressed as soon as possible before it grew to catastrophic proportions.

The crucial moment came when some of these young thugs assaulted and killed Denmark's ambassador, taking his money and fur coat during the attack. The event was critical, for it not only threatened the credibility of the Soviet regime, but it also reflected negatively overseas on the internal stability of the Soviet Union.

The milicians, as the policemen were called during the Communist regime, succeeded in catching the seven orphans who had killed the diplomat, and after they were arrested and then judged, they were shot by a firing squad as a warning to other criminals.

Of course, the execution of the seven orphans provoked an outcry from the media and the politicians of the capitalist states. The leaders of the Soviet Union were accused of being murderers of children. At that time, whatever the Communists did was criticized; it was just another opportunity to use propaganda to show the "cruelty" of the Socialist system.

By 1923, the Soviet Union could no longer afford to ignore the crucial problem of the bezprizornis, for it had evoked international attention and the regime needed to achieve clear vindication in the eyes of the world. The leadership appointed a special commission to resolve the issue, and immediately groups were organized and charged with gathering all these scattered children and putting them in reformatories run by professors, psychologists, and doctors.

In a few years, these interned orphans baffled international opinion by achieving unprecedented results. The little bandits were transformed into dignified and mainly useful citizens. Their instructors were proud of the achievements of their charges. All the orphans succeeded in recovering their dignity and in achieving a high level of professional preparation. The deprecatory word bezprizornis, formerly a term of derision, became a badge of honor for the orphans, many of whom distinguished themselves as pilots, military officers, scientists, and politicians. All or at least most of them helped to build the Communist state in Russia, thus showing their gratitude to a regime that gave them back their human dignity and offered them an opportunity to be part of a happy Socialist society.

I also recall another painful childhood episode involving the bezprizornis, during which I was again with my cousin Kolia, whom I had been seeing quite often since my family moved from the poor quarter of Bugayovka to Slabotka. We were both in the open market square, and since I was about five years old, I no longer needed to be held by the hand, even though I was grateful for Kolia's protection, for he was a very tall boy for his twelve years.

The open market was always full of people, where vendors offered a little bit of everything—vegetables, fruits, other food, used clothes, and miscellaneous items. One could still be aware of the shortage of products, despite the development of the New Economic Program (N.E.P.) introduced by Lenin; at the same time, the general situation was an improvement over the previous economic conditions. The N.E.P., which liberated business, was intended to explore whether private initiative could alleviate the hunger that still prevailed. At the time, I knew nothing about it, but I could see that food was already more abundant.

Kolia and I saw in a corner of the market a group of bezprizornis who were creating a major disturbance. They were obviously busy at some task, for they moved around a lot. Kolia, who was very curious, guided us in their direction, without suspecting that we would be surprised by the most repugnant of spectacles. It turned out that the little thugs were capturing sparrows with traps, and after gouging out their eyes with a needle, throwing them in the air. The bezprizornis cackled with laughter as they watched the poor little birds flying blind, hitting telephone poles, cables, trees, and buildings.

Kolia grabbed my hand and led me away, for he wanted to hide this spectacle from me, but it was too late; I had seen it all. I hated the violence then, and in my child's logic, I couldn't comprehend why people were so cruel. I wondered how small children could be so cruel as to burst the eyes of little birds and then laugh at their sufferings. It was above the level of my understanding, but without interruption, I kept observing with intense curiosity all aspects of life as they unfolded in front of me.

From the time I was six, while living in my new quarter of Slabotka, very often some overgrown boys wanted to fight me. I always avoided these encounters, even when I knew that all of them would be laughing at me. While I knew that I wasn't scared of them, I was puzzled that the boys would want to harm me.

At that time, I never thought of harming anybody, and something inside myself told me that I was right to avoid harming others; unfortunately, life taught me as I was growing up that the world steered by other laws, and little by little, I suppressed my internal feeling of mercy, giving freedom to my impulses, no longer afraid to be cruel.

Another picture comes to mind, of walking in Odessa's downtown area with my maternal grandparents. It was my first visit to the business area of the city, and I recall being very impressed by the tall buildings on both sides of the street.

The elegance of my grandparents remains engraved in my memory, and I recall being a little uncomfortable because of that elegance; it was the first time I had seen a woman wearing a hat as large as the one my grandmother wore. She had on a long and, to me, stunning dress, while my grandfather wore a suit with jacket and waistcoat, with a tie or a very showy bow hanging from his shirt. He continued to walk, never stopping to display the smile that appeared under his huge, curved moustache.

I think that my mother wanted to impress my grandparents, for she dressed me in the best suit I had, a little sailor's uniform. When she left me with my grandparents, she looked straight in my eyes and told me to behave and be a good boy.

Unfortunately, this sole and truly memorable encounter I had with my grandparents turned out to be a real disaster. I started developing a pain in my stomach, perhaps the product of anxiety and intimidation, but I didn't dare tell them, and I made an effort to control myself.

Unfortunately, not being able to control my bowels any longer, and still ashamed to tell them what was happening, I made it in my underwear. My blue pants were filled with a warm substance that slid down my legs, until my grandparents saw what was happening and became very irritated.

All this happened while we walked close to the Opera House—one of the prettiest in the world, I learned later. I don't know why, but for a long time after this incident, the word *opera* evoked a strange and very uncomfortable sensation.

I knew that my grandparents and I were supposed to go someplace to eat—I believe I heard the word *restaurant*—but because of my accident we had to go directly to my grandparents' home. My grandmother washed me as well as my clothes, then wrapped me in a towel while I waited for my uniform to dry.

That was how my mother found me when she returned to pick me up. She almost collapsed when she learned what had happened, and I felt real shame for the first time in my short life. Alas, it would not be the last time I had that feeling of being dissatisfied with myself and my actions.

I don't want to remember what my mother said in front of her parents and what she said when we went back home. She said something like it was a shame to behave in such a manner with distinguished people. I learned then a new word, *distinguished*, and I realized that my was what grandparents were, because I saw on the walls of their big house hanging a lot of large frames containing painted pictures, which impressed me very much.

Distinguished—the word and the images on the walls dwell like an incrustation on my mind as a synonym for opulence. Among those paintings hanging on the walls were portraits of Tsar Nicholas II and Tsarina Alexandra, a fact I learned later from my mother when we were living in Paris.

When the Soviets came to power, the new administration requisitioned my grandparents' huge mansion, using it to lodge several families and allowing my grandparents to keep only two rooms, without, of course, the luxury to which they were accustomed.

Somehow, the authorities learned of the presence of the portraits of the tsar and the tsarina on the walls of the house—perhaps someone reported them to the authorities. A commissar was sent to my grandparents' former mansion to see whether such a grave infraction was committed. Judging by what my mother told me later, it looks like my grandmother told the young Communist officer that she had always owned these paintings, that she was accustomed to seeing them at the house, and that she had no intention of getting rid of them. The commissar, a young student, explained in a kind way that the Soviet power could not any longer allow the ostentation of kings or tyrants, including such portraits. With great patience, he told her, "Listen, Grandma. The times have changed, even though I understand you. Habits are habits, and you don't need to get rid of both the portraits at once. You can, for instance, pull the painting of the tsar down and throw it away tomorrow, and the following week, you can do the same to the tsarina's portrait. In this way, you will have time to get used to living without the portraits. But understand—we can no longer tolerate despots and kings."

When the five sisters and my mother's younger, only brother learned what had happened, they assured my grandmother that the matter was much more serious than she assumed. For disobeying them, they told her, the Communists could put her in jail forever. It was much better not to provoke the Bolsheviks. She should try to live peacefully with them, for they were now the masters of the country.

As the family's matriarch, my grandmother made all the most important decisions. In fact, I don't remember my mother's ever mentioning my grandfather's taking part in any decisions other than those related to his business affairs. My grandmother also took care of the family's financial matters, and according to my mother, my grandfather would bring home payment vouchers and money from his

factories, which repaired heavy equipment and railroad locomotives. My grandmother would then run immediately to the bank to invest the funds by buying stocks.

When the Revolution came, the fortune that my grandmother hidden in a safe-deposit box at the bank was transformed overnight to valueless bundles of paper.

In their old age, my grandparents lived without resources, for the government took their factories away from them, along with all the properties they owned. Under the new regime, they were lucky to have the two rooms in what was formerly their own mansion.

Chapter 3

Of all members of the Tankovsky family, I loved my aunt Grafa the most; she lived close to us once we moved to Slabotka. She was the second sister by birth, my mother the third.

Aunt Grafa was very romantic, almost inconsistent and very weak with men. Several times, I heard somebody from the family say that she was always choosing “the worst one.” The men took advantage of her kindness and of her money, to the point that when she reached old age, she was penniless and died lonely.

Her only son, by her first husband, my cousin Kolia, introduced me to the outside world at a very tender age, when everything still seemed to me so mysterious and very often inexplicable. I was too young to understand that the Revolution was over and that the Communists were the victors and had the power.

I was learning very quickly a bunch of new words—words like *Whites*, *Reds*, *Communists*, *Bolsheviks*, *Makhno*, *Lenin*, *Petliura*, and *Denikin*—and of course very often and many times I heard people uttering words that I already knew, such as *bandits* and *bezprizornis*, representing categories of people whom I personally hated.

Later on, other words came to enter my primitive vocabulary—for example, *G.P.U.* (the fore-runner of the K.G.B.), *speculators*, *Commissar*, and *member*, understanding that the latter referred to Communist Party membership, a status that was then like a title of nobility, carrying with it a lot of privileges.

I couldn't always understand why my father very often wasn't at home, and he could even on certain occasions disappear for a good while, then suddenly come back (usually in the evening.) For a good part of the night, you could listen to whispers and secrets rippling between my parents. My mother was getting more and more nervous, a fact that made me think that my father was hiding, but I didn't comprehend the reason then.

My father's older brother, Uncle Andrey, also moved to Slabotka, but we were no longer living as close to him as when we were in Bugayovka, a fact I lamented, because I liked to play with my little cousin Tanya. Her older sister Nadya, who was now considering herself a grown-up, wouldn't even look at us, seeking the company of kids her own age instead.

My father's younger sister, Aunt Lolia, had been married to Yasha Jacobovsky, a Jewish businessman who in order to marry her had to convert to Christianity. Before the Russian Revolution, birth and marriage registrations were kept by the Church, and the Greek Orthodox Congregation, which was the official recognized religion, did not allow marriages of people from two different faiths.

Later on, when we were living in Paris, my mother told me several times (she used to repeat her stories over and over) about my Aunt Lolia's wedding, when the *pop* (the Orthodox priest) told her, "Listen, you bride, never forget that this man who today is taking you as his wife abandoned his own religion, the faith of his ancestors, for your love! He became a Christian to be able to marry you, and you should never forget his sacrifice, and consequently you should love him even more than you would love a man from your own religion!"

Telling it for the twentieth time, my mother—of course—would never forget to say that a lot of people were crying in the church as they listened to such moving words.

I never met my uncle Yasha, because he died very young a couple of years after the marriage, leaving my Aunt Lolia pregnant with my little cousin Sonya, who would be born a few months later. He died of the Spanish flu, which was taking the lives of millions of people. This 1918 epidemic lasted more than a year in Russia, as it did in many other countries around the world, killing 40 million people. Epidemics are normal consequences of wars and revolutions, as scholars have now proven.

My Aunt Lolia was very pretty and coquettish. Always smiling when a man was looking at her, she would sigh, while her little eyes shone. We saw each other quite often, and I remember that my Aunt Lolia was always well dressed and smelled good, as was my little cousin Sonya.

Sonya was more or less my age, and now that we had become neighbors upon my family's move to Slabotka, we had more opportunity to play together.

In my tender childhood, I liked to play and to touch girls' soft skin. Going as far back as I can in my memory, I remember that I always liked nice things, well-dressed people, distinguished manners, and everything that I later learned was my in accord with my "sybaritical" inclination.

I remember that we went several times to the cemetery to visit my Uncle Yasha's grave, and, following the Russian tradition, every time it was like a picnic held close to the tomb of the deceased beloved.

One day, we were seated on the little bench close to my uncle's grave, when suddenly we saw little Sonia jumping over the sepulcher of the father that she never met, screaming, "Yasha! I know that you are here, and stay there without coming out! Don't dare to come out!"

All of us were surprised and remained mute. Even I, who at that time was about four or five years old, understood that my little cousin did something that she shouldn't have done. The amazing part was that she was born after her father died, and of course she didn't know him, so it was very difficult to guess why she behaved in such an abrupt, unforeseen, almost mystical way.

My mother, who always had an explanation for anything incongruent, assumed that my Aunt Lolia had a motive for some animosity toward her husband during their short marriage, or perhaps she just resented the fact that the marriage was so brief. She conveyed that animosity to her daughter, who was acting out her mother's frustration by scolding her father in the grave.

My mother's other sisters were living too far from us—on the other side of the city—for us to see them other than on rare occasions. Her baby brother Ivan was slightly older than Kolya, but for unknown reasons, they were not close to each other. In a certain

way, without our knowing why, he felt superior to everybody. Perhaps he thought that the fact that he became a member of the Communist Youths gave him the right to be arrogant. He openly considered everyone in the family the people's and the regime's enemies. I observed later on that everybody was trying to remain on good terms with him; even my mother, during the few times they happened to be together, sought to please her younger brother.

I was bewitched by my Aunt Ana, my mother's oldest sister, who lived by herself in her mansion in the aristocratic quarter of Odessa's downtown, close to her parents. At that time, she seemed to me the prettiest woman who could ever exist in the world, and in secret I adored her. Before World War I broke out, she married an army officer who was killed six months after their wedding. His name was Misha, and he was one of the first victims of those hostilities, slaughtered a few days after the beginning of the Great War. I learned that it was in his memory that I was named Misha. We were seeing my Aunt Ana only from time to time. She always appeared elegantly dressed, wearing very flashy, colorful garments, but what was even more intriguing was the perfume she wore. It was such a "fresh" fragrance and so pleasant that it would make anybody go crazy. She was very sweet and charming, a real lady who would never get tired of talking about her Misha, whereupon she would smile with sadness and her stare would become distant, as if she were far away from us.

I learned that she had a lot of admirers and that there was always somebody asking for her hand, promising her a new happiness in the future, but she would very politely reject all of them one by one. Not only did she never marry again, but she didn't fall in love again either, keeping the memory of her first love alive until her death, which came at an advanced age; we learned about her death when we were living in Paris.

When I make an effort to pry into my past, trying to bring back some of the many events that impregnated my life, quite often I ask myself if all them really happened to me, or if they were all part of a nightmare inserted in some certain way into my memory, already so full. It seems to me very difficult to believe that a human being could have lived such an intense life filled with emotions and still be around to keep on accumulating many more of them. Perhaps this way of thinking was a contagion from my father, who was always amazed that he could have survived such indescribable adventures in his life. When anything abnormal happened to him, I heard him say more than once, "I have the impression that I am stealing time from life! I lived my existence with such an intensity that I should have been dead a long time ago, and when the morning comes, I feel as if I am robbing this day; I enjoy it with an illimitable elation!"

I will never deny that my father had a primordial influence on my intellectual development, as likely he also influenced to a great degree my political development, and that without noticing it, I modeled my personality according to his teachings. He came to have such a great weight in my life that most of the time during my adult existence, when I had to make an important decision, I would ask myself, "What would he have done if he were in my place?"

My father told me very much about life in Russia; he tried tirelessly to inculcate in me love toward everything related to Russia, mainly about its heritage and how life in Russia was before the First World War and the Revolution.

The amazing part was that when my mother would talk about the same topic and the same period of time, seeing them in the light of her personal experience, she

would present them sometimes in a completely different way from my father, so that most of the time I had two versions of the same event.

My mother had to survive in a time and in an environment when women hadn't yet attained the same possibilities they have now.

My mother's family was against her marrying my father, because even though he came from an old noble military caste whose ancestors had served in the navy for more than two centuries and been financially secure, my father's family nevertheless couldn't compare its wealth with the economic empire that the Tankovsky clan possessed. That was why they suspected that my father was looking more for my mother's money than for her love.

My mother wouldn't give up, and my grandparents, trying to avoid a scandal (my mother was threatening to elope with my father), at the end very reluctantly gave her their blessing for the matrimonial union.

It was certainly a result of her parents' opposition to that union that during all the time of the conflagration in Russia, my mother received a very indifferent help from her family and almost nothing from my father's, who remained resentful toward all these pre-wedding intrigues. They didn't want to help, or perhaps they couldn't help her, during all those years when my father was warring against the Turks in the Black Sea during the war and then serving as an active participant in the Revolution.

And so, while my father during these seven years of fighting experienced acts of courage, treachery, and slaughter, on the other side my mother was telling me what the civilian population really went through, for the civilian population always endures much more suffering than the military, at least during an internal struggle inside the same country, when there are not enough means and connections to help the people survive the horrors of war.

Living in Paris at a time when I was grown up, my mother would always refer to these conflicts from her own point of view, and most of the time she conveyed her interpretation of them through the lens of her own experiences.

Chapter 4

During the Russian Revolution, many factions were fighting in addition to the principal opposing forces of the Red Army of the Bolsheviks organized by Trotsky and the White Army, which was faithful to the monarchy and the Orthodox Church. These numerous other organized groups, which were not always united by an ideal, were only trying to take advantage of the confused situation for their own profit or personal gain.

Several uniformed nationalistic units were spreading all over, fighting for the independence of their nations, including Georgians, Armenians, Chechens, Ukrainians, and many tribes from the Caucasus and Asia.

All of them were forming alliances, fighting together against a common enemy and even sometimes battling among themselves—depending on the circumstances—on the basis of the advantages they would gain during these bellicose activities. Small groups of guerrillas with undetermined ideals also existed under the orders of a "batko" (daddy) as a commander, such as the "Greens," the "Blues," and so many other ephemeral and short-lived gangs.

The Ukrainians had three strong armies, Petliura's being the most important. Petliura's army was fighting for Ukrainian independence, and sometimes it collaborated with the Austro-Hungarian-German forces, which were occupying that country under the Brest-Litovsk Treaty. This army was anti-Communist, anti-Semitic and anti-Russian. Another group was under the command of "batko" Makhno, a self-proclaimed anarchist, even though my father never stopped branding him as a nationalist and a bandit who several times betrayed both the Reds like the Whites.

Now the third and the most powerful army—backed by the occupying forces—belonged to General Skoropadsky, who also was seeking Ukrainian independence from the Russians. He planned to collaborate with the Germans until presented with a propitious opportunity to get rid of them as well.

The fighting on the battlefield was ferocious—fratricidal warfare being usually the cruelest—because, as my father used to say, on both sides they were speaking the same language. In the detention camps, the prisoners were tortured systematically on both sides. No stable front existed for very long, and the cities, including Odessa, were periodically and sometimes only for a few days occupied by different factions that made the population pay very dearly for any disobedience of the new rulers' laws.

Armies from sixteen foreign countries invaded Russia in 1919, with the intention of establishing order, helping the White Army, and mainly prospecting in the oil-rich regions with the aim of exploiting them for their own benefit. In this respect, the English were the incontestable masters, and soon after their arrival, they wanted to take over the port of Baku in exchange for military aid. The French sent navy warships to the Black Sea, but afraid of facing a mutiny of their sailors, they called the fleet back home.

The English, Greek, and French came from the West, while the Czech prisoners of war who deserted the Austro-Hungarian Army sought refuge in Russia. During the Revolution, these deserters organized an army. Coming from their Volga River internment camp, they went to fight the Communists and also to plunder the banks. From Siberia came Japanese, Chinese, and American troops.

The merciless killing and cruelty sometimes took on proportions comparable only to those of the Middle Ages.

The Reds suffered defeat at the beginning, until Lenin ordered Trotsky to organize the Red Army. This new fighting force was created so fast and became so efficient that in a short time it could very easily rout all the invading foreign armies and the White Army as well. If it hadn't been for the French divisions commanded by General Weygand, the Reds could have again secured Poland as Russian territory.

My mother liked to tell me of another episode from that time, when she was pregnant with me, an event that occurred when she and one of her sisters were passing by the city hall, when she said aloud, without any malicious intention, "Look! Again the flag has been changed!" That precise day, the yellow and blue Petliura Ukrainian flag was waving atop the government building. Each time an army seized a city, the first thing it would do was to hoist its own flag. Unfortunately, the sentry who heard my mother became infuriated and started screaming at her, "So, you don't like our Ukrainian flag, dirty Russian!" And he hit her with the butt of his rifle.

The blow was quite powerful, and I assume that the fright of my mother and her sister was even more so, because both sisters ran away as fast as they could, stopping only when they could no longer hear the Ukrainian soldier's insults.

My mother confessed that for a long while she was concerned, afraid that the blow could have affected me while I was still in her womb. Always laughing every time she remembered this scene, she told everyone and repeated it that I, too, even before being born, participated in the Russian Revolution

My mother also loved to refer to one more episode, in which, of course, both of us were the protagonists, even though I was continuing to grow in her belly.

When the French forces were occupying Odessa, somebody blew up a munitions depot, in turn triggering bombs that started blowing up all over the streets, buildings, parks, and of course the people passing by. As was to be expected, the explosions originated a general panic of huge proportions, because the bombs were flying and blowing up everywhere in the city all during an entire day. A lot of people were killed or wounded, and much destruction was produced, with the result that many inhabitants were impelled to run away as fast as they could.

My father, as usual, was warring someplace, and my mother, who was easily afraid, always reacting by impulse and quite often without even reasoning, blinded by the fear of danger, joined all the other people who were escaping somewhere.

This group of scared people kept on fleeing for several hours, until they passed the city limit, and they ran until the night came, when they calmed down, realizing that the danger had been over for a long while and that it was about time to go back home.

In their escape, they didn't notice that they had bumped into a band of horseback-riding marauders who were dedicated to plunder but who, seeing these people so pitiful and frightened, felt sorry for them and left them without harm. It was almost a miracle that they respected these fugitives, among whom were some children and pregnant women. They saw them tired and hungry and let them catch a couple of geese wandering loose from a deserted farm, also allowing them to set a fire to cook the geese.

After this unexpected humanitarian gesture, the bandits mounted their horses and went on riding to new horizons to perform more sinister pilfering.

It was one of those numerous, uncontrolled bands roaming all over Russia at that

time. About an hour later, in the midst of a cloud of dust, a Red Army cavalry unit appeared, asking members of the group if they had seen the direction in which the marauders went, and immediately they galloped over the marauders' path, with the intention of catching and destroying them. For the fugitives, it became clear why the bandits didn't harm them: they knew that the Bolshevik riders were on their tail.

It was one more time that I participated in the Revolution still before being born.

When we were already living in Paris, my father told me that Lenin had strong support from the workers and from the Baltic Sea Fleet sailors, where Communists and also Anarchists prevailed. Later, Lenin ordered these same Anarchists to be massacred during the famous Kronstadt sailor's rebellion in 1921.

Lenin, in spite of the support from the Baltic Sea Fleet sailors, couldn't count on the Black Sea Navy, and he never dared pay that navy a visit, knowing that these sailors were Kerensky's supporters.

My father participated actively in the February 1917 Revolution that dethroned the tsar and proclaimed the Republic. During all this time, he never stopped collaborating with Kerensky, whom he met in Paris and with whom he became good friends thereafter. Both of them were dreaming of transforming Russia into a democracy similar to the French democracy.

My father would never get tired of telling me that when the Republic was declared, the people were jubilant, because finally everybody could feel a freedom reigning that they never had known before. It happened when the Social Democrat government was installed in the Petrograd Winter Palace.

From 1915 to 1925, the Russian capital of St. Petersburg had its name changed to Petrograd, because Russia was at war with Germany and the "burg" (city) suffix was too German, while the suffix "grad" meant "city" in Slavic.

The Social Democrats prevailed then, and they were all over, although many Anarchists were there, too, as my father would say, all of them wearing black shirts.

Most of them were intellectuals, students, even some nobles, with very few Jews, who formed an important group in Lenin's party.

At that time, little or nothing was known about the Communists, who were working hard clandestinely and were organized with an iron-fist discipline.

Kerensky was an idealist, but unfortunately, his political program was a little incoherent, and his slogan: "Neither war, nor peace!" didn't appeal to the people.

Russian soldiers, badly equipped and poorly nourished, were abandoning the trenches, which the Germans were occupying immediately, to the profound indignation of the allies, France and England, with whom there existed a mutual defense pact and an agreement to fight against the enemy until the final victory.

The Germans started occupying Russian positions without a shot, and they already had seven million Russian war prisoners, with hundred of thousands of those prisoners mutilated and sick. A large number of Russian soldiers were abandoning the front to join an army supporting some kind of cause or ideology, to join a band dedicated to plunder and robbery, or simply to be able to go back home and live in peace.

After several months of democracy, very few still believed in Kerensky, while the Monarchists were ready for a counterrevolution, and the Anarchists were getting stronger. Much too often among the latter, scoundrels and punks with sinister purposes infiltrated the ranks of the Anarchists, dirtying the Anarchists' reputation.

Many people from the underworld opted to wear black shirts, while a real anarchy was gaining at all levels of the population, giving the Anarchists an undeserved negative reputation for a long period of time.

This negative reputation wrested from them the possibility of playing a more important part during the Russian Revolution and later on in other regions of the world. Kerensky tried to honor the pledge given to England and France to pursue the fight against Germany until her defeat, but it was already too late. The Russian Army was in full demoralization, and there wasn't any hope of being able to restore its fighting ability. During all this time, the Communists were getting ready in their secret cells, trying to remain in hiding and not to attract any attention. Then, on October 1917, suddenly bewildering everybody, they appeared from all over, armed and confident.

Besides the fact that the throngs were watching Lenin and Trotsky in their harangues in the Moscow and Petrograd factories, nobody could have suspected them to be such dangerous adversaries, and much less that they would be able to take over the Winter Palace, which was defended by a women's battalion.

This women's battalion, fighting for Kerensky with Maria Bochkaryona as leader, was made up of the precursors of the feminist movement, most of them intellectuals and students, and it was determined to show that women could handle any situation in human life, even fighting, if necessary, as well as men.

The women of this battalion believed in their ideal that was inspired by the Social Democrat Party, and they died for it, crushed by a tremendous Communist superiority in numbers. After defeating this battalion, the Communists mercilessly slaughtered everyone in it.

Alexander Fedorovich Kerensky remained in the Winter Palace to the last moment, but when he saw the mob invading his residence, he got frightened and escaped by a little lateral door used by the servants, and for more precaution he did it dressed as a woman.

After that, for a long while the Communists kept on laughing at their enemies, the "counter-revolutionaries," and they were pointing at the Social Democrats, saying that they were running from danger "like women." The Communists didn't want to recognize the Social Democrats as being Marxists too, because the Bolsheviks wanted to present them as traitors to the people's cause.

For some time, Kerensky could hide in Russia, but understanding that the Communists were strengthening their power and witnessing so many of his friends and comrades harassed, persecuted, and shot, he succeeded in evading the Red Army that was looking for him and found refuge in Finland, a country that was already almost independent from Russia through some help from Germany.

After long and painful procedures initiated by French Socialists, Kerensky was allowed to emigrate to France, where he received political asylum.

Even at the end of 1917, the Germans were convinced that they still could win the war, mainly because they were witnessing the crumbling of the Eastern front that had been corrupted by the war and revolutions.

When the Revolution of February 1917 came, Lenin was living as a political refugee in Switzerland and wanted badly to return to Russia, but he couldn't do it without passing through territories occupied by the Germans or their allies, who undoubtedly hated communism. It was then that a political chess game was played, perhaps the most

important of the Twentieth Century. Lenin felt he was needed in Russia to direct his Marxist Revolution, and the Germans, even though despising him, were striving by all means to destroy Russian military power. Here appeared to the Germans the opportunity that they were looking for, and allowing Lenin to return to Russia seemed at that time to be advantageous to both parties.

After secret negotiations, the Kaiser sent Lenin in a sealed rail car to Russia. Both sides knew what they were doing, because they analyzed it coldly and were ready to assume all the risks and responsibilities.

Once in Russia, and after defeating Kerensky during the October 25 (Old Style) Revolution, which was November 7, 1917 in the new calendar, Lenin signed the infamous and shameful Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty with Germany. It was seen by everybody in the world not only as an unconditional surrender, but also as a humiliation, because Lenin was delivering to the Teutons 190 tons of gold (which at the end of the war was grabbed by the Allies), he authorized the occupation of Ukraine, and he accepted the sinking of the Russian Black Sea Fleet. Lenin, wishing to defend this armistice, said, "Give me a piece of land with peace, and there I will build Communism."

His faithful friend, collaborator, idealist, and creator of the Red Army, Leon Trotsky (Bernstein), didn't agree with him, saying that as long as capitalism existed, it would be impossible to build a real Communism, because both systems cannot coexist, and it was necessary to instigate a permanent revolution in all countries of the world until the final victory.

To a certain point in the theoretical aspect of his thinking, Trotsky was right, because it is impossible to institute Communism in a country surrounded by capitalist regimes. History vindicates him, even though it remains to be seen whether a universal revolution is possible the way the Trotskyites forecasted it.

Trotsky's ideas had an apparent success after the First World War, when in several countries like Germany, Hungary, Austria, and others, rebellions spread. The French fleet sent to the Black Sea to help the White Army in its struggle against the Bolsheviks rebelled in Odessa and Sebastopol in April 1919, under the Communist Andre Marty's leadership. The impact of that mutiny was such that the French government instantly had to recall the fleet. The several rebel leaders were judged and sent to forced labor. Andre Marty, the head of the uprising, after spending several years in jail had his sentence commuted, and later on he became one of the French Communist Party's leaders. During the Spanish Civil War, he organized the International Brigades, and I had the honor of meeting him in Madrid during one of his political speeches. In Russia, meanwhile, it didn't take very long to see the consequences of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty.

The Commander in Chief Baron von Eihgorn, with six hundred thousand Austro-Hungarian-German soldiers, invaded Ukraine, with the complicity of the Ukrainian hetman (chief) Skoropadsky, imposing a real reign of terror against the Marxists, the Jews, and the Russians.

My father didn't trust the "proletarian dictatorship," saying that he didn't participate in the February Revolution with the purpose of getting rid of the despotism of the Monarchy only to replace it now by another type of tyranny. He used to say quite often, "A dictatorship is still a dictatorship, no matter if it is right-wing or left-wing. I fought for the individual's freedom, and not to bring other types of oppression!"

Many times, my father told me that it was the most difficult moment of his life

when he had to make that decision. Most of the Social Democrats didn't know what to do either; it was a dilemma for all the intellectuals of the left, those who during their entire lives had been fighting against the tsar's despotism, with a yearning to bring freedom and democracy to the Russian people.

They succeeded in defeating the monarchy and the Tsar abdicated, but the democracy implanted with Kerensky was overthrown, leaving them only two painful options. They had to make their choice of the two powerful forces that were confronting each other very quickly, and unfortunately neither of the forces were acceptable to their political ideal. On one side was the White Army, mainly formed by officers of the old regime, Monarchists, nobles, middle-class families, rich landlords, and very religious farmers, convinced that they were fighting for the sacred Russian motherland. On the other side was the Red Army, organized by Trotsky and formed by Marxists, consisting of a large number of intellectuals, sailors, soldiers, workers, and a very few peasants who were not eager to join the atheistic Communists.

In this situation of uncertainty and indecisiveness, besides my father there were thousands of other liberals, such as Social Democrats, Social Revolutionaries, Mensheviks, Republicans, Anarchists, and those from some other ideologies who needed to join one or the other group. They couldn't remain neutral because they were too much exposed and committed, and they could possibly be wiped out without pity if they weren't part of one of these armies.

It was a rough decision to be taken, because if they allied themselves with the Monarchists, their yesterday's enemies, they would be forced to fight against their Marxist comrades, and if they enlisted in the Red Army, they would be serving with those who had brought down the democratic regime they had built with Kerensky and who were now jailing their companions.

Many of my father's friends joined the Bolsheviks, while numerous others, after thinking it over, went with Denikin's White Army, as my father did.

This antagonism among the Communists, Marxists, Socialists, Trotskyites, and the Anarchists prevailed for a long time, not only during the Russian Revolution but also during the Spanish Civil War.

In a very short period of time, the Red Army, Trotsky's pride, became such a disciplined military organization, helped mainly by professional Russian Army officers who were recruited by him, that they could face not only the White Army but also rout the sixteen foreign invaders' armies.

General Denikin, in whose ranks my father participated, kept on fighting until 1920; then came Admiral Kolchak, who continued the struggle against the Reds for a few more months but was defeated and shot by a firing squad. The last White leader was General Wrangel, who for a short time tried vainly to oppose the Communists. By the end of 1922, no important resistance against Lenin's Communist regime existed whatsoever.

From 1920 to 1926, to avoid being deported, jailed, or even executed, more than three million persons escaped from Russia, spreading all over Europe and some American countries. One of them was my father, and a year later he succeeded in arranging for my mother, my sister Maya (a few months old), and me also to leave Russia into exile, first in Germany, and finally in France.

Chapter 5

Long before I was born, and even before he was married, following his ancestors' tradition of more than two centuries, my father was already serving in the Black Sea Navy.

My father, like a good number of Russian noble officers, had long ago lost his faith in the autocratic Monarchy, the type of government that had been ruling Russia for about a thousand years.

The intrigues of the court, under the ominous Rasputin's influence and that of the German tsarina, generated a feeling of opprobrium that slowly gained strength in all Russian intellectual spheres.

My father's liberal ideas had been influenced by a distant uncle who spent more than ten years in exile in Paris and who narrated to him in detail the biography of one of our ancestors, Modest Burenko, who participated in the well-known "Dekabrist Rebellion" directed against the Tsar Alexander I. It had happened in December 1825, from which the revolt's name was taken, *Dekabrist* meaning "Month of December" in Russian.

Impelled by his uncle, Captain Bogdan Burenko, who was a republican, Modest was enraptured by the French Revolution, as were so many other Russian liberals striving to improve the living conditions of their people, who had suffered to such an extent during the long centuries of their history.

My father, who was an untiring reader to the last day of his life, was especially impressed by the events that happened after the French Revolution, which inflamed the thirsty Russian intellectual spirits. After Napoleon had been defeated and the Russians were occupying Paris, an occupation that lasted until 1823, Russian soldiers and Cossacks had a good time drinking in the French capital, while the officers, at least those who had liberal inclinations, were studying Gallic democracy. Such study was easy for them, because at that time almost everyone spoke French, which was not only the court's but also the aristocrat's language.

It was an interesting exchange between these two peoples, because while the Russians were learning to appreciate French liberalism, the occupied country's inhabitants were adding new expressions to their dictionary.

One of these words was *bistro*, which is now used at an international level. The starting point was very simple, but also original! It began when Russian patrols were passing by a tavern, and the soldiers wanted to have a drink but couldn't take too much time; with threatening gestures, they said to the bartender, "bistro," which in Russian means "fast." The French thought that "bistro" meant something like a place to have a drink, and ever since then it has been known as a synonym for a small bar, a cafe, or a location where drinks are served at a counter.

When, in 1823, the Russian troops were called back to their country, some of the

officers had already been seduced by the democratic idea, and they started plotting against tsarism with the intention of installing a liberal government, similar to the one established in France.

The date for the rebellion had been fixed for December 14, 1825, but only 3,000 "Dekabrists" came to the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg, with neither the organization nor the needed preparation and with a complete indifference of the Russian people, who were as much apathetic as aloof to politics.

Most of the rebels were arrested almost without resistance, then they were judged and many were hanged. The rest had their properties confiscated by the government before they were sent into exile to Siberia.

One of them was our ancestor Modest Burenko, who disappeared without notice and from whom nobody ever heard again.

I think that the crucial moment of my father's political life was when he, still a cadet at the naval academy, was sent to Paris with a group of students, where he met Kerensky and with whom he became very friendly, despite the fact that Kerensky was fifteen years older than my father. It happened in 1912, before the war, when my father was only 17.

When the February 1917 Revolution broke out, my father, already a navy officer on the cruiser *Emperatriz Elizabeth*, joined the movement backing Kerensky, with whom he had kept up a very intense and confidential correspondence.

Kerensky was nominated as Prime Minister of the Provisional Government and Commander in Chief of the Republic, forcing Tsar Nicholas II to abdicate and go into exile to Tobolsk. When Kerensky came for the Black Sea Fleet inspection in Sebastopol, my father, at Kerensky's direction, was appointed to squad command.

My father was several generations an atheist (calling himself rather a Voltairian), and consequently, we never went to church. I always felt sorry for those who were going to pray, persuaded that they were worthy of pity and convinced that they were a kind of different species.

Although I was very young at that time, I had already enough ability to retain in my memory how, so to speak, everybody was bragging about being a Communist, a Bolshevik, or a soldier of the Red Guard, and how Lenin was put at the level of god.

Once, playing with my neighbor from across the street, a kid my age whose name was Vania, I told him what I heard the grown-ups doing and I boasted that my father was a "Red soldier!" To my surprise, my little friend, after looking all around us to be sure that nobody could overhear us, said in a very low voice, "It is not true! My daddy said that your father was as himself, a White officer, but it is a family secret and shouldn't be told to anyone!"

When later on I conveyed to my mother what Vania had said, very angrily she scolded me, with a strict instruction to never talk about these things again with anybody, and much less to say that my father was a White!

To tell the truth, I couldn't distinguish very well between Reds and Whites, though it seemed to be so romantic to be a White officer. I saw that romanticism once in the theater, where I went with my mother to watch a show in which a White officer fell in love with a lady who denounced him, and he ended up being shot by a squad. I was saying to myself that it was so beautiful to be shot wearing such a showy uniform and to be a White.

I remember, too, how in 1924, suddenly all the sirens started to ululate, and everybody on the streets stopped, remaining as if paralyzed and silent for a good while. I overheard old women mumbling, "Lenin died! Lenin is dead!" And they were crossing themselves. All the faces were tense and looked scared!

On another occasion, I observed that my mother was gaining weight and becoming fat. Her movements were slow, and it seemed that all those close to her were treating her with a special consideration.

I was surprised that she didn't go see a doctor; neither was she complaining, nor saying that she was sick, until one afternoon my Aunt Grafa came to pick me up, telling me that I would spend the night in her house. This news filled me with joy, because it would give me the occasion to play with my cousin Kolia, whom I adored.

When we were at Aunt Grafa's house, during the dinner, she asked me if I would like to have a little brother or a little sister. To be honest, I didn't care, because I couldn't remember having any brother, with the exception of the little man who was in the cage, who my mother told me was my brother. But I don't recall that I ever played with him. I knew also about what my mother told me with reference to my sister Tamara, but Tamara had died before I was born, and I didn't know her, for which reason I felt that I had never had any brother or sister with whom I would have played.

When the following day, on April 23, 1925, we returned home, I learned that my little sister called Maya had been born in the morning.

A strange, curious sensation invaded me, as I said to myself with pride, "Now I have a little sister!" Meanwhile, my father, who arrived in a clandestine way, as he used to appear, said very solemnly that she would now bring us luck. I had never before seen my father so moved. I was surprised, because he was very cold by nature, and the fact that he was expressing openly such affection made me feel jealous for the first time in my short life. It looked like suddenly I didn't exist any more and that all the attention was tilted toward my little sister.

Chapter 6

During the first years following the Revolution and until 1926, the year of our departure from Russia, or the Soviet Union as it was called then, people's spirits weren't yet settled, and it looked like each one was trying to find himself.

The shameful Brest-Litovsk Treaty signed with Germany by Lenin on March 3, 1918, delivered to the Germans the entire Ukraine, which at once was invaded by an expeditionary corps, increasing even more acutely the confusion already reigning in Russia as a result of the fighting among so many different factions.

It was very difficult at that time to know on which side one's neighbor or a relative was, for he could be fighting in some other place on an unknown front. When such people came home, or better, slipped back during the night, they would always wear civilian garments, and very seldom uniforms.

Apparently, what my mother told me when we were already living in Paris happened at the very beginning of 1919, when I was just born and lying in my cradle. My father must have come sneaking home from the front, after several months of absence, dressed like a peasant and bringing a rifle with him.

The German occupation Forces, with the complicity of their Ukrainian nationalist lackey "ataman" Skoropadsky, were enforcing their decree by which all the inhabitants had orders to deliver up all the firearms. Those who would dare to disobey were shot on the spot, wherever they were.

It appears that when my father was squeezing into the house during the night, a neighbor must have seen him and denounced him to the Germans.

As a precaution, my father, as soon as he reached the house, hid the rifle under the parquet floor, and when the Germans burst inside screaming in pidgin broken Russian, "The cannon, the cannon, Russian pig, give the cannon or you dead!" my father played the dummy, saying that he didn't have any "cannon," repeating their word, instead of saying "gun." The soldiers of the Austro-Hungaro-German Expeditionary Corps almost tore the house completely down without being able to find the rifle, in which case they would have shot my father on the spot.

My mother, with tears in her eyes, begged my father with her look, pointing to my cradle to soothe him, with a mute silent supplication wishing him to deliver the rifle to the Germans and not prolong this agony.

When a couple of hours elapsed, not finding the gun, the invaders left when no more furniture remained to be destroyed.

My father explained to my mother when the German soldiers were gone that he wanted to keep on fighting and that weapons were very scarce on the battlefield.

This time, like others, he stayed home only a couple of days and then returned to the front. The word *front* was a very vague one, because during the Russian Revolution, there existed several fronts and a lot of confusion.

When I grew up, it came quite often to my mind that it was possible that my father more than once contemplated whether he should have changed sides, but we never talked about that, because he was very ambiguous about details of certain aspects of the Civil War. It was then that he experienced the moment of the worst internal struggle of his life, trying to figure out if he was doing the right thing or if he had made a mistake.

Many years later, when we were living in Argentina, during one of our numerous encounters that would last until late in the night, while we were drinking wine in Tucuman, he said to me, "I was a Socialist, I didn't want any more Monarchy, but I didn't want to be with Trotsky either, and much less with Lenin. I had to fight many times against the Ukrainian nationalist Petliura and the Anarchist Makhno, but when I was with Denikin, I realized that the majority of my comrades in arms were Conservatives and Monarchists. With Communists, it was the extreme! It was a time when it was difficult to take a decision, I mean a good one, without regretting it later on!"

When in 1920 Lenin was feeling strong, he decided to transfer the capital of the Soviet Union from Petrograd to Moscow because of better communications.

The fighting kept on going in several sectors of Russia and the Caucasus, but little by little the Germans had been wiped out from Ukraine, leaving a great amount of scattered military material and also many graves of their soldiers buried in that country.

Russia, or the Soviet Union as it was called then, was in ruin, its industry destroyed, its farmland half-abandoned. Hunger was everywhere, and it was impossible to organize a country in these conditions, with millions of orphans and more than five million war invalids.

The N.E.P. (New Economical Program) created by Lenin for a limited period of time was already showing some results, impelling business and small industry to provide the much-needed products of first necessity to the people.

I was told much later that there was a big shortage of empty bottles and not enough factories to produce them. Taking advantage of the N.E.P. which allowed the free market, some smart businessmen profited from the fact that by then the fishermen had an exceptional catch of sea bass in their warehouses. They purchased all of what was available, smoked them, and went on exchanging the cured bass for empty bottles, which in large quantity were lying as garbage in every back yard.

I still can hear the street vendors pushing their carts full of smoked bass, screaming as loud as they could, "I exchange smoked bass for empty bottles!"

These peddlers, called then "independent entrepreneurs," would appear from every corner, and from all over the city came the famous and continuous yelling of "Exchange smoked bass for bottles!"

The N.E.P. kept functioning for two years after Lenin's death, and it helped very much to improve the country's economic situation and mainly to alleviate the population's suffering.

Those who became enriched by it were nicknamed "The Red Capitalists," but when Stalin became the new master of the Soviet Union, the first thing he did was to cancel it, and later on after 1926, everybody sensed the roughness of his dictatorship.

My father was already "out," having taken advantage of a provisory traveling freedom granted to citizens going overseas to do business to benefit the Soviet Union.

I remember that about the middle of the year, a lot of excitement surged in our house, with all the family alert and nervous until several coaches pulled by horses arrived for us and all our relatives, who were going with us to Odessa's railroad station to say goodbye.

After we waited a good while, the so-expected train finally came, and in one of the wagons we loaded our belongings and left in the westward direction.

My little sister was almost one year old and I was seven.

When the train started slowly leaving the station, I couldn't know then that it would take me more than 60 years to come back to visit the country where I was born, and by that time, the country would already be completely foreign to me.

I couldn't feel attached to this nation, disorganized, mutilated, divided, humiliated, and run by shameless opportunists who began their careers in the Communist Party from their childhood, when their peasant parents realized that to be a member of the Party was to be part of the elite and naturally of the infamous "nomenclatura." Once "above" the crowd, they learned very fast with their scavenger's instinct from where the sun was coming, and at the first opportunity, when it became convenient, they turned to "capitalism" and the "Mafia."

Neither could I feel tied up or related to this brute population that I saw on the streets, with no manners and with apathetic natures when I compared them to my idealistic compatriots that I had known in the real Russia of my childhood, which I kept in the bottom of my heart. I couldn't compare them to the noble emigrants who lived in France and other countries, in poverty but with dignity continuing to honor the Russian nationality.

The third and last time I went to Russia was in 1993, and I realized then that a people capable of tolerating a despot, a drunkard, an inept idiot like Yeltsin would never get up again, and I will keep on being until I die the "frantzuz," as my father used to call me. Without my knowing why, the memory of my father came to my mind, with his so-typical little smile saying to me, "I told you!"

Book 2

Abroad

Chapter 1

I will never forget this, my first trip by train, the three of us traveling, my mother, my little sister Maya, and me, as we were leaving Odessa in the direction of Berlin, with a stop in Varsovia.

I still can see, as if in dreams, our entire family, who came to say goodbye to us at the railroad station, and through the years I learned what it was to "say goodbye the Russian way," a kind of never-ending rite when taking leave.

I can still hear the comments of my preferred aunt Grafa, my mother's sister, who was saying that it was a shame the way their younger brother Ivan had changed, when in the past since his childhood he had always adored my father for his participation in the February 1917 Revolution with Kerensky. He had idolized my father too, with a great respect, knowing that he was descended from an old professional military caste that had for many generations served in the Russian Imperial Navy.

When Ivan became a member of the Communist Youth, his attitude and outlook changed completely, and he ended up hating my father.

They remain, as if engraved in my mind, the tearful faces of all those who came to say goodbye, relatives whom we would never see again.

I was very much impressed by the metallic monster in which we were riding; it seemed to be flying in space, swallowing distances. It was my first trip in a train, and I couldn't stop marveling not only at the vehicles, their huge size and cleanliness, but also at being able to view the panorama as I looked out the windows.

I couldn't keep track of the time until we stopped at the huge railroad station of the city of Varsovia, or at least it seemed to me to be large.

My mother, who had saved a few silver coins from the Tsar's time until then, gave me one of them, telling me to go to the railway platform to buy something to eat, because we had already eaten all that we brought with us and we were hungry.

As in stations everywhere, in this Polish station was located a section with a lot of food vendors, and that was where she directed me, with the aim of finding any of them who would exchange the silver coin for something to eat.

The war between Poland and the Soviet Union had ended only a few years before, and the mutual resentments still prevailed, mainly on the Polish side, Poland having been several times divided between its powerful neighbors, depriving its people of enjoying the natural longing for independence that all people have.

The railroad station peddler that I approached looked at me with contempt and gave me only one sausage sandwich, saying in Polish, so as to show that he wasn't interested in speaking Russian with me, "It's all that I can give for your old ruble."

It was already late, and the three of us remained drowsy, lulled to sleep by the monotonous noise of the railroad car's wheels passing over the rails, and I will never know if our meager supper alleviated our hunger, or if it was our fatigue that caused our lassitude.

Chapter 2

I don't know why my memory has always been reluctant to record with more intensity our stay in Germany in the way that the same memory succeeded in recording our life in France, which I always considered as my country.

It is nevertheless all the more amazing, because it was in Germany that I saw Hamburg and Berlin, which were the first cities besides Odessa that I came to know.

It was in Berlin that I had my eighth birthday, and I can see every episode of our life in Germany, although it seems that I later endured a mental laziness that refused to allow me to bring back remembrances of this beautiful country, which still was suffering the consequences of having lost the World War and especially the international prestige and recognition it enjoyed until then.

It wasn't only the defeat that counted, but perhaps more the fact of having reached a crucial point in German history, which in a few more years would change completely the course not only of this country, but also of the entire world.

I was too young to understand how a nation that lost six million soldiers and in addition had four million invalids to take care of, without even mentioning the widows and the orphans of the war, could have recovered in only a few years.

I wasn't aware then that when Germany lost the war on November 11, 1918, the Kaiser had abdicated and the Weimar Socialist Republic had been installed.

The Allies, mainly France and England, were endlessly putting pressure on this vanquished state, constantly requesting disproportional war reparation payments. If it hadn't been for the intervention of the American President Wilson, stating firmly that allies must not make more demands on Germany, Germany would have sunk into a complete state of anarchy.

I learned later that the economic situation became so bad that even a discreet and of course illegal cannibalism was practiced in certain places, the last resort available for food for the hungry inhabitants.

The inflation of the mark was such that I have seen postal stamps in the billions of marks as postage for a simple letter.

In spite of all this tragedy, nightlife was expanding, and Berlin became one of the most important entertainment centers, perhaps the most bustling in all Europe at that time.

I couldn't witness all that, even though I had seen some consequences of war in Odessa and was able to find a lot of similarities in Germany.

Almost immediately, I realized that the relationship between my parents changed very noticeably, and it wasn't for the better. All those years of war, then the Revolution, followed by his long disappearances in Russia and later his overseas departure, had made my father accustomed to living alone, and it was hard for him to adjust suddenly to a married man's life, with children and with family responsibility. I should add that economic uncertainty did very much influence his behavior and his mood, too.

From what I could understand at that time, my mother was reproaching him for some kind of matrimonial infidelity, and thanks to her feminine sixth sense, she was feeling or guessing that he had a mistress, or something of that kind.

Even though they were trying to be very discreet in front of us, more than once I heard them lifting their voices, proof that the argument was still very heated.

Among all the new friends that my father was bringing home was one whom my mother hated. This was Jacob Berger, with whom my father was always trying to do something to make some money and who was monopolizing him, leading my mother to believe that Berger was the intriguing factor who was providing a mistress to my father. Of course, I learned the details of all this many years later, some of it in France and even certain things when we were in Argentina.

To understand the life of Russian émigrés, it is necessary to comprehend that as a result of the Russian Revolution, three million refugees were exiled, scattered all over Europe and the United States, with a preference for seeking asylum in France, which received a large number of them.

The majority of these émigrés were nobles, aristocrats, intellectuals, or members of the military, all with a limited ability for business affairs. Once overseas, the only thing they had were jewels, which everybody brought in hiding and which were the only valuable things they could salvage from what they possessed in Russia. Unfortunately, little by little, the small amount of money they could obtain evaporated, and being now at the end of their rope, it was necessary for them to think about what to do in the future to survive.

It is possible that this preoccupation with economic survival was increasing my father's enervation and that my mother was unable to understand his frequent absences and associations.

In the large German cities such as Hamburg and Berlin, some people owned entire floors in big buildings and sub-leased some rooms, giving permission for tenants to use the kitchen and of course the bathroom. It was in one of these buildings, in a very quiet area with trees, that my parents had leased two rooms.

We got along pretty well with the landlord and his small family. He too was a war veteran, and very often, while sitting in the living room with my father drinking beer while talking about politics, he expressed regret that Germany and Russia had had to fight against each other; otherwise, if they had been allied, they could have conquered the entire world. For certain reasons that I never understood, both of them hated the "Polacks," because in their opinion the Poles had betrayed both countries. I assume that the good amount of beer that they were consuming increased their desire to pursue their friendly chats about the international situation, although it so happened that a few times their chats didn't end so friendly.

My mother was on good terms with the landlord's wife, and I found in their son Kurt, who was my age, a real buddy from whom I became inseparable.

After living for a year in Berlin, I realized that the jewels were almost all gone, and my parents began to worry; many times I saw and heard them whispering that the time to make a decision was there, because very soon they would be without money.

My father, as a good navy officer, was completely incapable of making his living in a conventional way, because he didn't know any trade besides the military, and at that time in Europe, there was a surplus of former military officers, millions of war veterans of all nationalities.

I remember how one afternoon my father came back home with an old friend from Odessa, one whom I didn't know but my mother seemed to remember him. He was

Sam Grimberg. I mention him because it was during this specific evening that our future was set and fixed forever.

If my memory doesn't fail me, I would say that the conversation started like this:

"Tell me, Kiriukha (it was my father's Russian diminutive name Kirill, for use by close friends only), what happened to your uncle who had a cork factory on the big road at the entrance of Odessa?"

"I can see that you left our incomparable Odessa years ago, my dear Sammy!" my father would have said, taking a sip of wine, "because you would have known that all factories of a certain size have been expropriated by the Soviet powers, and of course my uncle Aliosha's, too. Do you remember that he employed more than 200 workers and was manufacturing corks for large wine-making companies? It was a terrible blow for him when they came to occupy his factory, and the Soviets named an incompetent mechanic as director of the establishment."

"Didn't your uncle go to live in their 'dacha,' in the outskirts?" asked my mother. "Because I remember now that their house on Deribasovska Avenue also was taken away from them, and your poor uncle with his ailing old wife went to live in that house in really bad shape that they owned in the farmland, the one they visited seldom."

"Why do you ask me all that, Sammy?" would have uttered my father.

"Wait a little bit, and very soon you will know! Now tell me Kiriukha, when you were a child, during your vacations you went quite often to play at your favorite uncle's place, and he spoiled you. I remember also that the workers liked you, and they carried you on the wagons full of corks. Once, you took me over there, and we had a great, unforgettable day!"

"I remember quite well, to the point that my uncle, after you left, even though he loved me, pulled both my ears because we had been distracting his workers."

"Tell me, Kiriukha, did you learn something about the cork industry?" Sam would have asked.

"I don't want to brag by saying that I became an expert, but I learned enough, because the workers, realizing that I wanted to know, taught me everything related to the cork industry. But why all this questioning about corks, after all?"

"Well, Kiriukha, here comes the explanation! As you know, I have been in the import-export business since I came to Berlin three years ago, but I keep good contacts with high-ranking people in Russia, from whom I received an order for oak's cork to make bushes in the Soviet Union, but even I don't know where I can get these bottle caps, or where they come from, or what they look like."

My father, after listening to that, laughed a while and told his friend Sam that the cork plates were taken from a special type of oak tree that grows in Spain, Portugal, and North Africa.

Once my parents were by themselves, they talked late into night about what my father's childhood friend Sam Grimberg had brought up. My father would soon start working with his friend to get a great amount of the cork plates; he would travel to the producing countries, taking care to check the product quality and to close the deals.

Chapter 3

I understood then, as I looked at my parents' smiling faces, that we would change our type of life entirely and that my father, whose ancestors had been professional navy officers for more than two centuries, would become a businessman.

The only thing I didn't like in all this fuss was our moving to Hamburg, which has a port. My father would have his own office at the Grimberg Brothers Co., but I would be separated from my playmate Kurt, whom I wouldn't see again.

Actually, at that time, I didn't know, nor was I interested in learning, what was happening in Germany—neither that Hitler was increasing his popularity nor that Mussolini was a dictator in Italy.

I entered without hesitation into this new life, and immediately I met new friends, chiefly because I came to speak German to perfection, to the point that anybody would think that I was a little Teuton from Berlin, and when we moved to Hamburg, the kids at the school couldn't believe that I wasn't German.

Now we had for ourselves an entire, large apartment, making my parents feel that they were almost in the old house that they had in Russia before the Revolution and that later was snatched away from them by the Soviet government.

My father began his new occupation by traveling overseas, and it seemed that his collaboration with the Grimberg Brothers was profitable, because money started appearing in larger amounts at home, money that our mother put to good use on the spot.

Although we always had clean clothes to wear, all our clothing was worn out and unfashionable. My mother at once began replacing everything with the most modern clothing she could find.

Our social circle expanded, and more people started coming to visit with us, to my mother's delight. She always loved to prepare special plates for all these distinguished guests, who were now coming more frequently to our home.

Alexander Fedorovich Kerensky, the ex-Premier Minister of Russia, appeared quite often, most of the time with Ilya Fedorovich Fondaminsky, who had been the political commissar of the Black Sea Fleet and was still my father's very good friend from the glorious time of the February 1917 Revolution.

Some nobles of royal descent also dropped by, but as I learned later, they consisted only of those who had left-wing tendencies and called themselves "liberals," labeling all the "others" with scorn as "reactionaries."

I started hearing then the same sentence quite often repeated: "They still think that they will return to Russia on a white horse, will receive back the thousands of acres of land they possessed, and the peasants will kiss their hand!" Or sometimes: "Yes! The times changed and the Russian 'muziks' woke up and would never any longer accept a regime that wouldn't give them the possibility of living with decency as human beings!"

All of them were inclined to good food, good beverages, and music. My mother had an opera singer's voice, and she took delight in indulging them with her beautiful, romantic, melodic songs.

"Maria Efimovna, please," the guests constantly begged her, never tiring of her singing. Sometimes somebody else had a good voice, and then they would sing in duo. I will not forget these delicate people who used to come to see us, with such distinguished manners, always kissing a lady's hand and showing consideration and elegance.

Chapter 4

At that time I had no way of knowing that these former nobles belonged to a human species from a social level that would become extinct. I found again amid the 300.000 Russian émigrés living in Paris the same distinguished manners from this nobility, which had gained an undeniable fame as the most refined of the world—so much so that in France, an expression to flatter somebody with good manners was to say that he was "a Russian prince!"

I had discovered that several rival factions existed amongst all these émigrés, irreconcilable antagonisms, even though some of these groups had been fighting in the same units against the Red Army only a few years back.

My father, like almost everyone who came to our home, hated the Monarchists, labeling them "backward."

He knew that many of his friends were believers, some very religious. He was, like Kerensky, a nonbeliever, and both reproached the Russian clergy for its alliance with the rich during all Russian history, leaving the poor workers toiling and abandoned, while telling them, "God knows what you are enduring, but you will have your compensation in the next world!"

At that time, I didn't yet understand how the grown-ups were divided and becoming organized according to politics, religion, and philosophy. In my child's head, I was imagining that the Tsar and the despots were oppressing the Russian people; then emerged the crucial moment when Kerensky and my father made the revolution, throwing the Tsar off the throne and proclaiming the Republic. Then Lenin appeared, and the Communists, or the Bolsheviks as they also were called, started the fighting one more time. From that point on, I wasn't able to understand what had happened, and I was suspicious that the grown-ups didn't understand either, because no one seemed to know exactly where the truth lay.

Many times, I heard contradictory opinions expressed about Lenin, Trotsky, the Communists, and other political groups in general.

It was when I was a few years older, 12 or 13, that suddenly I understood the situation much more clearly, or at least I thought I did.

My father was always my best friend, and he inculcated in me the Marxist ideal without at the same time fostering a belief in the Communists, because he distrusted them, and he connected their ideals with dictatorship.

My father's respect for Lenin was somewhat ambivalent; he assumed that if Lenin hadn't died so young, he might have installed socialism without resorting to Stalin's brutality.

One day, returning from a successful business trip in Argelia, he conveyed with joy to my mother that very soon we would be moving to Paris, the City of Lights!

Without a doubt, everybody was happy about this news, but I didn't share completely this happiness, because I had become accustomed to Germany. I was feeling comfortable there, and for certain reasons, under my little German friends' influence, I distrusted France. I realized later that, living in Germany in the constant company of its inhabitants, without my noticing it, little by little they had inculcated in me an apprehension of France, which had defeated them some ten years back during a cruel and a long war.

As a nine-year-old, I was curious nevertheless to know the country where my parents wanted to move, the country that my little German friends hated with such emotional intensity.

Chapter 5

I always considered that my emotional and intellectual life, if you could apply the terminology to a nine-year-old child's mental condition, started in Paris.

It was as if a certain maturity accompanied by light came to break inside me. Suddenly, I began to understand the meaning of words, to single out things, and chiefly I started to comprehend, partly perhaps, the reasoning and the behavior of the grown-ups who were around me.

I believe, too, that it was then that inside me surged the concept "can be done, or shouldn't be done!" which is the prelude of the moral balance with which we as human beings are endowed, something that had been so well described two centuries ago by Rousseau. I am convinced that we have an invisible device in our brains that spells out certain moral laws that allow the human species to survive, to live together, and coexist. In a certain way, Darwin deduced it, when he talked about the species and their survival.

I don't remember that I had any trouble learning the French language. It seemed so easy to me, as if I had spoken it all my life. It wasn't so for my parents, who had much difficulty at the beginning and even until the end spoke French with a typically heavy Russian accent.

I will be forever grateful to my parents for forcing me to speak Russian at home, because as soon as we arrived in France, I started to communicate in French with my sister. I assume that it was because we spoke it with the maid, in the school, and while playing in the yard with our little neighbors.

My parents were always very insistent regarding this matter, and more than once I heard this same sentence: "In this house only Russian is spoken!"

I will always therefore be indebted to my parents. Not only do I speak one more language, Russian, but I also had in my life many pleasant moments in sharing conversations in that language with native Russians, not to mention the indescribable emotion I experience by virtue of being able to read Russian literature in the original.

Needless to say, my sister and I continued speaking French in secret at home, and I don't believe that we ever spoke Russian between us, aside from when we were with our parents or when we mimicked their accent with exaggeration.

When we arrived in Paris at the beginning of 1928, we were greeted at the railway station Gare de l'Est by Robert Vargafeld, also a member of the Grimberg Brothers Co., a man my father already knew after having traveled a few times to North Africa with him. My father did not speak French at that time, and Robert helped him as interpreter, while also taking care of the financial operations.

We moved into a beautiful building at 132 rue Perronet in Neuilly s/Seine, close to the Bois de Boulogne. It was, and still is, one of the most distinguished suburbs of Paris.

Almost immediately, I was registered at the Communal School of Neuilly with children of my age, in the third grade, and as if by a miracle, I assimilated at once. In France, quite differently from most other countries, classes are ranked in descending order, so that students pass from the third to the second grade, etc.

I loved the French school. It was much merrier and less rigid than the German one I attended.

One of the memories that remained forever engraved in my mind came when after our recess, we were walking up to our classrooms, which were located on the second floor. I saw a marble statue of a woman's head on a pedestal, recessed into the wall. I was so intrigued by this statue that I couldn't resist satisfying my curiosity by asking the principal, who by coincidence was near me at that time, about it. His answer was short and precise, rendered as only people with French culture do:

"When the Revolution of 1789 came, the Republicans and the 'Sans Culottes' decided to eliminate 'God'. To replace God, that symbol of the woman's head was created to express the idea of 'The Logic,' or 'The Reason', as some people call it, and that is what this lady allegorically stands for."

"Monsieur le Directeur" made his answer in a loud voice, so as to be heard by some fanatic Catholics who were close to us. In France, it is prohibited to preach religion in the schools (unless they are private); still, people have complete freedom to worship any belief, but they must do so beyond the educational establishment's buildings. I thought how happy my father would have been if he could have heard these words, because he was an ardent, anti-clerical atheist.

I quickly made many friends, and during the breaks we were nearly always splitting into two groups: the "sportsmen" that I belonged to, because I loved to run, to scream, and to let my body move; and "the clerks" group, which consisted of students who were much more interested in talking, arguing, and engaging in intellectual pursuits.

It didn't take me long to realize that actually, my little friends were different from the German kids I had known. They were not susceptible, they loved to ridicule, they made bad jokes (almost insulting), and they accepted disagreeable words that sometimes hurt, as long as those words were comical and made sense. I remembered the Russian children who were more violent, more aggressive, and much less patient than the French.

Soon I changed my opinion when I met Russian kids living in Paris, children whose parents emigrated the same way as mine. These children imitated their parents and had extraordinarily refined manners. The French kids would laugh at these Russian children, saying that they "smelled mothballs," meaning that the Russian kids belonged to a time long gone and never coming back.

After a few months, my parents could actually afford to buy an apartment in the same building where we were living. The new apartment was on the third floor.

The property was composed of two similar buildings facing each other; it belonged to Madame Lambert. Monsieur Lambert was a doctor, extremely shy, to such a point that he had his private entrance from the street leading to their huge house, called a "Petit Hotel" in France. The house was at the end of the same property.

The Lambert couple didn't have children, and they adopted two orphans, a boy a little older than I named Willy and his sister Margot, several years older, who was very pretty to the extent that we boys admired and loved her in secret.

In front of our building, facing the third floor apartment, lived a war widow, Mme. Lanzenberg, whose husband, a colonel, was killed in the last war. It was her war widow's pension that allowed her to take care of her three children: the younger Claude, who was my first friend in France; Gerard, the second; and Marie, the oldest, who was over 20 years old and seemed an old lady to us.

Our family became quickly accustomed to the French style of life and mainly to the possibility of living in comfort. My father was traveling frequently and he appeared to be successful, because his work was very much appreciated and he was making more and more money.

My parents began to enlarge their social circle, to the point that they were dining out in restaurants or patronizing nightclubs several times per week, whenever my father was at home.

Paris had almost half a million Russian refugees, with many daily newspapers in their language, several Russian theaters, and even Russian book publications.

We didn't have any French friends, only Russians. Later, we added some Armenians, and our house was very soon filled with people who, as good Russians, were consuming large quantities of beverages and indulging themselves with music and songs.

My father was doing very well in business, and it appeared that the family relationship had improved. My mother no longer reproached him as often about his suspected escapades, although once she said to me, "Do you think that your father got settled? I can't believe it, because now that he is traveling so much, it is for sure he takes his girlfriends with him, or he finds them along with this new partner, this Robert Vargafeld."

As far as I was concerned, I had a completely independent life with my French friends from our building and also with some others living in the rue Borghese. I befriended Andre Hagron, whose father had been taken prisoner by the Germans during the Big War. Andre's father took advantage of being held in a camp with Russian and English prisoners by learning their languages, a linguistic acquisition that helped him when he returned home from captivity after the war to get a job as an interpreter in the Printemps stores.

My friend Andre Hagron was a fervent Catholic, a few years older than I, but both of us loved to argue about religion and politics, a real Frenchman's favorite hobby and pastime.

Another boy my age, Paul Henot, was also living close to this quarter, and he came to join us, along with Andre Montezin, the son of the famous French painter Pierre Montezin. These two boys were from very wealthy families. Paul Henot's grandfather emigrated to Brazil, where he and his father were born. I understood that in Brazil the family owned large sugar cane plantations, factories, and many acres of land. They were constantly traveling from and to France or Brazil, even though Popol, as we called him, and his beautiful sister Fabienne, slightly older than us, were going to school and lived with their mother in the mansion they had in Neuilly.

The mother, a very gloomy Brazilian lady, for curious reasons frightened us. She would seldom talk to us. When we went to see Popol at his house, she would immediately close herself in her room, often talking with her Georges, her smaller son, who was too young to associate himself with our group.

Andre Montezin also had an older sister. We almost never saw her, because as a very well known daughter of a Barbezou School painter, she looked toward other horizons and was always busy in the company of high society. Her father was very popular at that time, and the sale of his paintings was yielding wealth and prestige.

Our group was friendly and inseparable, and very often after finishing my

homework, I went to the court Borghese to join the gang, remaining until late at night to talk, argue, and laugh with my buddies. Also living in this court Borghese was a Dutch Jewish family whose name was Berg, and to different degrees, all of us were more or less in love with Edith, their only daughter, who was also our age.

Many years later, after World War II, I learned that during the German occupation, all this Jewish family had been sent to an extermination camp, where they perished with so many other victims, without leaving a trace.

Following my father's path, I was convinced that only the socialist ideas were justified, and most of the time during the long hours spent with my friends, who were right-wing Catholics, we were constantly arguing about politics.

In 1929, we learned with astonishment that the United States had a panic on Wall Street, the beginning of the famous Great Depression, whose effects were felt in Europe two years later.

Now comes to my memory an event that happened during this time of economic crisis and unemployment, when my mother put an ad in the newspaper seeking a maid. We could never have guessed that more than sixty persons of all ages and both sexes would come to apply for the job, but my attention had been attracted by a young and elegant man, very well dressed, with a hat and a walking stick, who, almost crying, was begging for this servant's position. No matter how many times my mother repeated that she needed a maid, he would answer that his family had been ruined by this depression, and taking into consideration that they were aristocrats without a profession and that none of them had ever worked before, they needed to do anything now to survive, if they didn't want to starve.

When my father returned home from his office and later learned about the number of people who answered the ad, he scolded my mother for not having given to each one at least the bus fare, because who knows if coming to see us with the hope of obtaining a job they weren't spending their last coin, considering that we were living in the outskirts of Paris and some of them had to take a long ride to reach our house?

Chapter 6

Engraved in my memory is an event that occurred at the end of 1931, when both Grimberg brothers came to our house with their associate, Robert Vargafeld, who often traveled as interpreter with our father. It wasn't so much because he spoke several foreign languages; rather, it was mainly because he was taking care of all the bureaucracy and paperwork that my father despised.

My mother still wasn't sure that she remembered the Grimberg brothers when we lived in Odessa, but she saw them many times in Germany and also in France, receiving them with typically generous Russian hospitality.

Sam, or Sammy or Semoshka, was the younger, my father's age, and he was married with children. We never had an opportunity to meet his family. He and my father were friends from childhood, but now they became solely business partners, without any socializing of the families, an omission that always seemed strange to me.

The oldest brother, Abbie or Abraham, was the real head of the enterprise and the soul of its success. He had a natural intuition for seeing the possibility of making money. He was a bachelor, and my mother called him "old spinster" because of his age, although he always had a young mistress that he was maintaining in the utmost of luxury.

Even though my mother never saw Abbie often, she hated him, because every time there was a business meeting at his apartment on the Champs Elysees, my father would return home smelling of whisky and very happy, leading my mother to assume that he was returning from an orgy.

This particularly unforgettable evening was very formal, because the guests participated in anticipation of dealing with a very important matter.

I was already old enough to understand a great deal, mainly when the name of Hitler, who was becoming more and more popular in Germany, had been mentioned several times. At the beginning, everybody laughed at him, calling him a clown, but later on his name began sounding more threatening, and everyone then started to talk about him with fear.

The guests stayed very late, eating, drinking, and talking with ardor. We kids were not admitted to the dining room; we ate in the kitchen with the maid. This was to a certain degree fun, an adventure for us, because nobody was supervising us, and my sister and I considered ourselves superior to our *bonne*, and we were behaving toward her as grown-ups would.

I was interested in learning what the conversation in the dining room was about, and I quickly finished supper and pretended that I was playing, but in reality I was listening to the conversation, which was going on in Russian.

I understood that something very grave had happened in Berlin. Jews were being assaulted, and many of them were trying to leave the country. Probably because my family came from Odessa, where a third of the population was Jewish, in certain ways we always were in solidarity with the Hebrews, to the point that in our conversation we used many Yiddish words.

I heard very clearly the older brother, Abbie, who usually spoke little but always had a precise understanding of the facts, as he expressed himself: "When they started breaking the windows of our offices, shouting 'Jews' at us, at once I understood that we

couldn't remain anymore in Berlin, and that's the reason why we moved to Paris last week"

I then realized that the Grimberg Brothers' cork business was over and with it the end of the enterprise, even though they promised my father to get reorganized as soon as possible and keep on working together, as they had done previously.

It seemed that the Soviets no longer needed any more cork, and consequently there was no reason to maintain the office.

At the end, I heard Abbie bragging to my father, saying, "You cannot complain, Kiriukha; you made a lot of money in these few years. Robert plans to keep traveling, representing several French companies; meanwhile, with Sammy, we will keep on importing caviar and other food products from the Soviet Union."

It was the last time I saw the brothers Grimberg, and I knew through my mother that we owed them a debt of gratitude for having changed our fortune and for giving us the opportunity to come to live in Paris. My mother, my sister, and I never saw them again, but my father continued to see them, even though my mother harbored a lot of antagonism toward Abbie, in particular.

It didn't take much time for my mother to get wind that old Abbie, as soon as he moved to Paris, had a kept woman, as she called such a female, whom he was lodging in an aristocratic quarter, with a private swimming pool.

My mother became hysterical each time my father would tell her that he had an appointment with the Grimbergs, saying to him with irony, "I know what kind of date all of you have! At any time you will bring a venereal disease, you will see!"

I didn't suspect then and learned only when we were in Argentina that both brothers, as well as Sammy's wife and children, would in a tragic way perish during the German occupation, in a concentration camp in Poland, some ten years later.

A few months after the Grimbergs' visit, while I was in the first grade class, my last year before going to high school, the porter interrupted us by bursting noisily into our room and running to our teacher to whisper something to him.

After that, both stared at each other without a word and suddenly went racing down the stairs to the principal's office on the first floor.

After a while, our teacher, Monsieur Fernand, came back very slowly and told us with a weak voice, "We just received terrible news. A couple of hours ago, the President of our Republic was murdered. Consequently, adhering to the national mourning and to show our grief, we are closing the school for today, and all of you must go home!"

After that, a profound silence reigned, followed by a general and tremendous uproar as each one as had a question to ask, but the teacher said again: "The moment is too painful to talk about details; come on children! Go back to your homes!" After looking at me seriously, almost with hatred, he made a statement to all the class, but I realized that it was intended for me: "So far as much as we know, I think that the murderer is a Russian, one of those to whom we offered our hospitality!"

Nothing else was said, and the students little by little put their belongings in their bags and left the building, first going to the court, and then to the street.

It was the first time that the pupils left the classroom in silence, without the habitual all-too-familiar noise that marked the end of a day's class.

Chapter 7

Returning home, I understood that my parents already knew that a Russian émigré had killed the President of the French Republic, the country that gave asylum to more than half a million refugees of all nationalities.

Of course, it was easy to foresee some anti-Russian demonstrations at any moment. "Only a few days ago, I was with Gorgulov," said my father, indignant, "and because of these crazy bohemians calling themselves artists, all of us will suffer the consequences of this crime. Mark my words; you will see!"

"It has been said also," my mother always needed to express her opinion, "that Gorgulov was reproaching Doumer for being too complacent with the Communists, and that's why he shot him. I heard it on the radio, which in addition said that nobody should forget today's date, May 6, 1932, when the head of the nation has been murdered."

"But how anybody could think to kill such a humanitarian president, one mainly without any political power, because in France the presidents are merely representative personalities and don't make any important decisions?"

"Be that as it may," continued my mother, who always assumed that she knew more than anybody else, "it happened at an art exposition, and Gorgulov knew that the President would come with few escorts, so he took advantage of the opportunity!"

Then, after a short respite, she added, "Who would have thought that this Gorgulov would be a murderer, always so quiet and so polite?"

My parents weren't wrong about the repercussions of the assassination, because the following day, you could see on the streets by the people's faces that they were in an extremely bad mood and inclined to insult the aliens, calling them *metecques*, an ancient Greek word of contempt used to refer to the refugees.

Everywhere, one could hear mumbling, such as, "We give them refuge, we receive them with open arms, they take our people's jobs, and now they kill our president. Killing Doumer, who was a pacifist and so good, one of the rarest!"

Nevertheless, a few weeks later, the subject of Doumer's assassination was old and forgotten news, because Mistinguette and Josephine Baker were in their apogee in the theaters of Paris. Georges Milton again was singing new songs, referring to the cuckolds who should be wearing bells over their head, to warn others that they were coming.

Also becoming very popular was the song about "Mirza," the little dog that the husband had the duty of taking for a walk every morning, allowing the wife to have a good time meanwhile.

The other hit was "Tout va tres bien Madame la Marquise!" which remained very popular for many years in several countries.

Paris will always be Paris, and the Parisians are very much inclined to everything that is comical or satirical, more than people from any other nation in the world.

At home I heard the mention of names of new friends by my parents, who were going out almost every night to restaurants, nightclubs, or other places of entertainment, French as well as Russian or Caucasian, for they existed in abundance. I heard the names of Marmarian, Aznavourian, Kasazbachian, Minian, Davoudian, and others. More often, I heard the name Aznavourian, with whom my father was already on good terms, calling

him by his first name Misha, and we began going quite often to the restaurant *Caucase* that Aznavourian owned, at 23 rue de La Huchette, in the Latin Quarter, close to the Place St. Michel.

I sensed that my parents were up to something as they frequented the restaurant, always during the weekends, when I had no classes. Our parents would remain until late at night, talking and listening to Misha Aznavourian, who extolled the virtues of the restaurant business.

His salesmanship worked, because later my father bought half of the *Caucase* restaurant, becoming Misha's partner. Aznavourian was married with two children: a boy called Charles, whom everybody called Charlot, was younger than I; and a sister, Aida, a girl more or less my age. I couldn't have forecast at that time that this Charlot, this boy too small for his age, with the lower jaw that was open and always hanging, without any apparent feature of special intelligence, would become the world famous singer under the name of Charles Aznavour.

I saw him again when I came to Paris, in convalescence from the wounds that I received in Alsace in January 1945. At that time, I was with the Free French Forces and was staying with the Marmarian family, old friends of ours who were living in Neuilly s/Seine.

During that meeting, Charles Aznavour, who was beginning his singing career, paid little attention to me, whereas Aida, his sister, then a beautiful girl singing in Paris at American clubs entertaining soldiers, went out with me a few times until I had to return to the front. My furlough was over and the war was not yet ended.

The other time I saw Charles Aznavour, he was already very well known and popular. It was in 1969 in New York, when I was working for Michelin Tire and living in Great Neck, on Long Island. My old friend Charlot became inaccessible to me. He was singing in a Manhattan theater; nevertheless, I telephoned him several times, but he never made an effort to return my calls.

My father's partnership with Misha Aznavourian was short-lived, due to several complex factors, in addition to their personality differences. The partnership ended when my father purchased the other half of the business, becoming the sole owner of the restaurant *Caucase*.

When I finished the *Ecole Communale*, my parents signed me up at the *Louis-le-Grand Lyceum*, and after they sold our apartment in Neuilly, we moved to our new flat at 3 rue de La Harpe, in the Latin Quarter, half a block from our restaurant. It was fifteen minutes' walking distance from the college, and usually I ate my luncheon in the *Caucase*.

The restaurant was closed only on Sunday. This was the special day that all our family spent together, unless my mother invited some friends for supper at home or we went dining at some of our numerous friends' houses.

Due, perhaps, to my growing process, I began to have my own life, separate from the life of my family. I wanted to live like a young Frenchman, involved with everything around me, and not be constantly preoccupied by the gossip of the Russian émigrés, or the plans that should be made, or should have been made, or what was going on in Russia. The emigrants would never call it the Soviet Union, nor would they call Leningrad the old capital of Russia, always remembering their glorious past by designating the city as St. Petersburg or Petrograd.

Chapter 8

In the Latin Quarter, my life changed fundamentally for various reasons, as a result of the atmosphere, friendships, my physiological transformation, and mainly the interest I started to feel toward politics.

My intimates and the Lyceum Louis le Grand's student companions were quite distinct from the little friends I had in Neuilly s/Seine. In the Latin Quarter, I could see what the real French way of living was, as much intellectual as cultural. I understood also that if I had to start my life all over, without any hesitation whatsoever, I would choose Paris. I said *Paris*, and not France!

I was already speaking French like a Parisian, without any foreign accent, and that flawless delivery was very important because of the censorious spirit of the French, with whom it is very difficult for anyone with a foreign accent to become intimate. There would always exist an invisible barrier that could be felt in the treatment one received. I love the skeptical outlook that most of the French people show toward religion, considering it as a purely personal matter, and usually they would apply the Descartes theory: "I believe only what I understand!"

The teaching at the Lyceum was a real process of perfection, delivered by the most prestigious of professors. One of my professors who lectured on history and geography was Georges Bidault, a very active democratic politician who became a minister in the government of General de Gaulle after World War II.

In college, I made friends quickly, and the first one was Rene Regal, born in Paris from a Caribbean mulatto family. His father was black and a very knowledgeable newspaper correspondent. His mother was a very light mulatto, also an intellectual, and his older brother Georges, like himself white, was in his last year of the Art Faculty of Paris, planning to be a professor in the same specialty.

Another friend who became very close was Raul Besu, a young Syrian Jew whose ideas were moderate, although he was also a Marxist, like all our group. "Snow Ball" was Janiver Tutsi's nickname, a black Senegalese studying medicine who was living with a beautiful blond French girl who was also a student. Another friend was Admiral, a French Jew who was a Trotskyite, always trying to convert everybody to his ideals. Another one was Jacques Trambeau, a student at the Sorbonne who proclaimed himself an Anarchist.

All of us were members of the Students Federal Union, a grouping of all the left-wing students, whose headquarters was on the rue St. Jacques, a few blocks from our lyceum. Our organization was very active, and most of us participated with fervor in all kinds of periodic demonstrations against the fascist movement, which was growing day to day in France in organizations like the Cross of Fire, Patriotic Youths, the Francists, The Bonapartists, French Action (monarchists), and many more whose center of activity was in the Latin Quarter.

The Boulevard St. Michel (Boul Mich, as we called it), on the 5th Arrondissement, was ours, but on the other side was the 6th Arrondissement, which already belonged to "them."

We were fighting, distributing our leaflets, or selling our newspapers, which each side tried to snatch from the other, its being a big proof of courage to bring back the

trophy of our adversaries' propaganda, for which we sometimes engaged in street fistfights.

We constantly had meetings, reunions, and lectures from left-wing political leaders as the elections approached. We were too young to vote, but we were helping our candidates, consisting of socialists or communists, in their electoral promotions and campaigns. I would come home sometimes with a black eye or a torn shirt, but I would be happy and proud of myself, paying no attention to my mother's screaming, for she was scared to death that something terrible could have happened to me.

In general, as if it were a routine, every evening, once we would finish our homework, which was very demanding, we got together in the "Boul Mich" to stroll together from the Place St. Michel up to the Luxembourg gardens, on the round trip always following the same route and remaining in the 5th Arrondissement, without crossing the street to the 6th Arrondissement—"enemy territory!"

I was very timid by nature and thus reluctant to talk to girls. I was under the impression that they would be laughing at me. However, sports, perhaps as a result of the law of compensation, were fascinating to me, and I was always engaging in various types of physical exercise. Fencing was attractive to me, perhaps because I read many of Alexander Dumas' novels, but I also liked soccer and boxing, to the point that Sundays and Thursdays, when there was no school in France, I was always very physically active.

After moving to the Latin Quarter, I didn't neglect my friends from Neuilly. On the contrary, our friendship flourished and remained strong even until now.

When I was twelve and a half years old and in the last class of Communal School, I felt the effects of puberty, an experience of most boys. This put me in a state of effervescence. I don't know if I was masturbating more than other kids, but all my same-age buddies and I wouldn't stop talking about sex. I remember that once my friend Claude brought an advertisement brochure from Galerie Lafayette for women's underwear—"lingerie"—and it seemed to us like a pornographic journal.

We were very open about the matter of sex, and it looked as though we were accepting our physiological transformation and trying to find out how to really satisfy our sexual urges.

Several years later, when we were living in place St. Michel, I had my first sexual experiment, with an old prostitute, and it disturbed me, but telling of the experience to my friends made a hero out of me. Popol was so enthusiastic that he asked me to take him with me the next weekend to see prostitutes.

When Popol and I started walking in the Chatelet area where the prostitutes were swarming, we allowed ourselves be "seduced" by these "ladies," and we agreed to meet within an hour to exchange observations about our adventure.

When Popol came back, he complained that the one who was with him was a very moody woman. She made him feel the sexual pleasure, but then she very rapidly dressed, and because he had paid her in advance, she left, saying that she needed to go back to work, leaving him feeling deceived and baffled.

I had the luck of having chosen a young girl who turned out to be Polish, pretty, and very nice, and I continued to see her for several months, when I could get enough money. It seems that most students, no matter how rich their parents are and how much they are spoiled by money, never have enough cash in their pockets, and in this

sense I couldn't complain, because my father was very generous with me. I was spending recklessly, buying books and also giving alms to beggars, the sight of whom broke my heart.

When our Neuilly s/Seine gang met again, now two of us bragged about having lost our virginity, and of course Popol and I were feeling very proud of it, as if it were a personal achievement.

During the weekends, we went out with our Latin Quarter friends. It was usually to walk to the Place de l'Opera, where many young people gathered. In general, several of us comrades went together, but this particular day it seems that most of them had previous commitments, and I ended up going with my classmate, Albert Dupont, to the famous "Grands Boulevard," where one could find a lot of slot and music machines that were attractive to youth.

My friend Albert, who wasn't timid, almost immediately befriended a little fat girl, a very sympathetic one, and he convinced her to go with us to a movie. I remember that very innocently I asked him, "What are we going to see?", to which with contempt and a side glance toward his "conquest" he responded between his teeth, "Who cares?", and he pointed to the girl with his head.

In the movie theater, the young girl was sitting between us, and ten minutes later, I saw my friend kissing my little neighbor, making me feel humiliated.

At that time, after World War I, I don't know why we young people were called "the sacrificed generation," because the moral code became very strict; a woman's virginity needed to be intact if she wanted to get married. It could have been the reaction against the moral slovenliness that prevailed during the four years of the just-ended war. Anyhow, it was very difficult to go to bed with a girl, and it was considered amoral, because it would have deprived her of the chance ever to get married, unless she could find a young, complacent man or somebody with advanced ideas.

That for sure was one of the reasons for which the prostitutes were so busy. When the film was over and we were leaving the theatre, Albert went to the restroom, and I remained by myself with Marie, the girl's name. She said, in a very convincing tone, "I rather would have preferred to be at your side, but your friend grabbed me first, and after the first kiss, it was already too late to change my companion. What if we meet again tomorrow and we go to the movie?"

I almost collapsed listening to this proposition, and full of emotion, joy, and chiefly hope, I said yes. I was not able to say anything more, because Albert, very proud of himself and feeling very "macho," was coming back nonchalantly from the restroom.

Chapter 9

Needless to say, I couldn't close my eyes during the entire night. I was fifteen years old, and I had never held a girl's hand, much less kiss a girl, and so the prospect of being with this little fat girl, of being able to feel her close to me, was creating a sensation of languor as well as vanity.

Exactly as she promised, Marie came on time to our appointment, and we went to a movie theater close to the one where we were the previous day.

Once the lights went off and the movie projection started, I don't remember the title, and I didn't care at that time, but after waiting a few minutes, I moved closer to Marie and, very timidly, I started learning how to kiss. She was a good teacher, and I loved the taste of a woman's mouth on mine. My head was exploding, my body was burning, and I felt something wet between my legs, with the same sensation as the one I had when I was caressing myself.

It was an unforgettable adventure, this one with Marie; nevertheless, I was so moved with emotion that when we were parting, I completely forgot to ask her if we could meet again, and for this reason, we never did.

The only disagreeable part in my first date with a girl was that she had a terrible cold, and of course she passed it to me. It amazed Albert very much the following day when my classmate saw me red-nosed and puffing, because he too had a tremendous cold and was cursing Marie for passing it on to him. I didn't dare talk about my adventure, taking into consideration that he had been with her first, and in my naivete, I was afraid that it could be considered a betrayal of a friend.

One night, walking on the rue St. Jacques, on my way back home from one of our meetings at the Students Federal Union, while crossing a lateral little street, I saw three prostitutes walking back and forth close to a shabby hotel, where it was certain they were taking their customers. I felt a warm sweat passing over my back, and the sexual obsession that was haunting me invaded my mind. I wanted badly to satisfy my desire, but unfortunately, I didn't have enough money in my pocket. I knew very well the rate, which was usually 6 francs for the room and 10 francs for the "lady's" services, in these quarters at least, because I hadn't been in others, where I heard it was more expensive.

Routinely, during my passing, each one said to me the inevitable "Come with me, and I will make you happy," but I kept on walking without answering or even looking at them. When I was already close to the street connecting to rue de La Harpe, the last one came close to me and kept insisting, until I had to confess that I didn't have enough money.

"But how much do you have?" she asked me, her body touching mine meanwhile. She was skinny, taller than I, and she looked thirty or forty years old.

"I have only 10 francs," was my answer, being sure that now she would let me go, because that's what had happened to me before in cases like this. I was surprised when she said, "Let's go!" and pushed me inside the hotel.

I had very little experience with women, and to be honest I didn't have any, so I was surprised to see that as soon as I paid the 6 francs for the room to the employee and closed the door, she lifted her skirt and lay in the bed, urging me to hurry to get undressed and to come over.

I thought that I understood well what my class companions were saying, when we were talking about sex, that prostitutes always simulate that they enjoy it, but in reality it doesn't mean anything to them, and it is a show to please the customer, with the aim of getting some more money from him. For that reason, I hadn't been impressed by the little screaming of my "lady" during the time I was taking my pleasure.

When the skinny one had her orgasm, she became radiant and started hugging me, saying in German "wunderbahr", and by her accent, I suspected her nationality. She kept on looking at and caressing me, saying with regret, "Oh! If only it could be repeated!," to which very innocently I responded, "If you want it, I can do it again."

It was a real riot; she jumped in the bed again, and this time I understood that she was not pretending. It was too real, and it seemed to me that she was taking her pleasure as much as I was taking mine, and perhaps even more.

This skinny German "lady" whose name I ignored, and I don't remember if I ever asked her, was always glad to see me. I saw her on several other occasions, chiefly when I didn't have enough money. Otherwise, I preferred to see the Polish girl, who was very young, slightly older than I, and with whom I felt much more relaxed. She told me that she was "doing it" to help her family, which was very poor back in Poland, and she was thinking that within a few years, when she could save some money, she would find a young man like me to marry.

So as to be able to remain in France legally, she made a marriage of convenience with a Parisian worker, whom she divorced after she received her residential papers with the work permit. Unfortunately, this man, whom she paid very well, was harassing her and constantly demanding more money.

At that time, I already understood a little bit more how this street woman's business was organized; it had been explained to me by some of those who claimed to have a good knowledge of the matter. These young classmates were saying that in all similar cases, there was always a pimp for whom these women were working and who was taking their money. According to these classmates, the pimp was always nearby and extremely dangerous, so that it was best not to get involved with such underworld people.

The German lady was "working" not too far away from where I was living, and I would see her sometimes, lying to her every time by telling her that I had less money in my pocket than I actually had. One day, as an experiment, I told her that I didn't have the 6 francs to pay for the room, and to my surprise she paid it from her purse, so anxious was she to go to bed with me. I couldn't believe it, but I liked it.

I was scared of this skinny, sensual whore, mainly when she had an orgasm. I still was far from knowing women, and it seemed strange to me to watch her twisting herself in the bed, whimpering and whining when she was about to come, and making me feel very uncomfortable, all the more so because she was twice my age and looked so old to me.

Talking about sex was very usual in all the educational establishments in France, and I assume all over the world, even though in France we took an interest in it with more passion and shared experiences with it with greater frankness. At the time, we were living in a very moralistic age, and it was prohibited even to pronounce the mere word *sex* at home, for fear of being called degenerate.

When I conveyed my experience with the German lady to my friends in the

school, my little friend, the Jewish Syrian Paul Besu, who for certain was still a virgin, told me that I should be very careful with this forty-year-old German, saying, "She must be crazy; how could a professional prostitute go to bed with a young boy like you without being paid and even pay for the room! Nothing good can come out of all that Michel; better let her go and stay away from her!"

My other friend, Albert Dupont, who already had experience with "women," as he had showed me not long ago in the theater, said, in the manner of a professor lecturing to his students, "You never will stop being a sucker, my poor Paul Besu. It could be that over there in your Syria the women are different, but here in Paris, when a woman finds a man who gives her an orgasm, she is ready to do anything for him just to have the sexual satisfaction she needs. For that she can steal, kill, and also become a prostitute. I wish I had found a woman like the one Michel got; I would become a pimp, and I would be living off her work immediately, without a doubt!"

My friend Rene Regal didn't agree with him, saying that a Marxist would never accept having a woman become a prostitute, much less to work for him.

Albert replied with contempt, "All you saloon revolutionaries, you always create moral issues, but in real life you behave exactly like the rest of the people, and sometimes even worse!" At this precise moment, we heard the bell ringing, reminding us that the break was over and that it was time to go back to classes. I didn't trust my classmate Albert, in spite of all his efforts to be my friend. I learned from other sources that they had seen him entering empty rooms to steal pupils' money that he found in the pockets of clothes hanging on the wall.

He confessed to me few years later that when he needed money, he would go after the afternoon classes to Place Clichy, where the pederasts met, and though he denied being a homosexual, he bragged that he was too smart not to make a buck with the "little old men." After he made this confession, I felt revulsion toward him, and I started avoiding and having just a cold social relationship with him, not showing any friendship.

As for my best friend Rene Regal, he who tried to portray himself as abstemious and a revolutionary defender of women's equality, I discovered some ten years later that he didn't live up to the convictions he so much bragged about.

Besides the old prostitute to whom I "gave" my virginity, along with the young Polish whore and the horny German, I went with some more prostitutes, and when I was about to go to Spain, I went with a black girl from Senegal, just to see if there was any difference, but I didn't find any. Otherwise, there is no need to emphasize that I had many opportunities to receive for free from women what I was paying for.

For example, once, when I returned from school one day, the only person at home was the Russian maid doing the house cleaning. When she saw me, feigning that she wasn't aware of my presence, she started mopping up the floor while backing toward me, until she squeezed me against the wall; then, as if she was sorry for what happened, she tried to clean my pants between my legs. Because I would never have expected that from her, the surprise left me mute, and instead of taking advantage of her advances, for she was still pretty and younger than the "German," I became panicky, liberated myself from her embrace, and ran away onto the street; meanwhile, I still can hear her even now, as she implored me not to say a word about what happened to my mother.

In addition, we employed in our restaurant a beautiful blonde waitress who constantly looked at me with soft eyes, saying, "Ah! If only I was younger, I would be in

love with Misha.” The other waiters smiled and stared at me, making me feel irritated and oversensitive. I should have understood that she was willing to go with me if only I had asked her, but my timidity was turning me into a dummy incapable of thinking and much less of acting.

I had all these opportunities and many more later on, but at that time I didn't know how the feminine sexual desire built up, and I didn't know what decision to make or how to behave in response.

Once, I read in a book that when a man is used to satisfying his sexual desire with prostitutes, later on he has difficulties in behaving normally with decent women. It disturbed me for a long while, because I was afraid that I was a lost cause and worthless for a natural sexual life.

I had a very curious experience once. When I went to the little street where I expected to find the "German" prostitute but did not find her there, I followed another one to the hotel. After I paid the employee 6 francs for the room and we were alone behind a closed door, I counted my money and realized that I had only 9 francs left. I had come with the intention of seeing the "German" one, and she didn't care how much I gave her; that was the reason I didn't pay attention to the amount I had in my pocket, which came to only 15 francs, instead of the normal rate of 16 francs.

This "lady" with whom I went had an agreeable complexion, even though her look was very harsh; learning that I was short by one franc, she became furious and began insulting me over and over. After a little while, she said, "Well, in this case I am not getting undressed," and without even removing her coat (it was wintertime and it was very cold outside), she lay down on the bed, with her hat and shoes on.

During the entire session, she continued to insult me, saying, "Come on, hurry up, hurry up, I've got to go back to work!" I had a strange, mixed feeling amid this fear accompanied by a powerful sexual desire, and I realized that I was completely at her mercy. I implored her to give me one more minute. Then, impatient, she hit me several times on my back with her fist, and once I finished, she pushed me out of her with such force that I almost fell on the floor. Once I was dressed, she said, with the same meanness, "And don't forget, the next time you come with me, it's 10 francs, and not 9 francs!"

I saw her several more times when I was coming for the "German" lady, but never again did I go with her, although with her I experienced a new emotion, something strange to me, a woman imposing herself during the sexual act. I began to ask myself if I weren't a masochist! I was reading many books about sexuality then and was learning new ways of sexual expression as well as different behaviors of people during the mating process. I started devouring Jung, Freud, and William James at a very early age.

Women's legs seemed to me the most tempting things in the world. Merely looking at them put me into a state of ecstasy, and I could barely refrain from jumping to start kissing them.

I have a vague memory of the taste of a small girl's little legs that I had kissed, almost devouring them and then passing my mouth over every single part of her young body. I don't believe that I was more than five years old then; after so many years, I still remember the physical taste of this carnal contact.

It happened in a room in which three little girls and I were playing, when one of them lifted her skirt and went on dancing. Then, I saw myself—because I was

seeing all this more the way one views a picture, rather than remembering the happening—very softly put the small girl against the bed, where I knelt and started kissing all her little motionless body.

I always heard the saying that perversions are the consequences of teaching or imitation, but I never had seen anybody engaging in one at this infantile age. I rather believe that we follow the natural instinct that is impregnated in us. It is an atavism impossible to repel, and unfortunately too many people ignore this force coming from Nature, which is dominating us, because we belong to and are part of her.

Sometimes I liked to watch prostitutes getting undressed—some of them don't do it, but rather lift the skirt—and I always remained open-mouthed, fixing my eyes on their legs, with an irrepressible desire to eat them with my kisses, and I had to make an effort to control myself, a process helped by my natural shyness at that time.

At the same time, I was repulsed by the thought that so many dirty old men touched these young bodies, and I wouldn't dare touch them with my mouth. I had to wait more than ten years before I could give way to my erotic fantasy, which was tormenting my anxious adolescent mind so much.

The libidinous conversations among us friends were never ending, and more or less all of us were delighted to listen to all the details of everything related to sex. Of course, among us, we had some fortunate few who already had their little lovers, or at least an older woman with whom they were making love, but they were very few, and we envied and were almost angry at them. Some companions even bragged that they had secret sex with their maids at home, but most of these maids wanted some kind of compensation afterward in the form of money or help with the housework.

Chapter 10

Our parents learned the restaurant business very fast, and it looked like they loved it. Once they became the owners of the Caucase, they completely renovated the entire establishment. A Russian artist painted the walls with fabulous murals representing a variety of Russian life. In addition to the Russian and Caucasian customers, many French students and foreign tourists began coming.

Quite often, my parents were indulging the clientele with music, balalaika, violin, piano, or accordion. All the personnel, including waiters, waitresses, cashiers, and kitchen help, were either Russian or able to speak Russian. Boris, my father's old friend, much loved by all, remained for many years as the barman.

I was eating in the restaurant, and sometimes, especially during the dinners, I participated in conversations with émigrés who came to our place. My father told us that they were very well known in political circles, the arts, and financial centers.

I was very much impressed by Prince Nikolai Nikolaevich, an uncle of the late Russian Tsar Nicholas II, shot with all his family in 1919. My father was always addressing the prince with deference, beginning with "Your Highness," until one day the prince told my father, "Please, Kiril Andreyevitch, don't call me Highness any more; the 'Highness' fell in the 'lowness'; just call me Nikolai Nokolayevich!" It was sad to listen to such words from someone who had been so important in Russia and who in France was working as a technical designer to make his living, even though he never lost his distinguished nature, just as the great majority of the Russian nobles behaved.

My father liked and respected him, because when the February 1917 Revolution came, he told the Tsar, his nephew, to renounce the throne.

Also coming often to see my father was the ex-Premier Minister Alexander Fedorovich Kerensky, with the Socialist writer Zenzinov and his inseparable ex-Commissar of the Black Sea, Fondaminsky. That evening they stayed very late, even after the last customer left the restaurant and it closed. Most had too much to drink, and this again afforded an opportunity for the conversation to turn to Russia, its past, its present, and the apparently unforeseeable future.

I was very much impressed by Kerensky's intimate friend, the huge Ilyia Isidorovich Fondaminsky, whom I had met in Berlin; he became a writer to be able to make a living. It was the last time that I saw him, even though Kerensky came many more times to be with us, as long as we lived in France.

I learned later, when I came back to Paris during the war, that Fondaminsky received a visa to go to the United States; he crossed the border into Spain in June 1940, and he could have escaped before the total German occupation of France.

For certain sentimental reasons, the tall idealist Fondaminsky returned and remained in Paris, in spite of the fact that he could have gone to the United States and saved his life. He seemed to be depressed and was tired of running. He was arrested by the Gestapo a few months later, because he had been a Social Democrat and a commissar during the Russian Revolution. He was then sent to a concentration camp, where he died in 1942.

The writer Zanzinov was sent to Finland as a newsman, and he took advantage of the opportunity to escape to New York when he learned that the Nazis were

looking for him.

All of our waiters had served in the White Army, some of them when they were 15 or 16 years old, but they always had an exemplary attitude, never complaining and always trying to accommodate themselves to the new conditions of life. Most of them were believers, drawing their strength through their religious beliefs.

The atmosphere was very interesting in our restaurant. A lot of people took an interest in talking with me, customers as well as employees, in spite of the fact that they knew that I had Marxist ideas. One in particular liked my conversation: Kostia, whose Italian parents came to Russia before he was born and who also served in the White Army. His nickname was: "Italian." He was always joyful, loved women with a fervor approaching madness, and had a strong left-wing tendency.

Our chef, Petia, a Russian whose natal city in Belarus had been handed over to Poland after the First World War, also was a sympathizer with our cause. He was living with an alcoholic French woman; once, coming back home from work, he found a little piece of paper on which was written, "Goodbye forever!" A few days later, her body was found floating in the Seine river. She had jumped into the water off a bridge, and no one could ever guess or learn why! Could she have been drunk when she made that drastic decision, or did she have some disappointment? Petia remained grief-stricken for a long time, repeating constantly, "But why? We were getting along so well together! We were drinking together; we never had any discord. Why did she do it?"

I had been very impressed by this event, and I understood why my parents were saying with contempt the word *alcoholic* when they referred to a customer or to any friend they suspected of being one.

We also had some customers who were taking drugs, at least my mother suspected they were; she would point to them as if they were the Devil incarnate. The words *alcoholic* and *drug addict* were making me very uncomfortable, because I had a lot of compassion for these people. Much later, I would learn what it was to be an alcoholic.

Many evenings, some friends would drop by our restaurant, most of the time when we were closing. This was an opportunity to have more intimacy, to drink wine, and to chat at ease without interruption.

Several different groups, very often with diverse political tendencies, would come to eat, then remain to talk with my parents. Almost needless to say, once the restaurant's iron gates were closed, the drinks were on the house.

It was then that I realized the honor I had to have been painted by such a known artist as Yuri Pavlovich Annenkov, who reproduced my head on a canvas. I didn't think at that time that he would become famous, in spite of the fact that I already knew that he had painted Block and Trotsky in 1923, when the latter was powerful in the government. He also painted Lenin, and after Lenin's death in 1924, the Supreme Soviet commissioned him with the task of documenting the deceased leader's life in paintings.

For no known reason, he emigrated to Paris in 1926, even though remaining on good terms with the Communist government. When Alexis Tolstoy came to France, both would stay until late in the night drinking cognac together, and a couple of these encounters took place in the Caucase. When Ilia Ehrenburg came to Paris, Annenkov never missed the opportunity to be with him.

Amazingly, during the German occupation, Annenkov succeeded in living quietly in Paris without attracting the Nazis' attention. That's how he survived very

discreetly this period, and after the war, he resumed his career as a famous painter until 1974, when he died of natural causes at the age of 85. I learned all that later, when I was living in Texas.

I heard mentioned many times the names Pasternak, Babel, Fedine, and other known writers and artists who often would frequent my parents' restaurant. At the time, it made no difference to me that they were famous in Russian circles, and to be honest, it didn't touch me and I was unimpressed, because I didn't understand them, even though I spoke perfect Russian. All of them had a logic with which I could never get familiar. They showed too much optimism and espoused beliefs that amounted almost to mysticism, and I could not relate to that. I always preferred the simple French logic and the clear, plain way of expressing my thinking and of understanding other people's ideas.

Many years later, when I was already mature, I understood much better what was going on in a Slavic mind, to the point that I came to admire them, even though I remained a *frantzuz*, as my father used to call me.

After the American Depression, when the New Continent started to improve its economy, thanks to the humanitarian policy of Roosevelt, European finances stumbled. The unemployed started filling up the streets, and the war veterans rented from my father the ground level in the 300-year-old building he owned for several years, in the rue des Petits Pretres St. Severin. The basement of this five-story building was several floors deep, and it was dangerous, for which reason it had never been rented, like the rest of the house.

I learned that in previous centuries, this edifice belonged to the Archbishop of the City of Paris, and the basement had cells where prelates who committed some kind of crime were thrown in, condemned, and punished by the church.

My father knew that I was enchanted with the place, and he gave me the keys of the building, allowing me to bring friends to play in the huge basement's empty places. Of course, now that all the people were forming lines, known at that time as "soup lines," they were renting the basement, and we couldn't go to play anymore in our favorite place. Needless to say, all this occurred when I was still growing up; later on, when I became a young man, I dedicated my time to more serious things, and I never returned to this basement.

The proportion of the unemployed grew every day, and anybody could see that the situation couldn't last forever.

I remember that the government devalued the currency, pegging the franc to 25 to the dollar; the effect of the devaluation was to bring masses of American tourists, in whose country the economy was improving, for they could spend nice vacations in France more cheaply than in their own country.

Until the devaluation, the English were the only ones who came to France as tourists in winter; now they were followed by the Yankees, who were branded as arrogant because of the natives' envy. For a senseless reason, without any explanation, the French, angry, unemployed, and unable to find work, suddenly decided to stone the tourist offices, chiefly Cook. It not only didn't improve the situation of the people out of work, but it also harmed business, because fewer tourists came to France and unemployment continued to increase.

Chapter 11

In 1933, Hitler was elected chancellor of Germany, putting an end to the Weimar Republic. On February 27, the Reichstag was set on fire, and the Communists were accused of the arson, even though everybody knew very well that it was the work of the Nazis, the new political party created by the Fuehrer.

Our students group was in close contact with the left-wing parties that very often asked us to help them to glue political posters on building walls or to perform all kinds of chores during their meetings, tasks that we always performed with enthusiasm.

In the middle of the same year, I learned through my comrade Admiral, who idealized Trotsky, that Trotsky had been expelled from the Soviet Union and was heading toward Norway, the only country ready to grant him asylum.

The Trotskyites were trying to organize a huge demonstration, asking everybody—students, workers, and employees—to congregate at the Gare de l'Est railway station where the train in which Admiral's idol was traveling would stop for an hour.

I wanted badly to see this indefatigable companion of Lenin, now treated like a pariah, but my friend Rene advised me not to do so, because "some comrades" that we knew were coming on the Communist Party's instructions, and Admiral warned us that this solidarity with the "traitors" could cause us some bad repercussions.

Already coerced or perhaps intimidated, we didn't go, and we lamented it later when we learned that thousands and thousands of sympathizers were shouting words of support to Trotsky at the railroad station, when the train stopped as scheduled for a short period of time.

We learned also that the police, already nervous because of the internal situation, deployed forces all over, but that did not affect the people's spirit, given Hitler's triumph in Germany, Communist dissension in the Soviet Union, and the French government's ineptitude.

On November 16, the United States officially recognized the Soviet Union, and both countries established diplomatic relations, a development received with international approval, mainly by the communists and the pacifists.

The year 1934 started badly for France, when the manipulations of Serge Stavitsky, the Russian Jew, were discovered; in conjunction with French politicians, Stavitsky accomplished a huge nationwide embezzlement of millions of francs against the banks.

Beginning on February 6, Paris was shaken by riots and spreading unrest, including street fights between the police and the protesters; it lasted until the 9th of the same month, when Stavitsky, unable to cross the border with Switzerland, ended up shooting himself.

Although we didn't consider this event our "revolution," we were still happy to see that the people were reacting and that the atmosphere was getting more propitious for us, even though the right wing, a glomeration of Croix de Feu (right-wing war veterans), Action Francaise (monarchists), Jeunesse Patriotes (fascists), and many others with the same tendency, were blaming the left for all the ongoing problems.

That was when the Popular Front was born, uniting all the left-wing parties

to oppose the rightists who were becoming more and more dangerous and aggressive, while bragging dogmatically about Hitler and Mussolini.

One of my friends from our Union des Etudiants was Jacques Trombeau, a student at the Sorbonne who openly presented himself as an anarchist. He was very quiet, determined, and intelligent. He always intrigued me, because I couldn't understand very well how the concept of a country that was ruled by anarchists, without government or with a limited one, could function.

Jacques repeated constantly, "Power corrupts human beings!" Then he added, "Look at the Soviet Union; everyone is fighting for power, and really none of them cares about the people's happiness. What they are looking for is control and materialistic advantages!" He fascinated me, but at the same time I was afraid to be seen too often in his company, because the Marxists distrusted the Anarchists.

One day, Jacques told me that he had received bad news: Nestor Makhno was dead as a result of his old wounds. He was the last Anarchist leader, one had once had a powerful army in Russia during the Revolution, fighting to impose Anarchism and Ukrainian independence.

I knew a lot about Makhno. My father always spoke about him with contempt, saying that he was a bandit and that he faced him several times on the battlefield; my father claimed Makhno would ally himself at different times with both sides, White or Reds. When it was convenient, he would betray them both. For Jacques, he was a real fighter, a revolutionary worthy of all respect.

He had an admiration for Makhno that reached the point of worship, and I told him what my father thought of Makhno. My friend answered that my father was a reactionary, and this was the reason he couldn't do justice to a true freedom fighter.

Thanks to Jacques, I learned more details of Nestor Makhno's history, and I never understood why my father despised and had such a low opinion of him.

According to Jacques, when the February 1917 Revolution came, Kerensky ordered all prisons opened and mandated that all the political prisoners to be set free. One of them, who had been enduring the rigors of the incarceration for more than eight years at the Petrograd fortress, was Makhno, punished for his anarchist activity.

Once liberated, Makhno immediately returned to Gulaypole in the Ukraine, back to the anarchist cell to which he already belonged. He had been arrested for trying to impose the anarchist-syndicalist type of government.

Meanwhile, Makhno succeeded in getting encouraging results in organizing the farmers. The greatest disillusionment of his life came when he learned that the prince Peter Kropotkine, one of his idols and the father of anarchism, along with Bakunine, who inspired him, gave their support to Kerensky upon Bakunine's return from exile in London to Moscow. However, when Makhno had an opportunity to talk personally with Kropotkine in Moscow in 1918, his trust and his inspiration were restored.

On the other hand, when Lenin honored him by receiving him in the Kremlin a few months later, Makhno was very deceived, mainly because the new "Dictator of the Communist Proletarians" felt no guilt about seizing power and closing the offices of the Russian Anarchist Federation in Moscow, jailing all their leaders. Makhno tried to reach an agreement with the Sovietics to fight together against the White Army and the Austro-Hungarian-German Expeditionary Forces, which were occupying Ukraine with the "ataman" Skoropadsky's Revolutionary Joint complicity. All was in

vain, because the Communists betrayed Makhno, and he kept on fighting alone for his ideal, until the summer of 1921, when the entire Red Guard was sent against his troops known as "Batko Makhno's Army," and he was defeated in his own town of Gulaypole.

He again received a shock, learning that his faithful political fighter and jail companion, the audacious, worldwide-known anarchist commander and terrorist Mary Nikiforova, fell prisoner to the Whites in Crimea and was hanged in 1919.

Makhno had been wounded six times during fights in his three years of struggle. The wounds had a weakening effect on his health.

Being completely routed on August 28, 1921, losing all of his commanders and seeing his forces decimated, he crossed the Dniester River and immediately was thrown into an internment camp by the Rumanians.

Learning that the Soviet Union was asking for his extradition, he escaped from his confinement and went to Poland. Unfortunately, here, too, he was arrested at the border. He was put in prison, accused by the Polish of plotting for the independence of Galicia, where the Ukrainians had been living for centuries and where the territory had been ceded to Poland by the 1919 Versailles Treaty.

After keeping Makhno a year in the Warsaw penitentiary, the Poles set him free. When he arrived in Danzig, again he was put in a fortress, this time for a short period, and in 1923, he emigrated to Paris, as so many other refugees did.

In exile, no one wanted to associate with Makhno. Petliura, the ex-commander of the nationalist Ukrainian Army (murdered in Paris in 1926), despised him, and of course the White Russians branded him as a bandit, as my father did.

Makhno, with his family, had a very difficult time in Paris, like so many political refugees. There, he started writing his memoirs, stating, "I am now living in Paris, among foreign people and political enemies with whom I was warring not so long ago!"

Makhno was making his living working on sets in a movie theater company, where he was helping to display the decorations on the stage and also repaired shoes. His wife was employed as a maid in a middle-class family.

His health was deteriorating as a result of his multiple wounds, and he was limping. The famous American anarchist Alexander Berkman came to Russia to see him several times, and when he met him again in Paris, he couldn't believe his eyes and barely recognized the legendary libertarian commander, who during the Russian Revolution had gathered an Army of 100,000 men.

Following Berkman's initiative, the American, French, and Spanish anarchists collected money to allow Makhno to keep living a modest type of life.

It was then that he tried to participate in politics, writing a book titled *Makhno's Movement and His Bolshevik Allies*, showing that his partisans fought for the Russian people against the Whites and the Polish-German counter-revolutionaries, and finally against the Bolsheviks.

He warned all the anarchists to watch out for those who want to usurp power, and he encouraged them to organize themselves against tyranny.

Without saying a word to anybody, not even to my parents, this July 29, 1934, I went with Jacques and 400 others to follow the funeral march to the Pere Lachaise cemetery in Paris, where Makhno was buried. Representatives of almost all countries were there, but the crowd consisted mainly of French people, then Spanish,

Italian, and of course the well-known American anarchist Berkman. Berkman not only participated in the ceremonial committee, but it was also said that he took care of the expenses.

Jacques, who was very solemn, told me, "You see, he was an anarchist hero in the Ukraine; look at the throng of people, but do you know that only two Ukrainians are present here?"

Much later, when I was living in the United States, I learned about the sad destiny of Makhno's wife Galina and their daughter Elena.

When the Germans occupied Paris in 1941, the Nazis ordered all foreigners to be registered at the local police precincts. When checking the list and seeing the name of Makhno's wife and daughter, immediately the Germans sent both of them to a concentration camp in Poland.

Near the end of the war, the Soviets freed the two victims from their captivity. Unfortunately, they enjoyed a very short-lived freedom, because when the Soviets learned of their identity, once again, the two were sent to a forced labor camp, this time in Siberia, where both spent eight years.

When they were freed, they both moved to Kazakstan, where Galina died at the age of 70 and the daughter Elena's path has been lost. She was last seen in Dzambule. Both Galina Kuzmenko and her daughter Elena were rehabilitated in 1989 by Gorbushv, who vindicated so many of Stalin's victims.

Many years later, several books were written about Nestor Makhno, published by French, Spanish, American, and later by Russian writers. In addition, songs have been written in his honor, and he is revered by all anarchists in the United States, Canada, France, Spain and other countries throughout the world. All that intrigued me very much. I bought Bakunin's and Kropotkin's books, because I wanted to know more about anarchism. I never said a word to my father, who never stopped despising the anarchists. Many years later, in Atlanta, Georgia, I read Makhno's memoirs translated into English. During my entire life, I vacillated between the ideals of Marxism and libertarianism. The excesses of the communists was frightening to me, but the anarchists' lack of discipline was putting me on guard against some adventurers who could lead the people to very dangerous tendencies.

Chapter 12

In addition to my friends in Neuilly and the Latin Quarter, I established another friendship. This friendship was made during our yearly vacations, which we were spending in Boyardville, on Oleron's isle, in front of the La Rochelle.

We went to this island's primitive beaches to spend our traditional two months of summer vacation until 1933. There, we rented the same chalet from Mme. Pelligrini, a descendant of Italians. She was a war widow who was living with her only daughter, Louise, a few years older than I.

Boyardville at that time was a small fisherman's town on the Atlantic. According to what older inhabitants remembered, it used to be a Russian nobles' summertime refuge, a place they came to enjoy themselves before the Revolution.

To reach the beach, you had to walk for 20 minutes in the pine forest on a sandy path. My mother was always saying that this air, a mixture of the ocean and the pine trees, was ideal for the children, of course meaning us.

As long as my father was working for the Grimbergs, he remained both months with us. After our parents purchased the Caucase, he couldn't stay more than three weeks, the period during which the restaurant closed for summer vacation.

Following the old European habit, every year almost the same people came back to the place. It seemed as if our friendships, or the last year's interrupted romantic idylls, were getting started again, resuming without any difficulty or delay, as soon as the tourists were back in town.

My first friends were children from a family living in Bordeaux, who like us returned every year to Boyardville. The older son, Maurice, was a huge boy slightly older than I, but the younger sister, Josette, my age, was a precious redhead who drove us all and anyone surrounding her crazy. Despite her young age, she already was coquettish, aware of her influence on us.

My mother, who loved old buildings, and chiefly the structure of the ancient churches, would never miss an opportunity to be part of any of those numerous tourist excursions that were offered to the vacationers who wished to know more about this old island. My sister and I hated these excursions and rather preferred to remain on the beach.

On the other side of Oleron was the isle de Re, a transitory penal camp where those who were sent indefinitely to forced labor in Guayanas spent some time. My mother was very sorry for those inmates, who were within our eyesight. When she saw the somber vessels sailing back and forth, she became very grim.

My father, more realistic, repeatedly said, "If they are political convicts, I am sorry for them. If they are just common criminals, I don't have any pity for them. You don't know how cruel they are to the political prisoners who have the bad luck to be with them. Now, who knows how many horrible things they have done, and the reason for which they are there?"

On the other side of Oleron was the third island, the smallest, d'Aix, locally very well known. It was there, in 1815, the English who were taking Napoleon to his exile in St. Helene stopped for a couple of months, and even today, there exists a small museum in the little house where the great Emperor stayed.

We once went to d'Aix island, and of course I remained very impressed as I

admired the place where the great Napoleon lived more than a hundred years ago.

At that time, Napoleon represented to me, as he did to the majority of young Frenchmen, an ideal, heroism, and a mixture of legend. My opinion of him changed completely when I started being active in politics. I learned then that even though during the French Revolution of 1789 slavery had been abolished, Napoleon, after naming himself Emperor, not only betrayed the republican ideals, but also reinstated the repugnant practice of slavery in the French Colonies in 1802. Slavery continued to be practiced until 1848.

Edmond Jaba joined our group consisting of Maurice, Josette, and me. His parents had fled Russia after the aborted 1905 Revolution, which began after Russia's defeat by Japan. The family was anarchistic, and Edmond, who was born in France, oscillated between communism and anarchism. His family lived in Paris, as did his friends Minia Kolodkine and Jacques Golovine, whose parents also had been revolutionaries in tsarist Russia.

By a strange circumstance, I became very good friends with Robert Romanin, a little bit older than I, stocky, but shorter. He had a younger brother Georges, who was too young to play with us and therefore joined kids of his own age. Robert's parents owned a clothing store in the same quarter where they lived in Paris. The most curious aspect of my friendship with Robert was that not only did he lean to the right, but he also professed fascist ideas, being a strong Mussolini admirer.

We became close friends, perhaps because his family was living in the Moufetaarde Quarter, not far away from the Latin Quarter. This contiguity allowed us to see each other frequently. We got along very well, and both of us liked jokes and agreed on everything, with the exception of political topics, which we simply avoided discussing. Later on, Robert once went with a group of French fascists to Italy, where the Duce in person received them in Rome, increasing even more his admiration for the Italian dictator. I never could understand how this middle-class young Frenchman could embrace such dictatorial ideas while remaining so independent.

From the very first glance, when Robert saw Josette, he fell in love with her. If my memory doesn't betray me, I think that she was only ten years old then and he was a few years older. Already, everybody understood that he had a crush on her. The years were passing by, we were growing, and in this particular 1933 summer, we were no longer children. We were almost men, and the girls' bodies were developing curvaceous shapes and taking appealing forms, especially in the case of Josette, who became a beauty, with her long, floating, red hair.

Most curious was that Robert never said anything to Josette, much less to us, his companions, but by his look it was evident that he adored her. It was a silent worship, and his passion was so strong and persistent that all of us who were with him could feel it. We became nervous when this pretty redhead appeared. She was perfectly aware of our veneration. Even more, she wanted to increase this passion that was boiling inside all of us. The passion absorbed Robert with a special strength. Josette never missed an opportunity to flirt with us, one by one, or several at the same time, to make him jealous. In all my life, I have never witnessed a passion as powerful as the one Robert had for Josette. It seemed to emanate from inside him, from some kind of uncontrollable magnetism that subconsciously was dominating him.

We young people had an independent style of life different from that of our

families, who were in our eyes more sedentary and more inclined to routine. Their days were very orderly, consisting of going to the beach and back, with the exception of when it was raining, in which case everyone remained at home or went to the small town of Boyardville.

The town center was located around the only hotel, five cafes and restaurants, diverse stores, and a large quantity of family *pensions*. The *pensions* were less expensive than the hotel, where businessmen lodged, as well as some of the well-to-do tourists. This colorful center was located close to the pier, where small fishermen's boats moored. Without doubt, the daily passenger ship's arrival, bringing people from La Rochelle or taking them back, was the principal attraction.

The younger generation, in addition to taking advantage of the beach, which was delightful, went to swim in the blue and sometimes turbulent waters of the Atlantic Ocean. For hours we would languish in the sun while girl-watching and talking. We played soccer or tennis but left to the younger ones our yesterday's games, such as building sand castles or running, as we used to do only a couple of years before.

Sundays were special days, because most of the adults went with their families to take an aperitif in the bars; because of our more advanced age, we no longer had an obligation to follow that tradition. Instead, we formed groups to talk about politics, sports, and interesting events, when we were not acting cocky with the girls.

It was a beautiful age. We didn't know it yet, but we suspected that life belonged to us, and we had the impression that something inside ourselves was getting ready to explode with pleasure. It might have been the internal felicity of feeling ourselves living and mainly discovering a new, previously unknown phase of life, the puberty that we were so anxious to explore.

Every Sunday, a little old man came to the Cafe du Port with his ambulant "movies," consisting of black-and-white silent films. These projections usually occurred in the evening, in the large saloon that the bar's owner rented. This wrinkled old gentleman brought the entertainment to us in exchange for a small fee that we gladly paid. His projector was so antiquated that he used a manual handle that he turned; because the movies were mute, he declaimed the corresponding dialog with a changing and monotonous voice.

On these occasions, numerous native inhabitants living permanently in Boyardville came to watch the movies. No permanent movie theater existed in the town, and it was the only amusement offered to them during the summer. Needless to add, sometimes people would talk during the showings, while others asked them to be quiet and children made loud comments. Soon, insults would fly back and forth, but I don't remember any instance in which these affronts resulted in a fistfight or a major disturbance.

As *parigots*—so the Parisians were called with contempt by the fishermen—we looked with irony at these peasants who never had seen a sound movie. We had viewed our first sound movie in Neuilly in 1930, and it was thoroughly enjoyable to go the theater to watch a movie on Thursdays, when there were no classes.

During the first days of July, most of the tourists came to the Oleron isle, which had many other beaches besides Boyardville. The tourists participated in the July 14 (Bastille Day) celebrations, featuring fireworks, music from the next town's firefighter's band, peddlers, and other entertainments.

By coincidence, in this 1933, several White Russians from Cote d'Azur or Paris came to Boyardville. My father did not know them. Some of them were originally from Manchuria, which was at one time a Russian protectorate; Russians had been living in Manchuria for generations.

Among these White Russians was a beautiful blonde lady named Larissa Leonovna Dolgoruky, with her son Andrey, a year younger than I. My parents told me that the Dolgoruky family was one of the oldest aristocratic dynasties of Russia. It was easy to corroborate that by this woman's behavior; she was one of the few true ladies whom I ever met. Never before had I seen such noteworthy distinction and nobility.

She was a war widow. Her husband, an officer in the Kolchak Army, was killed in Siberia in 1920 by the Bolsheviks, together with the general himself. She escaped with her son to Manchuria to stay with relatives. At that time, many Russians were still living there, and they regarded Manchuria as a Russian province.

Madame Larissa told us with emotion about the splendor of their life in Mukden, the capital of Manchuria. The city had a European Quarter, the Russian sector being the largest, followed by the English and the French. She said that the cost of living was so cheap there that anyone could afford to have several servants. Her dream was to one day be able to return to that country to continue to have, as she put it, a "normal" life.

Her son Andrey was a little gentleman with manners only seen in the movies. His noble birth was quite evident, but unfortunately he couldn't be my friend. He was a believer! He was certain that the monarchy would be restored in Russia, and he hated Marxism. He was very serious and too much of a "Russian" for my taste.

They had only recently come to France and had not had time to be polished enough to adapt themselves to the French intellectual life. Both of them, the princess mother and Andrey, appeared to me to have come from a movie of the last century.

Several other White Russians were also around, but I barely spoke to them. They would spend all the time with my parents, delighted at the opportunity to speak Russian and mainly talk about Russia, a topic that was like a sickness engulfing all the émigrés.

Among all these White Russians one seemed to me to stand out for his attractiveness and sympathetic nature. He was the ex-Captain of Cossacks Semion Nikolayevich Chernikov, who was engulfed in laughter when he heard my father calling me *frantzuz*. Like many other Russian officers who had just emigrated to France, he had served five years as a soldier in the Foreign Legion. At that time, such former officers didn't have any other alternative; it was a question of survival, and the military profession was the only one they knew.

Even though Chernikov was a nobleman, he served in the French Army and was living in Paris. This had given him a chance to become more familiar with the democratic style of life. He always kissed the hand of a lady, showing her his Russian noble courtesy. I could talk with sincerity with him, and I felt that he was much more receptive to the French culture than others.

Every time I watched a gentleman get up and kiss a lady's hand, the act brought to my memory my early education in Germany, where men had the same obligation. "Married women only," my mother would emphasize; "you don't kiss the hand of young ladies—or at least you don't do it to show respect."

The princess Dolgoruky, who didn't like to be called princess, was a

stunning beauty. One day, when she was sunning on the beach in her bathing costume, I overheard Chernikov whispering to my father, "She looks like Diane the huntress going to take a bath," referring to the famous painting. My father, a great admirer of the weaker sex, agreed completely about the appropriateness of the comparison. Even though I hadn't as yet been to bed with a woman, I knew nevertheless what sexual appeal meant. I was becoming very nervous each time I saw her appear so pretty, with her white skin inside a blue swimming suit that was molded to her tantalizing body.

The princess Dolgoruky provided me a lesson in how a lady could behave in adversity without resorting to vulgarity. One day, when everybody was lying on the beach tanning under the blue sky, I couldn't take my eyes from, or perhaps I was just devouring with my eyes, the seductive body of Larissa. Semion, who very possibly was doing the same, impulsively put his hand on "Diane's" beautiful leg.

Larissa jumped up and became very angry, asking with her sensual voice, "What happened, Simon Nikolayevich?"

Heads lifted discreetly to get a better view of what had happened, and a few were slightly ashamed for the ex-Captain of Cossacks. He had enough presence of mind to answer her, "You had a fly on your precious leg, and I chased her away!" Nobody said a word, but I am sure that everybody was secretly chastising Simon for being so rude as to dare to touch the lady's leg, regardless of how irresistible it must have been.

About twenty minutes after this little incident, when everybody was more or less drowsy again, we heard the report of a slap, and Semion jumped to his feet and in a quite irritated voice asked madame Dolgoruky, "Why did you give me this slap on the face, Larissa Leonova?" To which she very quietly answered, with her charming smile, "You had a fly on your cheek, Semion Nikolayevich, and I chased her away!"

She had administered the blow with such force that during all that afternoon the Cossack's left cheek remained red. It is needless to add that he never again tried to chase flies away from Princess Larissa's legs.

It was one of the few times that I remained the entire day on the beach with my parents and their Russian group. The truth of the matter was that I had more fun with my French friends.

On this July 14, Bastille Day, we were dining with Madame Dolgoruky and her son in a restaurant. My mother suddenly felt ill as a result of her painful rheumatism, which had been exhausting her for the past several years. She could no longer bear this physical suffering, and she excused herself and went back to our lodging, which was only a few minutes' walk away.

My father, a great admirer of ladies, had already had several drinks in celebrating Bastille Day. As the good republican he considered himself, he started once again to give compliments, one after the next, to the beautiful Larissa. I saw that her son Andrey was becoming uncomfortable, and to avoid any kind of embarrassing situation, I suggested that we go for a walk on the pier, which was always full of joyful people.

I really don't know how my father's flirtation ended with this beautiful Larissa. Tired of Andrey's boring company, I decided to return to the restaurant and found it vacant. It was already late, and I assumed that Larissa went to her home and that my father returned to his. Anyhow, I was glad to leave the young aristocrat and return to our summer home.

The following day, I learned that my father returned home not only tipsy,

but also very late. My mother, who was still suffering pain, gathered enough energy to confront him with her sarcasm, the product of her longtime accumulated and usually unsubstantiated jealousy. I observed that my mother subsequently became very aloof toward Larissa, who, anyhow, in a few more days, was returning to Paris.

I saw Larissa and her son again several times in Paris. Andrey was wearing my used clothes given to him by my mother; their economical situation was worsening and becoming desperate. I learned that a few months later they returned to the Manchuria they loved so much.

I learned many years afterwards that both the mother and the son perished during World War II in Manchuria. The Japanese who were occupying that country conducted an indiscriminate slaughter of people there for several years.

More than half a century later, I was told by a Russian Brigadista who participated in the Spanish Civil War and later came to visit with me in Atlanta, where I was living, that he met the ex-Captain Cossack Semion Nikolayevitch Chernikov, who left Paris to go to Albacete. At the end of 1936, he participated in the Spanish Civil War and had been assigned to the XI. International Brigade, where so many other Russian volunteers were facing Franco's fascist forces.

In 1939, after the Spanish Republic was betrayed by the so-called democracies and crushed by the Franco-Hitler-Mussolini coalition, he had been allowed to return to the Soviet Union with his friend Alexey Eisner, who also went from Paris to fight. During the frequent purges in the Soviet Union, both of them, with so many other former Brigadistas, were sent to forced labor for ten years in Siberia. They were then rehabilitated by Kruschev after Stalin's death.

Chapter 13

We loved sports and were quite active in swimming, running, playing soccer, and organizing long excursions on the beautiful and not yet spoiled beaches. After dinner, we would gather “downtown” to talk, to tell jokes, and to flirt with the girls. At that time, we weren't yet smoking, nor were we drinking alcoholic beverages, but we had a lot of fun without those vices.

We were cautious not to start any political argument in front of Robert or Maurice, Josette's brother, knowing that both were right wing, while all of us belonged to the left. The Popular Front was taking shape, and the recent anti-fascist convention in Holland adopted a three-pointed star as our struggling-emblem, called “Amsterdam-Pleyel.” At that time, I would never have guessed that in a few more years, during the crucial years of my young life, I would wear this badge.

Boyardville, just as the rest of the other three islands, had been a center of the king Henri IV's Huguenots (Protestants), whose core of resistance against the Catholics was La Rochelle.

The observatories, made of wood, were erected during the 1870 war against the Prussians. The French feared that the Teutons could disembark in France from the Atlantic. It didn't happen, but during World War II, in December 1944, the Germans had a resistance pocket composed of several Wehrmacht Divisions, and they occupied all the region. As a 1st Motorized Infantry Division member, I participated in liquidating it, killing or taking the Germans prisoners. All that happened more than ten years after these events, which took place during those memorable vacations.

It was already the death of summer, in the last days of August, and little by little the tourists were returning home. The great majority were Parisians. Quite often in Paris, I met with Minia Kolodkine, Jacques Golovine, and Robert. I would have never surmised that it was the last time I would see Edmund Jaba and his romantic and intellectual bohemian parents who were always strolling on the beach.

I saw Minia Kolodkine after the war, and he told me that the entire Jaba family had been sent to their final destination in a concentration camp, where all of them perished. I didn't realize then, and of course I couldn't ever have suspected, how many friends I would lose in such a cruel and ferocious way, unseen for so many generations of mankind.

After this glorious vacation of 1933, I would have never speculated that I would never again see my beloved “Boyard,” nor Josette, whose presence was generating silly dreams in our heads.

After the war, I learned through Robert about Josette's whereabouts. In spite of the passing of all those years, Robert was still in love with her, and his feelings remained the same, even when she married another man. I heard rumors that supposedly her brother Maurice was hanged by the Nazis for fighting against them during the Resistance. The report wasn't very clear. Other sources insisted that it was the other way around and that the guerrillas were the ones who hanged him for being a traitor and a collaborator with the Nazis in Laval's fascist "militia."

Before the end of our vacation, several of us decided to inspect a few medieval castles, which were still standing on the island. The law prohibited entrance to

these old, dangerous constructions, for they had many scattered and unknown traps built centuries ago by the dwellers as a protection against intruders.

More than once, an informer would alert the police and tell them about our plans to "invade" a castle, and the gendarmes would appear to kick us out. It wasn't exactly their presence that would keep us out. The police were scared to death of exploring these historical old lodgings, where the traps, or even the castle itself, could collapse at any time, hurting or killing by debris any unwanted intruder who could be there at that time.

While we were inside a feudal fortress, the gendarmes from the other side of the moat would be screaming at us, threatening to come across to arrest us. We knew that they were too afraid to go ahead and do it and that they were just trying to coerce us.

All these old castles, like the old abandoned houses so plenteous in Neuilly, were fascinating to me. As kids, we loved to have the feeling of thrill, and we liked to explore all the old, vacated lodgings in which people had lived not so long ago, their vibrations, we imagined, still in the air. This was the time of the European depression, which occurred two or three years after the American crash.

Chapter 14

In Paris, fall was approaching, as well as the usual start of classes in September. On October 9, 1934, the *Paris-Soir* newspaper announced that the king of Yugoslavia, Alexander, had been murdered at the time that the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Louis Barthou, came to receive him at the port.

The two assassins were Croatian separatists, instigated by some strange Hungarian elements. The French government, discovering this, was so indignant that it was about to declare war on Hungary, but the League of Nations succeeded in cooling the spirit of retaliation. It was very sad, because Barthou was one of the few politicians loved by the French people.

One of our chef's helpers in the kitchen was a Serb named Lazar. Learning about the assassination of his king Alexander, he exploded in tears, crying so much that my father sent him home. He was so disturbed that he was unable to perform any kind of work that day. I had contempt for Lazar, sorry perhaps and angry at the same time at this dummy's crying for a parasite king's death, no matter how good he could have been.

Petia, who certainly agreed with me, explained that Lazar was an ignorant peasant who had been brainwashed since birth to worship kings as super-humans appointed by God, and he advised me not to resent Lazar.

I sensed that Lazar felt my indifference regarding the king's death, and he couldn't hide the hatred he felt toward me. It was a hatred that could be felt only by a completely brutish and ignorant person against an educated young man. He was convinced that only experience and age built knowledge, and not the studies and learning that he despised.

The interesting part of this tragic story was the way both Croats had been apprehended. When both of them committed the crime, the throng of people waiting for the king of Yugoslavia was so dense that thanks to the confusion created by the explosion of their bomb, they started running and mixing with the people escaping the danger.

The terrorists hadn't been discovered. They remained cool, placing a further distance from the place of the attempt until they felt a thirst, undoubtedly as a result of the stress, and decided to go to the closest bar to quench it.

After drinking the cold beer at a neighborhood bar, they paid, leaving a tip as large as the amount of the bill. The bartender suspected that something was wrong, because no Frenchman would leave such a sizable tip. Very suspicious, he called the police, saying, "Two foreigners with a heavy accent just gave me a big tip and are about to leave the place." The police rushed to the bar and detained both terrorists, and a few months later both heads were severed by the guillotine.

Each day international politics were getting more confusing. The Popular Front won the elections by an overwhelming majority of votes; yet, there was a general uneasiness floating in the social environment, fraying the nerves of the common people. Unemployment continued to grow, and the workers began occupying the factories owned by those who didn't want to sign labor contracts.

The socialist Leon Blum was Prime Minister, and we thought that the revolution, our revolution, was approaching. Those from the right wing also increased their presence in the streets. Our fistfights became more violent. The rightists were screaming to us that it was exactly what the Germans wanted, to see a divided France, weak and disarmed,

thanks to the Marxists.

The year 1935 started very gloomy for everybody, and it was easy to sense that some kind of turbulence was accumulating in the air, accompanied by a general feeling of complete insecurity. The right wing was promoting huge demonstrations on the streets, parading and shouting, "The *metecques* to the shithouse," making my parents very anxious.

In mid-year, the very well known Communist writer Henri Barbusse died; he had written the impressive book against the war *The Fire*. The left decided to make a show of force, and all of us mobilized to follow the funeral procession to Le Pere La Chaise cemetery, where I once went for Nestor Makhno's burial.

The big difference was that instead of the 400 persons who two years ago followed the anarchist's funeral cortege, we were now about half a million people gathered in a huge procession. We were carrying red flags, posters, and other emblems that flooded all of Paris. The streets where we were marching were closed to all traffic, in spite of loud protests from reactionaries.

Many speeches were made. We were so far away that we didn't hear any of them, because our students' groups were almost at the end of the cortege. It didn't upset us, because we didn't care very much about the funeral. We wanted chiefly to be part of this human wave that was generating a strong feeling of human magnetism, powerful and impressive.

During this period of time, I assisted in many Popular Front demonstrations, which usually were held in stadiums because we were too many to fit in a theater or any other building, no matter how large it was.

All my political activities were reducing the time that I had to dedicate to sports and especially to my studies, the progress of which was already quite unsatisfactory and deteriorating.

I was happy that my parents were signing my scholar notebook without looking at it, and very often I counterfeited their signature in order to avoid having to face any problem that might possibly arise from my parents' exposure to my grades.

Robert Romanin, without saying a word to anybody, enlisted in the army, and very soon he was promoted to corporal. At that time, the French people were drunk with pride, saying that they had the strongest country in the world and that there was no need to send their army to defeat Germany, for the firefighters could do it. Sixty-five years later in the United States, I heard this same bluster, the people also considering themselves as owners of the world and behaving accordingly. Robert obviously had foreseen the proximity of the war and wanted to anticipate the events.

All these international happenings weren't yet disturbing us, but we could notice the beginning of a large number of German Jews and Spanish refugees pouring into France; consequently, foreign children were invading the schools to such an extent that the Russian émigrés who already were feeling like part of the country were referring to those new aliens as "intruders."

Hitler denounced the Versailles Treaty and began building up the German Army, under the eyes of the impotent, dovish, and cowardly so-called democracies, which still considered the Soviet Union more dangerous than fascism.

Mussolini invaded Ethiopia. We were indignant, and almost every day we organized street demonstrations to protest the Italian barbarity and the practice of Italy's

armed forces of mercilessly throwing deadly gases on the civilian population while endlessly bombing the cities of the invaded country, now completely abandoned by the League of Nations.

More often, the conversation in our restaurant revolved around politics. Despite the general condemnation of Italian aggression and Hitler's threats, some people were happy about the course of these events. I overheard a few Russian refugees saying, "Hitler is our last hope and liberator!"

It was a very difficult situation for my father to be a restaurant owner patronized by people of so many diverse opinions. During all his life, he had been a Social Democrat, but he was now saying that he couldn't start talking politics with his clients without risking the loss of half of them. That's why, after making some inconsistent comments without indicating a commitment, he would invent any pretext to move away from those who were arguing.

Like my parents, I was under the impression that most of our personnel favored the fascists and harbored hope that Hitler would pave their road back to Russia, so that they could once again enjoy all the privileges that they had before the Revolution.

My father used to tell them, "You are wrong, all of you. Since the Revolution, the Russian people have changed, and I don't believe that it is possible to bring back those times you remember. They will never return again."

I knew that our chef was a socialist, but I was surprised learn that the Russian waiter whose nickname was Italian had declared himself an antifascist. The poor Serb Lazar was so brutalized and illiterate that he never understood what the conversation was about, constantly repeating that no nation could ever live without a king. I always sensed that he hated me with the strength that only a mentally deprived person could possess. Right or wrong, he believed that his personal viewpoint was the only truth.

At that time, I had already formed my own opinion about the little world of émigrés who were coming to the restaurant; later on, however, I realized that the majority of the Russian refugees were real patriots, even though they were anti-communist, and more than once I heard them saying, "Would it be a king, the devil, or the Communists who run Russia, let them do it, as long as it remains an independent and strong country!"

I wasn't aware of all the beautiful literary bohemians congregating at Montparnasse. They consisted of such socialists as Kerensky, Fedine, Fondaminsky, Larionov, and so many more. A lot of them went to Spain to fight against Franco, and thousands of them enlisted in the Allied Forces to participate in subduing Hitler's hordes.

Boris Kazazbachian, my father's old friend and for a long while the barman at the Caucase, one day asked my father if he could lend him money to open his own bar. He opened it on the same street, in front of our restaurant, under the name of Ali Baba. He had a daughter whose name was Suzanne, the same name of her mother, and she was my sister's age. Maya and Suzanne became inseparable.

The Marmarians, who were old friends of my parents, visited quite often. Henri Marmarian was a very well known lawyer who had a 25-year-old daughter, Laurette, the frontrunner of the feminist movement. She drove a car, uncommon for a woman at that time, had her pilot license, and was completely independent. Divorced, she had a son, Serge (Coco), who was the age of my sister and Jean.

Also frequently coming to our home was the Aziab Minian family. Aziab, like Marmarian, was an attorney; he had a daughter, Betty, who about five years older

than I. She was a stunning beauty, acting in theaters and movies. Aziab had been an anarchist Bakuninist, as he liked to call himself. After perpetrating a terroristic attempt against Everian's chief of police in the Caucasus, where he was living before the 1905 Revolution, he escaped to France. There he finished the university in Paris and became a successful lawyer, as did his companion Marmarian. Both friends took French citizenship and participated in the First World War in the Foreign Legion, where they received many medals for courage.

I learned from my mother, who loved to tell me in "secret" all the gossip she could gather in the restaurant, that Aziab was living with his wife Fanny only for "decorum." I learned many years later that they were sleeping in separate rooms and didn't have a normal conjugal life.

The most amazing part was that Aziab had a mistress, Olga, whom everybody knew. He would alternate in his social life, coming one day with his wife and on other occasions bringing the "darling." What surprised me very much was that Olga was ugly and short, while Fanny, the wife, though no longer young, still conserved a remarkable beauty.

More than once I overheard my parents making comments about this subject, saying that Aziab was doing it to hurt the wife's vanity, in effect telling her, "See! I have an old and disagreeable mistress! It is to punish you for what you have done."

We were still seeing the Aznavourian family. Since they moved from the Latin Quarter, we did not see them as often as before, even though Charlot's grandpa remained with his restaurant on the rue St. Jacques. Monsieur Aznavourian was very well known for his strong and eccentric personality; he was adored by everybody, even though his rudeness at times was excessive.

When a customer had a complaint about the food of his restaurant, he would go to the table and tell the customer very aggressively, "Did I invite you to come here? Did I send you a telegram to come to eat at my place? It happened that you were passing by and you decided to come to my restaurant, and I serve you what I have, whether you like it or not!"

Everybody laughed at his behavior, and in spite of his attitude, his restaurant, also called Caucase, was always filled with customers, mainly students, who always savored the eccentricity, at least those living in Paris did. His second wife was a Russian German from the Volga region, whose ancestors had been brought from Germany by Catherine the Great, about two hundred years ago. The wife still spoke a deficient Russian with a strong original accent, while Monsieur Aznavourian spoke Russian with a heavy Armenian accent. Because neither one could speak French well, they had no alternative but to communicate in Russian, and their conversations were very comical to listen to.

More amusing were the instances in which he would become angry with his Teuton wife. He always uttered the same words, with the intention of hurting her: "Shut up, you German spy!" an epithet that was more comical than could be imagined. The poor woman was born in Russia and had never been in Germany, which her ancestors left two centuries ago.

By habit, I ate in our restaurant. My mother was busy there and would seldom cook at home. Besides, we were living around the corner, at 3 rue de La Harpe, and my college, Lycee Louis-le-Grand, was twenty minutes' walking distance away.

Very often my mother would ask me if I had my lunch, and more than once I would tell her, "I don't remember!" She would start asking the waiters, to see if any of them served me my meal, and quite often everybody laughed and came to the conclusion that I didn't eat at all.

During my entire life, even in difficult moments during war or expeditions, food has never been my preoccupation, and most of the time, it is rather a social event to be seated at a table, the food being of no importance at all.

One pleasant situation arose when my friend from Neuilly, Andre Hagron, came to study photography at the "Photo School" on Vaugirard street. After a short while, he became a steady customer at the Caucase, where we had our lunch together every day.

Although Andre and I had opposite ideas, it never disturbed us, nor did it create any inconvenience in our friendship. He was very logical in his thinking, without any passion, and that quality allowed us to enjoy very interesting conversations devoid of any hatred or ill feelings.

At that time, the future French President Mitterand never suspected that he would one day attain the honor of occupying such a distinguished position in history! He was then just an unknown student at a religious institute close to Andre's school. Both of the colleges were situated close to each other, enabling my friend and Mitterand to develop a life-long, lasting personal friendship.

Chapter 15

The year 1935 started ominously for many civilized countries, causing them to feel that they were living in an environment that was saturated with imminent danger. Hitler monopolized the radio, preferring Sunday to generate a moment of euphoria among the German people and anguish in most other parts of the globe. On March 7, the Fuehrer demonstrated his bellicose temperament, occupying all of the Rhineland with his newly formed army, paying no attention to the timid protests of the French and British.

In the United States, Roosevelt succeeded in reinforcing the American people's confidence, improving the living conditions and mainly creating many jobs, putting the sad memories of the Depression behind the people, one of the worst depressions the country ever had.

The Americans at that time had no army of any consideration and consequently in the international arena had no important role, for America was in no condition to raise its voice against the German aggression.

A lot of disturbances occurred in Spain, similar to those happenings in France, with constant and seemingly endless workers' strikes. The Italian fascists were getting closer to their German colleagues and to Japan, which was already putting its imperialistic ambitions in practice in Asia.

It was at this time that I was persuaded more than ever of the strength of my political convictions. A couple of years previously, I had discovered some literature that clarified my still-hazy thinking. The first author to perform this service was Diderot. I was delighted to discover that Baboeuf was the father of Communism, an ideal born during the French Revolution. I loved to read about Marat, who called himself "The Friend of the People" and ended up being murdered by the countess de Corday in his famous bathtub, in which he spent most of the time seeking relief from his scabies.

Rousseau never impressed me, because of his vacillation regarding religion; at that time, I was already a convinced atheist, and I couldn't even imagine the possibility of a divine existence. That was the reason I couldn't stop devouring everything written by Voltaire, who clarified many of my doubts, not only with reference to my spiritual convictions, but also regarding the sense of life itself.

I discovered also that I didn't need to be always right and that I had the right to be wrong, chiefly to be able to admit and accept ridiculous situations that had disturbed me in the past.

I was delighted to see how Voltaire could face any situation, no matter how humiliating it was, as in the case of his mistress Julienne, who in turn had a lover, the baron de Breux. When she became pregnant, Voltaire sent to all of his friends in Paris a letter saying, "The countess Julienne, the baron de Breux and I have the pleasure to announce to you that very soon we will have a child!"

My father, instead of saying that he was atheist, always bragged that he was "voltairian."

I had an extreme passion for psychology, especially for everything related to the mind, and my eyes were swallowing books written by Paul Jago, Jung, Freud, and above all, William James. James, the American thinker, was in the last century the precursor of psychoanalysis.

For a short period of time, I had been dominated by the almost sickening sentimentalism of Chenier, Lamartine, Chateaubriand, Heine, Turguenev, and some others, but fortunately I found new contemporary authors like Victor Hugo, Dostoievsky, Pushkin, Gorki, Leon Tolstoy, Jack London, Cooper, Bernard Shaw, and many more who shook me out of my sentimental and romantic mood.

When I discovered Nietzsche, I could say that I came to a new turn in my life. I think that I read everything written by Nietzsche, and I cannot remember how many times I read "Thus spoke Zarathustra," in several idioms. I was delighted to learn that when he had been questioned about his opinion regarding Karl Marx's *Das Capital*, Nietzsche said, "First you need to change the man, before you change the system!" I would never forget this definition, which has been strengthened in every country where too much power has been given to one person, no matter how good his intentions.

I always remembered what my friend Jacques Trambeau said: "Power corrupts man." Unfortunately, too many people think that Nietzsche inspired Hitler in his idealism about the "Superman." It is a big mistake, because the German philosopher was talking about an intellectual superiority, regardless of race. Many times in his books, he laughed at and mocked the German race, saying that it could learn a lot from the Jews.

It was then that I started feeling that I was a man and that I thought I understood the meaning of life itself. I was considering myself mature and ready to start struggling to accomplish my revolutionary mission.

My father foresaw the war, but like the majority of the people living in France at that time, he too thought that the Allies would defeat the Germans in six months. I never understood where this idea came from.

My diverse activities in general were engaging all my time, and I was enjoying life as if I were eating it. There is no doubt that at that age, it seemed as if I would never get older and that these happy moments would last forever.

I didn't completely give up sports, and I did win the fencing championship in Paris. I was also playing soccer, becoming captain of a team. I was practicing boxing and sometimes came home with a black eye, a red nose, and a pained body. I wanted to strengthen myself and to be "ready" for "our" revolution.

As so many other left-wing youngsters, I dreamed of barricades and was deeply immersed in the idealism in France in 1789 and the feats of the Russians in 1917.

At that time, the people were living with intensity, as if tomorrow would never come. Everyone was living life 24 hours per day, because Paris never goes to sleep, and at any time there is always a place to have a drink, to have a good time, or to find women.

I kept on devouring books of philosophy and politics, leaving unfortunately and in spite of my will, my studies abandoned. Politics was now the passion of my life.

Book 3

Spain

Chapter 1

As in the previous year, we spent the first three weeks of summer vacation in the city of Dax. This is a town situated in the southwestern part of France, close to the Spanish border, well known for the beneficial mineral water bursting out of natural springs and the curing effects of its black mud.

My sister Maya and I hated this place. We referred to it as "sick peoples town," and we were anxious to receive "compensation" for our patience in the form of spending the rest of the vacation on the beach, which this year would be at St. Jean de Luz on the Atlantic Ocean. Our mother was suffering from an acute rheumatism, and her doctor recommended taking a cure of mineral water and mud at Dax, to which we were returning for the third time.

Through the local people, we learned that the place had been discovered more than 2,000 years ago by the Romans. It happened after one of those numerous battles waged against the native Gallics. Some of the wounded Roman soldiers were left behind, and miraculously they had been cured by submerging their injured bodies into the hot water coming out of huge springs. The Romans also realized that those who would apply the hot, heavy mud coming out of this same running source were healing quickly. This area was named Ax by the Romans. They built a few houses and roads, as they always did to facilitate access to newly conquered places, and they regularly returned to cure their maladies. Thereafter, they came again with friends and relatives, making the place famous. They were convinced that their bodies were rejuvenating and that the arthritis and other bone or joint ailments were cured, thanks to the miraculous mud and water.

Little by little, this hamlet grew to a city, and several centuries later, when it became a Frankish metropolis, it was known as Dax. The name was much more in accordance with the phonetics of the French language.

In the central square of the town, the water of this Roman source continues to flow through a modern faucet. Not so long ago, the women from the neighborhood were still coming to it to do their laundry. The doctors recommended as a cure that patients come once a year for a period of three weeks' treatment, during three consecutive years. This was our third and last trip to Dax. Our mother was happy, as her health had much improved. My father, too, was happy, but for more egotistical reasons, for he was sybaritic.

Our restaurant in the Latin Quarter was completely under my mother's control. She needed to be in good health, because she was the one who was carrying all the load of this responsibility. My father was a man of impeccable taste who never would wear the same suit two days in succession. He concentrated all his attention on public relations with the customers, and I must add that his preference was to greet the gentle sex, avoiding managing major business obligations and decisions. On rare occasions, I

had seen him in the kitchen taking care of the menu or ordering needed restaurant supplies. His favorite place was at the bar, alternating his time between the customers and Boris, his Armenian barman, with whom he liked to have an "aperitif."

Both my parents were feeling content for different reasons—my mother for being able to return to her obligations concerning the restaurant she loved, and my father for resuming his usual pleasant style of life. Our parents were very considerate with regard to me and my sister, saying that we shouldn't be penalized because of our mother's sickness by wasting three boring weeks in Dax, and consequently we deserved "compensation."

My father, who adored the beach, always insisted, saying that we should do it for the "children," although he was yearning to go to swim more than any of us. We started the second part of our vacation in a magnificent way at St. Jean de Luz, in a hotel located in front of the beach, which delighted us. All our family had an atavistic attraction to the sea, perhaps because for several generations, all the members of our families on both sides had been born near the Black Sea shores, in Odessa.

It was at the beginning of August 1936, the weather was stunning, and the waves close to the beach were low, allowing us to swim and remain in the water for long periods of time. Suddenly, early one day, we heard coming from the Spanish border a languid thundering of heavy gunfire. Immediately, everyone's mood changed. The vacationing spirit disappeared abruptly, replaced by a feeling bordering close to a premonition of disaster. We all knew that Spain had free elections in which the Popular Front, uniting republicans, socialists, communists, and anarchists, won by a great majority. We learned also, by the newspapers, that General Franco, who was stationed in Morocco as punishment, invaded Spain with his troops, the Foreign Legion and the Moors, not recognizing the legitimacy of the elections, in which the right wing lost.

We also knew that President Manuel Azana requested the aid of the democracies to fight the rebellious fascists, saying: "In the mountains of Guadarrama we are protecting Paris by defending Madrid!" I was very much aware of all that was occurring. Before we left Paris for our vacation, I participated with my friend Rene Regal and some other companions from The Federal Union of Students from the Latin Quarter in a meeting related to the danger that was threatening the Spanish Republic.

We also knew that the Spanish reactionary generals rebelled against the Popular Front on July 18, 1936, in Ceuta, Morocco. The General Famjul didn't have the same luck when he revolted in Madrid. He tried to put the city under his control, was routed with his followers, and was killed on the spot.

On July 21, the German government sent airplanes that landed in Tetouan (Morocco). Giral's government asked France to deliver the weapons that had been purchased and paid for previously. Blum's administration, terrified by Hitler, preferred to ignore the request. When Giral was told of the decision, he gave orders to deliver the weapons from Madrid's arsenal and to allow the people to fight against the fascists.

Meanwhile, in Sevilla, General Yague paraded with 4,500 soldiers ready to attack the republican forces entrenched in Madrid, and German warships helped to transport Franco's armed forces from Morocco to Spain. During the very first days of August, Germany sent by ship via Lisbon 150 of its best pilots, anticipating the shipment of the Escadrille Condor, which inflicted so much destruction and suffering on the Spanish people.

We knew all the details. All that was under way in Spain was public knowledge. Our eyes were devouring the newspapers we could obtain, and in the hotel we gathered in the evenings to listen to the latest news transmitted by the radio. Everything was very well known by everyone, but we were looking at it as if it were happening in another world. It seemed far away from us, even though it was just on the other side of the Pyrenees.

For this reason, when we heard the reverberation of the guns, we remained perplexed, moved, and also frightened. It was like one day waking up from a lethargy, then understanding for the first time that all that was real and was truly happening near us on the other side of the border. We were now understanding the importance of the situation, while the boom of the artillery was intensifying. There couldn't be any doubt anymore that something very serious was developing in Spain, and we could sense that a new element, beginning from this very moment, would influence and change our lives forever.

We youngsters from the Parisian Latin Quarter, like so many other activists in the world, knew in advance what would happen. The majority of the inhabitants on the earth learned only ten years later, and many paid with their own lives. They realized too late that if we had stopped the arrogance and brutality of fascism in Spain, we could have avoided the horrors of World War II, where 56 million people perished! Nor would we be lamenting the shameful Holocaust, which destroyed millions of human beings in concentration camps, where half of them, for no other reason than being Jews, were slaughtered. We could have prevented this inhumanity, but we didn't! Unfortunately, Daladier, Laval, Blum, and Chamberlain, the leaders of the great powers, were paralyzed. Roosevelt was undecided!

All of them were frozen with fear of Hitler, including his buddy Mussolini, as was his ideological opponent, Stalin. The entire world didn't dare to provoke Hitler, who, after all, was the only one who could help them to get rid of something capitalism considered worse than fascism: communism!

Socialism was succeeding in the Soviet Union, and there was the possibility of extending the system to other countries. This idea was causing the capitalists to become hysterical. It would have been easy to avoid the slaughter that happened in Spain. It was sufficient merely to apply the international laws of the Conventions and deliver to the legally elected government of Spain the purchased arms, which would in turn have allowed them to suppress the military fascists' insurrection.

At the beginning of the conflagration, the so-called democracies began by characterizing General Franco's forces as "Nationalists, when in reality they were rebels and so were called from the moment of the uprising.

We could have stopped this barbarity and stopped Hitler in Spain, but too many interests were involved, and the most important of all of them was the fear of communism. The international proletariat wasn't without stain. It reacted too late, in a timid way. While the heroic Spanish people were bleeding in an unequal struggle against fascism, of the three billion proletarians from our planet, only 42,000 volunteers from 52 countries came to integrate the International Brigades to fight for the real democratic ideal.

Too many factors were helping Hitler, amid the fear of communism that he promised to destroy. The most important one was greed. Wherever a struggle or a fight

emerges, human vultures (could they be called human?) always appear ready to make fast and easy money on other people's blood: "It's human nature!" my father-in-law Lou Wasserman would have said. August 6, 1936, remained a date deeply incrusting in the lives of those who were on the beach that day close to the Spanish border.

It was also important for a few persons who were sympathetic to Franco's rebel cause. We had several of those Catholics in the hotel, who were not concealing their joy upon learning that the 'frankists' were occupying more Spanish territories.

We left the beach earlier that day, all of us serious, angry, and preoccupied. I saw my father giving me side glances, knowing that I was active in left-wing groups in Paris. I suspected that he was reading my mind, guessing what was going on inside myself. He had his own suspicions, and moving his head in his very peculiar way, he said without addressing himself to anyone in particular: "Yes! I recognize it! It brings to my mind the memory of what happened in Russia in 1917, and I hope that over there," pointing with his head again in the direction of Spain, "I hope it will not be as bloody as it was in our country, where several million people died fighting, a few more million starved to death, leaving about eight million orphans hungry, powerless, and annihilated on every corner."

As usual, my mother felt that she also needed to add to the observation: "Even now, I remember those poor three Russians hanged by the French soldiers in Odessa!"

"They were not French," replied my father one more time, because this argument was always brought up from time to time and had never had been resolved.

"Yes! They were French," interrupted my mother with fervor. "You were fighting somewhere on the front. It was in 1919, and I was passing by the church, the one called 'The New,' with Misha in my arms. Suddenly appeared from nowhere these French soldiers, easy to recognize for being the only ones wearing blue uniforms. They were dragging these three poor Russian workers who were shaking in fear. The French were insulting and beating them, while laughing as if it were amusing. When they reached the church, they hung them with cords tied up to an electrical pole!"

"You might be right; I wasn't in Odessa. We were fighting against Petliura in the Ukraine at that time. I learned then that the French enlisted man Andre Marty incited the French sailors to rebellion and the government of that country called their ships back home, fearing that Russian Communism could spread over all of France." Later, he added, "I always admired Andre Marty, and now he is one of the French Communist Party's leader. At that time, the angry French military occupation forces, when retreating, received orders to harshly punish anybody found opposing them. I assume that these poor people that you are talking about were victims of the circumstances. Unfortunately, it happened to too many of them!"

My father became very thoughtful and kept on remembering episodes from the Russian Civil War. "The Russian tsar sent 100,000 soldiers to France in 1915 to help the French fight against the Germans, but in 1917, when the Revolution erupted, many of those soldiers asked permission to return to their country to participate in their motherland's internal struggle, or to go home to protect their families, but this authorization had been denied by the French government. When some of these soldiers protested, the French authorities arrested the "rebellious" and ten thousand of them were shot on the spot by a firing squad. Of course, nobody wants to talk about this episode,

and much less the French."

When my father finished his sentence, he looked at me, knowing that I was always taking the side of the French, to the point that he kept on calling me ironically *frantzuz*, meaning "French" in Russian.

Suddenly changing the conversation, as my mother could do quite often and very easily, she asked my father, "What happened to Petliura? I know that he was killed, but I don't remember when!"

"I told you several times already that Semion Petliura, the leader and commander of the Ukrainian Nationalists, was shot in Paris on May 25, 1926," answered my very annoyed father, who hated to repeat the same thing several times. "I remember very well this date, because I was near that area, with some Russian friends who had emigrated to Argentina. We were celebrating Argentina's independence day when we heard shots, then saw a lot of people running. We learned then that it was a young Polish Jew who killed him, to avenge his parents who presumably had been murdered by Petliura's soldiers during a pogrom."

My parents lived with great intensity, and I was never bored by listening to them make comments or even argue about events that happened during the Russian Revolution. I loved to get acquainted with the historical moments that they witnessed, not only because they had a certain particular way of recounting them, which was almost theatrical, but also because I could learn so much about Russian history, sometimes with two different versions. This fascinated me.

Without any logic or reason, perhaps only because of my constant contact with the French environment, I looked with contempt at everything Russian, to the point that I would speak only French with my sister. This irritated my parents, and they never tired of repeating to us, "In this house only Russian is spoken!"

Even today, I lament my arrogance, because I not only missed the opportunity to have enjoyed living with these last Russian aristocrats who survived in France, but I also did not take advantage of the opportunity to learn more about the culture of my countrymen. It is only now, after so many years, that I can appreciate this Russian spirit, without understanding, nevertheless, how these nobles, by birth and by lineage, being good-natured souls, could have endured all their vicissitudes as refugees.

Most of them, who never worked in their lives, were earning their bread with their hands, as factory workers or in whatever work they could find. Old colonels from the Tsars' Guard were nightclub doormen; baronesses and countesses from old families were employed as maids and seamstresses; and unfortunately, a very few desperate younger ones became prostitutes. Many elegant noblemen became escorts to wealthy French women.

The third part of the Paris taxi drivers were young Russian ex-officers, almost all of them nobles, but without profession nor skill, who never worked before and were earning their living as they could, doing it with humor and the constant Slavic smile on their faces. They would say, "God will provide the bread we need!"

Paris had at that time more than forty Russian restaurants, and all of them had music, balalaika, or Cossack choirs. Even in St. Jean de Luz, there existed a little Russian restaurant that we visited a couple of times, until my father, after talking with the owner, realized that he was a monarchist anti-Semite, and we stopped patronizing it. My father hated the monarchists, blaming them for everything that was happening in Russia;

he was in love with the French type of democracy.

It was with joy that I learned many years later that besides the fact that a few Russians went to fight on Franco's side due to the hatred they held toward communism, several hybrids of other Russian emigres living in France enlisted in the International Brigades to fight for the Spanish Republic, mainly in the XIth International Brigade, where the Slavs prevailed.

We had only a few more days to enjoy our vacation on this beautiful beach, and soon we would be back in Paris, each one of us returning to his daily routine.

Chapter 2

When we were back in Paris in the Latin Quarter, I realized at once that the mood of the people had changed, and almost all the conversation was about the military rebellion in Spain. Before I went to the Lycee Louis-le-Grand to enquire about our schedule of studies for the bachelorship, I went to the offices of our students' organization to get acquainted with the latest news.

Our restaurant, just as our home, was close to St. Michel's Square, which was the center of my activities and the ground of our actions, which were taking place as far as Jardin de Luxembourg. We walked scrupulously only on the south side of St. Michel Boulevard. With a show of affection, we used to call St. Michel Boulevard "Boul Mich," which was in the 5th district.

It is now amazing to think, after so many years, that we never had even the idea of crossing the street and strolling on the sidewalk on the other side. This belonged to the 6th district, otherwise regarded as the enemy's turf. It was an almost unknown territory, and we passed it only when our objective was to go to the Jardin Luxembourg, because we had no other alternative.

Walking on the "Boul Mich" was like going to a friends' gathering. Colleagues would start appearing as soon as I turned the corner of rue La Harpe. In a little while, we were all in sight, two, three, then up to five walking together, but because of the traffic, we soon had to split up and form smaller groups, so as to be able to pursue our uninterrupted chats. The Seine River, Notre Dame Cathedral, and the sidewalk of the famous Boulevard were all so dear to our everyday activities that we couldn't imagine that life could be possible far away from there.

In the Latin Quarter, "Boul Mich" was the place where we grew up as a different type of Parisians, where we had our first strolls with a girl, and where we could share confidential information or our most intimate secrets, not to mention our heroic feats when we had fistfights with the "rotten," as we called the right wing. I have no doubt that was exactly what they were calling us, too. Only those who lived there are able to understand this unique sensation of belonging intimately, heart and soul, to this thousands-years-old corner, impossible to forget!

This place was our arena, our battlefield, because from the political point of view, we couldn't take it for granted that it was our conquered territory, and even with our "macho" spirit, we needed to have the strength to impose our ideological convictions.

Quite often, the monarchists appeared, selling their Action Francaise newspaper. They were accompanied by about twenty well-groomed bodyguards, the Jeunesse Patriotes, affiliated with the French fascists. Occasionally, some middle-aged, respectable gentlemen, their chests covered with medals, right-wing veterans of the First World War, the Croix de Feu, would come to parade in our sector. Most of them were about forty years old, and we called them "the old men."

These political participants sold their newspapers not for profit, but rather as a show of their beliefs and also as a challenge to us. Of course, we wouldn't be humbled, and we too would come to "Boul Mich" to sell our red literature in the same way, protected by our guards and with the same bellicose attitude.

It was a habit, almost a tradition, to respond when any political party—

Democrat, Socialist, or Communist—"invited" us students from the UFE to send some volunteers to protect vendors selling papers of our political inclination or to give a hand in any distant area meeting. We knew very well that these "sorties" to sell political newspapers would inevitably end up in a fistfight. Those of us physically more able and most resolved were always expected to be "volunteers" for those tasks.

When we foresaw the probability of a major confrontation with the fascists (already, we were calling those of the right wing by that term), other groups came to help us. Many of our supporters were not Marxists, but they were our allies, including LICA (International League Against Anti-Semitism). LICA's leader, whose name was Core, was a huge young Jewish wrestling champ whose presence on our side frightened more than one of those dandies who called themselves the "Real French."

When the squabbles started and the street became a real battlefield, the civilians, mainly women, would start screaming, while the older people would curse us. Immediately, we would hear the sirens of the police cars. The police would invade the area, arresting anybody who happened to be close to them. Those of us who were in good physical shape, without distinction of political preference, would run away; as the saying goes, "Legs, for what do I have you?"

I saw a lot of changes in Paris, mainly in the activities of my friends from the UFE, who were collecting money for the Spanish Republic in its fight against the fascists. We had meetings in all areas of Paris, day and night, with arguments erupting on every corner.

Inside the students' organization, we had our own little group, consisting of my best friend Rene Rigal, from the Lycee; Admiral, the husky, short Trotskyite who loved the fistfights; and "Snow Ball," the black Senegalese student of medicine who always laughed and made jokes. Not only did "Snow Ball" not object to the nickname we gave him because his real name was very difficult to pronounce, but he also enjoyed it. We envied him, because he was living with a beautiful blonde in a small, rundown, dirty room, where both were very happy. We liked him very much, even though we weren't sure of his convictions and we knew that we couldn't count on him in any emergency situation, because he didn't want to be involved, nor was he trying to help the Spanish republicans.

The Syrian Jew Paul Besu, another classmate from the Lycee, was always ready to help us, even though he was small and didn't have his residence papers in order.. He received many beatings, because he didn't know how to fight with his fists as we did, but he never showed cowardice. For that, we liked him very much. Also in our clique was Jacques Tambeau, the anarchist student at the Sorbonne. Sometimes others would join us, but most of the time we hung together as a group.

During one of these routine strolls on "Boul Mich," Admiral became very solemn and told us with emotion that he was going to Spain. All of us shuddered, asking him, "How come? What happened?" In a very serious tone, he answered, "It's not enough to send money to Spain, while our comrades are dying in an unequal struggle." Then he added, "We are forming groups of volunteers to go fight the fascists. We have practiced enough here on the streets, and it's about time to start the real fight against the people's oppressors; otherwise, through our complacency, we will soon let the fascists be the masters of the world!"

I returned late from St. Jean de Luz and therefore missed the unforgettable

meeting at the Velodrome Buffalo in Paris on August 15, when Maurice Thorez and Andre Marty fascinated an enthusiastic crowd of thousands with their speeches. It was then that the historical call to the working people had been made, asking them to send volunteers to Spain to fight for the Republic.

I was lucky enough, nevertheless, to assist on September 3, 1936 at the Vel d'Hiv and to listen to the emotional appeal made by Pasionaria. She issued her cry of war against the passivity of the democracies and asked us, the French people, to help the Spanish, who were in danger of plain annihilation by the well-armed fascist forces. She spoke in Spanish, a language that I didn't speak at that time, but we were listening to the simultaneous translation in French broadcast through the microphone. The passion in her voice and her strong intonations filled us with euphoria, and I will never forget that day. Along with Thorez, the Pasionaria will always be one of my venerated heroes.

After all these events, a powerful struggle began to boil inside me, and finally I decided that I also needed to go to Spain to fight against fascism, as my friend Admiral had done. I was 16 years old, a minor. Consequently, it was out of the question to speak to my parents about my intention. They would surely oppose my decision and could take some steps to block my going to Spain.

Meanwhile, our students' club became like a bee's hive, swarming with people coming to talk about what was preoccupying all of us, the military rebellion in Spain.

After succeeding in getting several addresses where those who wanted to volunteer to fight for the Spanish Republic were recruited, I decided to go to each one of them. There was an address that I discarded; it was given to me by Admiral and was the office of the POUM, which we considered as "traitors." Very proud of myself, with my chin up, I went to the Communist Party Headquarters, knowing that the Communists were very well organized. The first question they asked me was about my age and whether I had been my drafted or had any military training. When I answered no, they said, almost with contempt, "We don't want to send crybabies over there. We are not babysitters. We need already formed men with fighting experience."

Then the old man at the desk said with more kindness, "The fascists have mercenaries on their side, and the struggle will be rough! It is not the same as going to a Mardi Gras party! In Spain, the future of the working class will be decided, and it is imperative for us to send our best comrades, ready to fight and to die, if necessary!" I was fuming, after returning from each one of the recruitment offices with the same result, and I was afraid that I would miss the opportunity to participate in this historical and important event for the future of mankind.

At that point, Spain was the center of the world, and I was convinced that every Marxist had to go there to fight for democracy. I was afraid that I could be considered a coward if I remained in France with my arms crossed.

I wasn't the only one who was feeling such an anxiety to fraternize with the Spanish people. While not everybody felt the obligation to participate in the conflict directly, many were helping in various other ways. Many were collecting money, cigarettes, and cans of food, and the girls were placing love letters inside the parcels directed to the republicans.

Several committees to help the Spanish Republic appeared in Paris, and several of my friends were actively involved in helping them. It wasn't enough for me; I

was looking for action, and I was willing to participate personally in the fight.

I continued to lie to my parents, who were taking for granted that I was going to college during my last year for my bachelorship test. Since I had returned from our vacation, I ran from one place to the next, all the time thinking only about Spain, as if it were a personal matter that I alone could solve, while my attention to my studies was suffering.

One day when I was completely downcast at the students' club headquarters, I bumped into Jacques Trambeau, who I assumed would now be in Spain.

"What are you doing here? I thought that you were already fighting in Spain?" I asked him. "Not yet!" said Jacques. "Tomorrow I am leaving with a convoy, and I came to say goodbye to the comrades! I am happy that I saw you too before I left!" Very disturbed, and full of emotion, I dragged him to a corner, where nobody could listen to us, and I told him, "I want to go to fight in Spain too, but nobody wants to take me because of my age! I am desperate!"

"Why don't you go to the Anarchist Federation where I enlisted! For sure they will take you! Why don't you come tomorrow to our farewell, and I will introduce you to the comrades from the committee!" He jotted down the address of the Anarchists' headquarters on a piece of paper. It was the site from which he would be leaving.

The place was close to the Gare du Nord railroad, but as much as I wanted to say goodbye to Jacques and at the same time meet the people who would enroll me as a volunteer to go to Spain, my parents decided that same day to dine with some friends. They wouldn't accept any excuse for me not to join them.

But two days later, full of hope, I climbed the two flights of stairs in an old building, the address of which had been given to me by Jacques, and I reached the office, where the door was wide open.

I knocked, but no one answered. Then, hearing voices coming from another room, I walked inside. I reached a shabby desk at which sat a fat middle-aged man with a red nose, a sure indication of a "red wine lover."

Without even looking at me and puffing on his cigarette, he continued to write something on a ledger, while listening to somebody who was talking to him from another room. He asked me, "What do you want, comrade?"

I was trembling, and in a low voice I told him, "I want to go to fight in Spain!" The fat man, still without looking at me and not at all surprised at my presence, as if it were normal for me to be there, answered, "Come back next week, and you will be registered with a group of other comrades who are going to Spain." Then, for the first time, he lifted his face to look at me, still without asking my age, my name, or whether I had gone through the military draft.

He caught me staring with curiosity at the posters glued on the walls. He said, smiling, "You can look around, and if you want to buy books we have several of them on sale." A particular book caught my eyes. The title was *Makhno's Anarchism*, and it brought to my mind the memory of my participation in the Ukrainian anarchist leader's funeral.

I couldn't believe what I had just heard from the fat man! I could have kissed him for accepting me to go to fight for the Spanish democracy. When I came back the following week, according to the fat man's instructions, in his place sat an old, tall, skinny man who with an ironical smile said that the departure was projected for October

6th. He asked me to fill out an application, and when I did, I listed my age as 20 years. In the space for my name I wrote Georges Jorat, hoping my parents would not be able to trace me.

This new comrade at the desk was Raymond, an anarchist from an old stock. A carpenter by trade, he volunteered to take care of the office in his spare time. He told me that if I wanted to make good use of time and be productive, I could help them wrap guns purchased in France, which they were sending by train to the comrades in Barcelona.

With much eagerness, while my parents assumed that I was going to the college, I went every morning to this libertarian headquarters, where for an entire week I wrapped the old World War I used Lebel guns. Then, several of us would put them in wooden boxes and take them to the railroad station to be shipped to Perpignan. From there, the local comrades would be taking them to the other side of the Pyrennees mountains in Spain.

When this so-awaited and fortunate October 6th arrived, as soon as I saw my parents heading to the restaurant, I put a note that I had written weeks before on the table. It said, "Dear parents, I know that this decision of mine will cause you a great deal of pain, but at this moment, the destiny of mankind is at stake, and I wouldn't forgive myself for not having participated in this historical and final fight for democracy, which is now taking place in Spain. My conscience won't let me live in peace if I don't perform this duty of a free man. When I return after the victory, the world will be more secure and more beautiful for everybody. I love you and kiss the three of you, Your Son."

Chapter 3

Hurriedly, I grabbed a few personal belongings that I threw in a little bag. Saddened, I left the apartment to take the subway heading to the Gare du Nord, which was close to the Anarchist Federation's headquarters. A small truck was parked close to the sidewalk where our office was, and about thirty people were scattered around. Everybody seemed to be very moved. Several women with cheeks wet with tears were standing around. I knew that we were twelve volunteers; consequently, the rest of the people there had to be friends or relatives who had come to say goodbye to those who were leaving.

The one who I guessed would be our leader seemed to know everybody. People called him by the nickname Bouboule. He was short, with a prominent belly, and he appeared to be middle-aged and full of enthusiasm. It was evident that he was accustomed to command, because he was the only one giving orders and preparing us for the departure.

Much later, I heard the rumor that Bouboule's real name was Charles Daumier and that he belonged to the notorious Boneau's gang, which years ago assaulted a bank from which a great amount of money had been robbed, leaving several dead at the scene, but none of the gang had ever been caught.

The stories about the Boneau gang had appeared on the front pages of all the newspapers at the time during my childhood, and I heard a lot of rumors circulating about its deeds. It was regarded as a reenactment of the Robin Hood legend, in which gang members robbed the rich to help the poor.

Bouboule, whom we accepted as our leader, calling us by name and gave each of us a 5- peseta silver coin, saying with sarcasm, "It's for our first expenses in Spain, comrade!"

The time arrived for the start of our odyssey, and our driver, an older Parisian with an extinguished cigarette butt hanging on his lower lip, hurried us to climb onto the bed of the small truck.

At that moment, a general outpouring of human sentiment exploded, and all the families started hugging and kissing each other, while the women could not control themselves anymore, erupting in loud sobs and shedding tears that couldn't be stopped.

Only one friend came to say goodbye to me. He was Rene Rigal. I didn't want to take the risk of telling other friends about my leaving, afraid that through an indiscretion the news of my departure would reach my parents.

Rene brought me a grocery bag full of fruit. We embraced, and I climbed into the truck. When all of us were inside the closed vehicle and we tried to find a place to sit, we realized at once, with anger, that the truck bed was too small for the twelve of us. The platform was flat, without seats, and we tried to accommodate ourselves on the floor as best we could, even though it was very uncomfortable. In any case, it was now too late to change our minds. We were already leaving Paris, riding on the road heading south. There was nothing we could do to improve the situation that dampened our mood. It was getting dark, and we were on our way.

Bouboule was the only lucky one; he sat on the front seat beside the driver, who, as usual, had an extinguished cigarette butt hanging from the corner of his mouth.

Not only was the pickup small, but also the springs must have been so old and worn out that we never stopped bouncing, and as squeezed as we were, very soon arguments and other expressions of hostility broke out.

I was sitting in a corner close to the driver's window; at one side of me was the very sociable Alfred Rappaport, who immediately started telling me the story of his family. Alfred was the first companion I met. His mother was Ukrainian and his father a Russian Jew. Both had been revolutionaries in Russia, and when they experienced police oppression, they took advantage of an opportunity to escape to France.

His father was an anarchist, and Alfred, who was born in France, admired his father, saying with pride that he was pursuing the same beliefs and following his father's footsteps. It brought to my mind the memory of my Boyardville friend Edmund Jaba, whose parents endured the same persecution.

The companion sitting on my other side was apparently at least thirty years old, with dark skin and the look of an Arab or a Spanish citizen. We learned later that he was Catalan and that his name was Juan Mayol Ballester. He was an anarchist who participated in the April 14, 1931 Revolution, when the Second Spanish Republic was born. Sought for a terroristic act, he had to escape to France, where he had been living.

Juan looked very sad, and I understood him perfectly, because he was living in Paris with a beautiful girl whom I saw profusely shedding tears as our truck moved out. When I asked Juan if she was his wife, he told me that they had been living together for five years. They had a three-year-old boy, and Juan was sorry to leave her, but he felt that his duty as a libertarian was calling him to Spain.

The volunteer sitting in front of me was a Parisian construction worker, Pierre Carpentier, about 25 years of age. He was single and a convinced Marxist who wanted to go fight fascism in Spain. I couldn't distinguish the other travelers, because the old pickup's light bulb was very weak, and moreover, the high spirits had abated and everyone seemed to be sleeping.

We stopped in the middle of the night to urinate on the side of the road, then resumed our trip, without food or even a glass of water, and I was thirsty. I had eaten already, sharing with my companions the five oranges that Rene brought to me, and my mouth was dry. When we started complaining, Bouboule, from his front seat, asked us to be patient, saying that we would be in Perpignan very soon. In addition, he scolded us, emphasizing that if we were going to fight the fascists, we should immediately start practicing by getting used to the rigors of war.

We answered him that we weren't as yet in Spain, didn't wear the uniform, and didn't have the weapons to be considered warriors. We reached Perpignan almost at dawn, and all of us rushed to the water faucets and the restrooms. We stopped in the outskirts of the city, in front of an old, abandoned, half-destroyed hospital, where we were told to remain.

I was too tired to ask more questions, understanding that it was the place where those who were going to Spain were staying; I fell over an old, dirty mattress within my reach, and, without undressing, I fell into a deep, dead sleep.

I woke up suddenly. It was still dark outside, and I heard voices and screams; opening my eyes, I saw somebody lighting a candle, because the building didn't have electricity. Then, as if I still was sleeping and dreaming, a huge man that I remembered seeing in our truck when we were leaving Paris appeared.

During the trip, he had sat on the other side of the pickup, and I didn't have an opportunity to talk to or see him with greater attention. When I had seen him the first time, his empty look had attracted my attention. The candle's poor light now illuminated him as he stood close to the window. It was evident that he was trying to get loose from the companions who were trying to subdue him, and I could see blood running down his arm.

From what I heard said or rather shouted by several people, who had just awakened from a deep sleep like myself, I gathered that he tried to commit suicide by cutting his wrist. Realizing that he had failed to kill himself, he wanted to throw himself out of the window; meanwhile, he was yelling loudly, "Leave me alone; I cannot take this rotten life anymore!" He was a big, strong guy who succeeded by pushing hard in getting rid of those who were striving to subdue him, and before the other companions had a chance to interpose, he jumped out of the window. We were located on the third floor, and we could see him from there, smashed on the sidewalk and lying motionless near the building.

Nevertheless, when several comrades went running down the steps outside, expecting to find him dead, they saw him stand up, scream, and move his arms as if nothing had happened. We had received strict orders not to attract anybody's attention, so as not arouse suspicions that we were going to Spain. It was daybreak already, and here we were with this crazy guy who was creating such a commotion. The city was waking up and people were milling around; we had no alternative but to call an ambulance. It arrived half an hour later to take him to the hospital without delay.

We never had a chance to see him again, and only much later, when we were on the front in Aragon, somebody told us that this man, unknown to all of us, went back to Paris, once released from the hospital. It was a miracle that in his fall he wasn't killed or didn't injure any part of his body.

Some comrades who pretended to know him told us that it wasn't the first time that he had tried to commit suicide. His mental problems were severe, and nobody could guess the reason for his deciding to join us to fight in Spain. Juan said, " Maybe he was looking for a place where he could be killed!"

Bouboule was raving, because our entire trip could be jeopardized. He was afraid that the police would come to investigate the matter, and there was a possibility that we could be arrested, because the law prohibited crossing the border with Spain.

I began a friendly relationship with three comrades, Pierre, Alfred and Juan. In the morning, we received a loaf of bread with a cup of coffee, and it was now lunch time and the food hadn't appeared. We four decided to explore the area and get something to eat on our own. We were not familiar with Perpignan, so we began to walk in the direction we thought led to downtown. Juan was very cautious as a result of his revolutionary life and his experience in eluding the authorities.

Suddenly, Juan said, "Here come the cops," and we saw two gendarmes riding bicycles in our direction. They passed us without a glance, and we resumed walking, now much more relaxed. Turning the corner, we saw a cafe, where we indulged ourselves with food and my companions savored a bottle of red wine.

When we returned to the building that Albert was calling our headquarters, we learned that the two gendarmes we encountered had come to the old, broken-down hospital, asked a few questions of Bouboule, pretended not to see the group of about

thirty new volunteers who had just arrived, and left as if nothing had happened. We knew that not only the French population, but also a great number of government employees were letting us cross the border, pretending not to see us, although it was against the law. We became very emotional. Then we received the news that we would be going to Spain that very night.

In the evening, some local comrades brought us sandwiches, coffee, and wine. Later, a truck arrived, larger than the one in which we travelled from Paris, and we were told to hurry up. As soon as we boarded the vehicle, we left on the spot. The truck was covered by a canvas and was moving without lights, to avoid being seen by the borderguards, for many of them were hostile to us.

Once again, we didn't have any seats on the truck platform, and we were lying on the floor, while our bodies were projected from one side to the next each time the driver had to make a turn. He was a skillful driver to be able to negotiate the dangerous mountains at night, without lights. After awhile, despite all the jerks and the roughness of the dirt road, most of us started snoozing, overcome with exhaustion. Suddenly, we saw the lights of the truck come on, and we felt that we were running downhill on a smooth road of asphalt.

It was then that Bouboule, seated comfortably at the driver's side, shouted, "Spain, comrades, here we are!" All of us woke up, and ecstatic, everybody began laughing, talking, and spontaneously singing. It was daybreak when the truck stopped at a square in front of an edifice that looked like the city hall, where many armed people were passing back and forth in all directions. We descended from the truck, tired and numb, but we were received with screams and greetings by our Spanish comrades, who shook our hands, hugged us, and smiled. We did not speak a word of or understand Spanish, and they couldn't comprehend French. It was then that we realized how important Juan was for us, for he spoke both languages fluently and became our interpreter.

Juan was feeling as though he had arrived in paradise in his Spain, but he was becoming annoyed when we interrupted him each time he wanted so badly to talk with his compatriots, as we kept asking, "What did he say? What did he say?" We learned that we were in Puigcerda, which was in the hands of the CNT/FAI, or the anarchists, who had already started applying the syndicalist system.

The castle of the richest man in town had been expropriated and converted into a hospital. The owner feared for his life and left for France or Andora, the small little republic that we could see, not too far away from where we were. Everybody assumed that he would join Franco's forces.

In the outskirts of the town was a little convent that had been closed, thus giving the nuns a chance to start a new life. Some of the nuns left town, others went to work in the hospital, some went to live with relatives or friends, and one of them married a "miliciano," one of those who came to close the monastery.

This story created laughter, and after that, the joke of the day was that each one of us wanted to have "his own little nun!" After wining and dining us, the residents lodged us in the hotel facing the square, and the following day we left by train to Barcelona.

Chapter 4

We were feeling a strange sensation inside ourselves. It was like a spiritual drunkenness, and it seemed to me that I had wings, so that I was convinced that it was impossible to fill me up with more happiness than I already had.

All the people of Puigcerda came to the railroad station to say goodbye, not only to our small group but also to the hundreds of other volunteers who would be traveling on the same train to Barcelona.

The old locomotive pulled out, while the people on the railway platform screamed and wished us good luck and victory, restlessly waving their hats and their red and black handkerchiefs until we lost sight of them.

As we learned later, most of the guards on the train were Mexicans, who bragged that they were the first from the American Continent to join the republicans in Spain.

When our train arrived in Barcelona, we were surprised to see the large number of trucks parked around the railway station; walking around the station was an immense throng of armed people, or “milicianos,” the name given to us before we became Brigadistas. It was only after an intense search and thanks to Juan’s knowledge of the Spanish language that we located the vehicle that was waiting to take us to the Bakunin barracks, the name given to the Monjuich military headquarters.

At this time, we could appreciate and feel the strength of the masses; everywhere we saw red flags and the anarchists’ red and black flags. Monjuich was a huge barracks area built on top of a cliff. Barcelona was in clear view from there, and it appeared to be enormous, a fact confirmed by those who had been there, who also added that the city was beautiful. Juan never tired of lecturing us about everything related to anarchism and about the different divisions of political parties dominating in Spain.

The hundreds of foreign volunteers being lodged in the Bakunin barracks belonged to the FAI/CNT anarchist organization; they treated each other in a brotherly fashion, and they fraternized with all the newcomers as they arrived.

The general mood changed our spirits quickly, and we started singing anarchist songs, first in French and then later the Italian “Avanti popolo!” and of course the Spanish “If I have to live as a slave, I would rather die fighting for freedom at the barricades.”

We all felt how military life was uniting us. The food was served on time in the huge dining rooms, and we already wore the uniform of the “tercio” given to us the day we arrived. Apparently, the barracks had stocked a large number of these uniforms, because as new recruits arrived, each received one.

It didn’t take long for us to begin communicating with the comrades from the different countries represented among the troops. We found a large number of our fellow French countrymen, in addition to the many Slavs and Jews who were refugees from several countries and were living in France. The Germans formed the largest number of these, and it was evident that they were well organized.

Juan, as a good anti-militarist anarchist, laughed at the warlike discipline of the Germans, saying, “A German alone can be a good person, but put three Germans together and they will form an army and learn a quick military march.”

I liked these guys, who I learned with surprise were not anarchists, but communists; later they were integrated in the valiant and famous Thaelman Battalion of the XII International Brigade.

At that time, I still spoke good German, and I was able to converse with them, learning that many of these volunteers had been in the army, while others had escaped concentration camps to come to fight for the Spanish Republic.

Our group joined other compatriots, and soon we were already close to a hundred Frenchmen. We had that afternoon free, and four of us, new but already close friends, decided to explore Barcelona. We wore the uniform with the FAI/CNT badge and a red and black handkerchief around our necks.

There was no doubt now that we were part of the revolution itself. All of us wanted to go to the “Barrio Chino,” which reputedly was a very dangerous place dominated by underworld people. For that precise reason, since we were young and not at all worldly, we wanted to see this world famous area.

Juan had changed very much since coming to Spain. He now adopted a very dignified attitude and constantly reproached us for being too familiar with the Spanish people we met. “They are not French,” he lectured; “they don’t like to be fondled,” he would say every time we hugged somebody.

I was very much disenchanted when we arrived at the Barrio Chino; in my ingenuous mind, I thought that the revolution would change everything at once, and it saddened me to see the milicianos going with the prostitutes who swarmed all over the area, as they had done for many generations. The place was full of people of all types, not only parading prostitutes and military men but also large numbers of peddlers who offered all kinds of junk, as if it were a market day and the area was not part of a country where we had come to fight fascism and social injustice.

Juan, who was much older than the rest of us, made it clear that he didn’t approve of the activities, but he also made an effort to explain to us that a putrefaction that had existed for centuries couldn’t easily be destroyed by a revolution. It would take some time, he said, but little by little the realization of the anarcho-syndicalist ideal would triumph, allowing us to impose order on the moral chaos we observed. Prostitution, he kept saying, would disappear by itself once the reason to practice it was gone, for poverty would no longer exist and women would be able to live in dignity in a just society that we revolutionaries would build.

At that time, I was too idealistic and perhaps a little too timid to go with a prostitute. I wanted to badly, but I dared not do so. The fact was that it sickened me to think that a woman would have to go to bed with anybody for money, or even worse, could be forced to do so by a pimp. It was the first pain and disenchantment I experienced in Spain, this realization that the paths of the dominant classes were profoundly rooted in the established capitalistic order.

A few days later, our unit, which already consisted of about a hundred men, was ready to be sent to the front. Our unit was called Centuria Sebastian Faure, in honor of the French libertarian philosopher of the same name; it was composed mostly of anarchists, although we also had communists such as Marius Brunand, who became Durruti’s secretary. Even though our Hundred belonged to Durruti’s Army, it was absorbed in the Ortiz Column, whose commander was Antonio Ortiz, a carpenter by

trade. We also learned by hearsay, which spreads very fast in wartime, that we were going to the Aragon front, then being held by the anarchists.

Benvenuto Durruti quickly became a hero in our eyes. A rumor surfaced that a death sentence had been issued for him in several countries. He was a pure idealist. Once, after robbing a bank, he remitted all the money to the anarchist organization, which needed it for propaganda and a recruiting campaign. Later, so the rumor went, Durruti showed up at a comrade's house asking him to lend him some money, because he was hungry and needed to buy food. Durruti would not even think of spending a penny from his robberies on himself. He was one of those legendary personalities who inflame the imagination. He had the gift of dragging huge masses of people listening to his speeches into following him unreservedly wherever he wanted to lead them.

In addition, we heard many stories about one of his companions in the struggle, Francisco Ascaso, who was later killed during the assault on the Atarazanas Barcelonesas in July 1936. Ascaso also performed spectacular deeds of terrorism and armed bank robberies, only to bring the money to the Anarchist Solidarity to help ease the disastrous economic hardships of families where husbands or fathers were on strike or in prison.

We were delighted to learn that Durruti's wife, Emilienne Morin, nicknamed Mimi-FAI, was French. Some of our guys bragged that they had seen her and that she was beautiful. All of us hoped to see her one day, and we developed the assumption that her presence was the reason that the French anarchists were among the first to come to fight in Spain.

As I got to know my companions better, I became convinced that actually many of them were not anarchists, but almost all were Marxists who were strongly united in their desire to fight for the same cause, against the fascism that was little by little enslaving the democratic countries and becoming a threat to world peace.

Early on the morning of October 16, we hundred milicianos, wearing our brand new uniforms from the Spanish "tercio," stood squeezed together at Barcelona's railroad station, waiting for a train that would take us to Aragon.

Chapter 5

I had seen numerous railroad stations in the different countries where I had lived during my life, but I would never have imagined that such a vast number of people could assemble at one, as they did at the Barcelona station. Hundreds, perhaps thousands of persons, a great majority military, strolled from one place to the next, screaming, pushing, complimenting the girls, and singing. Everybody was singing! Most of them carried arms, and we envied them while trying to hide our feelings and making jokes, hoping that we too would soon have arms. It was the first time we had seen Bouboule humble, minus his habitual arrogance, as he talked to a stranger unknown to and seen by us for the first time.

When the train came to a stop close to the platform, the tall, unknown man shouted to us in French with a harsh Spanish accent, after the pushing and disturbance of the throng subsided: "Enter in these two wagons; remain together, and don't get scattered!" Then he shouted something in Spanish to milicianos in other groups as they tried to penetrate our wagons. His strong voice and dominant behavior made it evident that he was accustomed to command and to being obeyed; that was at least our observation, for the other soldiers obeyed him at once and went to look for seats in other wagons.

We adapted as best we could, sitting on the third-class wooden benches. Half an hour later, after prolonged whistling by the train and a big noise, the train started moving, then rushing forward, while the human wave standing on the platform shook their arms, scarves, and handkerchiefs while lifting babies to be seen, perhaps for the last time, by their fathers. Many of the women were crying, and Juan explained, "They have come to say goodbye to their men."

"What men?" I stupidly asked.

Juan looked at me, amazed, and in a recriminating tone replied, "I told you already that we anarchists don't believe in marriage; when a couple gets together, united only by feelings and not by the bond of a piece of matrimonial paper that enslaves free hearts, they are man and woman!"

As a good sixteen-year-old young man, I wanted badly to assimilate to the current environment, and even though I had not yet grasped exactly the essence of anarchism, I tried to show that I was current, and I made an attempt to ameliorate my crudeness by indicating approval of what had been said.

On our bench was a companion who came with us from Paris. I had seen him several times but had not yet had a chance to talk with him. He was Jacques Bernstein, a Polish Jew about 30 who had been living in France since childhood and consequently spoke perfect French. He was an ardent communist, and it was clear that he was not hiding that fact.

Whenever a political discussion broke out among us, Jacques would always repeat the same sentence: "We came over here to fight against the fascists, not among us." After a while, he would pursue the point further: "My parents had to escape from the Polish anti-Semitic dictator Pilsudsky, and now I have come here to struggle against the fascists

with you. You are my fighting companions, whatever your political ideology—so long as that ideology tilts to the left!”

He was of a very weak appearance, and his incessant coughing echoed throughout the railway car. He said that he had been a professor of science, but having encountered some difficulty in securing a stable job, he had decided to join us as a way of taking revenge against the Polish executioners who had killed several members of his family; he was facing the same type of people now in Spain, and he hated fascism.

Another companion from Paris seemed the oldest of us all at forty. He was the Yugoslavian Petr Bolislav. Petr was a medical doctor, but he had refused several offers to work in a military hospital. He wanted to go to the front. His complexion bore some very Slavic traits, and it was clear that he was drinking too much.

Most of our people drank a lot, but Petr drank to excess, afterward becoming very sad and absorbed in his thoughts. One day, after having too many drinks, he told me that when he lived in Strasbourg and worked at a hospital there, he performed an operation on a patient while drunk, with the result that the patient died and Petr’s medical license was revoked. The train rushed forward, producing that unique noise of wheels squeezing over rails while shaking the old, worn-out wagons from one side to the next.

We were brought sandwiches and wine, an unexpected break from the monotony of our journey. The wine in particular brought more heat to the conversations as they expanded, spread, and became more general. Everyone seemed to have something to say, and everyone wanted to tell the story of his life. After running along the river Ebro for almost an hour, the train stopped slowly at the Caspe railway station.

All of us in the car, in addition to many other milicianos, got down from the train. One more time the tall Spanish man, whose name was Lieutenant Navarro, from the regular army, one of the few officers who remained loyal to the Republic, appeared. He had been appointed to head our unit. He formed us in a square in front of Caspe’s railway station, and in a loud voice he shouted, “We don’t have time to organize our Centuria, because we need you at the front now. Form groups of eleven men each and select one as your group leader.”

Needless to say, our group consisted of Juan Mayol, Alfred Rappaport, Pierre Carpentier, Jacques Bernstein, and Petr Bolislav. We still needed more people to complete the group.

When I saw several companions scattered about, and because they hadn’t had time to befriend anybody and they appeared to be undecided, I suggested that they join us. I spotted a lost, lonely-looking youngster, slightly older than I, and I shouted to him, “Listen, you! Come over here! We need you to complete our group; we are the best, and you won’t be sorry!” It appeared as though I had shouted so loudly in my enthusiasm that not only this young man, but also several others came to us, and very soon we were eleven.

The young, lonely man was a Parisian worker, Paul Garde, a member of the Communist Youths who had not been accepted by his party as a volunteer for the same reason as mine: he was too young, and therefore he decided to join the anarchists.

Another new member of our group was Antoine Guillaume, a 25-year-old street peddler who admitted to pimping, whenever the opportunity allowed. He told us that he had women “doing” the streets. Bragging of his deeds, he told us what he said to his poor

victims: “I rented a part of the sidewalk, kiddie; now, to pay the expenses, start working hard for it!”

Nobody liked Guillaume, but if he could fight with us and kill fascists, we had to accept him. Lenin once said that he would ally himself with the devil incarnate, if doing so would help him attain his ideal.

Among other members of our group was Claude Verger, a 28-year-old intellectual who was very serious and a true anarchist who came to fight for his beliefs. Pepe Girard, an older compatriot about forty years of age, was a worker who was quite often drunk. We called him Pepe, because that is how grandfathers are affectionately called in France.

The last to join us was Marcel Fabre, a young artist and an ardent anarchist who could speak some Spanish and intended to paint battlefields.

After much deliberation, everybody agreed to put forward my suggestion that we elect Juan Mayol as our platoon commander. At first, he didn't want to accept, arguing that he couldn't take such a responsibility because he didn't have any military experience. We insisted firmly, and in the end he didn't have any other alternative but to accept.

Some bustling movements were taking place in all the other groups, and for a while they were moving from place to place until they named a leader. When all the groups were formed, the commander, Navarro—that was his rank in our Battalion—asked everyone of these newly elected platoon leaders to present themselves to him with two men each. The commanders, with their two men and, of course, Bouboule following them, disappeared behind the huge storage building located at the railroad station. We remained at our spots without moving.

We were gradually accepting our situation with increased seriousness. For the first time since we had left Paris, we began to understand that everything that had occurred until now was a mere prelude and that now, it was time for real action. Very soon we would be on the front to start fighting, an idea that created uneasiness among us because most of us had no prior military experience or training. There is, after all, a wide gulf between thinking and making a decision, on the one hand, and actually carrying out the decision, on the other. Now, an uneasy feeling gripped me and perhaps others in my group, and I tried to convince myself that it wasn't fear.

We remained standing at the station's platform, gazing at the armed milicianos passing back and forth close to us, stern and tense looks in the eyes of most. After a while, they were gone, and we were left alone on the platform, except for a few children who played and gave us some strange glances.

Almost an hour later, Commander Navarro and our comrades, now loaded down with guns, cartridge belts, and ammunition, returned. At this sight, an indescribable feeling of elation overcame us, especially when each of us received a gun and a cartridge belt filled with 100 rounds of ammunition. I received a WWI-vintage French Lebel rifle; while I was happy to receive any weapon, I was especially happy to get the Lebel, for I knew how it worked and how to use it.

Armed now like real milicianos, we sought out our assigned lodgings in private homes. I shared a room with Petr Bolislav, the Yugoslavian physician, at a farmer's house, and I began to spend more time with Petr, hoping to get to know him better. I was very impressed by his erudition, but I had trouble understanding his comments

completely, for he was always drinking too much; still, it struck me that he never said a word about himself, his family, or his past.

We remained an entire week at our headquarters in Caspe. The day following our arrival there, when we went to the restaurant where our meals were served, there was an unusual uproar involving the regular customers, the milicianos, and the waitresses. Not understanding Spanish, we could not determine the cause for the turmoil, but Juan soon came to our table of six while we were eating lunch. Looking very pallid, Juan told us that the day prior to our arrival, October 16, an important battle had been fought at Sietamo and Farlet. The fight had resulted in the complete decimation of a 60-man French unit under the command of the anarchist Louis Barthimieu; not one man survived. Among the dead were Emile Cottin, who had previously attempted an assassination of Clemenceau, and the well-known anarchist Aime Turrel, a worker at a Berliot factory.

Commander Barthimieu had been a captain of artillery in the First World War. He had come to Spain because his heart had always been with the anarchists. The French writer Simone Weil, nicknamed the Red Virgin, had barely succeeded in escaping the slaughter. Born Jewish in 1909, she was a syndicalist who ran a milling machine at the Renault factory. She had converted to Christianity but refused to be baptized. By a miracle, she had escaped the battlefield where Berthomieu had perished, but a short time later, she was injured in an accident, and she had to leave the front for good.

During our week in Caspe, we had meetings every morning and performed occasional exercises. For the rest of the day, we were free to stroll around the picturesque town, but of course, we never did so without taking along our rifles and our cartridge belts.

Eating our meals at the restaurant that had been requisitioned by the city's anarchist administration became a social event for us. We exchanged information and gossip, some of it contradictory because of the confusion created by our ignorance of Spanish.

We were being prepared to fight once we reached the front. Navarro, in his limited French, told us with Juan's help that it was very important that we get to know one another and that we obey orders at once, for our collective security depended on doing so. After dinner, we would spend the evening in different small bars, drinking Aragon's red wine. A local tradition was to drink the wine from a special glass container that had a small opening. People watched us adjust to the experience and gave us ironic looks. Ignorant of how to direct the wine's stream, we would spill wine all over our faces and clothing.

Many peasants made their own wine for sale to the public at their houses. They would set aside three or four tables at which customers could sit. In the region, only red wine was produced. It was in this area that I first learned to drink, although not yet to excess. That would come later. We strolled in small groups in the town. Some of our comrades had been drinking in the bars since morning, devouring the wine or the anis that the Spanish drink only with coffee after dinner.

As the headquarters city of the anarchists, Caspe saw a constant stream of people and vehicles. I was unable to speculate about what the locals thought of us. It appeared to me that they never showed animosity, and some even revealed open sympathy.

One day, a German unit passed through the town. They were easily recognizable as Germans, with the blonde hair, the blue eyes, and the military step that many of them

had learned in the First World War. Because I still spoke German, I took the opportunity to talk with them. One of them was from Berlin, and he was happy to talk with somebody who had lived in his native city. His name was Eric Saulier. He was a descendant of the French Huguenots who had escaped from France during the St. Bertelemey massacre by the Catholics in the 16th Century. Thousands of the French Huguenots had been welcomed in Germany. Among these families had been the Faberges, whose descendants had in turn emigrated to Russia to become that country's best jewelers in the 19th Century. I encountered this Berliner on several occasions during October 20. I learned that his unit was taking positions on the Zaragoza front.

I was amazed that the young girls who served us in the restaurant would attract our attention and put their hands together in supplication as a means of telling us that they wanted to marry us. Everybody else laughed at this display, but I found myself blushing.

We discovered somewhat later that as milicianos we were entitled to the pay of 10 pesetas per day. In case any miliciano was married, he had to leave his paybook with his wife, who would collect his wages. The waitresses knew this. Therefore, some engaged in "marriages" with soldiers. For a few days, they remained "married" so that they could acquire their "husbands'" paybooks. Once the "husband" left for the front, of course, a woman continued to draw his pay. And who knew what could happen to him? If he were to die fighting, she could collect a widow's pension.

Chapter 6

One early morning, we were ordered to form up in Caspe's main square. We had been told the previous day that we would be moving closer to the front very soon, and therefore we were not surprised to see several parked trucks, waiting for us to board.

One by one, the hundred or so volunteers of the Centuria climbed into the trucks. Our caravan pulled out to the north, toward the Belchite front. I never learned, nor did I try to do so, how many of us there were precisely; we were subject to augmentation and some personnel changes during our stay at Caspe. I learned much later, when I was living in the United States, that the English historian David Berry, who conducted extensive research on the Sebastian Faure Centuria, had determined there were forty-two of us.

The trucks traveled for about two hours at a very slow rate of speed until we finally reached a town much smaller than Caspe, called Escatron.

We were lodged at Escatron in two huge buildings that were converted barns. That night, we slept on straw, instead of the beds we had become accustomed to during our stay in houses in Caspe. Anyway, we knew that we had to get accustomed to a rough life, and we were therefore not disappointed by the accommodations. What we didn't know was how long we would be staying in Escatron.

The next day, following a breakfast that consisted of coffee and a loaf of bread, we were formed outside into platoons, and we marched toward the town's cemetery. We were conspicuous because we were the only miliciano unit in town; however, many uniformed and armed local civilians walked around and performed tasks independently from us. At the cemetery, we formed again. Then a fat, middle-aged man in a uniform read something to us in Spanish. Fortunately, Juan was with us to translate the speech on the spot: "Comrades, we are gathered to witness the execution of anarcho-syndicalist justice in our town. We have a duty to punish class enemies who intend to disrupt our proletarian revolution and who would allow the oligarchy and the exploiters to continue to enrich themselves by the sweat of our efforts and by the blood they force us to shed."

Suddenly, four men with their hands tied behind their backs, escorted by several armed milicianos, appeared before us. The men were led to the cemetery's wall, where they faced us. Juan continued to translate for us while the fat functionary read in a loud voice the indictment on which the men had been convicted.

One of the four men was the town's priest. He had been caught signaling with a flashlight from the church bell tower, possibly to send secret information to the enemy. The peasants had informed the new authorities in the town of the priest's suspicious activities, and the authorities began to watch him. During the watch, the priest's criminal acts were confirmed. Luminous signals from the other side, toward Azaila, responded in Morse code. Seeking out the source of the responding light led the republicans to the house of a landlord, who, after receiving the priest's messages, was sending the information to the enemy.

Short, fat, and bald, the priest very much resembled the functionary who was reading the sentence. I learned later that the two were relatives. The priest was frightened, trembling visibly. He had previously asked the people for forgiveness, but nobody liked or trusted him. Everyone wanted him prosecuted and executed.

The landlord who had been relaying the priest's signals was tall, straight, middle-aged, and confident. The other two condemned men were a father and son who were wealthy farmers. The milicianos had caught them in the act of cutting the telephone wires that were so necessary for communication in a time of war. They had been convicted of sabotage.

The priest wore his cassock, while the other three wore dark pants and shirts. The priest was shaking like a leaf, while the other three were quiet, apparently confident, and determined.

We learned later that the fat functionary who read the indictment and the sentence was a substitute for the town's anarchist mayor. Once he finished reading his long speech, the functionary said loudly, "I, as the representative of the revolutionary town of Escatron, ask that these four fascists be put to death. Agreed? Once we heard the translation, we joined the rest of the people present in shouting, "Si! Si! Oui! Oui!"

A miliciano put the four condemned men against the wall. Another miliciano untied their hands and blindfolded them with handkerchiefs, following an old international tradition. The tall landlord said to his companions as much as to the miliciano, "We don't need scarves. We are all innocent, and we can look into the eyes of those who are about to kill us."

Almost immediately, a firing squad of twelve milicianos appeared in front of the condemned men. The priest, regaining some courage, said, "God forgive them for all the pain they are inflicting on us."

In the midst of total silence came the shrill voice of the local commander. The salvo of twelve shots will remain in my memory for the rest of my life. The four men collapsed very slowly onto the dirt, much like a large curtain freed from its support. The image of those four men as they slowly collapsed to the ground recurred in my mind for a long time.

The young officer who gave the order for the firing squad to shoot, though he was pale and looked indecisive, went to the wall and shot each man in the head as a *coup de grace*. Each of them visibly shook when the shot was fired but otherwise remained motionless. The exception was the landlord, who at first tried to stand up, in visible proof that he had not been instantly killed by the squad, then collapsed on the ground.

We walked in silence back to our barracks. I felt a cold sweat running down my back, and I was gripped by a profound emotion. I was lost in my effort to assess what I was feeling, for I had never experienced such a thing before. Then a skinny miliciano with a Parisian accent, even though he was as pale as I, mumbled to me, "Do you know where I should apply to become a member of a firing squad, because I would like to take part next time?"

I moved away from this bloodsucker, without saying a word. It was repugnant to me that a human being would want to kill solely for the sake of killing. I thought to myself, I came here to fight for democracy, not to be an executioner.

It was my first experience with seeing blood run onto Spanish land, the first time I had seen people shot by a firing squad. In the months that followed, I watched other shootings, saw people dying in the streets and on the battlefield—men, women, children, old people. But this first experience with watching people getting killed would remain etched in my memory forever.

On October 26, trucks came early in the morning to take us further toward the combat. It was a short trip this time, lasting only an hour. When we stopped, we were told to get out. The camp at which we arrived was plain and dry; it was a place of valleys and of mountains that continued far away on the horizon. We were told to follow the paths that would lead us to our camp.

We were now close to the front, but not close enough to expose our trucks and us to the enemy. After all, we had few trucks, and we couldn't afford to lose any. We continued to walk behind Commander Navarro and our platoon leaders as we carried out guns, our cartridge belts, and the knapsacks we had been issued in Caspe. We had a change of underwear, a coat, a blanket, and a canteen.

After a short walk, we came upon our camp on a hill. I assumed that its location was chosen so as to hide us from the enemy on the other side. Commander Ortiz, already at the camp, came out to greet us. He already knew our leader Navarro, and both proceeded forward, followed by the platoon sergeants, to his office, which was underground. Meanwhile, the rest of us obeyed the order to wait at the entrance of the camp until the leaders returned. We were anxious for the return of Juan, so that we could learn about the dispositions of the troops and have an opportunity to get acquainted with the milicianos who were already at this front.

Once our leaders returned, they told us that we would be lodged in large tents that had already been erected in anticipation of our arrival. Each tent was large enough to shelter an entire platoon. Our tent proved comfortable enough. But now we would be sleeping on straw-filled mattresses, rather than on the beds we had in Caspe. That was how our lives as milicianos began on the front, and on October 22, the famous International Brigades were created, and we became known as Brigadistas.

I learned later that our camp was composed of a battalion of about 600 fighters, including our Centuria Sebastian Faure. Beyond the hill that sheltered us from the enemy's view, about two hundred yards forward on a slight elevation, were our trenches. From those trenches we could see, with a great deal of excitement, the enemy's entrenchments, less than half a mile away.

As might be expected, one of the first acts of the new arrivals was to rush to our trenches so that we could glimpse the location of the enemy. But Commander Navarro angrily ran after us, ordering us to return to the camp immediately. Juan had to translate the commander's angry words to us, for Navarro was too furious to speak in French, as he could normally do quite well.

Navarro forbade all of us to come close to the trenches again without special orders, unless it was an emergency situation that would require us to rush to our assigned positions. His reason was evident. The enemy watched us constantly through binoculars, just as we watched them. We could not let the enemy know that this part of the front had been reinforced.

We returned to our tent with a slight feeling of guilt. Some of the libertarians were angry about the tongue-lashing we had received, for they didn't like to be bossed around.

It was already becoming cold, for we were in Aragon's mountains. We ate dinner in the dark, our first meal on the front. I shivered in the cold. Now, we were soldiers; I no longer felt like a teenager. I had become a man!

We were awakened early in the morning by shouts of *café, café*. After we had washed our faces and dressed, we went to stand in line with other comrades for breakfast.

The night had been cold, and hot coffee was welcome. The camp appeared to be well-organized. There was plenty of food; I could see a lot of Russian cans of foodstuff. The feeling of solidarity among the troops was evident.

At this front were six young women who worked in the kitchen, in the infirmary, and at the command bunker, which was used as a meeting room for the decision-makers, or “chiefs.” The term *officer* was never used; it was considered too bourgeois for the anti-militaristic anarchists; they preferred to use terms like *chief* or *commander*.

Juan proved to be a very good platoon commander. He preserved his friendly relationship with us, but he was firm when he gave us orders. The other milicianos, almost all of them anarchists, were Catalans, for Catalonia was the cradle of anarchism in Spain. They accepted our platoons warmly.

The land was red, arid, and very hard—like rock, observed Pierre Carpentier, who as a construction worker was accustomed to digging holes as part of his profession.

My worst experience was my first night watch duty in the trenches; my post was not particularly dangerous—the advanced posts were more dangerous, for they were 60 to 100 yards in front of us, closer to the enemy.

Being in a trench at night with a rifle and a hundred rounds of ammunition, expecting to see the enemy appear at any time, promoted a terrible feeling. After all, the enemy could be hiding some place in front of me. Six of my comrades were also assigned guard duty; they were sleeping in the casemate not far away, waiting to take their turn. I stood watch with Claude Verger; as a precaution, two guards stood watch together for their two hours.

When my two hours were up, Antoine Guillaume showed up to replace me. Antoine was calm, for he had developed self-reliance through serving three years in the French Colonial Army in Africa. With him was a less steady Paul Garde, who shook as he walked and dragged his rifle behind him.

I don't remember if I ever slept that night in the casemate, for every two hours its residents were disturbed by the moving around of two comrades who were preparing to replace the guards in the trenches. Besides, it was a tremendously cold night; all of us were freezing. The nights I spent in the tent weren't pleasant, either. The cold and the wind took away all our desire to get undressed, and our military blankets were insufficient to protect us. We were like human icicles in our beds. When we weren't on kitchen or guard duty, life was monotonous. To break the boredom, groups formed all day to carry on conversations about various topics.

Everybody wanted to talk about the new government's dispositions of fighting forces; the foreign volunteers who came to fight for Spain would now be called International Brigades. The changeover was gradual. For a while, we would still be called by such names as “Centuria Sebastian Faure” and the “Centuria Commune of Paris.” We also used the term *column*, which later would be changed to *brigade*. The foreign volunteers incorporated into the Spanish Republican Army took an oath that ended with, “I am now here as a volunteer, and if necessary, I will give up my last drop of blood to save the freedom of Spain and the freedom of the world.”

Later, I learned more about the history of our formations. I also learned that Albacete had been selected as the location of the training center for all the armed foreign troops. The first unit to be formed was International Brigade XI, consisting of the German battalion “Edgar Andre”; the French battalion, called the “Commune of Paris”;

and the Polish “Dombrowsky Battalion,” which later had attached to it several Russian units under the leadership of General Kleber, and with Hans Beimar as the Commissar.

The XII International Brigade was formed in November. It had the Garibaldi, the Franco-Belgian, and the Thaelman battalions. A battery of .77 guns had been added, together with a cavalry company. It was under the command of General Lucas, with an Italian, Gallo, as the commissar.

From December 1936 up to January 1937, the XIII International Brigade was put on a war footing. Its units consisted of the Tchapaev, the Miskewicz, and the Henri Vuilleman battalions, whose commander was General Gomez.

The XIV International Brigade consisted of the 9th Battalion, the 10th Battalion—the future Domingo Germinal—the 12th Franco-English Battalion, and the 13th Battalion, or Henri Barbusse, whose commander was General Walter, the chief of staff being Major Morandi.

The last to be formed was the XV International Brigade. It included the “Lincoln,” the “Dimitrov” Franco-Belgian battalions, in addition to an English and a Spanish commanded by Colonel Copic, with Barthel-Chaitron as a commissar. Scattered throughout or grouped with the different battalions were volunteers from fifty-two countries. We occupied a very quiet sector on the front of Belchite and Azaila. Still, we inquired every day with eagerness about events on other fronts, where the fascists, helped by forces from German and Italy, were attacking.

We were disgusted when we heard the accounts of Franco’s slaughter of the prisoners at Extremadura. We were deeply concerned about Madrid, worried that the capital could fall to the enemy at any time, and many foreign units were sent from Albacete to Madrid to stop the Frankists. It was there that Pasionaria had uttered her historic words: “No pasaran!”

Chapter 7

In an effort to break the monotony of our life of routine, I began keeping a notebook in which I entered anything I deemed worthwhile. Entries included:

“Still on the same Aragon front September 3, 1936. I was on guard duty in the trenches. I hate it, mainly when the night comes. This morning we found the little Parisian Monchau dead at his advanced post. There is no doubt that he fell asleep on duty. Everything he carried had been removed from his pockets, and his loaded rifle was gone. It looks like the work of the Moors.

“Still on the same Aragon front September 10, 1936. We returned yesterday from our attack on Azaila. It was my baptism of fire. The enemy put up little resistance, but we had to break off the attack because of a shortage of ammunition. I had only fifteen cartridges left from the hundred I had at our departure, and I was terrified. Juan was very courageous, and his courage helped instill confidence in the rest of us, even though we had to return to our lines. We lost Andre Carbusier and another Parisian whose name I don’t recall, in addition to the Breton, Andre Lebon. We succeeded in bringing three wounded men back to our lines with us: Maurice Maison, Bouboule, and our Juan.”

“Still on the same Aragon front September 15, 1936. It is really cold now, and I can already imagine how cold it will be in these mountains of Aragon during winter. Juan said that he doubts we could ever take Zaragoza, for even Napoleon couldn’t take it. I don’t smoke, and each time we receive the weekly ration of cigarettes I don’t take mine. This creates a big problem for Juan, who tells me to take mine and spare him the problem of figuring out how to distribute mine among the rest of the men. We have begun to receive parcels from France; they include beautifully written letters from women, sealed with lipstick imprints. The contours of their lips on the paper are exciting. I still don’t know whether I killed any enemy. Even though I shot at several, I have seen others shooting at the same men. I saw several of the enemy fall to the ground wounded or dead, but I can’t be certain my shots hit them, no matter how good my marksmanship is.”

“Still on the same Aragon front November 3, 1936. I think I’m getting used to combat. I took part in several skirmishes, and now I am certain that I killed or wounded an enemy soldier. We were fighting in Azaila again. A Moor, thinking I hadn’t seen him, was getting ready to dispatch me to the next world. I pretended I hadn’t seen him. He aimed at me from a half-destroyed house’s window. But I shot at him before he could squeeze the trigger. A dark stain spread on the white turban he wore. Then, he collapsed like an empty bag.”

“I have good shooting skills. Ever since I was 12 and we were living in Neuilly s/Seine, I practiced marksmanship at a municipal shooting gallery. The French government attracted young men by allowing them to shoot without charge, thus hoping that one day they would like it and enlist in the army. The gallery even provided carbines. Every Thursday, when we had no classes, we spent the morning playing as though we were soldiers. Our scores were registered every time we appeared at the gallery, and the boy with the highest score for the year received a rifle as a prize. I never won a rifle, but I knew that I was a good shooter. In fact, our instructor, an old retired army sergeant, told me that many times.”

After a while, I got tired of keeping a notebook and abandoned it somewhere. Often, I thought of the Moor I shot, of his dark, greasy skin and his piercing eyes. He had been ready to kill me from a distance of fifty yards, I suppose in the hope of winning a place in paradise with Allah.

We expected reinforcement at any time, for we were getting ready to start a major frontal attack. I was told that the ammunition and the artillery to support the attack had already arrived. The new recruits we were expecting were still in training somewhere. Our commanders were determined not to have them show up as we did, without training or military skill.

Everybody else was smoking, but I didn't. I allowed Juan to distribute my share of the cigarettes, in spite of his complaints, for I didn't want to accept the responsibility of picking up my share and distributing them to others, lest I create enemies among my comrades. Juan was still limping from his wound, but he never complained.

Every day, a truck arrived from Caspe with provisions, munitions, newspapers, the mail, and the most prized supplies of all, the parcels sent by the French committees. Everyone read the love letters included in the parcels, and everybody else answered the letters, but I was too timid to respond to these unknown writers. Besides, I wouldn't know what to tell them.

I had not yet been to bed with a "decent" girl—one who did not want to be paid for it. At puberty at the age of 13, I had practiced masturbation. Women fascinated me, but I was afraid of them. It was not until I was 15 that I had the courage to go with a prostitute. The encounter had occurred on a street not far from the Latin Quarter, and while I felt shame, at the same time my urge for sex was unbearable. The old matron kept encouraging me, saying, "Push it, little one, push it!" I remember I bashfully mumbled, "Yes, Madame."

In camp, the nights were getting longer. Our chores and guard duty were not taking up too much of our time, allowing us plenty of opportunity to consult Juan about the information he had acquired from reading the Spanish newspapers. That was how we learned about the fight of the Spanish people against exploitation. Now that we had come to know Juan better, we appreciated and admired him as our chief even more. During his mature life, he had been a Catalan anarchist. To escape a death penalty hanging over his head, he had taken refuge in France. Juan kept us informed about what was happening in Spain and in the rest of the world, telling us about what he read and what he heard on the radio at the officers' headquarters.

Juan was our only source of information, and that was how we learned about Durruti, who realizing Madrid was in great danger, went with his column to defend the capital against the fascists. He did so against the orders of the Catalan Defense Committee, which prohibited him to abandon Aragon. On November 13, he moved with his 3,000 milicianos toward Madrid, where a delirious throng acclaimed him. After parading with his men, he led them to the front to repel the fascists. At his side were other well-known anarchists, such as Juan Garcia Oliver, the chief of staff, Manzano, and the Russian adviser Xanti. After a while, Juan Garcia Oliver became the justice minister during Largo Caballero's second administration.

On November 20, a general uproar was produced when we learned with sadness that our beloved leader, Benvenuto Durruti, had been wounded during the battle and died at the Ritz Hotel, which had been turned into a hospital. On the previous day, Aragon

Durriti was hit by a stray bullet and until now, it was unknown whether he died fighting or whether he was cowardly murdered by somebody behind him.

I learned about these details sixty years later, when I was invited to celebrate the 66th anniversary of the Second Spanish Republic in Villafranca de los Barros on April 14, 1997. With us was the President (governor) of Extremadura, Teresa Rejas, and about 300 comrades from that town. I will never forget this clever, pretty leader of the Autonomous Region of Extremadura. She is one of the strongest and most intelligent women I ever met.

After our arrival at the front, we grew accustomed to seeing from time to time one or more airplanes flying in the sky. Our Spanish friends told us that the airplanes were ours, but we had some reservations about them. Our suspicions were confirmed one afternoon when bombs started falling onto our camp from airplanes flying high overhead. Fortunately, we didn't have to lament any dead from the attack, but we did have three Spanish comrades wounded, and we lost a great quantity of provisions, and several tents were torn to shreds.

It was then that we were surprised to learn that we had no anti-aircraft guns. In fact, during air raids, we were using the light Hotchkiss machine guns with a very low range, and while the airplanes were immune, they could drop their deadly bombs on us from such an altitude. Little by little, the air attacks increased in intensity until one day, a huge squadron of about fifteen German Stukas were flying over us. We knew that the Condor squadron was operating in Spain, but it was the first time it had bombed our front.

A few days later, a much larger squadron attacked us early in the morning. This time, it was a real disaster, and half our tents were destroyed, including our kitchen. The attack lasted almost two hours, and by the time it was over, we counted fifteen dead and forty wounded. Some of the wounded soldiers were in very bad shape, and they were first sent to the hospital in Caspe, where first aid was performed. Later, the seriously wounded were forwarded to hospitals in Barcelona.

We had no available transportation to carry the wounded, and we therefore had to wait almost half a day for a couple of trucks to arrive from Caspe. They used the trip to good effect, for they delivered supplies and ammunition to us, in addition to loading the wounded and removing them.

Our platoon had two wounded men: Paul Garde, the young Parisian, and Claude Verger, the usually silent and intellectual anarchist. Their wounds were superficial, however; they were bandaged by our nurses, and they both remained with us. We expected at any time a frontal attack by the frankist infantry whom we could see on the other side of our trenches, but fortunately our predictions were not realized.

From Caspe we received more ammunition and war materiel; especially welcome were two .37 caliber anti-aircraft guns. A few days later, a unit of new volunteers from the south of France arrived to join us; it consisted mostly of anarchists, but there was also a plentiful number of communists. All of these new arrivals had military experience.

By the end of December 1936, the pressure of the fascists on Madrid had grown so strong that General Miaja, the chief of the Republican Army, decided to create a diversion by opening another front in Aragon, which until now had been quiet.

Defending the capital were the XI and the XII International Brigades, the battalions Commune de Paris, Thaelman, Edgar Andre, and Dombrowsky, consisting

mainly of Polish volunteers who were attacking with courage the German tanks with hand grenades, lacking artillery.

The XIII International Brigade, which had been formed in Albacete in fifteen days, was already in Valencia on December 19 and heading to the Teruel front, heavily defended by Franco's forces. They would attack the fortified enemy line stretching from Teruel to Alfambra, while the FAI/CNT anarchist Brigadistas were sent in the direction of the Belchite-Quinto front.

The battle opened at dawn on December 27 with heavy artillery fire from Caspe, while seven Soviet airplanes bombed the enemy lines. We received a large quantity of ammunition and seven hand grenades each, and after the preparation, we were ordered to attack.

We encountered very little resistance in Azaila. We had already invaded the area several times before, and after cleaning out some snipers in the city, we advanced in the direction of Montalban to reinforce the front at Teruel. Both career officers, Commander Navarro and Captain Ortiz, acted with great courage and decisiveness, a fact that increased our milicianos' confidence, for it certainly needed boosting, especially for the new French volunteers participating in their first combat.

We encountered little resistance from the enemy, largely I suppose because we had launched a surprise attack. At the outset, we suffered only a few losses; however, when we entered the city and started cleaning it out in house-by-house, hand-to-hand fights, we engaged in savage fighting for each building, where the Moors sniped at us, expecting no mercy, and in truth, neither side took very many prisoners that day.

The arduous battle lasted until January 2, 1937, when we were dead tired and exhausted, waiting munitions, as ours were already depleted. The only thing we wanted was to get a little rest, hoping to see soon the change of command, as had been promised.

On January 3 at dawn, Juan came, without his coat or hat. Holding a rifle in his hand, he shouted to us to be ready to repel an enemy counter-attack immediately. I will never forget this day; neither will I forget any of those who were with me on the front, when the fascists crashed into us, using all the firepower they could muster from artillery, warplanes, and tanks. The gunfire raged with a deafening thunder all along the front, from Teruel to Belchite.

Our positions became indefensible, and we started to retreat. Some comrades were already running, and I saw Captain Ortiz yell something to a Spanish miliciano who was escaping, and realizing that the miliciano wasn't stopping, he shot him in the back with his pistol. The captain stood in front of us and said that if we kept running, the fascists would kill us one by one in the back. He shouted with Juan, "Discipline! Discipline!"

We learned the following day that the XIII International Brigade, already facing the fascists close to the city of Teruel, endured the same fate as we did, with almost half its troops decimated.

We lost a large number of men during these days in the Aragon sector, but Madrid had been saved, for Franco had been forced to transfer some of his units from there to send them against us. No need to emphasize that Passionari's famous motto "No pasaran!" and the incomparable courage of the Brigadistas were the most important factors in the victory. All the merit should go to the XII and XIII International Brigades

and to the new, untrained, and inexperienced Anglo-American Battalion, which, in spite of losing half its men, refused to let Madrid fall.

Later in the history of the Spanish Civil War, this confrontation became known as the Battle of Jarama, where Franco, with all his fascist forces and the help of German and Italian hordes, had been stopped at the gates of the capital of Spain by the valiant Spanish people and the foreign volunteers whose struggle still endured until March 1937. I was sent to that front there when the main action was almost over.

Chapter 8

We were taken by truck to the same positions we had left three weeks ago, completely exhausted, hungry, ragged, and without ammunition. In our condition, the enemy could have taken us prisoners or even pushed us beyond Caspe. But Commander Navarro was a good strategist; he left a small, well-armed contingent of reserve forces to cover our withdrawal and was able to drive the fascists back once they attacked us upon our arrival.

After the battle on the Teruel front, we were harassed not only by the Moors, but also by units of the Foreign Legion and some newly arrived Italian soldiers that Mussolini had sent to Franco to help him fight his rebellion. At the time, the Italian soldiers had been recruited among the volunteers who were swearing they wanted to go to fight communism; however, the Italian authority never guessed that a large portion of these soldiers were anti-fascists who were looking for a way to go to Spain and at the first opportunity to desert the fascist army to integrate with the Garibaldi Battalion of the XII International Brigade.

After such a humiliation, the Italian authorities changed policies; henceforth, only members of the black-shirt Fascist Party were sent to Spain to be incorporated into the Spanish Foreign Legion called Tercio. At first, in 1937, enough Italian soldiers came to create two mixed brigades—called “Blue Arrows” and “Black Arrows.” Other than possessing the most modern arms and equipment, these soldiers never distinguished themselves in courage.

All of us were in really bad shape. Even though we had repelled the counterattack, it was obviously time for us to evaluate the situation. Captain Ortiz had taken a bullet in the stomach and had to be evacuated with other wounded by truck, for ambulances were scarce. We had grievous losses in my own platoon; they included the melancholy Polish Jew Jacques Bernstein and the good-natured old man Pepe Girard, whose chief preoccupation had been to keep his canteen filled with wine. Also among the dead was Claude Verger, whom I had admired for his strong convictions and his stated willingness to die for them. I am sure, however, that Claude never foresaw that his death would come so soon.

In addition, Alfred Rappaport and Charles Carpentier were wounded and were evacuated to Caspe with the rest. We did not know what had happened to Antoine Guillaume, whom nobody liked, and Petr Bolislav, with his smile so personal, said, “It’s for sure that he’s hiding some place. He’ll appear as soon as the danger is over.”

We learned the following day that our front had 143 dead and 211 wounded. Among the dead were 23 French, some of them from the Sebastian Faure Centuria, and the wounded included 41 French from different battalions. Most of the casualties were within the ranks of the new recruits. We were also surprised and frightened to learn that 37 Brigadistas were missing; those could be dead, wounded, in hiding, or prisoners.

I heard about Antoine Guillaume by coincidence a year later when I was back in Paris. One day, passing by one of the numerous kiosks on the Boul Mich, I saw a right-wing magazine on a stand; on its cover was the photograph of our peddler, pimp, and

former miliciano. The caption read, "This is how the Reds deceive the innocent French. Sending them to fight for the Spanish Communists, with Moscow paying the bill."

Much later, I learned the entire story about Antoine, as related to me by a Franco sympathizer who happened to know Antoine's whereabouts. He was firm in his ideas nevertheless. He had been introduced to me by my childhood friend Robert Romanin, who had remained in the army. Robert's friend Julien was a right-wing newsman who delighted in telling the story of Antoine. Antoine had been fortunate enough to surrender to a unit of French volunteers in the Jeanne d'Arc Battalion; that battalion, fighting on Franco's side, had the motto "For God and against the atheist communists." If not for luck, Antoine, who did not speak Spanish and could not have communicated with Spanish captors, could have been killed on the spot, especially if he had been captured by the Moors, who had little regard for human life, and especially for the lives of people who were not Muslims.

It is easy to assume, knowing Antoine, that he would have enlisted in the "glorious Jeanne d'Arc Battalion," as the right-wingers called it, to save his skin. This battalion, never more than 200, was composed of French volunteers. From the moment I had met Antoine in Perpignan, I had distrusted him. I fully expected that his egotism would lead him to any act, and I was therefore not surprised to learn that at the first opportunity that presented itself, Antoine deserted and sought shelter in France. Once in Paris, he decided to make some easy money by publishing an article in the right-wing magazine I had seen. I also learned that he had gone to Spain in the first place because it was his best chance to elude the police, who were looking for him concerning some crime he had committed.

Antoine, then, was not only a traitor but also a coward. I became so nauseated upon hearing the story that I had a crazy desire to seek him out and beat hell out of him, but I eventually cooled off, deciding to leave him alone and let destiny punish him for his repugnant behavior. When I came back from Spain, my reactions and impulses had become violent, and I knew by experience that once I was wound up, I could no longer control myself. The rage would grow to such an extent that in my angry mood, I was capable of actions with unfathomable consequences that I would have regretted later.

I never stopped being an atheist, but I believe in what I call The Universal Harmony and the Eternal Recurrence. At the core of my belief is that the world has always existed and that it has no beginning and no end. As Darwin taught us, the laws of evolution are such that we could have been born a fish, a tree, or any other creature. We live according to a certain innate logic of our instinct, which in turn guides our intelligence in the constant struggle for survival within our species.

This event in France occurred a year later. Meanwhile, the fight for the Republic in Spain against fascism was still raging, and I was a part of it. Now, the actions at our front increased in number and intensity as reserves were brought in, including many French, Belgians, and Swiss, along with the Polish Jews who were living in France. They considered Spain the ideal place to fight fascism.

It was winter and cold when we learned with suspicion that on February 23, Italy and Germany had announced their adherence to the covenants of the No-Intervention Committee. It was a joke. The fascists never stopped sending military materiel and troops to Franco; meanwhile, England and especially France had closed their borders to the volunteers who wanted to go fight for the Spanish Republic. Meanwhile, more than

100,000 German and Italian soldiers were fighting on Franco's side. However, not all was going smoothly for the fascist rebels, because the Germans were envious that the Italians had obtained economic control of Spain, and the Germans requested that Franco pledge that 60 percent of the production of the Rio Tinto mines, some of the most important in the world, be delivered to Germany at advantageous prices. A few days before, the German business news publication *Wirtschaftsdienst* had lamented that the center of heavy Spanish industry, including Bilboa ore and Asturias coal, was still in republican hands. They suggested launching an attack on Almaden to secure the mercury. It became obvious that Hitler, Mussolini, and Franco were acting in concert as market thieves, in spite of their differences.

Eventually, I started receiving letters from Paris. In February, Rene confessed that it was perhaps his own indiscretion that resulted in my parents' knowing where I was. We were arguing with indignation after learning about the tragic riots that occurred in Barcelona between POUM and FAI, on one side, and the communists on the other, and we had to lament many dead or wounded on both sides. POUM had been completely exterminated. George Orwell, wounded, returned to England where he wrote his famous book *1984*, in which he also insinuated that communists were dominating the International Brigades. The anarchists remained firm, especially in Catalonia; still, they were feeling the wrath of the Komintern, which reduced its shipments from Russia of food and weapons to us.

The fascists progressively developed a grudging respect for the International Brigades that had confronted them so successfully. In Barcelona, the flow of foreign volunteers continued to increase; in the Bakunin barracks, where they were formed by units, we sensed that the communists were exerting strong pressure to have the new volunteers moved toward Albacete, where they had their own training centers. In our group, a very strong friendship was born and I personally remained very much tied up to Juan, who never stopped trying to instill his anarchist ideals in me. Perhaps partly as a result of our friendship, when there was a need to send two volunteers to Barcelona to help bring a group of new recruits to the front, Juan suggested me to our commander. Anyway, I was so tired of the cold weather, the dirt, and the constant state of alert in which we were living that I jumped with happiness and even more so when I learned that I would be traveling with my inseparable friend, Rappaport, who had recently been released from the hospital after undergoing treatment for a bullet wound. He had been lucky that it was only a flesh wound in the shoulder and that there had been no major body damage.

Alfred and I would be return passengers on a truck that came to our trenches every morning to deliver food, ammunition, and the mail. Once unloaded, the truck would be returning to Caspe first, then on to Barcelona.

Once the truck was ready to leave, we climbed aboard in the back, where we found a wounded Spanish miliciano lying on the truck bed. He had been hit by one of numerous enemy snipers who hid all over the Aragon front, waiting patiently for unaware and off-guard milicianos, so as to fire at them as if they were in a shooting gallery. Of course, we also had a large number of snipers on our side.

Two brothers who shared the driving occupied the truck's front seat. The truck started moving almost immediately, and the three of us on the truck bed could see that the brothers were delighted to be leaving such a dangerous place and drive back home.

Shortly, we in the back realized that it was much more comfortable to lie down on the truck bed, rather than sit up, for whenever the old truck started rounding a curve in the road, we were propelled from side to side like sacks of potatoes.

After passing Caspe, where the wounded miliciano was sent to the hospital, we continued our trip until we reached Barcelona at night. Instead of taking us directly to the Bakunin barracks, the drivers, who were Barcelona natives, invited us to spend the night at their house with their families. We accepted this kind invitation without hesitation, for we were exhausted, and the barracks were far from their home. and I couldn't remember the last time I had a shower. We were like kids in a toy shop with the hot water in the shower.

The following day, we decided not to go to the Bakunin barracks immediately, for we had arrived a day before the schedule to report for duty anyway. We decided to stroll the streets of Barcelona and explore the city, and the two drivers were elated to be able to spend an extra day with their families. In gratitude, they offered the services of their younger 15-year-old brother Miguel to guide us around, an offer we accepted gladly.

The streets of Barcelona were packed with a variety of people, civilians of all ages and military mixing in intense traffic. Alfred suggested that we go collect our back pay, using the miliciano pay book that we always carried in our pocket, so that we could enjoy the city even more, and I agreed. We asked our guide Miguel to take us to a bank, where we found a long line of people waiting in front of the central bank.

After waiting about an hour, we reached the cashier, who gave each of us 1,270 pesetas. It was a lot of money for us. We were being paid 10 pesetas per day. Of course, the regular soldiers of the Republic were receiving much less.

As we stood in line, we had been flattered by the occasional taps on our shoulders as marks of admiration from our Spanish comrades in arms, who were also standing in line to receive their pay. Everybody applauded us as we left the bank, showing their respect for the foreigners who came to fight for Spain.

Once we were again on the street, we decided to do some shopping. We began by buying red and black handkerchiefs that we tied around our necks, the hallmarks of anarchists. We also purchased two very fancy leather jackets at what we thought was a bargain price. Hungry, we went to eat at a restaurant that Miguel indicated to us, and after we finished lunch, we gave him 10 pesetas as a gift. He was so pleased with the tip that he offered to guide us to the Barrio Chino, to which we had been before. Once we reached this tumultuous, crowded area, we told Miguel that we could find our own way to the barracks and that he could return to his home. The Barrio Chino had not changed much since we last saw it. It was still populated by a huge shouting, screaming, restlessly moving human wave.

Despite all his macho behavior and his talk about his knowledge of women, I suspected that he had never gone to bed with a "decent" woman, just as I never had been to bed with a woman who does it for love, and not for money. We had money in our pockets now, and the streets were full of prostitutes; still, we felt somewhat uncomfortable, and we continued to walk without even looking at them. Suddenly, we bumped into a rather short, wide-shouldered man wearing a Brigadista uniform, with a five-pointed star on his cap. Looking at one another, the man and I both laughed, for it was Admiral, whom I introduced. I could hardly believe he was here in this Barrio Chino.

The last time I had seen Admiral was in Paris, and I knew at the time that he was leaving for Spain.

Still laughing, the three of us went to a little bar for the traditional Spanish coffee with anis, without paying attention to the women who surrounded us to offer their services. Admiral, who was older than we, seemed not to be intimidated by these nocturnal beauties; he was surprised to find me in Spain, and he was especially surprised to find me serving in a column of anarchists. Knowing that I was a Marxist, he thought I would be with a communist unit. Similarly, I had not expected to find Admiral serving in a communist brigade; as I recalled, he was going to Spain to join a Trotskyite unit.

Admiral explained matters. He was in the telephone company in Barcelona during the unforgettable shooting that broke out between the Trotskyites and the FAI against some regular soldiers under communist command. In a serious tone, Admiral said, "I understood at the time that the most important thing was to win the war. There was a lot of dissension in POUM; in addition, I was very disappointed when I learned that Trotsky had refused to come to Spain when invited by his supporters. It was then that I decided to join the brigades. I am now in the XIV International Brigade, in the Henri Barbusse Battalion, along with several other Latin Quarter companions, including Garrigou, Jacquelin, and Galland. Our commander is the Polish general Walter, who is a born revolutionary, with Morandi as our commissar." Admiral added with pride, "I am a sergeant, a platoon commander, and I came to Barcelona on a mission. Our brigade is headed to Madrid, where important battles are taking place with the aim of containing Franco's armies. For several months, the XI, XII, and XIII brigades have been fighting there, and very soon, our brigade and the recently formed Anglo-Irish-American XV Brigade will come. Many Frenchmen are already fighting there. We need to stop the fascists in Madrid. As Pasionaria said, 'No pasaran!'"

Admiral's words left me feeling very uncomfortable for the first time since I arrived in Spain. Was I in the right place with the anarchists? Should I have joined the communists, whose ideals were closer to my own? I felt somewhat disoriented, as though the anis had gone to my head. I began to think that as a revolutionary, my duty was to be where the fighting was. Suddenly, I said, "Listen, Admiral. I would like to go with you, because I think my real obligation is to go to fight in Madrid, where our victory is really at stake!"

"Are you crazy?" Alfred shouted as he jumped from his seat. "You already belong to a fighting unit, the Durruti Column, and you cannot change! You would be considered a deserter. I can't believe you are capable of betraying your comrades! Don't you know that we too are going to Madrid?"

"That's not true, my friend," Admiral said, answering for me. "We are fighting for the same cause. Michael is right. It is on the Madrid front that the fate of the revolution will be decided. And Michael is not deserting; in fact, he is going to a line where the fighting is even more intense!"

His eyes opening wide in surprise, Alfred asked, "Who is Michael? Are you referring to Georges?" Both were staring with curiosity at one another.

I then had to explain to Alfred that I used a *nom de guerre* when I enlisted in order to throw my parents off my tracks, for they could have stopped my going to Spain by revealing my age.

Alfred, very serious now, looked me directly in the eyes and said, “Don’t forget that we came here on a mission. We came to pick up forty new volunteers and take them to our lines. I don’t believe this is the right time to desert.”

The word *desert* caught my attention. It resonated of something dirty, miserable, and incompatible with my self-regard. Admiral looked at me, a bit confused. Finally, I decided that it was not dishonorable to abandon my unit. Smiling, after some hesitation I told Admiral that Alfred was right.

When we parted in separate directions, Admiral and I exchanged addresses and promised to get in touch, although it was possible that we would be together soon fighting in Madrid. In the evening, we waved down a taxi that took us to the Bakunin barracks. There, we delivered the documents given to us by Commander Novarro to the comrade in charge of the fortress. We spent the night there prattling with the newcomers from France. They had the same enthusiasm, the same longing and curiosity that we had felt as new volunteers five months before.

Early in the morning of the following day, after taking breakfast, the forty-three new recruits climbed with us on the two trucks that were waiting for us, and we immediately headed in a northwest direction to the Aragon front. One of the trucks in which we rode was the same one that had brought us to Barcelona from the front. The brother drivers asked us how their younger Miguel had behaved; it seems that the boy had a wonderful time while serving as our guide, and he had not mentioned the 10 pesetas he had received.

Chapter 9

No sooner had we returned to our positions in Aragon than we learned that our Ortiz unit in Durruti's army would be sent to the Jarama River front in Madrid, where all efforts were directed to stopping the thrust of the frankist forces. Desperate, the fascists had planned to take Madrid before November; now, it was already March 1937, and every day the republican forces were becoming more efficient. The International Brigades brought to the fight not only enthusiasm, but also determination and a will to fight until the end, qualities in evidence on the battlefields.

Once our FAI units arrived in Jarama, I immediately saw that the International Brigades, under the supervision and leadership of Andre Marty and with the help of Soviet advisers, were much more disciplined and militarily better prepared than we were. A major problem existed nevertheless, and it was the language barrier. Most of us foreign volunteers could not speak Spanish, and we consequently encountered grave difficulties during confrontations with the enemy, for several of our units were composed of people speaking a variety of different languages. Orders had to be translated from Spanish into French, English, German, Russian, and Polish, resulting in a tremendous loss of time between transmission of the initial order and its execution. To remedy the problem and achieve more cohesion with the units, the commanders created mixed brigades by putting Spaniards and foreigners together in the same unit. Still, the volunteers were not good language students, and although the situation had improved somewhat, the atmosphere of a Tower of Babel still prevailed. It was not until April 1937 that all the units were organized by ethnic group. This reorganization was time-consuming and it was not completed until January 1938, as follows:

XI International Brigade	German-speaking
XII International Brigade	Italian-speaking
XIII International Brigade	Slavic-speaking
XIV International Brigade	French-speaking
XV International Brigade	English-speaking
129 th Brigade	Central European

The reorganization recognized the internationalism that induced volunteers to rush to Spain in defense of an ideal, while also creating an *esprit de corps* and a national pride that allowed the volunteers to fight in a common cause with more efficiency.

I arrived at the end of the memorable Jarama battle. Our units that had fought the battle were the XII and XIV International Brigades, the V Spanish Brigade, and two battalions of the 35th Division under the orders of General Walter. In a much more deadly sector of the front, the XI and XV International Brigades, under the orders of General Gal, distinguished themselves one more time. Lister, the head of the Spanish Brigades, commented after the battle, "The International Brigades wrote one of the most beautiful pages of the war. The Jarama battle confirmed that the Republic not only has an army capable of defending itself but also capable of attacking."

Our side lost 15,000 men during the battle, while the enemy lost 29,000 in this bloody struggle that ended in March 1937. It was there that I first met Americans. I had

known many Britons, for they had been in Spain for a while, and my relationship with the Irish was even superior to my connection with the Britons.

Right off the bat, I became good friends with the Spaniard Emilio Alvarez Canosa, whom I saw again sixty years later in New York during the annual dinner of the organization Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. I learned much later that he died in 1998 in Marseilles, where he was living. I was also lucky enough to meet Ernest Hemingway. I regret not getting to know him better, but at the time I had no idea that he would become a world-renowned writer. To this day, I admire his writing.

The Internationals suffered a lot of losses. Among them were Grebenareff from the Dimitrov Battalion, Emile Schneiberg from the XV International Brigade, and Fredo Bruheres. The Parisian commissars Le Van, Garrignon, and Casanova also died at their posts.

The fascists, after a relatively easy victory in Malaga, decided to break the Guadalajara front next. The Italians thought that after the Jarama battle, the republicans would be exhausted. Between March 6 and March 7, the Italians, under Manzini's command, began attacking Malaga with 50,000 men, 222 guns, and 140 tanks. They transported a total of four divisions to the battle in 4,500 trucks. These troops were supported by 60 airplanes of the Condor squadron, whose mission was to break the resistance of the republicans through intense bombing of their positions.

Without question, the Italians enjoyed a numerical superiority, with their eight brigades set against Lister's XI and XII International Brigades. However, the Italian commanders failed to consider the low morale of the Italian troops. Many had volunteered for service in Spain because they were unemployed in Italy. They had no real will to fight, much less to obey their orders, "Without victory, nobody should return to Italy alive."

After heavy fighting at the beginning of the battle, the Italians lost the initiative. Under heavy pressure from the Brigadistas, they broke and ran in a total rout, leaving behind great quantities of war materiel and many troops to be taken prisoner. Once again, our Brigade Garibaldi showed great courage. The troops in that unit were very important in our victory. On March 20, our republican planes conducted a daring air raid in which they destroyed 500 trucks and disorganized an entire Italian division.

On November 18, 1936, Germany, Italy, and Portugal officially recognized Franco as the head of the legal government of Spain. The Germans then sent General Faupel to Salamaca, General Franco's headquarters, to serve as German ambassador and commander-in-chief of German forces in Spain. The Vatican recognized Franco a few months later.

On April 14, 1937, Faupel signaled to Hitler that the French minister Laval was offering a joint collaboration with Franco, once the Spanish Republic was defeated, under an anti-communist pact. And the same offer was made by the Blum administration as a result of a conspiracy among Laval, Doriot, de la Rocque, and others who were planning to create a new government under Marshal Petain.

On April 16, 1937, the results of negotiations of the German corporation I. G. Farben Industries and some English companies were published. A joint venture called for these companies to work with minerals from the Spanish Rio Tinto mines, and the agreement called for the Germans to have sixty percent of the shares of the venture.

On April 27 and 28, the German air force conducted the most inhumane, intense slaughter of the entire war, destroying the cities of Guernica and Durango. The Republican air force responded by sinking the fascist warship *Spain* in Santiago. Even though things were going badly, the heroic Spanish people were answering the unequalled fascist cruelty vigorously.

But it was with pain and sorrow that I learned that in May 1937, a leftist group consisting of some Poumists and some anarchist elements were conspiring to start a rebellion in Barcelona. It was hard for me to believe, for I knew my companions in the Durruti Column and didn't think they were capable of such treason. Rather, I was inclined to think that it was all Stalinist propaganda intended to diminish or destroy the anarchists' influence once they defeated POUM.

I never sympathized with the Trotskyites, who were disbanded. But I admired the anarchists for the courage they showed in fighting in the 25th Division until the end of the Spanish Civil War.

On May 29, the German destroyer *Deutschland* provoked the republicans in Ibiza to return fire. In reprisal, the Germans severely bombed Almeria, a city of no military importance at all. As it happened, the bombing had been planned well in advance. The incident served as a pretext for Germany and Italy to abandon the protocols of the No-Intervention Committee.

The Republican command and its allies initiated a diversion operation to alleviate the tension that Franco's forces had placed on Bilbao. The XIV International Brigade was moved from the northwest sector of Madrid and sent in the direction of Balsain, while the XII International Brigade was moved from Madrid to the Huesca sector in Aragon.

Fighting began shortly after these troop dispositions were completed. In June 1937, the XI International Brigade covered itself in glory by destroying more than 400 fascists in Picaron. The order of the day was, "Attack in other places and save Bilbao," but the air superiority of the Germans was creating terror through deadly nighttime bombing of defenseless cities, with the result that more civilians were killed than soldiers.

It was at this time that I decided to follow Admiral's advice. I took advantage of a lull on our anarchists' front, which was close to the XIV International Brigade, and crossed over to join a battalion of that brigade, abandoning the Durruti Column. Making that decision was very difficult for me. The crucial moment came when I unexpectedly encountered Admiral, who was now a captain in the XIV Brigade; at that time, he told me that I had an opportunity to accomplish my revolutionary duty by fighting more efficiently with one of the brigade's battalions than I would by staying with Durruti's Column. I could not deny that the Brigades were better organized and better equipped. I lacked the strength or perhaps the guts to see my companions to bid them farewell. I preferred to leave in what is called "the French way," which is known in France as "the English way."

Once I was with my new unit, the trucks brought us to the outskirts of the Guadarrama mountains. It was still cold on this memorable night of May 29, 1937. We were part of the 35th Division, commanded by one of the best military leaders of the Spanish Civil War, the Polish General Walter. His reputation as a strategist and a commander was growing daily. Much later, I had the privilege of meeting his relations. When I was living in Atlanta, I met his daughter-in-law Magda, who had just divorced

the general's son, accusing him of neglect, and in Madrid in 1998, I met Nina Sverskaya, one of his two daughters; she had written a book about her father, in which she explained how he was killed.

Under General Walter's command was the XIV International Brigade, in addition to the Spanish 69th and 31st Brigades. Their mission was to occupy La Granja. Without any rest, with very insufficient artillery preparation, and with almost no air support, we started the attack on the morning of May 30. The 69th Brigade took Cabeza Grande with almost no resistance, but the 31st Brigade and our 13th Battalion had been repulsed by the garrison at Balsain. We had counted on surprise in launching our attack, but any surprise was lost when our communications failed. Communications, in fact, were so bad that the 9th Battalion got lost for several hours in the bushes of Cerro del Puerto. We were with Captain Admiral and Bonnet, Marcel, Jacquelin, Gallan, and others when confusion reigned in the ranks all around us; hungry, worn out, and exhausted, we almost collapsed on the ground. We could smell the sour odor of our own perspiration, for it had been a full month since we last showered. The following day, May 31, we attacked once again, and again, we did not receive the promised air support. In addition, the Germans dominated the skies, dropping bombs on us without interference. It was such a disaster that we had to cancel the attack. The republican tanks (the first I had seen) dared not come close to the enemy because of the irregular terrain that provided very little maneuvering room.

After a superhuman effort, the Spanish 61st and 31st Brigades reached the outskirts of La Granja, but no amount of the courage they displayed could take the city. Our XIV Brigade conducted a daring surprise attack at night, but it was driven back to its base. The last scene I saw was our platoon's Garrin falling on the ground, his head covered with blood.

Twice, on June 1 and 2, we attacked again, and again we were repelled by the superior numbers of the enemy. We initiated a night attack that was supposed to be a surprise as a means of getting around La Granja, but the frankist machine guns, protected by fortifications and barbed wire that we couldn't destroy because we had no special cutters, were all over the area to stop us. After four days, we were still unable to reach our objective. Worse, when we finally returned exhausted to our lines, we had to repel an enemy counterattack in which we lost Duillaume and Jacques from our unit. By this time, both sides were drained of any energy or momentum. Once the enemy started rotating its forces, we took advantage of the time to dig ourselves in deeper.

The Balsain battles were very rough and costly. Still, by the end, we were able to reinforce our positions so that we could defend them better. We had also helped take pressure off the Bilbao front, from which the frankists had to remove troops to fight us. But our sacrifices in the end were all for naught. In the end, the frankists took Bilbao. By summer 1937, our situation in Spain was desperate. Thirty-four of the provincial capitals were now in Franco's hands.

Internationally, our support was only slight. On June 23, 1937, German and Italy formally broke with the no-intervention committee, using as the pretext the sinking of the German warship *Leipzig* by republican submarines. In France, Blum's socialist administration fell, to be replaced by the administration of Chautemps, who on July 5 received Nazi dignitaries in the presence of Abetz and Brinon. Chautemps tried to reassure the Germans regarding any involvement in Spain. In London's chancellery,

rumors circulated that Franco had initiated peace negotiations and that it was possible that England would grant him a line of credit or provide other financial help. Franco's press then stopped its relentless attacks on England.

Elsewhere on the globe, the Japanese fascists implemented the anti-Komintern agreement signed by Berlin, Rome, and Tokyo. Japan did so by attacking China. Even at this time, the democracies could have saved Spain. Even applying League of Nations sanctions could have done it, but no one lifted a finger to help Spain. Everybody looked the other way.

Chapter 10

People in other parts of the world reacted slowly to the civil war in Spain. Among the working classes, an anti-fascist movement increased in size, but it was marked by timidity and indecision. In February 1937, the secretary-general of the Communist Party, recently returned from Spain, met Cabellero and Louis Campanys in the Velodrome d'Hiver in Paris. After the meeting, the announcement that the Communist and Socialist parties in Catalonia had decided to merge was greeted with general enthusiasm and created an uproar.

The Belgian Socialist leader Vandervelde, the president of the Second International, officially protested the blockade imposed on the Spanish Republic. In France, Emile Kahan, the secretary of the Human Rights League, declared that the government had blundered terribly by allowing international fascism to prosper.

On June 1, 1937, in Spain, communist, socialist, UGT, and labor organizations confirmed their solidarity with the Spanish people in a common statement. George Dimitrov, in the name of the International Communist Party, asked all Spanish anti-fascists to unite in their opposition to Franco. The call was backed by Franz Dalhem of Germany, Luigi Longo of Italy, and Maurice Thorez and Marcel Cachin of France. On June 24, 1937, all these Marxist and syndicalist organizations asked the League of Nations to apply sanctions against the fascist aggressors in Spain. But all these efforts were too late.

While political events were developing outside Spain, battles were raging inside the country—Tereul-Albarracin in the Aragon area and Brunete on the Madrid front. In September, Mussolini's pirate submarines, cruising the Mediterranean Sea, sank two Soviet transport ships, the *Timiriazev* and the *Blagoliev*. On October 2, President Negrin protested the fascist intervention in Spain in a speech made at the League of Nations in Geneva. It was to no avail, for Franco had decided to destroy the Asturian front, and nobody could stop him. On October 21, the Republican offensive on the Quinto-Belchite front failed to help the northern front. Gijon fell to the fascists. On October 31, the seat of the government of the Spanish Republic was transferred from Valencia to Barcelona.

On November 16, 1937, Franco and England signed an agreement to exchange consular agents. Sir Robert Hodgson was named the British agent, while the duque de Alba was the Spanish agent in London. On November 28, Franco imposed a total blockade on the Mediterranean seashores of the republicans.

On November 30, the greed of the capitalistic countries, or the so-called democratic countries, regardless of political orientation, was demonstrated when Germany declared that it could no longer tolerate that most of the Bilbao minerals was going to England. Germany then obtained the right to control the production of 73 enterprises. By the beginning of December 1937, 260,000 tons of raw material had been delivered to Germany.

On December 1, at Germany's request, Japan officially recognized Franco. On December 10, advanced models of the German Stuka appeared in the skies over Spain. These were Junkers 87, each carrying several 50 to 500 kilogram bombs to rain death on the republicans. In January 1938, the delivery of weapons to Franco from Germany and Italy had reached alarming proportions. In February 1938, the No-

Intervention Committee called for removing all foreign volunteers from Spain. Meanwhile, Hitler and Mussolini were increasing the shipment of “volunteers” to Franco. On March 9, 1938, the fascists attacked on an 85 kilometer front that stretched from Teruel to the Pyrenees mountains. The great Aragon battle lasted until April, with the International Brigades, mainly the XVth, with epic courage resisting superior forces armed with more sophisticated weapons. In the end, the Brigadistas were forced into a general retreat toward the French border.

The fascists were worried and surprised by the almost superhuman resistance of the republicans. They sent wave after wave of war planes to bomb the civilian population in Barcelona indiscriminately, killing thousands of people. In retaliation, the republicans sank the fascist battleship *Baleares*. By the end of April 1938, Franco’s forces were ready to occupy Valencia. Meanwhile, in Paris and Burgos, France and Spain continued negotiations to establish diplomatic relations.

On May 10, at a special session of the League of Nations, the Spanish minister Alvarez del Vayo once again denounced the fascist aggression and called for lifting the embargo so that the Republic could receive arms shipments. The request was denied, with England, France, and the United States all voting against the proposal. On May 29, the fascist forces attacked on a 120-kilometer front stretching from Teruel to the Mediterranean, toward the cities of Sagonte and Valencia.

On June 3, the German General Reitel informed Hitler that the Condor Legion and its materiel needed replenishment or else removal from the operational theater, for the equipment was worn out and the pilots were exhausted. By June 10, the Germans and the Italians were bickering about the coveted concessions of minerals in Spain.

While the Germans prepared to renew their air operations in Spain with more sophisticated and efficient weapons, French and English leaders were engaged in serious talks about removing all foreign volunteers from the battlefields. The talks came to fruition on July 15 through the No-Intervention Committee.

On July 17, Von Reichenau informed Hitler that the German soldiers had increased their fighting effectiveness during the last two years and had established strategic lines close to France and England, thanks to Franco. The general added, “At the first opportunity of going to war against France, we could reduce Bordeaux, Toulouse, Marseilles, Biarritz, and Bayonne to ashes and completely disrupt France’s railroad networks.”

On July 25, the Leal Army began its offensive. The entire world admired the resistance of the Spanish Republic and the courage of its troops. On August 22, Mussolini, growing increasingly impatient, sent a strongly worded message to Franco that the latter should accelerate his operations, for Italy could not wait indefinitely for the war to end.

One of the most decisive battles toward the end of the Spanish Civil War was at Ebro. Lasting from July 25 to November 15, the battle was both bloody and intense. The battle-hardened republican soldiers, mainly those of the International Brigades, distinguished themselves. On September 21, 1938, President Negrin declared at the League of Nations in Geneva that he was ready to remove the International Brigades from the fighting if the Germans and the Italians recalled their troops. On September 22, France and England reached the shameful Munich agreement, putting Czechoslovakia at Hitler’s mercy.

On October 9, Chamberlain, Daladier, and Hitler formally signed the Munich agreement and declared that they had achieved lasting peace. The agreement dealt a mortal blow to any democratic hope in Spain; it affected the mood of all those who were fighting for freedom on Spanish battlefields. On October 28, the 10,000 foreign volunteers who formed the International Brigades received a tumultuous, emotional farewell. Many people shed tears.

From 4 o'clock on the afternoon of October 28, 1938, Republican war planes marked the withdrawal of the brigades with flights over Barcelona; they were ready to repel any fascist incursion that might spoil the ceremony. Negrin was present, with all his cabinet members, to pay homage to the international volunteers who had come from 52 foreign countries to defend the democracy of the Spanish people.

As the international volunteers paraded on the avenue, they were cheered by hundreds of thousands of people, including men and women of all ages. Girls dressed in regional attire also acclaimed the volunteers. Flower petals rained down from balconies, and girls broke the lines of the volunteers to hug and kiss them. The parade march was not as orderly as it should have been, leading a spectator to say, "They learned how to fight, but evidently they didn't have time to learn how to parade." Still, the volunteers paraded with pride.

November 15, 1938 marked the official withdrawal of the internationals. It was on that day that Dolores Ibarruri—the famous Pasionaria—made her historic speech before the Congress: "A feeling of anguish and infinite pain invades our throats—anguish for those who are leaving, these soldiers of the human ideal, exiled from their countries, persecuted by tyranny. From all nations and all races, you came to us as our brothers, as children of immortal Spain, in the most difficult moments of the war, when the Spanish Republic was threatened. You brave comrades of the International Brigades came to save it with your fighting enthusiasm, your heroic deeds, and your spirit of sacrifice. It was seen as an astonishingly grand gesture, this formation of the International Brigades to display courage, self-abnegation, and discipline for the sake of saving the freedom and the independence of a threatened country, our Spain. We salute such heroes, bow to such martyrs. Mothers! Women! In the years that will come, when the war wounds are healed, when the rancor will vanish, and when the pride of freedom will reign among all the Spanish people, tell your children about these men from the International Brigades. We will not forget you. When the olive branch of peace is blooming and is interlaced with the laurels of the victory of the Spanish Republic, come back!"

Germany continued to send great quantities of materiel and men to Spain, in exchange for important concessions of mineral products. Meanwhile, protests and demonstrations against the embargo took place around the world. In New York City, 70,000 people staged a protest against the embargo, expressing their solidarity with the Spanish people. On November 30, Mussolini staged a counter-protest in which he requested that Nice, Corsica, and Tunisia be returned to Italy. On December 6, 1938, Ribbentrop came to Paris to sign a Franco-German treaty that gave Germany a free hand for expanding its control of Oriental Europe.

On December 19, 1939, Franco installed on the throne the puppet King Alfonso XIII. Ten months later, the Spanish Republic ceased to exist. It had drowned in the torrents of blood drawn by the fascists under the indifferent eye of the so-called democracies. Even Franklin D. Roosevelt, one of the best American presidents, did not

see the truth at the time. It was only later, toward the end of his days, that he was able to recognize that failing to help the Spanish Republic was one of his biggest blunders. Even I, a 17-year-old boy, had seen what Roosevelt had been unable to discern! I had seen the meaning of the Spanish Civil War and its consequences for the world's future.

The end of the Spanish Civil War was horrible for the civilians of Spain and for the combatants who had to take refuge in France. But I wasn't there for long. A little more than a year after the end of the civil war, I left France with my family for Argentina.

Chapter 11

On August 27, 1937, I was in a small town near Samper with a unit of the 13th Battalion, XIV International Brigade. We had started our attack on the enemy three days before. The attack featured several units, but mainly the FAI battalions of the 25th Division, which was on our right.

It had been almost a year since I left Paris with my companions to fight in Spain. As I thought of that time, it brought back the memory of that important day when I went to Aragon as part of the Centuria Sebastian Faure. This unit kept growing so much with an influx of French volunteers that it had to be divided into several units, one of them the Battalion France still under the leadership of Commander Ortiz.

Now, as a member of a unit that belonged to XIV Brigade, I was headed with my companions to the front, which was somewhere around the city of Quinto. Desperately I searched for my old buddies, Juan Mayol, Alfred Rappaport, Pierre Carpentier, and others. They must have advanced to their designated position, but at the time I didn't know whether they were still alive or even still members of the same unit. A month before, under Admiral's influence, I had abandoned my FAI military unit in order to join a brigade that would be more effective than the anarchists, who were seldom involved in the fighting. It had been painful to abandon my comrades, and even though I was very much attracted to the ideas of Bakunin, I felt that Andre Marty's communists were much better prepared to fight against fascism. That was why I sneaked away from the Centuria in the "French way"—without informing anyone of my decision or saying goodbye to my colleagues.

In my new unit, my chief was Captain Admiral. I was still a plain Brigadista, without rank. The commander of our XIV International Brigade was Marcel Sagnier, with Rol Tanguy as the commissar. Later, during World War II, Tanguy, already a colonel, received the unconditional surrender of all German forces in Paris in July 1944.

I saw both Sagnier and Tanguy again in Spain in November 1996, during the famous homage that the Spanish people rendered to Brigadistas. That neither remembered me was understandable, for I served only one month in the Henri Barbusse Battalion with them. I also saw Commander Fort from the XV Brigade; he was wounded in the Brunete battle and remained blind for the rest of his life.

In a remarkable coincidence, I saw Mercedes Fort, the daughter of the legendary French commander, at the annual dinner of the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in New York City in 1985. I was sitting beside my wife Birdie when I learned of her identity. She told me that her father had been evacuated to Russia with many other wounded Spanish Republicans in 1938. He apparently had a romance with one of the Spanish nurses who journeyed with the wounded soldiers. He married this nurse later in Moscow, and it was there that Mercedes was born. After the war, the Fort family returned to France. There, Commander Fort endured harassment, in spite of the fact that he had been a highly decorated officer in the French Army during World War I. The French government would not forgive him for his active participation in the fighting to defend the "red" Spanish Republic.

At the time I met her, Mercedes Fort was employed in the Cultural Department of the French Consulate in New York City. I also met Mercedes' brother, Jose Fort, who had been born in France and was now a very well known international reporter and a

director of the newspaper *l'Humanite*. He traveled to many countries, including Cuba, and remained in close contact with veterans of the International Brigades.

Commander Fort, General Lister, my friend General Pedro Merino, and other high-ranking Spanish officers had collaborated closely with the Red Army, lecturing at the Frunze Military Academy in Moscow, while they were in exile.

Now back to my service in the XIV Brigade. I was listening to the sound of artillery when somebody, I think it was Raoul, told me that Admiral was looking for me. He suggested that I try to find Admiral at the bar in the central square, where it served as our battalion headquarters. I went to this bar, which was like so many others in Spain. It was located on a corner, filled with people, and exuding a strong odor of alcohol, food, and coffee. I saw many of our people sitting around several tables that had been moved together. Armed heavily, they were our brigade commanders and the leaders of the anarchist military units in the 25th Division.

Seeing me enter, Admiral made a hand sign indicating I should wait for him. He then resumed an animated conversation with others in the group. I waited a good while until the meeting ended. Then Admiral rose from his chair and walked to the corner where I was waiting. He sat at my side and said with energy, "Tomorrow we are expecting an offensive." Then he lowered his voice and said, "But you are needed at Barcelona's headquarters." "Albacete," I corrected him, thinking he had made a mistake. "I said Barcelona," Admiral said with a slight smile that I found strange.

"It looks like your chevrons are blinding you," I said mockingly to Admiral, for I didn't like the cunning tone in his voice. "Don't worry," Admiral said with his smile. "You will not be participating in the offensive. To be honest, I don't know what is going on. You know that we in the brigades are military and obey orders without question. When they give me an order, I obey. I've been told that we have a headquarters in Barcelona, and that's all I know. You are going on a special mission." Then, more relaxed, he continued in a softer voice, "We have an office on the Plaza Catalunya in Barcelona, and that's where you are to report. They've already provided a pass for you to ride back on the truck that brings our provisions. As soon as the truck is unloaded, you will return with the driver to Barcelona." Once back on the street, I tried to guess what my new mission was about. After all, I was a plain Brigadista without rank or major responsibility. I could not recall any action in which I had distinguished myself; I wasn't a coward, and I had fought side by side with ardor with my comrades, but I had never had the opportunity to accomplish anything heroic or deserved a citation, much less to be worthy of being sent on a secret mission.

Two hours later, I was at the square, in front of the old church that had been damaged by bombing by each side. Several heavy vehicles were in the process of having cargos of military materiel and food unloaded. While the boxes were still being pulled from the trucks, I went looking for the driver with whom I would be riding back to Barcelona.

I found the old Ford I was looking for. It was so worn out that it was a wonder it could run a few more miles. Antonio, the driver, received me with a big, white-toothed smile and introduced me to another Brigadista who would be traveling with us. After a short while, Antonio, a Catalan as I learned later, asked the two of us, "Ready, comrades?" We both answered, "Ready." We mounted onto the empty truck bed, and the

truck departed. In the front, with the driver, were sitting two other persons who I assumed were his colleagues.

My traveling companion, who had an anemic appearance, wore a black and red scarf around his neck. There was no doubt that he was an anarchist, for not long before I was wearing an identical scarf as a member of Durruti's army. I learned that his name was Jean Tanbeau and that he was a Parisian who was returning to France to be treated for a stomach wound he had received three months earlier. The wound had started bleeding again, and the doctors believed he would have a better chance of successful treatment in France than by remaining several months in overcrowded Spanish hospitals where medications were scarce.

After we rode for a couple of hours, we stopped at Caspe to have the traditional coffee with anis before we resumed our trip to Barcelona. It was the last time I set foot in Caspe during the war. It would not be until October 1986 when I returned to Caspe, the city so engraved in my mind, with a group of Brigadistas from the United States to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Spanish Civil War. I remember then I sat on a bench in front of a monument erected to the memory of the victims of that internal Spanish struggle, unable to recognize any feature of the city when I walked around. At my side rested two old peasants with berets covering their heads. I told them that I had been in their town as a Brigadista fifty years before.

Neither of these old peasants moved. Finally, after a long period of silence, one of them looked at me and said in a poignant voice, "Yes! I remember all of you. When you abandoned us, you cannot imagine what the *Requetes* did to us. It is impossible to describe it. No words can!"

The words *abandoned us* cut like a dagger into my heart. I didn't know how to respond to these octogenarians. I knew they must have suffered the pains of hell. I mumbled a few words, something like "Yes, I know. We had it hard, too." Then I got up and left without looking back at them. I doubt that they looked at me, either. They seemed to be concentrating on the sad memories that my presence had evoked. As I say, that 1986 visit was the last time I would walk on Caspe's streets. But in August 1937, I didn't know and couldn't have guessed that I would again return.

We continued our journey, the truck jumping constantly on the rough road. The springs were completely worn out, and the road itself had been pockmarked by bombings and had other holes that revealed a lack of maintenance.

Once again, I arrived in Barcelona at night. The driver and his two brothers offered us the opportunity to stay in their home, for it was late. The family of the brothers received them with big hugs and offered us a small old bed that belonged to one of the children. The bed was too small for both of us, so we resorted to putting the mattress from the bed on the floor; one of us would sleep on it, while the other slept on the bed itself. We flipped a coin, and I won the right to sleep on the bed. Jean Tanbeau slept on the mattress, while I slept on the bed's hard, worn metal springs. Still, I was always amazed by the gracious hospitality of the Spanish people toward us foreigners who had come to fight for their country.

Only the next day, after I was rested, did I realize how many children were scattered about in this small two-room apartment that lodged the entire family, including the grandparents and two aunts, who were war refugees. I never asked whether

everybody was a permanent resident of the apartment or whether some were merely visitors who came to visit their relatives and welcome us.

After a good cup of coffee and a loaf of bread, Antonio, the driver, looked at my papers and told me that he could give me a ride to where I was going. It wasn't too far from the garage where he was to take the truck for repairs. Jean had no plans. I still didn't know how he was going to return to France. He was feeling very weak, so he decided to stay with these hospitable people for a while. Antonio took me to the old building where I was to report for duty. He then went on to the garage for the truck repairs. I noted to myself that only a miracle could restore that truck to a drivable condition.

I entered through a door guarded by a soldier and stopped at the first office I saw. An officer wearing a very elegant uniform was sitting there, and I presented my documents to him. After reading them with care, he called another, older soldier who wore no chevrons but had the red nose of a good drinker. This soldier nodded his head and told me to follow him. I walked briskly behind him as we passed through several rooms crowded with military people. The number of soldiers amazed me. I asked myself what all these people were doing here, when the front lines so badly needed soldiers. We at last reached another office, this one well furnished, where a very elegantly dressed officer told me to go into the next room. When I opened the door to that room, I received the surprise of my life. I found myself face to face with my father! With him was the family friend Henri Marmarian.

I learned later that when my parents learned I had left for Spain, they became depressed, especially my mother. She always had a weakness for me, while my father favored my sister Maya. My father had promised my mother to move heaven and earth to find me. Marmarian had excellent connections with certain political groups, and with their help, he was able to put some pressure on the Spanish embassy in Paris. Threats made to the embassy personnel included starting an international propaganda campaign to tell the entire world that the republicans were stealing children and sending them to fight for Spain, if the boy Michel Burenko was not returned to my parents.

To throw my parents off my track, I had used the assumed name Georges Jorat when I had volunteered to fight in Spain. However, once I had arrived in Spain, I had written several letters to them, in my innocence or stupidity, and each time I signed my new name and military address. That's how they located me. They gave all the information to the Spanish diplomats in Paris, at the same time using pressure from active legislators who were friends of the lawyer Marmarian. After several months of research, they succeeded in locating me. They then began negotiations with the offices of the International Brigades. It had taken much time, first because I had changed my name and secondly because I had switched from Durruti's army to the XIV Brigade.

The military message to me was very clear. Now that I was a Brigadista and wearing the uniform of the Spanish army, nobody could force me to leave Spain. Still, officers had promised my father that if he could convince me to resign, they would permit me to return to France.

It is almost impossible to convey the emotion I felt when I encountered my father after almost a year. My senses became unbalanced. Never had I expected to see him in Barcelona, not even in my dreams. My mind was refusing to accept the reality. After a while, I became aware that the room was filled with uniformed people who were staring in curiosity at us and trying to figure out why these two civilians were creating so much

anxiety in this young Brigadista. They were even more intrigued by the fact that we were conducting our conversation in French, a language that most of them did not understand.

My father, after kissing me three times according to a Russian tradition, hugged me firmly and said in his normal, quiet voice, "Very well! Here I am, ready to enlist as a volunteer to fight with you against the fascists! I was an officer during the Russian Civil War, and I'm sure the republicans could use a person with military experience. I will fight with you for the same ideal, and I would like to do it in the same unit where you are assigned. Here I am, ready to enlist." Then, in a low voice impregnated with emotion, he continued, "Only you know that the Republic will not survive. It is almost a certainty that we will end up being killed, without achieving anything." He kept talking as he looked at me with a mixture of love and steadiness. "Of course your mother, when she learns that her husband and her son died fighting, will not survive the shock. She will die of the pain. Right now, she is profoundly hurt by your leaving, and she is already in very bad health."

After a short pause and without a stop to look at me, my father continued, "Your sister is only twelve years old, and she will be left to fend for herself. We have no family in France, and I don't know where she could go."

Then my father, looking decisive, said, "Very well! Let's go sign my enlistment papers if I am going to fight at your side." Then changing the tone of his voice, he added, "Unless you would like to save your mother's life and your sister's destiny by coming back with us, since all the documents are ready."

Sensing that I was becoming very emotional, my father said, "Don't worry! They will be able to fight on without you. You know, one soldier, more or less, doesn't decide the result of a war." And still in a low voice he said finally, "Besides, everybody knows that this war is already lost."

After my father stopped talking and there was a short period of painful silence, Marmarian took advantage of my obvious confusion by saying very seriously, as if he were in court, "Very well, Misha! Hurry up and sign these papers and let's get out of here at once. We have things to do, and I can see that the commander is getting very impatient."

In the huge room, slightly apart from us, several high-ranking Brigadistas were pretending not to be aware of our colloquy, but it was very apparent that they all were listening to our conversation. I paid no attention to a lanky, middle-aged military officer with black hair who came close to us and said in a heavily accented Catalan French, "Comrade, you do what you want to do. Make the decision you believe is the most appropriate." Then I saw him exchange glances with our friend Marmarian, and I came to the conclusion that they had planned everything in advance.

With a smile and showing his white teeth, the Catalan ended his talk by saying, "It looks like, comrade, that you need to return to solve a very important problem in Paris, and we understand perfectly. We will continue to regard you as our companion in our common struggle. You came here and gave us your valuable support, fighting for our democracy in league with the international working class, and you came in the moment we needed you most. Sign this paper, and tomorrow you will receive your discharge documents to enable you to return legally to France. Meanwhile, you can drop by the bank to retrieve your pay. Don't ever forget that Spain is your fatherland!" I regret that I have forgotten this officer's name, but what he said impressed me deeply. He expressed

himself well in French, regardless of his Catalan accent. At that time, I did not speak the Castilian language; I learned it a few years later in Argentina.

The three of us went to the Colon Hotel, where in spite of the jumble of emotions that filled me, I jumped into the tub and reveled in a shower. We had only cold water, for the constant bombings had destroyed much of the plumbing in the city. Still, it was the best shower I ever had. It was already too late to go to the bank, and besides, we had so much to talk about that we decided to stay at the hotel and have dinner several hours later in the dining room.

I will remain eternally grateful to my father that he never once reproached me or even mentioned that I ran away from home to fight in Spain. As the saying goes, “May he rest in peace.”

One of the first things I learned at the hotel was that my parents had sold the restaurant *Caucase* and were ready to leave France. My father was not only highly intelligent, but also very logical in handling small details. Seated on the terrace of the Hotel Colon, drinking the traditional coffee and anis, my father said, “Listen, Misha! You know that I endured three years of war in the navy and three more years during the revolution. I am no longer of the age to be drafted in the French army, but you will be drafted next year. I can smell war getting very close, and I don’t want you to go through the same experience I had to endure. I know very well that the democracies will destroy Hitler and Mussolini and their fascist forces in less than a year, but I prefer to be far away from Europe while they do it. That’s the reason we sold our restaurant and that we’re selling the flat where we are living.”

Our friend Marmarian, drinking beer beside my father, nodded his head in approval and added, “Misha! Your father is right. I don’t think you’ll need to be expatriated for more than six months. In a short time you will return to your life in Paris, and this time without living in the shadow of the fascist threat.”

I wasn’t surprised to learn that both of them had come in Marmarian’s car. Marmarian was such a devotee of vehicles that it was unimaginable he would go anywhere without driving to it. Of course, it was a problem to procure the necessary gasoline. We hoped to solve that problem the next day when we returned to headquarters to get my authorization papers.

I also needed to return to Antonio’s dwelling to pick up my belongings, consisting of some personal documents and chiefly the few photographs that captured memories of the Spanish Civil War. I loved to take pictures. It had been a hobby since I was 10. Unfortunately, I had not brought a camera with me to Spain, and I had been forced to rely on the street photographers who were swarming all around. I found the same tumult at Antonio’s apartment, along with some human excrement left by kids as they ran from one place to the next. I had witnessed this scene before.

When my traveling companion, Jean, learned that my father was taking me back to France and that we would be riding in a Renault, he asked if he could travel with us to France. My father agreed with very little enthusiasm. We decided to leave on the next day, first passing by the bank to receive our pay. Of course, my chief concern was securing the paperwork that would allow me to leave the country legally.

We solved the gas problem, we thought. Marmarian, always a good psychologist, assured us that money would make the problem disappear. But it didn’t turn out to be easy at all. If it had not been for Antonio’s help, I don’t know what we would have done

to get the necessary gasoline. Antonio took us to the municipal garage where his truck was parked, and we filled the tank of our car with the precious liquid.

The last night I spent in Spain during the Civil War was August 30, 1937. The next day, before noon, I had my papers in my pocket, and my pockets were filled with the pesetas I had received at the bank. We started our trip, with plans to stop for lunch somewhere on the road.

Marmarian was very concerned about our safety. The entire city of Barcelona bore signs of violence, and armed throngs strolled in the streets. Suddenly, sirens went on, the screech penetrating our ears. We saw several enemy warplanes flying over the city. Then came a close formation of airplanes, which looked Russian, to chase the enemy planes. That day, no bombs fell on the city.

My father sat in the front seat beside his friend Henri, while Jean and I occupied the back seat. I don't know why, but for some reason my father disliked Jean. He seemed to have some kind of aversion toward him. Marmarian, however, was not only indifferent to this apparent dislike, but also tried to treat Jean with kindness.

Leaving Barcelona was not easy. We encountered rough roads and the heavy traffic of all kinds of vehicles, some driven erratically by young people, and most consisting of military people. I know that our friend was a good driver to be able to extricate us from this labyrinth of slow-moving vehicles.

On this August 31, Barcelona was highly animated. We learned that the republicans were starting their offensive on the Aragon front, in the direction of Quinto-Belchite. I felt slightly ashamed to be leaving for France instead of participating in the fight with my comrades. My father, as if guessing my thoughts, said, "Don't worry! During the course of your life you will see other revolutions, and you will have an opportunity to fight on many fronts, mainly the intellectual one. There will always be farmers and workers to grab guns, but the scarce intellectual and learned people are needed to guide them in any revolution."

Beyond the outskirts of Barcelona, traffic on the highway leading to the French border was not as heavy as it had been before. I heard Marmarian say to my father, "You did the right thing in giving me this money, because without it we wouldn't have gotten any gas." My father responded in a sarcastic manner, "For sure that Spaniard (referring to Antonio) got a good cut."

Marmarian answered him quietly: "What do you want? They are living in a very special situation. And if he could help me get gas, why not give him some extra money if we have it?"

My father continued angrily, "What kind of revolutionaries are they, anyhow? When we were fighting in Russia during the revolution, we had a greater sense of decency. It wasn't easy to bribe us!"

"I know," interrupted Marmarian. "It's just that even until now the famous gold that Kolchak was carrying has never been found. You know what I'm talking about! General Kolchak had 160 tons of gold in Siberia, and it has never yet been found, once the Whites were defeated."

"Yes," my father said, "but we cannot accuse anybody without proof, and who knows what happened to that gold?"

Marmarian replied, “We had better hurry to cross the border once and forever before it gets dark. Otherwise, we will have to pay more to cross.” Our friend was an excellent driver. After a few hours, we reached the border.

At the Spanish post Port Bou, the government milicianos pointed their guns at us. Too many spies and deserters had tried to cross the border, and the mission of these guards was to check the traffic carefully to be sure that only the legally authorized people crossed to the French side. I will never forget the look I got from a young miliciano who, after checking my papers, returned them in such a rude manner that they almost fell onto my face. The same thing happened to Jean by another miliciano. After talking in Catalan, the soldiers looked at us in scorn and yelled, “Keep going!” We didn’t need any further orders. Our Renault swiftly left the post. I felt annihilated, humiliated. I sensed I was a traitor as I huddled in a corner of the car.

A few minutes later, we approached the French border, which was marked by a small brick house. On the roof, the French flag was flying. The gendarmes at first looked at us with contempt. Every day they saw Spanish deserters or smugglers trying legally or illegally to cross into France; these guards were much more complaisant in the case of women or children, who were the greatest majority.

The gendarmes scrutinized the men, especially those old enough to bear arms, with much greater concern. At that time, too much xenophobia existed in France. The two young gendarmes lingered long over our documents. Then one of them went into the sentry box and returned with a broad-shouldered, middle-age sergeant.

We stood alongside the car. But as soon as the sergeant and Marmarian saw one another, they ran together to exchange hugs, kisses, and loud expressions of greetings. Everyone else was astonished by this display—not only the gendarmes, but also the throng of people waiting to receive permission to cross the border.

Then Monsieur Marmarian clarified the matter. He explained that both he and the sergeant had fought together in the last war, serving in the same battalion. They had been close friends until 1919, when they were discharged. They had not seen one another since then, in spite of their efforts to find each other.

“Gilbert, what in hell are you doing here?” Marmarian shouted. His friend responded, “And you Henri? I thought you were in Paris, and suddenly I find you here at the border. What were you doing in Spain? Did you by chance go to fight for the Spanish Republic?” Then both resumed their laughter with such contagious enthusiasm that all of us surrounding them started laughing too.

Of course, we had to go into the little brick house to celebrate this encounter with a glass of red wine, always kept in plentiful supply by the French military. We remained there about an hour, giving our friends time to relate what had happened to them during the many years before they met again. The three of us discreetly left the sentry box during that time, leaving the friends at liberty to enjoy their encounter.

Meanwhile, a human flow crossed the border with an accelerated rhythm. It consisted mostly of sad women, old people, and children of all ages. Very few people were leaving France to pass to the other side; the few who did were mostly men of an age to bear arms. The gendarmes turned some of them away, suspecting the men were going to Spain to fight for the republicans. The rules adopted by the No-Intervention Committee were strictly enforced here. Meanwhile, Franco’s fascists continued to receive soldiers, weapons, and airplanes from Italy and Germany.

After the two World War I comrades in arms bade one another an emotional farewell, we resumed our trip. Marmarian was still emotional about the encounter. Now, we were in French territory, on good roads with little traffic. We stopped in Perpignan for dinner, then continued the trip. Marmarian never seemed to tire of driving. When darkness came, we arrived in Montpellier, where we decided to spend the night. We had no telephone at home, although we had one in the restaurant before it was sold. My father, knowing my mother would be worried, wanted to bring me back to her as soon as possible to assuage her fears.

During the trip, my father's animosity toward Jean did not diminish, even though I felt that Jean did not deserve the hostility. He was returning to France badly wounded after performing his duty for democracy on the battlefield, while I was returning almost as a deserter. I was beginning to think that my father, unable to comfort me about the grief I was feeling for leaving my Brigadista comrades, was taking out his frustration on Jean.

We resumed our trip the following day. Marmarian and my father sat in the front, conversing about various topics. Suddenly, Marmarian said to me, "I understand you, Misha! I had a similar experience to yours in Armenia in 1906 when I was only 16 years old. I belonged to the Bakunin anarchist group, and we decided to eliminate the tsarist chief of police who was oppressing us. We threw a bomb at the police station, and we killed four cops. Unfortunately, the colleague chosen to throw the bomb died in the explosion. The rest of us escaped in different directions, for we were recognized."

"That was when you came to France?" my father asked, although he already knew the answer, for he had heard the story several times. "Yes," Marmarian said with pride as he concentrated on his driving.

After a period of silence, Marmarian said in a voice as if he were talking to himself, "I came to Paris without knowing anybody and without any money. But at least I spoke a little French, and I was therefore able to find a job doing manual labor. I washed dishes in a restaurant, and I swept the streets. Still, I badly wanted to continue my studies. For years, I deprived myself of every pleasure and ate anything I could find. I often slept on the floor of the restaurant where I worked. It was tough for me, for at the time, Paris was full of political refugees—Italian revolutionaries, Spanish republicans, rich Russian aristocrats as well as poor Russians, all running away from the tsarist persecution that followed the aborted 1905 Russian revolution. At the time, the xenophobia in France was even worse than it is now." He paused, while my father lit a cigarette for him. Both my father and Marmarian were heavy smokers.

"Then, after finishing law school by making immense sacrifices," Marmarian continued, "I was admitted to practice law. I got married and was in the process of getting on my financial feet. Then the war started in 1914. I was not yet a naturalized French citizen. As French men left for the war, it was not safe for young foreign men to walk the streets. People were often hostile to them, assaulting and insulting them while shouting, "You are protecting your own skin, taking our men's jobs while they are bleeding on the front!"

"Life was becoming impossible for me. Finally, I decided to enlist in the army. They put me in the Foreign Legion, for I was not a French citizen." Marmarian then interrupted his monologue and spoke directly to me. "During the war, the Foreign Legion was always sent to the most dangerous places, just as the Colonial Army was. In

proportion, we suffered much heavier losses than the regular French army. Finally, the armistice was signed on November 11, 1918. I returned to France, decorated with several medals, and I was eligible for French citizenship.”

After relating this story, Marmarian remained silent for a long time, as though he was meditating about certain periods of his life. He was a good friend of my father, perhaps my father’s best friend, and neither kept secrets from the other. Sometimes, my father would tell a confidence Marmarian had made to him to my mother, ending, “Don’t dare tell it to anybody else.” My mother, in turn, would often repeat it to me, using the same warning.

After a while, the conversation in the car resumed, covering different subjects or different people. Sometimes Marmarian would lower his voice, saying something to my father that he didn’t want me to hear. However, at that time, my hearing was excellent, although once I became considerably older, it deteriorated and I became almost completely deaf.

Marmarian began telling a story about one of his friends, Aziab Minian. Both he and Aziab served in the same company during World War I. While they were in their trenches in Alsace, Aziab had a dream or a vision that his wife was having sex with another man in Paris. Although Aziab was an anarchist and an atheist, he was superstitious about the efficacy of dreams in foretelling the present and the future. He asked his captain for a five-day pass so that he could go to Paris to take care of an important family matter. At the time, there was a lull on the front. Because Aziab had never asked for a pass before, he was granted one.

Aziab appeared unexpectedly at his home in Paris, but he did not find his wife there. He did find his four-year-old daughter Betty. Aziab assumed that his wife was probably standing in line to buy groceries somewhere, for food was rationed. In any case, Aziab did have time to search every corner of the house before his wife Fanny returned. He found a love letter to Fanny signed by Leo Avignon, who was then a well known actor. The envelope containing the letter had a return address at the Grand Hotel, on the Opera square.

Without waiting for his wife to return, Aziab took a taxi to the hotel. He asked the receptionist for Leo Avignon’s room number. Given the number, Aziab went to the room immediately. He knocked on the room door, and when a man opened it, Aziab asked if the man was Leo Avignon. Being answered in the affirmative, Aziab pulled out a revolver and fired five shots into Avignon’s legs and crotch.

The gunshots immediately attracted a crowd of people. Aziab took advantage of the confusion to leave the scene quietly. There was no witness who could testify that he was the one who mutilated Avignon, who remained crippled and impotent the rest of his life.

Without going back home, Aziab returned to the front the following day, surprising all his friends and especially the captain with such an early return on a five-day pass. Henri Marmarian was the only person Aziab told the story to. After the war, Aziab returned home and never again spoke of the subject. He opened a law office and provided a college education to his daughter Betty. However, he never resumed conjugal relations with his wife.

Nothing else is known about subsequent events in Aziab’s life. Nobody knows if Aziab told his wife about her husband’s role in the mutilation of her lover, although she

no doubt assumed her husband was responsible. The circumstances of their sleeping in separate rooms are also unknown. It is probably that Fanny told the actor that Aziab was the shooter. However, it is likely that Leo Avignon could have done little to take legal action against Aziab. After all, Aziab was a war hero, while Avignon was held in contempt and considered a draft-dodger, having been rejected for service because of bad health. Even if Leo had accused Aziab, no judge would have convicted Aziab in post-war Paris, when the population covered returning troops with glory and considered them heroes.

After recovering from his wounds to the extent possible, Leo was little more than a vegetable in body. He began to drink heavily and descend into misery, for he could no longer act in a theater. Soon, as is the case with a lot of famous people, the world forgot him.

Aziab did not want to divorce his wife for several reasons. First, he wanted her to be at home to help raise his daughter. Second, he was a very respectable lawyer and politician, and a divorce might have stained his reputation. Finally, the Armenians living in Paris frowned on divorce. In any case, Aziab lived under the same roof for appearances' sake, but he and his wife slept in different rooms. To insult Fanny even further and to take some revenge, Aziab chose the most effective way to hurt a woman: he took an ugly mistress who had money, a woman named Olga. At times, we saw him with both women on different occasions. We saw him with his legal wife at receptions and official events. On other occasions, we saw him with his mistress.

Fanny was still a beautiful woman. She must have been a real beauty when she was younger. People who knew her when she was young report that her beauty was very rare indeed. I had heard some of this gossip from my mother. Anyway, soon I stopped listening to the conversation that Marmarian was having with my father. I don't remember when I fell asleep in the car.

When I awoke, the three other passengers in the car were talking loudly. I realized that we must be close to Paris. We were all completely exhausted, and of course we were full of desire to be back home to rest. As we passed the La Vilette quarter, Jean asked to be let out of the car. I don't remember the name of the small street where we stopped. After Jean left the car, we resumed our trip toward the Latin Quarter.

When we reached St. Michel square, I saw my mother standing on the balcony, where I assume she had spent several days there waiting for me. Because we lived on the second floor, it would have been easy for her to view the street and the square. Once my mother recognized Marmarian's car, she screamed, closed the balcony door, and came running to meet us, even though it was late at night.

I felt very ashamed when I saw her. She had aged at least ten years, and her eyes were red from crying. Only now did I recognize the pain I caused her and the indescribable torment that had burdened her. A mother will always be a mother, and mine was an exceptional mother, especially with me.

During my entire life, people who knew us said that my mother didn't look at me as a mother would, but rather as a woman in love would. I know that I was very special to her. She could not have taken the blow of having anything bad happen to me. Her love for me was so intense that no girl or woman I chose to introduce to her was ever good enough, in her mind. She never approved of any girl I dated, and she never approved of any woman I married later.

Chapter 12

I discovered a very different Paris upon my return at the beginning of September 1937 than the one I left to go to Spain. The city was now dominated by fear and insecurity. No one believed the demagogic bravado of the politicians; they were ready to sacrifice any other country in the world, along with their English buddies, to have peace for themselves.

In France, the majority of the people continued to fool themselves by believing in the invulnerability of the famous Maginot line; however, many realized that the border barrier to invasion had not yet been completed. The Germans could easily bypass it by going through Belgium, as they had during World War I. Workers continued to occupy factories. The unions of the Popular Front were tremendously strong, and part of the nation's economy was paralyzed. Blum's administration was not only timid but also completely blind politically. Everybody in it was behaving as the ostrich does—thinking that hiding the head in the sand would eliminate danger.

When I went to see my friends at the UFE, I was surprised to discover that my reception was rather cold and not at all as warm as I expected. The reception was so chilly that some of them asked me sarcastically, "You already won the revolution in Spain?" I did not know how to answer or what to think. My friend Rene explained that during the year I was out of France, the atmosphere had changed considerably. He was feeling intense animosity from everybody, and it dissuaded him from talking frankly with his comrades, as he had before.

The only thing that had not changed but that had increased in intensity was the ardor with which people discussed the news. Every day in the newspapers, there were articles covering developments in Spain and the imminent possibility of France's going to war.

I'm uncertain whether I have the ability to foresee political events. However, both my father and I were stunned to see the vast numbers of German "tourists" who were invading the country. They were exploring all regions on bicycle or on foot and wanting to know everything. My father, indignant at the sight of them, practically stole the words from my mouth by saying, "They are German officers who have come to scout the terrain." It appeared as though nobody else deduced this possibility, if we were to judge by items in the newspapers. One editorial opined, "It is good to have all these German sportsmen come to know our country. It sets a good example for our youth to improve their physical conditioning. Anyway, it is a sign that we enjoy a good relationship with our neighbors to the East."

Less than three years later, as foreseen by my father, the Germans invaded France, and French farmers recognized some of these former "tourists" who had previously appeared in shorts and lodged in farmers' barns. The "tourists" were now wearing SS officers' uniforms, and they were coming with their troops to occupy the region.

I was hurt by the unfriendly reception I had received from my UFE comrades. I stopped coming around to see them. However, I continued to socialize with such old friends as Rene, Paul Besue, "Snow Ball", Andre Malmaison, and others. We resumed our traditional routine of strolling on the "Boul Mich." I also went to see my friends in

Neuilly s/Seine, for I badly wanted to catch up on events that had occurred since the last time I was there.

I learned from Andre Hagron that Dede Montezin was now in Switzerland, where his father had sent him to study agronomy. Paul Henot and his family left for Brazil; his father apparently had the same perspicacity as mine, resolving to spend his time in the New World, away from the approaching war in the Old.

I remembered that Popol's father (we friends called him Popol instead of Paul) was born in Brazil but came to France to fight in the Great War, as did his older brother, Popol's uncle. We loved this old bachelor adventurer; when he came to France, he would always take our group to a café to drink beer and listen to his stories about his dangerous life in the jungle.

Andre Hagron now had been drafted into the French navy. He was getting ready to depart for Brest, where the French fleet was anchored. I did not get an opportunity to see my childhood friend Claude. Many years later, we ran into one another by chance at the end of the war in Porte Maillot.

At home, my parents were readying for travel to Argentina. He had first gone to the American consulate, as I had suggested, but he was told that an eight-year waiting period existed for Russian refugees who wanted to emigrate to the United States. We could not wait that long, for I expected to be drafted into the French army at any time. My father was even more convinced now that war would break out.

During a meeting he had with his friends the Grimberg brothers and Robert Vargafeld, my father was stunned to hear the good things the three told him about Argentina. He was also surprised to learn that if he traveled to Argentina in first class, he could secure a permanent residence visa for every member of his family.

I had wanted us to go to the United States. At the time, it was the most popular, best loved nation in the world. Moreover, we had many friends there already; the Manouk and the Ashotian families, for example, had emigrated to this dream-like country. Finally, I had always been fascinated by the United States. My parents adored the nation for providing them with essential aid during the Russian Revolution.

But most of all, I never forgot a talk by our teacher in the Communal School at Neuilly s/Seine. As he discussed various nations and races, he went through various races living on different continents: Anglo-Saxons, Germans, Slavs, Franco-Gallo-Romans, Arabs, etc. Then he said in a serious way, "But there is a country where there are no races and no nationalities. It is enough to be born there or to live there for five years to become a citizen. It is the United States."

I never forgot those words. They followed me wherever I went. I considered myself French, not Russian; still, as soon as I responded "Burenko" to somebody who asked my name, I got the same reaction: "Ah! Ah! And so you are not French?" It always hurt and mortified me.

But I knew that if I went to America, I could become an American after living there permanently for five years. I dreamed of that honor many times. But at the time, I never imagined that it would be thirty years before I would become an American citizen.

Our family did not talk about my adventure in Spain. I don't know whether my father told my mother not to mention it, but I can't imagine it was otherwise. My mother was always very curious and even gossipy, and there is no doubt that she would have asked me lots of questions about my experience as a Brigadista if she had felt free to do

so. This tacit agreement was very convenient for me, for I was torn between the remorse for having inflicted so much pain on my mother and my regret at not having stayed in Spain with my comrades to fight the fascists.

Our preparation for our departure to Argentina was progressing rapidly. We had already sold the flat where we were living, and we had purchased our tickets in first class on a ship. My mother sold all our furniture to a wealthy lady who had purchased our apartment for her son, who wanted to live in the Latin Quarter.

But no buyer could be found for the five-storey old building on the rue des Pretres St. Severins, where I had played with my friends in the basement. Time was running out. Old Serguey Andreyevich, a former senator in the Russian Duma who was undertaking bookkeeping for my father and running other errands for him, suggested that my father donate the building to the city of Paris.

My father followed through with Andreyevich's suggestion. He donated the building to the city. Then he received a nasty surprise. He received a notice from the Paris government that if he did not pay his taxes, he could not leave the country. Astonished, my father went with Serguey Andreyevich to city hall, carrying a large briefcase full of receipts that proved he had paid all the taxes on time.

The bureaucrat with whom they met said with an ironic smile, "You donated a building to the city of Paris, right? But you should have known that you owe taxes on the property transfer." My father and Serguey were stunned into silence. He had donated an entire building to the city, but now the city was demanding that he pay taxes on the charitable contribution! It was beyond comprehension. Nobody else would believe it!

In this incongruous situation, my father behaved as a noble Russian would. Without saying a word, he pulled his checkbook from his pocket and wrote out a check for the amount of the transfer tax. He haughtily handed the check to the clerk, who received it with the kind of smug smile that all government employees usually have. A little later, he brought us the receipt we would need to leave the country.

I have never forgotten this ludicrous incident. I remember it even more now that I am living in the United States, where people talk about taxes with horror, even though they pay only half the rate that prevails in France.

A few days later, my parents organized a large banquet at a new restaurant that had opened on the street level of our building. Its owner was a Serb. With much anticipation, we dispatched eight large trunks containing our belongings, silver services, and other items to Le Havre. We traveled to Le Havre on a very fast train called the *Micheline*. It ran smoothly on rubber tires. I learned later that Francois Michelin, the owner of the company that produced the eponymous tires, had taken a train one day in 1935 and found that he could not write a report because of the constant jerking of his railroad car. Upon his return from the trip, he called his technical personnel together and told them, "I want you to work on a train ride that is smooth enough to allow me to write a report without enduring a lot of jerks." Thus was the 1935 initial invention of trains running on tires in France.

Ninety minutes after leaving Paris, we arrived in Le Havre. We remained there for three days before embarking on a ship of the Chargeurs Reunis. My father wanted to enjoy a few more days on the western shores before leaving for the New Continent, for he could not be sure that he would ever return to Europe.

The day before our departure on the ship, Marmarian and our friend/barman from the restaurant, Boris Kazazbachian, along with Davoudian, came to Le Havre to bid us farewell. My father had asked me not to bring any documents reflecting left-wing politics to Argentina, which had a right-wing government. I therefore asked Marmarian to hold my photos from Spain, my Brigadista paybook, clippings of articles I had written for the leftist paper *Avant Garde*, and other documents for me. Marmarian commented that my father was right, for it was wise to avoid problems that could arise if I had in my possession anything smacking of a Marxist orientation when I passed through the customs gate of the reactionary government now running Argentina.

We spent half a day in a cliff-top restaurant overlooking the blue ocean. The conversation was very focused. Everybody was very emotional, especially when my father told us that when he went to say goodbye to the Grimberg brothers, he told them to follow his example and leave, for war could break out at any time. My father told us that the brothers laughed at him, commenting that France was invincible. Robert Vargafeld had also been there to tell them about Hitler's persecution and harassment of the Jews in Germany; he expected the situation to get even worse, but the brothers would not be convinced.

My father was right, of course. Once the fascists occupied France, they sent thousands of Jews to concentration camps in Germany. After the war, my father's efforts to locate the brothers were all in vain. He concluded that the brothers had perished in one of the infamous SS camps, in which millions of innocent victims lost their lives.

Now the moment came for us to depart. One more time, my parents would be moving. For me, going to Argentina was an adventure. We were going to South America, to what my father called "still a virgin country." My sister's only comment was that she did not want to leave her friends.

That is how we left Le Havre in the last days of September 1937.

Book 4

Argentina

Chapter 1

Our departure from Le Havre, the old French port that had seen so many ships sailing in different directions through the centuries, had been very emotional for all of us. The new generations would never understand how our hearts beat with emotion when we were leaving by ship, or when we came to the pier to wait for someone we loved who was arriving. At that time, aviation was still in "diapers," as the Spanish people say, and very few dared to fly, especially across the Atlantic Ocean, a trip that was still made by boat. It is true that the journeys lasted much longer then, but each one of them was an adventure that we savored and eagerly anticipated.

For instance, my father, for our trip from Le Havre to Buenos Aires, selected the longest one he could find, one that took us 28 days on the sea. Our ship made many port calls, giving us the opportunity to debark and see Lisbon, Casablanca, Dakar, Cape Verde Isles, Rio de Janeiro, Santos, and Montevideo, with Buenos Aires as our final destination.

Our ship *Brest* was quite an old vessel, but taking into consideration that we were journeying in first class, it was pleasant, since we had all the comfort we needed in our two adjacent cabins. In third class traveled mainly the Ukrainians, with destinations of Paraguay, Uruguay, or Argentina, to escape Polish persecution.

When the Versailles Treaty had been signed in 1919, Poland had been granted along with the German province of Silesia, a good slash of Russian territory from Belarus, and Galitzia, which used to be part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In these areas lived about eight million Ukrainians, with Lvov, which the Austrians called Lemberg, being the capital of the region. Usually, the oppressed people, once liberated, are the worst oppressors of other people, who are unfortunate enough to be under their jurisdiction.

The Polish had been suppressed and divided three times in the previous two centuries, among Russia, Germany and Austria-Hungary, but as soon as freedom had been given to them, the first thing they did was to mistreat all the minorities under their rule, such as Germans, Russians, Jews, and mainly the Ukrainians. The latter tried to seek refuge in Canada, which during several years absorbed a great number of them until 1934, when the Canadians restricted immigration of all groups, including the Ukrainians.

The travel agencies that had previously made good profits by selling tickets to the emigrants, to whom they had already sold the fare for Canada in advance, needed to find a country to which to direct these oppressed people who were ready to leave Poland, before these people asked for a refund of their money.

After many researches and hard work with the shipping companies, the travel agencies reached an agreement with several South American countries that were eager to receive skilled European people. It was then that these emigrants were rerouted to Paraguay, Uruguay, Argentina, and Brazil.

Most of these emigrants were peasants, and during the evenings, they would get

together on the deck at the stern to sing in choir their melodious Ukrainian songs. My mother loved their singing, and she went very often down to the third class quarters to listen to them, sitting on the steps for hours. They were poor, uprooted people, persecuted in their own land; now they were going to an unknown country to start a new life.

The memory of Nestor Makhno came back to my mind. He struggled so much for his people, and at that time nobody could have guessed that they still would wait for 55 more years before they saw their Ukraine independent, an event that happened when the Soviet Union crumbled in 1991.

In second class traveled people with limited economic means who were going to visit relatives or friends; among them were tourists, Slavs, French, and some Latin Americans. In first class with us were some Argentines, Uruguayans, and Brazilian tourists, along with some French businessmen returning to their adopted countries. We had a great number of German Jews in first class who were among the front-running waves of those who would escape the fascist anti-Semitism in their country. Most of them were from high intellectual families or professionals and had distinguished manners. They tried in vain to go to the United States, but because of the quota system, they couldn't get the immigration visas. As had happened with us, when they learned that by traveling in first class to Argentina they received at the same time a permanent residence permit, many of them invaded the port of Hamburg in their quest to escape the Nazis. Most of these refugees belonged to the middle class, some of them happy to escape whatever they were sensing would happen to them in Germany. Others, though, were very sad to have to abandon their country where they had been living for centuries, where they always had been considered and they always had considered themselves as Germans.

Usually, everybody takes advantage of unfortunate people, and these German Jews not only had to purchase the first class ticket, but in addition, they had to give to the shipping company a \$200 non-refundable deposit per person for eventual bar expenses. One of those Germans, an older man, seeing that my father would always take a cocktail before going to the dining room and quite often would drink beer during the day, explained to us their tragedy. This German, whose name was Fluegelman, told us that with his wife, he had sold in a hurry, almost for nothing, everything they had to be able to buy the tickets and had also given their last \$400 as a deposit for the bar expenses, which they knew they would never get back, because neither of them drank, and the deposit was nonrefundable. He then asked my father if it would be possible to do him a favor: each time my father ordered a drink at the bar, to let him sign the check on account of his deposit and to receive the equivalent in cash instead.

My father was delighted to help Fluegelman. He did it; nevertheless, the barman tried to put forth some objections, because he was counting on a part of this deposit, which he assumed would never be used, as the crew were taking advantage of the other emigrants in this way. Not only was my father consuming on account of Fluegelman's deposit, but sometimes he was even paying the German for a drink, an act that made the barman fume.

In the various and different classes also traveled very strange couples, and I once heard the Commissar on board, who became friendly with me, say that it was difficult to determine if the couples were real or if they were pimps bringing aboard women to put them to work in the bordellos, a white slave traffic that at that time was

still performed almost openly. When he realized that I was interested in the topic, the following day, he lent me the book written by London, *The Road to Buenos Aires*, in which the author described very well how this repugnant business was organized on a worldwide scale. This young commissar, Jules Moisson, had seen too many disagreeable scenes during his ten years of crossing these seas, and he recounted some of these tales to me.

On a cruise, there is always plenty of spare time, and immediately I started reading the book about this problem, which always intrigued me. First, I learned one more time that the equation mentioned by Karl Marx about the demand and the offer is also applicable to human beings, in all their atrocious deals.

When several South American countries started developing rapidly, thanks to American and English investments, immigration increased tremendously; but men were coming more than women, to the point that after a while women were in short supply. Not only were there not enough women for marriage, but there were not even enough to satisfy the sexual appetite of the masculine population; as a result, organized bands began importing French women to Argentina and Brazil. When in 1925 the French government intervened effectively, this kind of business became difficult, and the underworld thugs needed to find a source of women to be sold at a good price in Latin America.

In these countries, the disproportion between women and men came to be one woman to every three men. The worst case happened in Panama, during the construction of the canal of the same name, where in the population there were six men for each woman. Only rich people could get a woman for a spouse or mistress, and the rest of the poor people had only the prostitutes who were offered everywhere to satisfy their desires.

After the war, Poland, a brand new independent country, was going through a very difficult time, and some Jewish pimps from Varsovia and from the Russian city of Odessa, started bringing women to Latin America, fooling them with any kind of pretext, even promising them marriage; however, once in Argentina, they were sold to work in the bordellos, very often with the complicity of the police, who were receiving a good cut. I always have been sensitive to this problem—at least I still was at that time—and I suffered very much as I thought of these poor women fooled and sold as sex slaves.

When we were in Spain, during our long nights on the Aragon front, we often talked about this topic, and of course Antoine Guillaume said that these women didn't know anything better than going to bed with men, and anyhow they preferred it to working at a factory. Juan always got angry, and he screamed at Antoine to shut up! He said that it was a shame to talk that way and at the same time to be a volunteer in an anarchist army that was fighting to free men and women from slavery or oppression. He said more than once: "They are victims of capitalism, but when we achieve our goal and have power, these same women will get back their freedom and will live with decency, and of course"—and he would look at Antoine and then end his sentence with "we would shoot all the pimps!" When I was already living in Argentina, I learned that they were called *caficios* in that country, an Italian word meaning the same thing.

In addition to my lectures and looking around the ship and scrutinizing people, I was studying the Spanish language with assiduity. I was angry at myself for having spent a year in Spain without even having the idea to learn the idiom of that

country. A journey of four weeks is a long period of time, and after making a port of call at Lisbon, then Casablanca, where we went to stroll and eat in an Arab restaurant, little by little we got acquainted with several other passengers on board. One of them was a Uruguayan, Pedro Carcaran, who was traveling with his wife and his oldest daughter, just a nasty and ugly spinster. He was a good-natured man who like my father came every day to the bar, and very soon they started having a friendly conversation. I never understood how they were communicating, because my father couldn't speak Spanish yet, and Carcaran didn't know French or Russian, but they had a good time, chiefly after consuming a few drinks. We learned that he was what is called in South America a *quinelero*, a person dealing in illegal gambling or accepting bets on numbers in connection with the lottery and eventually paying the winners with his own money, which happened very seldom. Usually, the *quineleros* enriched themselves very fast with impunity, until the time when this kind of game was legalized.

Even though it would seem impossible, I befriended a priest, Charles Leclerc, who came from a small town in Brittany and was going to Brazil to see his successful married brother, who had made a fortune with some kind of plantation, the nature of which Charles couldn't explain. Charles was very proud of his brother, whom he hadn't seen in twenty years and who had sent him a first-class ticket to come to visit with him. His brother had promised to come to Rio de Janeiro to pick him up and to drive him to his *fazenda*, as farmland was called in Brazil.

Leclerc was excited by this prospect like a kid on vacation, and he consulted with the Vatican whether it was true that in Brazil, because of the extreme heat, the priests could wear white cassocks, a fact that was confirmed and that doubled his childish joy. This forty-year-old, big-bellied, and short priest had never in all his life left the little town where he was born; he hadn't even had a chance to go to Paris. This was the first trip of his whole life. He was happy like a baby, and his greasy face reflected his joy. Without knowing why, I liked this little priest who loved so much to talk, to talk about anything, with the exception of politics, which he hated, and very seldom would he even mention the topic of religion. I patronized him so much that to avoid his having any pain, I didn't tell him that I had been in Spain fighting for the Republican cause, and of course much less would I tell him that I was an atheist. I was very protective of him, and I liked him, almost behaving as if I were older than he and trying to avoid disturbing his good mood, thinking that after all, he couldn't change my thinking, nor could I change the little country priest's ideas.

Every evening after his nap, he would come to sit on my side of the deck, on one of the comfortable couches, to chat with me. He loved gossip and was a very good observer, always encountering something comical in the people we watched. Afterwards, we would compare our opinions about something, or somebody comical, and would start laughing like kids.

When the following Sunday he was officiating at a mass, I gave as a pretext for not attending a headache, and of course I didn't go to the living room, where he had permission to perform his religious service. The same thing happened the following Sunday, and finally he ended up by asking me, "Don't you go to church?" This time, I didn't have any other choice but to tell him that I didn't believe in God and that I was an atheist. This moment was a very painful one, because from the sympathetic friend that he had been until then, he became a fervent preacher, telling me that it was impossible to

live in sin without believing in God and that he would pray for the sake of my soul, etc. Not able to take it any more, I got up and left the deck.

After this incident, we stopped getting together, and it looked like we were avoiding each other when it happened that we crossed paths. This load was lifted from my peace of mind when, in Rio de Janeiro, I saw him all dressed up in his white Catholic priest's cassock, descending the gangway heading to the pier, where his brother was waiting for him. Inside myself, I wished him a wonderful time with his brother. He left, and I felt much more relaxed without his being aboard with us any more.

By the schedule, the ship was supposed to stay all day in this capital of Brazil. At that time, Brasilia hadn't yet been built as the country's future head city. I was gazing with attention in trying to locate Popol Henot on the wharf, where he had promised he would be in a letter he sent to me in Paris, before our departure. When I located him, the four of us descended the gangway to encounter this old friend from Neuilly, to whom I gave a big hug. Of course, Popol, now proud of his "new" country, took us to the Corcovado and also to other interesting places of this enchanting city of Rio de Janeiro. I was so impressed that I would have remained there very gladly, and Popol was encouraging me to do so, telling me that I should come to live in Brazil.

Late in the afternoon, we returned to our ship, which was scheduled to depart at midnight, and my friend suggested to me that we go to . . . over there! My father understood him and gave me some money, and we both went to the famous "zona." This time, Popol wanted to show me that he was very familiar with "women" and that he wasn't any longer the timid boy whom I knew before. It happened that I ended up with a French woman—many of that nationality were working in that area—and I asked her if all of them had a pimp, to which she replied that they didn't pimps in Brasil, but all of them had one in Buenos Aires.

This quarter, called "zona" in this section of the city, was completely different from our Place Clichy, or rue St. Denis, in Paris, where the women offered themselves in neighborhoods where there was a normal style of life prospering for the rest of the inhabitants and commerce was not limited only to "bordellos" or similar businesses involving this kind of activities. Here, it looked like a city, completely independent and different from what I had known until then. It looked more like Barcelona's "Barrio Chico," but with more people, more a feeling of violence, and also a great number of blacks, amid people of all kinds of nationalities. After our little excursion in this "red light" area, we got together again in one of the narrow and tumultuous streets, where we had decided to meet beforehand.

Paul was born in Bahia and thus was already a Brazilian of the second generation, but because he spent all his childhood in Paris, he spoke Portuguese with a slight French accent. I felt immediately that he wasn't completely at ease living in his country of birth and that he was missing Paris. I would experience the same sensation a few months later living in Argentina.

We went to have the famous Brazilian *cafezinho* in a bar of noisy customers and women who were coming to take a "break" from their "work." We had a very touching conversation, remembering our childhood in Neuilly, and Paul told me that my father was as intelligent as his uncle, who had forecast the coming war for any time soon, and it certainly would be better to spend that time in the New Continent, far away from battlefields. I don't know whether it was by courtesy or just by omission, but Paul never

mentioned my adventure in the Spanish Civil War. He was a fervent Catholic, and perhaps he opted not to touch that topic, thereby avoiding creating one of those disagreeable arguments that we used to have sometimes in Neuilly.

My ship was sailing at midnight, and it was already late; thus, my friend took a taxi that drove us to the wharf. The pier was deserted at that late hour, and after saying goodbye to Paul, I returned to our cabin, feeling after a while that we were moving, our boat resuming our cruise. Before leaving me, my childhood friend told me to see the captain of our ship *Brest*, Commander Poisson, who was a very good friend of his family. That I did the following day, so as to be able to brag in front of my new friends about my connections, because a captain during a cruise is an important figure on board.

We also became very well acquainted with another passenger, who was heading to Montevideo, Ernesto Quinones, who Carcaran assured us belonged to an old aristocratic family from Uruguay. We were surprised to see that they never socialized together, which would be normal, since both came from the same country, and the absence of this contact made us assume that they had some kind of class separation in Uruguay. This Quinones had very good manners, and it was visible that they belonged to a prominent family, even though he behaved too effeminately for my taste. I realized that these South Americans, who could be called "rich" because they didn't have hereditary nobility, didn't mix with plebeians, or people who weren't at least at their economic level. I could convince myself about that a few months later, when we were established in Buenos Aires and decided to spend our summer vacation on Uruguayan beaches; with this aim, I wrote to Quinones, asking him to give us some information about his country's most popular tourist recreation areas, but I never received an answer from him.

Also returning to Buenos Aires were two Air France families returning from France, where they had gone to visit with their relatives. At the dining table with us sat a couple of Spanish Basques, who were going to Mendoza, where they had relatives, and they assured us that the Argentine future was in the provinces.

After calling on the port of Santos and then Montevideo, a city that we liked very much, we were expecting to arrive at Buenos Aires the following day. The ambience was changing slowly, and it was easy to sense that a lot of the passengers were becoming very nervous. Everyone was realizing that very soon they would start the new life that they had planned so long in advance.

When we woke up the following morning, we saw an impressive spectacle in front of us; the ship came alongside the port of Buenos Aires, and we could see far away the tall downtown buildings. We heard several people stating, "It's like New York!," despite the fact that they never had been there and had seen that city only in the movies. At that time, no skyscrapers existed in Europe, and we were surprised to see these constructions of fifteen, twenty, and up to thirty floors high.

The most painful part of any cruise happens at the end, when the immigration agents come to inspect the documents, followed by the sanitary inspection and medical control, and then hundreds of people rushing to the gangplank to go to the warehouse and gather their wardrobe trunks (which ceased to be used when people started traveling by airplane.) The custom employees asked us to open our eight huge trunks in the midst of noise, children's screams, and flows of human waves going back and forth in all directions, all frustrated, tired, and in bad moods.

My father was very much surprised and disappointed when he didn't see

Robert Vargafel on the pier waiting for us, as had been agreed the last time he saw Vargafel in Paris. We had a feeling of abandonment; we could see it in my father, who in such situations would become pale and even colder than he usually was. By pure coincidence, the Basque couple passed by, and seeing my father frustrated, with kindness they asked us if they could be of any help to us. I explained to them, in my broken Spanish, that our friend who was supposed to come to pick us up hadn't appeared, and we didn't know where to go. The husband told us that he had the address of a hotel where they were heading and that we could also stay there. We were relieved at once, while the Basque contacted a moving company to make the arrangements to forward our belongings to this same hotel; this matter once settled, each family took a taxi for that destination.

During our trip through the streets, we looked without believing and with bewilderment at this huge and modern city that was beyond our expectations, because in our European minds we were more inclined to expect a backward town. When we arrived at the Constitution Plaza, where the little hotel was located, my parents almost collapsed, because it was a run-down building of the last category. My father was angry and he told our Basque friend that he wasn't used to staying in such a pigpen. The hotel's owner, also a Basque, without showing any anger, suggested to us that we go to the Mayo Hotel, where he promised he would forward our belongings, which were to arrive at any time from the port.

Chapter 2

The Mayo Hotel was located on the avenue of the same name, in the center of the city. Of course, this time it was a hotel of high category, a fact that placated my parents' mood, and even more so when they saw that the place was very elegant, with two luxurious rooms that we rented with windows offering views of the street.

We were overwhelmed, because we wouldn't even in dreams think that we could find all this comfort so far from Paris. From our window we were staring at sidewalks bustling with very well-dressed people, and on the streets, modern, mainly American cars circulated in heavy traffic.

Unfortunately, this enthusiasm didn't last too long, because when we went outside, we began to notice the negative and disagreeable part of the city. First we were surprised to see many fewer women than men on the streets, and when a woman was by herself, immediately men would start following her, or at least coming close to her, to say "things" that later on we learned were what the *portenos* (inhabitants of Buenos Aires) used to call *piropo*, meaning a juicy compliment.

When for the first time we entered a cafe, for my father had the habit of having an aperitif, or a beer, even before we had time to sit down at a table, we realized that only men were sitting in that room. Everyone stopped talking, and all of them stared at us with curiosity, until a waiter suddenly came running to us, saying as in reproach, "No! No! In the family section, please!" We saw that all the bars, restaurants, and other places where food was served were segregated into two sections, one for men only and the other for women, or families, which my father from the very first day, with his very special humor, nicknamed "harems."

On the sidewalks, the peddlers and other street vendors were quite aggressive, streaming to sell lottery tickets and newspapers; the barbers, shoeshine boys—every one was offering wares or services in a strident and deafening voice; so that one got the impression that the people were screaming more than talking.

All of us ended up very tired on this our very first day in the New World. We were still feeling the lag of time and also of season, because here instead of fall it was the beginning of spring, but in spite of that, none of us four could sleep that night.

We were at last where we had planned to be, and we needed seriously to start to understand the reality, beginning by getting used to this new country, where we were supposed to stay a few months until the next imminent war ended, as my father had forecast. The following three days were like a succession of tumultuous and contradictory feelings inside ourselves. On one hand, the country was very much advanced, the people were well-dressed, the food was not only good but abundant; but in the ambience floated a fragile cloud of indecision. We did not feel at ease, especially my sister Maya, who never could get used to Argentina.

One Sunday, we had a little family council in one of these "harems," as my father never stopped calling these sections reserved for families. After exchanging a few words, we unanimously came to the conclusion that after all, war might not be imminent in Europe, and perhaps we were too precipitous in leaving France. Maybe we could return to our Paris and await events there with more patience, because whatever should happen, we always could come back to Argentina. We were feeling very happy for having made this decision, and we decided to go to the French consulate to let the

officials know that we were going back to Paris as soon as possible.

The following day, after an abundant breakfast with good coffee served in the hotel, we stopped a taxi on the street, and it took us to the French consulate. It looked like we had come too early, because the door was closed and already waiting were a lot of people sitting in the waiting room. When one of them, a middle-aged gentleman, heard my father speaking Russian, he jumped with surprise, got up smiling, and came to him to introduce himself in the same language. His name was Lev Padusk; his wife Louise, who was much younger than he, didn't speak Russian and was Belgian.

My parents chatted a good while with this Mister Padusk, who, learning that they wanted to return to France, became frightened and very nervously told them that they were about to make a big mistake, because the war was about to start at any time and Argentina was a wonderful country, and once you lived there, you would learn to love it. He was almost begging my parents to think about staying in Buenos Aires a few months at least, without taking a precipitous decision, because in the future, we always would have the choice of returning wherever we decided to go if the European situation improved, which he personally doubted would happen. They were at the Consulate to renew their passports, but Lev told them that he could do it another day. It looked like he was taking our case very much to heart, and moving very fast for his age, he suggested that all of us go to eat at a German restaurant he knew, which wasn't far away from there, and at the same time to have a chance to know each other better. No need to say that my sister and I were disappointed, because we were already seeing ourselves back in our Latin Quarter.

We had to agree with Lev that this German restaurant wasn't any different from the French on our "Boul'Mich," because no "harem" existed there, perhaps because most of the clientele was European. My parents remained for hours talking with their new friend Lev, and it appeared that he succeeded in convincing them to remain a few more months in Argentina, because when we were back at our hotel on the Avenida de Mayo, the general mood had completely changed, while my parents were slowly getting back their self-confidence.

Two weeks later, we moved to an apartment on the street Montevideo 555, on the third floor, which Lev helped my parents to select and to rent. He became their inseparable friend who stuck to them all the time, and of course he went with them to purchase our furniture on Corrientes Street, a Jewish business quarter. Each day my parents became more and more appeased, because wherever Lev would take them, people not only spoke Russian, but many of them were from Odessa. The most important Jewish club in Buenos Aires was also Club Odessa.

The landlord, who in addition to the building in which we rented an apartment had ten more building in the same quarter, was also from Odessa, which he left before the First World War, coming to Argentina, where he made money by working hard. Our flat was very comfortable, with three bedrooms, a room for a maid, two bathrooms, and a huge kitchen with an installed refrigerator (a luxury in France at that time.) The area was very pleasant, and we were surprised to see that almost all the buildings around were ten floors high.

On one occasion, we were in a grocery store, where my mother was buying the produce she needed, and I was talking French with my sister, which attracted a young lady to come to us, delighted to have come across compatriots. My mother was happy,

and she invited Jeannette Hamel, the woman's name, to come to our home the same evening to have a cocktail with us. Jeannette was an attractive young lady, short in size, about thirty years old; she told us she was working at a library, and seeing that we had recently come from Europe, she bombarded us with questions about France, wanting to know mainly if it was true that war was imminent.

It was December 1937, and we learned that summer in the Southern Hemisphere was beginning that same month. Lev helped my parents to enroll my sister Maya in the French Lyceum at Belgrano, which was one of the best and also perhaps one of the most expensive high schools in Buenos Aires, and where the classes were to begin in March 1938. At the same time, I filled out my admission applications at the Institute (College) of Mechanical Engineering.

Needless to say, my parents, after all these hassles, came to the conclusion, my father especially, that the "children" needed some vacation, using one more time the same well-known litany. I don't know why, but at that time in Argentina it was a common belief that only Uruguay had good beaches—even Lev kept on insisting that "Argentina doesn't have beaches," an assertion that later we found was false, because that country has in fact very beautiful beaches. Anyhow, as newcomers, we were convinced that the only place we should be going was Uruguay, and it was then that our father remembered our two Uruguayan traveling companions on the ship *Brest* when we crossed the Atlantic. I was the official interpreter for our family, because I was the only one who could speak more or less good Spanish, a skill that put the burden on me to write to Pedro Carcaran and to Ernesto Quinones, asking them to give us their opinions about where to spend our vacation. As already noted, we never received any answer from the aristocrat Quinones, but through Lisa, Pedro Carcaran's daughter, we learned that the best place to go was Carrasco, not too far from Montevideo. She was kind enough also to include the name of a few hotels from that area, offering to make the necessary reservations for us.

When our new French friend, Jeannette, learned that we were planning to go to spend our vacation in Carrasco, she gave us the name of the hotel where she had been staying for years during her summers; the hotel was across from a beautiful beach. The family's mood improved at once; we were accustomed to having our yearly vacation, but due to my fighting in Spain, the family had been deprived of the last one, and in addition to that, it was necessary to start getting involved in the Southern Hemisphere lifestyle, and the sooner the better.

Montevideo is situated to the north of Buenos Aires, at the end of the Rio de La Plata estuary. We were told that the city's name was a concoction that was born when Portuguese sailors came for the first time to the region, which hadn't yet been yet discovered, and exclaimed in their language, "*monte vido eu!*" (I see a hill). From there came "Montevideo." The La Plata River is so wide that the Spaniards who saw it for the first time thought for a long while that it was a sea. When they later realized that it was a river, they gave it the name of "Rio de la Plata," because with the sunshine the water pouring into the Atlantic Ocean looked like silver.

The Mihanovich Shipping Company, created at the beginning of the century by Jewish European colonists, served with its huge fleet all the ports on the Parana River, up to Asuncion in Paraguay. A special and more frequent scheduled service was provided in summer time to cross the river, leaving Buenos Aires daily at 11 p.m. and arriving at Montevideo at 6 o'clock in the morning the following day.

It was the first time that in all our family existence we didn't celebrate New Year's Eve. We never celebrated Christmas—only socially, if invited someplace, just as an occasion more to be with friends; but New Year's Eve was different. It was like a superstition, the idea that if we had a good time and toasted the last day of the year at midnight, we would be lucky all the coming year. Without any special reason, we went to bed that night without celebration, and whether it was coincidence or whatsoever, 1938 was the most boring year of my life, quite different from the rest of my existence, which was filled with emotions and exciting activities.

January 1938 we spent at the Carrasco beach, feeling in our element, close to the water, the sea, our Atlantic Ocean. Jeannette was already in the hotel when we arrived. I don't know if I fell in love with her or if I was sexually attracted to her, though I still was afraid of women, perhaps for wanting them so much. Nevertheless, after a while, without remembering how it started, we were kissing in hidden places and indulging in some sleight of hands, but we were still horrified to go farther, while I sensed at the same time that I could do anything with her, without expecting any resistance.

One day there appeared in our hotel a couple from Argentina. The man was old and fat with very little hair over his big head, while the lady looked like a twenty-year-old movie star. He could easily have been her grandfather; and when they came to the dining room, everybody stared at them with a slight smile. The men were jealous of this old grandpa's luck for having with him such a beauty, and the women never stopped glancing at her with contempt for being a "kept woman"; still, at the same time they were eaten up with envy, seeing her so young and so appealing. Nobody had a doubt that she was the old man's mistress, and a few days later he returned to Buenos Aires, where he was an important businessman, with wife and children, as somebody gossiped once. His pretty companion remained by herself, enjoying the rest of the vacation. It didn't take too long before all of us became friends, as very often happens during a vacation, because we spent most of our time in the same places, in the hotel eating, or sitting at the terrace, on the beach, in the water, etc.

This little Carmen was precious, and even more attractive when wearing a bathing suit. She was originally from Galicia and quite often sang in her soft voice melodies from her land. When she would begin to intone "It's your fault, that my little heart has the blues," and her sensual look caressed me with her beautiful brown eyes, I couldn't control myself and I blushed, realizing that everyone around us understood her play on words with me; and she would side-glance in my direction with a discreet nod.

Carmen was always around me, and she wanted me to teach her how to swim, although I saw her many times swimming like a mermaid. She asked me to teach her how to skid underwater between my open legs. When I was showing her what to do, passing under her legs, she would close them, holding me tight while she caressed my head with her hand. When she was practicing to pass between my open legs, she would let her appealing buttock touch my body and move in a very provoking way, grabbing my legs without passing through. I was raving with desire. I wanted to howl like an animal in heat; but at that time, my timidity still was controlling me, and even though I understood that I was behaving as a stupid, I couldn't curb my shyness. I was angry, because I guessed that everyone at the hotel was convinced that I was going to bed with her, and I didn't know what to do to liberate myself from this embarrassing situation.

Fortunately, or perhaps unfortunately, little Carmen returned to Buenos

Aires a few days later, and seeing that I didn't ask for her address, she didn't give it to me; nevertheless, I could see that she was expecting to see me again in Argentina.

There is an American saying that you can bring the horse to the water, but you cannot force it to drink. When I matured and was cured of my timidity, inside myself I asked all the spirits—actual gods, the old ones, and those to be invented in a future time—to in some way transmit to all these precious girls I neglected my most sincere apologies. Because of my ignorance and shyness, I offended, without any intention, the most sublime, divine creatures who were offering themselves to me, driven by a candid human desire, and whom in secret, in every moment of my life, I adored. Unfortunately, I learned too late what Nietzsche, the philosopher who most inspired me, said about them: "There is not a more ferocious animal than a despised woman."

Our Uruguayan friends, the Carcaran family, came to visit and eat with us every Sunday, and on one occasion, the older son, Enrique, invited me to come to Montevideo to watch a soccer game. I accepted at once, because soccer was my passion, and I had been a soccer team's captain when I was a boy scout in Paris.

When the day came, I took the bus from Carrasco to Montevideo to meet Enrique, who was waiting for me at a place whose address he had given me previously. We went to a small restaurant for dinner, where typical food was served, and of course we had to sit in the "men's" section, because there too they had the "harem," as my father had nicknamed it. After dinner, Enrique told me that we still had an hour before the game started and that he was taking me someplace—to where I didn't pay any attention, because not knowing the city, any place would be worthwhile to be seen, and I opted not to ask any questions. I realized when we came to the place that it was a bordello. I never before had been inside any of these places, and I understood that was the place he mentioned to me and that I had been unable make out at the time. Needless to say, inside myself I was grateful to my Uruguayan friend, because I hadn't seen a woman in a long while and my desire was tormenting me. I ended up going to bed with a Hungarian girl, while he went with a French one. After this short adventure, already more relaxed and satisfied, we went to watch the game.

The vacation was coming to an end; we had good tans, all of us were in a happy mood, and it seemed that we were getting used to our new South American life. We met also in the same hotel an Argentine couple, Pablo Ricci and his wife Farina. He was the head of the advertisement section at the well-known department store Harrods in Buenos Aires. We quickly became good friends and continued to see each other frequently for many years.

Once back in Buenos Aires, we returned to our little routine, but this time with pleasant feelings, because we already were liking the country and we were meeting more and more new and interesting people. We loved the tango, and my father purchased a big radio that constantly transmitted this Argentine music, which at that time was the most popular music around the world. My sister Maya was ready to start going to her lyceum in Belgrano, while I would be taking my courses at the Institute of Mechanical Engineering.

The European situation was worsening, and my father one more time explained the circumstances that had allowed fascism to take over in Italy and Germany. He insisted that if the unemployment and then the Depression in the United States that expanded later to all Europe hadn't happened, and if England and France hadn't

requested exaggerated reparations from Germany, ruining that country, fascism would never have had a chance to succeed, not to mention the tremendous fear of communism that the capitalists and their imperialist propaganda were creating. All these factors were letting the Spanish Falangists massacre with impunity their own innocent people, with the complacency of the so-called democracies. To be honest, the situation in Spain was bad, and I wasn't missing any news when it was given by radio regarding that country, news that got into my skin for the rest of my life.

After a long silence, I finally had received recently a letter from my comrade in arms, Juan Mayol Ballester, the first that I got from him in Argentina. He didn't reproach me for having left Spain, and he asked me to keep on fighting for democracy and human rights.

In February 1938, Hitler occupied Austria without shedding a drop of blood, thus increasing anti-Semitism there, which was already practiced openly in Germany. The same year in September, Chamberlain from England and Daladier from France signed a pact with Hitler, giving him a free hand over Czechoslovakia.

In November, a young Polish Jew in Paris killed Erns von Rath, an employee at the German Embassy, an event that provided a pretext for the notorious "Kristallnacht" (night of broken glass), when in 24 hours in Germany, 100 Jews were murdered, 30,000 were arrested, 7,500 Jewish stores were looted and their windows broken, while 250 synagogues were burned. From that time, of the million Jews living in Germany, only a third of them succeeded in escaping from the country. Argentina had a right-wing government that was applying an iron fist to the leftists.

What attracted my attention was the clear lack of interest the Argentine people had regarding political activities. With their mouths, they were very good, because talking about politics was the *portenos'* favorite sport, just after soccer and chatting about women. Since the time of Buenos Aires' foundation, the inhabitants of that city were nicknamed *portenos*, because they lived in a port. It was amazing to see that, in the working class, the people were mostly ashamed of themselves for belonging to the proletariat, and on Sunday they would get dressed up with the best they had, trying to appear as if a part of the middle class, and they loved to come as such to mingle with them downtown. I also was surprised to learn that officially the labor unions didn't exist, nor did retirement plans. Health care was run by the government, was free for everybody, and usually was considered pretty good.

The general opinion of the people on the street usually was liberal, and the majority were supporters of the Civic Radical Union, which was the most left-wing legal party existing. To belong to any Marxist party, socialist, not to mention the communist, could have been dangerous. To give them credit, on average, the people had a good standard of living, or at least they were not starving, as in many European countries of that time.

Most of the Argentines were descendants of Spaniards, and Spaniards were even actually the main immigration influx, chiefly from Galicia. The second most important immigration was the Italian, which brought many Italian words and tunes into the Spanish language. It was amazing to hear people speaking Spanish on the street with an Italian accent from Naples. I would witness it during World War II, when as part of the 5th American Army I happened to be in Naples and heard people screaming Italian words that I couldn't understand, making me feel like I was back again in Buenos Aires.

The third important immigration flow came from France, increasing sharply after the Franco-Prussian war of 1871, when Alsace-Lorraine had been snatched by victorious Germany. More than 100,000 persons from these provinces chose to move to Latin America rather than remain under the German boot.

At that time, the Argentine economy was very closely tied to European capital. All the frozen-meat packing factories belonged to English companies. From Argentina was exported forty percent of the total meat sold worldwide. The Britons built the railroads and also the subway in Buenos Aires, the fifth subway to function in the world. The first had been constructed in New York in 1903, the second in London, the third in Paris, and the fourth in Chicago.

When we arrived, industry almost didn't exist, but the country was very rich from exporting meat, wool (the second exporter after Australia), leather, cereals, fruit, wood, and also the little polo horses, the best in the world.

At home we avoided talking about Spain, and when in secret I would buy any newspaper or magazine referring to that conflict, I read them in hiding. My heart bled when I learned about the Republican retreat from Aragon on the Ebro river, which had been so familiar to me. The Germans were increasing their Condor Legion and the Italians were sending more soldiers, while the League of Nations was talking about removing all the foreign fighting forces from both sides in Spain. I was inconsolable, reading in a Republican magazine published in Buenos Aires how the International Brigades had left Barcelona after the emotional parade when Pasionaria made her historic speech: "You are History, you are Legend!"

A few weeks later, I received another letter from my friend Juan Mayol, telling me that our "Sebastian Faure" Centuria had been incorporated into the 25th Division and also that he had been promoted to captain. As a Spaniard, he couldn't leave the country with the volunteers of the International Brigades, so he remained in Spain to continue his fight against the fascists.

Chapter 3

My parents were expanding their social circle, because Lev never stopped introducing them to new Russian friends living in Buenos Aires. One day, walking on Corrientes Avenue, I passed the intersection with Canning, and I didn't hear any more talking in Spanish, but only Yiddish. I was told that 600,000 Jews were living in Argentina and that most of them came before the First World War, almost all of them from Russia, and some came after the failed 1905 Revolution. Half of the Jewish people were established in Buenos Aires, with garment, jewelry, furniture, or other kinds of stores. They had several clubs, and it was easy to see that they felt comfortable in Argentina.

Very quickly, my parents became friends with the Kahn family, in spite of the fact that they were older than my parents; but all were from Odessa and had a lot to talk about. Abraham and Sarah didn't have children, which was their only sadness. I heard Sarah telling us many times about their courting period, which started in their native city. Abraham was very poor and decided to make money to be able to get married, coming to Argentina at the beginning of the century. He worked hard and even tried his luck as a partner in one of those brothel businesses in Rosario, the second largest Argentine city in population.

Eight years later, already on his feet as a wealthy businessman, he asked his fiancée to come to Argentina to marry him. She left Odessa by ship with her mother, and as quite the gallant man he was, he came to Rio de Janeiro to wait for them, returning together with Sarah and her mother to the Argentine capital to have the long-awaited ceremony performed at last.

Sarah's mother, who had many more children in Odessa, decided after a while to return to her home, a decision she regretted very much later, because shortly thereafter began World War I, followed by the Revolution. Anyhow, a few months later, after Sarah's wedding, she died in her beloved Odessa.

The fact was that my parents were happy to be with their countrymen and to talk at ease with them. Abraham was already retired, but he had a membership in the Stock Exchange Market, where he was speculating. He introduced my father, who wasn't doing anything at that time, to other stockbrokers and backed his request for membership, to permit him to do the same thing as he was doing, buying and selling shares and actions for profit. All my father's money was in English pounds in the Bank of London and wasn't moving, nor yielding him any interest. Abraham was able to convince my father that the Argentine peso was actually the strongest money and that war would erupt at any time, in which case the English currency, as was expected, would lose its value. My father followed his advice and never had to regret it, because for many years the Argentine peso remained very strong, fluctuating in the market at the level of the American dollar.

Lev always had good ideas, and one day he suggested to my parents that they put an ad in a newspaper to give me a chance to practice Spanish with young Argentines. My mother liked the idea, and it became a question of choosing in which one of the papers to insert the ad. Lev discarded the Russian publication because of too much confusion and the fact that in general, Argentines believed that all Russians were Jews,

because Jews came from there with Russian passports, and at that time very few Russians were living in Argentina.

The French newspaper was also very problematic, because there still floated in the air a sort of ghost related to the white slave traffic from France, and thus there existed the possibility that the ad could attract some undesirable people.

Lev thought that the best newspaper for that kind of ad would be the German one, and, after some more deliberations, there appeared in Argentina, in a German newspaper, an ad placed by Russian immigrants with the following text: "Young Frenchman recently arrived in Buenos Aires seeking to exchange French for Spanish conversation," and ending with our address; the telephone wasn't yet installed.

One day, our entrance bell rang, and when I opened the door, I saw standing in the hall three young men more or less my age, but all of them were taller. The three of them were laughing, while one of them was showing me the German newspaper with our ad and just said: "We come for that!"

My mother and my sister Maya were at home, and I let the young men in, and they introduced themselves. The one who was talking and wearing glasses was Theo de Grand Pre, 19 years old, an American from Chicago of French descent; his younger brother was Enrique, 17 years old; and the last was their "uncle," they said laughing, Paul, who was German. That was how our new friendship started, and it lasted all our lives.

We learned that the father, Mr. de Grand Pre, when he divorced his wife in Chicago, had decided to change the ambience, and once he had secured the RCA Victor representation for Latin America, he moved to Argentina. That had happened ten years before, when both sons were 7 and 9 years old.

Coming first to Buenos Aires, Mr. de Grand Pre stayed at a German boarding house held by a father with a daughter. After a while, Mr. de Grand Pre married the daughter Liesel, who for me became "tante Liesel," who was one of the family and the most admirable woman I ever met. Many years had passed since then, the children grew up, and "tante Liesel" brought her younger brother from Germany, and he was living with them.

In a short period of time, the four of us became close friends. They lived in Banfield, on the outskirts of Buenos Aires. They owned a huge mansion, with a swimming pool and a small soccer field, where on Sunday with other kids from the neighborhood, we organized championships, playing Argentina's favorite sport.

I learned later that when Enrique came to see us for the first time and saw Maya, who at that time was 12 years old, once back home he said to "tante Liesel," whom both called "mutti," that he was reserving for himself Miguel's sister, once she grew up.

My sister did not participate in our group due to her youthfulness, but when I came back from the war in September 1945, I learned that she was engaged to Enrique. That's destiny! Not only did they get married, but they had a very pleasant life, with their two children and one granddaughter—but we will come back to them later!

We started molding our life to the country's rhythm and chiefly to that of Buenos Aires, which was the heart of Argentina. At the end of 1938, we were already feeling very comfortable on this New Continent, with an ever-increasing list of friends, and we spent New Year's Eve at the house of our new acquaintance Ricci, where we met the Riccardi family, all of us celebrating the New Year and raising toasts that 1939 would

be a prosperous one.

Once more listening to Lev's advice, this time backed by Abraham Kahn's opinion, my parents decided to buy a house, because it was evident that the war would begin at any time, would last a very long time, and would not be short, as my father had thought when we still were in France. After looking in the best quarter in Buenos Aires' northern suburbs, we selected a beautiful house in Martinez, not too far from the La Plata River, and all of us liked it at once. It was four blocks from the railroad station, very convenient for my sister Maya to travel to her lyceum at Belgrano.

I split my time between the Engineering Institute and the Faculty of Anthropology, where I met and became a friend of the famous professor Enrique Palavecino, a scientist known and respected worldwide.

I was interested in knowing the origin of mankind and above all in following the evolution of our ancestors. I never neglected increasing my knowledge about the structure of life itself, trying to integrate it with my Marxist ideal, looking for compatibility between ideology and science, which my mind hadn't yet come completely to understand.

My social circle also was enlarging, and I became a member of the French Club "Patrie," where in between other sports, I practiced Greco-Roman wrestling, which I liked even more than boxing, which had enthused me so much when we were living in Paris. There, too, I made a lot of new friends, who were mainly "creole," meaning that they were born in Argentina to European parents, chiefly French, and their language was the one we spoke, although very easily we could switch to Spanish, or vice-versa.

After our exercises, we split up into small groups of five to ten companions to sit at any of the numerous cafes on the sidewalks of the newly inaugurated 9 de Julio avenue. It had been constructed after tearing down all the buildings between Cerrito and Carlos Pellegrini streets. It was designed as much with the intention of alleviating the heavy traffic that was increasing daily as it was for vanity, to be able to brag that Argentina had the widest avenue in the world, which until then had been the Champs Elysees, now a few meters narrower.

In the French Club I became very close with Andre Pons, who emphasized that he was related to the at-that-time=famous singer Lili Pons. He was born in Buenos Aires, but had to go to France for the draft. He was assigned to the Colonial Army, in the "Spahis" cavalry unit, in North Africa.

For many years there existed a very incongruent situation for the "creoles" whose parents were French, in that they had a dual citizenship and most of the time had to perform the draft duty twice, once in France and once in Argentina, according to both countries' laws. This could not last forever, and the burden was removed a few years later by the declaration that young men of draft age could perform their military service of choice, either in Argentina or in their parents' country.

Andre told very interesting stories about the three years he had spent with the "Spahis" in Morocco, and especially about their patronizing the infamous "Bu Sbir's" brothels, considered to be the world's largest and known to have everything in sexual perversions that anybody could fantasize or imagine.

Andre introduced me to another friend, Louis Menker, who also came to Latin America with his mother to escape the war that was about to start in Europe. As they didn't have enough money to travel to Argentina in first class, which would have

given them resident status, they decided to go to Paraguay, planning later to move to Argentina. What they ignored was that Argentine authority accepted Europeans coming from Paraguay only if they were Christians. Louis, who was a Jew, opted to convert to Catholicism and thus to be able to travel to Buenos Aires. At that time, he worked at the French Chamber of Commerce; he was very erudite, and almost immediately we began seeing each other on a regular basis. I got together with Andre almost daily, because he lived a few blocks from our apartment at 555 Montevideo Street, and later, when we moved to Martinez at 2347 Albarellos Street, I still succeeded in being in touch with both of them often. Louis called himself an anarchist, and he didn't believe that any political system could bring peace and welfare to everybody, because someone would always exploit others when there was the opportunity to do it with impunity. That was the reason that he trusted Bakunin's ideas.

The year 1939, politically, was a very sad and shameful year! Franco, after defeating the last Republican resistance and occupying all Spain, imposed a reign of terror, shooting thousands and thousands of people suspected of having democratic ideas.

The Allies didn't reach an agreement with the Soviet Union, expecting that Hitler would invade that country, and the lack of an agreement forced the Russians to protect themselves by signing a pact of neutrality with Germany on August 23 of the same year.

The war started that same year, too, when Germany invaded Poland. On September 3, England sent an ultimatum to Hitler, and not receiving an answer, England declared war on Germany; then France did the same. It didn't help Poland, because two weeks later, the German tanks were rolling down the streets of Varsovia, without any action from any of these countries, which failed to come to Poland's rescue. The League of Nations was powerless. Mussolini invaded Albania, with the purpose of occupying Europe from the south.

There wasn't any doubt any more that the war would last for years. In Argentina, meanwhile, life continued its normal rhythm. Vacation time was close, and we decided to spend it in the south of Argentina, discovering beautiful beaches in Mar del Plata, Necochea and Miramar. We liked the latter town, where we rented a chalet to spend our traditional and annual two months of rest.

During this vacation, I fell in love with a young Jewish girl from the Middle East, Maria Nolan, who of course spoke French. She was spending the vacation with all her family in Miramar. I had a very pleasant and emotional time with her, but only and purely in a platonic way. For the first time, I believed and was convinced that I had the opportunity to start my apprenticeship in affairs of love. Unfortunately, besides kisses and some touching, I couldn't go farther. Maria, all confused and almost ashamed, confessed that she was from a very religious family that was expecting her to marry another Jew as a virgin.

Once we were in bed, in one of those little hotels by the hour whose address I got by coincidence through Louis, it was there that she made this inappropriate or at least unexpected confession, which disappointed and disarmed me completely. At that time I didn't know yet, but I learned later, that I could have been called "virgin pardoner." It happened to me the first time as a result of my being shy, but it wasn't the last time, because on another occasion the same situation arose, or one very similar.

During the war, when we disembarked in the south of France with the Free

French Forces on August 16, 1944, we were pushing back the Germans, opening the road toward the north. Our battalion was completely exhausted, we had many losses, and another division had to come to replace ours, giving us a few days of rest, which we spent in a small town 5 kilometer from the front. For us fighters, a few miles behind the front was considered safe, while for those at the rear guard and bureaucrats, "ink-suckers" as we nicknamed them, 50 kilometer from the front made them feel as if they were fighting on the front, and quite often they received more medals for courage than we did.

Anyhow, that day Jojo Louzon, Coco Levi, and I, each one of us with a girl we succeeded in seducing, were heading to the town's small hotel. We learned that the then-Lieutenant Jean Pierre Aumont, the famous movie actor who left Hollywood to come to fight on our side in the First Motorized Infantry Division, was there. At that time, he was our General Brosset's adjutant and was lying wounded in one room of this inn. A piece of paper was glued to his door asking passersby not to make any noise that could disturb him.

When I closed the door of my hotel room, remaining alone with the little French girl, I realized that she was looking like an innocent doll. Not only was she a virgin, but she intended to stay one. Seriously, she said to me that she was mine, and not pure any more, due to the fact that she had lain in bed with me. I had such pity of her that I didn't even intended to touch her, though I couldn't close my eyes during the night long as I rested at her side and felt her beautiful, warm body close to mine.

At that time, it had been already a good while since I wasn't any more the inexpert adolescent from Neuilly s/Seine. I had acquired already an enormous experience with women, and I had deflowered quite a good number of them, but I was sorry for this little country girl. I understood that in her innocence, she went with me, because in her eyes I was a hero who liberated her country, and in some way she wanted to show me her gratitude, ignoring completely my intentions, what she was risking, or what could have happened.

It would be a few more years before my attitude changed, and with Maria I still didn't have this skill. When we came back to Buenos Aires, we kept on seeing each other, but the situation was becoming unbearable, and I had to use the old solution that I learned in Paris to placate my anxiety, which was to go with prostitutes whose addresses Louis and some other friends furnished to me.

My father wanted to invest part of his money in something related to food, because as he said, in wartime food is the most important commodity. It was decided to buy a big ranch with a poultry breeding factory in Derqui, 70 kilometers from Martinez. And so, for a short period of time, we became ranchers. I owned already my four-door, eight-cylinder 1936 Packard and could move easily back and forth. My parents, as good sybaritites, remained in Martinez.

Without disregarding my Engineering Institute classes, I was learning how to live on the farmland, where besides cattle and horses, we had 10,000 hens. After all, I wasn't too far from Buenos Aires with a car, and on the ranch we had good management, which was giving me the freedom to move at will.

Once, being with my friend Louis Menker in Buenos Aires, in one of those cafes with orchestra that abound on Corrientes Avenue, I saw suddenly that at our neighboring table was a group of young people, and just beside me was sitting on the same sofa a beautiful dark-haired girl. We began casually talking with them, and when

they learned that we were French, because it was the language I was speaking with my friend Louis, they showed us a special consideration. At that time, anything French or from France was considered special and was enviable. I learned that my little neighbor's name was Dina, and very discreetly, avoiding the notice of her friends, we arranged to have a date for the following day.

I was very excited, because this black-haired girl was very appealing to me and I sensed that she liked me, too. I didn't try, nor did I expect to achieve anything on our very first date, but we had a good time listening to music in a cafe, and mainly talking.

I learned that Dina Felstein was from Entre Rios. The father, a Russian Jew, ran away from the tsarist anti-Semitism, and she was born in Argentina. It was apparent that she was sentimental, being fond of poetry and literature. She surprised me by her erudition and her culture, amid the spiritual beauty flowing from her words, while her little dark eyes were shining with emotion.

Chapter 4

It was the beginning of the New Year 1940, and we were thinking about our vacation, which we knew would be spent in Miramar. One more time, we rented the famous Villa Nene chalet, which was only four blocks from the beach.

The landlords were Italians who, like most of their people, had the ambition, shared at that time by many workers, to acquire or build three houses for their old age, meaning to occupy one of them and to live off the rent from the other two. No public retirement program existed yet in Argentina, and everyone planned his own way to make a living when he wasn't able to work any more.

Most of these Italian immigrants were construction laborers, and while at work they were saving money to buy the construction material for their houses. The owners of Villa Nene not only were leasing two houses, but during the vacation period, they were also renting their own home, using this money to travel and visit with friends and relatives.

We were paying 1,000 pesos in rent for the summer season, and the landlord offered to sell it to us for 5,000 pesos, with all the furniture in the house. The three of us badly wanted my father to buy it, but he hated to own properties and said that we already had a house in Martinez and a ranch in Derqui, and he didn't want to be tied up with more real estate. He insisted that we would have an unattended dwelling for almost ten months; he pointed out that nobody knew what could happen to an unoccupied property and that he didn't feel like coming a few times in wintertime to check the house. In addition to all that, he wasn't sure that he would always want to come to spend our vacation in Miramar.

My mother never forgave him for missing such an opportunity, and every time we went on vacation, she would say sarcastically, "Now, if only we had the Villa Nene, we wouldn't be spending money in rent . . .", a sentence that remained proverbial among us.

At the end of February of the same 1940, we came back from our vacation; my parents went to Martinez, and I returned to our ranch in Derqui. When, after our vacation, my parents came to our camp, my mother complained that we were neglecting our ranch and that I should have come back sooner to take care of it, because she insisted that the laborers were stealing eggs, chickens, and even calves during our absence. But despite all her complaints, our ranch was very well run, and my father, with his own philosophy, said that if anything had been stolen, it was in a certain way normal, because it was a kind of extra wages that our employees were granting themselves for taking good care of our property while we were spending our wonderful vacation.

I wasn't doing well in my studies, and I never was a good student, despite the fact that I could learn very fast when I compelled myself to do it. I divided my time between driving to the Institute in Buenos Aires and taking care of the ranch. One weekend, I remained by myself in Derqui, because although my parents quite often came to spend a few days on the farm to breathe a pure and fresh air, this time they were going someplace with their friends Sarah and Abraham Kahn and the inseparable Lev, with his wife Louise, who was always tired. I took advantage of being alone to call Dina, who promised to come early in the morning the following Sunday by train to spend the day with me in Derqui.

That week, it rained so much that the earth road was impassable; it was out of the question to try to drive my car to the railroad station to pick up my girlfriend, and I had to harness two horses to our carriage for the trip. Dina arrived all radiant by the train; her head was covered by a straw hat filled with flowers, and the first thing she noticed was my tan, which amazed her.

I tried to fix something to eat in our huge mansion's kitchen, because on Sunday the maid had her day off and I had to do my best. Our camp's workers were far away from our dwelling; they knew what they had to do, and I wasn't expecting to be disturbed by anybody. We ate the little food I fixed in a hurry, had some wine, and after finishing our lunch with fruit, we went to sit in our big living room. This time, I devoted myself with all my eagerness to my proposal, and after a couple of hours of efforts, kisses, and fondling, I succeeded in taking Dina to my bedroom, where very soon we were lying on my couch.

Finally, the much-awaited moment that I had seen so many times in dreams came. Without too much effort, I succeeded in going to bed with a girl, a "decent," which was what I always called someone who would not take money for it, and in addition, I had a virgin. After our lovemaking, Dina became frightened at seeing blood on her panties and on the bed sheets. Later on, she washed her underwear, and of course she cried a lot. I was expecting it, because I had heard so many times the saying that girls cry when they lose their virginity—at least that was the way it was in 1940!

Not only did we keep seeing each other, but I realized that the physical pleasure wasn't everything, because Dina constantly requested that I show her my love, not with facts, but with words. She would unavoidably start crying when we were making love in bed; instead of remaining still or mumbling sweet words, she would continuously repeat with anger the same reproach: "You don't love me, I know that you don't love me!" which disturbed my erotic meditation. With time, Dina wanted to increase her control over my life, my time, and my tastes, not leaving me alone any moment, as if I belonged to her.

Already I wasn't feeling at ease with her, to the point that I was asking myself if having this short period of physical pleasure was worth enduring afterward for a couple of hours her complaints, her recriminations, and her whimpers. She kept on saying that now that she couldn't get married, because no man would take her knowing that she was not any longer a virgin; if I were a decent man, I would marry her, instead of bringing her so much suffering.

This situation was torturing me, to the point that I told my mother that the girl I was dating wanted me to marry her. My mother, listening to me, cracked up laughing, and once more, as she always did, she showed her contempt for any girl I would like. "You are innocent Misha! For instance, do you believe that she doesn't have several candidates to whom she is telling the same story!" Of course, I didn't dare tell my mother that I had taken Dina's virginity, which anyhow she wouldn't have believed.

After that, with sarcasm she told as a joke, to anybody who would listen to her, that a girl had asked for Misha's hand. Every time, she would emphasize, "It wasn't Misha who asked her hand, it was she who asked his hand! Can you believe it!" All our friends smiled, knowing that my mother was always inclined to be jealous of any girl I was with.

My insatiable sexual urge took precedence over all the disagreeable aspects

that my relationship with Dina was bringing to me, and I was forced to accept it, as long as I could satisfy the erotic impulses that I came to consider as part of the process. As far as marriage goes, such a step was far away from my mind, and for several reasons, the most important being the economic, because I didn't have nor was I earning money to start a family. I didn't feel emotionally ready to take such a responsibility and much less to start a "petit bourgeois" life with Dina, when so much had to be done at this historical moment, in which the future of mankind was at stake.

Time was passing, and I was seeing Dina almost once a week, either in Buenos Aires or when she could come to see me in Derqui. I was getting used to her laments, and after all, I considered that the compensation I was getting from her was much more stimulating than what I felt with prostitutes. Dina was one of those girls who should have lived in the past century, in the time of Lamartine or Chateaubriand, who had so impressed me during my adolescence in Paris because of sentences like: "Lulled to sleep by his own crying!", or, "The entire world is but an immense altar, on which everything living should be sacrificed!"

Dina didn't seem to take part in the physical pleasure that so much enraptured me during our lovemaking encounters, to the point that many years later, remembering this affair, I asked myself if she hadn't been frigid. I didn't discard the possibility that my lack of experience could have been the reason that she never experienced orgasm. And so, while I was floating in Eros' world, she remained quiet or would reproach me for my lack of love for her and my increasing her sufferings.

In our long conversations at our ranch at Derqui or in Buenos Aires, I learned that when she was living in the small town of Entre Rios, across the Parana river, she had fallen in love for the first time with a "philosopher," who was living in a primitive shack. She told me that she would bring food to this bearded revolutionary, remaining afterward a good while with him to listen to his rhetorical complaints about social injustice, the existence of which had made him take the decision to live alone in the midst of nature.

Dina's parents, intrigued, followed her once and discovered the place where she would come to spend so many hours in the company of this "bum." Despite the fact that Dina's father was a Marxist, a very cultured and liberal man, he didn't want his daughter to get tied up to this homeless, lazy vagabond who came to the town sometimes to earn some money by doing any kind of work, because he didn't have any profession nor any ambition in life.

Of course, the police had been alerted, and no matter how much Dina pleaded with her parents, the "dreamer" had been chased from his place, and she never could get in touch with him again, despite all her efforts. To avoid creating any feeling of jealousy on my part, she always would add during her confessions: "He never touched me, and you know that you took me as a virgin! I loved him, but not as much as I love you! It's impossible to love anybody more than I love you; my heart is saying it to me!"

There in Entre Rios, fearing that she could fall in love with another type of bum, her parents sent Dina to Buenos Aires to stay with an aunt. The day I met her, when I was with my friend Louis Menker, she came with her cousins to that same cafe to listen to the Hungarian gypsy music, which at that time was very popular. I tried always to deflect the conversation, which she stubbornly brought back to my feelings—when we were going to get married and other boring similar topics. Once, sitting in a cafe in

Buenos Aires, I was tired because our conversation was dragging, and by chance, I told her that I had fought in the Spanish Civil War. I didn't expect that such a confession would affect her so much. As soon as she heard me, she jumped on her seat, calling the attention of the other patrons, who thought perhaps that it was the beginning of a fight.

Dina had grown up in the midst of Jewish emigrants who came from Russia before the First World War and who ended up scattered throughout several countries of the American continent.

Without any doubt, it had been the best foreign idealists who came from Europe to the New World. Many of them pursued their fight for freedom, equality, and the integration of black people in the United States, for human respect, and mainly for the organization of the unions. Unfortunately, after World War II, many of these idealistic Marxist descendants became capitalists and came to increase the ranks of the exploiters, often laughing at their ancestors' innocence, those who came from the Eastern Europe and who spoke Yiddish. With time, the publications in this language were exhausted, and very soon they disappeared completely, with the exception of Argentina, where they are still published. I remember once in 1986, when I came to Buenos Aires, and took a subscription to a Yiddish newspaper for my father-in-law, Lou Wasserman, who lived in St. Louis. At that time, no newspapers in that language were published any longer in the United States.

Dina followed her father's teaching and knew very well the Marxist ideals, but even though she didn't believe the fascist lies, which accused the Popular Front revolutionaries in Spain of burning churches and raping nuns, she got scared after hearing that I had fought in an anarchist column. She became terrified!

After that, I had another headache with her. For some reason, she believed that all anarchists were terrorists, and she was afraid that the police would put me in jail each time we came across any law enforcer. She would start trembling, clinging closely to me, whispering in my ear, "He comes for you!" When she called me on the telephone, she would always begin by saying that she was happy to see that I wasn't in jail. This she said no matter how hard I tried to explain to her that I went to Spain very young as a volunteer to fight the fascists in an army and that we never did anything for which we should have been punished, because we never did anything against the law. Much less should she fear for my life in Argentina, I told her, where not only didn't I belong to any political party, but I didn't even know anything about them. When she heard that all my ancestors were from Odessa, for no reason at all she started calling me "my little Cossack," insisting that I was a descendant of those romantic Cossacks idealized in literature, and she promised to write a book about me.

This situation was already growing unnerving, especially since I was also disturbed by the international situation, which was getting more dreary and complicated daily. My affair was becoming painful, and instead of obtaining some kind of relief and serenity from my girlfriend, when I left her I remained more distressed than pleased. At that time, I still was very honest with myself, and it seemed to me that it wasn't very decent of me to see Dina only for the purpose of using her for my sexual relief. I wasn't giving her what she most wanted from me—love, feelings, hope, or maybe the fulfillment of some kind of dream—because I told her on many occasions that I wasn't marrying her and that she should forget about it.

There came a moment when my patience wore out, because I had to handle, besides her, some more important problems at home and also financial matters. I sensed that my father, without saying a word to me, expected that I would do something exceptional to take care of the crucial situation that everybody saw coming very soon. I didn't hold any grudge against him, because I wasn't improving in my studies, I was neglecting the ranch's administration, and I was living like a millionaire.

I decided to break with Dina, which was easy to do physically, because I could always tell her that my parents were on the farm when she intended to come see me. If, by chance, she asked me to see her in Buenos Aires, I could always invent a business meeting, or as a pretext, some kind of important test at the university that I couldn't postpone. The problem that I foresaw was rather a sentimental one, because knowing her, I was sure I would be receiving telephone calls from her every day, begging me, crying, and imploring to see me.

It was only after a series of many disagreeable episodes and hysterical scenes, including threats to commit suicide that little by little I succeeded in driving her out of my life. When I say drive her out of my life, it was just an assumption, because several years later, a few months after I came back from the war, while I was walking one day in Buenos Aires' downtown close to the Congress, I heard somebody calling my name. When I turned my head, I saw Dina in the company of an older, big fat man, whom she introduced to me as her husband. She betrayed herself, looking at me with her shining intelligent eyes full of happiness, as if she were an open book that anybody could read, chiefly her husband, who saw in them that her feeling for me was still inside her. He barely could control his anger, while staring with hatred at me.

When I came back from France to Argentina on the ship *Groix* on September 22, 1945, there appeared in all the city's press articles about us as the first party of volunteers returning from the war, mentioning all of our names. Dina, learning that, called on the telephone to my parents' house, but unfortunately my mother answered, and recognizing her voice, told her that she didn't know anything about our arrival.

My mother never stopped hating her, despite the fact that she never had seen her; it commenced from the moment she learned that Dina "asked for my hand," which upset her so much. After several more attempts, Dina got tired of listening to my mother's rude voice and gave up. She was then already married and had to be careful not to create any problem. My mother, for her part, never told me that Dina called me. Because of me, and this time without any interference on my part, Dina's husband ended up by divorcing her, or rather being separated from her, because at that time divorce didn't yet exist in Argentina.

After that, Dina, with her habitual persistence, succeeded in reaching me with her call; it was a big coincidence, because I was seldom at home, and my mother always answered the telephone. After Dina's asking, imploring, and begging me, we saw each other again, and the first thing she said to me was how much she loved me and that she never stopped loving me. If she had gotten married, it was almost natural, because she was feeling so lonely after I left and the man who became her husband had always been so good and so nice to her that she accepted his proposal. She told me that she had finished writing the book about me, whose title was *My Little Cossack*, but unfortunately, her husband found it one day and tore it into a thousand pieces, an act that affected her so

much that she had to stay one entire month sick in bed. With a bitter smile, Dina told me that when she introduced me to her husband, he realized at once that I was the character she wrote about in her book, and when they returned home, once more a violent argument broke out between them, because of his jealous nature.

The surprising part of all that was that Dina, being Jewish, should have definitely learned through her parents or other friends that in Imperial Russia, most of the Cossacks were profoundly devoted Christian conservators who enjoyed special privileges granted to them by an old tradition, with the condition to serve the Tsar for twenty years. They were always ready to fight at any time when requested and were used to breaking strikes or any public manifestation of dissent with brutality. The Cossacks came to be feared by the Russian people, who accused them of being tremendously rude and anti-Semitic. Even my father wouldn't say anything good about the Cossacks, but Dina, for some reason, with her sentimental mind invented a romantic idyll, in which I became the protagonist, an enamored Cossack.

That was the last time I ever saw her, and I hope that if one day Dina should remember me, she will forgive me for my lack of comprehension and my misunderstanding of her pure and noble feelings, which I couldn't appreciate at that time.

Chapter 5

In spite of all the bad news coming from Europe, life in Buenos Aires was quite agreeable. Argentina was a very rich country, made up of cattlemen and featuring conservative, strong, domineering governments. In Martinez, in a short while, we became very good friends with all our neighbors, having quite frequent gatherings and barbecues in any of our gardens and drinking beer during the long summer nights, under a sky adorned by the Southern Cross. The Southern Cross is a group of stars formed in that shape, allowing, in times not so long gone, sailboat explorers to navigate in the Southern Hemisphere, as the Polestar did in the Northern Hemisphere.

On these occasions an excessive amount of Quilmes beer was consumed, my father's and our neighbors' preferred brand, while the men talked about politics, the most recent gossip, and about women, when the wives were in the kitchen.

As far as I was concerned, I was very busy, or at least I should have been, due to my many responsibilities. I always hated to do things I didn't like, and very often, instead of going to the Engineering Faculty, I dropped by Jeannette's place to chat about France, which both of us enjoyed greatly. We still were having our kissings only, but because of my shyness, I respected her, even though I learned later that for several years she worked as a prostitute. Actually, she had what she called a "little old man" who kept her up. He was a bank director and came to visit her once a week, on Thursday evening, telling his wife that was when he had a board of directors meeting, followed by dinner in a restaurant.

Jeannette was a good raconteur, changing her voice when needed and also doing a lot of mimicking. "Of course," she said, "he would come at five o'clock in the evening, and at that time a hen would already be cooking in the oven, since it had to be ready at six o'clock, because it was very important for him to have time to have his cocktail first." Then she would tell me in detail how they sat at the table and talked about everything, chiefly about his bank, his work, his wife, and their little dog that replaced, in a certain way, the child they never had. After dinner, he needed an hour for digestion, because he always emphasized that it was dangerous to have sex just after eating. They were killing time, talking once again about the bank, the little dog, and the wife, whom of course he would call several times on the telephone, telling her invariably that the directors' meeting would last longer than he had foreseen and that he would come home late.

Jeannette was from Normandy, but during the First World War, when her father was drafted and sent to the front, her mother decided to move to Paris when Jeannette was still a teenager. When the world-wide fight ended on November 11, 1918, Jeannette learned that her father had been killed in the battle of Verdun, and her mother, already old and overburdened, decided to return to her native town in Normandy. At that time, Jeannette was 18 years old and was working as a salesgirl at a cheese store. She didn't want to follow her mother and go back to the small village where she was born, preferring the splendor of Paris, which she was already used to. All that was told to me little by little, with intervals, interruptions, and piece by piece; I reconstructed the story over several years after listening to her confidences.

A couple of years later, when she thought she was settled, because she had

her own little flat and friends in Chatelet where she was living, a steady customer started to come to the store where she was working, buying cheese from her. He was a lovely man, about thirty years old, very elegant, with black hair, always kind to her. He was from Corsega, and one day he invited her to spend Sunday with him. She accepted immediately and had a wonderful time that day with him, strolling in the park and eating in expensive restaurants. After that, a close friendship was established between them, followed after a short time by lovemaking. He was the most delightful person she had ever met, full of kindness and attention toward her and never stopping his telling her how much he was in love with her.

Two months after they met, Jules—that was his name—told Jeannette that he wanted to marry her. She couldn't believe it could be true, because Jules was enchanting, generous, and kind as only few can be. He had taken her to the most elegant and expensive places in Paris, always treating her with a special consideration. Without hesitation, Jeannette told him yes, but she wanted to bring her mother to Paris to assist with their wedding.

Jules told her that unfortunately that was impossible, because he was established in Buenos Aires with an important business, and he came to Paris only to settle a few matters related to his trade, with the intention of returning to the beautiful home he owned in that Argentine capital. By misfortune, the previous day, a telegram had come from his associate, telling him that he was very sick and it was urgent for him to come back to take care of the business, which needed immediate attention. He kept repeating that no matter what happened, he loved her, that his feelings wouldn't change, nor should their project of going to the New Continent to get married and to live a happy life together. He insisted on saying that she already knew him well, that she should trust him, and that she would see what a beautiful time they would have together in that colorful country, where he was very rich and able to satisfy all of her whims.

She didn't listen to some of her friends who were skeptics and said that only two months of courtship wasn't enough and that she should think about it seriously and wait a while to make her final decision. Jeannette was as if possessed, because she never even in her dreams thought that such a possibility would present itself to her. She wrote to her mother, who also opposed this precipitous marriage, which went against the Norman traditions requiring that all the family get together to be introduced officially to the groom and to decide on even the minute details of the wedding preparations.

Without paying attention to anybody else, a week later Jeannette was already in Le Havre with Jules, where she was about to embark on her journey. Her native town wasn't too far away from there, but she didn't dare go to see her mother, because she was leaving with a stranger without being married and therefore bringing shame on all her family.

Full of pain and with tears in her eyes, she left France without seeing her mother, whom she would never see again, because her mother died a year later, when she learned what had happened to her daughter. The journey was very pleasant; they were traveling in first class, mesmerizing Jeannette, and she was visualizing already the kind of magic life she would have in this new country with such a good-looking husband. When they arrived at Buenos Aires, Jeannette saw on the pier a lot of people who were waiting not only for Jules, but also for a dozen more men who traveled with them on the same boat, each one of them with a young girl, all of them looking like they came

because of the same promises.

Jeannette asked me if I knew the Tabaris nightclub on Corrientes Avenue, which was the most luxurious in the city, or at least the most popular. Without waiting for my answer, she said, "That's where he brought me to work!" Looking with a profound sadness at me, she added, "But at that time it was different from now, where the girls dance and keep you company. Then, we were forced to do everything!"

I was afraid to move, fearing that she might stop sharing this sad part of her life with me. I wanted to know everything, because it confirmed my political ideas and also our program on how to fight against this human exploitation and the use of women's feelings and confidences to send them to perform the most degrading trade against their will. It was pure and simple slavery! The most usual way to coerce a woman to sell her body was by intimidation, fear, and physical punishment. In many cases, the police collaborated with these thugs and brought back the poor victims who dared to escape from this servitude.

The worst thing for Jeannette was to see, once she arrived to Buenos Aires, that Jules had his "regular" woman, like a favorite prostitute with whom the pimp was living but who still worked for him and brought him the money earned by selling her body. Life became so difficult, and the psychological shock so rude, that most of the victims, mainly poor young girls from working families or farmlands, were inclined to start drinking or taking drugs, which were offered to them in unlimited amounts.

Tired of this anguished and humiliating life, one night when they were driven to the secluded place where they lived, Jeannette decided to end her life and jumped under a passing car on the street. She was bruised but she didn't die, and her tormentors took her to a place where the *mafiosi* had a hidden hospital for cases like this or for girls with overdoses. They wouldn't dare take her to a normal hospital, from which she could escape.

Once she was cured, she was severely punished by being beaten with a wet towel, hurting her without leaving scars on her body that would have depreciated her commercial value in this infamous business. Four years later, an assiduous customer started to come to see her frequently. He was a bachelor "Creole," an important businessman, who seemed to like her. Between drinks, dancing the tango, and the bed, Jeannette came to trust the sincere friendship of her admirer, to whom little by little she told her story. Manuel Gonzalez—that was the name of her new friend—ended up falling in love with her, to the point that he wanted to get her out of that notorious place.

Manuel had good connections in political and other important spheres, from whom he succeeded in obtaining Jeannette's protection, helping her to escape and to shelter her in his house. It is one of those difficult-to-believe stories, because the underworld was powerful; it had its own laws and organizations; however, backing his efforts with a lot of money, Manuel used all the artifices to trick the scums and keep the "French girl" for himself.

Not only did he use his connections with important people in the government, but he also used a blackmail threat against the thugs, promising to start a newspaper campaign against them that could end their organization if they dared even to try to get in touch with his "girl."

That's how a new episode in Jeannette's life started. Manuel Gonzalez purchased a small apartment at 1717 Uruguay Street, on the 4th floor, furnished it with

beautiful furniture, and spent unforgettable nights of pleasure with his "Frenchie" in this little nest of love. Manuel was very generous with Jeannette; he gave her all the money she wanted, and above all, he made it possible for her to walk freely in the city again, looking in the windows, or just shopping around.

Very soon she was acquainted with other French people who were living in Buenos Aires in large number, including a couple of unlucky women who went through her own experience, falling into a trap and almost by a miracle recovered their freedom, thanks to nice men who helped them.

Little by little, Jeannette contacted her relatives in Normandy, and that was how she learned that her mother, hearing through an anonymous source about her life, died of pain. She was already corresponding with cousins and uncles, but she didn't yet dare go visit with them.

Among immigrants of that time, it was a trend to buy lands in their own native towns through some specialized enterprises that could build houses of the purchaser's choice, thus providing a steady monthly payment. Many dreamed of returning to their land once they reached old age to enjoy their retirement.

Jeannette, as so many others, was sending money to one of these enterprises, without even seeing her house under construction or at least the land. She wanted to wait a little longer before going to France, hoping that her kin would forget her past. With Manuel, everything was going perfectly well, but of course Argentina was a Catholic and puritanical country, where it was out of the question to marry a prostitute. Consequently, their relationship was limited to his visits to her apartment, because he would never defy the traditions by going out with her when there was the possibility of being seen by any relative in public places.

Jeannette, optimistic by nature, hoped that Manuel could marry her one day and go to live with her in another city or perhaps in another country. She often dreamed of both of them living in France and going to her native town to introduce her handsome South American husband to her large family. Unfortunately, luck one more time was preparing a cruel game for her for this second time she was in love. Manuel would never marry an ex-prostitute, because he had too many relatives in Buenos Aires and would never accept becoming a laughing stock. This kind of arrangement could last for a long time; it was convenient for him to have a place to satisfy his sexual urge and at the same time to remain free, being a bachelor.

Nevertheless, one day, during a party organized by one of his cousins living in Olivos, he was introduced to a beautiful girl who had just arrived from Cordoba and was related to the cousin's wife. Renato was his favorite relative, and many years later the suspicion that all that had been set up and planned in advance by the family was confirmed. As they said, it was made with the intention of pulling the "poor" Manuel out of the French "sinner's" claws, she who was snatching away all his money. Whatever the fact was, after two years of happy life for Jeannette, Manuel appeared one day in her apartment and sat down without saying a word in the little living room, which she had decorated with her natural French taste.

Jeannette didn't know anything about what had happened; when he came to see her, by a routine she had established in these occasions of his visits, she brought him the cocktail he liked, Cinzano with gin on the rocks. Manuel, by courtesy, took a sip and asked her to sit down on a chair in front of him without waiting for her to bring her own

drink, as she usually did. Then, without any previous explanation, he told her bluntly that it was the last time he would see her.

Almost from the beginning of their relationship, Manuel's family learned about Jeannette. They knew that Enriqueta's parents, the girl from Cordoba, would have never allowed the courtship of their daughter, knowing that the French mistress was in between. It was to be assumed that Manuel's relatives were following all these steps to be sure that he broke with this "French whore." Once Jeannette emotionally got over her pain, and after spending many nights weeping, she began to think about her financial security, because after so many years of living free, she wasn't afraid any longer to be harmed physically, feeling out of reach of the Mafia, even though they still were powerful in Buenos Aires.

Manuel was not only sentimental, but he was also a considerate young man, and to cut sharp with this "little Frenchie" whom he had loved for two years, he transferred into her name the apartment, furniture, and belongings, and he put in the bank in her name an amount of money that would allow her to live without worry for a few years. Jeannette, as a good child from Normandy whose people are reputed to be stingy and not squandering took good care of that money, going on vacation to Carrasco every year and to France every three years.

Since she had lost the habit of work from the time she was selling cheese in Paris, she still needed to think about her future, but she sensed that her physical attraction would take care of her worries for the time being. Jeannette was an assiduous book reader, with a preference for works in her native tongue that for several years she bought at a French bookstore on Carlos Pellegrini Street. The owner was also French, married, and he always had been very attentive with her, but, knowing that she was kept up by Manuel Gonzalez—because gossip ran fast in Buenos Aires—he never intended anything with her. When he got wind of what had happened and that she was now without a "man," he increased his flirting. One afternoon, she stayed late in his library looking for a book; it was already closing time, and when he was locking his store, he took his chance, inviting her to have a "coffee" or a cocktail with him.

Monsieur Germain Richet, the shop owner, could indulge himself in such extravagance, because his wife was old and sick, and she very seldom got out of their home located in Vicente Lopez, in the suburbs far away from Buenos Aires. His bookstore was in a commercial center, and it was almost impossible that any of his friends could see him in a cafe with a young woman. Needless to add, as a good bookseller he would have been able to find a good excuse for why he was having a cocktail with a good customer whom he had run into by coincidence.

After a few more visits to the library, then drinking cocktails together, Monsieur Germain Richet, after gathering all the courage he could muster, proposed that he be with her, as Manuel Gonzalez had been previously. Jeannette didn't like him; he wasn't attractive at all, but the money Manuel left her was melting too fast, and not being able to count on any other income, she accepted his proposition.

This relationship lasted about five years, until tired of listening to his wife's laments and pressured by his children who had returned to France, one day he made up his mind, sold his business, and went with his wife to join them in the Old Country.

When we first met Jeannette, it had been three years that she was kept up by this old bank director whose routine she hated and which seemed never to end. "Thank

God, it's only once a week," Jeannette would say with a sad smile, "because not only doesn't he see me after that, but seldom does he call me on the telephone." At that time, she was 36 years old, almost twice my age, and I never understood why I never tried to have sex with her, which would have been easy, because without saying a word, she insinuated it vaguely several times.

For many years she remained a friend of our family, and of course my parents never learned about her past, although they suspected that she was hiding something gloomy about her life. I conserved a very close friendly relationship with her, talking openly about everything, without any prejudice. She always was very proud of me, especially when I came back from the war, always introducing me to the few friends she had.

She needed to improve her economic situation because the "old" bank director wasn't as generous as Manuel or even Monsieur Germain Richet, and she began by giving basic French language lessons. With time, she succeeded in having a good number of students, an outcome that not only helped her financial situation, but also restored her self-esteem, showing her that she could make her living by decent means, something that I suspected always had tormented her.

As if all the suffering that this poor woman endured weren't enough, she learned through French friends living in Buenos Aires that the real estate company that was supposed to be building her house in Normandy was fictitious, perpetrating a plain swindle that cheated many innocent victims out of their money. This organization disappeared one day, without leaving any trace.

After that, many different things happened in my life besides the general concern we felt about the international situation, and these events made me lose all contact with Jeannette without noticing it. Unfortunately, I learned much later, when I was already living in Atlanta, Georgia, that her mind deteriorated and she became incoherent, sometimes even throwings things out of her window that faced Lavalley Street. The neighbors complained, and she was interned in Buenos Aires French Hospital, in the mentally sick section. She died at the age of 92, without regaining her mental balance.

How many times did I remember the commissar of the ship *Brest*, Lieutenant Jules Moisson, with whom, when crossing the Atlantic Ocean a few years before, I talked about the "white slaves" and made comments about London's book *The Road to Buenos Aires*! On that occasion, Jules said something that I never forgot: "In the past, enemy prisoners were taken by force and sold as slaves, while now, with sweet words, innocent girls are fooled, then turned into slaves and sent to brothels to perform the most repugnant trade that could exist.

How many beautiful lives of these young girls were stolen and ruined, now scattered all over South America! Actually, most of them are old and are not needed any longer by their pimps. They live their last old years in poverty in nursing homes, or begging in the streets."

Chapter 6

Already, some of the sailors from the German warship *Graf von Spee* were seen strolling on Buenos Aires' streets. By international laws, they were considered in wartime as belligerent forces interned in a neutral country, Argentina.

All of that happened when the German cruiser *Graf von Spee* was surrounded by three English battleships, the *Ajax*, *Exeter* and *Achilles*, in the Southern Atlantic close to Montevideo. It ended up in a tremendous sea battle, described with many details by the local newspapers and broadcast by all the radio stations in the world, because it was the first time that we felt the war so close to us. Everybody was anxious to learn about the result as soon as possible. A hidden hatred surged between us democrats and those who were on the Nazis' side in Buenos Aires, and they were many, beginning with the government.

Each one wanted to know what happened to those they supported. The battle lasted an entire day, despite the fact that the German *Graf von Spee* succeeded in breaking down the British frigate *Exeter*, she herself was damaged to such an extent that she lost all of her working ability. Not being able to move at will and under a constant, merciless bombing by the other two English warships, the German captain asked the Uruguayan government for permission to dock in Montevideo's port for repair.

Uruguay was a democratic country sympathizing with the Allies and therefore refused to allow the Germans even to enter its territorial waters, much less to come repair their broken-down navy cruiser. The German captain, realizing that his ship wasn't fit any longer to continue the fighting, and, of course, refusing to surrender to the British navy, as was his other option, ordered his crew to be ready to sink her. He checked to be sure that his officers and sailors, to the last man, manned the lifeboats safely and were headed to the Argentine shore. Just before his ship blew up, standing on the commanding deck, the German captain shot himself in the head, disappearing in the waters with his huge marine metallic monster. This date, December 13, 1939, marks Great Britain's first naval victory in World War II.

By international law, military units interned in neutral countries weren't allowed to leave their seclusion camps, and much less to feel free to stroll in any city of that country. The Argentine authorities who relocated the 600 German officers and sailors in Cordoba little by little softened the rules, and already, as early as the beginning of 1940, it was possible to see German sailors wandering in Buenos Aires streets, in the company of pretty Creole girls. These good-looking blond guys, with blue eyes, very quickly found women to their taste to marry, and later on they established themselves permanently in Argentina. After the war, only very few of them returned definitely to Germany, most of them settling forever in their new country, where they prospered very fast.

Even though my father was a Russian nationalist and anti-fascist, he couldn't help but admire the courage of the German captain, who refused to be humiliated and taken prisoner, rather preferring to sink with his ship. My father kept saying with pride, "We, the Navy people, we have our own code of honor, and no captain, respecting himself, would see his ship sinking without remaining on her"; then, after a cunning smile, he would add, "I would have done the same thing if I were in his place!"

Of course, after the exercises and wrestling in our club Patrie, we would stop in any of the numerous outside cafes on Carlos Pelligrini Street to comment about these events. The whole street was upside down with the debris from the razed buildings, where city laborers were working hard widening it, to become in the future 9 de Julio Avenue, which would be the widest in the world.

The ambience was saturated with anguish and personal apprehension, due to the fact that the French government was considering anybody born overseas to French parents as a French citizen. Most of the French businesses, institutions, and banks in Argentina were mainly employing French people, most of whom had already received from the embassy a draft notice to perform their military service and to fight for the Fatherland. Those who wouldn't present themselves to the consulates as requested were immediately discharged from their jobs, receiving the corresponding indemnity as stipulated by Argentine laws.

Our friend Louis Pons had already been dismissed from his work as a clerk at the French Bank of Rio de la Plata, and so were many others who were born in Argentina to French parents, even if they never had been in France. Louis Menker, who was employed at the French Chamber of Commerce, was expecting to be fired at any time.

As we usually did, sitting outside, around a large table, preferably at the La Criolla, situated at the corner of Lavalle Street, a cafe that we liked to patronize, we had a very important topic to talk about. We used to call it: "Solving the world's problems!" I loved to listen to these sons of emigrants from the past century, talking about the old times. I learned that the foreign ethnic organizations had their own clubs and could parade on the streets like boy scouts bearing arms during national holidays, which was later prohibited by the Argentine government.

The French language was almost indispensable to get any kind of job at that time, and the young men's main preoccupation was to how to satisfy their sexual drive. Second was how to find a wife, whom in many cases they would find by traveling to Europe, or some relatives would do it for them, or even selecting one by correspondence. At that time, very few women were available, at least in the cities, and much less "decent" ones fit for marriage. It was dangerous for a woman to walk by herself on the streets, because men would appear from nowhere to talk to her and even to touch her. If the woman called a policeman, it was very possible that he too would start by fondling her.

While we were sitting and drinking beer, it was interesting to see how these young people switched from French to Spanish and even inserted some various foreign words. When the moment to pay the bill came, almost always an uproar would suddenly surge; some had urgent telephone calls to place, others lamented having left their wallets at home, and others would complain that their wives had taken the money out of their pockets.

Our instructor, Charles Changeur, Greco-Roman wrestling champ, always had this kind of excuse, when he wouldn't just disappear upon seeing the waiter bringing the check. When a new member was integrating with our group, we had a certain initiation ritual, which consisted of going with up to a dozen of us to one of those "cabarets" that were swarming all around the city and everywhere in the country.

Officially, prostitution was prohibited, but the "escort girls" were doing an

on-the-side job in different ways in these "cabarets." Where booths were available, we would rent one of them and our problem was solved, because by lowering the curtains, we remained protected from other patrons' curiosity. The selected "lady" would just lift her skirt without being seen from outside and could satisfy any of us who wanted it, needed it, or was in condition to perform it!

Otherwise, where the screen-box didn't exist, the "escort girl" would tell her customer directly that if he paid for 15 glasses of beer, she would "take" him for free. Then he would sit on a chair with his pants down, while she was placing her naked rear end over him with her lifted skirt, ready to satisfy him. Several girls would come close together, hiding them from the indiscreet looks of the other customers, while the couple got busy practicing the cult of Eros. Of course, these little groups encircling couples appeared all over the place, and everybody pretended not to see anything or to not be aware of what was going on.

Needless to say, the candidate was hot and in a hurry, not ready to waste his time drinking fifteen glasses of beer, preferring rather to pay for it. The waiter was called and paid, and right away, he would give the chips corresponding to her commission to the "girl". Once the waiter disappeared as if by magic, the scheduled performance would start immediately.

When my initiation turn came, we went, about a dozen altogether scrambled into a booth, and while I was accomplishing the initiation rules of our club, the other companions were laughing, making jokes, or tickling (me and the girl). Once my performance was over, more women came in the booth, and it was a real orgy, because some of the guys started smoking cigarettes with a strange smell, which made them euphoric, especially the women. I was still ingenuous—it would take many more years before I would be introduced to drugs, which I never liked, even though I tried all of them.

Usually, I would never let slip an initiation party of a new member, because I knew what would happen afterwards. At that time I still was disturbed by sex and wouldn't miss any opportunity to have it, even more so because I wasn't seeing Dina anymore.

All of us were following closely all the international events, and we learned with pain that German troops invaded Denmark and Norway in April, and the following month of the same year, 1940, Holland and Belgium were occupied, after heavy bombing that almost completely destroyed Rotterdam. On June 4, the Germans routed the Franco-British armies at Dunkirk, although 340,000 of them managed to flee and be transported by boat to England. On June 14, the Germans occupied Paris, which had been declared an open city, and the French government asked for help from the United States that had been denied. Premier Reynaud's government resigned and was replaced by Marshal Petain, 83 years old, who signed the armistice, followed by the German occupation of half of France.

In England, Prime Minister Chamberlain resigned and was replaced by Churchill. The Vichy French government broke diplomatic relations with England, and the latter sank the French warships in Oran, North Africa. On July 18, 1940, General de Gaulle made a dramatic call to French patriots, saying that one battle had been lost, but not the war, and asking all French people to join the Free French Forces. Hitler, inebriated by his success on the Continent, was planning to invade England, but when, on

August 15, the British Spitfires knocked down 180 German bombers, he postponed the date of this invasion.

In Mexico, the Russian revolutionary Trotsky was murdered by Ramon Mercader, Stalin's agent, afraid that Trotsky might ally himself with the fascists; this eventuality was completely inconceivable, a product of the Russian dictator's paranoia.

On September 27, the agreement of the Axis was signed for ten years among Italy, Germany, and Japan, while German submarines intensified their attacks against allied ships. On October 2, the *Empress of Britain*, which was transporting children from England to Canada, was sunk, drowning many of them in the sea.

The Argentine government sympathized with Germany, because all Argentina's army had been organized by Germany, while the high-ranking officers were going on a regular basis to train in military exercises with their German and Italian colleagues before returning to perform important functions in the Argentine Army and quite often in politics too. When General de Gaulle made his historic appeal, in many countries "de Gaulle Committees" were founded, recruiting volunteers to go fight against the fascists in the Free French Forces. In Argentina, such a committee wasn't authorized but was operating illegally, while in Montevideo, all of the French Embassy embraced the de Gaulle organization, with the Uruguayan government's moral support.

In Buenos Aires, the founder of this committee was Monsieur Bruel, a prominent French businessman who, as punishment, was the third one to lose his French citizenship, as decreed by Marshal Petain. Andre Pons was out of work, because at that time, it wasn't easy to find a job, and no French enterprise would give him an opportunity, knowing that he had been fired for not obeying the draft order.

He regretted it later, because the ship that left Buenos Aires with the French draftees, once reaching Dakar, learned that France had been defeated, and to avoid being taken prisoner by the Germans, the ship returned to Argentina. After that, all of them were considered deserving to be treated as war veterans, and some of them even succeeded in getting important military medals.

It was at the end of the Southern Hemisphere summer in 1941, and we had just come back from our vacation at Miramar and our famous Villa Nene. In March, it is still warm in Buenos Aires, and with Andre, we decided to go to a movie theater. He was still living off the money he received as indemnity when he was fired, and I was trying to put my thoughts together, because a turmoil was inside my head and I needed to put things in some order. That day had been very important for me; the movie we saw was boring, and I don't even remember the title, but I will never forget the news they showed us. There was German news showing Vienna, where some Nazi soldiers were laughing, watching a group of old, bearded rabbis kneeling on the ground and scrubbing the street with tooth brushes.

Some of the spectators in the theater were laughing too, but both of us were indignant. I remembered then that the mission I started in Spain hadn't yet been finished. I am an atheist, but now it wasn't a religious question anymore; it was a question of human dignity, and I will never accept anyone pretending to be racially superior to me, or whomever, and I made up my mind to show it to these heroes of the Aryan superior race.

When we left the movie theater, it was already late, but we decided to go the following day to the de Gaulle Committee to enlist in the Free French Forces to fight against the Germans. As we had planned the previous day, we went to Mr. Bruel's

business, which was lending an office to the de Gaulle Committee in secret. We were received by a Free French Forces volunteer, Liza, a skinny girl full of enthusiasm, who gave us some forms to be filled out. When we told her what we had seen in the movie theater, she became very sad, saying, "I am a Jewess, and I too don't accept being considered inferior to these fascists!" She promised to call us as soon as she got news from England about our transportation to join General de Gaulle's forces.

Events were rushing at an unnerving speed; in March, the German Army came to help the Italians in their invasion of Greece and Yugoslavia. The Croatians allied themselves with the Nazis and proceeded to slaughter 300,000 Serbs and 70,000 Jews. England, fearing that the Germans could occupy the route to the oil-producing countries, invaded Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria.

During the night of June 22, 1941, we were awakened by our friend Ricci, the one who was working at Harrods, who told us on the telephone that he heard a German radio station announcing that Germany had invaded Russia. That time, by chance, I was in Martinez, and needless to say, none of us could sleep the rest of the night. Not willing to create more commotion at home, I didn't say a word about my enlistment in the Free French Forces.

My father was worried about his childhood friends and ex-partners, the brothers Grimberg, from whom he hadn't heard anything for more than a year. Unfortunately, we never received any news from them, which made us believe that they were victims of the German cruelty. One day my father came back from the stock market, and once he had his cocktail in front of him, he very excitedly said, "I will never understand those Jews, although I grew up with them in Odessa and knew everything about them. We used to live together like brothers, but still I don't understand them! . . ."

My mother, who sometimes was inclined to hear bad news, asked him, "What did they do to you?" To which my father indignantly answered, "To me? Nobody would dare to do anything bad to me; it's about something else," and he related to us what the reason for of his anger was. Some days back, a new member appeared at the stock market, and my father's friends Lev Padusky and Abraham Kahn told him this enigmatic person's story. It seemed that he had been a Nazi who held an important job in Austria, and when Germany annexed that country, he received a high-ranking government position. He was a declared anti-Semite who persecuted Viennese Jews without mercy. Nevertheless, somebody from the Nazi Party, by coincidence or by chance, discovered that his maternal grandmother was Jewish, something that he didn't know. He had been summoned to appear at the Nazi court of Vienna, accused of misleading them, lying about his Aryan purity, and hiding his Jewish blood. Only because of his good record and the services he had rendered to the Party, they didn't arrest him, instead giving him the opportunity to leave the country unmolested. Still hurt, and without understanding what was happening to him and why, he decided to come to Argentina, where he arrived with an immigration visa.

Once in Buenos Aires, and not being able to consider himself German anymore, he contacted the Jewish organizations, who welcomed him. My father remained shocked by this whole situation, and he kept on saying, "Now, all these Jews accept him as a landsman, and they forgave him his previous anti-Semitic stance he had in Austria! I cannot really understand it!"

My mother, always inclined to see a happy ending, asked him, "And what do you want them to do? After all, he is a Jew, and now it's impossible to deny it! Believe me, he will be punished morally with harshness, thinking about all the harm he brought to his own co-religionists, mainly realizing now that all these new friends forgave him, and how well they are treating him now!"

Sometimes my father would come back home smelling of whiskey, and of course, my mother would not miss an opportunity to reproach him for it, accusing him of having been with his friend Abraham and Lev visiting "those women," insinuating call girls, an accusation my father always would earnestly deny.

Chapter 7

The events of the year 1941 already weren't leaving any possibility of doubt about how serious the international situation was getting for mankind. With great delay, a letter from Andre Hagron reached me, describing in a very laconic way how he and all the people who were with him reacted to the notice of the French surrender. He was still serving in the Navy at the port of Toulon and said in that letter that, after commenting about the news with his comrades in the barracks, he went to the beach to swim. He was preparing to return to Paris, because the radio announced that all French Army and Navy forces would be disbanded and the servicemen sent back to their homes. I was indignant, because I couldn't believe that a friend from my childhood who always had been so patriotic was now accepting the German domination, without any major preceding preoccupation, without even a comment, laments, or anger.

I never stopped corresponding with Popol Henot, and he shared with me the contempt for the French government that cowardly accepted the defeat without even trying to keep fighting in the colonies, where France had an entire army, and a strong navy in the Mediterranean, second only to the British. Both of us were enthusiastic about de Gaulle's decision to keep on fighting, and we cheered each other about our faith in democracy. It was the first time that we had agreed on something, because all our life we were on opposite sides in politics. He was inveterately Catholic, close to fanaticism, and had an almost superstitious fear of agreeing with my democratic ideas.

I also had a great surprise when, after more than a year of silence, I received a letter from my comrade from the "Sebastian Faure Centuria," Juan Mayol, who was writing from Veracruz, Mexico, where he had gone with a lot of other refugees. Mexico behaved in a marvelous way during the Spanish Civil War, first helping the Republic in its fight against Franco with arms and provisions, then, after the defeat, accepting thousands of Brigadistas and Republican soldiers, with scores of children whom the Mexican people received with open arms.

One more time, Juan complained about the so-called democracies that betrayed the Spanish Republic. He forecasted that they now would pay dearly for it, because they would have to face a stronger enemy. He also asked me if I could lend him some money, because he was still weak, and the wounds he received on the battlefield weren't yet healed. He didn't have energy as yet to start working, and he didn't have any source of income. He promised to repay me the money as soon as he found any kind of job.

Even though my economic situation wasn't rosy—I could even confess not good at all, because until then I had depended on the money given to me by my father—I managed nevertheless to send him on several occasions money orders, until one day I received a letter from Juan thanking me for my friendship and telling me that now he was on his own and didn't need my help any longer.

I learned later that he had found a job in a bar as a bouncer, with the duty of maintaining order among the drinking patrons. I shivered when reading about the details of his work. I could see the irony of destiny in a person like Juan, who had been all his life an anarchist-terrorist, persecuted by police from several countries, gone to fight in the Spanish Civil War, reached the rank of captain, and was now in a foreign land, sick and

without any means to find a steady job, performing the functions of a security guard in a cantina.

Fortunately, he didn't remain for too long on this not very "honorific" job, announcing to me one day at the end of 1941 that he was going to live with a widow (he didn't believe in marriage.) His new "lady-friend" inherited from her deceased husband a large "rancho," which Juan would be running. Now he was asking me to send him a subscription to the magazine *Chacra* (Ranch), from Argentina, one of the best publications in the Spanish language at that time about farming.

We continued our correspondence in a sporadic way, interrupted by the war; then I resumed it when already living in the United States. Unfortunately, one day while I was on a business trip in Kansas City, my rented car was stolen, with my bag in which I put my address book. I never retrieved it, and that was how I lost track of my fighting buddy, my comrade Brigadista. I know that I could have tried to find his address through any of the Spanish Civil War veteran organizations in Mexico or in the States, but at that time, I was already abusing alcohol, which was poisoning my organism and reducing my intellectual ability.

It was later, when already living in Atlanta, Georgia, that finally I contacted the Abraham Lincoln Brigade veterans and learned about my friend Juan Mayol Ballester, who died in the State of Ver, Mexico, in 1989 at the age of 89.

In Buenos Aires, the style of life didn't change at the beginning of the war, but very soon a lot of industrial products began to get scarce. It was almost impossible to find tires for the car, because all the rubber produced in the free world was needed for military use. Fuel also began to be difficult to find, until it came to be sold through coupons only, which consequently gave birth to the black market.

In Derqui, by paying a little more, I could get all the gas I wanted, which wasn't so easy for the Buenos Aires' inhabitants. Fortunately, not only was food available, but Argentina was making a killing by exporting meat to Europe.

Not having yet received news from the de Gaulle Committee and impatient to go to fight against the fascists, I wrote to Litvinoff in Washington, who at that time was the Ambassador of the USSR to the United States. I conveyed to him my desire to fight against the Nazi aggressors whom I had already fought in the Spanish Civil War, and as a descendant of Russians, I was feeling my duty to participate in that struggle.

A month later, to my great surprise, I received from the Soviet Embassy in the United States the following letter: "Dear Mister Michael Burenko, thank you very much for your letter in which you offer to take part in the defense of our country. Nevertheless, I would like to let you know that the privilege of serving in the Red Army is granted only to citizens living permanently in the USSR. Again, we commend you for the expression of patriotism, with regards, signed not readable, for Ambassador Litvinoff.

Impatiently waiting to be called by the de Gaulle Committee, I went to see Mr. Guerin, where the Free French Forces had an office. He wasn't there, but Liza greeted me with a sad smile and at the same time surprise. Before I even had a chance to say a word, she muttered annoyed, "What happened?"

I kept looking at her without understanding what she was trying to say to me, while she maintained a strong look, staring at me with indignation. Then, not being able to control herself any more, she almost shouted at me, "What do you think, all that is a game? We cannot work freely here, due to the fact that the Argentine government

recognizes solely the French Embassy that still obeys Vichy, while we are considered conspirators and have to go through Montevideo, where our central office is located for our task. It is difficult to coordinate how to send French volunteers to England. Last month, we sent you a letter, asking you to come to our office, but you didn't even call us to explain why you weren't able and didn't come to see us. By your fault, we missed an opportunity to send somebody else to England in your place!"

I didn't understand anything of what she was saying, but little by little I guessed what could have happened. Surely it was that the letter from the de Gaulle Committee had been received by my father or my mother, and upon learning that I had enlisted in the Free French Forces, they destroyed it.

After clarifying all this misunderstanding with Liza, I asked her next time to send the letter to Derqui, without passing it by my parents any longer. I asked her to forgive me for this discrepancy, and I assured her that it wasn't my fault and that I was impatient to go to fight as soon as possible.

The news about the war on the Russian front was discouraging; the Germans were advancing in all sectors, occupying important industrial centers, destroying entire armies, and taking hundreds of thousands of Red soldiers prisoners. Fascists from all over the world rejoiced, and even the most optimistic of the democrats were losing all hope for our victory. Nobody could foresee the Russian people's resistance, nor their military ability. Not even Hitler, convinced of the superiority of his forces but still afraid that the German armies could suffer the same end as that of Napoleon's troops if the fighting was prolonged.

In Buenos Aires, social life was reaching a height never seen before, because the more the people saw what was happening in Europe, the more desire they had to enjoy their lives, to the extent that it became like Paris, with activity 24 hours a day. It was like a madness!

My American friends de Grand Pre were the other group with whom I was quite often spending the weekend in Banfield. They owned a huge property, with eight live-in serving personnel, a chauffeur, maids, plus a waiter, a cook, and a gardener. Usually we would get together to play soccer, and after a luncheon, we would hang out in the game room, where we liked to shoot pool, drink soft drinks or sometimes beer, and listen to the radio transmission about the soccer game. The most important rivals in Buenos Aires were River, Boca and Independiente, of whose team all of us were ardent fans.

Enrique was the younger brother, one year younger than I, and Teo who was one year older, and almost naturally he was accepted as the gang's leader. Tante Lizel's brother Paul, who was living with them, was with us, always smiling, and when speaking Spanish, he had a strong German accent. Very often two other young Germans our age would come; one of the boys was Walter, a braggart who was prepotent, very stingy, someone who would never put his hand in his pocket, waiting for somebody else to pay the bill when we would go someplace together. Enrique used to say to us joking, "It looks like he's got some snakes in his pockets; that's why he never puts his hands inside them." The other boy was Otto, skinny and lanky, who wouldn't pay either, nor would he invite us, but at least he did it with grace and without any pretense.

During our meals in Banfield, served by a waiter with white gloves, Mister de Grand Pre would always make some jokes, laughing before finishing them, for which

reason very often we wouldn't understand them, but would laugh out of courtesy. Even though he lived so many years in Argentina, he retained his American accent when speaking Spanish to the last day of his life. For me, he was the stereotypical American, as we thought they would be during our childhood in Europe. Always well-organized and calm, in all the years I knew him I never saw him, not once, angry or irritated.

His wife "Tante Lizel," as she liked to be called by us, was a perfect German, and despite having so many servants in the house and the kitchen, she liked to cook dishes of her preference by herself. She was the children's stepmother but was taking care of them better than any natural mother would have done, and both of them adored her, always calling her "mutti" with love. She had managed a boarding house with her father, but once she married Mr. de Grand Pre, her father returned to Germany, which he was missing too much. Little by little "Tante Lizel" brought her three brothers from Bavaria to Argentina. She helped them to get on their feet, opening mechanical shops, to get married, and to establish themselves forever in that new country.

The import-export business was booming, and Teo decided to drop out of school to work with his father, while Enrique went to La Plata to study at the university. Paul went to Rio de Janeiro to manage their Brazilian branch.

I will never forget December 7, 1941, when all our gang went to a movie theater downtown. When we were leaving the place, we heard the newspaper kids on each corner screaming, "Extra! Extra! The Japanese sink American fleet at Pearl Harbor! Extra! Extra!" All of us remained as if frozen, because nobody would ever have suspected that such a thing could happen. We could see around us everybody was as perturbed as we were, with an awful feeling inside themselves. So as not to change, Teo, who always wanted to be the "macho," said that he would be the first to enlist to fight the Japs. His brother Enrique was very indignant, too, but didn't say anything about going to fight anywhere. At home, my parents already knew that I would be leaving anytime for Europe to fight the Nazis; it wasn't any secret any more. My father asked me not to leave on his shoulders our ranch at Derqui, because he didn't feel like burying himself in the farm, and after all he had bought it more for me, seeing my lack of enthusiasm for my studies. I promised him to do my best to sell our rural property, and unfortunately, when I received from the de Gaulle Committee a second letter from Liza telling me to be ready to depart for England, I had to ask her again to give me a couple of months that I needed to get rid of Derqui. I was desperate; I came to hate our farmland, and I could hardly wait to see it sold and to be free to go to England.

When I got together again with Louis Menker and Andre Pons, the latter, learning that I had enlisted in the Free French Forces, tried to explain something very confusing to me, and I realized that he didn't have the guts to emulate my example. He said that he was under pressure, had certain obligations to take care of, but as soon as it was over, he would join me on the European battlefields.

Louis Menker, in addition to being short and very fat, had asthma; but besides that, in spite of all his health problems, he had tried to enlist in the Free French Forces, but had been rejected. Not giving up his purpose to fight against the Nazis, he wanted to be useful to the Allied cause. He had a good knowledge of the English language and contacted agents from the Intelligence Service, with whom he offered to work, and his offer was immediately accepted.

It looked like he was doing a good job, because the Germans complained

about him to the Argentine government, putting pressure on them until he was expelled from the country for violating the neutrality laws and spying. At that time, the Nazis had a carte blanche and could practice surveillance on the Allies at will, especially in the ports, where English ships were coming to load meat. Around Argentine ports swarmed the German submarines, and once alerted by their agents in Buenos Aires that an English ship was leaving the port, they followed her and sank her, once she was farther than twelve territorial miles from the country. Louis, with his mother, was able to find a refuge in Uruguay, where I saw him again when I returned from France after the war.

My two American friends, Teo and Enrique, who had shown so much patriotism during the Pearl Harbor announcement, didn't have a chance to put it in evidence, because when they received a draft notice from the American Embassy in Buenos Aires, it happened that both couldn't perform military service, because one of them had a visual problem, and the other a pulmonary disease, and both of them, indeed, had to remain in Argentina for the duration of the war.

My father, who was following the war deployment with anxiety every day, became optimistic now: the Germans were stamping their feet, and dragging on the Russian front. No longer were they advancing at an accelerated pace, as they had at the beginning; and they had been stopped at Stalingrad.

The United States was getting ready, mobilizing its immense industrial power, building ships, including the famous Liberty transport ships, and an impressive air force. The country was already fighting against the Japanese in the Pacific, and its military might started being felt all over the world.

The English, after suffering a great defeat in North Africa when Rommel pushed their armies, under General Auchinleck's command, to the Egyptian border, had stopped the Germans in Tobruk and El Alamein under a new commander chosen by Churchill, General Montgomery.

Coming back from the stock exchange, my father would always bring some gossip, and it was usually about Jewish people, because almost all of his friends were Jews. One day it was about a colleague who also was speculating at the stock exchange, Josef Schoenberg, married to a Christian Argentine lady. One day Schoenberg came with tears in his eyes, telling his buddies what his son had told him. It appeared that Josef's only son wanted badly to enroll in the military academy of Palermo, but he hadn't been accepted for being a Jew. When the son returned home, with anger he said to his father, "How, you Jew, did you dare to marry my mother, who is Christian? If she had married another Catholic like her, now I would be able to enroll in the military academy, which always had been the dream of my life!" It was awful to listen to those words thrown on the father's face by his own son, and everybody was very sorry for their friend Josef.

Another day, my father told us that a prominent lady from the Jewish Federation, Maria Taufelbaum, had died recently of natural causes, leaving to the heirs a great fortune, with the condition that she be buried with a religious service in the Jewish cemetery in Chacarita. Now, the entire family was fighting with the rabbis, who didn't allow them to fulfill their aunt's wishes. The reason was that she accumulated her fortune in the "white slave trade," fooling young Polish Jewish girls who were brought to Argentina with lies, to be placed to work in the brothels. The synagogue's representatives offered the indignant family, as the only place where she could be placed, taking into consideration the case, a burial in the wall, but never inside the cemetery. Almost all the

cemetery's walls were packed with cemented stones with names of the buried people. They were the mortal remains of the famous gang which for years brought innocent Jewish girls to South America to perform the infamous profession.

After some time, my parents also met some other Russians who were not Jewish, and they were agreeably surprised to learn that almost all of them were on the side of the Red Army fighting the Germans. One of these families was Mundirotff, whose only son was studying with my sister Maya at the French Lyceum of Belgrano. The mother, a widow, was performing miracles to stay afloat and give a good education to her son. To earn her living, she was working as a masseuse, barely succeeding in surviving.

Another Russian they met was from Odessa, Chernoiivanenko, who was always complaining that the Whites kept him away from them, because during the Revolution he was only a sergeant, and not an officer as all of them were. He had a very quiet life, counting every penny he spent, and from time to time he would sign up for four months on one of those whalers, hunting mammals in the Southern Ocean and making enough money to live without working an entire year. Every morning, he told us, he would go to a cafe, ordering a coffee, which cost 30 cents, or 40 with the waiter's tip, and at the same time he would read for free the newspaper *Prensa* or *La Nacion* offered as a courtesy to the customers. Once he said to me, "You see! I drink my coffee, and I read the paper for an hour for only 40 cents, when the newspaper alone costs 30 cents each!"

We also met an ex-navy captain, Chernof, who was in love with Mrs. Mundirotff. Trying to impress her, he told her about his adventures in the Seas of China, where pirates supposedly stole all his identity papers. We never believed him completely, because many White Russians liked to upgrade their titles and ranks. I remember one particular situation, when a friend of my father, whom we hadn't seen in a long while, said that he was a colonel. My father told him that, as he remembered it, his rank had been captain in the Russian Army, but he answered to my father, "And what do you think, that through all these years I wouldn't have been promoted to colonel, if we hadn't had this unfortunate revolution?"

Mrs. Mundirotff used to tell my mother that the "Captain" was too old for her, that what she really wanted was a young, good-looking and rich man, to which my mother would always ironically say, "That's all?" It appeared after all that this "Captain" had been telling us the truth, because he was hired to make a trip as a second officer on an English ship that was carrying meat to England. At the beginning of the war, the German submarines were sinking so many English merchant ships and killing their crews that England was forced to hire foreign navy officers for newly built vessels. The money Chernof made during this long and dangerous journey was invested in buying a chicken nursery, in partnership with another Russian. Their chicken-breeding plant had only white Leghorn hens, and as a good romantic Russian, he would say, "These hens looked like college students with their white aprons!" Russian people always see the romantic side of anything that surrounds them, even white chickens.

One more time, I realized that life wasn't easy for these White Guard émigrés, the vast majority of whom didn't have any profession or skill, much less money. Very few people talk about, or even still remember, the famous war between Bolivia and Paraguay, which was fought in the tropical jungle. This military action began in 1932 and lasted for three years, remaining known in the history as the "War of Chaco." It has been definitely established that this needless slaughter had been a plot developed by American

weapon vendors. At that time, the effects of the Depression were felt badly in the United States, followed by the inflation in Europe. A certain type of peace reigned at that time, with political calm and a slowdown in business, especially for the arms manufacturers, as a result of a general want of money.

Some of these arms merchants sent their representatives to both countries, making them believe that the Chaco area, at that time completely uninhabited, had rich deposits of fuel. These same agents were informing both countries' governments that their neighbor was preparing to grab all of Chaco by force, with the aim of taking possession of the oil fields. They were offering to sell these countries the most sophisticated arms for the defense of this rich region, which, they stressed, would be invaded at any time.

That was how Bolivia and Paraguay armed themselves to the teeth, until the moment when war became inevitable. Armed forces from both sides clashed in the jungle and marshes, surrounded by wild animals, while the warriors were devoured by the mosquitoes. Even though Bolivia's population was made up mainly of Indian Coyas, Bolivia was better armed and had a good number of American mercenary pilots, while Paraguay, with its untamed Guarany Indians, was badly prepared and worse-equipped. To face the enemy in the jungle, the soldiers from both sides had to make an opening in the dense and wild vegetation with machetes, then fight hand-to-hand in the brushwood.

At that time, thousands of White Russians were living in France, almost all of them from the military caste, without profession and unable to find any kind of job, because in 1932, unemployment was high in Europe. The Russian General Belayev offered the Paraguayan government to organize a Brigade of Russians to go fight against the Bolivian forces as mercenaries, and the offer was accepted at once. It was the beginning of one more odyssey of suffering, torture, and sacrifices for the poor Russians, born in a cold country covered with snow and now having to endure fighting in the hot, wild tropics, infested with insects and maladies.

Worst of all, General Belayev recruited mainly Cossacks, cavalry men, but in the jungle it was difficult for a human being to move, and unthinkable madness for a rider mounted on his horse in these eternal bushes. Nevertheless, these soldiers of fortune managed to assimilate so well to the prevailing conditions that they became an important factor in the Paraguayan armies' victory when the war was won on June 12, 1935.

The Cossack Colonel Ivan Borisovich Andreyev, who now was Chernof's partner in raising chickens in Pilar, told us many more stories. Paraguay, as victor, received the possession of Chaco as a spoil of the war; it remains to this day an inhospitable region, with a few Indians as a population, and very little is said about oil.

The Cossacks, or at least those who survived the killing, epidemics, and maladies, received from the Paraguayan government some arid lands as payment for their military service. As was to be expected, very few of them remained in that hot country, abandoning it little by little and emigrating to Brazil or Argentina.

All this was told to us by ex-Colonel Andreyev, who participated in that war. This happened once when we went to visit the chicken ranch they had in Pilar. All the family traveled in my Packard, and we took the ex-Sergeant Chernovivanenko with us. He was wearing breeches and mounting boots like an important gentleman-farmer. Of course, we brought with us a lot of food, which my mother prepared for everybody, because in our family we always have been very sensitive about eatable products, and we

didn't want to take any chances now. We were going to a farm where two lonely men were living, without women or cooking experience, and my mother was squeamishly muttering, "Who knows what kind of garbage these two men could fix for lunch, and I doubt that they ever wash their hands!"

One more time, I realized that the White Russians belonged to a forever-disappearing species. They didn't seem to see the reality and were living more by their rich Slavic imagination, bringing themselves to believe and behave as if they still were in their old country. These two noble and intellectual emigrants, lodged in an old deteriorated shack on a small farm in the middle of nowhere, received us as if they were old Russian landlords owning thousands of acres.

My father didn't forget to bring enough vodka for this occasion, and as soon as we arrived at the cabin, Chernoiivanenko wanted at any price to mount the old and only horse they had, which was their sole means of transportation. The poor, worn-out, and tired hack barely could move in the dirty, weedy path under the weight of this lanky rider, whose boots were almost touching the ground. Captain Chernof, who despised Chernoiivanenko, said with scorn, "He looks like the Cat in Boots from the fairy tale!"

A lot of vodka was consumed that evening, but at that time I wasn't yet addicted to that vice, and being sober, I could calmly observe everything that was going on in front of my eyes as if it was in a movie theater or in a story from a book by Tolstoy. My sister Maya was sitting on the torn-down porch in front of the shack, reading a book she brought with her, having known in advance that she would be bored.

Everything was conventional, with etiquette and formality to the smallest detail, even in making a toast, which most of the time was done by the ex-Colonel Andreyev. He would rise from his chair, lift a glass with beverage, look at everybody with dignity several times, and say, "And now, let's lift our glass to the health and memory of those glorious Russian soldiers who right now are risking their bellies defending the sacred Russian soil!" He had already had a lot of drinks, but the more he drank, the more he remembered Russia, became sad, drank more, then made more toasts, and it was then that he told us about his experience in the Chaco War.

He ended by telling us, "I am a military man from an old caste. I served in the Don Cossack's regiment, where I reached a colonel's rank. I fought against the Bolsheviks during the Revolution in Wrangel's army; once we were defeated, I emigrated to France. Then, so as not to starve to death, I enlisted for five years in the French Foreign Legion as a plain soldier; after that, I came back to Paris and married a widow who died from alcoholism the following year. When my friend General Belayev offered me to go to fight in Paraguay, I accepted. I had been a Cossack, fighting in our Mother Russia covered by snow, I was a Legionnaire in the North African desert, and finally, I wasted three years of my life fighting in the jungle of Chaco, where I got malaria, and right now, already old, I am living surrounded by hens, or 'school girls,' as our friend the captain calls them. Let's have one more drink for the sake of our eternal and sacred Russia!" That night we returned home, each one of us with different impressions, while my parents felt very sorry for these two men with such a sad destiny.

I learned later on that Colonel Andreyev, having been affected by a venereal disease contracted through a prostitute, ashamed and tired of his life with so many upheavals, shot himself in the mouth, blowing out his brains, as any Legionnaire would have done when losing the desire to keep living.

Chapter 8

The news about the war was becoming more encouraging each time. In spite of the disaster the Allies suffered at Dieppe in August 1942, the Germans were paralyzed on the Russian front, while in North Africa, General Montgomery was reorganizing his 8th Army, in which several French Brigades were already on the front fighting.

At home, my father still hoped that I could change my mind, making general comments to nobody in particular, but I knew they were for me, saying that the war would end any time soon and a lot of good jobs would be available for people to work in reconstructing Europe.

I had my own moral and personal preoccupations, because our ranch hadn't yet been sold, and so far, we didn't have any potential buyer. I couldn't leave for overseas and let my father deal with this financial burden. My friend Louis Menker was still in Buenos Aires, ready to leave for Montevideo, and when I told him about my problem, he promised to take care of the matter through some friends who were in the real estate business. When I left, I forgot that the Packard was in my name, but my sister Maya imitated my signature, and the vehicle was sold to a hospital and transformed into an ambulance.

I was reading all the newspapers I could put my hands on, and I wouldn't miss any radio information, because I wanted to know how the situation was on the different fronts. I was extremely confused when watching young soldiers fighting fascists in the news or at the movie theater. I felt that my duty was to be there with them, and I wouldn't even contemplate the possibility that I could miss the opportunity to fight the Nazis, because it was part of history and I wanted badly to be part of it. I felt that I hadn't finished my mission in Spain, and I was looking for another chance to do it. We learned that an Anglo-American expedition disembarked in Casablanca, Oran, and Algiers on November 8, 1942, where they encountered some resistance from the Vichy forces, under Admiral Darlan's command.

After trying to organize a resistance and some fighting, he realized that it would be more convenient to sign a peace treaty with the Allies, and a few days later he was assassinated by Vichy's agents in revenge. Once the fascist resistance was suppressed in North Africa, General de Gaulle established the Free French Forces Headquarters in Algiers.

After a few more days of nervousness, I received from the de Gaulle Committee a letter written by Liza, asking me to contact her immediately! We didn't have a telephone at our Derqui ranch, so the Packard took me as fast as it could to Pilar, where I called her from a public telephone. I almost jumped with surprise and happiness when I heard Liza's quiet voice saying to be ready to leave for Egypt within two weeks. In addition, it was necessary to see her in her office the following day, at Monsieur Bruel's business, to pick up my military documents and instructions for my trip.

The following day, early in the morning, I drove my car to Buenos Aires, and I was impatient to see Liza as we had agreed. She gave me an envelope with my identity documents, stating that I was a volunteer in the Free French Forces, some instructions about my duties, and also an order to move to the Hotel Bartolome Mitre, located on the street of the same name, where I already had a room reservation made in

my name for December 4th.

I told her that I was living in Martinez, close to the capital, and that I could stay at home, without going to a hotel, and be ready at any time they would call me. Liza kindly scolded me, saying that I should from now on start by learning to obey orders without questioning, if it was meant for me to be a soldier.

Then, with more calm, she told me that German submarines were waiting 30 miles from the Argentine ports, sinking British ships loaded with meat, and it was necessary to remain in the hotel. We would be advised when to be ready to be transported to the port, where we would take a ship that would depart at once, without warning or notice. She told us that unfortunately the Argentine rulers were on the Nazis' side, and they were letting the German spies send messages to the submarines, informing them about the English ships' schedules.

She told me that I was going to Egypt. I interrupted her, saying "England!" But she insisted, saying, "No! I said Egypt," then added, "Two more volunteers will be with you; they will be coming any time soon from Chile, and all of you will travel together." Before I left, Liza asked me not to tell anybody about my departure, because, as she said, "Nazis' ears are very long!"

I had only two more weeks in front of me, during which I needed to do so many things, besides buying supplies included in the list Liza gave me. Many products were not available in the old country due to the war, and it was better to take soap, canned food, candy, and warm underwear. Inflated with pride that I barely could hide, I told this "secret" to my parents and friends, asking them to be "discreet," and they promised not to do as I had done and not to tell it to anybody.

My parents were more relaxed with reference to our ranch, knowing that my friend Louis would help them, and they were awaiting his telephone call, which could come at any time. I couldn't leave without saying goodbye to my American friends de Grand Pre, and I was very much surprised to hear "Tante Lizel" saying that the following Saturday, she would have a farewell party in my honor at her home. I was very emotional, because after all, she was German, and she knew that I was going to fight against her own people. It was hard to believe, and I wondered about what kind of thoughts were crossing her mind. No matter how much she knew me and loved me, she surely understood nevertheless that it was wartime, and I would be perhaps killing somebody close to her in Germany.

For that fixed day, she went out of her way, striving to cook all the dishes she knew I liked. I was very touched when all of us were sitting around the table, with the exception of Mr. de Grand Pre, who was in the states, and the guests made a toast to my health and to my success. Besides "Tante Lizel" and the brothers Teo and Enrique, there were the other German friends, Otto and Walter. I will never forget that emotional farewell dinner.

Life spins fast, and it was already time to go to the Hotel Bartolome Mitre and to start a new episode in my life this December 4th, 1942. When I reached the hotel's reception desk—the hotel was of the second or perhaps the third category—I could see that the staff was already waiting for me, because at the same instant I received the key to my room, I was told that I would be close to my other two companions.

As soon as I left my bag in my room, I went to knock at the neighbors' room door, because I was eager to meet my adventuring comrades. The door was opened by a

skinny young man with brown hair and the same color eyes, rather short in height; he let me in as soon as I gave him my name. "Rene Genestier," my new journey companion introduced himself, shaking my hand. I saw, sitting on a sofa, another young man who was looking at me with curiosity but remaining on his seat without getting up to greet me.

When he felt that his inspection of my person was over, he got up and introduced himself: "Gerald Esquerre," adding while he was shaking my hand, "I hope we will not have to wait too long now. We have already been in this pigpen four days."

He was a tall, blond young man with blue eyes and refined manners. Both of them were slightly younger than I. The three of us stared at each other with analytic looks, understanding that we would be risking our lives together, fighting for the same ideal.

I learned that both of them were living in Concepcion, Chile. Rene was French, the third generation, born in Chile. His father, also born in Chile, volunteered to fight in World War I. The family owned a large and important utility store, considering themselves as French as Chilean. Rene had several brothers and sisters, in addition to many relatives living in Concepcion.

Gerald Esquerre was born in Paris, bragging that he came from noble ancestry, with his complete name being "Esquerre de Rosny," and "Esquerre" a Scotch name meaning "four." His father died when he was still a small child, and his mother married a Chilean businessman, whom she met in France during one of his buying trips. Once married, all of them moved to Concepcion, where his stepfather had his residence. He grew up in Chile, and considered himself French, but he very easily was also accepted to be Chilean, because he spoke Spanish with the Chilean accent. We very quickly became friends and started our strict routine kind of life, which was to remain in the hotel without leaving until 8 p.m., after which time we could do as we wanted, with the condition that we be ready to leave the following day by 7 a.m.

The three of us had some spare money in our pockets, and usually we would go every evening to have dinner in neighboring restaurants; then we would spend part of the night drinking wine or beer, talking, or listening to music in bars. At that time, jazz was very popular, and the "Little Jug of Beer," among so many other songs published during the war, was one of the preferred ones. Sometimes we would go to a movie theater, mainly to watch the news about the war.

At that time, Buenos Aires was a very important and active center, not only for spies, but also for all kind of activities related to the port. Argentine meat was shipped all over the world, and it was possible to see on the streets sailors of all nations, walking or drinking in the bars or night clubs.

Little by little, we came to know each other better, each one telling his own story; I realized that Rene wasn't very strong physically, to the point that I wondered how he could have been accepted into the military. With Gerald, it was the opposite situation; he was a strong and well- built young man who practiced all types of sports during his entire life and was privileged to have very good health.

His manners remained always very distinguished, and I learned later that was why he had gotten the nickname of "Russian Prince." Russian nobles invaded France at the beginning of the century, stunning the people with their manners, and perhaps even more with their generosity. The women were always staring at him, because he was very good-looking and he knew it, but he still remaining very dignified,

pretending as if he wasn't seeing them.

During the day, we had a lot of spare time to read and to talk, the only distraction we had. It was then that I read Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, and I was slightly disappointed by this novel, which in my opinion didn't reflect exactly what I had experienced during the Spanish Civil War. My new friends hadn't been impressed by learning that I was in Spain fighting against Franco—first because they were not interested, and second because I learned later that both were right-wingers.

We were very much interested in the progress of the war, being impatient and full of desire to participate in it. We never tired of reading every day several newspapers, trying to be more informed about what was going on in Europe. We were aware of the battles that were fought in North Africa, just as we were also aware of the Americans in the Pacific, and we couldn't stop being indignant about what the Germans were doing to the Jews. Liza told us that we could place and receive telephone calls, without telling anybody about our departure or anything related to the de Gaulle Committee. Once a day we received a call from a certain Monsieur Brun, whom we never met, but we knew he was one of our contact men, and he invariably asked us to have patience.

On December 7th, we came back to the hotel very late from our binge, and the receptionist told us that we had missed by a few minutes a gentleman who came to see us, just after we left, and she handed to us a piece of paper from him. On the note was written in French, "I will call you tomorrow at 7 a.m., Regards, Brun." We realized what that was about, and of course none of us could close our eyes during the entire night. The following day, we woke up early in the morning, got dressed, and packed our bags, assuming that Monsieur Brun would call us to tell us he was coming to pick us up. This call came only at 9 a.m., telling us to be ready for 1 o'clock.

We were nervous and walked back and forth from our rooms to the little hotel's bar, then to the entrance facing the street, expecting at any time to see Monsieur Brun. A few minutes before 1 o'clock, a car came to a stop at the hotel's entrance, out of which came a limping, middle-aged gentleman who introduced himself as Mr. Brun, a World War I veteran, an invalid, and a member of the de Gaulle Committee working with Monsieur Bruel. We loaded our small bags into the huge Buick, got inside, and Mr. Brun, without wasting any time, started driving us out of Buenos Aires, passing by the Plaza Constitucion and heading toward La Plata, a city south of Buenos Aires with an important port, about a two-hour drive.

While Monsieur Brun was driving, he explained to us that our ship would leave as soon as we boarded it, a precaution taken by the English Navy so as not to give time for the German submarines swarming in the region to be alerted by their numerous agents spying in Buenos Aires. That was the reason why the cargoes were leaving the port without warning, to gain time and to put some distance between them and the German submersibles.

We learned that we were going to Algiers first, as this French colony had been recently liberated by the Anglo-American forces, and that was where the refrigerator-ship was going to deliver the meat for the English Army. When we arrived at La Plata, we headed toward the port, where we easily found the British ship *Daro* mooring. We said goodbye to Monsieur Brun and climbed the gangway into the boat, which immediately weighed anchor and slowly slipped away from the port.

Book 5

World War II

Chapter 1

As soon as we boarded the *Daro*, and even before we took a few steps on the dock, an officer came to pick up our identity papers, while a sailor carried our bags to our cabins, where we would be staying for the next two weeks until the journey was completed. We were introduced to two adjacent cabins with a bathroom between them. The first cabin had two stacked bunks, and it was a little larger than the second, a smaller cabin with only one bunk. I took the second cabin immediately, while my two companions settled into the first one.

After leaving our belongings in our new home, we went up onto the deck to enjoy the beautiful and moving spectacle of a ship's departure from port, a sight that always impressed me so much. We watched as the ship moved slowly away toward the deep waters of the open ocean. A young officer who had been leaning on the rail close to us took our papers and introduced himself as the commissar, Lieutenant James Canning. He spoke a little French and some Spanish, but with supplementation of our deficient English, we were able to hold a thorough but primitive conversation.

We learned that *Daro* was an ultra-modern refrigerator vessel, brand new and built in Liverpool, now only on her second voyage. The first voyage had been to Australia to bring back mutton to England, and now, she was carrying Argentine canned beef to English troops in Algiers. On the bow and the stern were anti-aircraft guns; in addition, there was a catapult for throwing depth charges into the sea as a means of fighting a submarine attack. Each merchant ship was assigned a crew of English navy sailors who were in charge of these weapons. We also learned that although *Daro* was a cargo ship, she had fifteen cabins to accommodate passengers, as did other vessels of this type.

It was late already, and once we lost sight of the port, we went down to the officers' mess, where we were told we would be eating. Our new friend, Lieutenant Canning, introduced us to the other diners, who told us that the present time was the most dangerous of the trip. The German submarines swarmed the exit of the Buenos Aires port, ready to attack departing ships. They also told us that *Daro* was a fast ship, capable of outrunning the submarines that submerged in the daytime, but that our ship was no match for the speed of the submarines when they were running on the surface at night.

Throwing trash or garbage overboard in the daytime was strictly prohibited, for it would tell German submarines that a vessel was in the vicinity; all trash and garbage were to be thrown into the sea at night. Moreover, smoking was prohibited on deck at night, and all ports and hatches had to be closed then so as to prevent any ray of light from being seen by the enemy. Finally, we learned that the ship had four shifts, with each crew member working four hours on, followed by eight hours of rest, followed by four hours on, etc. This 24-hour routine was called *watch*, and it was observed as long as the

ship sailed. The regimen had been applied to men of the sea all over the world for centuries.

After dinner, we went back on deck; however, we found only complete darkness everywhere, and nobody else was moving around there. All the lights were off, because at sea even a lit cigarette could be seen from several miles away. The Britons had the strongest navy in the world by that time, but the Germans had built a large submarine fleet that posed a terrible danger to the navigation of Allied ships.

Having nothing else to do, the three of us decided to return to our cabins. As we went down the steps of the winding stairway, we saw four young officers standing at the door of our cabins. They seemed to have been waiting for us, for as soon as they saw us, they advanced in our direction, introduced themselves, and shook our hands. If there was any doubt they had come to see us, it was dispelled as soon as we opened the door to our dwelling, for they followed us inside. It was then I saw that each of them carried several cans of beer. They were young mechanical engineer officers assigned as technicians to maintain the equipment on our refrigerated cargo ship; under the shift system, some of these officer-specialists worked while others rested, slept, or ate.

Our uninvited guests were close to our ages, and in no time, we became friends, a process helped a great deal by the Australian beer we drank. My Chilean comrades and I found the taste of the beer excellent; some of it had been left aboard after the previous trip to Australia. I later came to believe that this was the start of the long career of drinking that increased in pace during most of my adult life. We acknowledged our new friends, for we would be living together for the next two weeks, and it was better to spend that time as best we could.

Jim Pauling, who wore glasses, seemed to be the leader of the group. Although he was short in stature, he was a London native, a fact that seemed to bestow a certain prestige on him among his companions. All four of these newcomers had blond hair and blue eyes; however, Bobby's hair was more of a straw color. Bobby was tall, and he talked rapidly, giving us a hard time understanding him, even though he was from Welshire. The other young men laughed and told us not to pay him much attention, for they didn't understand him well either. Tony, the Scot, was the funniest of all; he always smiled and told jokes. The fourth, Jack, very effeminate and candid, loved to dance, especially when we sang "The Little Keg of Beer" or any other popular song of the day. Sometimes, the short Commissar James would also drop by for a short period; however, because of his superiority of rank, his arrival always brought among us a kind of coldness, and we were happy to see him leave.

We continued with this life during the entire journey, which featured a few memorable incidents. One of them occurred when we were engaged in our usual drinking in our cabin when suddenly, the Scot Tony appeared at the door, showing a bloody hand. It had not been quite an hour since he had gone to take his watch in the hold to take care of the refrigeration machinery.

Tony was slightly drunk already, and during a minor distraction, or perhaps from fatigue, he had managed to slice his finger halfway through. He had not reported the incident, afraid that if the captain got wind of the fact that he was slightly inebriated, he would be punished. His friends, wanting to help hide the accident, took him to the infirmary, where a friendly nurse disinfected and bandaged the wound without the captain's knowledge. A companion completed the rest of Tony's watch. Rumors of

Tony's accident spread all over the ship, but they never reached the captain, who was very strict about discipline.

On the third day of the journey, Tony, his hand still bandaged, appeared in our cabin. He was accompanied by an older, dark-haired officer who was introduced to us as Chief Mechanical Lieutenant Anthony. Anthony was a Canadian who apparently liked the drinking cup, for he became a frequent guest at our drinking parties, coming almost every evening to join our group.

Anthony once told us how he got married in Montreal. For eccentricity's sake, he and his bride decided to get married while parachuting from an airplane; laughing, he said that the most difficult problem was finding a Catholic priest who would perform the wedding service while dangling in mid-air from a parachute. He added, still laughing, that the extravagant ceremony had not helped secure happiness, for a few months after the wedding his wife asked him for a divorce. He acknowledged that his occasional binge drinking could have been the reason for their separation. As we listened to his story, we nodded our heads in agreement, for it was evident that his wife had probably dropped him for precisely that reason.

Anthony was a very somber person, and no matter how much he drank, he was never as contagiously joyful as many of us were. Although he talked a lot and seemed to be both learned and intelligent, it was apparent that something was bothering him; he was unsuccessfully trying to chase away a ghost that haunted his mind. Several times, he seemed about to tell us something, especially me, for we had reached a certain degree of friendship. Then, he would change his mind and resume his talking about trivial things, while a bright light of sadness shone in his dark eyes.

What surprised me was how little attention we were paying to the war, even though some of these people had gone through painful experiences while serving on ships sunk by German submarines, with terrible consequences. Jack, the effeminate one, had already been on two vessels sunk by submarines; he told us how he had been on a passenger ship that had been sunk in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, with the passengers, largely women and children, and the crew remaining adrift for eight days.

When Rene asked Jack how the people dealt with the problem of relieving themselves, for lifeboats have no restrooms, Jack responded that if a woman had to go, the men turned their heads and looked over the side while the lady lifted her skirt and relieved herself overboard. For the men, of course, the challenge was much easier.

A week after our departure, the captain sent a message complaining that we were consuming too much beer in our cabin and threatening to ration the purchases of this beverage if we continued to drink at our accelerated pace. Soon, he pointed out, we would deplete the bar's stock of beer. We were told that he also said, "These Frenchies really know how to drink! I wish they would fight as well as they drink." Although we were the only three passengers on board, we soon became very popular with the crew.

One afternoon, we witnessed a major action on deck. The sailors hastily removed the sheaths from the machine guns and the depth bomb mechanism, for a submarine had been detected close to us by radar. The ship had sent a message asking the navy to protect us, and the navy promised to send a frigate as soon as possible to chase the submarine away. We knew that the *Daro* was faster than the submarine in the daytime, but at night the submarine could sail on the surface, overtake us, and sink us.

Early on the morning of the following day, we heard a deafening noise. Getting dressed at once, we went up on deck and saw our sailors launching depth bombs into the sea, the bombs exploding under water with the sound of thunder, shaking our ship. We never learned whether our sailors did any damage to the German submarine. Far away, we could see a British battle cruiser coming at full speed in our direction. As we resumed our journey, we could hear the uninterrupted sound of explosions generated by the English warship as it tried to locate and hit the attacking German submarine with depth bombs.

Two days later, we were close to the Straits of Gibraltar. The three of us were wide-eyed at the spectacle of the enormous number of ships taking on troops all around us; we were told that the ships were part of a convoy that we would join, protected by warships, for the Mediterranean Sea was full of German and Italian submarines.

After waiting for half a day, we became part of the convoy that began moving, escorted by war vessels, like dogs guarding a herd of sheep. In all this time, the sky was full of Spitfires and other Allied airplanes; the spectacle amused Gerald, for he dreamed of becoming a pilot. A convoy always moves at the speed of its slowest vessel; while this practice delays the general movement, it provides protection to every vessel.

After two more days of sailing, we arrived at night at the port of Algiers. The sailors badly wanted to go ashore to have a drink and be with women; however, our ship was anchored too far away from the dock to permit debarkation. Suddenly, we saw one of our sailors undress and jump into the cold water in his underwear, where he proceeded to swim to the port. It was freezing weather, at the end of December, but youth is always daring.

Half an hour later, we saw the same sailor standing in a boat that was rowed by two Arabs; he had surely hired this boat to take his buddies ashore for some fun.

The port was well illuminated, but it was silent, without movement, and now we knew that we would have to wait a little longer to begin the life of a soldier. Of course, none of the three of us could close our eyes all night. Before we returned to our berths, we stayed on the deck a while, leaning on the rail and watching with curiosity the half-dozen sailors from the *Daro* as they got into the rowboat to go into the city to have fun, drinks, and of course women. Most likely, they would return the following day with headaches and empty pockets.

After a while, when complete silence surrounded the entire port, we went to our cabins to spend our last night on the ship. We could not fall asleep for a long time; then, we became drowsy, our heads full of dreams and visions.

Chapter 2

The following day, December 24, 1942, we woke up early, not being able to sleep more than a couple of hours; we were already packed and ready to leave the ship. The Commissar, James, told us that within an hour somebody from the de Gaulle Committee would come to pick us up, but that we still had time to enjoy our last breakfast on board. The new friends we had made during our cruise were shaking our hands, wishing us good luck, telling us that we had been very good company as beer-drinking buddies and that they surely would miss us.

After we took leave from all these friends, Anthony came to say goodbye, with his usual sad look, and even the captain came to shake our hands; we then remained by ourselves, waiting for the people who would take care of us ashore. After a good while, while watching the dock from the deck, we saw an old, run-down car parking at the gangplank, and coming out of it was an old man in plain clothes who we assumed would be the one we were waiting for. He started climbing the foot-bridge steps, and, seeing us standing, he waved his hand to us.

The Commissar received him very politely and handed to him our documents; then the newcomer faced us and introduced himself as Pierre Cordier, de Gaulle Committee Coordinator. We loaded our belongings into his car, took a last look at the *Daro*, from whose deck several friends were still waving their hands in farewell, and rode toward Algiers' downtown. We were at first surprised to hear the extreme noise reigning in the city; then we noticed the picturesque and colorful attire of the people wandering the streets, the women's faces covered by veils. All this was new for us!

Monsieur Cordier was very serious, and while he was driving, he told us a little bit of what was happening in the French colonies. When the English and American allies had invaded North Africa at the beginning of November, in an operation called Operation Torch, Roosevelt had asked Churchill to keep the Free French Forces away from the center of operations. This request had been honored, because both the Americans and the British preferred to deal with Admiral Darlan. When the latter was assassinated, General Giraud replaced him as military and civilian commander in chief, without even giving de Gaulle a chance to talk to Giraud. The encounter between the generals de Gaulle and Giraud occurred much later, on January 22, 1943, during the Anfa Conference, when we were already in Libya as part of the First Free French Division.

Roosevelt was betting on Giraud's African Army, 300,000 strong, as a force on which he could rely; Roosevelt did not realize that a large majority of these soldiers were looking for an opportunity to desert, so as to be able to enlist in de Gaulle's Free French Forces.

Monsieur Cordier also told us that the de Gaulle Committee had big problems in the Colonies, and especially in Algiers, where they had a hard time finding a transit center and had to agree to take an abandoned old run-down barracks, which they revamped for the recruits of the Free French Forces. He assumed that we would be sent to Egypt to become part of the Gaullist forces incorporated into the Eighth English Army.

We almost collapsed when we arrived at the old falling-to-pieces building that served as the transitional barracks. It was even worse than what monsieur Cordier had told us and impossible to describe. Dirt, trash and garbage were everywhere, and the building was full of soldiers wearing torn, worn-out uniforms, wandering from one place

to the next, most of them drunk and without any semblance of discipline or order. Monsieur Cordier took us to the only office still usable, close to the gate at the entrance, where several bad-humored French employees received us scornfully and with suspicion. When checking our documents, they couldn't believe that we were coming from South America.

One of them, smiling, said, "Look at that! Our soldiers are trying to get out of here, and these three birds came all the way from the other side of the world to join us!" Some laughed, but no atmosphere existed there for humor or jokes, and silence again prevailed. They made us sign some papers, telling us that now we belonged to the Free French Forces, with our mission to embark within four days—that is to say, on December 28—on a ship that would take us to Alexandria, but meanwhile, we were free to do whatever we wanted. A soldier who came across us told us to watch our bags closely if we didn't want them to disappear and that if we still had some money, we should rather spend it on a hotel room while we were waiting.

Before leaving, Monsieur Cordier told us that one of his friends, also a Gaullist, wanted to invite a couple of Bretons to celebrate Christmas at his home, and he gave us the address of the Sanlieu family, telling us to be there at noon the next day. When he was leaving, he stopped his old car to instruct us: "This friend of mine asked me to send him two Bretons, but I don't think he would object to having three South Americans instead! Now boys, behave, because he has a very pretty young daughter, also from the FFF. You seem to be nice kids, the three of you, and I wish you luck!"

Here we remained standing, with our bags on the floor, under the scrutiny not only of the office employees, but of a multitude of soldiers who wanted to see these strange guys who came from remote South America. When we asked the soldiers where we could find a place to spend the night, they laughingly told us, "When you find an empty bed, just jump on it!"

Trying not to appear too sissy, we tried to get in the general mood and laughed with them, a gesture they appreciated, while a huge Parisian told us to follow him, because around where he was sleeping were several empty beds that we could occupy. It was late, and we heard the bugle calling for supper. We had to stand in a long line close to the kitchen, and each one was supposed to have his own plate, fork, and knife, objects we didn't have. It was once again the same new friend, the Parisian Robert, who provided us with plates, forks, and knives. Once each plate was filled up with a piece of meat, turnips, a loaf of bread, and a cup of red wine, we sat on a heap of bricks in the corner and began to eat. We didn't have any appetite for this food, remembering the delicious plates served on the *Daro*. Needless to say, of course, we hadn't come from Argentina to Algiers to eat, but rather to fight for our ideals. With the help of the red wine, which Robert was pouring into our cups from two bottles he produced as if by miracle, our mood went on improving, and at the end, eventually all of us were laughing.

This joyful new friend whose company was making us feel so comfortable first listened to our story, then confessed that he had served in Giraud's Colonial Army for two years as a cook, a job that was demanding work. Drunk officers would often wake him up in the middle of the night—a very common occurrence—and ask him to fix them something to eat. He became fed up, tired of this kind of life, and decided to desert that army to enlist in the FFF.

Robert asked us not to tell anybody that he was a cook, because it was the

worst kind of slavery in the army. He had heard that the Gaullist Army was much more humane, and that was why he joined it. He told us that we would be traveling together on December 28 to Egypt. This Parisian's name was Robert Larue, and he became very happy when he learned that I too was from Paris. Robert told us that during the Vichy regime, life had been very hard, because practically all the French North African colonies were under German occupation, and the French Army had been run under an iron discipline.

It was night already, and we could feel the temperature's going down, which was normal, according to our new friend, who stated that he had lived enough in this bloody country, adding "During the day the heat is cooking up to your balls, and at night you feel like dying of the cold that is freezing your ass!" He took us to an end of this dirty building, and when we opened a door, we found ourselves in something like a huge hangar, with beds all around. Some of them were empty, but the majority were occupied by soldiers of all nations—French, Arabs, Blacks, Asians, and a mixture of all kinds of skin colors lying in different postures in the beds, and of course almost all of them were snoring while sleeping.

What couldn't be missed in this kind of place was the existence of several groups of people sitting on the beds drinking wine, a beverage that was accessible to anyone in all French barracks. Not a single small fort or military bunker, no matter how far away from a civilized area it was, was without a canteen where wine was sold. It wasn't any problem in the French Colonial Army for soldiers to be drunk; it was tolerated, and in fact, those who wouldn't drink were suspected of being communists and consequently dangerous people who should be watched.

Robert lay down on a bed, under which was placed his little bag locked with a pad-lock, and invited us to take any available bed and to lie down. The three of us were looking with distrust at these dirty beds, covered with dark blankets emitting a strong human odor of sweat, wine, and trash accumulated during so many years. When I sat on my bed, I realized that the springs were so worn out that my rear end was almost touching the floor. We didn't undress, and after putting our own handkerchiefs on what were supposed to be pillows, we lay down all dressed with our coats on, trying to get some sleep.

I was lying on a bed between two empty ones, but when I woke up in the middle of the night, my eyes were staring at a black head eight inches from me. My dark neighbor was sleeping as though he had been knocked out, while his mouth was smiling as if he were in paradise. I shuddered; then I remembered where I was and I relaxed, but I couldn't sleep any more. I lay on my bed listening to the snoring noise, and sometimes from somewhere on the other side of the building, I could hear a drunk just returning and singing a sad song.

Before dawn, we heard the bugle calling us for breakfast, and little by little, all the human wave in this building started moving slowly. Some went running fast to the lavatories, but most of them got dressed without even washing their faces, in a hurry to get a cup of coffee and the loaf of bread served in the morning. When my next-bed neighbor awoke and then stood up, he had on his face the same smile of happiness as the night before, and he said to me in broken French, "Good drink, coffee morning!" I couldn't believe my eyes, seeing the height of this black fellow who must have been close to seven feet tall. Understanding my surprise as I looked at him, he said with pride,

speaking in the same broken French, "Me Sara, race from Oubangui-Chari, best soldier of Africa," while the three cuts he had on each side of his face were wrinkling. He explained that the Saras, like the Massais, are the tallest people of Africa, and as a tribal distinction, when the boys are small, the witch doctor uses a knife to make three cuts on each cheek.

With our friend Robert we went to the huge lavatory, dirty and flooded with water, where everyone tried to clean himself as best he could before standing in the line in front of the kitchen for a cup of coffee. Robert understood that none of us could sleep during the night and that it was a rude shock for us to find ourselves in such a surrounding. I thought then that at least in Spain the people and the barracks were cleaner than here. Seeing that we remained speechless, Robert said, " Listen boys, I can see that the three of you belong to another category. I know also that you will get used to this kind of life with time, because such dirt does not reign in every camp. If you still have some money and you can afford to pay for a hotel room, go spend the rest of the three days in a more agreeable place!"

We learned through Monsieur Cordier, who came to see us the following morning, that toward downtown there was a little hotel where he had once taken two young Gaullists who escaped from France, passing by way of Spain to come to join us. We were really relieved to learn that we had an answer to our problem, and by unanimity, we decided to move to that hotel. We asked Robert to come with us to the hotel, but he said that he didn't have the necessary money, and he even refused when we told him that we would pay for him. It was nine o'clock in the morning when we settled with a young Arab, whose job was to carry things in his two-wheeled cart, which he pushed by himself. We used Robert's advice to bargain before agreeing on the fare. Then we loaded our bags on this primitive carriage and went moving toward the hotel, whose name was The Queen of the Desert.

After walking for about forty minutes through winding and steep streets, where more than once we had to help the young Arab who couldn't have pulled the cart by himself, we reached a small two-storied building. At the entrance, a middle-aged woman was waiting for us; we paid her in advance for the three days we would be staying and went to our two rented rooms. We descended two floors, as if going to the basement, because the entrance was at the street level, but when once we were in our suite and we opened the window, we realized that we were on the second floor from the street. We laughed a lot when we understood that the city's inhabitants built their houses to take advantage of the geographical slope conformation. We almost had a fistfight for the first turn to go to the bathroom, and once we washed up and put on clean clothes, we felt that we were living again.

It was already eleven o'clock, and we hadn't forgotten that we were invited for the Christmas lunch at noon. Before leaving, we asked the same woman who received us for directions to the address where we were supposed to go. After explaining to us where to go, the woman told us that she was the owner's wife, that they were Jewish, and that her father-in-law had died the day before, for which reason her husband wasn't there, because he was very religious and would stay praying for one week before returning home. I had brought a big box of chocolate from Argentina suitable for any special occasion, and we decided that this one was an ideal gift for our lunch host. After wandering for half an hour among the throng of Europeans and Arabs, we succeeded in finding the building we were looking for, which was located in a nice area populated by

French people only, and we went up to the third floor, as instructed by monsieur Cordier.

I rang the door bell, slightly nervous, because we were already half an hour late. After about a minute, the door opened and a girl appeared, a stunning beauty who asked us what we wanted. Seeing that we were silent and confused, she continued to smile while she looked at us. After gathering all my courage, I ventured to say, "We were told to be here at noon, and here we are, with the difference that you asked for two Bretons, and the three of us are from South America!" The beautiful girl laughed loudly at that, and said, "Don't worry; Monsieur Cordier has already told us about your visit. He is right here with his wife. Please come in!"

I had forgotten about the box with chocolates, and Rene pushed me with his elbow until I realized what he meant, and I delivered the box to the young girl, whose name was Nelly and who insisted that her name was written with a y—American style—and not with *ie* as it is in French.

When she opened the box and saw the chocolate, she became radiant, saying that we would never realize what that represented to her, because it had been years since chocolate was available in Algiers. She showed us into the living room and introduced us to her parents, screaming, "Look what they brought me, the 'false Bretons.' How happy I am that they came over instead of the Bretons, who would never have brought me chocolate."

In the living room, in addition to Nelly's parents, were monsieur Pierre Cordier and his wife, three French officers from de Gaulle's army, and three American officers, all of whom were introduced to us one by one. It was one of the most pleasant Christmas lunches of my life. Of course, the general situation increased the excitement: we were in wartime, we would be in action very soon, and we were with people quite different from those we were with on our arrival. The three French officers were from the Colonial army; they had switched to de Gaulle's forces, and Nelly was already working at the de Gaulle Committee and was incorporated in the military unit as an interpreter. She could speak perfect English, and that was the reason for bringing the Americans, with whom she was already working as a translator in her new job.

At that time, the Americans still enjoyed a popularity very close to veneration. For us, they represented the ideal in every sense. The shortest of them would never stop talking and making jokes, which Nelly translated into French, provoking a general laughter. Her mother said that this joyful American seemed to be very intelligent, to which one of the others said that in the United States there existed a saying that "In the moving train, it's the empty wagon that is the noisest!" We also laughed when the guests introduced themselves, because one of the French officers' names was Genest; then Rene came and said "Genestier." The kindness of Madame Sanlieu—Madelaine, Nelly's mother—was matchless, and the three of us went on calling her Our Guardian Angel.

After the American officers left, we learned a lot about the political situation, and it wasn't for the best. Vichy still had a lot of influence and followers; Marshal Petain, a traitor to us, was still revered by the majority. The worst of all was that Giraud, who replaced Darlan, was behaving almost as an undeclared intermediary for Marshal Petain.

The Allies, as much the English as the Americans, weren't paying much attention to de Gaulle, who had only a few thousand soldiers; they were relying more on Giraud, who had under arms half a million men in his African Army, which was a force

to be reckoned with in case they decided to fight against the Germans. Monsieur Charles Sanlieu, a fervent Gaullist, told us how the real patriots suffered during the Vichy government and that Admiral Darlan was the Vice-President and Commander of the Navy and Colonies. He told us that it would be quite impossible to describe the happiness they felt when they learned that de Gaulle didn't recognize the coward Petain's surrender, saying, "We lost a battle, but we didn't lose the war!"

We were aware of some of these things, because the news about international events and about the war in general had regularly reached our American continent, but we ignored the sadness and the cruelty that had been imposed on the colonies.

Monsieur Sanlieu said, "Hitler's and Petain's sympathizers were backed by the Foreign Legion, and also by some elements of the Colonial (referring to the Colonial Army), taking into consideration the common, earnest belief that England would fall sooner or later and a New Era would begin." Then, with emotion, he continued, "When Germany attacked Russia, our faith was restored, knowing that their last hour was close, but the Russians were losing ground, retreating, and being wiped out, a development that gave vigor to the Petainists by confirming that there was no other way out but to work with the Germans!"

After a short pause, he resumed talking, while each one of us devoured his words. "When the coup in Iraq came, a rebellion instigated by Rashid Ali, Hitler's ally, Darlan allowed the German Air Force to build a base in Neirab, in Syria, close to Aleppo, to consolidate Germany's advance to the East, because Germany badly needed oil for the war. After costly and bloody fighting, Rashid Ali was overthrown, running to refuge in Iran, on May 30th, 1941. The English were frightened by these events and preoccupied by their oil fields, which lay in these countries under their dominion. They sent from Palestine to Syria a military expedition, with a unit of the Free French Forces. The small German garrison was no match against the forces sent against them, and the Germans abandoned their positions, under the Vichy Army's protection."

Then the conversation became general, because each one of us wanted to ask questions, to understand better what was happening at that time, and both ladies, Our Guardian Angel and Nelly, also wanted to give their opinions about these events that they lived with such an intensity.

During the three evenings that we spent with our new friends, we learned a lot about what had happened there, to the point that we felt a little bit ashamed of our ignorance about what went on in North Africa, while we had a good time without such preoccupations in Chile and Argentina. We learned that when the Germans abandoned their base in Syria and only the Vichy Army remained, the small unit of the Free French Forces tried to get in contact with that army. The commanders were Lieutenant Colonel Brosset and General Cartroux. On the other side was the Alsatian General Denz, along with the special delegate from Vichy, Verdilhac.

Unfortunately, Petain's people suddenly declared that they couldn't deal any longer with traitors of the Fatherland, and they refused to continue the talks.

To put an end to this fragile situation, the English General Wilson intervened and ended up signing an armistice. This armistice was so ambiguous that it looked like Syria and Lebanon were passing under England's mandate, while the Vichy forces with their families, 25,000 persons in all, could return to France unmolested, under General

Crystal's supervision.

The Gaullists wanted badly to continue talking with the Petainists, trying to convince them to defect and join the FFF, but the Briton's attitude was so negative that it infuriated and demoralized the Free French Forces. The situation became so tense that when General Wilson tried to put some pressure on the FFF, their General Monclar, even though with much reduced forces, accepted the challenge; and this rivalry became so dangerous that it could have transformed itself into an open hostility from both angry sides.

General de Gaulle lodged a protest in London, which resulted in the English government representative Sir Oliver Littleton's giving orders not to provoke the FFF in Africa. In July 1941, the English General Auchinleck came to replace General Wavell as Commander of the forces in the desert.

A deep animosity existed among the English against the FFF, and it was apparent that the English were planning to take possession of all overseas French colonies after the war. The English took a firm stand not to let the FFF participate in any military action that could give the FFF some prestige.

When de Gaulle asked Churchill to incorporate his FFF units in any of the "Western Desert" fighting duties, he received a negative answer. Angry, he contacted the USSR's Ambassador Bogomolov, offering to send his Free French troops to the Russian front to fight alongside the Red Army. The French squadron Normandie was already incorporated in the Soviet Air Force, and Russia sympathized very much with General de Gaulle.

On the other side, in Beyrouth, General Larminat, who was much more diplomatic than de Gaulle, was trying to convince the British to let the Free French Forces fight alongside theirs. After many painful meetings and political games, on December 7, 1941, Churchill communicated to de Gaulle that General Auchinleck would incorporate the FFF into the 8th English Army.

On December 10, General Larminat became the first commander of the 1st Free French Division, and a few days later, on the first day of 1942, the division was sent to Daba, 120 miles from Alexandria, where they received English uniforms, equipment, and weapons.

The division was composed of a large number of different type of arms and different nationalities: French and Jews from the Colonies; Arabs, Spahis, Moors, Indochinese; gunners from Senegal and from diverse parts of Equatorial Africa; Foreign Legionnaires, Colonial Army soldiers, and French who had escaped from the German occupation by way of Spain; many Spanish and foreign Brigadistas who fought in the Spanish Civil War; and volunteers from Latin America, like General Brosset from Argentina. We were about 300 who came from that country.

The four days we spent in Algiers passed very fast, and we learned a lot; in particular, the human magnetism and love that we received from this wonderful family was so intense that we were profoundly sad to leave them, and we promised never to forget them. Unfortunately, because of the circumstances and the turns of life, we never again had a chance to see Our Guardian Angel nor monsieur Sanlieu, a real French "Black Foot" patriot. His luck also changed several years later—for the worse—when he had been driven to leave the country where several generations of his family had been born. It was in 1951, when Algeria became an independent country, and all of the French-

born there were expelled as “foreigners,” thus becoming undesirables, not only where they were born, but even in France. There were about three million of these "Black Feet," as Arabs called French people born in North Africa. They had to find a new country, to start a new life. It was impossible for France to absorb all of them, and it was all the more difficult for these “Black Feet” because they no longer had any roots left in that old country. Many years later, I saw a lot of these "Black Feet" resettling in Argentina, helped by French President de Gaulle.

I never again had a chance to see this wonderful family, with the exception that when I was in Paris on convalescence leave in 1944, by chance I had the joy of seeing Nelly one more time. She was already a lieutenant in a women's corps.

Chapter 3

Early in the morning of December 28, 1942, after drinking a hot cup of coffee in a hurry, coffee prepared for us by a sympathetic Jewish family, we left our little hotel, The Queen of the Desert. The landlords said goodbye to us several times, wishing us good luck over and over, knowing that we were heading to the battlefield. On the street, a taxi we had asked for was already waiting for us to take us to the port.

We left most of our belongings at the Sanlieu family's house, and our bags were no longer as voluminous as they were on our arrival. It wasn't easy to find the dock where our coasting vessel *Liege* was mooring, but after driving awhile along the port, we saw a throng of people standing together close to a ship, which we assumed was the one we were looking for. Inquiring around, we were told that we were at the right place. We paid the taxi driver, took our bags with us, and joined this group, much amazed to see so many different kinds of people in this multitude. About forty persons altogether were standing there, one by one climbing the gangplank to the end, where an officer to whom they were showing their documents was greeting them. In the midst of the deafening noise, we heard somebody's voice calling our names. It was our friend Robert, who was shouldering people aside to come close to us.

"How did you spend the time, kids?" this jovial Parisian asked us, then continued, "Let's remain together, because the journey will last at least five days, and it is safer and better to have a good time meanwhile!" After boarding the ship, we went down into the hold, where we were told our cabins should be located; instead, we found just hard wooden benches, without a mattress or even a blanket to cover our bodies.

When we complained, the captain, a huge man with a big beard, came and told us in French, with a strong Belgian accent, "What do you think you are? Tourists? Just cruising on the sea, or are you future soldiers who are going to fight?" These words were so unexpected that all of us cracked up laughing, and the captain, now more human, told us, "Kids, coffee with a loaf of bread is already on the tables in the dining room, and as soon as we finish loading, we will depart!"

We located benches in a corner that the four of us decided to occupy. We noticed then a skinny, tall, blond young man occupying the bench next to us. He had very soft manners, and he introduced himself as Pierre Norman, saying that he came from Argentina. This made our eyes open wide, and it surprised me particularly, not having been aware that other volunteers from that country would be coming on this ship.

We sympathized at once with this newcomer and learned that Pierre was descended from the Germans whom Catherine the Great brought to Russia from Germany in the 18th Century and that his father fought against the Communists during the Russian Revolution, after which his family exiled itself to France as refugees.

I leaped, surprised, and told him, "You are telling the history of my family, with the difference that all our ancestors were Russians; but my father too fought with Denikin in the Russian Revolution." By coincidence, Pierre's family had also done what we had done, going to Argentina to avoid the horrors of the coming war.

On the bench close to Pierre was a tall young man with a dark complexion, Ben Benzara, a native of Egypt who already was lying down with his head leaning on his folded coat instead of on a pillow. He told us that his family was living in Algiers, but

when he got wind that the FFF had opened an office in that city and was recruiting volunteers, he decided to join us.

The trip was perhaps monotonous, but it was not boring, because all these people who were with us came from different places, and it was amazing to listen or to talk to them. Also in the group were two Frenchmen who had escaped from occupied France, passing through Spain to come to fight the Nazis in the FFF army.

We were still sailing on the sea on New Year's Eve, and we spent this holiday aboard. We were grateful, nevertheless, to this old bearded steamer captain who had been thoughtful enough to provide us with enough bottles of wine to toast this special occasion. As always happened—in the French Army at least—some of our trip comrades went to bed completely drunk, and for a good while they kept on singing from the hold's different corners, while the rest of the recruits were snoring, sound asleep and perhaps dreaming of the new 1943 year.

The Mediterranean Sea was very busy with maritime traffic, and as the *Liege* was the captain's private property, to avoid taking any chances and to stay away from German and Italian submarines, he steamed close to the shore. We cast anchor in Alexandria late at night on January 3, 1943, when everybody was still asleep, and we were allowed only the following day to debark ashore.

We knew that the Captain sympathized with the FFF, being a strong anti-fascist, and we were glad to learn that he had volunteered to transport us from Algiers to Alexandria free of charge, because anyhow he was hauling to that port goods freighted by Egyptian businessmen. On the dock were parked several different types of vehicles, including an English Landover and some German light desert trucks with wide balloon-type tires; they had been taken from the Afrika Korp during battles. All around several persons were standing, apparently having come to give us a ride. We were surprised to realize that as soon as we docked, most of the passengers traveling with us disappeared, while a few of us remained to meet those who were waiting for us on the pier.

Rene, Gerald, Pierre and I traveled together in one of these German desert trucks with tires as wide as soccer balls, while Robert Larue and Ben Benzara, with two more comrades, occupied a Landover and went in another direction. Once again, while our open vehicle was as if flying over Alexandria's streets, we never ceased to admire the diversity of the people, a diversity that was even more stunning than what we had seen in Algiers.

After riding for about half an hour, we arrived at an old barracks that looked like it had once been an antique fortress; at its entrance were two Indian soldiers standing guard. After checking our driver's papers, they let us in. This barracks was very similar to other barracks that I had seen, and it was quite different from the one in Algiers where we had spent a night. It was a huge place—clean, orderly, with a strict discipline—where soldiers of many nationalities were spread all around. When we reached the area reserved for the Free French Forces, the driver told us smilingly, "Here we are; it's the end of the trip!"

Inside the building, close to where we were left, several French officers were sitting at a big table, all wearing the English Army battledress and short pants. After checking our identifications, they sent us to the infirmary, where two young doctors checked us to see if we were fit for the army. When the examination was over, we were

told to come back to the first office, where a lieutenant of the Colonial Army with a huge moustache and a red wine-drinker's nose asked us a few questions, the answers to which he wrote down in a little book. He, too, was fascinated upon learning that we had come from South America, that I spoke several foreign languages, and that I was a mechanical engineer.

"Do you know how to drive a tank?" he asked me briskly, to which I said yes, because I had learned in Spain with the Russians, who had received tanks on the Aragon front, even though I never had been a tankist.

"You speak English too?" the interrogatory continued. When I said once again yes, he called somebody on the telephone, and after that conversation, he told me, "Sit down and wait for me!"

Rene Genestier was sent to the 24th Infantry Battalion, composed of blacks from Chad, while Gerald Esquerre was sent to the 5th Infantry Battalion, along with the other young man, Pierre Norman, who came with us. A good while had passed since my friends had left to join their assigned units, and I was still sitting and waiting.

Suddenly, there appeared an English officer whom the French lieutenant saw coming, and with his head, he motioned in my direction. The newcomer asked me the same questions—if I could speak English, if I could drive a tank, and if it was true that I was a mechanical engineer. I knew that my English wasn't perfect then, but I still could carry on a simple conversation. It appeared that the English officer was satisfied with my answers, because after he went back to talk with the French lieutenant and signed some papers, he told me to follow him. We got in his Landover and went riding to the other side of the barracks, where the English troops were lodged.

I was surprised to learn much later that the 8th English Army had received a large number of small Morris tanks, and at that precise time, they didn't have enough specialized personnel needed for the crews. That was the reason why they asked the FFF to lend them some soldiers with tank experience, while they waited for the arrival of the English tankists, who were being drilled then in a school.

That was how, after receiving my uniform (battledress), I was sent to the Castle Benito Airport, close to Tripoli, where I began my military career in the desert as a Free French Army soldier, borrowed by the 8th English Army as a tankist.

So I spent all of January in drill, and I didn't have any problem in getting familiar with the small Morris tank, with its 45mm cannon and three-man crew, because the mechanism was very much like the John Deere tractor we used to have in Derqui; it was manipulated by levers, a very primitive system.

The room inside the tank was cramped, tremendously noisy, and very uncomfortable; the tank had a 160 HP motor and a top speed of 25 mph. In appearance, these tanks seemed to be not as strong as the Russian ones I had seen in Aragon in 1937. In February, Major Johnson, my English commander, decided as a baptism of fire to send a group of seven tanks to patrol the area surrounding Tripoli. You would never know where the enemy would be in the desert, but this time it was almost certain that none were around us.

In these small tanks, the heat is unbearable, and my two Scotch crew companions were constantly cursing "bloody, bloody!" in protest. We were on the left side of the tanks' deployment and were moving quietly in a relaxed fashion when suddenly our radio told us to pay attention, because German tanks were approaching in

our direction. A few minutes later, we could see five of them heading toward us. Then we received by radio an order to proceed in a wider, spread-out formation and to open fire on them. I was steering the tank as best I could, because the Morris was a very articulated vehicle, easy to handle.

Our gunner fired on the Germans several times with our 45, but with no result, and when we came closer to them, they opened an intense fire on us, knocking out the tank next to us on the right side; it at once caught fire, billowing smoke that went skyward. The fight increased in intensity, the artillery noise blending with the smoke in the air, while our Morris tank vibrated.

It was evident that our Africa Korp adversaries were veterans, while almost all of our seven tanks' crews were green and participating in their first skirmish. We didn't have enough practical experience to take advantage of our superior numbers by cornering and destroying our enemy. Within a few minutes, another of our tanks was blown up; this time it was one that was slightly in front of ours, while the German deployment remained intact without any losses, moving and firing relentlessly at us.

The last and only thing I remember seeing was a German tank coming in our direction; then I saw it burning, spreading black smoke in the air, and that was all I could remember, because I fainted.

Several days later, when I recovered my senses in Alexandria's hospital, I learned that we lost three tanks in that encounter with the Africa Korp, against its one loss, and the German tanks left only when the RAF's airplanes came to our rescue. I had been burned in the tank to the point that my bones could be seen; our gunner had been killed, and our radio operator had lost both legs. We were lucky that when the Spitfires scared the German tanks off, some crew members from another tank, taking advantage of the fact that ours had just begun to burn, showing only a small flame, came to help us, unlocking our door latch and pulling both of us out. A couple of minutes later, our tank exploded in a thousand pieces, and we were lucky to have been rescued before the explosion. All my body was hurting, and I was completely bandaged from head to feet, to such a degree that I couldn't move at all.

That was my first military experience in World War II as a Free French soldier borrowed by an English tank unit. After that, I remained for a month in the hospital, suffering acute pain; much of my skin was gone, and any movement caused me a pain impossible to describe, while my muscles were hurting constantly.

Before I was released from the hospital and sent for a month of convalescence, the doctor told me that I was lucky that none of my vital organs had been damaged, other than my skin and my hair being completely burned. He gave me the advice to grow a beard to hide the scars on my face. With reference to my body, he recommended that I take as much sun as I could, letting my skin peel, because the scars would take years to heal and would remain on me as a souvenir of the war to the last day of my life. When I looked at myself in the mirror, I saw that I didn't have any hair on my head, and I was scared of what I saw. I walked in pain, but little by little I was regaining my strength.

Once, several of the convalescents and I went strolling on Alexandria's streets, and a South African soldier, also from the 8th Army, suggested that we go see women. All of us needed that sexual relief badly, and we went to have it. He guided us, since he knew where the red-light zone was; he liked both drinks and girls. The four of us

climbed into a huge taxi that drove us to this well-known sex quarter that had brothels and many bars. At our arrival, we found a boisterous throng of people wandering and strolling in all directions, but because Johnny, the South African, was familiar with this sector, he led us to a big building of poor appearance and in obvious need of repair. We were surprised to see that the interior was very clean, with beautiful furniture and erotic, suggestive pictures hanging on the walls. We were greeted by the bordello's fat owner, whose thick make-up barely hid her advanced age. She knew Johnny, who had been a steady customer, quite well, gave him a big kiss, and told him that she was delighted to be introduced to all of us.

About thirty white English soldiers were in this living room, all of them waiting for their turn to go to bed with one of the nine working "ladies." Most of these women were Arab girls, one black from Sudan and two French women whose youth had left long ago, probably after starting their careers in Paris and ending up in this place over time. The "girls" wore light gowns and looked very tired, because they were supposed to spend only ten minutes to satisfy each customer. The fat owner, whose name was Diane, was selling the tokens that the customer, or "john," paid the girl when going to bed with her. The soldiers were waiting in line to go with the next available woman, or if there was any preference, then it was necessary to wait until his turn came, if the one of his choice, usually the prettiest one, was also wanted by others.

My first surprise, when I went up to the room with the young Arab girl, who wasn't yet fifteen years old, was to see that once she was undressed, she didn't have any hair between her legs, a sight that repulsed me, perhaps because I was so used to seeing hair on the few women I had seen naked, for the sight of pubic hair had aroused me very much. I learned later that most Arab prostitutes shaved between their legs to avoid catching lice.

The next unexpected happening was that when I was removing my shirt, she saw my body mutilated and full of scars and became frightened. She created a real disturbance and near riot, screaming and running half-naked away from the room, while shouting that she wouldn't go to bed with me because I was rotten. She was horrified, as she looked with dread at my wounds and at my scorched body. The uproar became general, and to avoid any disagreeable consequence, Diane, the bordello's owner, refunded the money I had paid for the token.

The atmosphere then cooled down, but one of those present, an Irish sergeant, half drunk, started hollering that it was a shame that a "fella" who was bearing the honorific testimony of his heroism on his body couldn't have "one" with a dirty slut, and he encouraged everyone to burn the damned building down. He lifted a chair in the air and smashed it on the floor, but before he had the opportunity to duplicate his furniture- destruction process, other customers grabbed and restrained him.

My morale was very low, because I didn't know how much time it would take to heal my skin, which was as thin as cigarette paper. I still had pain all over my body, but the mental distress was even worse, and I had to make a great effort not to go crazy. I was very grateful to this Irish Sergeant Patrick who intervened in my favor and defended my "right" to screw a whore. After what happened in the bordello, all five of us with Patrick decided (some of them still with an unused token in their pocket) to have a drink some place. We in fact had several drinks, stopping at different bars before we reached the convalescence building of Alexandria's hospital.

It was only on the first day of April that I was released from the hospital therapy center, and the very same day I went to the FFF offices on the outskirts of Alexandria, in a shabby building that looked almost abandoned. The following day, with other soldiers released from the hospital, I was taken by truck to our FFF camp at Daba. That's where I should have been sent in the first place, if it hadn't been for the fact that the English tank battalion "borrowed" me from the FFF, thus giving me the opportunity to participate in my first battle of WWII, only because I had already acquired some military experience as a Brigadista in the Spanish Civil War.

When I arrived at this camp in the middle of the desert, I was taken directly to the Signal Corps Division, where Captain Hauet (recently promoted from lieutenant) received me personally in his tent. He was very surprised to learn about my adventure as a tankist, and he couldn't believe that such a thing could ever have happened, insisting that it wasn't normal and that we would undertake some inquiries about it. Then he was surprised by my knowledge of languages and much more surprised to learn that I had come from Argentina to fight in the Free French Forces.

At the Intendency, I received some complements to my uniform, such as covers, extra shirts, underwear, an extra pair of shoes, and half a camping tent. A huge Negro who was working with Chief Sergeant Louis Lefevre never stopped looking at me while he was handing all these effects to me. Then, unable to resist, his curiosity taking over, he said in the pidgin French that all blacks serving in the Colonial Army were using, "You come from Argentina with train?" When I told him that I had come from a continent on the other side of the ocean, his big eyes opened wide, and he said, "Then from big river in boat, with oars?" I persisted, telling him that it was a huge ocean that took us two weeks to cross in a big steam boat.

It was too much for my new friend, whose name was Karikala; tired of listening to my foolishness and extravagance, he cracked up laughing. He called other black Senegalese to whom, with a strong gesture of his long arms, he related our conversation in his dialect. His account provoked a general laughter, and, pointing fingers at me, his acquaintances started chanting in rhythm, "Friend crazy! Friend crazy!"

In a short time I became very popular with all our black soldiers, until one day I got a visit from the *marabu*, the Muslim priest. He told me very seriously that he didn't know of any country on the other side of the ocean, that he lived in Senegal close to the Atlantic, and that he had never heard of such a country as I was describing. He was sure that I was trying to pull the legs of all these good guys who were trying to be friendly with me. Instead of appreciating their feelings, I was merely mocking them, and now I was trying to laugh at him. He stated that he wasn't a simpleton and that he refused to swallow or accept all this nonsense.

My eccentricity excited all the black soldiers for several days, until once a short Senegalese, rare among the Equatorial Africans, who are mostly very tall, came to see me. He told me with sadness, "You starving in your country? Here there is much food for everybody!" When I asked him what was he talking about, he answered, "If you come from far, far away, crossing big river during two weeks, it's only because you hungry and wanted to eat. You joined army to eat, poor man!" It was impossible to explain to him that actually Argentina had more food than any other country in the world and that I came to fight the German fascists and not because I was hungry.

Suddenly, everybody began moving back and forth, with uproar and

agitation all around, because our First Division Signal Corps Battalion received orders to start moving. In every corner, our men were packing, crating, and loading equipment onto the huge English Chevrolet trucks. We didn't have enough chauffeurs, and in a modern war movement, drivers are of primary importance. Two days after my arrival at Daba, I passed the driver's test, and I was given one of these big Chevrolet trucks to drive during our advance.

We left our Daba camp on April 16, 1943; meanwhile, we had to engage in violent battles, as was the case on all the other fronts where the war was raging. On the 29th, we crossed the border with Tunisia, and we were now in French territory. We camped with headquarters and all the units of the division on the outskirts of Sfax.

On May 2, Colonel Diego Brosset came from Tripoli to establish his operations center in Sbikna, close to Kairouan, while the English General Alexander began the famous "Vulcan" operation, sending his troops to take Tunis, while the American troops, in coordination with the Free French Corps, occupied Bizerta. The German General von Varst, the 5th Panzerarmee commander, surrendered with his 50,000 men, while General Messe, with 150,000 German and Italian soldiers, retreated to Cap Bon, trying to improve and to consolidate his troops' position.

Following the commander's plan, General Alexander sent his 8th English Army with the 1st Free French Division to close as a pincers on the Axis forces. On May 13, the rest of the German effective forces were completely routed, followed by the Italian General Orlando's surrender with all of his 25,000 soldiers, who were taken prisoner at Bou Ficha.

This May 13 was a joyful day for the Free French, not only because we participated in annihilating the enemy, but also because we reached out to reunite with the African Army fighting in Tunis. The first contact between the rival groups took place in Djeradou, where the Free French officers met Colonel Le Coulteux de Caumont, who had been heading the forces who confronted the FFF in Syria during the Kuneitra counterattack.

Giraud's soldiers' desertion to our camp was constant, and an order had been given to stop this process, but it didn't help at all. On the contrary, more of Giraud's soldiers were leaving his army to join de Gaulle. General Koenig had been nominated commander of the 1st Free French Division, and General Leclerc, commander of the 2nd Free French Armor Division.

On May 20, an important military parade in Tunis's streets to present the victors to the population was organized, but General Larminat didn't allow the FFF to march with Giraud's African Army, headed by General Koeltz. The FFF paraded with the 8th English Army, very visible and distinguished by their blue caps, with the Lorraine cross on the flags.

The throng of people watching the parade was delirious and raving, screaming, "Long live de Gaulle!" which ironically was also shouted when Giraud's soldiers were marching in another part of the city.

"It was a tragic symbol," said the American newsman Kenneth Pendar, "to see the impressive Army of Africa, compared to the small Gaullist group, parading in different places, far away one from the other; all of them brave men but separated."

The following day, a large group of Giraud's soldiers deserted to enlist in our army. The situation was becoming tense, and General Juin reproached General

Larminat for inciting such desertions, and he prohibited the Free French soldiers from entering Tunis city. Angry, General Larminat reacted immediately, threatening to send Gaullist patrols on the spot to Tunis, adding, smiling, "And remember that my men are very sensitive with the trigger when they hold a gun in their hands!"

Some riots originated between the rival forces, and the FFF, in defiance, decided to open recruiting offices in Sousse, Monastir, and in Kairouan. Giraud's government in Algiers prohibited the Gaullists from remaining in Tunisia; consequently, our 1st FFD had to proceed to Zuara, 60 miles west of Tripoli. Summer 1943 was very hot, especially in the desert inside our tents.

The soldiers' morale was very low, and a lot of resentment dominated everyone, for most were now sensing that both armies would never reach a definite understanding. Still, too much loyalty to Marshal Petain existed in Giraud's African Army. Each side was suspicious of the other. The Free French laughed at the antiquated Giraud soldier's uniform, saying that it had been saved in "mothballs" and that the men looked like soldiers coming from an old history book, a long time gone. The FFF men also despised the Giraud soldiers for having dragged their feet and hesitated so long before making up their minds and conducting war against the Germans.

Chapter 4

It is impossible to forget the three months we spent in Zuara, where we were constantly tortured by thirst and where we endured an unbearable heat all day long, to be replaced by a freezing temperature at night. The food, too, was bad, and even though usually I don't pay any attention to what I eat, I couldn't be indifferent to seeing that we went entire weeks and even months without even having a taste of meat. Every day we were served a turnip soup with potatoes and a loaf of dry bread. The only thing that wasn't missing was the *shrab*, which means wine in Arabic. At that time, in the French Colonial Army, the ammunition could be scarce, but never the wine, which was part of our daily diet, supplied by the quartermaster.

After being transferred several times to such different units as Transportation, Signal Corps, Radio, Tankist, Infantry, etc., for the first time my situation became steady in Zuara, when I was assigned to the divisional transmission battalion, whose commander was Lieutenant Denoyers.

In consideration of the fact that I am not a career military specialist, I don't have any ambition to describe all the maneuvering skills of the different battalions during the engagements in that bloody war, and I will rather limit my descriptions to relate mainly to people issues. Too many volumes have been written, with thousands of details about all these events, and I do not wish to compete with these professionals. They know how to do it much better than I would have done, even though I participated in and was present at many of the most important battlefields of the North African and Western European operations.

Most of my friendships began at the administrative corps, where my first friend was Georges Louzon, who was from Sfax, Tunisia, and whom everybody called "Jojo." I realized that we had a lot of Jewish FFF soldiers from that city. Another who also became a good friend, from the same town, was Coco Levy, a real daredevil whose ambition was to be assigned to the Motorcycle Messengers Section. Also from Sfax were the brothers Ben Souci—the older Samuel, who was about 30, and the younger, Jean; they were assigned to the kitchen. Both were Orthodox Jews, and their principal preoccupation was that the food have a cleanliness that would qualify it to be termed "kosher."

These young men from Sfax would receive packages with food from their families on a regular basis, and they would always share it. We spent more than one evening in Jojo's tent, which was always filled with friends who drank and laughed until late at night.

I was very well acquainted with European Jews and also those who emigrated to the American continent, but this was my first experience of being with these North African Jews, who are physically impossible to differentiate from Arabs. All of them had very good relationships, because they spoke as much French as Arabic. None of them could speak Yiddish, and very few could speak Hebrew. Even their manners were similar to the Arabs', to the point that it was impossible to tell who was who. They were emotional, always ready to start a fistfight. That's where I learned a little bit more Arabic, because I had learned a lot already with Maria, during our vacations in Miramar and

Buenos Aires several years earlier.

We were receiving many deserters from Giraud's army and other volunteers, who after escaping from the Germans who were occupying France, came to join us to fight against the fascists. We had in our division a Foreign Legion brigade, and it was impressive to see how many Spanish Republicans were in that unit. I also met some Czech, Polish, German, and mainly Italian Brigadistas who, not succeeding in escaping to the American Continent when the Germans invaded all of France in 1942, took refuge in North Africa.

When sometimes I got together with Brigadistas or Spanish Republicans, our conversations were always sad, and we shared a nostalgic love for the Spanish people whom we got to know during the Civil War; we shivered at the thought of what this brave people was enduring right then under the frankist terror. We couldn't stop accusing the cowardly democracies that could have helped us rout fascism in Spain and thus could have avoided the war that we were fighting now, for it was a continuation of our struggle against Hitler and Mussolini. These reunions appeased our grief, but inside ourselves, we still saw that something ugly had been done in the history of mankind.

A lot of White Russians, already growing old, still remained in the Foreign Legion, or in a few cases in the Colonial Army, waiting to serve to the end of a 20-year period so that they could begin to receive their military retirement pensions. Our Captain Hauet's orderly was Volkov, one of these Russians, with whom I had a feeling of warm personal regard.

Among those we called "evaded" from France, many were from Alsace who came to us through Spain. All of them had to change their names when enlisting, because their parents and relatives were still living in their provinces and could have suffered persecution and even death for having a family member in service with the Free French Forces. The Germans considered Alsace and Lorraine part of Germany, and a person from that region taken prisoner and caught wearing a French uniform was shot on the spot as a traitor, while all the prisoner's family was deported to a concentration camp. The companion with whom I was sharing a tent was one of those who had chosen to change his name to Moutarde (Mustard). He spoke French with a heavy German accent, as many Alsacians did.

These people have always intrigued me, because when Alsacia is part of Germany, the inhabitants have a tendency to speak German, but when it is part of France, very seldom do they speak French. Moutarde was a nice guy who many thought was crazy because of his extravagant behavior, but he knew how to gain everybody's love. I came to the conclusion that he didn't want to have any problem with anyone and preferred to be friendly with whomever he was dealing with; for that reason, he avoided being involved in any kind of argument. I had to recognize also that his mental scope was somewhat limited, but to his credit, he was prone to help people at any time.

Moutarde loved to be by himself; I wasn't disturbing him with my presence in sharing the same tent with him, yet I sensed that he was trying to find a way to get rid of me. His tent was decorated as any old spinster would have done it, and he wanted to enjoy the loneliness and perhaps his memories.

Lieutenant Ansuc was in charge of taking care of the Sport Section, sending future boxing champs, wrestlers, or soccer players to the training centers at the division level. Not far away from us, lodged by himself in a beautiful big tent, was a plain soldier

named Paul Homer, who was a boxer. To be honest, I don't really know what Moutarde did, but when Paul left for Alexandria for an inter-Allied boxing championship event, he succeeded in making me the heir apparent of this palace. Paul Homer never returned to our unit, because with time he became a boxing champ in our army. This smart boxer fabricated a real bed with springs made by interweaving small olive tree branches together. He had a table bed, and even a kerosene-burning lamp that he made out of a can.

Our water was scarce, and we had to be careful not to waste it, but we had plenty of gas, and with this precious liquid, which was rationed all over the world, we washed our clothes. I know that there are dues to be paid in learning, and I paid them the very first time I did my laundry, hanging two shirts and some underwear on a rope that I tied up to the pole of my tent. I should have known better, because the following day in the morning everything was gone, and I found only the empty rope.

Moutarde told me never to leave anything outside the tent, especially during the night. He told me to wash my clothes during the day with gas while I could observe them hanging, and they would be dried in a couple of hours. I was raving about the theft, because I didn't have any more spare shirts, but Jojo saved my situation; thanks to him, I got replacements for all the stolen effects, all of which very discreetly came from the quartermaster.

Most of my companions assumed that the thieves must have been Syrians and Lebanese, and for a long time I was distrustful of them. I learned through experience and time, however, that the thieves in the army are from all nationalities. In August, a rumor burst like a bomb that we would be moving to Tunisia; it filled us with joy, because we were tired of the desert and the inactivity. Apart from drill and maneuvers, life was very monotonous.

Finally, on August 31, 1943, we received orders to move toward the north in the direction of Tunis, and we spent the first night in this French territory in the city of Teboulbou, causing a general contentment among our Tunisian soldiers. In July, the Allies had already occupied Sicily, opening a breach in the defenses of Italy. All of us despised the Italian fascists, and we weren't surprised to learn that in the same month, on the 24th, during Italy's Congress held in Rome, the Duce had been arrested. It was then that King Victor Emmanuel had been asked to lead the country.

He immediately named Marshal Badoglio as prime minister, and on September 3, when the Allies invaded the peninsula, the rumor was leaked that an armistice had been signed with Italy. The armistice was supposed to be kept secret, so that the Allies would have more time to get a grip on that country, but the Germans learned about it, invaded Italy, occupied Rome, and disarmed their combatants. The Allies disembarked in Salerno, but it was too late to help the Italian antifascists. Following Giraud's suggestion, the Allied Headquarters gave him the green light for his African Army to liberate Corsica.

The Allies, under General Alexander's command, were stopped between Naples and Rome, as a result of the skillful and energetic maneuvering of Marshal Kesserling's German armies. The Germans occupied a powerful position on the fortified "Gustav's" line, which stretched from the Adriatic, passed by Monte Cassino, and extended from the Garigliano river estuary and emptied into the Mediterranean, at Sangro's river. It was easy for us to realize that because of the problems General

Eisenhower encountered in Italy, very soon he would be forced to resort to using the French divisions, whose elements were more familiar with fighting in mountain areas.

In December, it was planned to send the 1st Free French Division to Italy, but General Alexander, Chief Commander of the Italian front, opposed it, because we were equipped and armed with English material and couldn't have been successful in our activities while serving in the midst of the 5th American Army.

The entire division was camped under olive trees around Nabeul until January 7, when officially we were incorporated into the 5th American Army. From then on, we began receiving all kinds of American equipment: uniforms, arms, trucks, ambulant repair shops, radios, food, and, of course, tobacco. It is not so easy to transform an 18,000-strong division endowed with English material to fit into an American army, dressed and armed with entirely different equipment and supplies of that country. It was not only a matter of the uniforms, but mainly the vehicles and other materials, including trucks, jeeps, repair shops, all kinds of communication devices, codes, kitchen installations, sanitary services, and other diverse utilities.

It took us several months to accomplish all that, beginning with our battledress, which was replaced by the American uniform, martially less impressive but much more practical and perhaps smarter, almost elegant. We received constant visits from American officers who not only continued to deliver arms, equipment, and vehicles, but also taught us how to use them.

The African Army also had been equipped by the Americans, but of course the first thing General Giraud's officers, always conservatives, did was to remove the pockets from the shirts, considering them too luxurious for plain soldiers.

We spent an awful winter in Nabeul, with the cold humidity penetrating not only the atmosphere, but everything else, including the tents and our clothing. It was then that an epidemic of malaria, or paludism, started, a disease that had already attacked a score of our soldiers in Libya, and it kept wreaking havoc on our health. Unfortunately, I became one of the victims, and for a long period of time I was prescribed quinine to calm the fever that often gripped me. Many years later, when I became middle-aged, my hearing became badly impaired as a consequence of my excessive use of quinine. Because of the stagnation, our spirits were invaded by a bitterness in Nabeul; we felt some relief when we moved to Sionville, located between Hammamet and the Mediterranean beaches, where we could go to swim with ease.

After fighting for three years, the FFF was striving to have a more important part in the action, hoping to be the earliest to enter France. We wanted to be the first to liberate the country, but now knowing that we were going to Italy, we realized that this privilege was reserved to the units of the 2nd Armored Division, under the command of General Leclerc. That division had already been transferred from North Africa to England, and it was almost certain that France would be invaded from there, while we would be warring in Italy.

We began receiving leaves to spend in Tunis. Many artistic events had been organized to lift the soldiers' morale. On one of these occasions, I had an opportunity to appear on stage with Jean Ben Souci and a newcomer, Guindler, who had just arrived from Uruguay. Our act consisted of singing "la cucaracha" in Spanish, and after the presentation, when I asked Jojo how it was, he replied, "Terrible!" Anyhow, because we collaborated as actors and worked backstage and at the bar, Captain Hauet gave each one

of us 48 hours' leave. Our spectators were officers and soldiers, including several generals and government representatives, and all of them were satisfied with our performance and the program.

Strolling on Tunis' streets, in addition to us "actors" and Jojo Louzon, one of the organizers, was Coco Levy, who had a bandaged arm as a result of a motorcycle accident. On his very first mission as a messenger, Coco almost killed himself with his Harley-Davidson by running into a truck, and now he was suffering the result. With us also was Soliga, who had just escaped from France to join the FFF. He was a huge guy of Polish descent who had been living in Pas de Calais. We wouldn't have been good veteran "desert rats," as we were called, if we hadn't appropriated for ourselves no less than ten pounds of sausage, which was part of the food sold in the bar. We hid it for retrieval the next day.

Consequently, the first thing we did when we woke up in the morning on the theater's stage, where we spent the night, was to go to a restaurant and ask the staff to fry a few pounds of the stolen sausage, which we devoured as if we were starving. Jojo told me that the Sfax kids would take advantage of the 48 hours' leave to go home to see their parents, and he invited me to join them. A train that we still could take was leaving in a couple of hours. All of us agreed to go, with the exception of Soliga and Guindler, who preferred to remain in Tunis, this being their first visit to this city, and they wanted to enjoy it.

The trip from Tunis to Sfax took several hours, but we were traveling with a large group, to which other Jewish soldiers from other units were joined, all of them from the same city and all of them on leave. Needless to say, we had plenty of wine, and when you are young and healthy, the good mood prevails constantly and very quickly.

I went with Jojo to his home, where I was impressed by his parents, his younger brother, and two sisters, all of whom did their best to make me feel comfortable. In the neighborhood, a party had been organized at a club, and of course Coco Levy was one of the organizers. When we arrived at the place, which was well decorated with banners, a big crowd of beautiful girls were already there, anxious to start dancing, while more than one was also looking for a future husband.

We had a wonderful time. The music was loud but good; there was a lot of food, and an abundant quantity of beverages was placed on the tables; in addition, we had all those pretty gals around, and they knew how to make the party merry and pleasant. We returned to Jojo's house very late and quite inebriated. In the morning of the following day, still half-asleep and without realizing where I was, I heard knocking at the door. I was lying in Claude's bed, Jojo's junior brother, who used to share the room with Jojo before the latter enlisted in the army, but for this occasion Claude gave it to me, and he went to spend the night on a sofa.

I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw Jojo's mother coming into our little room, bringing on a tray cups with coffee and the delicious and well-known Tunisian pastries, saying while smiling, "Children, I'm bringing you breakfast, because I learned that you had a wonderful evening last night, or at least one full of emotions!" I will never forget Jojo's mother, and I said to myself that if it had happened at my home, my mother for sure would have done the same thing for my friend.

The train returning to Tunis was leaving at noon, and so after visiting this attractive city, which used to be filled with tourists in peacetime, we directed our paths

toward the railroad station, our arms full of packages of food prepared by Jojo's mother. The farewell from these hospitable people was very emotional, and unfortunately, I never had a chance to see them again.

I saw the younger brother Claude many years later, when I came to Paris from Atlanta with my wife Birdie. At that time, he was a professor at a Paris lyceum. Claude and the sisters followed Jojo when he moved to France in 1953, after Tunisia declared its independence, and unfortunately at that time, a lot of resentment had been created against foreigners. It was at that time that almost all of the 130,000 Tunisian Jews went to live in Paris, mainly in the Montmartre quarter.

During our return trip by train to Tunis in this year, 1944, our general conversation was about the previous day's party. As usual, several were bragging that they had succeeded in "cornering" their occasional female companions. They could then, as we used to say, "discharge their urgent sexual need!" Coco was one of them, telling us in the most precise detail everything he did and what happened. He couldn't stop conveying to us that the girl he was with was putting her tongue in his mouth, to the point that he was feeling asphyxiated. "I wanted to tell her 'enough,' there is no more room in my mouth, where did you get such a tongue?" he was telling us while not stopping to laugh. Unfortunately, I wasn't as lucky as most of them, and I was listening without saying a word, because the only thing I achieved was to dance a lot and steal a few kisses.

During the stop at Sousse, the train was boarded by several Foreign Legion soldiers, also returning to Tunis from their leave. The seats were scarce in the train, so some of them sat in our compartment and the rest went to other wagons. I don't remember how everything started, because I lay on the upper compartment reserved for the bags and had fallen asleep, when suddenly I was awakened by a loud voice spitting insults.

I lifted my head just at the moment when one of the Foreign Legion soldiers caught Coco by the shirt and screamed at him, "Dirty Jew!" It was very cowardly of him to look for trouble with somebody who had a bandaged arm. Unluckily for him, he didn't know our Coco, who grabbed the Legionnaire's jacket with his good hand and hit his chin with his head. The aggressor remained groggy, and Coco hit him again several times until blood started running out of the Legionnaire's mouth.

Not expecting such a reaction, the soldier of the desert, stumbling and spitting blood, left our compartment. Still unbalanced, he muttered something like, "Just wait for me; I will come back with more Legionnaires!" His threat never materialized; it was just an airy bravado, because nobody came to challenge us, and we arrived at Tunis without any further problems. From there, we took another train to Nabeul, then had to walk the three miles on the road to reach our camp, for no other means of transportation existed. We arrived at our destination when it was almost dawn.

Chapter 5

Our camp at Sionville was located not far away from the general division canteen, which was operating under a wide circus-type American tent housing several tables and corresponding chairs, as in any other normal bar, with the difference that the only beverage that was served there was red wine. It was at that place that I met the huge Polack Casimir, our General Brosset's orderly, an old Legionnaire with numberless adventures and the best friend of Volkov, who himself was our Captain Hauet's orderly.

At the same table with Casimir another, older Polack was sitting, answering to the name of Andrey, also a Foreign Legion veteran. Both of them were sipping red wine when we came in. They were all close friends, and Volkov introduced me as a Russian, because they were very ardent Slavophiles.

We remained together a good while drinking and talking about different topics, all the time in Russian, which they spoke perfectly, because more than half of Poland was part of Russia until 1919. Then Casimir, as usual, began bragging about his General Brosset, whom he worshipped, showing us his silver cup that he kept in his pocket. He repeated several times that at six o'clock sharp, he would be serving the general coffee, because "his" general was an early bird. Then, the mood intensified progressively and became heated with excitement, and we began singing Russian romances, increasing the volume of our voices in proportion to the quantity of red wine we consumed.

I don't recall if the four artillerymen sitting beside our table actually said something or whether Casimir made up his own interpretation of comments, but the fact was that he started insulting them. Not feeling satisfied with that, he suddenly got up from his chair and approached them, grabbed two of the closest-sitting soldiers by the shirt, pulled them out of their chairs, and dragged them to the entrance of the tent, to throw them outside as if they were small packages. When he came back to our neighbors' table to repeat the operation, it is needless to stress that the other two gunners had anticipated what would happen to them and had run away.

In the canteen, about thirty patrons were drinking, but Casimir, whose height was that of a giant, became furious, determining that some of them were talking too loud and that some of them had even dared to sing. He ordered them all to shut up or to leave at once, screaming that the bar that day belonged to the Slavs. I was feeling very uncomfortable, and I was happy at not seeing any of my friends from my unit in the tent. Of course, a lot of people complained and refused to obey Casimir's orders, trying to prevail with their fists, but they were no match for Casimir, Volkov, and the other Polack Nicolay, who attacked them with such violence that in a short while all of the opponents had been thrown away from the bar as if they were bags of potatoes.

From Casimir I could expect anything, because I knew that he had extraordinary strength, and I wasn't surprised by his rush forth, but I would have never expected to see the apparently shabby Andrey, who gave an impression of being an old, weak man, using his fists to bash his assailants' heads with such dexterity. When the two bartenders in charge of the place tried to say something, Casimir's look alone silenced them, and they resumed doing what they were doing before the melee, without even

daring to look at us. We stayed drinking very late that night, and when the four of us left, we kept on walking and singing Russian and Polish songs on our way back to our camp.

After that evening, I tried to avoid getting together with my “Slavic” friends, fearing being involved in a fight with my French companions. I realized also that I belonged to another generation, one that was different; while they were still grieving over the First World War and the time of the Russian Revolution, I wanted to fight against the fascists. I belonged to another era.

Casimir was a drunkard, as only an old Legionnaire can be, always ready to do his duty when called upon to do so, but always drinking when not fighting. His temperament and his manners created many enemies who more than once plotted among themselves and beat him almost to death. After such punishment, Casimir wouldn't appear for a few days; then he would come back to the canteen all bandaged, saying that he knew who had attacked him and that, once cured, he would grab them one by one and break all the bones of those cowards who took advantage of him while he was drunk. He was feared for this reason, because he kept his word and would deliver on his promise, breaking enough of his enemies' bones to be remembered.

It was in the first days of April that the confirmation that we would disembark in Italy finally came. We were supposed to be moving to Bizerta, from which we would embark on this new adventure, because France's liberation day was close. My circle of friends kept expanding, and I came to know Jacques Tricot better; he was a skinny, very determined, and cynical sergeant who had scoffed at the weather's rigor or the proximity of any kind of danger. New recruits were constantly coming to our battalion, and among them was another volunteer from Argentina, Robert Jacob, who brought bad news from my newly adopted country.

A few days later, our unit moved to Sidi Ahmet, three miles from Bizerta. There I met Lieutenant Howard from General Clark's 5th American Army, who would remain with us as a liaison officer. He was a notable officer with distinguished manners, a native of the state of Virginia. He never tired of telling Captain Hauet and me that all of us had a wrong concept about Americans when we thought that all of them were like those we saw around us. He insisted on emphasizing that the majority of them were ordinary yankees from Brooklyn without manners, but that the real Americans were those from the South, mainly from Virginia. I liked him very much, and I assumed that feeling was reciprocal, chiefly because I was one of the few with whom he could speak English while drinking cans of beer in his tent.

Once, we were sent with Guindler to pick up some documents at the headquarters located in Nabeul, and Howard, lending us his jeep, told me that he kept some pipe tobacco in the glove compartment and that I could take a can for myself. At that time, I was smoking a pipe much more than cigarettes, and when my companion and I opened the glove compartment, we were fascinated by the five Raleigh tobacco cans. After Guindler and I accomplished our mission, we each took a can of tobacco, which was difficult to find in the army at that time. When I drove the jeep back to Howard's tent, just in case I checked the glove compartment to show him that three cans still remained, but to my surprise and anger it was completely empty.

While I blushed and became angry, Howard couldn't stop laughing, assuring me that he knew in advance that all the tobacco would be gone and not to pay too much attention to all that. When I returned to our camp, I was fuming, and I wanted to kill

Guindler, who had embarrassed me in front of my friend Howard, who always had been so nice to us. I had tried everything I could to let the American have a good impression of us, but Guindler had ruined my purpose and kept repeating, "I couldn't resist, no way I could resist; it had been a while since I had seen so much tobacco, and I was tired of the cheap tobacco we receive. When we went to have a Moors' bath in Nabeul after delivering the message, I went to the jeep and I couldn't resist looking at such a treasure, and I grabbed it!" His explanation didn't satisfy me, and hitting him with my fists, I dragged him to Howard's tent to show him that I wasn't the one who stole his tobacco.

All this amused Lieutenant Howard very much. He showed us inside his tent and gave us several cans of beer and some more tobacco to boot, saying not to worry about it, and if we needed it, he could get more for us, because "Uncle Sam" could afford to provide for all those who were fighting the Nazis. Our relationship with Howard remained excellent throughout the Italian campaign. Then I lost contact with him, and despite all my efforts—even later on when I was in the States—I couldn't locate him. I lamented it very much, especially when I came to live in Georgia, another of the Southern states that he liked to talk about so much.

We were endlessly receiving reinforcements in men in the form of new recruits or troops returning to the unit after performing duties in other assignments. One of them was Sergeant Polianowsky, and another was Cassagnes. The first was from Russian descent like me, with the difference that his parents had gone to Yugoslavia when he was twelve years old. He went to the Russian Cadets Military School, the last one to ever function outside of Russia. Yugoslavia received a large number of Russian refugees who still hoped to topple the Bolsheviks, and they were forming military cadres to be used in their country.

Unfortunately, like Polianowsky, many hundreds of other Russians, having finished the military school as officers, couldn't find any country to serve in such rank. In Russia, communism was growing stronger, and the hope of being able to return any time soon to their fatherland as they knew it was vanishing little by little. Those who were older and managed to survive accepted any kind of occupation, but for all these young Russians brought up with the idea that they would be the military leaders in their country, it wasn't so easy. After many failures and disenchantments, they had to recognize that everything had been a fairy tale, and that the time had come to wake up and face reality as it was.

Polianowsky, at the age of 20, knew only everything related to military life; not having any other skill, he couldn't find a job to sustain himself. Full of resentment, he left Yugoslavia and went to France, where close to a million Russians without professions were having great difficulty adapting themselves to the circumstances. It was then that with other thousands of Russians he enlisted in the Foreign Legion as a plain soldier, because only the French ranks were recognized in that unit.

The other new friend I met was Cassagnes, who was a colonist in Ubangui Chari, where he worked as a manager of a cocoa plantation. Born in Africa, he told me very interesting things about the life they had in this French colony. A tremendous discrimination reigned there, and it was very rare when a white man would marry or would live with a black woman; the other way around was impossible, because nobody would allow a white woman to stay with a black man.

When I asked him what happened when a white man married a black woman, he told me that this man had to go to live in the black quarter. When I protested, indignant, he retorted nervously, "If he decided to live with us, he would be welcomed; but if he prefers to have a black woman, he has to live with them, for we wouldn't ever let him bring his black wife to socialize with our white spouses!"

He said that in the huge storehouses where the cocoa grains were selected, mainly young girls worked. Sometimes bored or tired, they would fall asleep. In this case, the overseer could beat them, or even worse, fire them, which would be a catastrophe, because her family would be deprived of her earned money, which was helping the family to survive. Usually these young black girls, to appease their boss's anger, would lie down on their backs, lifting their skirts, and invite him to have sex in exchange for his forgiveness. Their body was the only thing they had to defend themselves, and they offered it to avoid any punishment. They used it to protect themselves, not only against the white overseer's brutality, but also against the black and all-powerful chiefs.

Cassagnes narrated to me a lot of very interesting stories about life in the tropics. I laughed a lot when he told me that to catch a monkey, a hole was made in a tree, which would be filled up with peanuts. The opening of the hole had to be the monkey's hand size, so that once he put his hand inside and grabbed peanuts, his fist would be too big to pull it out. The monkey would never open his hand to drop the peanuts and pull out his empty hand, because he wanted badly to keep the peanuts, and that is how he would be captured alive by the hunters.

One day, a young recruit named Albert Duchamp came to our camp. After escaping from France, he had passed through Spain, where he spent three months in jail before he could cross the Gibraltar strait to reach North Africa to join the FFF. He was very quiet, talking very little, and in his spare time he was always reading the Bible. He had the misfortune of telling Moutarde that he was virgin and intended to marry a virgin. I think that before poor Albert even finished revealing this confidence, all the battalion knew his story, and, of course, he became from then on an everyday laughing stock.

We had also a homosexual couple, Jules Chatelain, a dark-haired man of short stature; his "female" lover, Maurice Villermoze, a tall and blond Alsatian, very effeminate, always complained that some mean, anonymous people were putting carrots on his sleeping-bag to tease him. Both were assigned to the telephone section, a very dangerous work unit in the Signal Corps. Sometimes the men of this unit tended telephone cables close to the enemy lines. Communications were insured in three ways: by campaign telephones linked with wires, by radio, and by messengers, with use of all three ensuring that one of these means would allow a message to reach its destination.

The bookkeeping section was under the charge of Chief Sergeant Bobbie Assie, a good-looking man who was well-educated and who knew how to talk to women. He was Jojo Louzon's boss, but very seldom would he come to mingle with us, because he had his own group of friends. A lot of different groups were formed according to affiliation, religious, racial, national, or attraction.

The interesting personality of our unit was Sergeant Andriani, who was

short, very nosy, and always in a quest to lead in any action and to be indispensable. He was an old Legionnaire who spoke several different foreign languages, and whoever would come to be with him, not being French, he would tell him that he was of the same nationality. Nobody ever could determine, or check, from which country he was, because each time he changed the name of his country of origin. He was a movie-type character, and in spite of being short, he was a feared fistfighter, using all kinds of subterfuge to knock down his adversary.

Quite often, in the evenings, the blacks from the infantry battalions would organize some kind of celebration. They would roll some empty barrels to be used as drums to the place of their choice and would bring only one chair for some black sergeant who would preside over the event. It was very difficult for a man of color to reach the rank of sergeant, unless he was born in Dakar, where by special decree he would automatically become a French citizen. It was the dream of all pregnant black women to have a child born in Dakar.

These black sergeants were cruel and despotic, to the point that a nasty nickname for them, "Black Sergeant," was a synonym for cruelty. When all the preparations were ready, the huge black soldiers would form a circle. From this moment on, they didn't belong to the army any more. Their minds were far away from the present place and they were transported in imagination to their homes, changing their personalities and returning to being primitive blacks from the jungle.

The Colonial Army officers were very well aware of these habits and these bouts, and they tolerated them, preferring not to be close to these people during the period when they seemed to be swallowed by Nature, becoming bushmen again. Suddenly, after a short period of silence, a group of five to six Negroes would approach the seated black sergeant, who for them would symbolized the king. They would bow profoundly in front of him, by which in a certain way they asked his permission to begin the party. With an indolent movement of his hand, the chief would allow them to start, and immediately the thundering noise of the drum would fill the air. Some soft, melodious voices would begin singing a monotonous chant, with a repeated rhythm, and some black soldiers would get inside the circle to start performing a ritual jumping. The intensity of the dance would increase with time and would attain the apogee when the rhythm would accelerate, reaching a frenzy in the dancers, while the same sounds would be sung at an increased speed.

Usually, it was recommended to white soldiers not to be around these euphoric, almost mystical actions of these people. I couldn't resist the temptation, and with my liberal spirit, I didn't see or didn't even think about the racial differences, because for me it was just another folkloric dance.

During one of these events, I was standing close to a tall Negro, at a certain distance from the circle; he wasn't singing or moving like all the other warriors around. I asked him in their broken French, "You not going to dance with your comrades?" I knew that all of them used to call each other "comrade." He gave me a strange look, almost one of contempt, as if I were an illiterate ignoramus, and said to me, "You not see that this music is not my country's music? It is other tribe! We don't dance like that!" He gave me another contemptuous look, turned around, and left.

Chapter 6

When we began moving toward Bizerta at the beginning of April, there was no longer any doubt that we would disembark in Italy, our dream coming true as we had hoped for months. We camped at Sidi Ahmed, only three miles from the port, and it was obvious that all of us were nervous, moved, and happy, because a lack of activity kills the soldier's morale. We were drinking some wine in a small Arab bar with Jojo, Guindler, and Ben Souci when the latter mentioned something that none of us knew anything about.

It seemed that in January of this 1944 year, Commander Saint-Exupery had come to see us in Nabeul. To us, he was a much-admired hero who was considered the father of French aviation. He was our Lindbergh! I regretted having missed him, but I changed my mind and relaxed when I learned that he was still backing Marshal Petain, considering the armistice as having saved many French people's lives, a shameful and cowardly statement to us. I had also ignored the fact that he had gone to the United States after France's defeat, where he wrote books, and it was only in March 1943 that he had decided to enlist as a pilot to fight with us.

Something very curious had happened nevertheless, because this world-famous pilot was 44 years old and wasn't familiar with modern planes. The first time he took off with a plane, he couldn't land; the second time, he landed in a pasture after losing consciousness; and the third time, he landed so badly that the plane he was piloting was destroyed, putting an end to his pilot's career. It was his last flight, because he was prohibited from ever flying again.

He insisted that he didn't know that the Vichy government was helping the Germans by sending war material to Iraq, which rebelled against England, and when General Weygand delivered to the Afrika Korp fifteen 75 mm. caliber cannons and 2,000 trucks, which allowed them to attack the British forces in Bir Hacheim. Vichy also helped the Germans in Tunisia during the Libya campaign, letting them use all the French military installations.

We could guess that we would be leaving very soon, in view of the huge human movement appearing everywhere, and while drinking our red wine, we began to talk and remember the comrades whom we left buried in Tripoli's deserts. "Our groups are growing smaller, and we see more and more new faces," San Souci said with emotion, but Guindler, with his habitual humor, told a joke, thereby erasing the sadness that had been slowly taking hold of us. A little bit later, Cassagnes and Polianowsky, who appeared to be already loaded with booze, came to join us; our spirits continued improving, and we became again the famous "Desert Rats," as the troops of the 8th English Army, to which we had belonged for several years, were known. It was late at night, and as we were reaching our camp surrounded by lines of tents, we heard laughter and witnessed a crowd of people clustered at the entrance of a huge campaign tent.

We were heading in that direction anyhow, and now we were even more driven by the curiosity generated by this kind of invitation to participate in this apparently festival atmosphere. We saw before us the most comical spectacle that anybody could ever imagine. Many people were standing around, not only from our unit but from others, and we were surprised to see that our General's assistant Lieutenant Jean-Pierre Aumont, the movie star, was among them. This very well known film actor had left his Hollywood

career to enlist in our army to fight the fascists.

Inside the tent, we saw Moutarde, who after he tied up Alfred Duchamp with a rope, lowered Alfred's pants and was showing him, or rather was putting under his eyes, a magazine with naked women that the victim refused to look at. Everybody was cracking up with laughter, while the prisoner kept his eyes closed and begged, "Please, leave me alone, don't torture me anymore!"

Moutarde, encouraged by our laughter, was pointing with his finger at the pretty women's naked bodies, and sometimes he was hitting Albert between his legs with the magazine, trying to get him excited. Moutarde continued hitting him while repeating over and over, "Let us see if you are a man! Come on, little virgin, start hardening your little stick, so when you get married you will know what all that is about, and right now this is your last chance to learn how to use it!" This episode could have reached a nasty ending, because even though Albert was very pacific, he was becoming exasperated and seemed ready to blow out at any time, striving already to untie himself from the ropes and to attack his tormentor. Everyone felt relief when Lieutenant Garbay suddenly appeared at the tent's entrance, shouting as much to the spectators as to the actors that it was time to go rest, because a harsh and busy time was expected the following day.

After that, poor Albert was untied from the pole, feeling all his body hurt by the cords and even more his self-respect; ashamed and humiliated for being a laughing stock, he ran away without even looking at us. It was late, and each one of us went walking to his own tent to get some rest, which came to most of us as soon as we lay down on our cots.

It was on the following day that we were able to appreciate fully the organizational ability of the Yankees, and above all their industrial capability that was supporting them in their country. Everywhere, wherever we looked, appeared tents, trucks, tanks, all kinds of vehicles, and in the port an enormous number of ships moored, with the so-called Liberty Ships as a highlight. These ships were built in record time, thanks to an assembly system invented in the United States by Kaiser. The innovation was made possible by separately constructing different parts of the vessels, then assembling them in a few days, instead of building one ship at a time, a process that used to take months and sometimes years.

Military men were everywhere, chiefly Americans. We were surprised to see the great number of black soldiers who were moving back and forth, without interruption, in the port. My new friend, Lieutenant Howard, explained to us that the colored soldiers were doing their duty only in auxiliary services and were not being sent to the combat zone. We could admire the black drivers' ability, truck driving being one of the jobs they could perform in wartime, at least at the beginning of the campaign. I was appalled to realize how the white and the black soldiers segregated themselves in an almost natural way. Being reared in France, I had not developed such an understanding of racial relationships.

Our unit embarked on April 20 on the transport ship *Brennan*, which as soon as we were aboard left the port and cast anchor, remaining at the roadstead with many other embarkations to form a convoy that would be protected by warships during our journey to Italy. The following day, our convoy, formed by about thirty transport liners accompanied by warships, left the roadstead and began moving toward Italy. A day later, we passed the Messina Strait, where, to our amazement, in front of our eyes appeared a

great number of Italian embarkations that were expecting us on the open sea. Some were propelled by oars and others by sails; very few had motors, because of the lack of gasoline. From these boats came shouts in Italian asking us to give them matches, cigarettes, and canned food.

Once again, our American friend Howard told us that many citizens from Italian descent lived in the United States and that these citizens were emotionally touched at seeing their parents' fellow countrymen in distress; they tried to help them, throwing everything they could to these people, including food, tobacco, and even clothing, items that were immediately recovered from the water by the Sicilians. This time, these Italians, who took us for Americans because we wore American uniforms, were very much surprised and even deceived not only not to receive the requested goods, but also often having to listen to insults in their own language made by Corsicans among us who hated them, because Corsica was occupied by Italian fascists.

We were all angry at Italy, because when Germany defeated France and Vichy signed the shameful armistice, while the German troops were occupying the conquered country, Italy cowardly attacked defenseless France, annexing Nice, Corsica, and Tunisia. This was the reason that not only didn't we have any sympathy for these Sicilians floating in their barges, but also we despised them profoundly.

Our convoy reached Naples on April 24, and even though it was very late at night and it was raining, a group of us descended from our ship to stroll on the port. With Gozlan, Chamoune, and Rosini, a Corsican who would never stop saying that after the war he wanted to enclose himself in a cloister, we were very much impressed by the destruction that the war had caused to this historical city. We heard a lot about this city's fate during the war, and we could confirm everything by what we saw. The quarters close to the port had been completely demolished and were lying in ruins. Of the tall buildings, only the skeletons of walls and broken stones remained, and everything looked like a ghost town. Until now, we had seen vestiges of the fights in the desert or in small towns, but this was the first time that we could see real destruction, with huge buildings completely smashed and enormous holes all over the roads, a product of the intense bombings. My memory went back to Spain, where I had already seen many, many cities destroyed that way.

While we were staring at the rubbish and debris, we suddenly heard the very well recognized sound of German bombers heading in our direction. We had the opportunity to witness how these airplanes, flying very low after dropping their explosives and creating an infernal noise, disappeared in the dark sky. The anti-aircraft guns could still be heard for a good while after, in spite of the fact that the planes were long gone. We decided to return to our ship *Brennan* because we feared getting lost, and besides we were in wartime, and we were behaving just as if we were tourists. We realized that none of us was carrying a gun! We woke up the next day early in the morning and had the opportunity to watch the majestic picture in front of us and once again to admire the American ability to organize. The trucks, with a deafening noise, were climbing the ramp from the hold to the dock, one after the next, without any respite or rest.

We could only wait at this point for our turn to drive our GMC onto the Italian land; we didn't have another choice. The unloading was going very fast, but too slow for us, owing to the fact that a huge number of vehicles were in the hold in front of

ours, which were at the very end.

Night approached, and the unloading continued, never stopping until dawn, when very few trucks remained aboard. Suddenly, we again heard the very well known sound of the German bombers, followed by the tremendous noise of their exploding bombs and the anti-aircraft guns, and it was then that I realized that our vessel was moving slowly away from the port to reach a place where she cast anchor, several miles farther out.

Few of the Free French Forces remained aboard, and we learned through the sailors that a convoy with arms and ammunitions had just arrived, and of course it had the priority to be unloaded immediately. A day later, we realized that we were the only twenty French aboard; the remainder of our food provisions were about to be eaten, and we were restless. There has always existed in this world stupid and pretentious people, and our case was no exception, for some of our companions arrogantly requested food from an American officer. Usually, the crew and the officers were kind to us, but I understand that nobody likes to be pushed around, much less to be talked to with impudence. After this incident and other similar ones between some headstrong people of our unit and the American crew, an atmosphere of hostility was growing, and it was already too late to smooth it out.

The third day on the roadstead, April 29, we were hungry, and we didn't want to stay with these crazy Colonial soldiers, who requested to have a meeting with the captain to have the food delivered to them or to be allowed to send a message of complaint to our French headquarters.

The American captain, through an officer, told them that he was too busy to handle this nonsense and asked them to leave him alone or otherwise he would lock them in the calaboose for insubordination, with the possibility of a court martial. That worsened the situation, and it almost came to a crisis, with the exception of us three, who all this time remained to the side, away from this silly dispute.

The German planes flew over us every evening and dropped bombs, trying to interrupt the unloading of our war material and thus creating a very uneasy environment for the sailors. They were annoyed with our presence, because if our trucks had been unloaded, they would now be returning at all speed to the States. On the other hand, our companions, who had no more food available, were becoming agitated, for it is no fun to be aboard a ship without any possibility of going any place, with no comfort, and in addition with nothing to eat.

The fourth day, Chamoune said to me, "Michael, we both speak English, and I think that if we go to see the cook, offering him our services in exchange for food, we certainly could get something; otherwise, we will starve to death!" I was kind of skeptical, being under the impression that everybody aboard disliked us. Chamoune, nevertheless, wasn't giving up his idea and insisted by saying, "The three of us should go, without saying a word to the other dummies, and we will see what happens!" It all reminded me of my father's saying, "We will see, said the blind man!" We went to the bow and descended to the hold, where the crew section was, and once in the kitchen, with a smile on our faces the three of us asked to talk to the "Chief." Our presence surprised the American crew, and they surrounded us, because until now, they hadn't had any contact with us, for they were busy with their routine chores. The five or six sailors who were working in the kitchen couldn't believe that we, the French allies, had been denied

food. They didn't know anything about all the intrigues that arose between their officers and the French soldiers, and on the spot they welcomed us. The easy-going fat "Chief," Pat, told us that the first thing he wanted to do was to feed us, and later on we would pay for it by scrubbing the pans. At that moment, I couldn't remember the last time I had such a banquet, with such delicacies that we were indulged with that day in the kitchen.

Before our hungry eyes, under the curious and amazed stares of the sailors, appeared on our table hams, sausages, sardines, eggs, pineapple, beer, and coffee to boot, but this time real coffee, not the powdered instant version that we normally received, called Nescafe, which was invented during the war and became popular afterwards.

We not only were in paradise, but we also had a lot of fun with the kitchen crew. While we were scrubbing and cleaning the huge pots and pans, dishes, and the silverware and mopping the floor—everything that they were supposed to be doing—they were feeling like tourists, drinking coffee or beer on this unexpected occasion. One of the sailors who was from Hawaii, learning that I came from Argentina, picked up his guitar and sang South American songs in English. We were very happy, for our stomachs were full, and after finishing our chores, we went back to the deck, feeling sorry for our stubborn companions who kept on creating discord with the Americans with whom we had such a good understanding. Needless to mention, we didn't say a word to the others, and that night we slept, as it is said, with full stomachs.

We were already planning to repeat our feat the following day, but when we awoke we realized that our ship was docked again in the port, and we were told to hurry up and remove our trucks from the hold and drive them onto the pier. We were forced to move so fast that we didn't have time to say goodbye to our friends in the galley, and especially to their good humored "Chief" Pat.

On the dock some twenty trucks were already aligned; they had been delayed as we were, and their chief, Lieutenant Ansuc, waited for the drivers to form a convoy. When we started moving, I heard someone say that we were heading to Albanova. Just before our departure, we met several new companions of our battalion, some old FFF coming back from missions or from stays in the hospital. One of them was Jean Fernandez, from Spanish descent, who was living in Oran, Argelia; very smart and a real joker, he was hated by the sergeants. When he was involved in any mess, a frequent occurrence, a sergeant would shout to him to obey the regulations, an order to which Fernandez each time would answer with the same sentence: "The regulation is a whore that each one screws at his own will!" Another newcomer, also from Oran, was the fat Gomez, who liked to drink and bragged ceaselessly that he had been in Bir Hacheim with Andreani, and I think that Andreani was the only friend he had.

Emile Poinceau was also from Argel, coming from a "Black Foot" family. He had served two years in the infamous African battalions, where the delinquent draftees or those who had committed some kind of crime when young were sent. It was a rough unit, and the discipline was applied with an iron fist. Emile, after serving the two years as a draftee, had enlisted in the Colonial Army and was planning to remain there until reaching his retirement age.

Maurice Chateaubriand was a Frenchman who had escaped from his country, passing through Spain and joining us when we were embarking in Bizert.

Ben Nayan was an Argelinian Jew who deserted Giraud's Army, where he had been drafted, to pass to our side.

Returning from the hospital was Giovanni Padliachi; I had seen him many times in Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia. He was a sergeant, like Andreani, and they had known each other for years. Both had served previously in the Foreign Legion before the war, but it was known that for certain past reasons, they hated each other, and I saw them fistfight more than once.

The convoy was formed, and we moved toward Albanova.

Chapter 7

After remaining a few days in Albanova, where our unit was preparing to get ready for action, we advanced closer to the front in the Montella Frignano Maggiore, Tentola, and St. Clemente area. Thanks to the special attention given us by our allies, we were assigned to a region of marshes infested with mosquitoes and malaria.

On May 5, 1944, we were already in position on the front, facing the enemy on the famous German "Gustave" fortification line.

Chief Sergeant Jean Pietri and Corporal Genson were gunned down while on a reconnoissance. They were our first victims in Italy, where we suffered enormous losses, much higher than those of the other Allied armies. The 5th American Army, with the 8th English, had already been paralyzed for several months on the mountainous Altina and Frosinone front. No matter how much French Expeditionary Corps Commander General Juin asked for the opportunity to send his Moors, skilled in mountain fighting, the Allies didn't pay him any attention until the moment came when stagnation at the front was becoming unbearable, and then General Clark didn't have any other alternative but to allow Juin to put his strategy into practice.

Immediately after receiving the green light, the 2nd and 4th North African Divisions, with our 1st DFL, were sent to the summit of the mountain. Our men had to climb in the mud of the bluff, expecting to find before them a scene of victory, all the while glancing at the roiling and deep Garigliano River on the north and the Liri River on the south, close to Monte Girofano. The Germans were expecting to fight the Allies along the Garigliano River, but they had been taken by surprise when our troops, descending from the top of the mountains, attacked their right flank. The artillery bombardment was deafening, and the explosions were succeeding every second all night long; they continued without interruption for several days. Our forces suffered many casualties during the bombing, while our friends Faidit and Poumirou were wounded and sent to the hospital, along with many more from our battalion.

Our batteries, manned by expert gunners, on May 8 opened a thundering fire that didn't subside, not even for a minute during the day or the night, until May 12, when we were ordered to attack the "Gustave" line. Land mines had been buried in all the footpaths, causing many losses during our frontal land attack. The Germans, alarmed by our persistence, fortified the Liri Valley in a hurry with the "Dora" works, as they did with the Pontecorvo line, which the Allies called the Hitler line—nobody knew why.

In front of us were war-hardened troops who already had fought in Poland, France, and Russia, and they were led by Marshal Kesserling. On our right flank the British forces were situated, and a complete silence reigned, because a surprise attack had been planned for the following dawn. The heavy and impressive stillness suddenly was broken at 11 p.m., when 2,300 artillery guns opened fire, all at the same time, while our Moors wildly attacked the Germans by surprise. Driven from all positions, the enemy was forced to seek protection under the cover of their mortars while retreating. Our other men from the infantry battalion rushed gallantly forward, climbing to the top of the Girofano mountain to attack the astonished Nazis. The fighting intensified at once, and the Germans, unwilling to surrender, transformed the battlefield many times into a hand-

to-hand struggle, using their bayonets, hand grenades, and light weapons. The losses were of great magnitude on both sides, and again the new soldiers who were participating for the first time in action died in larger numbers.

On May 13, the final attack was ordered, and it ended at nightfall, when the "Gustav" line had been completely overrun, at a heavy cost in lives for the Colonial Army, especially among the officers, who as usual were leading their men or marching toward the enemy alongside their soldiers. While we were in the process of cleaning out the positions we took from the enemy, the Polish from the 8th English Army opened their way, fighting all the way toward the old Monte Casino monastery, which had been transformed into a fortress by the Germans.

On May 15, under an intense German bombardment, we advanced toward San Giorgio. We were moving among rubbish and debris, while the putrefaction of corpses and dead horses that hadn't been buried, due to the constant fighting and the lack of time, was filling the air and our nostrils. We resumed our advance, attacking the Pontecorvo front, on the fortified German works "Dora", then the "Hitler" line, in the Liri Valley.

During that time, General Monsabert's Argelian soldiers were leading a surprise attack on Esperia and San Oliva on the left, overrunning these enemy positions by descending on them from the high cliffs. The Germans were doing everything they could to slow down the advance of our 1st DFL (Free French Division). The mountainous configuration of the terrain didn't give any room for maneuvering, limiting the fight to hand-to-hand fighting. We were at a distance from the Britons, who not only were advancing at a slow pace, but also quite often were dragging, and we were losing contact with them. On the west side of San Giorgio, the steep cliffs made it impossible to use tanks, and only the infantry could be used reliably in this region.

During the night, from the 16th to the 17th of May, our company alone suffered 16 killed and 43 wounded when at dawn we had to face the German sniper's fire and an attack with hand grenades. The fight lasted all the following day long, and on the evening of the 18th, Monte Casino had been taken by the Polish, who placed their flag on top of the monastery.

We were surprised by the arrival of General de Gaulle and General Juin close to San Ambrogio. After analyzing the military situation with our General Brosset, our Commander in Chief gave out at random some decorations, then left with all his entourage. I wasn't lucky enough to receive any medal from him, but one more time I shook his hand, and he told me that he remembered me.

On May 19, an American Sherman tank company had tried to open its way in the winding valley bordering the Liri River, but it had been ambushed by the Germans, who destroyed several of the tanks, which exploded and burned immediately. The American servicemen from the undamaged tanks, becoming nervous, opened careless, heavy fire at random, wounding several of our men, until they received orders to halt the fire, to end this incursion, and to retreat to the rear. We were moving between corpses scattered on the irregular terrain while breathing this rotten human stench, which was filling the atmosphere, while German planes and their artillery were bombing us without respite.

Our headquarters decided to move to Castello, and during the skirmish, while cleaning the area of German snipers, Lieutenants Cunin and Vellutini were

wounded, while the soldiers Debono, Robichon, Leclerc, and Tactique were killed; they were buried on the spot without any delay.

Afterward, we had a series of sporadic fights, with short periods of rest. Suddenly, for strategic reasons, we were moved, scattered to the cities of San Apolinario, Ponto Corvo, Ceccano, and Palestri, where our company made its home in the castle of Count Ciano, Mussolini's son-in-law.

At the beginning of June, we were a few miles from Rome, and after crossing the Tiber River, we received orders to stay to the side, letting the 4th English Infantry Division, which received the privilege of entering the Eternal City before us, pass ahead of us; nevertheless, we were so close. After Generals Clark and Juin entered Rome, they were immediately surprised to see that the population was treating the French forces as "liberators," and not as victors, shouting, "Long live France!" "Long live de Gaulle!" "Long live Rome!" and they were covering our vehicles with flowers.

General Clark said very seriously, "Without the French, we wouldn't be here!" Jean Pierre Aumont, the movie actor and General Brosset's assistant, said, "The people are delirious with enthusiasm, the women are offering themselves, the men smile, and the children scream, waving little French flags!" For several days, the 1st DFL remained consigned to Vermonete city, close to the capital, and many soldiers received 24 hours' leave. For security reasons, it was prohibited to go to Rome without a special permit; nevertheless, the natural soldier's ingenuity solved this dilemma swiftly, and the city was flooded by allied military.

Pope Pius XII, who always favored the fascists, had no alternative but to invite an important group of the Allied military to his Vatican residence. He wanted especially to entertain the French Forces, who had a large number of Catholics. For this notable event, a hundred French combatants were selected to be honored by seeing the Pope. By a very curious coincidence, my name was drawn on the list, which was a mystery that even now I can't understand, unless it was a joke pulled by somebody at the headquarters who knew that I was an atheist.

When Albert Duchamp got wind that I was one of the few lucky ones to go to the Vatican, he came, almost crying, to ask me to let him go in my place, offering me money and even his services for anything I would need in the future. I didn't in earnest have any intention of going to the Vatican to see this old, shameful Pope, who had blessed the German soldiers when they were leaving for the Russian front. "For him to waste my 24 hours' leave," I said to myself, "when I had the opportunity to go with Jojo, Ben Nayan, and Maurice Chateaubrian to Rome to see women and have a drink or so!"

The city didn't impress us, because we were expecting to see a capital and we saw only a provincial city, a small Venician square, and the muddy Tiber River. The Coliseum was protected against bombing and was wrapped with planks, and it was out of bounds for tourists, leaving us only the prostitution area, filled with bars, where the people received us very kindly. Only a few people passing by us sent discreet looks of contempt in our direction. So as to avoid suffering the repetition of what happened to me in Alexandria, this time I didn't remove my shirt when I lay down with an Italian prostitute. Neither did I choose too young a woman, just in case she would glance at my body's scars.

After our escapade in the brothel, we went to a bar to drink together. It was a nice one, with the emblem of two babies sucking milk from a wolf at the door. We

found several Italian anti-fascists, and by speaking Spanish to them, we could understand each other. We were laughing, because all the people around us pretended that they had been anti-fascists, to the point that Maurice Chateaubrian asked me to translate to them that he would like to see a fascist. He promised that he wouldn't do him any harm; he just wanted to see one in person. All the people surrounding us were laughing; men as well as women would smile, repeating that none of them had ever been a fascist.

It was late when we arrived at the Venice Square, where our truck was waiting for us to take us back to our camp. At that time, I considered that it wasn't so important to see the Pope, feeling I would have more fun with my friends by sightseeing the city, enjoying women, and drinking some wine, but many years later, I came to regret not having gone to the Vatican. It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see the Pope, and many people would have paid a fortune for the honor of being received by the Pope in person. Even though I always have been an atheist and still am, I lament not having seen the one who used other peoples' superstition to claim that God had chosen him to be his ambassador, or representative, on earth.

My poor opinion about Pius XII was confirmed several years later, when he was on his deathbed, crying and begging four doctors who were taking care of him, asking them to prolong his life, screaming, "I don't want to die, I want to live more, I am the Pope of Rome, I want to live!" I keep asking myself whether at that time his God was plugging his ears so as not to listen to these disdainful laments coming from somebody who assumed he was chosen by God, or where was God?

Albert Duchamp also was standing on the square with the rest of us on leave, waiting for the truck to depart. His beatific face glowed with a blessed smile, and it's for certain he would never forget this visit to the Pope of Rome. "He touched my head with his hand, the Holy Father!" mumbled Albert, completely transformed and showing us a cross with Jesus that he assured us was blessed and given to him by the Pope in person.

Albert described in flavored and rich detail everything that happened during the famous reception granted to them at the Vatican. Of course, the French, as the older children of the church, were placed on the front line; then came the Italians, Polish, Canadians, and behind them, a small, noisy group of Anglo-Saxons. After the mass, the Supreme Pontiff distributed saint images, crosses, and other religious ornaments. At the end of the ceremony, the Pope, surrounded by his Swiss Guard adorned in their medieval garb, was escorted to the door of his residence, while Americans and Englishmen cheered him, as they used to do during the football games in the stadium, yelling, "Hip-hip Hurray!" The fervent Catholics were dismayed, the visitors as much as the Cardinals who came along with the "Holy Father," but when he smiled back to these young Anglo-Saxons, amused by their way of showing respect, everybody else joined him in a prudent, almost silent laugh.

From the moment Albert left the Vatican, he never stopped caressing his gift cross; he didn't eat or drink during all the day he spent in Rome, so completely absorbed was he by his internal emotion, which was, as he said, "sublimating" him. As soon as our GMC ten-wheeler truck was ready to depart, we all hurriedly climbed on the platform, because no seats existed and each one was trying to claim a corner to have room to stretch out. Almost immediately after the truck started moving, many intoned some joyful soldiers' songs, while the vehicle rushed back to our camp.

Each one of us had his own emotions and adventures to think about. Unfortunately, not everyone had been so lucky, because Taieb, a quiet Lebanese married to a French woman who remained in Beyruth, at the moment of climbing on our truck realized that his wallet with all his money was missing. He didn't want to accuse anybody, but because he would very seldom have a drink and therefore couldn't have been drunk, he had a hunch that he must have left his wallet some place where he spent most of his day. Anyhow, it was one more memory, a sad one, especially for his first visit to Rome.

Chapter 8

The happiness we felt at having occupied Rome was instantly diluted by the news that the same day, June 6, an Expeditionary Anglo-American Corps, including the 2nd Armour Free French Division under General Leclerc, had disembarked in Normandy.

We always dreamt of being the first to land on French soil, and this event saddened us, mainly the Marines, who in great majority were Normans or Bretons, and they were hoping to be the first to come back to their land. After a few days of rest, our battalion continued to chase the Germans, who were retreating to the north, to Viterbo and the direction of the lake of Bolsena.

Very soon, the 14th German Army, under the new command of General Lemelsen, stopped our advance. It was easy to do so because of the mountainous terrain, which made any movement painful and cost us a lot of effort and countless loss of human lives. When our 1st DFL tried again to push the enemy northward, we were stopped by three PanzerKorps divisions, under the command of von Senger, and the 1st Paratroopers Corps and its 3rd Panzergrenadiere division, which was behind the "Gothique" line's trenches. All of them were crack and elite troops, resolved and determined to stop us at any price and with any sacrifice.

Our advance was paralyzed, and we dug trenches in Montefiascone on June 10. It is a very old small town, built on a hill and known worldwide for its famous "Vino espumante" (sparkling wine), a type of champagne produced in the region. Needless to say, the first thing we did was to rush to the wine cellars and fill up our canteens and our five-gallon tanks with this red, sparkling, good-tasting wine. The wine was delicious, and we savored it, without paying enough attention to our security, leaving this responsibility to our headquarters.

We paid dearly for this neglect, because we were close to the lines of the enemy, who when they were retreating could be heard, their sergeants shouting orders to their soldiers in German, "Schnell, rauss, rauss, schnell!" On the afternoon of June 13, German fighter and bomber planes appeared in the sky, and for more than an hour they dropped bombs on us with a deafening noise, while their pursuit planes, flying low, were gunning us without mercy.

It happened when I was talking with Lieutenant Ansuque, close to a big tree, when the bombing started suddenly, and he told me that he was going into his tent to pick up his helmet to protect his head. Just when he reached his tent, a bomb fell, destroying everything and causing his death. After that, I thought once more about the mystery of life, because if Ansuque, who loved to patronize sports, had remained at my side, perhaps he could have been saved. Our camp was completely destroyed, and almost half of the men of our company were dead or wounded. In addition to Lieutenant Ansuque, the Lebanese Taieb was dead, the one whose wallet had been stolen in Rome during his leave, as were radio operator Jean Faure, Claude Perrin, Michel Lamotte, and many more. Among the wounded were our Captain Hauet, Sergeant Derney, Asseraf, Guelfucci, and many others, all of them immediately sent to the hospital.

The following day, we buried the dead with the corresponding military honors in the division's cemetery, about 10 miles from our camp. Our position was too open, and we had to move eight miles to the Lake of Bolsena, where much against our

will, we were ordered to dig trenches. It was a real task to round up our men, who were dispersed everywhere, because the order came unexpectedly and most of the soldiers were in Montefiascone.

In the cellars were stored huge old wooden casks with quality wine, and the soldiers, mainly those from the Foreign Legion, not being able to open them, would shoot them with machine guns to make holes from which poured the precious liquid with which they hurriedly filled up their canteens. After that, the wine continued flowing on the floor. We found several of our comrades, who once they became drunk, drowned, falling on the cellar's floor that had been flooded by the wine running from different opened casks. Our patrols had to pull and drag some rebellious, completely inebriated soldiers out, and our commanders were happy when we moved away from Montefiascone.

We kept advancing slowly toward the north. The Germans had buried a great number of land mines in the ground when retreating, and every day these mines created a good number of victims, decimating mercilessly our ranks and killing Raymond Ruze, Van Moerkerke, Lieutenant Bickstrog, and many more who walked over these buried metal discs. Our headquarters had been installed in Radicofani, while our infantry was fighting in the mountains, where the tanks were useless. We realized that our airplanes were increasing their attacks against the enemy positions, and Moutarde, who had a sickening fear of the planes, having once been wounded during an air raid, knew how to recognize them by their noise, their nationality, their types, and even sometimes their brands. The hearing of this young man was unbelievable and unique.

We became unwilling witnesses to two events that would remain in my memory forever. One evening, we were resting behind the fighting line, and I saw, with Jean Fernandez walking by my side, a throng of soldiers agglomerated close to the debris of collapsed buildings. When we approached, we were surprised to see the stunning movie actress Marlene Dietrich seated on a jeep's hood, with her sexy legs crossed. We knew that the Americans had a special program to cheer the soldiers on the front by sending well known actors for that purpose. The tireless Bob Hope was constantly on the front entertaining soldiers, but we didn't know that we, too, would have the privilege of being visited by the famous German-born American star Marlene Dietrich.

We admired her, because Hitler tore up her Teutonic citizenship, as he also did in the case of another German, Erich Maria Remarque, for his anti-Nazi stand. Both had been my favorites since my childhood. Marlene as a woman inspired me, as she did millions of other men, and I admired Remarque for showing everybody the real horror of war through his book *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Working with our elbows and pushing forward in the crowd, we came close to the jeep, glueing our eyes on Marlene's beautiful exposed legs, knowing that we liked the whole package.

I don't know how it happened, but my good looks or perhaps my stare attracted her attention, because with her hand she invited me to come close to her, then gave me a pack of Camels and a kiss on the cheek, while in a very German-accented French she said, "I like French soldiers very much!" If the Yankees wanted to lift our morale, it's for sure they succeeded! We were tired and dirty, and receiving a pack of cigarettes from Marlene Dietrich was the best reward we could have ever dreamed of.

We came back to our camp, and Fernandez, hiding his envy, said with anger that he didn't like Camel cigarettes anyhow. It was a lie, because we didn't have enough tobacco, and any American brand was very much coveted. I understood that he was angry

at not having been chosen by the actress. While we walked, we lifted our heads, because a thundering noise in the sky accompanied a dogfight in progress between our own and German planes. We saw six German Stukas in a fight to the death with five English Spitfires.

An airplane fight in the sky is the most emotional and moving spectacle that could be seen during the war. It is very impressive because it is quite different from our fighting on the ground, which is fast and instantaneous. Instead, in the air, the fight lasts a good while, featuring several minutes of passing several times so close to one another that I assume the pilots could see each other's faces. It was a relief and a joy to watch a German plane knocked down, covered in smoke and falling toward some place in the mountains that were surrounding us. We couldn't see the plane once it dipped below the horizon, but after a short while we heard an explosion that marked its end.

A minute later, the same fate happened to another Stuka, and it looked as though our pilots had the upper hand so far, when suddenly we noticed a Spitfire losing speed and beginning to descend slowly, but it was not surrounded by or emitting smoke, which is the habitual sign that a plane has been hit. The remaining planes never stopped chasing each other, while the English Spitfire kept on losing altitude and apparently was heading toward us, where all around were several plowed farm lands large enough for a landing. We stopped watching the dogfight, which resumed with intensity, to concentrate our attention on the plane that without any doubt was trying to land. The plane's speed was diminishing, and we saw the tires on the ground, performing a perfect landing, then stopping in the midst of the plowed spot of land.

We hurried toward the plane to see if anybody needed help, and when we approached closer, our eyes could appreciate the most beautiful picture of a warrior's gallantry, the lonely fighter pilot sitting stiff on his seat, with his head slightly inclined toward the dash board, while blood slowly ran down his face. It wasn't difficult to guess what had happened! When the pilot felt that he was wounded and realized that he was no longer in a condition to continue the fight, he decided to save the plane and landed the best he could, while death overtook his body. I will never forget this Canadian pilot— young and blond, with the appearance of calm and tranquillity on his face and his body entirely motionless. The authorities were contacted, and an ambulance was immediately dispatched to the scene. Unfortunately, it was too late, and I had the impression that he had died just before landing.

And so, on the same evening, I had seen two completely different episodes: the one agreeable, consisting of seeing Marlene Dietrich in person, and the other sad, in which a real war hero preserved his dignity by fighting to the last moment of his life. After a couple of weeks of warring, we were sent for a rest a few miles behind the front—I smile, remembering that those working behind the desk, "the hidden ones," being twenty miles from the action, considered themselves on the front, in the trenches.

When I returned to Argentina after the war, I learned that my parents did not receive news from me for a period of six months and had been very much concerned, especially my mother, who knew that we were engaged in heavy and bloody battles in Italy. On one of those occasions when we were "resting," I received, after going several months without any correspondence, an entire pack of letters. Several were from my parents and friends, including one from Sanlieu, our "Guardian Angel" from Argelia.

To enjoy reading my correspondence more, I went strolling a distance away

from our camp, choosing to sit by a beautiful little bush where a small stream was running with a slight whisper between the trees. Suddenly, the reigning silence was interrupted by a noise, similar to that of a baby crying or screaming; afterward came a whistling, and I knew immediately what it meant, and protecting myself, I fell down on the ground, just before a shell exploded near me. It was the fire coming from the famous German six-tube mortar, which was not only deadly, but also worked psychologically on the soldier's mind. Once the six shells were fired, three acres of land were leveled, destroying everything and everybody on the surface. But now, when the first shot was coming in, I couldn't know whether the next would explode north, south, east, or west, ravaging the acreage they were set up for. I heard the second baby's cry, followed by a whistle, knowing that the shell would explode any time, but I couldn't guess in which direction. I kept counting the shots, while my body was sweating profusely. The letters I had in my hand were scattered on the ground, and I opted not to pick them up, because now the third shot was coming in.

I still had to wait for three more of the mortars, but I couldn't figure out the direction where they would be falling. I don't know how, but certainly I had been seen by someone manning the mortar, because I was under the impression that I was at least a few miles from the front, and these mortars had a five-mile range. The fourth shot came with the same characteristics, very well known by all of us. It came to my mind that if I were a believer, it would be the right time to pray to God, or the gods, but for me, everything was dependent on circumstances and the aiming ability of the one who wanted to destroy me with his mortar. I think that this precise moment was the closest I came in my life to thinking about what I would do if I were a believer. When the fifth shell exploded, I became very nervous, and I remember that I began to tremble; but after the sixth shot went off, covering me with dirt and debris, I got up, and smiling, I immediately began to recover my scattered letters from the grass.

When I returned, the heavy enemy artillery was shelling our camp again. Everything was shaking, while dense clouds of dirt and smoke were bursting in the air. Once again during our rest period, we suffered big losses in dead and wounded; the latter were immediately sent to Naples, where our Sears Division Hospital was actually functioning.

The following day, I was assigned a mission to take some tires to Sergeant Jacques Tricot, who was close to the enemy lines with his Dodge truck, which had been damaged by enemy artillery. It was a hard mission, to drive a ten-wheeler GMC on these dirt roads or footpaths cluttered with shell holes, fallen trees, and destroyed buildings. When we approached the front, we were seen by the Germans, who opened their machine gun and mortar fire on us, the shells exploding all around our truck.

I don't know why Sergeant Guillaume decided to come with us, because he wasn't assigned to perform this mission. I saw him getting inside the covered platform, joining the other soldiers. He was so scared that from the back he was yelling at me, asking me to stop the truck, which would have been madness. A stopped truck was always an excellent target for the Nazi gunners, especially now that we were so close to them. I always believed and still believe that movement and action are the best protection against an enemy attack, and without paying him any attention, I kept on accelerating in spite of the falling bombs until we reached a spot behind some high rocks; this point was my friend Jacques Tricot's nest, from which he manned the radio with his men and sent

information to headquarters regarding the German positions.

His place was in a terrible shape; several of his men had been killed, and others who were wounded had been sent to the hospital in the rear. Our mechanics replaced the Dodge's flat tires with those we brought and repaired as best they could the damaged vehicle as well. Tricot was a good friend with whom I had participated in many campaigns. I always was surprised by the cold bloodedness that he was displayed, even during the most dangerous moments. One of his hobbies was to unscrew and disarm hand grenades and land mines full of explosives, a feat that scared his companions to death.

After a few drinks of the red wine that we brought with us, although Jacques wasn't drinking, we gave big hugs to each other and began to return to our positions. Before we left, I said very seriously to Sergeant Guillaume that if he opened his mouth during our trip back, I would stop the truck in the middle of the road, even if the Germans were shelling us, and shoot him in the head for insubordination.

It looked as though this advice produced the desired effect, because during our return trip on these winding and half-destroyed roads, when the Germans never missed an opportunity to shoot at us with artillery and mortars, Guillaume remained mute, and we didn't hear his voice again during the entire trip.

We returned very late to our camp with the truck full of holes, and both mechanics who were traveling in the back had to be sent to the hospital because of the wounds they received while I was driving. The following day, the military actions intensified around Radicofani, with the Foreign Legion furiously attacking the enemy in the mountains.

After these events, a profound silence prevailed, while a thick cloud covered all this region. Because of the enemy's fast retreat, we again lost contact with him. Suddenly, during the afternoon, a group of men appeared in front of Lieutenant Chiari's section. They looked like Americans; they wore similar helmets and were speaking English. The black Saras riflemen, happy to see allies, stood up and went to welcome them, only to be received by heavy, close-range machine gun fire. Before that, even the lieutenant had been fooled, because he shouted, "They are Americans, don't shoot!"

The 150-strong German intruders belonged to the 3rd Company of the Fallschirmjager Paratroopers Regiment, which had been specially brought to Calcinajo. Once the mistaken identity had been established, the black riflemen threw themselves against the attackers, using guns, grenades, and machetes. Unfortunately, Chiari and the other white officer who was with him were both killed first. It was really lucky that Captain Coutin, who was about a mile from the place, heard and saw what happened and came with his men to help this rifle company.

The German paratroopers belonged to a special storm unit and fought with notable cold blood. Little by little, they had been overpowered by the black riflemen, who fought very well with great courage when led by a white officer. The black riflemen used to say in broken French, "If white officer goes, no danger; but if white officer doesn't go ahead of us, it is dangerous, and we not going!"

Headquarters had been alerted, and Captain Fournier's company had been dispatched to this dangerous place. The German paratroopers, well covered by their 88mm artillery guns, continued to resist until late into the night, when with many losses they were forced to retreat to the Calcinajo mountains.

We too had to lament heavy losses in men. The dead, in addition to Chiari,

included another lieutenant, Tabuteau, a Bir Hakem veteran whom I was very close to. All the officers of the 1st Company were killed, with the exception of two who were wounded. After the fight, the Germans bombarded the entire region heavily at night. A shell exploded close to Captain Blanchet, killing him at once and wounding Lieutenant Zinguedeau, both veterans of the desert campaigns.

The intensified German resistance became vigorous, no matter that the Legionnaires and the riflemen fought with their legendary determination and courage. It ended up as hand- to-hand fighting in streets of the city of Madona dalle Vigne, close to Radicofani. When cleaning out the city house by house, Lieutenant Poirrel, with six Legionnaires, discovered 92 hidden Germans in a basement who were immediately taken prisoners. One of them was a Frenchman belonging to Petain's militia. The German Commander, Major Radgens, refusing to surrender, shot himself in the head.

On the other side of Radicofani, my company had also the task of what is called in the military cleaning out the city, which consists of finding, chasing, and ejecting the enemy sharpshooters from the buildings, from which they were firing on us. Opposing us on this front was a battalion of Bersaglieri, Italian crash troops whose courage couldn't be compared with that of the same type of German unit.

I don't know how it happened, but as occurs very often on the battlefield, I lost contact with other companions, and while we were firing at the fascists, I heard stones falling from a building half-destroyed, and I immediately went in that direction. I didn't realize then that I was completely alone and far away from my men, who were doing the same thing or taking care of their own security, while shooting at the enemy when locating them.

Coming close to a house without lights and entering a room that seemed to be the living room, my eyes slowly got used to the darkness, and I saw standing in the corner a tall young Italian officer, wearing a high military hat and pointing a gun at me. In my right hand I was holding my American semi-automatic carbine, but I realized that I wouldn't have enough time to lift it and shoot at the Italian, who could have shot at me first. Once more, I put my knowledge of psychology to work, a knowledge that so many times saved my life. Without batting an eye, I shouted to him in a mixture of French and Spanish to surrender, while looking him straight in the eyes. The Italian captain—I learned of his rank later—was very agitated and kept threatening me with the shaking hand that was holding the handgun, while repeating the same words, whose meaning I understood as being something like "stop or I shoot!" I kept walking toward him at the same steady pace, looking in his eyes and saying with authority, "Surrender!" He didn't move, and when I came close to him, I hit his threatening arm with my carbine, making him drop the gun on the floor, and I took him prisoner, without any resistance on his part. I pulled him outside the house on the street, where other Italian prisoners were already herded, and of course, as a bounty, I kept his beautiful Berreta gun, so coveted by all of us.

In Germany, most men were drafted into the army, and not having enough help to fortify their numerous works, the Germans brought many of their war prisoners to do that job on the front, which was against the Geneva Convention. During our advance, we found one of these prisoner camps and liberated it; to our surprise, we learned that they were war prisoners from the Russian Red Army. Most were almost starving, but the majority of them expressed the desire to keep on fighting against the Nazis.

By pure coincidence, I happened to pass by Commander Mirkin, a Russian Jew who had emigrated to France at the same time as my family; he was slightly younger than my father and had enlisted in the Colonial Army, later joining the FFF. When he heard me speaking Russian with the prisoners, he ordered me to be in charge of them. One of the Russians was very mentally defective and was saluting every officer by lifting his arm and saying "Heil Hitler!" When Commander Mirkin heard him, he said, "How fast you learned to salute the Nazi way!" He was interrupted by another Russian prisoner, whose name was Petia, who explained to us that the Germans were beating those who wouldn't salute an officer with the "Heil Hitler." This mentally affected Russian, Grisha, had been tortured so many times that he had lost his mind, becoming incoherent and saluting everybody as the Germans demanded. He had been transformed into a real robot. You could see the fear reflected in his eyes, for he was always terrified.

That evening, we took about six of these Russians to our tent, with Jojo, Ben Nayan, and Poinceau; we remained late at night talking with these unfortunates, who were happy to be with the allies and grateful for all the food we gave them, including tobacco. The following day, several trucks carried the 80 Russian ex-prisoners of war to the rear. They were exceedingly weak and were directed to hospitals, while the six who remained with us in the tent, including Petia, enlisted in the Foreign Legion the following day.

A year later, by one of these circumstances of which I had so many in my life, I saw Petia again in Paris. It was after the war; he was decorated and wearing sergeant's stripes, and he was doing the paperwork to return to his Russian motherland. As to Commander Mirkin, I am very sad to say that it was the last time I saw him, because a few days later he was killed during one of our attacks on Radicofani. The day after his death, he was buried in our division's San Lorenzo Novo cemetery, at the same time as Colonel Laurent-Champrosay, who modernized our artillery and was an old friend of our commander.

It was raining that day, and emotion engulfed General Brosset, to the point that he wasn't able to speak, and General Larminat had to deliver the farewell speech to these heroes alongside whom we had fought so many times and had fought the entire campaign of the desert together. It was during the night of June 18 that the Germans retreated behind the Orcia River, where they built the "Frieda" line. The weather remained unbearable, with constant rain, and even though we fought with great strain, our forces kept on pushing the enemy toward Sienne, after taking Castvecchio and San Piero-in-Campo.

On June 24, 1944, the campaign of Italy came to an end for us, and General de Gaulle promised us that we would participate in liberating France. General Juin replaced our division, which was leaving the Italian front, with the 2nd Motorized Division, which was already taking our positions. We were assigned for the near future to be part of the Anvil operation and to land in Provence, in the South of France, with the 3rd DIA, two divisions of Moors, and the American 36th Infantry Division. During the campaign of Italy, we lost a quarter of our forces in dead and wounded, and we needed not only to rest, but also to replenish our units with fresh troops, which we were expecting would come from North Africa.

Close to the end of the war, Brazil declared war on Germany and sent an expeditionary corps of 30,000 strong to Europe. They were meant to take over our

position on the Italian front, once the Free French Forces left the Italian theater of war.

The interesting aspect of this Brazilian Expeditionary Corps was that the government of that country, trying to hide the fact that the majority of the country's people were black, decided to call for active service only selected white citizens, among which a great number were of German descent, whose ancestors colonized the Brazilian southern states. Unfortunately, at the first encounter the Brazilians had with the Germans, all or a great number of these Teuton children deserted, passing on the other side. It was such a complete disaster and embarrassment that the Brazilian authorities tried to dissimulate the best they could. The Brazilian Headquarters recalled all the soldiers from German descent serving in the army on the Italian front and replaced them with white citizens whose ancestors came from allied countries.

It was how my childhood friend, Paul Henot, who just a little before the start of the war was in Paris with the favorite uncle that we loved so much during our youth, got drafted into the army. When in 1939 Paul received the order to join the army, he opted to return urgently to Brazil, so as not to be drafted in France.

Europeans don't go by birth place to determine nationality, usually called the "Monroe doctrine"; instead, they first consider the kinfolks' blood and the parents' citizenship; thus, Popol was Brazilian in Brazil, since he was born there, but he was considered French in France, because he was from French descent, no matter how many generations of his family had been born in other countries.

Popol made it, running away from the French draft and escaping to Brazil, but when that country entered the war, unfortunately for him, Popol had been chosen to be drafted in the Brazilian army, ready to be sent to Italy. We would joke about this topic later, saying that Popol preferred to be fighting in the Brazilian army with the "macaques," and not in the French Army! It is necessary to understand that the worst insult that could be made to a Brazilian at that time was to call him "macaque."

Chapter 9

On June 24, 1944, the 1st DFL Headquarters undertook the task of moving our entire division to the south, returning by the same roads we took during our advance against the Nazis and getting ready for our disembarkment in France. We left that day in the afternoon, riding all night to avoid being seen by enemy aviation and arriving at dawn the following day in Sabadia, after covering 300 miles by road. The next day, our entire division followed the same southbound direction we had taken a few months before, and at 5 a.m., after driving all night, we arrived in Albanova, where we had already been once before. We had the feeling that we were now at home! When we came to this town the first time, we had been lodged in private homes, while this time, we camped in our American tents a few miles outside the town. These tents were more practical than those provided by the English, which we had during all the desert campaign, but they couldn't be compared to the luxurious accommodations of a home.

During our move southward, we had suffered an enormous number of accidents because it was necessary to drive without lights at night to avoid being spotted by German aviation. German air attacks were still quite strong at the time, and they made it necessary for us to move in the darkness with no lights on the vehicles. It was now that we really could rest for the first time since we had come to Italy, and aside from some arms inspections and the morning call, we were free to do whatever we wanted during the day. Some of our companions had already been on leave in Naples, and each one of us was expecting his turn to go to this city that everybody who had been there talked so much about.

I succeeded in getting in touch with the Chilean friends with whom I came to Africa, Gerald Esquerre and Rene Genestier. Although we were serving in different units, we succeeded in joining up to go to Naples on leave together. It was very moving to be reunited after more than a year. We needed to remember the place where the truck that brought us on leave to Naples would be departing to our camp and try not to get lost. As soon as we descended from the military vehicle on the street, we went directly to a bar to have a drink. We had just received our pay, with "occupation liras," which the Italians were accepting with reluctance, but it was the only money we had on us.

By chance, we befriended an American soldier who was walking by himself and asked us how to go to the Pompei ruins that he wanted to visit. We hadn't as yet made up our minds about what to do in the area, and it seemed to the three of us a good idea to go see this historical place. This marvel of antiquity had been preserved by almost a miracle, and every day thousands of persons were viewing it with awe. After this unforgettable visit, the four of us went to eat at a restaurant, and of course we talked about our "Guardian Angel," from whom the three of us were receiving news regularly.

Our American friend Jimmy had just arrived from Chicago and hadn't as yet received his baptism of fire; learning that we were returning from the front, he bombarded us with a lot of questions about the war, because in a few days his unit was leaving for the Florencia's line that we had left not too long ago to be ready for a much more important mission, which was disembarkment in France. When Jimmy left us, because he needed to be back with his unit, we began to talk about our war experiences,

and we agreed that it was quite different from what we had read in books.

As far as I was concerned, I already knew about the horror from my experience during the Spanish Civil War, but my Chilean friends learned it in practice during the recent battles; but none of them had any regret about having enlisted to fight against the Nazis. After having a few more drinks, we went to the place where our truck would be waiting to take us back to our camps, promising to maintain contact with one another.

This first leave I spent in Naples was very formal, and when I came back to my unit, my friends laughed at me when they learned that we didn't go to see women, we didn't get drunk, and we didn't have any adventure worthwhile to tell, thus honoring our "marsouin" (porpoise) reputation, as the colonial infantry soldiers were called.

A week later, I had again a day's leave to Naples, and I went with Cassagnes, Emile Poinceau, and Polianowsky, but this time it was very much different. As soon as the truck brought us to the habitual square, we went directly to the place where we knew we would find food and beverage, in small bars or even in private homes. After eating, we went to the place where most soldiers of all nationalities were going, to have a good time with women.

In Italy, a law imposed by fascism prohibiting prostitution was still in effect, but kids 10 to 12 years old were offering us women on the streets, telling us, "Volete seniorina muito joven, muito bela." At this sight we laughed, because we hadn't before seen such young boys performing this pimp's trade. Poinceau said smiling, "I bet the kids are offering their mother, or an older sister!" and I doubt that he was mistaken, because when we followed these little intermediaries a couple of times, they led us to a private apartment in which everybody was involved in this type of business. Some older men would offer us a drink, while we would select a woman from three or four of different ages, who seemed to belong to the family.

The streets were swarming with people, and wherever we went, they were filled with uniformed men—English, American, Polish, of course French from both sides, the FFF as well as the "Giraudists," all of them drinking and having a good time with women. When the Germans were retreating, desperate at losing Italy and angry at the Italian people who didn't like them and didn't cooperate with them, under the pretext of inoculating the population in certain areas against malaria, they injected women from 15 to 45 years old with syphilis. This devilish and perverse technique worked well for the Germans, because these same Italian women who had been contaminated with syphilis passed it on to our men, reducing our fighting manpower.

While the Germans were retreating and our troops were occupying more and more Italian territory, we noticed almost immediately afterward that many of our allied soldiers became syphilitic. Of course, the disease reduced the number of our men on the front and increased the number of people admitted to the hospitals for venereal disease. The Americans, practical as they usually are, began including condoms in our normal food and cigarette rations.

As is very well known, young people don't like to use condoms, and for that reason the medical corps had ordered installed in Naples, almost on each block, what came to be known as "Prophylactic Stations," specially prepared for that kind of service, with a large number of "bidets." When one of us would go to these stations after having sex with a prostitute, a nurse soldier would give us a cream to scrub between our legs (to

kill vermin) and a syringe with medicine to be injected inside our penis, with a pack of cotton to wrap around it. This was the best way to eliminate the danger of venereal disease. Nevertheless, for all these precautions taken, we still had many of our soldiers treated by our sanitary division. It was sad and funny at the same time to learn about one of our companies, in which the lieutenant at the head and all his men were lying in the Sears Hospital, contaminated! This situation was of a great concern, because soldiers dead or lying with syphilis in the hospital represented for us less manpower to oppose the enemy.

We loved to go to Naples, where there was an effervescent atmosphere and an excitement in having good wine and an abundant number of women available. It was a terrific amalgam of ethnical variety, generating an interesting, ever-changing show worth watching. As young soldiers, we had a lot of fun with the Italian girls, drinking wine or beer, not to mention our fistfights with the Irish, English, South Africans, Australians, Americans, Polish, as well as other Frenchmen, and I believe that the only ones we really respected, especially the Bretons, were the Canadians. Now, when we ran into some French-speaking Canadians, we flattered them ad delirium. From our childhood in the French schools, we talked with love about Canada, this ex-colony lost by King Louis XVth's stupidity.

Once, when we were drinking wine in one of Naples' numerous barrooms, we started to talk with a soldier wearing an English battledress, which had been our uniform during our Desert campaign. On the left side of his sleeve was a badge saying "Palestine." He belonged to the battalion formed by Jews, enlisted in the English Army, with the agreement that after the war, Palestine would be returned to the Jewish people to create an independant Jewish country. The promise, which of course England had forgotten to keep after the war, was the beginning of a cruel struggle that ended in 1948, when the State of Israel was created.

We already had three weeks of this kind of tourist's life when suddenly, as it always happens in the army, we received an urgent order on July 19, 1944 to start moving toward the south, in the direction of Taranto, where we arrived the following day. We were five miles north of Tarento, and our camp was named Tucker Camp, under Colonel Delange's command.

It was classified information, but very well known by everybody that we were preparing to invade the south of France, and every day new recruits arrived to enlarge our ranks; we had to drill these recruits in the use of arms, vehicles, radio, and transmissions, preparing them to occupy positions in which modern war demands so many skills. I learned with surprise that in our actual war, only one out of five soldiers fought on the front line; all the others were auxiliaries: technicians, chauffeurs, mechanics, couriers, office workers, clerks, post office personnel, and communications, signal corps, and medical corps staff.

Our camp was established under olive trees, reminding us a little bit of Nabeul in Tunisia, with the difference that there we were close to the desert, while here all around us was good, arable land covered with different kinds of farming produce, including grapes growing between trees. My tent companion was Cassagnes, and as a neighbor we had Poinceau, who was sharing his tent with Polianovsky. The four of us got along very well, perhaps because the latter owned and played a guitar delightfully while intoning Russian or French songs with his soft and melodious voice.

July in the south of Italy reminded me of Argentina, the weather being almost a tropical heat; but after our obligation in drilling the new recruits, we would get together in the evening under the olive trees. Some other friends would come and join us to chat or to listen to Polianovsky's guitar, while we drank the traditional French Army's red wine late into the night.

None of us was a gambler. The gamblers assembled themselves in other tents, remaining to play cards for money all the night long. It was then that I learned about this gambling vice, this excitement they experimented with by taking chances and risking their money. Gambling was tiresome for me, no matter if I was winning or losing, because half an hour later, I was bored to death and would get up to return to my tent, leaving the gamblers astonished, not understanding how somebody with a clear mind could leave a game before the end.

It was the reason I stopped going to the gamblers' tents, because every time I felt bored and ready to leave, problems arose, creating anger, insults, and even sometimes fistfights. We had money, a lot of it, for very little of our pay was spent; in addition, it wasn't rare to watch other companions emptying German prisoners' pockets, saying as an excuse that once they were sent to the rear, the "hidden ones," bureaucrats, without any doubt would dispossess them of their goods. Soldiers are human beings, and when fighting from house to house, if an empty room had some money, jewels, or something they liked lying around, I think that even a saint couldn't resist the temptation to pick it up. It was called "requisition" and was considered "almost" legal, because if you don't take it, the next person coming behind would. The honesty concept is relative and quite different in wartime, because our life was hanging by a thin string that could be cut at any time. I remember when once we attacked San Georgio and I entered a half-destroyed house, tracking a German who disappeared as if by miracle. Suddenly, I noticed on a little table a golden pocket watch that I grabbed with an automatic gesture, almost by instinct, because it was beautiful and antique and I couldn't leave it there. I worshipped this jewelry, and I never tired of admiring the beautiful workmanship, until it was stolen from me by a prostitute in Naples while I was drunk, and for a long while I missed it.

I never raped a woman in Italy, but I know that many were doing it automatically, some of them saying that they were doing it for revenge, because the Italians stuck a dagger in France's back by occupying her territories when the Germans had defeated and subjugated the country already. Others, more sincere, confessed that they couldn't miss an opportunity to rape a woman when presented an occasion. It comes to my memory an episode that at that time seemed comic to all of us; now, after so much time, I look back at it with pain. It happened in a small town in Garigliano's area, where we were "resting" at a place that was, as usual for us warriors, a few miles in the rear of the front. I was walking close to the river when my eyes were attracted by a throng of our people around an isolated house a mile away, and, of course, guided by my curiosity, I went in that direction.

After remaining a good while in the midst of this multitude, making an effort to figure out what was going on, I learned later that some soldiers entered the property and began by raping the farmer's wife in front of him and his children.

When, by chance, an officer passed by with his sergeant in a jeep, he guessed what was

happening; he pulled his 44-caliber handgun and shot in the air, immediately reclaiming order. Still, with the gun in his hand, he went inside the house and asked the peasant what had happened, and when he learned the sad story, he asked him again who had raped his wife. The poor man, shaking and afraid, said in Italian, "Tutti, tutti, bianco, negro, tutti!" (Everybody, white, blacks, everybody.) When the officer asked him how many perpetrators there were, the man, still trembling and crying, said, "twenty, thirty, many, many soldiers." He was very much concerned about his wife because she was pregnant, and he feared that she could lose the expected child that would add to the other six that they already had. We were in the war zone, and apparently the officer was intimidated by the mob surrounding him, for they were looking at him with insolence, or perhaps he too hated the Italians. Anyhow, the fact was that he didn't take any action, or try to find who was guilty in this riot, but he ordered his sergeant to deliver to the farmer his personal food rations he was carrying in his jeep.

The Italian accepted the supplies with tears in his eyes, while all of us left this place, some more or less touched and others indifferent. The thundering of cannon that we were hearing from a distance intensified and became louder, waking us up from our momentary distraction and bringing us back to the cruel reality of the war that was developing with increasing intensity in the proximity. After supper, while sitting down on the grass in front of our tents with such other friends as Jojo, the fat Gomez, Fernandez, and Chamoune, we were commenting as usual about diverse topics and about our soldier's life.

Suddenly, Emile Poinceau said to Cassagnes, "Then the Moors' MBC is returning with them to Morocco?" I knew that MBC meant "Military Brothel in Campaign," but I didn't know how it was functioning. For quite a while, I had wanted to satisfy my curiosity about why, out of all the native Colonial troops that we had, only the Moors had the privilege to have their own ambulant brothel; and it was the right moment to ask about it. Emile Poinceau had served in the Spahis in Morocco, and with Cassagnes, an old one from the Colonial, perhaps one or both of them could satisfy my curiosity.

The conversation became general, because many had served in different Colonial branches, and each one was interrupting the next, while all of us were smoking and drinking red wine, trying to make it clear that the "Moors tabor" were mercenaries from the Shleu tribe from the Atlas mountains in Morocco. They enlisted for a six-month period, and in addition to their pay, they had the right to plunder, which wasn't recognized officially but in practice was tolerated. Without a brothel following them in a campaign, they would never go to fight.

These military units were unique, and in addition to the courage they displayed, they were specialized in fighting hand-to-hand in the mountains, and nobody could match them; it was for this reason that the French military authorities recruited them and often tolerated their barbarism and cruelty. General Clark, the 5th American Army Commander, loved them and used them in the most propitious situations, where no other unit would have succeeded.

The French officers who commanded them had to speak Arabic and usually were the best graduates of the renowned St.Cyr Military School, similar to the American West Point. It was, along with the Foreign Legion, the best place for a military career to be made quickly, because more than enough opportunities existed to show courage and determination, indispensable qualities respected by the Moors and the rough

Legionnaires.

These Moroccan Shleus were so audacious that even the common Moors feared them. They were earning money because they were mercenaries, but they were not killing Germans only because of the money; rather, being fanatic Muslims, they had an opportunity to be admitted directly into Allah's paradise, killing or being killed, by fighting the infidels. I didn't like them, mainly because they reminded me too much of the Spanish Civil War, where they were so cruel with us of the International Brigades. Of course, the situation was different here, because they were fighting for our cause and the Germans were scared to death of them.

These same Moors were not going to participate in the invasion of France, because we were afraid they could commit the same atrocities against the civilian population as they perpetrated in Italy, and only regular Moors' units from the Colonial Army could come along. All of them belonged to General Giraud's Army of Africa. We didn't have any "Moors tabors" unit.

I loved to listen to these African campaign veterans as they talked about this particular world of the French Colonial Army; even now, for most people that world is still unknown or a mystery. France, before WW II, had the second largest colonial empire, after England, and it needed a powerful army to keep its overseas territories. The way the natives were recruited in Black Africa is another confusing aspect later disclosed by Cassagnes, who spent almost all his life in that continent.

When the time came to draft native recruits for the infantry battalions, usually once a year and mainly during the dry season, a company of the Colonial Army was sent, with veteran aborigines who had been under arms for several years and the infamous "Black Sergeants," under a few white officers' command.

The expedition would open a track or path in the almost impenetrable jungle with machetes, until it reached a town inhabited by several thousands, generally under the rule of a chief, or a Little King's domination. Some trinkets as gifts were brought along for the head of the tribe, telling him that the French Republic needed five men out of a hundred from him to serve in the army for two years.

The following day, the Ruler would assemble everybody in the town's square and personally would point with his finger to who had to serve in the army, usually men he wanted to get rid of. Those selected could be as young as 15 or as old as 40. The Ruler didn't care if they were married or not, and he didn't care if these men opposed going; they had to obey his decision, and they obeyed without complaint.

Once the "draftees" were chosen, they were at once surrounded by the long-time-trained Black soldiers, and the expedition then went to other towns to repeat the same operation, until they fulfilled the assignment of the number of men to bring back. Usually, they recruited 30% to 40% more men than they needed, because during the night, no matter how good the guard was, many succeeded in running away, and it was too far and too wearisome to catch the fugitives. It was much easier to grab many more men than needed, knowing in advance that many would escape. When this human herd, many of whom had seen a white man for the first time, arrived in a city, generally Dakar, they were locked in barracks and delivered to the "Black Sergeants'" care or servitude. With their twenty years' service in the army, these sergeants were the worst tormentors who ever existed. The poor devils, from the very beginning, had a problem with shoes they had never worn or even seen before, for they hurt their feet. Then they had to

remember by heart about twenty common command words in French, which they had to learn to obey immediately. That was the way the French overseas empire was recruiting the black soldiers to serve in their colonies, as without any doubt were all the other colonial powers.

On July 30, 1944, a patrol of our Marines had been assaulted by Italian Marines in Taranto's port. Later on, some civilians also mistreated some of our men on leave. The reigning turmoil started boiling and degenerated into a violent and disorderly attack on Italian sailors by our soldiers in the port, leaving many dead and many more wounded and ending as a provocation that generated the Taranto inhabitants' hostility. This situation extremely irritated our General Brosset, and he personally ordered the Marines not to act on their own, because the Allies were seeing these acts as evidence of a lack of military discipline.

Tranquility returned, and we renewed our routine style of life. We had plenty of time to spare, and usually, when we weren't on duty drilling recruits or on guard duty, we were spending most of the time on the beach, beginning to feel almost like tourists.

It was quite interesting to look at us whites on the beach, wearing swimming suits, while the blacks, who adored the sea, where they liked to play and to swim, were jumping into the water naked. They were very primitive and shy, trying to hide their genitals, mainly their huge penises between their legs, and they would slowly walk, almost slightly limping, toward the sea. It was the funniest scene to looking at them naked, with what looked like a big banana that reached their knees' length.

I think that the Black Africans are the most sexually developed males of our species. Anyone who had served with the indigenous troops or had lived in Africa can confirm it. One of our insults was, "Go get a Senegalese to stick it in your rear!" or talking about an hysterical woman, we would say, "She needs a Senegalese to calm her down!" or as a joke, "Watch out and don't get grabbed by a Senegalese!"

At last, the so much expected moment came, and on August 5, our units started by embarking on the Liberty Ships in Taranto's port. We left the Tucker Camp and boarded the Dutch ship *Vollendam*. The rest of the 1st DFL embarked with all the headquarters, including our General Brosset, on the following vessels: *Sobieski*, *Durban Castle*, *Staffshire*, and *Empire Pride*. Our Commander in Chief de Lattre hoisted his pennant on the Polish transport ship *Baroty*, while the heavy division's material was loaded in the *Brindisi*'s port. One more time, we had to be patient; even though we had been on the roadstead, with 80 other vessels, for a full week.

Suddenly, our ship received the order to take its place in the convoy that had formed, and we would start moving any time soon. We were escorted by warships and strike planes, to protect us against submarine attacks. When these files of ships, reaching the horizon, started moving, we knew that the final destination was France.

After a few days' navigating, we learned that on August 15 a force of 10,000 American, English, and French paratroopers disembarked on the Cote d'Azur. Then we opened the sealed envelopes and learned that we would disembark the following day in Cavalaire.

The author, eight years old, Berlin, 1926



Paris, 1930



Paris, 1932, Mother Mary, sister Maya and author



The Havre, France, 1937, the family ready to journey to Argentina. Farewell party: Author, Davoudian, mother Mary, Henri Marmarian, sister Maya, father Kiril and old friend Boris.



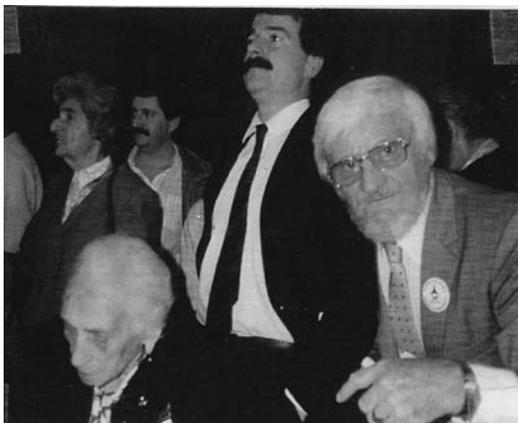
Upper right: author, vacation in Miramar, Argentina. Lower left: September 1944, south of France, heading toward Lyons. Author driving his jeep with captain Huet on his side. Right: Spanish Civil War, Caspe, Oct. 1936. Durruti Army, Pierre Carpentier (French) Juan Mayol Ballester (Catalan Anarchist, exiled in France), Eugene Rappaport (born in France of Russian Jews) and author.



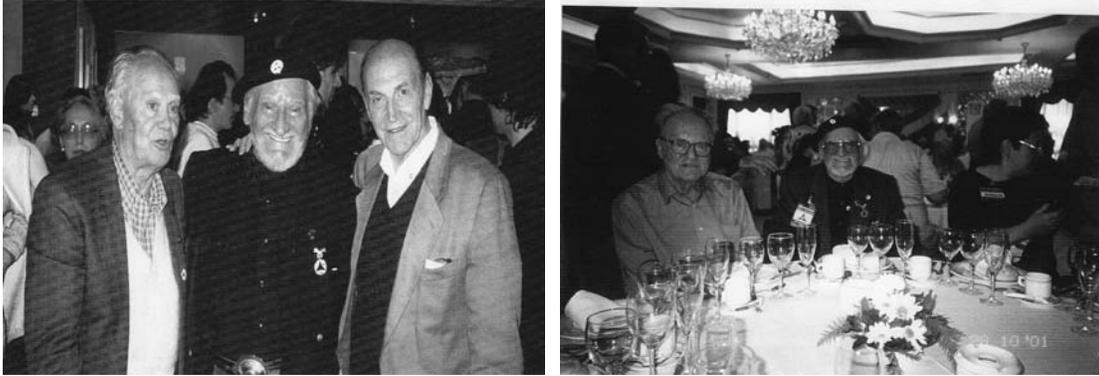
New York, 1985, annual dinner of VALB (Veterans of Abraham Lincoln Brigade).
Ed Asner (movie actor), two activists, Brigadista Jacques Grunblatt and author.



Left: Madrid 1996, Homage to the Brigadistas. La Pasionaria autographs a book for the author. Below: Homage to the International Brigades.



Below left: L.B. Convention in Madrid, with Gervasio Puerta and poet, Marcos Ana.
Right: Madrid, Oct. 2001, official dinner in honor of L.B. Author sitting
with writer Gabriel Jackson.



Below: author with Moe Fishman (VALB's secretary) at the
monument for the L.B. in Barcelona



Chapter 10

For this new military operation, we were no longer part of the 5th American Army. We disembarked as a B Army, with all the other French divisions, as part of the 7th American Army, under the command of General Patch.

Our 1st DFL landed on the French beaches on August 16, in the evening, transported ashore by about 2,000 Higgins flat-bottomed landing crafts, which were ferrying the troops from the ships to the shores.

On our right side, the 36th American Infantry Division was doing the same thing. It was also part of the 7th Army. As soon as we approached Cavalaire's beaches, several German airplanes appeared.

Immediately, all the sky was covered by an artificial cloud, while our anti-aircraft machine guns began shooting at the intruders, who after dropping a few bombs on our positions, disappeared from our sight. Our first losses were fifteen dead and several dozen wounded, almost all of them from the 3rd Argelian Infantry Division.

While we were disembarking, the sound of the cannons never stopped some place far from us, and sometimes we could see smoke coming from burning fires behind the mountains. The French soldiers were emotional, because some had been waiting for years to be able to return to their fatherland and liberate it from the Nazis.

Once on the shore, the first thing we had to do was to remove the sealing grease product that the vehicles' carburetors had been covered with, so that we could enter the water during the disembarkment. On the bridgehead, the officer Jean Pierre Aumont stood; he had disembarked with the Americans and the unit commanded by Markin and was helping to direct the traffic. When we arrived in Gassin, with a little German resistance, we were received by a delirious population, being the first French soldiers they saw after five years of German occupation.

We proceeded in "cleaning" the region of the enemy until we reached Hyeres on August 22, while heavy fighting erupted around the Gulf Hotel, which the Germans had transformed into a bulwark to protect the port of Toulon. The following day, the Germans counterattacked in Giraudiere, close to Hyeres, and I, not realizing that my unit had moved back, remained by myself, trapped.

When I saw the first German soldiers, I hid in a granary, with my semi-automatic carbine ready to open fire if they came close to my hiding place. I heard shots coming from far away, but because I was insulated, I could see very little and know much less about what was going on outside. I could see the street by peeping through a little keyhole, thus following the German movements; the Germans were running and shooting toward the East, where our forces were supposed to be. It never came to my mind, not even in my dreams, to surrender and be taken prisoner by the Germans. I had already had this preoccupation in Spain, where I was carrying mercury on me, ready to swallow it if the enemy was about to take me prisoner or if I wasn't able to continue fighting any more. I preferred to die, rather than have the shame of being taken prisoner, a possibility that I couldn't even conceive.

I was on the lookout, and I was getting ready to fight at the first sign of

danger. I was at full attention, ready for the worst, when I heard French being spoken outside and realized that our forces had counterattacked, retaking Giraudiare. I felt relieved, out of danger, and I got out of the granary to resume the fight.

We had a lot of losses when taking Toulon, but we couldn't annihilate all of General Wiese's 19th German Army, which succeeded in escaping toward the north. In that place, we took several thousand German prisoners, and I was surprised to see among them Armenians and Georgians belonging to the Ost-Legion. It was a very depressing scene, seeing these thousands of war prisoners who already had walked more than 20 miles and kept on moving on foot under a tremendous burning heat, without water. It seemed to them that everything they had on was too heavy to carry, and they were removing their jackets, throwing them away to feel lighter, then the hats, then the belts, wanting to be without any extra load on them, and it was obvious that they couldn't take it any more. We were looking at them while sitting on the grass, on a small hill, close to the road, smoking and contemplating this sad parade. I was sorry for them, because they belonged to the Wehrmacht and were not Nazis; most had been drafted, and I learned later that many of them opposed Hitler's madness.

In our kitchen, a soldier named Schneider worked, an Alsatian, short in height, with blond hair and blue eyes, always silent and very quiet, and I don't remember ever having heard him say a word. We were looking at this moving spectacle, mainly seeing that some of these German soldiers had white hair and were begging, "wasser, wasser, bitte," offering their wallets in exchange for some drops of water. The guards serving as escorts were pushing them along with their gun butts to make them walk faster. It all happened so fast. All of a sudden, we saw five or six of our men running toward the prisoners, beating and mistreating them. I saw an old German prisoner who received so many strokes that he stopped moving and fell on the road, nobody able to lift him. He was dead! I couldn't understand how a human being could be so cruel or so low as to beat a defenseless and unknown prisoner. In addition to that, it was against all international laws, legal and moral. The small Schneider kept on hitting the prisoners with his fists without pity, until the guards had to intervene and ask him to leave them alone.

I hated this vile and despicable man, because he never had been in the front fighting, remaining all the time in his kitchen. He never did show his courage, if he had any, because he always remained far away from the battlefields. Schneider's features remained engraved in my memory, but after that event I didn't see him for a good while. The most interesting thing was that when we liberated a war prisoners camp in Alsace about eight months later, there was Schneider, who had been taken prisoner by the Germans three months previously. I never learned how it had happened, because Schneider was always far away from the front. It happened during the last of German General von Ruhshted's offensive, which succeeded with a tremendous counterattack to push us back for twenty miles. During this drive, many of the allied soldiers had been taken prisoners, mainly French and Americans.

One more time, I felt that this something that I call "Universal Harmony" was at work, because for a certain reason of logical compensation and circumstances, one way or another bad actions are always repaid. When I saw Schneider again, I couldn't help asking him, "How was your prisoner life?" and seeing that he wasn't answering, just looking at me with his scared eyes, I kept on tormenting him: "Did they by any chance

treat you as you treated their prisoners, the ones you assaulted in Hyeres?" He didn't remember me, and much less was he thinking that I would recall what had happened that day. After making a strange movement with his body, he looked at me with alarm and left, never more to be seen.

We learned with pain that our Commander in Chief, de Lattre, who had a complete incompatibility of character with our Chief General Larminat, whom we admired so much, had been removed from his coordination mission between the divisions, a case which had been taken to de Gaulle. I learned with pain also that our funny buddy who made us laugh so much, Jean Fernandez, had been killed during the storming of the city of Toulon. The 19th German Army under General Wiese was slowly retreating to the north, while our forces were chasing him. Once again, a great dissention erupted, when General Patch wanted his 7th U.S. Army to enter Lyons, while all of us were expecting to be the first to take this second most important French city, a dream that had been shared by all Free French Forces. It was after many arguments that an agreement was reached allowing our division to liberate Lyons, thus relaxing the tension accumulated until then in our ranks.

We had already reached the Rhone River, liberating Arles and Avignon, and now a very short distance separated us from the great capital of the silk industry. The German General Wiese was retreating now with such speed that more than once, we lost contact with his troops, and for want of fuel, we had to stop our operations, while the Americans crossed the river on the east and were in Saint-Symphorien d'Orzon. It was only on September 2 that we were in a condition to attack Lyons, even though we learned with anger that the Germans blew up twenty-two bridges over the Rhone River, without encountering any resistance from the Interior French Forces, the name the partisans gave themselves.

We entered Lyons with almost no serious resistance, and we were surprised to see so many uniformed military people with fancy stripes on their shoulders, strolling by the city or driving in military formation in official or private cars they had confiscated. General Brosset had already visited the city, driving his jeep, and when he came back, he almost insulted us by saying, "What are you doing, lazy ones? What are you waiting for? I was in the city's downtown, and I stopped in a bistro to drink a glass of wine! I kissed at least two hundred girls, and all of you are standing here! Are you playing cowboys and Indians, or something? While you are staring with your open mouth, the Germans had time enough to destroy all the bridges, without any opposition. Go ahead, fast!" It took a while for the city inhabitants to realize that these soldiers with the American uniforms were French, and when they were convinced of it, everybody ran toward us to hug and kiss us.

Brosset was irritated to see all these guerrillas who practically didn't participate in the liberation of Lyons now swaggering all over, armed to the teeth and shooting at any window that looked to them as though it could hide Germans. The gunfire never stopped, until General Brosset sent a Marine detachment to disarm these "civilians with guns" who created so much confusion and unrest.

Only one bridge remained fit for transit, one the Germans didn't have time to blow up, the Homme de la Roche (Man on the Rock), over the Saone River, one of the Rhone's tributaries. A lot of disorder still reigned in Lyons, and General Brosset nicknamed the partisans "costumed soldiers," for they were strolling all over, dragging

women with shaved heads on the streets for having lived with German soldiers during the occupation; or they marched suspected Laval's "militians" who were all bloody, with their hands tied up. This bunch of heroes who appeared suddenly just after the fight were creating a nasty general environment. Of course, not all the guerrillas were fakes. Some, like the Secret Armed Chambarand Battalion, fought against the Germans with courage, and when we arrived, they enlisted in our 4th Infantry Battalion.

The population threw themselves on us, mainly the women, who gladly befriended us with no loss of time. Needless to emphasize, I didn't miss my share of opportunities to have intimate encounters with pretty girls; just the same, I still wasn't removing my shirt when going to bed with women, for my scars were still too visible.

Once, walking with my friend Cassagnes close to the only bridge not destroyed, we saw a Peugeot occupied by a middle-aged couple stop at our side, and the man who was driving told us, "Listen, Gentlemen Officers, we are celebrating your arrival, and we are going to the Cafe de la Gare, where a very good orchestra is playing, and to be fair, the food as well as the wine they serve is not too bad either; would you do us the honor of accepting our invitation to be our guests? They didn't have to beg us very much, because as soon as they opened the door of the car, we were already sitting in the back seats. We passed streets full of people, mainly pedestrians walking among the debris.

The Cafe Restaurant was a beautiful place decorated with taste, where an orchestra of five musicians played American music. Monsieur Croiseur, our host, seemed to be very well known there, and we learned that he was a notary, which in France is as prestigious as being an attorney. As soon as we entered the big saloon, the maitre d'hotel, with all the respect due to a notary, showed us to one of the best tables in front of the dance floor, where many couples were moving to the beat of the music. Our table was decorated with French flags and flowers. Madame Croiseur told us, half confidentially, as if it were a secret, that they had decided to invite a couple of French heroes from General de Gaulle's Army, and not yet having met any, they felt that luck would decide for them, and they left home by driving.

"As you see, everything went well; we found you, and we hope you will have a wonderful time, because we are here, thanks to you, and the celebration is in your honor!" she ended, saying with a smile, proud to have "heroes" at their table. Almost by magic, two bottles of wine appeared on the table, one red and the other white, while the music resounded loudly to the pleasure of the dancing couples. More than half of the patrons were military, and they also seemed to have been invited by the city's families.

The musicians were excellent and were performing all kinds of dancing music, chiefly American, the newest fashion for us, but almost unknown by the majority of the people, because during Petain's regime, dancing was outlawed. It was also the reason that the girls weren't very good at it. They were trying to get up to dance and learn as fast as they could.

Suddenly, the orchestra began by playing the popular German song "Lili Marlene," which generated an uneasy general silence in all the dining-room. I was sensing that something bad would happen, angry at the musicians who had such bad taste as to play something German.

Unexpectedly, close to our table, a Marine got up and walked firmly toward the

musicians. He faced the violonist, grabbed his instrument, and broke it, slamming it on the floor as he was screaming at the band, "Sons of dogs! Only a few days ago, you were entertaining German officers, and now you dare to poison this environment by playing the same Nazi music!" I don't remember the details, nor who started or who ended it, but the fact was that it degenerated into something quite common for us, a real squabble of great proportion, with fistfights where bottles, glasses, and even chairs were flying in the air.

The women, taken by surprise, because it was the first time that they had really had a good time in five years, were screaming, while everybody was running toward the closest doors to get out of the restaurant. The poor musicians lamented having such a bad idea as to play a German song for French soldiers, paying the price with their instruments, which were completely destroyed as a result of this stupid incident.

With Cassagnes and some other officers, we went to the center of the melee, trying to restore order and also to protect the musicians, who were in danger of being harmed by the Marines, who were excessively aggressive. Unfortunately, as happens very often in these cases, other Marines, thinking that we were on the musician's side and were about to attack their friends, came to confront us. The fistfight became general, but Cassagnes and I weren't drunk enough to enjoy this scuffle; then we remembered that we came with the Croiseurs, and we went back to our table to protect them.

Unfortunately, they were already gone, thinking that we had abandoned them, or perhaps they were just scared and afraid of being beaten; in any case, they ran away, seeing that almost all the uniformed men were involved in this battlefield. We regained the street, but couldn't remember where our kind friends left their car, and after several efforts to locate it, we gave up and tried to return to our camp, which we remembered wasn't too far from the only bridge left in service, close to the place where the Croiseurs drove by and gave us the kind invitation.

While we were having a good time, other units that replaced us on the front were fighting, and we learned with sorrow the following day that several comrades had been killed in action, including the "Fat Gomez," a good friend of Andriani, with whom he fought in Bir Hacheim; Chentouf, always taciturn; Sergeant Philippe Dietrich; Maurice Chateaubrin; and several more whom I knew, but with whom I hadn't had time to establish a close friendship.

On the other hand, we also had good news when we learned that some veterans who had been taken prisoner by the Germans in Bir Hacheim escaped from the Italian war prisoner camp and went to seek asylum in Switzerland, where they had been very well treated, and they had just arrived from that friendly country. They were Sergeants Laye, Farcas, Van Develde, Viard, Frantichek; Corporal Abou Chacraet; and soldiers Abdeslam B. Abdeslam, Sabat, Kadour Mohamet, Halbouni, Tuck Amine, Dine Marcel, and Abou Chelbi.

Provisions, supplies, ammunition, and fuel were exhausted. The Germans were retreating too fast, and our quartermaster corps couldn't come to deliver our combat supplies fast enough. For that reason, we had to remain a few more days in Lyons, waiting to have our division fit and replenished with what was needed, so as to be able to move northward to pursue the enemy.

I will never forget the evening when we were treating our heroes from Bir Hacheim in the Half Moon, at Lyons outskirts, the day before leaving the city. These

brave "Gaullists," after so many vicissitudes and adventures, following their successful escape from the camps surrounded by barbed wire received sanctuary in Switzerland, where they remained waiting for us. They knew that we would soon reach Switzerland's border, and they crossed the Rhone River to join our army.

I was surprised to hear Frantichek saying that he had been fighting in Spain, in the XIII International Brigade. I went to him, and we both left the group to remain by ourselves to evoke our mutual memories, which were too intimate to share in front of witnesses. Frantichek was Czech, and he fought until October 28, 1938, participating in the historical parade of the International Brigades in Barcelona, when they were leaving Spain. At that parade, Pasionaria had made her unforgettable speech: "Better to die standing than to live kneeling." When he arrived in France with many thousands of other Republican soldiers, he was interned in the French concentration camp of Gurs until 1939, when World War II began.

The French authorities were putting pressure on the internees to enlist in the Foreign Legion, and that was how Frantichek, a huge blond Slav colossus, tired of the humiliating life of Gurs, was recruited to fight the Nazis in the French Army. In June 1940, the Germans routed the Franco-English forces, and a great number of soldiers escaped to Dunkirk and later were transported to England.

About three weeks later, when Marshal Petain became head of the French Government and signed the humiliating peace treaty with Germany, General de Gaulle, who was in England as military attache, made an appeal to the French people, asking them to keep on fighting and pronouncing his historical sentence, "We lost a battle, but we didn't lose the war!"

Frantichek, with many other Brigadistas and Spanish Republican soldiers who enlisted in the Foreign Legion, volunteered to join the Free French Forces. I already knew the rest of the story, when they had been sent to Egypt. Fighting in the 8th English Army, they had been surrounded in Bir Hachein by the Germans, who took a good number of French prisoners and sent them to Italian camps. Frantichek succeeded in escaping from his confinement, thanks to the brave "partigianis" Italian guerrillas, who helped him to cross Switzerland's border, where, with many thousands of other refugees from many countries, he had been well received.

He was feeling very happy to be with us again, and more than once he told me that he was lucky that the Germans never learned that he had been a Brigadista in the Spanish Civil War, because he would have been shot on the spot, as they were doing with so many who fought for the Spanish Republic. It had been a long while since I had talked about the Spanish Civil War, because in my unit we didn't have any who participated in it. I was surprised to learn that the Czech was up to date on all the international events, and Frantichek told me that they had a lot of spare time in Switzerland, and the natives provided them with newspapers and invited them to listen to the news on the radios in their homes. He never stopped bragging, saying that he never had seen people as kind as the Swiss.

To protect its independence, this little country, surrounded by Germans on all borders, maintained an army of men, ages 20 to 40, under arms, during all the wartime. In addition to this burden, Switzerland had to take care of a large number of refugees of many nationalities, mainly Jews. Everybody was taken care of by the Swiss government, which was giving them lodging, food, and clothing at a great sacrifice by the local

population who always volunteered to help them, sharing with them what they had.

We had a profound love for Switzerland, which so much helped needy people who crossed her borders during the war to escape from the Germans, the country's thereby risking alienating its powerful neighbor.

I was surprised to learn that we had in our Free French Forces many volunteers who fought in the Spanish Civil War, mainly in the 2nd Armored Division of General Leclerc, which liberated Paris. Much more surprised was I years later when I was informed that many of them had also been fighting with the French guerrillas. When I confessed that I had a very poor opinion of the French partisans, if I had to judge them by their behavior I had seen in Lyons, Frantichek told me that besides the known guerillas, there were many "last-minute partisans," but a lot of real fighters sacrificed their lives, when they fell into German hands. He told me also something I had completely ignored, that on August 24 of this same year, it was Colonel Rol-Tanguy in person who received from the hands of the German General Von Choltitz the surrender of his forces in Paris. I was very emotional, because Colonel Roy-Tanguy for a short period of time had been my commander when I was in the XIV International Brigade in Spain. During the German occupation of France, he organized a resistance group and became the chief commander of the Ile-de-France partisans.

Frantichek told me that many Brigadistas were still fighting against the Nazis, and showing proof of his exceptional memory, he continued to give me such names as Joseph Epstein in Paris, Jean Baillet, and Carre and Goefroy in Limousin. The ex-commissar of the XIV Brigade, Jean Hemmen, along with Haudecoeur and Lafond, had been shot by the Germans who caught them while they were placing dynamite at the entrance of a military arms warehouse.

In Nimes, the Spanish formed a half-brigade under the command of Cristino Garcia, who became a colonel in the FFI. I learned later with sadness that when he returned to Spain after the war, Franco gave orders to shoot him. There also existed a well known group called "Manouchian-Boezov," under an Armenian commander Manouchian, whose 23 members had been shot by the Germans in 1944 and of whom five of them had been fighting in Spain in the International Brigades: the Polish Grzywacz, Kubacki, and Gedulfig; the Hungarian Boezov; and the Spanish Celestino Alfonso. A Rumanian girl who was with them had been beheaded. The group committed 46 assaults against Teutonic military installations, with the result of 150 Germans killed and 600 wounded.

It was late, and the wine we were drinking as we were talking was keeping us warm, while our minds brought more and more memories that we were living one more time. Returning to the group with Frantichek to the welcome party for the newcomer veterans of the Bir Hacheim battle were Jules Chaltelan, always serious as a good husband, and Maurice Villermoze, exuberant as a little bride. They were walking in my direction. Both of them knew that I didn't have any prejudice and that I felt that it wasn't any of my business what they were doing, because I judge people by their moral integrity, their behavior as human beings, and the sincerity of their friendship. Villermoze, with his feminine smile, told me, "Michael, we found a transvestite bar in Lyons that functioned during the German occupation, closed once, and again opened when they learned that the allied forces were close and the Nazis were leaving. We found it by coincidence, and it is called Dorian Gray. It was full of very interesting people; we

even met one who is working there who is as pretty as a movie star, and nobody would believe that he was a man. I even became jealous when my Jules looked at him with insistence and desire."

I didn't realize that Moutarde and Emile Poinceaux were standing at my side, and the latter asked Maurice where the place was and what this "beauty's" name was, because we wanted to see him, Emile saying that he loved to look at men dressed as women and that he was very liberal in this respect. We knew that he was saying all these things only to be able to get the needed information from the couple. We learned that the transvestite's name was Gigi, and we also got the address.

I didn't realized what was cooking then; Frantichek had left to rest in his tent, and I saw my two friends cracking up with laughter. Once they calmed down, they told me that they had a brilliant idea, to bring the "virgin" Albert Duchamp to the place, without telling him that the hostesses were transvestites, but rather that they were just girls with whom men were coming to dance.

Chapter 11

When we learned that our departure had been postponed one more time for a day, both joker buddies, Moutarde and Poinceaux, succeeded in convincing their victim Albert Duchamp that it was about time for him to start living in the real world, and not to remain submerged in a kind of self-imagined domain. They insisted that his desire not to lose his virginity wasn't a reason to deprive him of enjoying a real life where women existed and that he should at least come with us to have an enjoyable evening.

Both accomplices swore that no strings were attached and that Albert wouldn't have any obligation toward any of the women. They convinced him that they wanted him to stop living with his eyes closed like an ostrich, which thinks that putting his head in a hole and not seeing the danger will make him immune to it. It was time to wake up and behave like a responsible, grown-up person ready to start to live a real life, and not continue as a child still believing in fairy tales.

After many vacillations, Albert accepted the invitation, with the condition that none of us would insist that he go with "these women" and that none of us would make fun of him in front of them. The three of us swore by the most sacred oath that he could trust our word. At nightfall, our group of four headed to the Dorian Gray, which had been recommended to us by Villermoze; to our disappointment, it was far away from our camp. Luckily, so many good people stopped their cars when they saw soldiers walking on the roads and offered them rides, and that was how we reached our destination.

I knew that Poinceaux went early that same morning to see "Gigi" and that he plotted something with her/him, but I wasn't exactly aware of the details; I suspected nevertheless that what they had plotted was nothing decent, and I assumed that he asked him/her to fall all over Albert with kindness and attention. When we reached this famous place, located in a poor Lyons suburbs, it was with suspicion and concern that we went down the steps to the basement, where the nightclub was located.

Our eyes weren't expecting to witness such a spectacular scene, given the nondescript, mundane appearance of the place from the street. We remained petrified by what we were looking at, because everything around us was pure luxury and extravagance, as much in the quality of decorations, tables, the dancing floor, and music as in the elegance of the patrons. We didn't want Albert to be aware that we were watching him, so we tried to behave in an indifferent manner, pretending that we were interested in the "girls." If we hadn't know that they were boys, we certainly would have found them the most adorable women because of their soft skin, their sensual bodies, and their stylish dress. Our surprise never ceased as we looked at these apparent beauties, with all their feminine charm.

When we entered this establishment illuminated by blue lights, we saw with amazement the large number of people moving inside the place. The great majority were military troops who were being entertained by about forty "girls," who were moving back and forth among tables, sitting down with the men to have a drink, or dancing with them in very tight embraces. As soon as we entered the huge room, three very attractive "girls" came to us, and immediately I figured out that the one who looked like a movie star was the famous "Gigi."

After the introductions, all of us took a chair around a table and ordered drinks, acting as if we were not seeing or noticing Albert. We did more—Poinceaux and I went to dance with the other two "girls," "Lulu" and "Cocotte." "Gigi" remained sitting at Albert's side, while Moutarde suddenly became very interested in the architectural structure of the ceiling, looking at it without lowering his eyes. We had agreed in advance not to invite "Gigi" to dance.

With "Cocotte," I made an almost professional demonstration of dancing the Argentine tango as I had learned it in Buenos Aires, becoming at once the hero of the night. All the "girls" wanted to dance the tango with me, calling me "Argentinian" with love, to the point that some of the other clients from different tables became jealous.

While we were busy with our amusements, to our delight, we saw out of the corners of our eyes that Albert and "Gigi" were holding hands and getting closer. We continued to behave as if they weren't with us, but we continued to peer at them furtively. We were cracking up inside ourselves as we watched their every move, because we had never seen Albert behave in such a manner. We had not seen him even look at a woman, much less to hold hands with one. It looked like "Gigi" knew her trade, because as the time passed, Albert was melting, becoming more and more affectionate with her.

Suddenly, the three of us were wide-eyed. It seemed like a dream to see "Gigi" kissing Albert on the mouth, with apparent mutual satisfaction. Poinceaux, who was sitting at Albert's side, told him to go to the room with "her"; it wouldn't be a sin, Poinceaux said, but just a little training, kind of a learning process. We realized that Albert had become another person, one whom we hadn't known until then. He was no longer the master of himself, and while kissing "Gigi" on her mouth, he was caressing her/his legs, slowly lifting her/his skirt and putting his hand deeper and deeper inside.

All at once, Albert jumped from his chair and started howling like a wild animal, suffocated by rage. It seemed that when he started exploring "Gigi's" legs with his hand and put that hand between her/his legs, he expected to feel warm and soft flesh, but instead his fingers had grabbed something similar to what he himself had between his own legs.

I just can visualize what could have happened inside Albert in that precise instant. The indignation stirred his ire to such an extent that he began throwing dishes on the floor, then chairs, tables, and whatever else he could put his hands on, while screaming, "Sons of dogs, why did you do this to me? Sons of bitches, if I catch you, I will kill you one by one! Where did you bring me?" While he was spitting out these insults and imprecations, he pulled a Beretta revolver from his pocket (most of us carried one as a "souvenir" from Italy) and began shooting in the air at first, then into the floor.

He originated such a disturbance that it was followed by a riot impossible to describe, and without asking, as the Argentines do, "Legs, for what do I have you?" we opened our way with our fists, pushing aside the waiters who blocked the doors and pressed us to pay the bill, and running away down the street.

Once we were outside, we had different reactions. We had a desire to laugh, even though it was a joy mixed with a little guilt; in war time it was a joy that was very attenuated, because we became cynical. We were happy that we had escaped from that queer situation, because for a good while, as we were running away, we still could hear noise and shots. We knew for certain that we would have been the recipients of Albert's rage if he had caught us.

We were serving in different companies, but just in case, for several days we hid from Albert. It wasn't difficult, because the following day our battalion started to move, putting an end to our rest time as we pursued our fight against the Germans who kept on retreating. It was really strange that I experienced these two tumultuous events in Lyons in such a short time and had to run away in both situations.

Somebody told us later that after we left the Dorian Gray, it became a real battlefield, because the soldiers never liked to miss a fistfight, the reason or the motive for a fight being of no great importance. In this case, the tumult had caused too much destruction, and shots had also been fired, attracting the military police, who arrived half an hour later. Of course Albert had been arrested and charged with misconduct, because everyone was a witness against him that he had started the fight and fired his gun. When the M.P.s communicated with our headquarters, the former learned that our unit was heading to the battlefield, and Albert was brought to our camp in a jeep. It was silly to keep a soldier in jail, especially when he was supposed to be going to the front, where men were needed so badly.

As a result of all the wartime assignments and relocations, I didn't see Albert Duchamp again until September 1945, four months after the end of the war. At the time, I was about to be demobilized, and I was getting ready to return to Argentina, but before I left, I wanted to enjoy one last time the charm of Paris, and I was strolling by the Place de l' Opera, close to the Grand Hotel, where an American recreation center for military personnel was open. This encounter was like a scene in the movies; when a young woman walking behind me stumbled and lost her balance, she unintentionally pushed me while trying to recover her balance and immediately apologized. Turning my head, I saw that a man was grabbing her by the arm, and looking at him, I couldn't refrain from smiling, because he wasn't just any man: he was Albert Duchamp, who already was wearing the chevrons of a sergeant.

We looked open-mouthed at each other for a while, but when he saw a smile on my lips, he came close to me and gave me a hug, saying with emotion, "This is my wife, Helene; we were married last month. I met her in Notre Dame Cathedral, during the victory celebration mass." Then, very proudly, while she glanced at a group of children a few yards from us, he said in a low voice, "And I got what I was looking for!"

Of course, I congratulated both of them and invited them to have a drink with me in one of the many cafes open on the Grands Boulevards. They were very emotional, as all newlyweds are, and I saw in Albert's eyes an infinite felicity. I learned that he was to be discharged the following month, and both of them were leaving for Brittany, where Helene's family had a farm. She was the only child, and the parents offered them the opportunity to live, work, and take care of the farm with them. After wishing them good luck, I gave the bride a kiss and my comrade in arms Albert a big hug, and we parted.

While I remained alone, I said to myself that I always thought that Albert would find this type of woman the kind he was always dreaming of. She was the prototype of a Briton peasant who knew only the road from home to the church, and, of course, she had remained a virgin until she was able to get married. I never again saw this brother in arms, who most surely must have been thanking his God for granting him what he most desired, even though he had to pass through so many painful situations before he found it.

We stopped to spend the night at Nuits St. Georges. This city produces one of the best French red wines, and we were certainly anxious to taste it, being very impatient to reach the place where we were scheduled to set up our camp. Reaching a crossroads where several military convoys were being detoured, we stopped. I was driving my jeep on roads full of holes, debris, and destroyed buildings when I saw standing on what used to be a sidewalk a young girl about ten years old. She was very thin, with uncombed hair, and she was too lightly dressed for the season, which was beginning to become cool, especially at night. As we were stopped because of the traffic, I don't know why, but I kept on staring at this little creature, who had something powerful in her look as she observed us with an adult's eyes.

I made her a sign with my hands to come closer to me, while I searched with my hand in my jeep's glove compartment for some of the chocolate that I always carried. Once I found it, I offered it to her, saying, "Take this chocolate. It is very good!" I knew that sweets were very scarce during the German occupation, and many children had never tasted chocolate. The girl looked at me with intensity and said that she wouldn't take it. I was surprised, because usually the children jumped all over us for chocolate until we didn't have any more to give to them. I couldn't understand why this little girl didn't want to take the chocolate that I was offering her.

I said one more time, "Look, it is chocolate; it is very good, so take it!" Several times she said no, and I was intrigued but still insistent; then she looked at me with her adult look and said, "You eat the chocolate! You need to be strong! You have to be strong to kill the Germans! They destroyed our house—over there you can see it! They killed my daddy, my mommy, and my little brothers. Now I am alone, and I want you to kill them, but for that you need to be strong, and you need to eat the chocolate to be strong!"

I wanted to tell her something, to comfort her, but at this precise moment, our convoy received the order to keep moving, because it was now our turn to cross the road, and our unit began to move. I turned my head one more time, and I saw the little creature still standing on the sidewalk in the same place, looking at the military vehicles that were going to the front to "kill Germans," as she said. This encounter remained engraved in my mind for the rest of my life. How horrible war is! Only those who don't participate in a war can be bellicose, and usually when such people are in power, they send other people onto the battlefield to be killed.

When we reached Nuits St. Georges, we were surrounded by girls, who invited us to a dancing party organized in our honor. This happened in every town where we would spend the night, and of course a great number of these girls were ready to please us. Each one of us was already choosing with his eyes the one he would like to have for the night. We didn't have time to waste; we were living too fast, and perhaps we would never pass through this place ever again.

After washing our faces and refreshing ourselves a little bit, Jojo, Bobby Assie, Chamoune, Gozlan, and I walked to the city hall, where a multitude of people were already expecting us, providing wine and music. Food was scarce, and we were providing cans of meat, our rations, coffee, and of course a lot of chocolate and chewing gum for the girls. Very few of the girls knew how to dance, because all festivities had been prohibited during Petain's regime, and for years the girls lived without enjoying it. We were doing our best to teach them how to dance, and of course we took advantage by

squeezing them against our bodies, saying that doing so was the best way for them to learn faster.

Jojo was a little drunk, and after a while, he disappeared with a young, plump girl. I saw him only the following morning, when the convoy was ready to leave for Dijon. Jojo, still with a hangover, his head weighing a ton, said to me, "Do you know, Michael, what happened to me? Did you see me leaving with a fatty? We went away from the main square where everybody was dancing; it was dark, and I was trying to find a place to lay my companion down. I couldn't see anything, and in the darkness with my hands I was looking for some flat place for us to lie down. It seemed to me that it was a table that I was touching; still, I didn't understand why it was made out of stone. I continued caressing my girl until I felt that she was ready; I lifted her skirt, and I laid her down on the table. After making love, which was so good for both of us, we fell asleep. When I woke up and my eyes became accustomed to the obscurity, I saw at the head of what I thought was a table a big cross. At first, not comprehending where we were, I continued to look around; then, suddenly, I realized that we were in the cemetery, and we had had sex while lying over a tomb!"

This story circulated like lightning through all our battalion, because not just anyone makes love on a tomb in a cemetery. Many years later, when Jojo came to visit with me in Atlanta, we recalled this adventure and many others, laughing, while our wives were trying to understand the reason for our joy.

On September 17, we pushed the Germans beyond Dijon, Auxonne, Dole, and Besancon, until we reached Abbenans, where we camped in the middle of the town. I was setting up my tent for the night, planning to wash myself and be ready for the habitual reception, with which we were received by the local youth who wanted to mark the liberation day of their town. I was busy putting some order into my belongings when all of the sudden, I saw that two girls, ten to twelve years old, were staring at me.

Knowing by now, that the kids wanted chocolate badly ever since they discovered we had it when the Allies disembarked, I offered the little I had left to the girls. To my surprise, they told me that they didn't come for chocolate, but that their mother told them to bring a "little soldier" home to entertain him and that they had "chosen" me, because I reminded them of somebody they liked very much. It didn't take me too much time to make up my mind and follow both girls, without forgetting to take with me some cans of food that the civilians craved, along with cigarettes and, of course, chocolate.

I was surprised when reaching the rather modest house to see a beautiful woman coming out, perhaps a few years older than I, strong, with a big bosom. She received me with an ear-to-ear smile. Jacqueline—that was her name—explained later that she was a Parisian who had come to live in this small town with her sister Ernestine because it was easier to find food to feed her daughters better. She was a divorcee, and with her sister she had decided to give a welcome to a "little soldier," because they couldn't afford to invite more, given the scarcity of food. During all this time, Ernestine kept an eye on me, but she was older than Jacqueline and too thin to boot, and she couldn't have known that I didn't like skinny women.

The food was very simple, and my cans therefore enhanced the menu greatly. The wine was abundant, and the three of us drank with zest. Then, to my surprise, and even more to her sister's, Jacqueline asked her sister, "Do me a favor and

take care of the girls, while I go to the square with Michael, where the orchestra is playing. I want to show him the town!"

I was under the impression that Ernestine was still hoping to have a chance to be chosen by me, and with poor grace she accepted the chore of babysitting the girls. We left the little house and headed to the center of the town, from which the sound of a fox trot and other American popular music was coming.

During a few dances, Jacqueline's body never ceased rubbing against mine, thus making me understand without words that she wanted exactly the same thing I wanted desperately, especially when we kissed with extreme passion.

One more time I became nervous, remembering my ill-fated visit to the whorehouse in Alexandria almost two years previously. I was worried about what Jacqueline's reaction would be if she saw my scars; however, I was always keeping my shirt on when going to bed with a woman.

Couples were strolling everywhere, and the music, the wine, the laughter, and the shouting were giving a general impression that we were living the last day of our lives, making our hearts beat very fast.

The evening was becoming very cool, and it was not feasible to try to lie down on the grass with Jacqueline, as I had done so many times before with others when the temperature was more agreeable; I was concerned, because I didn't know where to take her. Suddenly, after some ardent kisses, Jacqueline told me, "A lady friend of mine who went to Paris left me the keys to her room in case I needed to use it, and I don't believe that a better occasion to use it would ever exist than now."

I had previously been feeling needlessly uncomfortable, but my new date behaved so natural that I calmed down, and we began to walk to her friend's apartment. As soon as we entered the small room of her friend, she wasted no time in undressing, and seeing that I wasn't removing my shirt, she told me that she loved to make love completely naked, the way "God made us," referring to something that at this time I couldn't fathom.

I didn't know what to do. She didn't want to turn off the light, saying that she loved to see a man's face while he made love to her in bed. I was very excited and had a crazy desire to jump on her, but I was afraid she would see my scars, become repulsed, and reject me on the spot.

Time was running, emotions were about to burst, and I decided to gamble, staking everything on the chance of telling her about the tank, the battle, the desert, and how I got my scars. I never had patience enough to wait, and I always wanted to know where I stood, without wasting time in making assumptions.

When Jacqueline heard my story, her eyes filled with tears, which began running down her cheeks, and with her beautiful naked body, she came even closer to me, slowly removing my shirt. She then looked at me with a profound feeling of love, and while her tears were falling from her chestnut-colored eyes, she began kissing my body's scars, saying, "Little dummy, how come you don't realize that a woman likes to be with a man, with a macho man, and your war scars honor you; I adore each one of your scars, and you should be proud of this proof of your courage!"

I will never forget Jacqueline, who reaffirmed my confidence in myself, making my inhibitions disappear, because after that night with her, I never again was ashamed of my scars, and from that time on, I undressed without any preoccupation. To

my great surprise, most of the women who shared intimate moments in bed with me agreed with Jacqueline, or at least they pretended to do so. I never found any woman who would show repulsion at looking at my scars, or perhaps they knew how to hide it. I spent several fabulous days with Jacqueline. She was a first-class lover, and she knew how to make love in every imaginable position.

Before we parted, once my unit resumed the fight against the Nazis, she gave me her address in Paris, to which she was planning to return in the near future, and she asked me to come to see her during my leave. Suddenly, comes to my memory a picture of what happened a few months later in Paris in her apartment, when she left to go to the grocery store and I remained by myself with her two daughters, who were adorable. They loved me very much, and I played with them as if I were their father.

At that time, I didn't know whether to laugh or become angry when her younger daughter Antoinette, in her candor, said to me, "We love you, because you look so much like Fritz, who was also very good and always brought candies to us!"

Surprised, I asked, "Who is this Fritz?" Then the older one, Claudine, said, "Fritz is the German who was mommy's friend!" Realizing that they had succeeded in attracting my attention and thereby becoming important, they continued with their gossip. Claudine said, "It was the reason why we left Paris, when all you soldiers came! Fritz had to leave, and mommy was scared that someone could say something bad about her. I really don't know why, because Fritz was so good to us!"

I kept on asking questions, not being sure if it was jealousy, surprise, or anger motivating my curiosity, while at the same time I tried to appear indifferent in front of the girls, afraid that they would change the topic of conversation. Meanwhile, Claudine kept on babbling: "When we saw you the first time in Abbenans, since our mother had asked us to bring home a 'little soldier,' we chose you, because you looked just like Fritz—to the point that Antoinette said, 'Here is Fritz,' and I told her not to be silly, because you were wearing a different uniform!"

I realized then that Jacqueline had a German lover during the occupation period and had to escape from Paris when the Allies liberated the capital. At that time, the partisans, who were surging from everywhere—the real ones, rather than the "last moment guerrilleros,"—were punishing the French women who had been living with German soldiers by shaving their heads.

Jacqueline thought that after spending a few months in Abbenans with her sister—who didn't know anything about her adventure with 'Fritz,'—the partisans' vengefulness would cool down in Paris, and then it would be safe for her to return to her apartment, without the risk of facing the mob's anger.

In one sense, she was right, because the partisans were punishing the women who were sleeping with Germans; at the same time, too many partisan abuses had already been committed, and many people had taken advantage of this situation to try to get even with their enemies. People used a lot of different pretexts to exact personal revenge that had little to do with war retribution, and they were thus creating a great confusion. The mob retribution ended when a legal authority was designated to examine each individual situation before an accusation was made or punishment was executed.

Chapter 12

We were engaged in furious fighting on the fortified city outskirts of Belfort, where we had been stopped by the Germans' tenacious stubbornness. Our advance had been so fast that our supplies hadn't been able to reach us in time, quite often forcing us to interrupt our attacks.

We continued to incur large losses, including such personal friends as Ben Nayan, the Jewish Argelinian who had deserted Giraud's army to join us; Sergeant Dietrich; and Corporal Chentouf. Those killed in action were buried in a local military cemetery.

On the other hand, we rejoiced in learning that several companions who had been taken prisoner by the Nazis at Bir Hacheim had returned to our battalion by way of Switzerland. They had escaped from their German "stalag" in Italy and run to take refuge in Switzerland; they rejoined us when our troops reached the border of that hospitable country, which saved so many of our people. Many partisans from the Massif Central came to enlarge our army, and Captain Hauet formed a new company to intergrate Autun, a guerrilla brigade, into our division.

One day, we found an entire abandoned warehouse containing clothes and food for the German army; it had been left when the Germans were caught by surprise by our fast advance, and they had not had time the stored material with them. The captured warehouse provided the opportunity for a lot of recuperation and also plunder, as always happens in similar situations in war time.

I was lucky to put my hands on a magnificent German officer's folding bed, allowing me afterward to sleep with much more comfort, and from that time, I never parted with it. One evening, if I am not mistaken it was on September 24th, I went to drop by my friend Jojo's tent at the quartermaster's, and I was surprised to find so many people inside; there must have been at least twenty people squeezed in that small place. I was intrigued to see that all of them were North African Jews, with the exception of Guendler and the little Uruguayan Esquinazi.

As soon as I entered, they stopped talking in the midst of a noisy conversation, and they began staring in my direction, making me think that they wanted to have some privacy; I therefore moved back to the entrance, ready to leave.

Jojo, seeing that I was about to depart, jumped from his seat and said as much to me, as to those who were present, "Come on, Michael, you can assist in our meeting! All of you know him very well, and also his political orientation; he knows about our problem. He is a Marxist, and moreover he has fought in the Spanish Civil War in an International Brigade!"

I still couldn't guess what this was about, and I wanted to know a little bit more about this reunion, when Ben Souci, his brother Samuel, and at the same time Coco Levi, got up and pushed me down to sit on a wooden box, which was used as a chair, saying, "Sit down and listen; and if you wish, you can participate in our conversation."

I remained very quiet in my corner, without missing a word of the debate, becoming aware after a short while that they were talking about what the French Jews suffered during the German occupation.

The meeting lasted for several hours until late into the night, but I kept listening

attentively to the detailed description, accompanied by figures, presented by a fat sergeant with glasses, whom I never had seen before, learning only later that he was Jojo's friend from Sfax.

I learned a lot that day, and this information, supplemented by my previous reading of the newspapers in Argentina and again of the newspapers in Egypt, gave me enough knowledge about the liquidation of the Jews. I remained almost paralyzed, listening to the details of this infamous and repugnant repression committed by the Nazis, "the superior race." Of the 330,000 Jews who were living in France before the war, the Nazis sent 76,000 to the concentration camps in Germany, and they never returned. As soon as the Nazis set foot on conquered territory, they despoiled of their belongings all the affluent French class, such as the Rothchilds, from whom the Nazis appropriated their properties, art objects, and bank checking accounts.

After that, they did the same thing with tens of thousands of shopkeepers and other members of the middle class living in Paris and the suburbs. Marshal Petain's government from Vichy collaborated in everything with the Germans, and on March 29, 1941, by a special decree, the term "Jewish religion" had been substituted for by "Jewish race."

Dannecker was in charge of the anti-Jewish Gestapo section in France, and he requested the French police to deliver personally to the Gestapo all the foreign Jews who were living in the Parisian region. On May 14, 1941, these police arrested 3,747 foreign Jews, including Poles, Russians, Czechs, and Austrians, interning them in concentration camps at Pithiviers and Beaume-la-Romaine in the Loiret.

The second operation took place the same year on August 20, when 4,232 Jews, of which a thousand were French, were sent to the Drancy concentration camp. On December 12, about 700 members of the Jewish middle class and businessmen were arrested at Compiègne by the Gestapo, and 53 of them were shot by a firing squad as punishment for acts of violence against the Germans committed by the partisans. The first Jewish deportation from France started on March 23, 1942, when 1,112 Jews, half French and half foreign, were sent to concentration camps in Germany.

In June 1942 in Paris, a new German police department was installed, under the orders of SS General Oberg, with SS Colonel Knochen as his assistant. On the French side, the Laval police under their chief, Rene Bousquet, offered the Germans complete collaboration in the fight against the Reich's enemies, including Jews, communists, Gaullists, and terrorists. As of May 29, 1942, all Jews over the age of six had to wear a yellow band with the Star of David with the word "Jew" on the left sleeve of their shirts. After that date, an average of 1,000 Jews were sent to Germany every week. The French clergy reacted, sending a note to Vichy saying, "We cannot drown the scream of our conscience any more," but the protest was to no avail.

That year, the Gestapo received 40,000 people deported from France, as many from the occupied as from the free zone, sending all of them to Auschwitz. Then, in November 1942, all of France was occupied and remained under German control.

The Italian authorities admitted to their country all the French and foreign Jews who could reach the Riviera, which the Italians were occupying. The Italians were giving protection to their Jews, to the extent that very often they would deliver to these people new identity documents that did not mention the word *Jew*.

The Germans put pressure on Mussolini in March 1943, requesting him to

hand over all the Jews from the French region that Italy was occupying. The Italian inspector general in charge of the Jewish question, with his adviser Angelo Donati, an Italian Jew who knew with notable efficiency and ingenuity how to systematically protect the Jews, saved a lot of them, without considering their origin.

The Gestapo persisted, requesting to have more Jews be sent to Germany, and under the command of the implacable Alois Brunner, the most feared of all Eichman's delegates, they began the bloodthirsty hunting of Jews on the Riviera. Unfortunately, on September 8, the Allies prematurely announced the signing of the armistice with Italy, depriving the 20,000 Jews who took refuge in Nice the opportunity to be saved by being shipped to a safe place in North Africa, as planned, for Germany, learning about the betrayal by its partner, occupied Italy and sent all these Jews to concentration camps, where they perished. In France, the sending of trains packed with Jews to Germany intensified in 1944: 4,000 Jews from Paris, 1,400 from Marseilles, 1,000 from Nice, 950 from Lorraine, 900 from Lyons, and about 3,500 from the south. Darnan, with Klaus Barbie, was helping Brunner round up Jewish children to send them to extermination camps.

After he finished reading this report, the fat man, whose name was Ben Dardi, very slowly folded the papers containing the report in his hands, wiped the sweat from his brow—because he was sweating a lot—and remained, like all of us, a good while in silence, nor did we look at each other. Little by little, the comments about the report came, but without the agitation that I had found when I entered the tent about three hours previously.

Everyone was emotional, because it wasn't a laughing matter! Ben Dardi was working at the headquarters, in the security section, where he had access to confidential information that he wanted to share with his brethren Jews and friends. We said goodbye in silence, almost religiously, and each went to his own shelter, for it was late.

The next day, we had to follow the same routine, even though we were out of patience, because the Germans were well entrenched in Beaufort's works and were resisting with stubbornness all our assaults. The temperature was changing little by little, and at night we could feel the cold, especially because we still were wearing our light summer uniforms and hoping to receive warmer clothing at any time from our baggage train that we had left in Provence.

The losses of life on the front were increasing, but on the other hand, with our winter clothes came an unexpected wave of newly formed units of our FFF that had crossed the border. The new units were composed of those who had been taken prisoner at Bir Hacheim, had escaped from German camps in Italy, as many others had before, had taken refuge in Switzerland, and had come back to our unit, including such men as Sergeant Laye and Corporals Viard, Abou Chacract Hassan, and Abdeslam B. Abdeslam.

In addition to this reinforcement, entire units of partisans were coming to our division to replace, at least to a certain extent, the men we had lost in battles. The entire 13th Partisan's Company, under the command of Lieutenant Perrin, came to join our brigade, as did Thivollet's Battalion, under the command of Captain Mariotte, who in civilian life was a medical doctor.

All these new units, in addition to the recruits who came individually to integrate our ranks, were placed under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Babonneau,

an old Bir Hacheim veteran and ex-prisoner, as well as many more who had escaped from an Italian camp to return to our division. Suddenly, we learned with a childish joy that the convoy with our baggage train and the winter uniforms had just arrived.

The fighting on the front was increasing in intensity, and we had to understand that our quiet period was over, because our forces were attacking now on all fronts without any rest. Because the 7th American Army retreated, our 1st Army had to be extended on the left flank, with the mission to cover the 6th American Army, which was heading toward Gerardmer. At the commander General Truscott's request, approved by our General De Lattre, we jointly attacked Lyoffans city.

It took us an entire day to capture this town, because the Germans entrenched in the cemetery were repelling our assaults with a powerful fire. The following day, the situation didn't seem to be much better for us, even though we had extended our flanks to the Cherimont forest. After heavy attacks and counterattacks, we reached Amdornay, which we secured but paid for with heavy losses.

On September 28, we reached Lure, where we installed our headquarters, and one more time the front was momentarily stabilized. Belfort was still resisting, no matter how hard our forces, combined with the Americans, repeatedly assaulted the Germans there. The Germans were well entrenched, stopping our advance with an obstinate resistance, in spite of all of our efforts to dislodge them.

On the Eastern front, developments of which all of us followed very closely, we learned that the Russians were advancing very fast after routing the Germans at Stalingrad on August 22, 1943, taking 200,000 prisoners. This triumph proved to be very expensive, because the Russians lost more than 750,000 of their soldiers, while half a million German warriors were buried on Russian land.

The Red Army, whose luck completely changed, was now advancing on all fronts, and by the last news we received, we learned that the Soviets had already crossed the border with Poland and the Baltic countries, where intense battles raged.

One more time our headquarters was transferred, this time to Alsace, where the 1944 winter was the coldest registered in this region's history. We weren't too far from Strasburg, where civilian life was reactivated almost immediately after the liberation. In November, sporadic battles still persisted in the Geromany region, which we had not as yet succeeded in seizing. On the 20th of the same month, we received a heavy shock, difficult to bear, especially for the old 1st DFL veterans, when we learned that our popular General Diego Brosset had been killed in action.

His assistant lieutenant, Jean Pierre Aumont, who was with him, reported, "With the General at the steering wheel, the Sergeant Chief on his side, and I in the back of the jeep, we were driving toward Champagny, while encountering on our way a large number of civilians returning to the homes they had left during the German occupation. When we reached the Plancher-Bas bridge, we didn't know that it had been mined by the enemy, and it was too late when we saw a demolition section working to disarm the 600 pounds of explosives ready to blow the bridge up.

The General was driving too fast, and not knowing anything about the bridge's being mined, he realized only when he came closer to the bridge that his route was obstructed by the Engineering Corps' material. He put the brakes on immediately, changing his vehicle's direction, but the wheels of his jeep skidded, hit the railing, breaking it, and passed on the other side, falling into the frozen waters of the Rahin

river.” Jean Pierre Aumont, after being ejected from the vehicle, was beginning to drown , but he was saved, along with the sergeant, by the Engineering Corps' soldiers, while Brosset's unconscious body was dragged down by the stream. He was found dead two days later in Chapagney.

General Garbay replaced him immediately as division commander while we still were mourning this loss. General Diego Brosset had been really legendary. As many knew already, he was born on October 3, 1898 in Argentina, where his family was living. At the age of 18, he received his parents' permission to enlist in the French Army during the First World War. Thanks to the courage he showed in action against the enemy, he had ended up with the rank of lieutenant at the end of the war.

Always attracted to military life, he then joined the Colonial Army. It didn't take him too long to realize that he liked the African life, and in a few months he learned to speak not only Arabic, but also several Berber dialects, in addition to the Spanish language, which he had been speaking since his childhood in Latin America, where he was born. In 1930, as a captain, he entered the Superior Military School. Then he was sent to Colombia as a military adviser and professor to train officers in the Bogota Military School, schooling them in combat strategy.

On June 24, 1940, when France was routed and Marshal Petain signed the shameful armistice, Brosset went to England, being one of the first to join General de Gaulle to continue fighting against Germany, and he was nominated as Chief of Staff for the Free French Forces. General Brosset had been an exemplary career Officer, with a personal courage hard to emulate; he was in love with the weaker sex, and he was adored by his men. He died at 44, at the moment when he had become one of the most popular military officers of the Free French Forces.

I will never forget how a few years before, in the African desert, on the eve of a battle, when reviewing the troops and passing where I was standing, he stopped, looked sternly in my eyes, and said with his habitual smile, "Tomorrow, you could become a beautiful corpse!" I learned later that he loved to use this sentence quite often as a joke, without any intention of being mean. Never again did I see or hear of Gaspar, General Brosset's faithful orderly who was always at his side and adored him.

On November 25, our units were sent to rest, because we were exhausted and we needed not only to get back our depleted strength, but also to replace those who had fallen during the rough battles. Our unit was installed in Geromany, and we were lodged in private houses that had been offered to us or that had recently been directly requisitioned. It was too cold to remain in tents, for the deep snow was covering all the roofs and the streets. Needless to say, during such a rest, the soldier is attracted by three temptations: women, wine, and gambling.

The town had several brothels that, since the beginning of the war, were meant for military only, bringing back to my memory the first time I was in charge of a patrol to keep order in one of them. It was a big house that had served this purpose for many years, and there is no doubt that a few days before, the Germans had been receiving the same favors as now were granted to the allied soldiers.

Our patrol was formed by six of us. Jujules was the bawdy house owner, a skinny man with a malevolent's face who seemed to be the right person to be in this trade. A dozen women of all ages, a few young and the rest older, looked like they had been working in that place for a good while. The manageresse was Madame Minette, an old,

fat woman who looked very much like the brothel owner I had met a few years before in Alexandria. Jujules was standing at the entrance as a cashier, selling the chips that the customers gave to the “girls” before going up with them to the second floor. Madame Minette was in charge of keeping order, because a long line of men was always standing and waiting their turns.

Sometimes the hall was completely full, while the line of men outside stood under the cold sky. When those who succeeded in getting inside would complain that the cold wind was getting in through the open door, the operators would close the door, and those who were outside protested and cursed.

When Madame Minette judged that some serviced customers had left the place and there was again room for others, she would let in a certain number of men who were standing outside, shouting at the entrance, "Five can get in, not one more!" And everybody obeyed her.

Soldiers from all nationalities were coming in and out, when unexpectedly I became the unwilling interpreter. Our first case was with an American soldier who couldn't come and wanted his money refunded. The woman who went with him to the second floor (where the rooms were) was screaming to him that he was drunk and that was reason he couldn't get an erection, because she did everything she could to excite him, and if a man could not get aroused with her—who was a professional—then that was proof that he was just impotent.

The Yankee was complaining that the "girl" didn't give him even time to get undressed before dragging him to the bed, and there was no way anybody could get an erection in those circumstances. I told him in English that perhaps he had too much to drink and should go rest and come back the following day, when most certainly he would be feeling sexually aroused and would be able to perform. Everything went well, and our allied soldier left without too much complaining.

The second problem was caused by a Vietnamese from our Colonial Army with whom the woman didn't want to go to bed, saying that he had a venereal disease. By habit, all the women inspected the customer's penis before going to bed with him, because very few, besides the Americans, used condoms.

The Vietnamese became violent and wanted to fight, but one of our soldiers, the lanky Parisian Chalesin, hit him so violently on the shoulder with his carbine's butt that the poor Asian understood that it was better for him to leave the place in peace.

Then came a group of three Spanish from the Foreign Legion who had fought in the Republican Army during the Spanish Civil War and who, once defeated, had been thrown in French concentration camps, with so many others, and were pressured to enlist for five years in the Foreign Legion.

They too complained that the “chicas” (girls) weren't giving them enough time, to which I explained to them that they were in a brothel and not with their fiancées. They found it so funny to hear all that explained to them in Spanish, with my *porteno* accent, that they left laughing, with the promise to come back later, after having a few drinks.

I realized that little by little strange people were coming in, people with criminal faces who spoke Russian. I imagined that they had served in the Red Army, had been taken prisoner by the Germans, as had happened to so many, and induced by the Russian traitor General Vlasov to join the German Army. When again taken prisoners,

this time by the French, they pretended to be Russian war prisoners, and without objection, they enlisted in the Foreign Legion, afraid to be sent back to Russia, where they could be shot by a firing squad for treason.

It was one reason I didn't like these Red Army veterans, in addition to the fact I saw that more of these people came in, and while none or very few would go with the women, most remained just talking, almost all of them seeming to be drunk.

Suddenly, my interpreter's services were requested again! This time it was a Russian who had a problem! He accused the "lady" with whom we went to bed of stealing his wallet. She kept on saying, "I am a prostitute, but I am not a thief!" She was fat, a noisy woman who knew how to treat her customers. I asked the soldier in Russian if he was sure that he had the wallet with him when he came in, and he swore that he had it. Francoise, the fatty, now angry, was screaming that she was wasting her time and missing the opportunity to make more money with other customers because of this dirty Russian. Swiftly, with her expertise she started poking into the Legionnaire's pockets, succeeding finding a hidden place in his pants where the wallet was. When we came down the hall, I felt a certain animosity reigning among the thirty or forty men who were moving back and forth in the hall.

Madame Minette, as usual, was shouting to the undecided customers, "Don't let the girls remain idle; don't let them be unemployed!" Jujules, as usual, was becoming very nervous whenever any girl remained standing without a customer to take to her room. The men remained in line, waiting their turn, but when it happened that they didn't like the next available girl, they had the right to wait for the next one, until the one they wanted came, while the man who were standing behind him could go with the one who was unoccupied. The prettiest of all was a tall blonde with a gorgeous body, Nanette, whom everybody wanted, but to get her it was necessary sometimes to wait a good while.

As a curiosity, I checked with my watch the time it was taking a woman to satisfy her customer, and I came to the conclusion that it was from five to ten minutes. This time was taken from the moment the candidate climbed up the stairs to the second floor and then returned to the hall.

Meanwhile, the Russians became more noisy, still not going with the women, which seemed strange. It looked like they came in just to heat their bodies or whatever. I decided that the moment to restore order had come, because my men were getting nervous, especially Sergeant Bouillet, who told me that he was sensing trouble and that his sixth sense never betrayed him.

I went to the group of Russians who were the noisiest of all and told them in their language that they couldn't remain standing inside; it was a brothel, and they had to go with a woman or leave the place to make more room for those who were waiting outside.

A tall and big Russian with small, shining eyes and a curious movement or jerk of his right shoulder said to me, "Listen, companion, you are Russian, and so, just move aside and let us deal with all these Frenchies," ending with insults and curses in Russian that were interminable and violent. I answered to him that I was French, that my duty was to put order in this place, and that I would not tolerate any more disturbances.

I don't recall how all that happened, and until now I cannot understand how I became so careless, because usually I have a very quick reaction. I had been a good wrestler and boxer, but my interlocutor was faster than I, hitting me in the jaw with his

closed fist, which looked like a metal ball. After that, it seemed that the rest of his gang was expecting this as a sign to start the action, because the Russians jumped on us from all sides.

I still could see how several of them cornered Sergeant Bouillet, while one of them snatched his carbine away. The attack was so unpredictable and unexpected that only two of my soldiers remained at my side against about thirty Russian, while our three other companions were lying on the floor covered with blood.

The women created a tremendous choir in screaming, while the rest of the uniformed men standing in line didn't interfere in our business, because it was an old military tradition not to get mixed up in others' fights, without motivation or interest in the outcome.

I don't know how this melee would have ended if it hadn't been for a Marine patrol that happened to pass by and came to the building after hearing the women's screams. When they entered, the Russians panicked and pushed each other to run away, without forgetting to take Bouillet's gun with them, while Bouillet himself didn't move and remained prostrated on the brothel's floor, completely unconscious.

A few minutes later, the three Spaniards who had already been there before and with whom I talked about the Spanish Civil War came back. I saw with dread that one of them had his right eye hanging out by a nerve, while the his companions, without paying him any attention, told us how these Russian Legionnaires assaulted all the soldiers they encountered on the road and attacked them too.

Immediately, an alert was issued, and a hunt for these Russians was organized by the Marines. The patrols went to every place where they thought they could find the mutineers, but to no avail. They were nowhere to be found or even seen. I remained with the two soldiers in the brothel, because the rest of our companions, along with the Spanish soldier whose eye was hanging out, had been taken to the hospital.

It was very late when the brothel closed, and when we were about to leave, Jujules, in his generosity, so as to compensate us for our inconveniences, gave each one of us a chip that would allow us to go without charge with any of the women.

Before leaving the brothel, we had a last cup of red wine, again offered by Jujules. I asked several women out of curiosity how many chips they were exchanging for money at Jujules' cash register. I learned with amazement that each woman on average earned sixty chips, saying with a professional pride that it was more or less what they were getting every night. It meant that each one of these women went with approximately sixty men, and I couldn't believe my ears when I heard Nanette bragging that she had 83 chips. She told me later that she was living with a poor student and helping him finish studies at a school of medicine; they were planning for when he would be a graduated doctor, and they would get married.

One more time, I realized how many stupid women still existed who were selling their bodies like suckers and helping a crook who would never marry them. Without even knowing this repugnant student, I visualized this shameless subject, who once becoming a doctor would be looking for a decent woman to marry and have a respectable family, not even remembering the poor prostitute who helped him.

The following day, Sergeant Bouillet, no matter how much I intervened in his favor, received a sentence of a month in prison for having let his carbine be taken away from him. I remained for many weeks without being able to chew food nor eat

meat; my jaws were hurting, and I had a black eye to boot and a red nose.

Bouillet detention was a mere formality; it would only appear on his ledger, because in wartime a soldier couldn't be put in jail. We needed military on the front, unless a grave crime had been committed, such as rape, robbery, or insubordination, in which case the offense was remitted to the military tribunal.

Chapter 13

Both the composition and the spirit of our division acquired in the African deserts, were changing little by little, considering that half our men came either from the partisans or from individuals who enlisted voluntarily in our ranks in France. Also, we sensed a change in the trend of what was called the division “whitening”; at the beginning, our division had been two-thirds composed of soldiers from the colonies, such as Arabs, Indochinese, and blacks. Many of these had been killed on the battlefield, but they had been replaced largely by French volunteers.

It is almost needless to state that our fighting ability was no longer comparable to what it had been before, but we were in wartime and we didn't have too much spare time; for that reason, our volunteers had to learn how to become soldiers and develop fighting skills on the battlefields.

Anyhow, our division still was trusted and reliable when needed, and it was able to impose order in Poitiers, where the guerrilleros attacked and plundered the city hall. Immediately, our division sent two companies of infantry from the 21st Battalion to restore order at once. We again re-established order in Lyons, where the so-called partisans invaded the jails and opened the cells to drag out and kill all the political prisoners.

More than once, some had falsely created and emphasized the public opinion that no genuine partisans existed in France, or that they were “last hour partisans” who appeared after our disembarkment. Even some rumors insisted that all of the partisans were part of the mob and the underworld. Again, evil rumors tried to discredit the courage of the real guerrilleros, who cooperated closely with us in our common fight against the Nazis in the entire country, and especially in Alsace. It is necessary to mention with pride the “Alsace- Lorraine” Brigade, under the command of Colonel Berger, whose actual name was Andre Malraux, whom I had the chance to meet in Spain during the Civil War. This partisan unit fought as well as the army against the Germans, helping us push them to the other side of the Rhine River.

During our advance to the north since our disembarking in Cavalaire, we left several encircled Nazi units that we didn't exterminate, leaving it up to the guerrillas to do it without our help, while we pursued the enemy in a hurry.

Unfortunately, in the southwest of France, on the Atlantic Ocean, a considerable German force remained, resisting in pockets in La Rochelle and Royan pockets, in the strength of several divisions. It was decided then to send the 1st DFL to finish off these pockets at once.

In a three-day forced march from December 12 to 15 , we crossed all of France in a diagonal direction, passing Vesoul, Gray, Dijon, Beaune, Autun, Moulins, Gueret, Montlucon, Angouleme, Barbezieux, and Jonzac.

When we reached the Charente region, we rejoiced, feeling that the temperature was much warmer, even though some snow still remained in a few spots. In this part of France, very little military activity occurred, and the farm people were much more hospitable, almost obliging to us. We were lodged in private homes, in our new station of Fontaine d'Auzillac. The three of us, Jacques Tricot, Sergeant Pierre Augnac, an old career soldier from the Colonial Army, and I were staying in a huge

house in the center of the town.

It happened once that all three of us were sent on a mission to Bordeaux. None of us knew the city, and I drove the jeep to an area where no allied soldiers and much less French soldiers had ever come before. On our way, we found in a quiet corner of two crossing streets a grocery store selling seafood, which was exposed on shelves on the sidewalk. None of us three even remembered the last time we ate oysters, and because we were far away from the front and our mission wasn't urgent, we decided to stop and indulge ourselves by eating the tempting seafood.

The owner's wife was a short, fat lady whom we later heard being called Madame Francine; she had red cheeks and a smile from ear to ear, conserving her femininity as only a French woman can do to the last moment of her life. She never stopped examining us, one by one, with her shining, coquettish little eyes.

While Madame Francine was opening the oysters, the silent husband, who had a huge moustache and whom everybody was calling "Big Ives," brought a bottle of white wine with glasses, and immediately we started savoring the renowned wine of the region, while swallowing the oysters.

We didn't realize how nor when a big crowd of people came to surround us from all sides. Our admirers were mumbling and whispering something, looking at us out of the corner of their eyes, because we seemed to be an enigma for them, and they didn't know who we were.

Suddenly, an old and thin lady wearing a big green cotton hat came close to us, and with timidity, she directed a question—I don't know why to me—if by chance we were French, because she heard us speaking French.

Other people from the throng, talking among themselves but loudly enough to be heard by us, were saying that we were Americans, because none of them had ever before seen a uniform like the ones we were wearing, and they doubted that we could be French. Then, the old lady, whose hat was protecting her like a tent, learning that we were French, came closer to us and asked with timidity, "Can I touch you Sir? I haven't seen a French soldier in so many years that we can't believe that you are French. I want to be the first one to touch a French soldier!"

We started to laugh, including the grocery's owners, and after a while all the people around us were laughing. The old lady with the green hat already felt like the owner of the place, and she started to scream to several young girls standing there with other curious people, "Come on, girls! What are you waiting for! It is an old French tradition for the women to kiss the soldiers who fight for us! I will always remember the Big War, when we had the 'poilus,' and we would eat them with kisses. Of course, I too will give you a kiss, but there is not a shadow of a doubt that these warriors would rather feel these girls' lips on their mouths, more than mine!"

As soon as the old, bossy lady finished her harangue, a shower of kisses fell on us from all the women standing on the street, young and old alike. We were very much surprised, especially Jacques Tricot, who was rather skeptical by nature, when the grocery store owner didn't want to take any money from us when we tried to pay. We ate nine dozen oysters, and I don't remember how many bottles of wine we drank.

Without knowing it, we were the first French soldiers to enter Bordeaux, or at least in that quarter, without fighting, and here we were, eating oysters, drinking the delicious white Bordeaux wine, and receiving kisses from beautiful girls as dessert. The

owners of the house where we stayed had two teenaged girls, Pauline, 14, and Jeanne 17, both coquettish; they loved to joke and play all the time with us.

The landlords were so nice and so kind to us, especially Madame Juliette, always romantic, with her constantly smiling husband Monsieur Maurice; they were making us feel at home, which was strange, because in most requisitioned houses, a lot of hostility reined. Usually, the French people received us with happiness and a sincere love, while the farm people, even though they were happy to see us, would never forget most of the time to charge us for the food they served us.

More than once, Jacques would become angry and would tell these farmers, "For sure, you were charging the Germans less than you charge us! I wouldn't even be surprised to learn that more than once you gave it to them, while you are charging us twice the price!" The people in the house where we were staying were well-to-do peasants who raised chickens, pigs, and cows, were working their own land, and sold the vegetables at their grocery store, located on the street level, displaying their products on the sidewalk. When Madame Juliette learned that December 22nd was my birthday, she prepared a surprise, fixing a little banquet for twenty persons, including her family, who wanted to participate. We had good food, abundant wine, and of course a birthday cake, which was the first I had had since I left Buenos Aires. Thanks to the people's kindness, the short period of time we spent in the La Rochelle region was very pleasant. Nevertheless, we had a little problem or perhaps some distress with regard to women's company.

In these small towns, no brothels existed, and the fact that the local people were living too close together gave no female a chance to remain intimately alone with a soldier. In this part of France, for the first time, very few companions could brag later on of having had a love affair, not even a fast one.

Pierre Augnac was complaining constantly about it, saying that he came to the point that if he happened to see somewhere a cow with an apron, he would rape her after closing his eyes and pretending that he was with a woman, so desperate was he. The constant babbling of the sentimental Madame Juliette, who never tired of saying in a loud voice that the French soldier was the best, the most sentimental, and the most noble of all, was getting on Pierre's nerves.

When remaining to ourselves in our room, he would tell us how fed up he was with all this old stupid woman's bragging about the French soldiers, because her mind remained living in the last century! Angry, but still smiling, he said with his French southerner's accent, "Let me remain only fifteen minutes alone with Jeanne or Pauline, or even with Madame Juliette, and she would see how the three of them would be lifting their panties while crying aloud 'Look what the romantic French and the most sentimental soldier in the world did to me!' I am so desperate that I could put her on the casserole, the way she is, all dressed, and even let her talk all the way during the action!"

The most interesting event was that when he returned to Bordeaux, Pierre went to a brothel, where he seduced an old prostitute, convincing her to come with us to the East, where we would be returning soon. He hid her in a big GMC truck and smuggled her to Alsace, where he put her to work in a brothel.

We were so close to the Oleron Island that many times I thought of Boyardville, bringing back the memories of the vacation we spent during so many summers with my old friends, Robert Romanin, Minia Kolodkine, Maurice, his beautiful

sister Josette, and so many others. This familiar place was now occupied by the Germans, who were trapped in the Royan's pocket.

I was also asking myself how the local inhabitants were behaving with the Nazis! Were they submissive and docile, or did they organize any kind of resistance against them? We were preparing to celebrate Christmas, and our commander decided to entertain the Fontaine d'Auzillac inhabitants with a military parade. We collected a good amount of chocolate for the children and canned food for the population, knowing that wine would be there in big supply. On their part, the city hall, with the Mayor, was organizing an impressive dance party with music in our honor. The girls were delirious with joy just thinking about the prospect that they would be dancing, because for years they hadn't had any celebrations, and for many of them it would be the first possibility to dance with a young man, an opportunity that would have been inconceivable a few months before.

As usual, when mortals build up too much expectation, anticipating joy, the Olympian gods always manage to deceive them, changing the cards of luck. Without expecting it, or even thinking that it could be possible, we received an urgent order to return immediately to Alsace as soon as possible. We left in hurry that very same day, on December 24th, instead of going to the party organized for us. We left the encircled Germans in the La Rochelle pocket to the care of the partisan units. We knew that they weren't able to dislodge the Germans, but they were surrounded and didn't have anywhere to escape, nor did they have ships available to come rescue them by sea.

The situation in Alsace became very serious. Not encountering great resistance from the Germans, the 1st American Army extended itself over 80 miles. General Bradley couldn't have guessed nor foreseen the surprise attack that would be launched against him by the German Marshal Model, with twenty divisions, three of them armored, with more than 1,000 Tiger and Panther tanks. The assault was so violent that the Nazis took back Dinant on the Meuse River, and General Bradley, learning about this disaster, exclaimed, "How did these sons of bitches gather such strength!"

General Eisenhower gave orders to General Patton's 3rd Army to get reorganized on the Sarre, which immediately extended the 6th American Army Group. Bradley needed more troops to cover the right wing, previously held by the 3rd Army, and General Devers decided to suspend the attack on Royan, calling back our 1st DFL, with orders to rush back east.

Again, from December 26th to December 30th, our division crossed all of France one more time diagonally, passing by Barbezieux, Angouleme, Limoges, Montlucon, Moulins, Nuits St. Georges, Dijon, Langres, Vittel, Rambervilliers, and Baccarat, where our battalion was installed. We had to enter into action almost immediately, trying to liberate three American divisions surrounded by the Nazis during the von Roschedd Army's assault, the last the Germans made at the end of the war and one that cost so many lives to our forces. The cold was unbearable, and we were attacked on all sides by the enemy. They brought several units from the Russian front, accustomed to the cold weather and war-hardened after fighting no-quarter battles against the Red Army.

On January 5th, on patrol, we fell under a dense, heavy, deadly fire from the German artillery. The last thing I remember was seeing Pierre Galeon and Gautier thrown into the air after a tremendous shell blast.

Chapter 14

When I woke up, my entire body was in pain, and I was experiencing a sensation of drowning. Barely able to breathe, I realized that I was in a campaign hospital. The doctor was smiling at me, while I was opening my eyes, without being completely able to get out of my dream, remaining in a profound lethargy.

The doctor was speaking to me, but I couldn't understand him because of a strange noise I was hearing in my ears, preventing me from comprehending. When he left, a nurse gave me a shot in my arm, and I resumed sleeping. When I woke up again, I looked around and realized that I was in another place, and opening my eyes wide I saw that I was in a huge building, some kind of factory or warehouse, or a saloon transformed into a hospital for wartime.

On my left side was lying a wounded German soldier who was receiving the same attention as all of us, and when we were sent farther from the front, a nurse told me that this German soldier didn't survive and died of his wounds during the night. I was told then that we had numerous losses during von Roschedd's attack, called by the Germans the "Sonnenwende" operation. Not only did we have many dead in the 5th American Army, but in addition, a great number of our men had been taken prisoners, one of them my Chilean friend Rene Genestier, with whom I had come from Buenos Aires.

The wounded were brought to the hospital in a constant rhythm, because medical personnel installed close to the battlefield were giving the wounded only the indispensable care, then sending them to other hospitals, farther from the battle lines. That's how, after passing by seven hospitals, I ended up in Lyons, where I remained for three weeks.

I cannot omit to mention that the ambulance chauffeurs, whom we were calling affectionately "chaufrettes," were women, and they were doing outstanding work, showing not only their courage, but also giving us their feminine comfort.. Always smiling, gentle, and indefatigable, they were trying to do everything they could to alleviate our suffering while driving us to hospitals, sometimes passing close to dangerous zones near the enemy. Some of them were mature already, but the great majority were young, and some even looked like high school girls. There were always two women per ambulance, taking turns in the driving, and sometimes they had to stay up to fifteen hours behind the steering wheel, without ever complaining, telling us, "You kids had it worse than us on the front, risking your lives daily!"

How could I forget one episode, which happened in one of my numerous trips in an ambulance being transported from hospital to hospital, when one of the two "chaufrettes," whose name was Nenette, bewitched all of us with her spirit and happy mood? This forty-year-old blonde was still attractive and must have been a beauty when she was young. All the time joking with us—of course with those of us who weren't too badly wounded and were not in coma—she suddenly turned to us, while her comrade was driving, and asked, "By chance, are any of you from the Foreign Legion?"

All of us began to protest and rain a shower of questions on her, some of them sarcastic, with several guys asking what was wrong with the artillerymen, or infantrymen, or the tankists, or the Colonials, but the "chaufrette," with her red cheeks told us with conviction, "I know that all of you are good, there is no doubt about it, but not like the legionnaires. . . .!" And it was as though the words were melting in her

mouth, provoking a general hysterical hilarity among us, even though some of us were wearing bandages and could barely move.

It was when I arrived in Lyons and was received in the hospital that I learned what had happened to me during our encounter with the Germans in Alsace. A bomb exploded close to me, throwing me in the air and bruising and wounding me with several pieces of shrapnel that penetrated different parts of my body. I lost my consciousness, and I remained lying a couple of hours in the snow until the Red Cross nurses located me and took me to the closest campaign hospital. I was sad to learn that my comrades Galeon and Gautier died in this explosion and that several more of our men were wounded.

When the doctors operated on me, they pulled seven metal splinters from my body, still inadvertently leaving some; I got rid of the last one only when it was removed from my right hand many years later in Tucuman, Argentina. The consequence of my lying too long on the snow for so long was that my right lung froze.

The doctor told me, "For the rest of your life, you will have to be careful with your badly affected lungs!" He was right, because asthma has been my lifelong companion, and since then I have always experienced serious breathing problems, to the point that I came to hate the cold weather and wintertime.

This Lyons hospital had been there for more than a century, and now it was used for those who needed complicated operations, were finishing their cures, or needed special care. The Americans were supplying the hospital with all the needed drugs, medicines, surgical installations, and modern instruments. It was during the last war that penicillin had been used in great scale for the first time, and of course it had been applied to my wounds, helping them heal faster. It was amazing what a miracle this new medicine was.

I had plenty of spare time in the hospital to write, and I got in touch with my friends from Paris, receiving after a short while letters from Marmarian, Davoudian, Minian, Rene Regal, and my friends from Neuilly s/Seine. Everybody was happy to know that I was alive and expressed hope of seeing me very soon in Paris, where I was planning to spend my convalescence leave.

This hospital was really big, with huge buildings all around, and it was served by an army of doctors and nurses. On the left side of my bed, my neighbour was a "Black Foot" from Oran, Argelia; Charles Gonzalez was of Spanish descent, and without any reason, just joking at the beginning, we adopted the habit of speaking in Spanish, the language spoken in his town. Almost immediately, we realized that we were getting along and becoming close friends, and just for bragging's sake, we were calling ourselves the "Conquistadores" (conquerors), in contrast to the badly wounded, who couldn't move from their beds and whom we called with malice only between the two of us the "crippled."

I was surprised to learn that most of the wounded were from the Giraud Army, mainly the professional military from the old Colonial Army who in a poorly hidden way despised the "Gaullists," saying that we joined the Free French Forces because we were starving and that we came into the army for the food, and not for an ideal. I had heard that already before on several different occasions, and I knew this to be the farthest thing from the truth. I tried to avoid fights or arguments, and after enduring a lot of sarcastic comments, we reached a sour status quo. My best friend in the hospital

remained Charles, who, even though he was also from Giraud's Army, sympathized with de Gaulle.

I was also surprised to see that very few wounded could leave their beds and move around. We decided that our first priority should be tracking the nurses who were not engaged, nor had a boyfriend, in or outside the hospital. We learned very fast about all the intrigues boiling up inside the hospital between the doctors, the nurses, and some patients; because some of them had been interned there for many months and knew all the gossip.

I was very sorry for the most seriously wounded in our room, who was lying in the last bed of our row. He was very young, without a leg, and he had a paralyzed arm and was blind, with his head bandaged. It was a very sad spectacle to see a young soldier so badly wounded, who had nightmares every night, calling his mother in his dreams. He also had, as could be expected in a case like this, some outbursts of rage, and while he was screaming, he threw on the floor anything that his hand could grab from the bed table. When this happened, several nurses, both male and female, came to give him a shot to calm him and put him to sleep. During this process, which unfortunately happened quite often, all of us would look in his direction silently and with compassion.

Worse things were occurring. Some men dressed in black would come in our room to remove a soldier who had died during the night. This sad and unpleasant spectacle unfortunately occurred too often, and it was one of the most painful visions I saved from this hospital stay.

Quite often, at least once a week, we had visits from several charity organizations. A Catholic priest would come on Sunday morning after mass, asking if anyone of us needed confession. Without any regard toward this man in black, who was slightly older than me and who was coming to confess people instead of going to fight on the front, I told him directly that I was an atheist. Nuns also came to comfort us from a neighboring monastery, offering us one or two cigarettes, which I never accepted. Of all the volunteer organizations, the one that I loved and respected the most was the Salvation Army, which was doing remarkable and exemplary humanitarian work. At the railroad stations, when the wounded were filling up the entire platform during the wait for a train that would take them to another hospital, the people of the the Salvation Army would always be there to offer us a cup of hot tea. The same warm feeling prevailed in the soldiers' welcome centers, where the uniformed men on leave, going to join their units on the front or discharged from hospitals, could always be sure of being offered a cup of hot tea and even sometimes a loaf of bread by these kind people.

After the war, I never neglected to put some coins in the basket in any place where the Salvation Army was collecting money. It was my token of gratitude for being comforted so many times during painful situations.

My friend Charles, was about to take his leave in convalescence, because the bullet wound in his leg had healed, was very happy, and he was conveying it to all the numerous friends he acquired, including the doctors and nurses, especially the female nurses. One of those nurses was Flora, a very beautiful, sexy, dark-haired girl who once came to see him, complaining that an Arab laboratory worker was constantly bothering her. She was very much afraid of that worker, because he had already tried in several different occasions to grab her in the hospital's dark corners. Charles, as a real gentleman from Iberian descent, went immediately to face the impudent fellow and gave him such a

shaking up, with such violence, that afterward the beautiful and coquettish nurse felt safe to walk wherever she wanted, without being disturbed and much less molested.

I never learned, nor was I interested in knowing, how everything had been set up, but Charles told me one day to be ready to go to a party the following Saturday. We would have a chance to dance and have fun with girls, all as part of an entertainment planned for his farewell by some of his partisan friends. It was prohibited for us to leave the hospital without a permit, but we all knew a place, close to the basement, where some fence's loose planks could be bent to allow us to go outside without being seen.

When this so-expected Saturday came, I was already with Charles at the previously agreed place, on Lyons' outskirts, a little bit more than a mile from the hospital, waiting for two girls who were supposed to go with us. It was cold, the snow was falling furiously, and we were standing on the street this night, under the sky without any cover. We were shaking and trembling, almost frozen, but we kept resisting, and after a little while we were compensated for our patience when we saw two nurses, who to beat the cold were almost running in our direction.

Flora was as beautiful as a movie star, and I envied my friend "conquistador," chiefly when they introduced me to the fat Madeleine, called by them Mado, who had been apparently brought for me. I was expecting something better and was deceived, remembering now that I had seen her a few times at the hospital. She was working in another wing and would come only seldom to ours, always looking gloomy and angry. I understood that everything had been planned in such a way beforehand, and instead of lamenting, I should rather be grateful to have female company. I had a crazy desire to go to bed with a woman—any woman—and after all, this fat one would do, even if I had to close my eyes.

It was local partisans who had organized this dancing party and invited Charles, with whom they became friendly by chance, when he told them that he too was a communist during a visit when they came to see a wounded comrade in the hospital. It was such a happiness to be inside a warm building now, and it appeared to us as hot as an oven compared to the severe cold we were enduring only half an hour before. We became even warmer later, after swallowing a few glasses of red wine.

The orchestra was quite good, and as soon as we got inside this huge saloon, we began by dancing; then later, already feeling better, we would take a break at the bar to have a drink. After a short while, the cold mood began to melt, to be replaced by a spontaneous and contagious laughter that invaded everyone in the place. We remained at this warm place very late, dancing and drinking in the company of these guerrilleros, because very few regular military people were with us there. As for women, plenty of them were hanging all over, mainly young and pretty ones, ready to do anything. After the monastic life they had lived within the Laval-Petain rules, they wanted to live and enjoy life, without controls or restrictions.

It always happens after an austere and imposed period of tension; the dam of repression is broken, and an avalanche, an exuberant flood of pent-up human desire, breaks forth. The orchestra stopped playing and the musicians were getting ready to leave; half of the saloon was already empty of people. A young partisan then came close to Charles, and they mumbled and whispered something between them, after which the partisan disappeared at once. Charles pulled me far away from the girls, not wishing them to listen to our conversation, and told me that the partisans had the kindness to lend us a

room with a big bed for the four of us, in a house requisitioned by them.

Once outside on the street, we left the heat, which was quickly replaced by the frozen air that seemed to cut our faces like a knife. What a difference with the Lyons that we liberated a few months before, when the temperature was so agreeable, and we never suspected that the winter could be so cold!

We were walking in a large group, because in addition to us four, the partisans were also coming, or rather returning to their homes, and we went to the house where the room they loaned us to spend the night was. I understood that everyone knew perfectly well what had been planned, but each one was pretending that he didn't know anything, and no one would even look at us. Once again, when we reached the big mansion that the partisans had requisitioned, we found the so-needed heat inside, and without any further explanations, the partisans showed us with their hands the second floor, where there was an open door leading to the quarter reserved for us. Once in the room, and after locking the door, each couple went to a side of the huge bed. Our partisan friends didn't lie to us, because the bed was extraordinarily big, and after turning off the lights, each couple had enough room and lay half-undressed in the bed.

It was the first time that I made love with my companion while another couple lay on the same bed. So as to get in mood, I began by imitating Charles and Flora's example, whom I saw through the semidarkness, devouring each other with kisses. I started doing the same thing with Mado, who turned out to be much more ardent and sensual than I expected. Little by little, between kisses and caresses, we got undressed completely, and this time, I didn't care about getting nude—first because it was dark, and secondly, because I didn't have a feeling of shame about my scars any more.

The bed began to shake, and I understood that our friends were getting into action, which we should imitate as soon as possible. I was amazed to realize that I wasn't inhibited to have another couple at our side, and of course, I would have preferred to be with Flora, whose divine body I could see in the half-darkness, for I had looked at her out of the corner of my eye while she was undressing. After a short while, I discovered with surprise that the fat Mado was an excellent bed partner, and she was doing everything she could to keep me excited.

I was also surprised after a while that our neighbors were talking more than acting, to the point that I was suspicious that they were sneaking looks to our side, where we never stopped acting with passion. After a couple hours of love-making, being happily tired and without saying a word as with common accord, we dressed and went down the steps to the hall, where a dozen partisans were scattered, sitting, playing cards, talking, and drinking wine.

"How did it go, little doves?" asked us a big partisan, while swallowing the rest of the wine that remained in his glass smiling with insinuation at us. To dispel an embarrassing situation, I began making jokes; we laughed a while, and after giving thanks to all the comrade partisans for their hospitality, we said goodbye and left this warm place to again face the cold outside.

One more time, the four of us walked toward the hospital, which was half a mile's distance from the house. None of us opened his mouth, for the cold was so harsh that it was freezing our breath. Our main preoccupation was to return as soon as possible to our warm places. Once we reached the hospital, Charles and I entered through the same loose plank close to the basement, while our little girl friends entered legally by the

main gate, where the guard recognized them and let them in.

The following day, Charles confessed that the previous day, he was too emotional and couldn't become sexually aroused, no matter how excited Flora was, and unfortunately, he left her unsatisfied, a situation that was giving him a complex. I recognized that I was also disturbed somehow by being with other people in the same bed, but I achieved the personal satisfaction I had been looking for, and I was sure that Mado was also brought up to date, without realizing that I was embarrassing him with my bragging.

Later, I had several more encounters with Mado in her house. She was divorced and living with her two children; every time I came to visit her, she was sent them to buy something at the grocery store, giving us half an hour to be in bed each time. One day, the director of the hospital called me into his office, saying that the doctors considered that I was healed but that I needed three weeks' leave that I could spend any place in France with my family. Without hesitation, I told him that it would be Paris. The orders had been issued to prepare my leave papers, my railroad pass, and my ration coupons for food, so that I would not be dependent on my family. I could leave the following day, which was February 3, 1945, and I needed to be back in my unit on the 25th of the same month.

It was impossible to describe the emotion that possessed me during my preparations for my trip to Paris, the city where I spent my childhood. I was anxious to again see my friends from my youth and also the old companions from the Latin Quarter. It had been a long time that we had decided through the mail that I would stay with the Marmarian family, who were now living in Neuilly s/Seine, on the rue Charles Lafitte, close to the Bois de Boulogne. I said goodbye to my hospital companions and my adventure buddy Charles, who was also leaving the same day on convalescence to Argelia.

My farewell with Mado became very sentimental, because she was crying a lot, and she begged me to promise her to come back to see her; she said that she loved me and definitely needed to see me again. Everything was very emotional!

Chapter 15

I was feeling my heart beating when we approached the Lyons railroad station. The air in Paris is unique, and I was breathing it with my open mouth and my nose, still without believing that finally I was in my city. I took the subway to the Porte de Neuilly station, and from there, with my bag on my shoulder, I directed my path to the Marmarians' house, with the impression that I was returning to my family, because our families had been always very united.

When I reached the address I was looking for, I was surprised to see the size of the mansion. To my disappointment, I learned that none of them were at home, and I was received by two maids who already knew of my coming and had received pertinent instructions about me. They told me that everybody would be back at dinnertime. They then showed me to my beautiful room, located on the third floor, with a window on the street; it would be my lodging for the next three weeks.

I had already taken a shower, was shaved, and was wearing a clean uniform when everybody returned home, and seeing the family was a real celebration for me. It would be impossible to describe the sincere happiness of these dear friends at seeing me again, as if I were one of their family.

Monsieur and Madame Marmarian had aged very much, but they had conserved their good mood. Laurette was as pretty as usual, and she was married now for the second time to an Armenian from Iran, Leon. Serge—what we were calling Coco—was her son from the first marriage; I had left him when he was a child, but he was now a quiet, good-looking young man who was studying to be a lawyer, like his grandpa.

At the outset, Monsieur Marmarian gave me the bad news, saying that all the papers and photos related to my participation in the Spanish Civil War that I left with him before leaving for Argentina had been burned and destroyed. Paris was occupied by the Germans at the time, he said, and he didn't want to take the risk of keeping any compromising documents in his home, because he could have been shot on the spot if they were discovered by the Nazis during their routine and unexpected house-breaking and searches. We both lamented the destruction, but nothing could be done now, and I understood that it was his responsibility to take all the necessary care to protect his family, because the French police had blacklisted him as Marxist, and he could have been arrested at any time, without any reason.

All of us were speaking at the same time, and the questions were coming like a line of showers, one after the next, because the family members wanted to know how we were living in Argentina, how my parents were, and on which fronts I had been fighting during my military campaigns; on my part, I was curious to know how the family managed to survive during the German occupation.

Knowing in advance the date of my arrival, they had already organized a big reception in my honor for the following Saturday, and with anticipation they had invited all our common old friends. Food was scarce in France during the war, and the rationing was rigorous, but like all people with money, the Marmarians were receiving once a week the necessary supplies from peasants, who were bringing them everything they needed, including meat, butter, oil, vegetables, fruit, and whatsoever, in exchange for a big sum of money; it was all part of the black market that was prospering in all of

Europe. Many farmers, in fact, became rich during the war by engaging in the black market, and not all of them had been engaging in it for patriotic reasons, because peasants, whatever nationality they are, always like money.

Securing beverages posed no problems in France as the premier wine producer in the world, for there existed a great reserve of all kinds of liquors that were easy to purchase, sometimes by paying only a little bit above the established price. Unfortunately, the surplus didn't last too long, because very soon the Americans also discovered French beverages, and one could see "Uncle Sam's" soldiers walking on the streets with bottles of brandy in the rear pockets of their pants; such purchases instantly increased Martel (the preferred cognac) from 16 francs per liter when the Allies reached Paris to 1,000 francs in a few months.

I gave my food ration coupons to Madame Marmarian, because they would help the family somehow, but not very much, because the family had a very lavish lifestyle. I still had three days before the Saturday date fixed for the party in my honor, and the following morning, after eating an abundant breakfast, with a cup of real coffee instead of the hated army's Nescafe, I went to the address that Jacqueline gave me, which was in the poor Belleville quarter.

At that time, having a telephone was a luxury reserved for rich people only, and I knew that Jacqueline didn't have one, a fact that gave me no alternative but to go directly to the quarter where she was living. Military people at that time were traveling for free on the subway or on buses, and transportation in Paris was excellent, allowing me to locate her place easily.

Arriving at the old, five-story building, I saw the Parisian concierge sweeping the sidewalk with a broom as usual, without failing to see at the same time what was happening around her. The synonym of *concierge* in Paris is *gossip*, and a rumor held that all of them were snooping for the police. I learned later that many of them were spying for the police during the German occupation, even though some of the porters risked their lives to help the partisans.

When I asked this plump lady, as most concierges were, for Jacqueline's floor and apartment number, she told me that Jacqueline had just left for the post office and would be back in a short while. I asked her the direction of the post office, assuming that Jacqueline would return by the same street, so that I could encounter her halfway back.

When I entered the old post office building, as most are in Paris, I saw Jacqueline standing in a corner, apparently reading my last letter, in which I was telling her of my coming to Paris; it seemed the letter's arrival had been delayed. When Jacqueline turned her head and saw me, she got so emotional that she opened her hand and let all her mail fall to the floor, including my letter, which now lay scattered close to her feet. The surprise of seeing me was so great that she began screaming with joy like a little girl, jumping on me and almost choking me with her hugs.

The French people are very complaisant with lovers, especially when a soldier is with a girl. People around us had smiles on their faces and looked at us with love, without saying a word, seemingly concentrated on their own business, but without failing to see what we were doing, because Parisians are extremely curious. Needless to say, I spent two wonderful days with Jacqueline in her little apartment, which was more of a studio. We were lucky, because her daughters were back in Alsace with her sister

Ernestine.

When I came back to Neuilly s/Seine, all the Marmarian family scolded me, saying that they were worried about me because I had disappeared during all this time without even calling them, and they were afraid that I would miss the party in my honor. Monsieur Marmarian, with his cunning smile, said that he knew that something like that would happen, because he too had been young during the First World War, and he knew what it meant to be on leave for a soldier coming from the front or the hospital.

When the night came, all of us were dressed, and the tables were brimming with food and open bottles of wine ready to receive the guests. The first to arrive were members of the Davoudian family, who never stopped hugging me with effusion, and once more I had to relate the present situation of my parents—how they liked Argentina, how big their house was, and other details of their lives. Also arriving was Laurette's brother-in-law Albert, her husband's brother who had married a Russian girl, Natalia. The Minian family would certainly not miss the party, including Fanny, the beautiful Betty, and her third husband Valeri, an Armenian from Lebanon. Also coming were many other family friends, some of whom I knew and others I didn't.

Serge, Laurette's son and Monsieur Marmarian's grandson, was in charge of the music, mainly playing records of American dancing tunes, which at that time was the trend. From his childhood, Serge was called "Coco," a nickname that made him angry, and he would always say, "My name is Serge!" Now he was 18 years old, almost a man. Among the guests were several very attractive girls and a few military people. I don't know how it happened—perhaps it was because of the mutual attraction or purely because of chance—but I discovered Betty, and she discovered me.

She was about ten years older than I; prior to this time, she had always looked upon me as a little boy, never paying me attention, even though I secretly adored her. Now, she was seeing me as a man in uniform, and perhaps of her type, for at that time I had become very secure in myself, daring and forthcoming with the sweet sex. To tell the truth, ever since we had disembarked in France, women had spoiled us with all kinds of attention, little by little making us go out of our minds and out of control.

I learned through Monsieur Marmarian that during all wars the same thing happens. He broke the enchantment that I felt inside myself by saying to me, "Listen, Misha, in wartime everyone wants to live with intensity; men fight and die on the front, while women strive to have intimate, unforgettable moments with those who tomorrow perhaps will not be among the living!"

The party organized in my honor was magnificent, a very animated one held in a friendly and gay atmosphere. I think that I had too much to drink and that it went to my head, making me feel exuberant and increasing the effect of the constant compliments I was receiving from everybody, especially women. I am under the impression that I danced with every single lady who was there, even though something powerful was pushing me to be close to Betty all the time, to the point that I noticed that Valerie, the husband, was looking at me with a certain distrust and irritation. Betty, with her feminine instinct, felt her mate's suspicion, and once when we were dancing together, she said to me in a more than friendly manner, "Listen, Misha! I think that Valeri doesn't like to see us too close! He is very jealous, and if you want to see me, we could meet any day next week!" There's no need to say that I was delirious with joy, and we agreed to see each other Monday on St. Michel Square, close to my old quarter, at 11 o'clock in the

morning sharp. She emphasized that she didn't like to wait for anybody.

The party ended very late, and when the last of the guests left, I thanked everyone for organizing such a reception for me, and the family retired. Before parting, while I remained a moment alone with Laurette, she said to me, "Misha, I saw that you were sticking very close to Betty; she is very coquettish, and my advice to you is to be extremely careful with Valeri, who is very jealous and violent. He has demonstrated his rage several times!"

I thanked her for her warning, and I went to my room on the third floor, where I collapsed on my bed. Nevertheless, I couldn't sleep well; I had drunk too much, and in addition, Betty was always present in my mind, giving me an insane yearning to see her again. I came to the conclusion that she wouldn't come only to see me and to have a drink; rather, during our planned date, she would be ready to go to bed with me.

I barely slept a few hours that night, and the following morning, as I had to spend the day with Jacqueline, I got up early, and once dressed, I left the house without making any noise to avoid waking up those who were still sleeping, knowing that both maids had their day off on Sunday and weren't in the house. I took the Metro to my Latin Quarter, remembering the rumor that no room in any hotel was available in all of Paris. It was an understandable situation because of the large number of war refugees, the Allied administrations occupying many buildings, and now the influx of so many foreign troops arriving in the capital for different reasons. I then recalled that about ten years before, I went several times with prostitutes to a little, by-the-hour-hotel in this area, the Hotel des Peres St. Severin.

As soon as I opened the door of this old and musty building that smelled of human sweat, I almost bumped into a matron who certainly was the hotel owner and said to me before I even opened my mouth, "If you are coming for a room, I regret very much that we don't have any available, neither for today nor for tomorrow!" I had to use all my psychological wit to try to get along with this old, retired prostitute, now a hotel owner; telling her that I used to live in this neighborhood, and I gave her the name of my parents' restaurant, on the rue de la Huchette, that she knew quite well. I insisted that I needed the room only for a couple of hours in the afternoon, and after winking at her, I came close to her and whispered in a low voice, even though nobody else was there to listen to us, "She is married, and it is for Monday!"

The old matron looking sensually at me and said in a very friendly way, "You know that I need the rooms for the "girls" who work, for I make more profit on the rooms that way than by renting them by the day, but I see that you will make your lady happy, and it's a deal; the room is yours for three hours. Of course, you will have to pay in advance!"

Now having a place to take Betty during our Monday date, I went down the steps to the station and took the Metro to see Jacqueline, with whom I had planned to spend the day. While riding the subway full of people, civilians and much more, including noisy military people, I thought of the remote possibility that Betty could refuse to go to bed with me, but then I remembered my hospital companion Charles and our having called ourselves "conquistadores," and I calmed down.

I was so happy to be back in my city and to have all this spare time to do anything I wanted—to eat well and especially to have all these complacent women available. I didn't forget, however, that this bloody war wasn't over yet; it was a fact that

the Russians were advancing, capturing Varsovia and Budapest, while our Western front had suffered several defeats since von Ronschedt began his deadly assault, from which we hadn't yet recovered.

It was with sadness that I read in the newspapers and learned through conversations with different, well informed people, that there was a series of intrigues among the Allies, who for certain reasons didn't want to give de Gaulle and our army the recognition we deserved. Since the Germans began their "Nordwind" offensive, General Devers, with his 1st American Army, had been pushed back 70 miles, from Phlasburg to Vittel. During the retreat, in which we lost so many dead and wounded (I was one of the latter), General Eisenhower, without consulting with our headquarters, contemplated abandoning Strasburg during the first days of January.

When our General Juin learned about this prospect, he exclaimed that it was worse than a bomb explosion and conveyed the information to de Gaulle, who very angrily complained to Roosevelt and Churchill. Unfortunately, both confirmed that they had approved this retreat. De Gaulle then gave an order to General Juin to defend Strasburg with French forces in case the Americans retreated.

When the chief of staff of Eisenhower's headquarters, General Bedell Smith, learned about de Gaulle's decision, he threatened the 1st French Army, saying that if it dared go ahead with this act of disobedience, that army would not in the future receive a single cartridge, nor a gallon of gas. General Juin answered that general de Gaulle was determined to defend Strasburg, and if the Allies should put this threat into effect, he would prohibit the American forces to use our railroads.

The following day, when de Gaulle went to the headquarters located in Versailles to talk with Eisenhower, he encountered Churchill there, who had just arrived from the United Kingdom, and de Gaulle told Churchill that everything had been already set up to defend Strasburg. I realized then that while I was in the hospital, big battles had been fought in Alsace, when the German generals Wiese and von Maur re-crossed the Rhine River, attacking and forcing the Allied forces to retreat.

With their Tiger and Panther tanks, the Germans pressed heavily on our soldiers, forcing our troops back, with abandonment of positions and a great loss of material and human lives. After my convalescence and my return to my unit, I learned that we had lost a great number of men, not only during this obstinate and bloody engagement, but also because the enemy took so many prisoners. We kept witnessing the final radical change in the nature of our division, called "whitening," as the killed-in-action colored Colonial soldiers were replaced by white French recruits with little or no military experience.

The train in which I was riding stopped at the Belville station, where I had to get off to go to Jacqueline's apartment, and I assumed she would be waiting for me with the table set up with food and a bottle of wine, while the bed would be covered with clean, just-washed bed sheets. It was the way I spent my three weeks' vacation, having a good time alone, with friends, or with women.

I didn't realize how much I was abusing my energies, and even though I was very sexually strong at that time, I didn't think that there was a limit for everything. I could spend an entire night with Jacqueline, then go to enjoy the untiring sensual encounter that Betty would offer me in the evening, and more than once, when returning home tired, I would see in the subway a beautiful face smiling at me, and unable to resist

it, I would be ready to start a new adventure, giving my new “conquest” a date for the following day, because that same night I had another girl to see. It wasn't only me: a lot of soldierly women-lovers had the same opportunities thousands of times a day. My organism was really strong, for I was able to satisfy all these ladies, without a single complaint from any of them.

Chapter 16

I didn't have enough time available, because although I wanted to see my childhood friends, as well as those from the Latin Quarter, women were monopolizing half of my life. I don't know how I found some spare time and accepted an invitation to see the Aznavourian family, who prepared a beautiful dinner for me. I couldn't believe that the little girl Aida was now a pretty young lady, very successful as a music hall singer. I couldn't see Charlot (he hadn't at that time changed his name to Charles Aznavour), but he was already becoming famous and a few years later would become one of the most celebrated singers in the world.

I went to Neuilly s/Seine to see and have a lunch with Andre Hagron and his wife, who was working at a foreign embassy. Andre Montezin was with us, too; he had recently married a young Swedish 16-year-old girl who a few months later dropped him, a development that affected him very much and completely changed his entire life.

Nobody knew anything about Claude Lanzenberg, but I heard about Paul Henot, who corresponded with his Neuilly buddies. After participating in the campaign in Italy as part of the Brazilian Expeditionary Corps, Popol was still some place in Italy fighting against the Germans. I also went to see my friend Rene Regal, who invited me to a ball in Montmartre, where he brought two good-looking girls with him, but they were too intellectual for my taste at that time.

It was the only case in which I went on a date with a girl in Paris without going to bed with her. She was getting on my nerves with her pretensions and her feminism, especially when I tried to court her and she said with a tempting or mocking voice, "You could be deceived with me!" To which I angrily retorted, "I don't believe that you will have the luck to scoff at me, and I know how much you will be missing by not going with me! With respect, goodbye!" I got up and walked away, leaving the three of them standing close to our table and still not understanding what had happened for a good while.

The following day, Rene scolded me very much, telling me that I behaved like a pig and spoiled his night, because he had an obligation to take both girls back to their house, instead of going to a hotel with his date. Later on, more relaxed, he added, "When we were saying goodbye, the girl who was with you said, 'He is very sensitive, your friend Misha! He doesn't know enough about women, because I liked him, and who knows what could have happened if only he had behaved more gallantly!'"

I saw my old friend again several times, and he told me about other companions from college and some of our friends from the Student Federal Union who had been shot by the Nazis, accused of committing acts of sabotage. Rene told me, too, something very personal about himself, because we were so close that we always candidly shared everything that happened in our lives.

When he had studied at the university, the last year was very demanding, not allowing him any time to keep a girlfriend and forcing him to seek sexual relief by going from time to time to a prostitute. After such a visit, he could then return to his books. However, he realized that the prostitute that he was going with was also taking her pleasure with him, and little by little they became friends. In one of their candid

conversations, Denise—that was her name—told him that she had a pimp to whom she had to give all her earned money.

Her story was the usual one: she came very young to Paris from Provence, and very soon she became engulfed in this trap of prostitution, without being able to liberate herself from these chains. She had been already sold three times, and her current master was a rude man who was beating her mercilessly when she wouldn't bring him the daily amount of money he would assign her.

I became very sad suddenly, remembering what had happened in Buenos Aires to Jeannette. I always have been a libertarian, a freedom lover who hated slavery, but I was even more outraged when it came to what is called “white slavery,” or prostitution. Rene, kept telling me that he was very attached to this woman and had tried to get her out of this infamous situation, but the French underworld has its own laws, as do all the other Mafia organizations, because for them, she was merchandise that could be sold, but only to one of them, and not to an outsider.

After inquiring among all his friends in the Latin Quarter, Rene discovered to his surprise that one intimate friend of his, also a student, was part of the underworld, something that he would have never guessed. This friend had a woman, a prostitute, who was giving him all her money, so that he could continue his studies at the university, promising her that once he graduated they would get married.

This friend, Philippe, succeeded in arranging an underworld bosses' meeting, also inviting Denise's “master” Francois to participate, bringing Rene with him. They were in total ten persons gathered in a cafe's basement, where they usually gambled. Philippe served as Rene's intermediary, because the former belonged to the underworld and was consequently qualified to deal with the matter; the other scoundrels were judges.

The fact was that Rene wanted to buy Denise from her “master” Francois, who didn't want to sell her, because she was bringing him good money. The “judges” declared that it was a special situation that needed to be handled immediately; then Francois requested an out-of-proportion amount of money for her. Philippe asked the “judges” to put some pressure on Francois to lower the price; otherwise, blood would be running, because in this case it was a matter of feelings more than money.

After many deliberations, screaming, threats, and much bargaining, at the end they came to an agreement about the price to be paid to Francois for Denise. Rene was far from having the amount of money they were talking about, and they agreed that Denise would continue to work as a prostitute and pay little by little that sum of money to her ex-“master” until the debt was satisfied.

Rene continued to tell me his story while we sat on the sidewalk of the Cafe de la Gare, Place St.Michel, drinking beer. It took almost two years for Denise to buy back her freedom. She was happy, thinking that they would go some place where nobody knew them to start a new life together.

What the poor thing didn't know was that Rene was already spoiled during these two years when he was taking part of Denise's earned money and was living without working. He needed her first for her body, to satisfy his sexual desire, but now he also wanted the money she was earning as a prostitute to keep his standard of living high. A good while since, he had lost all desire to live with her and much less to marry her, because she didn't have any education, much less manners, making him feel ashamed of

being seen in her company by his friends.

He kept lying and postponing the moment to marry her, each time inventing new pretexts and new explanations for his need for the money she earned. He kept telling her to be patient, because very soon she wouldn't do "the sidewalk" any more. What Denise didn't know yet was that Rene had a fiancée, Marie, with whom he planned to marry. Rene was making little money but was playing the role of the rich man, spending almost all the money Denise was giving him on Marie.

It was during the German occupation, during the war, when Parisians had a hard time in getting food or a job. Rene was spoiled with Denise's easy money, with which he could fulfill all his girlfriend Marie's whims, not having any other income.

Two things happened almost at the same time. Denise, through one of her streetwalker friends, learned that her "man" had been seen too often with the same girl from the Latin Quarter. Denise, angry, at the first opportunity reproached Rene with this information and uttered recriminations that started a violent argument. Then came the liberation of Paris, which as if by magic was invaded by allied soldiers appearing at the same time, with provisions and large amounts of money.

Denise, working the sidewalk, met an American military man in charge of the recreation center for American servicemen, at the Opera Place, in the Grand Hotel. Almost in no time, the Yankee fell in love with her and wanted to see her constantly, with a promise to take her with him to Texas after the war. When Rene learned about the relationship, he threatened her and tried to play the macho pimp, but she complained to her huge Texan boyfriend, who hit my buddy, insulted him, and told him to get out of his sight forever, if he wanted to remain alive.

Now Rene was without his goose with the golden eggs, and to boot, his fiancée was not being spoiled any more with the whimsical spending that he could no longer afford; she dropped him for another man who could buy her what she wanted. Rene was bursting with rage, feeling powerless to do anything whatsoever, and he decided to "sell" Denise. I told him that he was playing a dangerous game, especially one with a military man in wartime, a big American sergeant who could break all his bones or even kill him, giving as an excuse that it was in self-defense.

Denise's Johnny didn't know yet that she kept doing the "sidewalk" when she needed money; and one evening Rene asked me to go with him to meet her. He wanted me to talk to her, because only now did he realize how much he loved her, and not the money she used to provide him. With that line, he was thinking that he could perhaps seduce her and get her back, an eventuality I doubted from the start. I was rather skeptical, and to be honest, I didn't like this situation at all, not believing that my friend's intentions were sincere, but at the same time, impelled by my natural curiosity, my striving always to learn something new, I agreed to follow him to the Le Sentier quarter where Denise was "working."

Rene knew perfectly well where to find her, because we headed directly to the entrance of a hotel on the rue St. Denis, from which by mere coincidence she was coming out with a customer, a drunk and screaming American soldier, as most of them were in Paris during the war. I observed that the smile Denise had on her face disappeared when she saw us, and it seemed to me that she was about to run away, but once her noisy client left her, Rene grabbed her by the arm and with pretended good humor told her, "I want you to meet my friend Misha; we studied together at the Lycee

Louis-le-Grand.”

While we were standing on the street, another girl, her companion, came toward us; she had a pleasant appearance, and the four of us remained talking a little while, but the multitude of people, mostly military people, was bottlenecking every access to this quarter, and we were pressed against the wall. No matter how much squeezed together we were, the throng of pedestrians, like a human wave, kept on pushing us. Rene told Denise that he would like to talk with her, to which she answered that she was too tired and needed some rest and that she possibly would go to a hotel, because Johnny wasn't at home and she had forgotten to bring his apartment key.

Her friend, whose name was Suzanne, said the same thing, and she was already trying to drag Denise to the hotel's entrance, perhaps to get rid of us. I remembered suddenly that it was past midnight and that the subways weren't running any more. That meant that I would also need to spend the night in a hotel. Taking the initiative, I said to the group, "Listen, guys, I see that the four of us are tired, and I have missed the last train to Neuilly and will have to spend the night in a hotel. What about if the four of us check in right here and I treat you with a bottle of champagne that we can drink together before we go to rest?"

I realized that Rene didn't have any money, but I still had several thousands of francs from my back pay, having received it when leaving the hospital. After we looked at each other, the plan was approved, and we went into the hotel. We didn't foresee that it was almost impossible to find a room available in all of Paris, but the girls whispered something to the receptionist, and we got two rooms for ourselves, paid for by me.

The situation was really theatrical; here I had at my side my friend Rene, the ex-pimp, with his prostitute, already half-liberated and with a friend of the same profession, and I, who in a certain way was playing the host. We sat around a huge bed in one of the two rooms I rented, while a waiter brought the bottle of champagne with four glasses. It looked like an innocent social reunion, to the point that even the conversation was very courteous, almost without any kind of strain.

When the third bottle was served, which, of course, I also paid for, our tongues became looser, and Denise said directly to Rene that when she first met him, she thought that her dream was coming true and that at last she had found a man on whom she could rely. Then, as time passed by and she continued working on the "sidewalk," she realized that he was similar to all the other men she met, who considered her only good for or a machine to make money, and not as a human being.

Since she was 17, she had been forced to perform this miserable trade, in which she had already engaged for ten years, giving her enough time and opportunities to learn how to catalogue men. She confessed that twice in her life she had made the same mistake, the first time when she came to Paris from the Provence and met and fell in love with a man who turned out to be a pimp who, after a short time, sent her on the street to work, then when he needed money sold her to somebody else.

The second time was when she met Rene, whom, without knowing why, she believed she could trust, but very soon she understood that he was the same as all the others. During these two years that she was with him, she tried to deceive herself, thinking that perhaps she was wrong and that very soon he would show her how honest and loving he was. Now, she was convinced that Johnny, the American, loved her and

that she could rely on him. Unfortunately, she still needed money, and secretly and without his knowing, she was returning to "Le Sentier" today for the last time! From now on, she would be living as a decent woman, and in addition, she had the opportunity to go with Johnny to America, where nobody knew her and she could start a new life.

Rene tried to interrupt her, saying that the circumstances had been unfavorable for him, because he too wanted to remain with her; but Denise cut his speech short, making mention of Marie and revealing that she learned about this affair thanks to Suzanne, who followed him more than once during his courtship with his girlfriend. It was a completely new environment to me, and I was pleased to see how a prostitute could regenerate herself; one more time, my thoughts flew to Buenos Aires as I remembered Jeannette, who also had her second opportunity.

I made an attempt to ask Suzanne to remain with me for the night, while Rene could go with Denise to the other room, but both night-ladies looked at me with contempt, telling me that they thanked me for this tempting offer, but taking into consideration the way we had established our relationship in this room, we were bound now to consider it solely as a social reunion. After emptying a fifth bottle of champagne, we said our polite goodbyes to both "ladies," who left us, going to another room to spend the night.

When Rene and I remained alone, I ordered one more bottle of champagne, saying to Rene that I didn't see any issue in this affair, and I advised him not to worsen it and especially to avoid any trouble with the Texan, who, without knowing him, I assumed would be ready to do anything. I asked him what kind of woman Suzanne was, and he told me that she was a special type of street woman; she had a very tolerant pimp, an alcoholic who was much better and less demanding than any gambler. She was a lazy woman with little schooling, but she liked men and didn't complain about her profession. Anyhow, as she was fond of saying, the sidewalk is better than working eight hours in a factory for a miserable wage, where any supervisor could force her to go to bed anyhow.

The following morning, while we had breakfast in one of the numerous local cafes, Rene asked me briskly if I still had the Berretta pistol that I had snatched from a prisoner in Italy, the details about which I had related previously to him. I was surprised by the question, and even more so when he asked me to lend it to him for only a few days.

The following day, I brought it to him, asking what he needed it for, and he replied, "You know Johnny gave me a good one; I am under the impression that he takes me for a coward, and I want to let him know that I am not and that I can defend myself, if necessary! I promise you not to use it!" The pistol was never given back to me, because soon after I returned to my unit. It wasn't the way I was expecting to see my best friend for the last time. I never saw him again, and I never was able to locate him, no matter how hard I tried and how many letters I sent him. I never learned what happened to my Berretta, nor if something drastic happened to my friend Rene.

I wouldn't have missed the opportunity to see my Boyardville friend Robert Romanin either; he was waiting for me at the Cafe de la Gare, as we agreed, thanks to the "pneumatique," a mailing system that allowed sending letters through tubes located at any post office in Paris and delivered them the same day. Robert was quiet, very serious, and after talking about our mutual families, he told me that after the armistice and after

the French Army was disbanded, he was discharged and went to work at his father's store during all these years. He missed the military life and career, and now that the French Army was getting organized again, he was planning to enlist in the Colonial Army to fight against Japan in Indochina.

I asked him if he had any news about Josette, and I noted that his cheeks got white, while he said that she had been married for a few months, then divorced a little while later. He saw her a few months before, when he went to Bordeaux for an errand; he visited her at her family's home, where she was living now. I realized immediately that Robert was still in love with her, because he never tried to get married or at least have a girlfriend during all these years.

Time was running, and I was in hurry. I was about to return to my unit on the front, and I was going to spend the last evening with Betty in our little hotel. As usual, it was a powerful sensation because Betty seemed never to be satisfied in bed, and each time I left her I was completely drained, squeezed.

This time, however, I felt at the end of our lovemaking that something had gone wrong. I had lost all my energy and felt that something inside myself was empty. I wasn't satisfied with my performance, and I was afraid that Betty wasn't either, for she couldn't understand why I was so weak and completely exhausted.

The following day, early in the morning, I went to the Gare de l'Est to take the train to Strasburg.

Chapter 17

After traveling an entire day by train and asking for rides from other military men driving their vehicles, I finally located my unit at Neuve Eglise, in Alsace. I was very touched to see that all my friends were happy to see me alive, because many of them had been concerned about my health, while others inquired about Paris and how I spent the time in the City of Lights, as Paris was still known.

They told me about the bloody battles in which they had engaged, chiefly during the von Ronshtedt thrust, when our 4th Brigade, with three American divisions, had been surrounded and almost destroyed. I was saddened to learn the names of those who died, including many good friends like Farrache, and I grieved to learn that my Russian friend Sergeant Polianowsky was killed when a mine exploded close the German lines. The four men who were on patrol died, and with them was another friend, Villermoze, the one who told us about the transvestite nightclub Dorian Gray in Lyons.

When by chance I bumped into Jules Chatelain, I could barely recognize him, so skinny was he and so depressed while he still mourned his companion Villermoze, with whom he lived for more than two years in a husband-and-wife arrangement.

I don't remember having seen a husband lament his wife's death as much as this "homo," who was suffering for his beloved one, his companion, his wife during all the dangerous moments they had spent together during the war.

The weather was still bitterly cold, and as I used to do before, I went to socialize by going to see my friends at Jojo's tent, or rather now the house where the quartermaster was installed. I was happy to see Bobby Assie, good-looking as usual, Cassagnes, Gozlan, and Rosini (the one with the monastic thoughts), along with many others.

While drinking wine or "gnole," a strong alcohol produced in Alsace, by habit we were striving to get acquainted with the latest news, mainly the news coming from the "shithouse radio," the name given to restrooms from which gossip came. I learned on the spot that we would be leaving Alsace very soon, where our Colonial troops resisted the cold weather badly, and that we would be sent to north Italy, where the climate was much more favorable for them.

On March 8th , once again we began to move, this time south, passing by Colmar, Besancon, Bourg, Lyons, Valence, Montelier, Aix en Provence, St.Maxim Frejus, Cannes, Nice and Villefranche s/mer, where we arrived on the third day. Our unit installed its quarters in the military barracks that used to belong to the "Mountain Hunters" unit, close to a fisherman's hamlet and the sea. We were jubilant to be close to the sea where we could swim, since the temperature on the Riviera was always agreeable all year long.

Because I had an infected lung, the Evaluation Military Commission recommended that I not be sent any more to the battlefield, and it had been decided to keep me at the division headquarters' signal corps, where Jojo Louzon was. Villefranche was only a few miles from Nice, and most nights we drove there by jeep or by "auto-stop," also called "the finger." We were surprised to see the large number of mines buried all around our barracks, and as a result, no day would pass by without someone

losing a leg, a limb, or his life in an explosion.

As for me, I had an intimate secret that I couldn't share with anybody, and it was driving me crazy! For almost two months, I had been impotent! It started in Paris, when I had my last date with Betty, and since then I couldn't feel anything between my legs. I tried to stimulate myself by looking at magazines featuring naked women, but with no result! Sometimes in a bar in Nice, I would be looking at a pretty girl sitting with crossed legs, and I would try to concentrate my mind on undressing her in my imagination. Closing my eyes, I would see every corner of her body, while I would be feeling caressed by her intimate underwear, something that always excited me so much, but now all of it was of no effect! My chagrin was eating me up, but I was fearful of discussing my problem with a friend like Jojo, or Cassagnes, or perhaps to see our doctor, who was very understanding.

Once, as we had been doing almost every evening, we went to Nice with Jojo, Shindler, an Alsatian, and Gozlan to entertain ourselves in one of the numerous dancing places that were abundant in the city. Military people were parading everywhere—Americans, English, soldiers from all their colonies, some Brazilians, and, of course, us, all united in the same quest to find women and have a drink. Shindler had been to Nice many times, and he suggested that we go to a place that he knew, a huge building where an excellent orchestra played continually, mainly the jitterbug, which was the hit of the time, and most importantly, this hangout attracted many pretty girls.

Our friend didn't deceive us, because this place not too far from the casino was huge, full of all kinds of uniformed people, featuring principally American music, bringing out a lot of dance-lovers. It was so jammed that unfortunately we could find only a table far away from the dance floor, on which about thirty Hawaiians from the American Army were dancing at the time, moving alone, but with such expertise that it was worthwhile to watch them. I understood later the strategy they were using, and it was very simple. None of them spoke French, and in making this demonstration of their skill as dancers, they knew that later any girl would be more than glad to dance with them. And it happened that way! They were the ladies' preferred dancers during all the night, to the point that many blond American soldiers were looking at them with animosity, because they were monopolizing the prettiest girls and the best dancers in the ballroom.

After we were seated, a few minutes later a man looking to be in his forties, with four girls, one prettier than the next, came to occupy the table next to ours. This newcomer, Erneste, was a joker, and from the beginning he said to us, "Listen, friends, in June 1940, I brought the Germans up here—thus mentioning the date when Petain signed the armistice—and now it's up to you to drive them back to Germany!" It was a very original introduction, and we learned later, because it was unnecessary to beg Erneste to talk, that he liked to brag that he had participated in this "funny war" as a soldier and was happy that people like us Gaullists came to restore French honor. Then, his eyes twinkling and with a big smile, he told us, gesturing to the girls with his hand, "Don't worry about me! I brought these girls for you; go dance with them. I don't have any commitment with any of them!"

Feeling more at ease, we began a general conversation with our neighbors, and Jojo was the first to dance with the blonde Juliette, who was sitting close to him at the table. My neighbor was a black-haired young girl whose name was Mari-Lou Lampini, and bragging, she emphasized that she was from the third generation born in

Nice of Italian descent. She was very attractive, and she very much resembled any girl you could find on the streets of Buenos Aires.

Mary-Lou and I continued to talk while my comrades danced with their newly found companions. Only three of us remained sitting at the table now, and all of a sudden Erneste, impatient, said to me, "What's going on, Michel? Mari-Lou didn't come here to talk; what she wants is to dance. Come on, little soldier, move on!" Now I didn't have any alternative but to ask my neighbor to dance, and we proceeded to the dance floor, where a compact mass of human bodies was moving to the sound of the American music.

We returned late to our Villafranca barracks, and my three friends were bragging that they would see their dates the following day, with the possibility of going to bed with them. Needless to mention, I was consumed by an intense internal anger, without being able to share my pain with anybody. No matter how much I pressed Mari-Lou's sensual body against mine, and without regard to all the kisses we exchanged while dancing, I couldn't feel any physical excitement.

The following day, during lunch, when I was with Jacques Tricot, Gozlan, and Cassagnes, who joined us, the latter informed the group that a new unit had been formed, the 36th Division, which would be sent to Indochina to fight the Japanese. He told us that he had already enlisted and signed the papers, as did the sergeants Freitag, Leroy, Martiny, Temin, Baur, Simonian, Gauthier, Brodid, and Moerman. He was trying to convince me to enlist too, saying that the war in Europe would end very soon and it was a wonderful opportunity to explore this part of Asia.

Jacques Tricot, as his usual self, said, "Of course, it's a good occasion to know these regions, but over there cemeteries exist too, and I agree with you that the war in Europe will not last too long. The Russians already occupy a great part of Germany, and once this mess is over, I don't want to remain an extra minute in the army. I am fed up with all that, and I would like to try something else in life, before I become an old, grouchy, senile man!"

It was the last time I saw my friend Cassagnes, an old colonist from Equatorial Africa who was going now to the Far East, from where possibly he would bring stories like the ones he told me about Senegal, like how they trapped monkeys, the colonists' habits, and other entertaining anecdotes. Now, I was far away from the front, but I knew that military actions were going on with habitual intensity; nevertheless, the Germans, though sensing that they were routed, were retreating slowly, while losing their faith in the Fuehrer.

At the beginning of April, intense military actions began on the heights of Authion, a fortress in the Italian mountains defended by the well-entrenched Nazis. The repeated assaults were increasing, and all the day long we could hear the heavy artillery in action. Without being able to improve their position, the infantry units at the same time were involved in isolated sporadic skirmishes. According to what had been promised, the volunteers from the Middle East, Syrians and Lebanese, had permission now to leave the army and to return to their country, which would become independent nations.

It was with emotion that I gave a big hug to Chamoune, a companion of so many military campaigns who very soon would be back in Beyrouth to get involved in politics, and I learned years later that his career had been very prestigious, mainly his work with his uncle, who became the Premier in Lebanon.

On April 7th, Lieutenant Paul and Corporal Packant disappeared while on patrol; only their jeep had been found, abandoned in the mountains. It was assumed that they had been taken by surprise by Germans and seized as prisoners.

On April 12th, everybody was dismayed and saddened to learn that the President of the United States of America, Roosevelt, who had gained so much popularity around the world, and especially with us, had died. On April 18th, the military police came to our barracks to arrest Sergeant Reculet, who never told us that he had been Admiral Darlan's secretary and had also been an officer in Laval's notorious fascist militia. He was sent to a military tribunal.

Our group continued to go almost daily to Nice, except when we had to report for orders or had some obligation to deal with. I succeeded in establishing a good relationship with Mari-Lou, more friendly than loving, because my sensual problem was still the same and didn't improve, becoming a constant worry. I was grateful to her for not pushing me in this sense. It had been almost one month since we formed our little group, with Jojo going with Juliette, Shindler with Poupon, and I with Mari-Lou, always the three couples together wherever we went.

This night was special. We were celebrating Erneste's birthday; although he wasn't military, he had earned admission to our group by virtue of his good sense of humor. For this occasion, we assembled at the same place where we met the first time, a place named "La reunion." Each one of us brought a lot of our food rations "A," "B," and "C," along with chocolate and cigarettes that the civilians so much desired, while Shindler acquired in the black market half a dozen bottles of champagne that he exchanged for cigarettes. We had a wonderful time dancing, eating, and drinking that evening. I was in a good mood that night, and dancing with Mari-Lou, I was feeling her warm and beautiful body pressing against mine; then, unexpectedly, while she was kissing me, I felt something moving between my legs.

I didn't want to wait longer to see if it was real or imaginary, and excusing ourselves with an invented pretext, saying that we urgently needed to go somewhere, we left the party, and without explaining anything to her whatsoever I dragged her to the closest little hotel that we found on our way. After all the more than two months of impotency, it was an incomparable sexual experience for me, as if I were a new man, and I was taking this pleasure with an intensity impossible to describe in words. Exhausted, lying along this beautiful Mari-Lou's naked body at my side, I said to her bragging, "Wasn't it wonderful?"

As she didn't answer, I asked her the same question again, and only after a lot of hesitation, she confessed that she was very slow in having an orgasm and that I would need to have a lot of patience, but for now, she didn't yet feel anything. I was very deceived and perhaps hurt in my pride, but I understood that from this moment on, I would have to manage to waste a lot of time just to prepare her. These preparations were boring to me, because she needed too much time; it looked like it would never end by waking her sensuality, and I was getting nervous, because she wouldn't always experience an orgasm, while I was satisfied, happy, and exhausted, wishing only to rest in the bed. Our relationship was stabilized, and the three couples together went to parties, danced, swam in the sea, and made love in our off-time from our headquarters or on assignments.

We learned with joy that the Italian partisans, the "partigianis," on April 28 caught

Mussolini with his mistress Petruchi and killed both of them, then hanged them upside down as a display for the people.

On the other hand, we learned with sadness that the mutilated bodies of Lieutenant Paul and Corporal Packant had been found in Tende, Italy. We were told that both of them had been taken prisoner after falling into a German trap. By a matter of only minutes, they lost the opportunity to be saved by one of our patrols sent to their rescue; the patrol had crossed very close to the German group, without their seeing each other.

While the Germans were taking their two prisoners to Tende, a group of Italian patriots attacked the Germans and set our comrades free, just before liberating the city. Unfortunately, when the castle that dominated the town was taken by the Allies, the Germans, angry, took revenge during their retreat by killing all the partisans who were in their way, and among them were Paul and Packant.

On May 7, 1945, we were all together in Jojo's office facing the sea, listening to the radio and calling all over the headquarters and newspapers, anxious to have confirmation that the war was over. The following day, May 8, we learned officially what we knew already: that the war was over, Hitler had committed suicide, and the Allies received the German unconditional surrender from Marshal Keitel. Early in the morning, we were formed in our square, in the position of "attention," while we received the official notice that we had won the war, an epical moment that would remain forever in the pages of history. Sergeant Chief Leroy got from someplace, or perhaps he had it prepared already with anticipation, an empty coffin. Then, from the formation's ranks four soldiers were called: a Catholic, a Muslim, a Jew, and a Buddhist to be pallbearers of this empty coffin. They carried it on their shoulders, as a symbol of all our comrades from different faiths who had fallen on the battlefield, in whose memory this ceremony was performed. The procession walked to the small church in Villefranche, followed by about fifty of us behind the cortege. The priest, loaded down by years but with a still strong look, as if he was seeing something far away, with his two sacristans at his side was already expecting us at this several centuries-old church's altar.

In front of them stood a long table covered by a white tablecloth, on which was placed the empty coffin brought by our four soldiers. Once liberated from this load, the soldiers stood firm in presenting arms, while the bugle emitted the solemn and gloomy sound, in memory of all our comrades fallen forever in this war. Not only am I not a believer, but I am an atheist, and I don't believe in God, but this symbol of the coffin and the representation of all religions that could have been worshiped by those who died fighting, increased by the emotional lament of the bugle, brought tears to my eyes, and they didn't have anything to do with religion. I will never forget this solemn moment, and I think that I will evoke it during my entire life, willingly or unwillingly.

When we returned to our barracks, bottles of wine were provided to celebrate this event that we had been awaiting for so long. We received orders to break ranks, and we began to greet each other and drink to our victory. Jacques Tricot, with all the men of his company, went to the pier, and one by one they jumped completely dressed into the sea, just as they had previously decided to do on the day of victory. Some of the soldiers were so drunk that they didn't remember that they didn't know how to swim, and they would have drowned if it hadn't been for those of us standing on the shore, who went to rescue them.

After calling several units to take care of the minimum service necessary, we were

told that we could do whatever we wanted and should celebrate the victory in our own way. Half drunk and deafened by the noise of the horns, sirens, and bells from churches, we decided to go to Nice, where big preparations for the festivities were occurring. I remember as the four of us came to Nice, the truck that gave us a ride stopped at the casino, and all the jubilant military men from different units stepped down and scattered immediately in all directions.

We succeeded in remaining together for a short time, passing by many bars and private homes, where the people were dragging us in to celebrate and drink to our health and victory. Suddenly, I was alone with Jojo in a Russian restaurant with the owner, with whom I spoke his language, and he was filling up our glasses at no charge. I couldn't remember how long we stayed in that bar, but my ears were exploding with the loud music and screaming, while my face, my lips, and even my shirt were covered with lipstick from so many women's kisses.

Most of my other comrades had more or less similar adventures, and such was to be expected, because during our military life we had accumulated so much tension, and from that surged this desire after so many years of suffering and fighting to celebrate the end of this internal oppression.

Nevertheless, I never understood why I didn't call on Mari-Lou to celebrate with her, unless that evening I wanted to have another adventure. Our military life became much more bearable, and our three couples remained living as if we were enjoying a summer vacation. I liked Mari-Lou very much, but her frigidity was exasperating me, and in addition we were told that we would be heading north, perhaps to Paris, as was forecast by the "shithouse radio."

On June 1st, 1945, I said my goodbyes to Mari-Lou, because the following day we were to begin our move toward Paris. She cried a lot during all the night we spent together, asking me how Argentina was and assuming that once demobilized, I would come back to marry her and take her with me to South America. Unfortunately for her, at that time I didn't have any desire to marry or to start a sedentary life with anybody, but of course I was mute on this subject, and neither did I promise her marriage.

In four days we covered with all our units in cars, trucks, and all types of vehicles the distance from Villefranche s/mer, to the castle of Montceaux, 30 miles from Paris, passing by Nice, Cannes, Aix en Provence, Avignon, Valence, Lyons, Macon, Nuits St. Georges, Dijon, Sens, and Fontainebleau.

It was when we reached this locality that Jacques Tricot conveyed the sad news of what had happened to the good-looking Sergeant Booby Assie. A few days before the armistice, he received a four-day leave that he planned to spend with his family in Clermont Ferrand, whom he hadn't seen in a good while. The jeep in which he was traveling ran over a land mine, one of so many that the Nazis buried close to highways. It appeared that to avoid running over a group of refugees who were clogging the roads on their way back home, the right front wheel of the vehicle departed from the asphalt and touched a hidden mine that exploded, blowing the jeep to pieces. The three riders had been sent to the hospital in critical condition.

No matter how hard I tried to find out about my friend Bobby, nobody could give me any news.

Chapter 18

I came to see the Paris of my youth again. During a short leave, I saw Jacqueline, Betty, and my many friends. I was feeling like a kid whose parents had let him go outside to play with his buddies.

Unfortunately, when I returned to Monceaux's castle from my leave, bad news awaited me. During the German occupation, France wasn't allowed to have an army. It therefore badly needed experienced sergeants and officers. As a lieutenant, my name was on the list in our provisional barracks for the tasks of drilling and training recruits. I was given 300 Breton recruits for drilling, and with the help of two sergeants, we tried to do our best to make worthy soldiers of them, troops able to defend the fatherland; meanwhile, most of my friends were in Paris having a good time, drinking wine and going to bed with the pretty Parisian women.

I hated these Bretons, but I didn't convey my feelings to them; in addition to being rude peasants, all of them were profound Catholic believers, some of them even students from religious seminaries. For me, they were too unruly, and I insulted them, shouting that they were not in church now, and if they didn't like it, they could complain to the Virgin Mary.

The poor things didn't grumble, and they kept smiling, not understanding my anger. Fortunately for me and them too, another event connected to my demobilization occurred; my presence was requested by the War Ministry in Paris to fill out some forms. It had been decided that the volunteers who had enlisted overseas would be discharged first. I managed to be in Paris a day before my appointment, and I was able to spend a couple of hours with Betty in the hotel Petits Pretres St. Severins. Later in the afternoon, I went to the offices of the War Ministry.

As if by enchantment, and certainly to my heart's content, I was received at the desk by a pretty redhead, whose name was Angelique; she had been assigned to take care of my discharge process. As soon as I saw her and her courteous manners, I tried to win her esteem, telling her that her name was appropriate, because I had never before seen such a pretty face looking so much like an angel.

After small talk on various topics, including the matter of my discharge from the army, I invited her to have dinner with me, and she accepted, blushing. I could already foresee her reaction to me, but I didn't want to rush my declarations of love for her, because no matter how beautiful she was, I needed her for something different from bed, which wasn't as important to me, because Paris had a surplus of available women. I learned during the dinner that she was a practicing Catholic, and of course she was convinced that she needed to remain a virgin until the day of her marriage; she thanked God for helping her to remain so. I was immediately reminded of Albert Duchamp, who thought exactly the same way.

After a few days of persistent but respectful courtship, we became friends, and I asked her then if she had access to my service file. Receiving an affirmative answer from her, I asked her, as if by coincidence, something without any apparent importance to her: if she could remove my name from those who had further military obligations, such as drilling recruits in Montceaux's castle. In her ingenuousness, Angelique said that not only could she do that, but she could also remove my name from all my military obligations,

leaving only my eligibility to receive benefits, food coupons, and pay. This meant that I could leave Montceaux's barracks at any time and move to live with my friends in Neuilly. That was exactly what I was trying to do; I wanted no more chores, service, or obligations until the moment my discharge papers were ready.

I felt as though I was in paradise, and I was very happy that I didn't spoil my relationship with Angelique by trying to take her to bed. In fact, she confessed to me that she was helping me solely because I was the first military man who hadn't been insolent with her. She complained that many soldiers were making sinful propositions to her and that some shameful soldiers even suggested "dirty" things to do, things that the church prohibits before the wedding.

She constantly repeated that she was right and that God knew that nice people like me existed; unfortunately, too many unrepentant sinners were living in this world, and she was glad that I wasn't one of them. I was listening to all this praise while keeping my fingers crossed under the table and making a concerted effort not to laugh.

I kept a very friendly relationship with Angelique until I achieved my purpose. She was always delighted to be with me, and she came to believe that one day I might possibly marry her because I "respected" her so much. Without promising her anything, because I didn't want to push my hypocrisy too far, I never stopped telling her to the last moment of our strange relationship how refined she was and what an exceptionally good man she deserved, even though too few existed for such a pure girl.

Upon my return to our camp at Monceaux's castle, I had a disagreeable surprise. My chief, Captain Chabriel, called me into his office and asked me briskly, "Do you know a certain Mari-Lou Lampini from Nice?"

"Yes, my captain," I replied.

"Did you go to bed with her?"

"Yes, my captain."

"She says that she is pregnant now. What do you think we should do?"

I already knew that Mari-Lou was pregnant, because she had written several letters to me addressing the topic. But all my friends who had the same problem advised me not to write her back, for that would only complicate the situation unless I was ready to marry her. Gathering up all my courage, I said in a loud voice, as if I were making a military report, "My captain, lately I went to bed with about a dozen women, as most of my friends did. If all of them get pregnant, I couldn't marry all of them, unless I were a Muslim, which I am not!"

Captain Chabriel wasn't expecting the conversation to take this turn, and he tried to hide a smile so that he could pretend to be more serious or angry. He told me to get out of his office before he lost control of himself, because an officer needed to respect his own dignity and accept responsibility. I didn't stay to listen to any more reproaches, and not only did I leave his desk, but I also went to my bed and started putting my military belongings in my military bag. I was ready to leave the place, because in my pocket I had a permit signed by the military command. This document stated that I could leave the premises and stay wherever I chose until my final discharge from the army. It was the document that Angelique obtained for me.

Our postmaster, learning of my desire to leave the barracks, told me to wait until the following day, when he would drive his military Dodge truck to Paris to pick up the mail, and he would give me a ride. But I didn't want to wait any longer, and I walked to

the road, hoping that somebody would give me a ride. I was ready to end my military career and get out of that place as soon as possible.

As I approached the gate of our barracks on my way out, I bumped into a group of my Breton conscripts who, seeing me, immediately stood at a very tense attention. I put my bag on the ground, stood at attention myself, and shouted very loudly, “Dismissed!” Then I asked them to come close to me, and I told them, “You guys can rejoice, because I am leaving for good and somebody else will take my place. I hope he will be more tolerant and not curse you as much as I used to. Don’t forget that when the war came to an end, all my buddies went to Paris to have fun; meanwhile, I was assigned to drill your company. I know I took my frustration out on you, but I didn’t intend it as an attack on you; rather, it was destiny that put us together at the wrong moment. Good luck, guys! And don’t hold ill feelings against me.” I shook all their outstretched hands as they strived to have a last handshake with me. Then a little Breton who had given me a problem with his lack of a military aptitude said to me, “My lieutenant, we don’t have a grudge against you; we understood from the beginning that you were angry, but not at us. God knows everything, and you will be forgiven by him. We wish you good luck, too, and remember us with kindness.”

Once outside the barracks, still touched by the sincerity of these Breton peasants, I stood on the sidewalk and waited for somebody to give me a ride to Paris. A young newlywed couple stopped their Citroen when they saw me standing, and learning that I wanted to go to Paris, they gave me a ride. They were heading to Paris to visit some relatives, and not only did they drive me to Paris, but they also dropped me off in Neuilly at Marmarian’s mansion. Once again, the family that had always been united with ours received me with open arms. It was June 23, 1945, and even though I was still wearing a military uniform, I had ceased in fact to be a soldier. Without military responsibilities or obligations, I was now a free man—free to do whatever I wanted.

At the end of the same month, the Armenians collectively had some kind of a big and important celebration (I don’t recall which one), and of course I was one of the guests. In a huge salon, in a sumptuous restaurant on the Champs Elysees, we had a big table that we shared with the Marmarian, Davoudian, and Aznavourian families, while the Kazazbachians were sitting not too far from us on this occasion, in this luxurious place occupied by close to 300 persons.

During one of the ceremonial toasts, Monsieur Davoudian got up, lifted his glass, and said that he was drinking to the health of Kiril Andreyevich Burenko’s son, “the Armenian-naturalized Misha Burenko.” The statement provoked an explosion of laughter because my parents had already associated themselves with the Armenians living in Paris, and it looked as though I, their true son, was following in their footsteps.

There was plenty of food and abundant beverages, in addition to the musicians who entertained their Armenian guests with the typical music of their country, and everybody seemed to be in a wonderful mood. Monsieur Marmarian got up from the table and told me to follow him to the other side of the salon, where he introduced me to some people sitting there. One of them was a fat man, the father of a skinny, black-haired young girl. Monsieur Marmarian almost threw me against this girl, saying, “Come on, Misha; show pretty Lida that a Russian-French-Argentine-Armenian gentleman knows how to treat a lady!”

Soon I had Lida in my arms, moving to the rock and roll music in the middle of the dance floor. This shy and gentle girl spoke French with a strong foreign accent, telling me that they were Armenians living in Iran, from which they had arrived recently, and that she was the only daughter in a close-knit family.

After dancing several times with this slim and timid girl, I returned to my friends' table. An angry Monsieur Marmarian said with disapproval, "What happened, Misha? Why did you come back, and why didn't you stay to enamor Lida? Do you know that her parents are multi-millionaires? They own Iran's most important diamond mines! They are desperate to marry their daughter so that they can have a future son-in-law work with them, because they don't have boys in the entire family!"

Everybody was staring at me as if I were guilty of an offense or had done something wrong. I realized that everybody was disappointed that I hadn't remained with the millionaire's shy daughter. To justify my action, I told them that she was too skinny and that I wasn't attracted to her. Everybody laughed ironically at me, saying that with the money I would have as part of that family, I could keep a dozen of the prettiest girls in the world on the side. Later on, on different occasions, I tried to please my "Armenian family" by courting the timid daughter of a millionaire, but in truth she didn't appeal to me, and I couldn't even imagine being in the same bed with her. At that time, I was skeptical—cynical, perhaps—but I was not an imposter, an advantage-taker, or a person seduced by materialistic gains.

In addition to Lida, I had many other opportunities to solve my economic problems and live in luxury. Having money had never been my preoccupation, nor my priority, and I never regretted not being attracted to money. Life gave me many other compensations that embellished my existence with emotions that would never be experienced by those who lack the capacity for pure and deep feelings. After dancing a few more times with Lida and once definitely convinced that I could never love her, I escorted her back to her table.

When I returned to the New Continent, I learned that Lida had married a very greedy Giraudist army officer who neglected her, striving only to satisfy his rapacity and thirst for money.

After leaving Lida with her family, I returned and sat down with Aziab Minian's family, close to Betty and her jealous husband Valeri. I danced several times with different ladies at our table, and then, as if it were by chance, I invited Betty to dance and returned to sit at her side.

I have already said that at that time I was very arrogant, and as soon as we sat down, I gripped her legs under the table between my own. I underestimated Valeri, however, who was too smart in his Middle Eastern spirit and couldn't have failed to see my game. He got up briskly from his seat and said slowly, "Exists in Lebanon a saying, that where the elephant cannot go through, the dagger can!" Then he left. He sent me the message that where strength couldn't prevail, dexterity or treachery could. He said it because he was scared of me.

Everybody realized what had happened, but they feigned that they didn't see anything. Betty was very pale, and in a low voice so as not to be heard by anyone she insulted me for being such a fool. Then she also got up to follow Valeri, without taking leave from any of us. I learned the following day that Valeri gave her a good beating.

I was angry with myself, because it had not been necessary to create such an unfortunate situation, especially one so embarrassing for everybody; it would hurt only me, because from now on, it would be more difficult for me to see Betty. At that time, I developed a habit of drinking a lot, and once I had alcohol in my body, I always felt that I was right, even if I had been wrong or nasty.

I knew that Jacqueline had the girls back in her apartment; consequently, I couldn't go to see her unexpectedly. I had a powerful desire to have a woman at my side for the night, and the Marmarians weren't expecting me to return with them to their home. It was late at night before the Armenian party was over, and I went to the Champs Elysees and in no time found a ride to the Opera Square, where there were many places to entertain the military. Plenty of girls came there too, ready for whatever adventure would come.

Without vacillation, I directed my path toward the American Welcome Center at the Grand Hotel, which was always full of people. It was strictly for American troops, but we were accepted too for wearing American uniforms. I found many French people inside enjoying "Uncle Sam's" drinks and music. As soon as I came in from the entrance, I was attracted by two girls standing close to a column while they looked at couples fully exhibiting their skill in dancing to American rock and roll.

I came closer to them, and by their badges I realized that they were French. Just to get a conversation started, I said, "These Yankees must really be blind to leave two pretty French girls like you standing while they dance with all these slipper-dragging females!" Both laughed at my joke, especially because at that precise moment, a very good-looking American soldier danced past us with a huge and impressively ugly woman in uniform. It was a very successful way to start a conversation, and we extended it by talking about women in service in general. The three of us agreed that the American women in the army were the least attractive of all and consisted mostly of lesbians, while the little English girls and the French competed with one another for beauty. Nevertheless, both girls said that some of the American boys were more attractive than the English or even the French.

I learned that the dark-haired girl with the stronger body was Cristina, a "Black Foot" from Argelia of Spanish descent. She said with a smile that as far as boys are concerned, the Americans were the best-looking of all. Her companion Emilie was always smiling; she was from Lille, and both of them worked in an administrative service. Even though I was speaking Spanish with Cristina, my eyes continued to be fixed all that time on Emilie, who was as tall as I and had light-colored hair and a reddish skin that I liked very much. Not losing my habit of giving nicknames to women, I told her that she looked like a little red fish, and the girls found that funny, and from then on that was what we called her. I danced several times with Emilie, a very attractive girl, and once we returned to the same place where we met, the "Black Foot" girl wasn't there any more. I feared that her absence would preoccupy my new companion, but Emilie said very calmly that for sure Cristina had found some American to her taste and that we shouldn't be concerned about her.

It was very late, past midnight, and testing my ground, I told Emilie that my last subway ride to Neuilly s/Seine, where I was staying with family, ran a long time ago, and I didn't know where I would spend the night. To my surprise, Emilie laughingly said, "I don't know where to go either, or what to do!" That's all I wanted to hear, because

without wasting time I suggested that we just spend the night together and resume our routine lives the following day.

After trying several small local hotels, we were finally lucky enough to find an available room, where we spent an unforgettably marvelous night. Emilie wasn't inhibited, and she behaved very naturally, considering the time we were living in then. It was mid-July, and the only thing I was doing was having a lot of fun, as if it were the only thing I had to do in my life.

I went several times to see my friends from Neuilly s/Seine, and of course I came back to the Latin Quarter; even though I wasn't looking especially for Rene Rigal, I had the hope of bumping into him one day on the Boul Mich.

I was lucky enough to see my Chilean friends, Rene and Gerald, again; the former's cousin was living in Paris, and they organized a party in his honor, inviting several friends, including me. This party was very emotional, and I could see how Rene Genestier had changed since being taken prisoner by the Germans, who kept him for three months in the Black Forest wilds, cutting trees. He didn't want to talk about this sad period of his military life, and we all respected his wish, avoiding bringing back memories that certainly must have been rough and painful. Many girls were at the party, and we had a good time. My Chilean friends thanked me for letting them know about our discharges and about the fact that the French government was paying for our trip back to the South American countries from which we came. They knew nothing about that, but of course they didn't have an Angelique to give them that news. They were happy to learn that our return had been scheduled for August 29 and that we would be leaving from the port of Le Havre, the same port from which we had left in 1937 on our first trip to Argentina.

Once, during our supper, Monsieur Marmarian told me that they were going on vacation in Normandy, on a beach close to Dieppe, where they used to rent a little house every year. He asked me if I wanted to go with them. It brought back the memory of the time we lived in Paris and rented a little house in Boyardville every summer from Madame Pellegrini.

I was too involved in having fun in Paris, and I didn't want to waste my time going to the beach, where I certainly would not have the freedom I now had. The Marmarians told me that they would be back on August 20 and that I would be by myself until that date, because both maids were also taking their vacations.

We were in the last days of July, and I was home alone when the telephone rang. On the other end of the line was Jojo, who told me that they had located Bobby Assie, who was at the St. Louis hospital. With Schneider, they decided to go see him on the following day, and they asked me if I wanted to go along with them. Hospitals always depressed me, but a hospital with wounded war veterans is the most impressive, strongest sight that anyone could see. I had lived this life as a patient at the Lyons hospital, and just thinking about it was enough to cause my heart to race.

After Schneider, Jojo, and I arrived at St. Louis Hospital, we chatted a little about our mutual whereabouts and then went to the administration offices to ask where our friend

Bobby Assie was. Crossing one hospital ward after another, all jammed with wounded soldiers, we followed the directions and finally reached the room occupied by our fighting companion. It is impossible to describe the happiness Bobby had upon seeing us, and we could notice at once that he had gone through a lot of suffering and depression, judging by the expression on his completely changed face.

As far back as I can remember, ever since I had met Bobby in the North African desert, in most of our gatherings the women around us had always been seduced by his presence. Jojo had never stopped saying that it would be foolish for any one of us to introduce our girls to him without risking losing them.

He had certainly been a real “conquistador,” and now he was lying without his right leg, which had been amputated, while his right arm was half-disabled, with only limited strength or control of movement. He confirmed what we already knew—that his wounds were inflicted a few days before the end of the war, when he was riding northward with two other sergeants to enjoy his leave at Clermont Ferrand. Bobby was sitting in the front of the jeep beside the driver when the right wheel steered away from the asphalt and hit a land mine buried in the dirt. Bobby took all the impact of the explosion, while the wounds of his traveling companions were only slight. They remained only a few days in the hospital.

As we were leaving the hospital, the doctor told us that when Bobby learned that his right leg was gone, he became violent, and he tried to commit suicide, dragging himself to the window with the intention of jumping out of it. By chance, a nurse passing by his room saw his body on the floor, and guessing his intention, she screamed for help, saving his life. When we arrived, we went to the doctor first to ask his permission to take Bobby outside to the closest bar to have a drink with our North African desert companion. The doctor first told us that it was against the rules to do so, but then he said that he didn't have the heart to refuse four gallant comrades in arms the chance to have a drink together. He gave orders to bring a wheel chair to our wounded friend.

Our presence and babbling, and especially our sitting with him and drinking wine at a neighborhood café, as we had done some many times before, was comforting to Bobby and to us. In proportion to the extent to which the wine went to our heads, we began to remember our campaigns in the desert, some love adventures we had, and other memories we shared. The people surrounding us, mostly civilians, little by little came closer to our group, then timidly at first began to participate in our conversation. After a while, they befriended us and insisted on paying for our drinks, feeling honored to be drinking with “Gaullist” warriors.

This warm atmosphere almost brought back Bobby's old “conquistador” feelings he had before being wounded. On our way back to the hospital, while we pushed his wheelchair, Bobby blew in his closed hands and imitated the sound of a siren, alerting the people on the sidewalk that we were coming and asking them to leave the road for us.

After that event, many years passed before I saw Bobby again, but between those years, we never interrupted our correspondence, even though I changed my address several times. That was how I learned that Bobby remained in the hospital two years, in the rehabilitation center, before being released. After his long convalescence and upon learning to walk again, now with an artificial leg, he found an important job as a chief of personnel at Creuset, where he remained until his retirement.

I always considered 1945 the happiest year of my life, because everything I wanted had happened by chance or by a miracle, as if it were presented on a silver platter. I was once by myself in the huge Marmarian family mansion, and I wanted to go out, but I was broke. I didn't know what to do without money, when suddenly the doorbell rang. When I opened it, a postman asked for Lieutenant Michel Burenko. When I told him he was talking to him, he handed me a certified letter. When I opened the envelope with an Algiers postmark, I realized with joy that the letter was from our "Guardian Angel." The letter informed me that since the war was over, the family assumed that I would very soon return to Argentina. Thus, the family took the liberty of selling all the things I had left at its home and was enclosing a check for \$200, the proceeds of the sale. I had completely forgotten about the effects left in that house, but I was happy that the family had the good sense to sell them. The money saved my situation.

I had an appointment with my friend Robert Romanin, who wanted to see me, because in a few days he was embarking to Indochina to renew the military career that had been interrupted during the German occupation. The war with Japan was still on, and he was eager to participate in it, because a career soldier can earn stripes during combat.

Military personnel from different nationalities gathered and lived in Paris; over a million gathered at the Place de l'Opera, which for centuries had been a tourist attraction. The throng of soldiers and girls dressed in multicolored short skirts above the knees filled all the quarters like a human wave.

As the good Parisians we were, we met at the Café de la Gare at Place St. Michel and sat around a table on the sidewalk, enjoying the summer breeze while drinking cold beer. We were planning to go to the Eiffel Tower, where a big dancing party had been organized on the first floor by the Free French Forces; it was early, and we were killing time.

To be sitting at a sidewalk café in Paris, watching as the pedestrians walk by, is the best therapy, and we were taking advantage of it. A tremendously large number of people were strolling on the streets of the Latin Quarter. It looked like the military was occupying the entire city, because military people were seen in every corner. And, of course, after so many years of privation, the French youth were enjoying themselves by discovering the beauty of life, which had been so austere during their childhood under Petain.

Suddenly, our eyes remained fixed on a woman—I would almost say a lady, judging by her elegance and the way she was walking; she was very distinguished, with her brown hair and a model's figure. I don't think that we were the only ones looking at her, and doubtless she realized it. She was certainly used to being watched, because she smiled with complacency, without encouraging anybody. Both of us said, "With one like this, for sure I could spend a wonderful nap."

In a mocking voice, I asked him, "Better than Josette?" But he pretended not to hear me, and suddenly he changed the topic of our conversation. I was curious to know whether he was still in love with the red-headed Josette, who drove us crazy in our childhood. Without hesitation, he confirmed that he still loved her. He had loved her at the time she married, and he still loved her at this moment, knowing that she was divorced. I understood that his problem was that he felt that she was inaccessible to him, and he didn't dare face her with his passion.

I asked Robert why he hadn't ever told her of his love, but he became evasive, and I couldn't get any other comment from my friend. His passion was odd, for in other things in his life he was very logical, but he was madly in love with this same girl, and his love was out of control; there was nothing he could do. Nothing had changed since his childhood, and he never considered marrying any other woman or even having a girlfriend. Briskly, Robert told me that it was time to get going to the Eiffel Tower, and we took a nearby subway and got out at the Champs de Mars station. At that point, as we expected, a large crowd of soldiers was scattered, but this time they were mainly French, with a very few Americans and British.

All the tables had long ago been taken, and we asked permission from two couples to share theirs. We were received with smiles, and immediately we sat down close to them, beginning a friendly conversation without wasting time.

Both soldiers were new recruits from our recently formed army, and they looked at me with respect, seeing all the medals I earned in the desert, in Italy, and in the South of France. They adored me, to the point that both girls who were keeping them company began to look at me with hatred, because my presence interrupted the idyll they certainly had started before we arrived. To get in the mood, now that I had money, I ordered a bottle of champagne and invited our table companions to drink with us, which helped to defrost the atmosphere a little bit. The music was good and varied, because several orchestras played one after another, even though the favorite was the Caledonian group that played a music similar to the Hawaiian melodies. During the war, the Caledonians were in charge of the anti-aircraft defense in our division. They were dark-skinned guys, very sympathetic, shy, and always joyful, but we didn't want to take a chance by sending them to the battlefield.

Robert did not really enjoy dancing, but so as not to keep imposing our presence on the soldiers sitting with us—they were making sheep's eyes at their girls, who were wearing miniskirts—he got up and said that he would go look around to see if he could find somebody to his taste. I remained sitting a little while, enjoying as usual watching people and observing the crowd around us, as people moved on the dance floor to the sound of the music; I was already worried that Robert had not returned.

I was sitting by myself now, because the two couples also went to dance, when suddenly I saw Robert coming toward our table with a vulgar-looking girl who was displaying a smile as if it were painted on her face. When Robert came close to me, he said smiling, "Why are you sitting here open-mouthed, when so many pretty girls want to dance?" And without any warning, he grabbed me by my arm and pulled me somewhere. Then suddenly he stopped in the middle of the dance floor to present me to the girl with the big smile on her face, whose name was Catherine. We resumed walking some place with difficulty, elbowing our way through this dense, exuberant group of uniformed men who were embracing super-excited girls wearing miniskirts or occasionally uniforms.

I followed them intrigued, asking myself where we might be going, but I didn't say a word; moreover, Robert couldn't have heard me, no matter how loud I shouted, such was the noise. Suddenly, we stopped close to a little table where a woman was sitting. When she turned her head toward me, I recognized her as being the one whom we admired when she was walking on the Boul Mich while we were sitting at the Cafe de la Gare. I couldn't believe that she was the one; meanwhile, this intriguing, beautiful lady, who seemed to see me for the first time, looked at me with a cunning smile, until Robert asked

her, "What do you think of him, Lidia? Is he to your taste? You see that my friend Misha is taller than I!" Without any need for explanation, I understood that my friend Robert had come to invite her to dance, but seeing that he was shorter than she, she suggested that he dance with her friend Catherine, the one with the smile painted on her face, who was shorter. I am of regular height, but Robert was short, and I said to myself that he certainly must have told her that he had a childhood friend who was of her height. What I assumed was later proven true, because everything had happened exactly as I surmised it had, a fact that Robert confirmed later.

Lidia had an elegance and exemplary beauty; she was perhaps ten years older than I, but she was in the full splendor of her feminine attractiveness. I liked her very much, because I appreciate distinguished women with good manners who are quite different from all these crazy little heads with whom I had been involved lately. I decided to take the precaution not to blow it by hurrying events with her. I understood that she wouldn't go to bed with me that same night, and I didn't even suggest it to her. Anyhow, before parting, we agreed to see one another again the following day. Of course, I suggested we meet in my Latin Quarter, an invitation she accepted smilingly.

By chance, she lived not too far from there, and she always liked to walk on the Boulevard St. Michel. Once we said goodbye at the foot of the Eiffel Tower, the girls were lucky in getting a taxi to take them home, which was close to the Luxemburg Garden. This automobile, used as a taxi, was a really small car called derisively in France a "bidet on wheels," for it could accommodate only two passengers, and no matter how hard we tried, we couldn't get the four of us inside. Robert was living on Mouffarde Street, in the 5th area, and it was easy to find a ride that came close to his apartment, where I spent the night, because it was too late and the subway wasn't running any more.

The following day, walking by La Harpe street, I came close to the hotel Peres St Severin, and I saw Mado at the counter. She already considered me a steady customer, and looking at me, she said simultaneously to me and the "ladies of the night" with whom she was talking, "Here is our Casanova! Is it to be a room for the same lady, or for another?" Knowing how curious Madame Mado was, I told her that it was for a new conquest and that I needed a very nice room, because I needed it for the entire night. Madame Mado told me that I was crazy. How could she give me a room for the entire night, when she could rent it to at least twenty couples over the same time? It was a hotel by the hour, and I understood Madame Mado's logic. I desperately needed the room, and I tried to charm her, telling her that if she wanted to know why I needed the room for the whole night, I would bet her that if she spent all night with me, she would recognize afterward that it was worth the price to be with me! All those present laughed, and the "night ladies" backed my petition, saying, "Come on, Madame Mado; give him the room, and let the little soldier enjoy it all the night long; we promise you that we will take less time with our customers to make up for the lost rental, and that way we will give you the chance to rent those rooms more times to compensate for the loss you will have with the little soldier's room."

After pleading a lot, my protectress convinced Madame Mado to let me have the room for the night, with the condition that I come after 10 p.m, so that she could have a chance to rent it a few more times.

Of course, I had to pay in advance. I kissed the three "ladies'" cheeks and went to Neuilly s/Seine to take a shower and change my underwear, because I would be wearing

the same uniform.

I wasn't wrong in considering Lidia a lady, because she came to our appointment dressed like a movie actress, to the point that men were looking at her with admiration. We crossed Place St. Michel and went to eat at the Rousier restaurant, which we used to patronize when we were living in Paris. It was very well known, one of the oldest and most distinguished of the city, and it immediately pleased Lidia, for it was at an appropriate level for her social rank. When we sat down at our table, a parade of waiters started; first came the barman, from whom we ordered Cinzano as an aperitif; then came the Maitre d'Hotel to take our order, which was duckling with orange; then came the somelier, from whom I ordered a bottle of Nuits St. Georges white wine; then came the bus boy to bring bread; and at the end came the Turkish coffee maker, dressed in Arabic attire. Lidia remained impressed by my manners, especially when the Maitre D came to ask me about my parents, because he knew that we had moved to Argentina.

It was a memorable and wonderful evening, one that evoked the same environment in which I used to live with my parents, to the point that I didn't want to break the spell of this enchantment or see this magic end. But all good things have an end, and after paying the bill, we were again on the street; both of us walked without saying a word, understanding that the moment of charm had vanished and that we had been again plunged back into reality. It was almost eleven o'clock, and Lidia conveyed to me that she was taking the subway to go back to her mother's apartment, where she was staying, thanking me again for the wonderful time she had.

Now I had my last chance to try my luck, and suddenly, while looking into her brown eyes, I asked her, why not spend the night together, taking into consideration that we were living in such a special epoch? The moments I spent with her were so romantic that I would like to seal them into an unforgettable memory, as could happen only in a fairy tale, if we could spend an entire night together making love. At the beginning, Lidia seemed surprised at my daring proposition, and she even tried to get angry. Then she cooled and said in an ironical voice, "It has been a long while since you left Paris, Misha; everything has changed here, not to mention that we also have been through a long war; so even if I say yes to you, do you know that there is not a single room available in all this city?" Already with some hope, I answered her smilingly, "And if by chance the fairy destiny suddenly delivers this wish to us, what would you say, yes or no?"

Laughing, Lidia said that in this case she would accept, because she knew that she wasn't taking any risk, knowing that no rooms were available in all of Paris. She added that I was a spoiled innocent if I thought that I could find a room, which is impossible! Then, seriously, I told her that I already had that room, and it was only two blocks from where we were. Lidia stopped in the middle of the street, and half-angry, half-laughing, asked me how I could have guessed that she would accept such a proposition.

I told her that I took that chance, and we went walking toward Madame Mado's hotel. When Madame Mado saw me entering the hall of her inn, she looked at me and winked. She was showing her approval of my companion, who meanwhile was using the desk's telephone to call her mother to tell her that she would be spending the night with a girlfriend and wouldn't be coming home.

Chapter 19

Two days later, after this memorable adventure with Lidia, while I was still profoundly asleep in Neuilly s/Seine, the incessant telephone ringing woke me up. It was Robert Romanin on the other end of the line, screaming, "What is happening, Misha? It is the third time that I've called you! I don't know why you don't answer; I know that you are there in the house! Don't you read the newspapers? We are living in a magic time, and it is difficult to believe!"

I had a hard time following my friend's line of thought; it looked as though he was speaking a different language that I couldn't understand. I asked myself what he was talking about. When I told him that I just woke up and wasn't completely alert and was unable to comprehend what was he talking about, he told me, "Today, August 6th, 1945, the Americans dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, killing more than 100,000 Japs!"

A cold sweat passed over my shoulders; I got up from my bed and went to get dressed as fast as I could, and without having breakfast, I took the subway to Place St.Michel. Robert was already sitting outside at the Cafe de la Gare, with several unfolded newspapers scattered on his table. It was easy to see that this unexpected event would shorten the war against Japan, nullifying all the previous forecasts. People from all sides seemed disoriented, because all over the streets, arguing groups had formed to comment about what had happened.

Suddenly, everybody had become a scientist, and everyone was explaining in precise detail how the atomic bomb was built and how it works, as if they had invented it themselves. It is very Parisian to pretend to be up-to-date about whatever was happening and to show a familiarity with everything that is new.

I became unexpectedly confused and perturbed, because since the end of the war in Europe about three months previously, I had been living as a parasite, thinking only about myself and how and where to have fun, without caring about what was going on around me. It was enough to open one's eyes to see everywhere wounded people, invalids, and throngs of refugees who crowded every corner of the city appearing on the streets. Those who came back from concentration camps also appeared, some still wearing pajamas with stripes, as a reminder or a living reproach of the Nazi cruelty. Mixing with them were innumerable individuals wearing rags, searching for relatives they had not seen in years or even ignorant about whether the missing relatives were still of this world. I needed to shake myself and be convinced that many more battles would have to be fought in the future, because even though fascism had been defeated, capitalism was triumphant and would always try to oppress the working classes, as usual.

The following day, Robert took the train to Toulon at the Lyons railroad station, where he would embark on a transport ship heading to Asia. He planned to renew his military career in the Colonial Army, but this time in Indochina.

After breakfast, Robert and I had a couple of glasses of cognac, and without too many comments, we hugged each other and said farewell, wishing each other good luck. I couldn't know at that time that I would never again see my childhood friend, whose life would end in such a tragic manner a few years later, during the French-Indochina war. Preoccupied by the events of the day and the sadness of Robert's departure, I suddenly remembered that I had a lunch commitment with Jacqueline, who would already be

waiting for me at the Porte Maillot. When I got out of the subway station, I heard somebody calling my name, and turning my head, I saw my childhood friend Claude Lanzenberg. I was already late for my appointment with Jacqueline, and I suggested to him that he come have lunch together, where we could talk.

Of course, Jacqueline, seeing me coming with my friend, was deceived, because she was expecting to be alone with me. She had already sent her daughters to Alsace so that she could spend a few days in my company. She became more angry when I introduced Claude, whom I had not seen in many years. He wanted, of course, to know what had been happening in my life all this time and how our common friends were doing. Claude told me that when the Germans put pressure on the population, life became insupportable; he had joined the partisans, remaining with them until the end of the war.

As soon as Claude left us, Jacqueline became immediately full of enthusiasm, telling me all the plans she had made for us to remain a few days in her apartment. She had even succeeded in buying black market food and of course the white wine that I liked, even though the red was preferred by the French people. One more time, I had to lie to her and tell her that I had been transferred to Fontainebleau to drill new recruits. I doubt that she believed me, but anyhow I stopped loving her, or rather I didn't need her any more, and I was impudent enough to drop her just like that.

It is only now that I had plenty of women that I realized how ordinary Jacqueline was; she was very poorly dressed, compared to Lidia or Betty. It was our last encounter, not counting the many times she called me on the telephone, trying to reach me at the Marmarians' house. Thinking about all that now, I confess with time I became ashamed of my behavior, because she was the one who restored my confidence in myself by essentially kissing my wounds, which I had kept hidden until then. In addition to that, she dissipated the complex that had I held internally for so long, one that had inhibited me from going with women for fear that I would scare them with my scars.

Time was running at a vertiginous speed, especially when on August 9th Americans dropped another atomic bomb over Nagasaki, killing about 80,000 persons and forcing the Japanese government the following day to accept unconditional surrender, putting a final period to World War II. It is impossible to describe the joy that surged all around the world as a result of this announcement.

One more time, we got together, the three "South Americans," as we were called, and we went to the recreation center of the FFF, where a victory celebration had been planned. I also needed to see Emilie, who already knew that I was returning to Argentina in a few weeks and wanted to see me.

After we all ate dinner, I said goodbye to the friends with whom I would be journeying very soon back to South America. Emilie took me to the little room that she was renting close to Chatelet. She came directly to the point, without any evasion, saying that she didn't want to have anything more to do with me. She had fallen in love with me when she met me, but afterward she realized that the only thing I wanted from her was to have fun, without anything serious in mind.

She wanted to find a man who would stay by her side and enjoy life together, and she concluded that I was inconsistent; consequently, she had found a Mexican guy with whom she began living, because he promised to marry her and to take her to his country. I heard about these Mexicans, and I had some information about how they had enlisted in the Free French Forces almost at the end of the war, so that they never had even a chance

of going to the front, no matter how much they wanted to.

I don't know nor do I recall what happened that day in the little room; perhaps it was the way the "little red fish" had her legs crossed, but I had a sudden irrepressible impulse to take her, and I went toward her, while she kept saying, "No! No! I can't do it now! He can come back at any time!" She kept on mumbling these words, without moving or putting up any resistance, even when I began to undress her and laid her on the bed, nor when I made love to her, only responding with a violent passion shown by her entire body. When we finished, she got up, gave me a big kiss, and getting dressed while crying, she said, "Better you leave; I cannot remain at your side without desiring you!"

When I reached the street after going down the steps, I realized that in two days, my "harem" had been reduced by two girls. I remained in touch with Amelie, and for several years, I continued to receive her letters after I returned to Argentina.

I learned for the first time through her correspondence that she took her enlistment in the Army very lightly; already, at the time I first met her, she hadn't returned to her barracks for more than three weeks and was considered officially a deserter! After I was gone, she had been arrested by the military police, who were searching for law violators. Once arrested, she had been sent to a court martial, which sentenced her to six months in jail, after which she had been discharged from the Army. Regarding her Mexican, he treated her as I had done: he used her until he returned to his country and then never contacted her again. Our correspondence waned until I lost interest, and I ended it when she asked me to bring her to Argentina. I didn't answer her and never wrote her back .

I was all dressed up as elegantly as I could, while riding the subway going to the St.Michel station to see Betty, who had just come back from a vacation she had spent with her husband and her parents in Arcachon. On the telephone, she told me that she had an irresistible desire to see me, but it had to be that afternoon, because her husband was working in his business and would come back home late.

One more time, I had to count on Madame Mado's complicity to get a room. It was becoming more difficult each time, because when the war ended, all the American soldiers wanted to spend their leaves in Paris, and of course too many professional women, or just those who did it for love, were willing to satisfy them, thus creating a general room shortage much more serious than before.

While the subway cars were flying along, I looked at my watch every minute, because I knew that Betty hated to wait, and I was already a little bit late. The train stopped one more time at a station, and with no special interest, I looked at the people getting out of or coming onto the car. Suddenly, I turned my head and found myself face to face with my Boyardville childhood friend, Minia Kolodkine.

As I was late for my date, I suggested to Minia that he ride with me in the same subway car to the St.Michel station, while we could talk at the same time, because he too was in a hurry. Unfortunately, he was also late to an appointment at a newspaper, where he was going for an interview for a French-Russian interpreter's job.

We didn't have enough time to spend together and could only exchange a few words about what had happened to us. I learned that he had been taken prisoner by the Germans in 1940, almost at the beginning of the war, and that he remained five years interned in a camp for officers, because he was a lieutenant. He confessed that he had saved his own life and had not been sent to an extermination camp, thanks to his Russian name, Kolodkine; he had not told the Germans that his mother was Jewish, which would have

been his death. Because he spent all these five years with Russian officers, he improved his knowledge of that language and now had the possibility of getting an interpreter's job with a newspaper. He was sorry not to be able to spend more time with me, but he was late, and he needed badly that well-paid job.

He also gave me the bad news about our common friend Edmond Jaba, who, with all his family, had been sent to an extermination camp in Poland. We parted without even having time to share our addresses. After many years and researches, I succeeded in locating him and renewing our correspondence. I saw him again about 50 years later in Paris, where I came with my wife Birdie to assist at a convention.

That day, after leaving the subway with Minia, I arrived a little late, but as usual I spent a wonderful evening with Betty, who was more sensual than she ever had been before. She had a great technique in love-making; she adored being in bed and was almost as skilled as a professional.

In spite of all these events, I took some time to see the Davoudian family in Meudon, and I never stopped saying thanks to Madame Davoudian, who had sent me on a regular basis packages of food to the front, especially the Middle Eastern sweets that I liked so much. We spent a very warm evening eating lamb, as could have been expected, and drinking a lot of vodka to wash it down. Serge Azarian, Madame Davoudian's brother, was with them, and I always considered the Davoudians as part of my family.

I couldn't neglect Boris Kazazbachian, and I also went to see this old barman, my father's friend; his wife Suzanne, always so gentle, had also sent me parcels to the front. Their daughter, also called Suzanne, was a pretty girl who later married Serge Azarian. Boris still had his bar Ali Baba on the rue de la Huchette, and I was surprised to see in that area a great number of Georgians. It was difficult to say if they were ex-war prisoners from the Red Army or whether they were KGB men, deserters, or soldiers fighting in the traitor Vlassov's army, or whether they belonged to any of the units from the Caucasus fighting alongside the Germans against us.

I distrusted them, especially when some of them asked me to sell them American military uniforms, promising to pay well for them. My suspicion increased when I saw them strolling in the Latin Quarter, with a lot of money in their pockets, accompanied by pretty but suspicious girls.

In mid-August, all the Marmarian family, sporting beautiful tans, came back from vacation in Normandie. Monsieur Marmarian was called to go to the Soviet Union, where there was an important conference regarding the question of unification of the Russian and Turkish Armenians. Such a unification meant requesting that Turkey cede the part of its territory where Armenians were living, for the purpose of integrating it with the Armenian Soviet Republic.

At the same time, Leon asked me a favor that I performed very reluctantly, because it was a question of bringing some Armenian relatives from Iran to France; they had been stranded in a refugee camp between the French and German border. They were refused entry into France because they couldn't provide the necessary authorization required by law. The huge wave of refugees was the direct product of the war; they came from the Ural mountains and the Caucasus to the Central European countries, and they were striving to work their way toward the West. Of course, France, being the last nation before the Atlantic Ocean, was where everyone was heading.

This situation was already creating a problem for the French government. The

government fought back, issuing strict orders to close completely its borders to all those who didn't have the legal right or the residence permit to be in France.

After a good while without seeing Angelique, and with a certain degree of vacillation, I went to see her at her new place, the Division Liquidation Office in Clichy sous Bois. She was very happy to see me again, and to my surprise she accepted my invitation to have lunch. It was only at the end that I told her my invented story of my relatives stranded at the border with Germany, and because they had lost their documents, they weren't allowed to return to France. I desperately needed to help them, and I had come to seek her assistance. She asked me several times if they were French or legally established in France; and each time I lied to her, saying yes, emphasizing that the only thing I needed from her was merely to provide me a special mission permit to go to Alsace, to cross the border, to have access to the refugee camp, and then to be able to bring my relatives back to Paris, where they had lived for so many years. Angelique, one more time doing credit to her name, asked me to come back the following day, promising to give me not only the requested documents, but in addition to provide a pass for the train.

A few days later, we had a family reunion at Marmarian's home, because the family members wanted to show me their gratitude for accepting this dangerous task. They perfectly well knew that I would be involved in a very dangerous and compromising, almost disreputable mission, and they appreciated what I was doing for them. After the usual hugs and wishes of luck, I left the house to take the subway to the gare de l'Est railroad station, where I would ride the train to Strasburg.

I always had been lucky with women, especially when they were able to help me, and this time too it didn't fail. As soon as I arrived in Strasburg, a beautiful city that I always liked, I went directly to the office of displaced people. At that time and at this place, millions of French citizens and legal residents were stranded; they had been sent to forced labor camps in Germany in wartime. Many had lost their documents, and it was the purpose of this displaced persons office to determine who had the right to return to France. Because millions of other people from all kind of nationalities were taking advantage of the confusion, trying to infiltrate into France, it was necessary to screen the displaced people carefully.

I was received in the office by a middle-aged woman who was still striving to conserve her femininity by applying a lot of make-up on her face. She greeted me with a smile, and after listening to my story that I had learned by heart and had recited to her as naturally as I could, she suggested to me that I first have lunch with her, because it was mid-day and she was hungry. After eating, and with a lot of flirting, Elizabette—that was her name—had the kindness to give me the necessary permit to cross the border. I could also go to the refugee camp, which was located in an old, half-destroyed building on the other side of the Rhine River.

It was too late to start going anywhere; a throng of people was filling up every corner of the city, and it was almost impossible to find a place to spend the night. I was too much of a psychologist to pretend to play the lover with this mature lady. Gently, I asked her permission to spend the night in her office's waiting salon, where I could sleep on a sofa. It took her only a glance to think about it, and she let me stay there, where I spent the night alone, with the night watchman in charge of security sitting in the next room.

Early on the morning of the next day, I got up, washed myself in a hurry, and without having even a cup of coffee, I crossed the bridge across the Rhine, which marked the

border between France and Germany; I then walked to the refugee camp.

Lady Luck kept smiling on me, because the director of displaced people was also a woman. This woman was a young Gaullist from North Africa, Noelle, who was delighted to learn that I had been in her city, Oran, in Algeria. Now, my instinct told me that this young woman would be more receptive to my advances, as long as I didn't hurry her too much. I had breakfast with her, then lunch, because Noelle was proud of her assignment of running the camp, a job requiring the assumption of a lot of responsibility. She had secured the job by joining the FFF from the beginning, as had many other Gaullists who received important positions after the war. In talking about Algeria, I was happy to learn that she knew my friend Nelly Sanlieu, and she loved the nickname we gave the mother, "Guardian Angel"; she found the nickname fit the lady very well, because of her kindness. Noelle insisted on showing me the camp where thousands of refugees were scattered all around, and she also wanted me to understand that she was the supreme chief of all this organization.

The night came very fast, and it was supper time, so she took me to a FFF unit cafeteria, where I found many soldiers from the 1st. DFL. After the war, they had signed up to work as functionaries in the administration of occupied Germany. Our large group of FFF veterans participated in an animated conversation during the dinner, and of course the Alsatian white and the red Moselle wines helped to increase our pleasant mood, until the time came to go to sleep. I spent the night with my FFF comrades, who offered me a bed in the huge building where they had their provisional living place. All that helped my situation with Noelle, because I didn't know whether to suggest that she spend the night with me or not. She might have accepted, but she also could have been offended, putting an end to the important mission for which I came from Paris.

The following day, after thanking my comrades-in-arms for their hospitality, I said goodbye to them, and I went back to see Noelle at her office. This time, I made up my mind not to waste time and to explain to her the reason for which I came to Strasburg, a situation which until then I had never explained to her.

Legally, I didn't have any document or proof, or even an official order authorizing me to take the Parvizian family with me to France; they were people whom I had never seen before, and I didn't even know what they looked like. I think that Noelle was curious about and interested in my case, the very common sentimental one of the "little soldier" who comes to pick up his aunt and uncle whom he hasn't seen in such a long time and take them back to their house in Paris from the refugee camp.

I had to wait a couple of hours, while she was finishing her routine paperwork at her desk, after which she picked up the documents referring to my "aunt and uncle" and she insisted on coming with me, for she wanted to witness the emotional moment that surely would take place during our encounter. Already, from far away the soldier in charge of that section showed me with a motion of his head a couple of refugees of about forty years old, sitting in a corner and appearing very tired; the two were looking in our direction, and I assumed that they were my "aunt" and my "uncle."

To be sure that they were my "relatives," I called their names loudly, and only when I saw them shuddering was I convinced that they were the ones I was looking for. Then I continued talking to them in a very sweet voice, with the purpose of making Noelle think that I was greeting them. I kept saying to them in Russian that I was their "nephew" and that they should jump on me as soon as I come closer, giving me a hug and thus

pretending that they knew me. I told them also that I would keep talking French, because they were supposed to have been living for many years in Paris and consequently should be speaking that language. I told them not to say a word, but just to deliver exclamations, hugs, and smiles. My “relatives” turned out to be very good actors, because they followed literally my instructions when I came within their reach, and Noelle got very emotional when she saw the show of a sentimental family reunion we put on for her.

After that, the events succeeded one after the next very fast. Noelle gave orders to let them go, and one of her employees helped my “uncle” carry one of the two huge bundles that they were dragging with them, and we went walking toward the camp's exit. Noelle said goodbye to me with a very prolonged kiss, and we promised to see each other again; then Noelle gave me the documents that stated that Lieutenant Burenko's aunt and uncle were returning to their home in Paris under my escort. Then, without wasting any time, the three of us walked across the Rhine River bridge to be back in France.

In my hurry to get out of there as soon as possible, I had forgotten to ask Noelle for a rail pass for the Parvizians, so that we could ride on the train from Strasburg to Paris. I went to see the chief of the railroad station, hoping to remedy this inconvenience. He was sorry that no seats were available, but he emphasized that no problem existed as far as my accommodation on the train, even though my relatives needed a special permit to travel with me. In the last resort, he said, I could travel with them in a freight car. I didn't want to waste more time, and after asking from which railroad platform the train was leaving for Paris, we went in that direction. After looking inside the numerous freight cars, we finally located one with not too many people and we hopped inside, accommodating ourselves over the straw spread out on the floor, but without seats. My new “relatives” were begging me to go to my comfortable seat in the passenger car, but I was afraid that something could happen, chiefly because they didn't speak French and it was possible that it could be discovered that they were traveling illegally to Paris, with my complicity.

I was tired, or rather exhausted, and I lay down on the straw, under the examining looks of the other passengers, who couldn't understand why a French officer was traveling in a cargo car, lying on the floor on straw, instead of enjoying the trip in a passenger car. The Parvizians were still trembling with fear, watching carefully their huge bundles that they kept the entire time close to them; and without taking time to breathe or close their mouths, they told me about all the pain and adventures they had had to endure during the war—hunger, displacement, persecution, sickness, corpses, cold, German soldiers' cruelty in the displaced people camps—but after a short while I was already soundly asleep. I woke up, or rather I was awakened by the voices of refugees, deportees, and even some voluntary workers traveling with us in the same freight car; they were returning to their homes, and now close to arrival, they were showing their happiness. We were approaching Paris, and everybody was emotional. I didn't stop to give instructions to my “relatives,” because in Paris the immigration police worked more efficiently. It was the last dangerous step to take, and we needed to be very careful.

I told my “relatives” that as soon as we arrived in Paris, they were to remain on the railroad platform, giving me time to go hire a porter to carry their huge bundles to the checkroom. Then, without any bags, we could pass the control gate as naturally as could be, trying to look as if we had just arrived by a local train. That is what we did, even though they made me nervous by the preoccupation they had about their bags that I had left at the checkroom; to reassure them, I put the checkroom receipt in their hands.

After leaving the Gare de l'Est railroad station, we found the military police and immigration agents outside on the street. I pretended to be very concentrated on a story I was telling my "relatives," the story consisting of just a lot of sentences pronounced loudly, while my "relatives" laughed, as I instructed them to do. Without paying any attention to all these uniformed functionaries passing by, I just said to the functionaries, smiling, "How are you doing, guys?" and I continued my talking and walking.

The Parvizians were in Paris for the first time, and they remained bewildered by what they were seeing, but I didn't have time to play the tour guide, and I pushed them into a taxi to go quickly to Neuilly. Not enough words exist to describe the emotion that reigned when they arrived and everybody got together. Leon and the Marmarian family came out on the street to greet us, and they seemed to never stop hugging and kissing each other, while they thanked me thousands of times for what I had done. Before I could even guess what she was going to do, Madame Pervizian grabbed my hand and kissed it with gratitude.

Chapter 20

The Parvizian family was lodged the following day in an apartment that Leon had rented for them in anticipation of their arrival. The following day, he went by himself to the railroad station to retrieve the two famous huge bundles, thus calming his aunt and uncle down, even though I never learned what they had inside those bundles and why they had such a concern for them.

Thanks to the confusion reigning at that time and also thanks to Leon' money, Leon easily legalized his relatives' situation, and after a short while, they went into business, creating for themselves in a few years a very comfortable economic situation.

I heard about them many times later, but I never had the chance to see them again. A few days were left before the departure of our ship to Argentina, and I wanted to take advantage of feeling and being in Paris. I had the option of being discharged in France and starting a civilian career there, and I even had several interesting job propositions from French and American enterprises. I could also apply to go to work in the German occupation administration, but it had been so long since I had seen my parents that I wanted badly to see them first. Betty was very sad about my departure, and we spent several more unforgettable evenings in the Latin Quarter, which remained so much engraved in my mind.

Later on, back in Argentina, I learned that Betty had a baby boy, blond, with blue eyes. Betty and her husband both had black eyes and hair, while my mother was blonde with blue eyes, and I assume that it was the reason for their divorce. I never received too much information about the matter, but in 1953, when I became the father of a boy, I compared the picture that Betty sent me of her son with my own, and they looked like twins. I don't know if the similarity was a coincidence, but in any case I never saw Betty again, and our correspondence faded. Many years later, when visiting Paris, I learned that she had died in a car accident.

I couldn't leave Paris without seeing my friends from Neuilly s/Seine, for I was under the impression that I wouldn't ever come back to Paris, and I went to every quarter as if I were saying a permanent goodbye to my city. My prediction was almost right, because it took me almost forty years to come back to my City of Lights.

My farewell adventure with Lidia had been very interesting; she came as usual very elegantly dress for our date, and of course I had already reserved a room for the occasion, thanks to Madame Mado's complacency. So as not to change, we went to have a nice dinner in a luxurious restaurant, and when it became dark, by habit I suggested to Lidia to walk to the Place St.Michel and go to the little hotel, our love nest. To my big surprise, she gave me a cold "no." Lidia then confessed that before meeting me, she had a romantic affair with an American soldier, and it had lasted six months. She not only got used to him, but she was hoping that one day he would take her with him to the States. Unfortunately, one day he came to see her, bringing a carnet with food coupons and saying that he was leaving the following day for his home in Los Angeles.

She had met me two weeks later after his departure, and she still was vulnerable. She thought that perhaps with me, my being French, it would be more serious, but one more time exactly the same thing happened to her. I didn't want to insist, and besides I realized that I wouldn't change her mind, nor the decision that she had possibly taken a long time

ago. And so we said goodbye, and I never saw her again, nor did I hear about her.

As for Madame Mado, I am sure that she remained very concerned at not seeing me coming back, and she probably asked herself what might have happened to her "little soldier," as she used to call me, when she didn't sometimes call me "Casanova." She would remember me as the "lover" who always reserved a room, paid in advance, but one time didn't enjoy it and therefore never returned.

The following day, I said goodbye to all the Marmarian family and took the train to Le Havre, where I would be embarking on a ship to journey back to Argentina.

Book 6

Returning to Argentina

Chapter 1

On September 3, 1945, I was again in the port of Le Havre, recalling how eight years before, all our family was also leaving from the same place for the first time to Argentina.

The circumstances were quite different, and at that time, there existed too much insecurity in the international political environment, and it was easy to forecast the coming of World War II.

At that time, I was a youngster, just returned from Spain, where I gone to fight fascism as a volunteer in an International Brigade, where at the end we had been defeated, due to the so-called democracies' cowardice and their abandonment of us.

My father, who could clearly see the future, had wanted to take us far away from the imminent horrors of war that according to him was approaching very fast and would explode at any time in Europe, which was the reason that we left the Old Continent to go to Argentina.

Now, I was a man, and I was proud that I had fought, participating actively with arms in hand to smash fascism, because I could actually return to any place on earth and carry my head high for having helped to impose my democratic ideal. For several years, I had remained faithful to the socialist values that I served with dignity and made many sacrifices until the final victory.

Our mixed passenger/cargo ship *Groix* was still filling her hold with cargo, and we would be ready to depart at 5 o'clock that same afternoon. It was the very first sea journey since 1940 between Argentina and France; the voyages had been interrupted during the long course of the war.

A large throng of people had congregated on the pier, most of them passengers, although some were friends or relatives who came to say goodbye.

Once aboard, I learned that we had exactly 7 volunteers with a destination to Brazil, 15 to Uruguay, and 33 to Argentina. Fourteen were English veterans, and 19 of us were veterans of the Free French Forces, in addition to 40 Chileans who would continue from Buenos Aires by train to the country where they had enlisted.

It was an emotional experience to again see my traveling companions of the initial voyage, Gerard Esquerre and Rene Genestier, who were returning with the Chilean group. I knew many of those who came from Argentina, including Aaron Vaindraj, Miguel Ferreira, Carlos Dalibot, Wadi Pardo, Kune Grimberg, Edward Wilson, Herman Spenski, and my battalion comrade, Robert Jacob. The always-noisy little Uruguayan Guindler was also there, and more than just a ship departure event, it looked like a county fair where people were happily milling about.

Among the civilian passengers, I could discern some South Americans who were returning to their respective countries, but at the same time, I noticed a great number of civilians who by their posture and their rigid attitude were betraying themselves as being

members of the defeated German military. My suspicion was confirmed after hearing them speak the language of their country to communicate among themselves. Most of them were traveling with their wives and children all ages, who were equally stiff in their bearing.

Very soon, we learned that they were "returning" as natives to Buenos Aires, carrying the Argentine passport, although not only could they not speak the Spanish language, but they also had never been to the New Continent before. The Argentine President Farrell, and especially the Vice-President, Colonel Juan Peron, both with deep sympathies toward the fascists, gave the necessary orders to their consuls in Europe to deliver Argentine passports to those Nazis, saving them from courts martial as war criminals.

The always-emotional moment of leaving came, and our vessel, little by little, began moving away from the Le Havre port. After a couple of hours, we were on the open sea and losing all interest in looking at the vanishing French coast; instead, we left the deck to go inside the ship, where the action was.

This journey was completely different from our first trip to Argentina, because then we had traveled in first class, while now, as military people, we were traveling in second and third class, packed several passengers to each cabin.

From the very beginning, our journey featured open hostility from the vessel's crew toward us; we assumed that the crewmembers resented all these aliens who had gone to fight for France, and it was possible that many of them remained faithful to Petain, who now was rotting in a French jail after his arrest for treason. The antagonism began with little things and escalated gradually to the point that no day passed without a fistfight between some of our people and the sailors.

After a few days of navigation, a resentment even more profound began to grow among us toward the so-called "Argentines" who spoke only German and who adopted a superior attitude toward us.

A few more days passed before we had our first port of call at Lisbon, where the ship loaded coal, but we didn't have permission to go ashore. The second port of call was the Verde Cape Isles, a Portuguese colony formed by several small, poor islands and populated by black Africans. They made their living through fishing and mainly through tourism, showing their swimmer's skills by diving deep in the sea to retrieve coins thrown for this purpose by the passengers from the ships. We were permitted to go ashore there.

No port existed in this poor country, and the ship cast anchor close to the isles, allowing us to go ashore transported by local rowing boats hired at the expense of a few coins. We did not want to miss this opportunity to break the monotony of our life aboard, and all the military passengers, together with many civilians, went to explore the tropical places, which consisted of a few buildings and a lot of shacks.

We realized immediately that there was plenty of wine on these islands. We began to drink, while also enjoying the typical ritual of naked black girls dancing and, of course, making themselves available after the show for bedding, along with other girls who hung around. The price was only a dollar, which was a lot for them and very little for us. All these activities were performed in a very natural way, in public, almost in front of everybody, giving every voyager the impression that it was their normal way to keep the islands' finances solvent, because the soil was so poor that nothing, with the exception of bananas, grew there.

In the company of my two Chilean friends, I became completely drunk, to the point that I later could not remember how I came back aboard. I was told later that my buddies took care of me, in spite of my nasty opposition and obnoxious behavior to them. The worst part was that my FFF badge, which I cherished so much, had been stolen, and in addition, I had such a headache that it lasted several days. My only consolation, if I could call it so, was that almost all my companions went through the same situation, and some even had it worse, because they returned with empty pockets, completely cleaned out, with their watches also gone.

Three days after our adventure in the islands, we were about to cross the Equator and enter the Southern Hemisphere. At that time, during the maritime journeys, it was a tradition to celebrate the crossing of the Equator, and all those who never had crossed it had to be “baptized” before being granted permission from the god Neptune to pass on to the other Hemisphere. “Neptune” presided over the ceremony with his wife, surrounded by a gang of devils who were mercilessly chased the candidates who tried to escape from these procedures. The god Neptune was a huge Chilean who had served in the Foreign Legion, Juan Moreira; he wore only a white gown, and his head was covered with a crown made of seaweed, while at his side sat a beautiful little English girl, Dorothy, who was traveling to Brazil in first class. She was scantily attired like a Hawaiian girl, revealing all the splendor of her seductive body, which we never stopped admiring. Neptune’s “warriors,” all from the FFF, wore only shorts and remained busy in pushing the victims into a basin prepared for this purpose, all the while simulating some kind of grotesque baptismal ritual by washing everyone with a huge broom. Those who had already crossed this imaginary line of the Equator at least once stood or sat on the floor to the side, laughing at the expressions on the victims’ faces, while we drank beer on the deck under the tropical sun.

We were amused in watching a skinny and lanky English gentleman who, after enduring all these torments, went to his first class cabin to put on clean clothes. Later, already dressed, he returned to the deck with the intention of now enjoying himself by watching other people’s torments. By an inexcusable mistake, he was taken by the “devils,” who assumed that he hadn’t yet been “baptized,” and once again, they grabbed him and put him through the same ritual of immersing him in the water and washing him with the symbolic broom. When everything was over, the British gentleman got up with his new suit all wet and calmly asked, “Now is it over?” And when he received an affirmative answer, without any anger or resentment he said quietly, “But it was the second time!”

That same night, the celebration ended with an impressive costume dinner followed by dancing, with music provided by the vessel’s orchestra. All of us FFF people tried to stand out and outdo others with our dancing skills on the floor, but because most of us had had too much to drink, we weren’t very successful in attracting the attention of the weaker sex, and to be honest, most of the women were already with somebody else. I succeeded in dancing a couple of times with Dorothy, but too many suitors were waiting around her, and I gave up all my intentions to impress her, all the more so when I saw her dancing cheek-to-cheek with an English officer; to console myself, I acknowledged that she would be disembarking very soon in Brazil and that to pursue her was just a waste of time.

The problems we had with the ship’s crew were increasing, to the point that very

often we would see some of our companions or a sailor with a bloody face. Captain Bocheau was very preoccupied with the problem, and on several occasions he threatened to punish those who engaged in fighting.

One day, I witnessed a real, pitched battle, in which about twenty opponents were involved; it could have had a nasty ending had not the Captain sent an armed patrol to break up the fistfight. Our champion was the Chilean Legionnaire Juan Moreira, who during the Equator-crossing festivity had represented the god Neptune, while the sailors' leader was a huge Breton, Manach, who hated us, calling us "dirty foreigners."

Two days after this boxing encounter, a real rebellion occurred, and it frightened the passengers. The women in first class were screaming, and it appeared as if the entire ship's passengers and crew were running amuck!

This time, Captain Bocheau gave an order to arrest two of our companions, Juan Morreira and Wadi Pardo, the latter being there just by coincidence. Both were locked in the hold's caboose. We were angry, especially regarding the detention of Wadi, who hadn't participated in the fight, had no problems with anyone, and was there by pure chance. Several of us, including Grimberg, Miguel, and Larondeau, decided to set the prisoners free that night. The cells were guarded by two armed sailors, who as soon as they saw us coming toward them accepted being disarmed without putting up any resistance. We took the prison's keys from the guards and set our comrades free, throwing the guns we snatched from them into the sea, and then we went to sleep.

The following day, the Captain was furious; he assembled all of us on the deck to discuss this serious situation, telling us that if we wouldn't instantly respect the discipline aboard, he would send a message to an English warship that happened to be in the area to intervene, because we were committing an act of mutiny on the high seas, and all of us could be court-martialed, for we still were in military service and not yet civilians.

We promised we would remain far away from the sailors, if he would also keep them far away from us! Apparently, the problem had now been solved!

Everybody assumed that we wouldn't have any more problems, but the following day, during the roll-call, the authorities realized that the Breton sailor Manach was missing and couldn't be found anywhere aboard.

The ship veered a few miles back and stopped, assuming that the sailor could have fallen in the water and was still alive, but all the search results were negative, and the missing man could not be found. So as not to waste any more time, because nobody could say for sure what had happened to the man, the Captain gave the order to resume our navigation.

But before that, a message had been sent by radio to Le Havre informing the shipping company that a sailor had been lost during the journey and had not been recovered, in spite of an extensive effort to find him dead or alive. The Captain received the order to resume his trip, because now it would be almost impossible for the sailor to be alive, given all the sharks swarming in these tropical waters.

The Captain's decision to resume the trip had not been made because he wanted to be nice to us; rather, if he had denounced us as suspects in a crime that had been committed, the ship would have been immediately interned at the next port. In that event, the passengers in uniform could have been placed in quarantine for all the time needed to complete the investigation. It would have been a big material loss for the company to have the ship immobilized and moored, instead of making money by transporting

passengers and freight.

On the other hand, no witness to a crime was available, and no one had any indication or clue that the sailor's disappearance had been the result of a criminal act, because, after all, it could just be one more case of a drunken sailor losing his balance and falling overboard.

We didn't say a word, and nobody wanted to comment about the event, even though some rumors were heard that during the previous night, Juan Moreira had had a fistfight with Manach. It was possible that the Chilean threw his adversary overboard while he still was unconscious. But such an event was only an assumption, and in any event, no witness could ever explain what had happened.

The other problem had arisen with the German Nazis, with whom we also had several fistfights; however, after they realized that they couldn't intimidate us, they opted to remain in their first class section, without coming to the lower deck to bother us anymore.

Those who had never been to Rio de Janeiro remained bewildered by the breathtaking spectacle before them once we approached the port. It is certainly the most beautiful bay in the world; the seven volunteers from Brazil disembarked, while two Frenchmen and five Englishmen were soon ready to follow them. About twenty civilians also went ashore, and among them, of course, was the pretty little English lady Dorothy. From the deck, we were screaming goodbye to her, while we waved our arms and fists, a farewell that delighted her. Once she reached the pier, she stopped, turned her head toward us, and blew kisses to all of us, touching her mouth with her delicate fingers, then moving them in our direction, while smiling sensually.

I was happy to see that my childhood friend from Neuilly, Popol Henot, was there. The local Gaullists prepared a special reception for the volunteers who went to fight in Europe, but I instead accepted my old buddy's offer to go to a good restaurant close to the sea. Wadi Pardo was close to us, and Popol invited him to come along.

I always liked Brazil, especially Rio de Janeiro, which at that time was still the nation's capital, until it would be transferred 20 years later to the newly built Brasilia. To be seated facing the ocean, on the terrace of one of the Cocacabana's most luxurious restaurants, while the tropical breeze caresses you, is an absolutely overwhelming sensation.

Wadi Pardo, a Creole from old Spanish descent, joined the FFF early in 1941. He wasn't in any way related to anything French, but he still went to fight against fascism, and he spent all these years in the Foreign Legion of our division. He was a wonderful companion whom Popol liked immediately; after drinking some Brazilian wine from Rio Grande, we brought back again all our old memories from our childhood and from the war. Eventually, we extended the conversation to various other topics. Popol had been in the army only eight months, participating in the Italian campaign, where the Brazilians came to replace us when we were sent to disembark in the South of France in August 1944.

After the armistice, the Brazilian Expeditionary Corps of 30,000-strong returned to their country. It had already been three months since Popol had been discharged from the army, and he came back to work with his father, who owned great sugar cane plantations in addition to large real estate properties.

Popol told us how his grandfather, a Breton adventurer, came to Brazil in the last

century, took thousands of acres of lands by force, and succeeded in building a commercial and industrial empire. His father was born in Brazil, in Bahia, as was Popol, who, laughing, said, "Well, I am Parisian, I mean a Brazilian from Bahia!"

We talked about France, and I gave him news about our common friends. Popol confessed that he missed Paris very much. I noticed that even though he was born in Brazil, when speaking Portuguese, he had a strong French accent.

The moment came to say goodbye, and Popol took us back to the pier in his car, from where a short while later, our *Groix* resumed its steaming southward. Three days later, we arrived at the port of Montevideo.

Uruguay had an old democratic tradition, and the news the people there gave us about Argentina was not very encouraging. The Chileans, who were the noisiest of all our group, told us that they went to fight for France, but if it necessary, they could come to Argentina to resume the fight against the fascism, which was little by little dominating that country.

In Montevideo, we were welcomed with overflowing enthusiasm, not only by the Gaullist representatives but also by the government dignitaries and high officials who came to greet us at the port.

The Military Circle was formed by professional soldiers, because Uruguay didn't have a draft system. Members invited us to their club, and while riding to it, we were surprised to see so many people acclaiming us on the streets and the special reception given to us. When I arrived at the pier, my old friend from Buenos Aires, Luis Menker, was waiting for me, and I asked him to come with us to the reception. I was surprised to see him still in Montevideo, but while we were eating and drinking in the huge hall of the officer's club, he told me in detail what had happened in Argentina after I left. I knew that because of Luis's health problem he hadn't been accepted to fight in the FFF and that he went to live in Uruguay because of Argentine political coercion. A bloodless coup was set up in Buenos Aires on June 4th 1943, when the army rebelled against the legally elected and radical President Castillo, replacing him with General Arturo Rawson and later by General Pedro Ramirez. In January 1944, General Edelmiro Farrell had been elected president, and his vice president was Colonel Juan Peron.

My friend Menker, in his desire to help the Allied cause, worked for the English intelligence service, discovering several German spies in Buenos Aires. Because of his efficient work, the German military attache asked the Argentine authorities to expel Luis from the country, as I already knew. That was why he was still in Montevideo, and not back in Buenos Aires, as I had thought. He warned me to be cautious in Argentina, where a fascist-inclined government prevailed.

The following day, our *Groix* was finally brought alongside Buenos Aires' Puerto Nuevo, and it was then that I really saw what a reception was. At the pier waiting with expectation was a military band, directed by the best maestro, Jose Maria Castro, performing the Argentine anthem, then "God Save the King," and finally the "Marseillaise." After that, once the gangplank was lowered to the port, the French Ambassador Count d'Ormesson came aboard, along with representatives from the Argentine Army, Navy, and Air Force, delegations from the de Gaulle Committee, the Chamber of Commerce, the French Club, and distinguished members of many different organizations, all welcoming the volunteers.

It was with indescribable emotion that I saw my mother, my father, and my sister

Maya, already a real "senorita," standing at the dock. Nevertheless, we still had to go through all the legal requirements requested by the immigration service and the maritime police before we were allowed to go ashore. When all the ceremonies were performed, the French Ambassador Count Wladimir d'Ormesson, surrounded by all the Buenos Aires media, gave us the welcome officially.

After that, the enthusiasm became general, as much among the travelers as among the large crowd of people who had been waiting for a long time on the pier, which had been especially decorated for the occasion.

The emotional reaction to seeing my parents was immense, and it was with sadness that I glanced at my mother, who seemed to have aged so much, while my father remained as handsome as he was before, without apparently having changed at all through all the years I was gone; meanwhile, my sister had become a beautiful young lady.

It was only the beginning, followed by a series of celebrations, treats, and receptions in our honor. It was very late, and my heart was beating at a rapid pace when we arrived at our house in Martinez, 2347 Albarellos Street.

The following two weeks were like madness, with receptions and festivities succeeding one after the other at the French Club, the Chamber of Commerce, the French Embassy, the War Veterans Association, and Harrods, where the Committee de Gaulle purchased badly needed civilian clothes for each one of us. The clothes I had left at home years ago were too small for me.

The Argentine government allowed us to wear our uniforms for one week, and wherever we appeared in uniform on the streets of Buenos Aires, the people would greet, applaud, and cheer us loudly. In my Martinez quarter, the young people whom I didn't know but who had befriended my father had asked constantly about me during wartime, and they had organized a reception at the German restaurant in my honor. My father was feeling very proud of all the attention focused on me, and I was thinking that it would bring memories of his past to his mind, memories of when he, too, participated in war.

When we happened to discuss the war, my father, with a slight sad smile, said, "It wasn't exactly what happened with us. During World War One, we had to capitulate to the German power; and during the Revolution, you already know what happened. As a result, you see we are in a foreign country, without a fatherland, without prestige, and without the money we had in Odessa, and to boot you went to fight wearing a foreign uniform!"

We had at home a little English fox terrier named Bijou that I had trained since he was a puppy, but when I came back, he didn't recognize me and never stopped barking at me. Somebody told me that a dog's memory lasts only one or two years, while the bears and elephants never forget people—thus the saying "Elephant memory." Anyhow, I had to renew my friendship with Bijou, as if we had just met.

Chapter 2

After the euphoria cooled down, the celebrations came to an end, and the 40 Chilean volunteers took the train back to their homes. Each of us began spending more time with his family. I had once again confirmed that the political situation in Argentina was not so good. The warning I received in Montevideo was valid, even though I still did not understand why the right-wing dictatorship had such an appeal among the common Argentine people, usually such lovers of freedom.

When we had first arrived in Argentina at the end of 1937, General Agustin P. Justo, a conservative, was president, and the tendency was already inclining to the right. In 1938, President Robert M. Ortiz was elected, with Ramos S. Castillo as Vice-President; they were from the Union Civic Radical Party, which was much more democratic.

We now had a semi-fascist government, with Farrell and Colonel Peron; the political situation was completely fogged by intrigues in different political sectors, a circumstance that was creating unrest among the inhabitants and mainly in the working class.

In 1943, U.S. Secretary of State Cordell Hull imposed an arms shipment embargo on Argentina, because that country had been transformed into a spy paradise for the Germans, something I already knew. As a reprisal, the Americans shipped great amounts of arms to Brazil, creating a state of panic in Argentina, where it was assumed that a Brazilian invasion would happen at any time. As a result of this state of mind and this serious situation, Ramirez wanted to begin building the needed weapons in Argentina, with German and Italian help. Then, a secret service German agent from Argentina carrying highly compromising documents had been arrested by the English police just before his departure from the Caribbean islands.

Because of Argentina's hostile attitude toward England, the Allies requested Argentina to break diplomatic relations with the Axis; otherwise, the United States would enforce a complete embargo on all products shipped in or out of Argentina.

Pushed against the wall, Ramirez had no alternative but to reluctantly break diplomatic relations with the Axis. The Argentine military was furious over Ramirez's submission and brought him down immediately in a coup d'etat, replacing him with Farrell.

The new leader began his administration by mobilizing all the human and natural resources, claiming he did so to protect the nation's "sovereignty." The military began by building roads and arms factories, increasing the share of national expenses of the Ministry of War from 17% up to 43%. Instead of calling a third of eligible draftees, as it used to be, all citizens reaching the age of 18 were conscripted into the army, and the number of officers went from 30,000 in 1943 to 100,000 in 1945. By halfway through 1944, it was quite evident that President Farrell was only a figurehead and that the government was really in Juan Peron's hands. Colonel Peron, a professional soldier, had been training in Italy from 1939 to 1941, where not only did he become fascinated by fascism, but also by Mussolini's cooperative system, both of which he intended to introduce in Argentina. He had been plotting behind the scenes until he overthrew Castillo, and later he did the same with Ramirez. He succeeded finally in installing Farrell as President. Under Farrell's administration, Peron became Minister of War, and a short while later, he became Vice-President. It was his own idea to organize the Air Force

as an independent unit, so as to be able to act fast in case Brazil invaded Argentina.

In November 1944, Hull resigned as U.S. Secretary of State and was replaced by Nelson Rockefeller, who was looking for new commercial markets and who preferred reconciliation to coercion. Rockefeller lifted the arms export embargo on Argentina. In February 1945, Argentina signed the Chapultepec Agreement to cooperate with and to defend the American nations. Then, in March 1945, under American pressure, Argentina declared war on Germany and Japan.

On May 8, 1945, after the German defeat, the new President of the United States was Harry S. Truman, who once again changed the American orientation toward Argentina, replacing Rockefeller with the recalcitrant Spruille Braden.

Truman instructed Braden to require the Argentine government to call for free elections, if Argentina wanted the recently imposed embargo to be lifted. Meanwhile, Peron was inciting the people of Argentina against America, and President Farrell was ordered to jail, thus giving the upper hand to Braden. That was the political situation in Argentina when we arrived. It was ironic that after routing fascism in Europe, we found the same totalitarian ideas we had fought against taking over in Argentina, the country where we were living.

I found the people on the streets very much changed. Argentines, who usually had been so apathetic or indifferent to politics, were now ready to strangle one another on the streets, at meetings, or in their neighborhoods. When I left Buenos Aires for the war, the most important topics of conversation were soccer and women, while now it looked like the issues of ideology were prevailing. Argentina never had unions, other than some strong local labor organizations, nor had the country any job protection laws related to working hours, health care, vacations, or retirement. Juan Peron brought from Italy the cooperativist idea, and the members of the Argentine working class felt that for the first time, someone in power was concerned about them. On the basis of this belief, they following Peron blindly in whatever he was doing. Before Peron's time, the Marxists had been persecuted with such cruelty that they never had an opportunity to explain to the working class that only Marxists were qualified to fight capitalism. Nor did Peron give them this chance, because he didn't want to have any competition in his thrust to dominate the poorer classes of people. He learned quite well in Italy how to use demagoguery; moreover, he was an excellent speaker able to bewilder the masses, who could listen to him for hours.

Sometimes I felt that I was in a foreign country, because the Peronist ideas quickly spread and in no time had taken hold of all sectors as if it were an epidemic. We discovered this political reality only little by little, because we were still living in our "little soldiers'" glory, coming back victorious from the war.

One afternoon, I was sitting on a cafe sidewalk on the still-under-construction Avenida 9 de Julio with Wadi Pardo, Eduardo Wilson, and Carlos Dalibot. While drinking Quilmes beer, we were analyzing our choices about how to begin anew our normal lives as civilians. Wilson had been contacted by a shaving blade company that had "Foreign Legion" as its trademark. The company asked him to make a series of speeches on radio about his war experience in the real Foreign Legion. He was expecting to be paid very generously. Wadi was tipsy, still drunk from the reception he received in his native town of Tres Arroyos, in the Buenos Aires Province, where they celebrated his heroic return from the war.

"Can you imagine," Wadi said, "all stores closed their doors that day in my honor, and on the San Martin Square, the band played while the mayor was heading the entertainments. Tables covered with food and wine were scattered all over, and the entire town was greeting me!" Some of that we knew already through the newspapers, and we were happy for our friend's recognition.

But I was slightly concerned about Wadi. I saw him too distracted, searching constantly for something and ceaselessly making extravagant plans in which he said nothing about the most important concern—how to find a job. None of us were planning to live off our families, but it was exactly what we were doing at the time.

Three weeks after this encounter, I learned that Wadi put an end to his life with a gunshot to the head. He left neither a note nor a clear reason for his suicide, even though I dreaded it had happened because of his strange and jittery behavior. I understood that it was rough for him, after four painful years of war in the worst of conditions. He could not readapt himself to the normal sedentary life in his small town of Tres Arroyos, or even in Buenos Aires.

Robert Jacob's mother called me daily to complain that her son was spending all day long lying on the sofa. He never went any place and just smoked one cigarette after the next, not talking with anybody and eating very little. He wasn't the only one in this mood, because many of my other companions went through the same mental depression, or even worse.

Since my childhood, the most important thing in the world for me was to become a member of a war veterans group, for I always looked at veterans with great respect. Now that we had returned from the war, we had the right to be members of the French War Veterans Association, where we were received kindly by the First World War Veterans. From the beginning, however, the members patronized us, making us feel uncomfortable. Very soon this club, located on 1435 Santiago del Estero Street close to Plaza Constitution, became our almost obligatory gathering point, where we went almost every day. We could drink there, eat, shoot pool, play cards, or read in the beautiful library, but very few undertook these activities. Mainly, we met to talk, to babble, and bring back the bloody past, which was not yet erased from our troubled minds, over and over.

After a short while, little by little, a rivalry began to stir up between the veterans from the different World Wars, one in which we gradually prevailed, due to our larger number, our younger age, and our aggressiveness or meanness.

For many years, this place had been a reputable social club, but in a few months we transformed it into a cheap neighborhood den where we drank too much, talked too loud, and brought strange friends and even stranger women, people who quite often didn't belong in the place. None of us as yet was working, and most weren't in a hurry to work or even thinking about work.

Carlos Dalibot had been badly wounded in Italy, left for the rest of his life with a deformed arm. Because he didn't have any profession, he was worried very much about the future. We had several of these war companions who would bring their sorrow to the club, but once sitting at the bar and after a few drinks, all their gloom would vanish, and in a short while, they would be laughing and talking loudly.

I learned that the French Embassy asked the French companies in Buenos Aires, which were many, to give the "boys" who came back from the war an opportunity. I was invited to come to the Rio de la Plata French Bank, which had decided to give a job to a

veteran. I went to this bank the following day, and after several tests that I passed, and because of my knowledge of foreign languages, the bank offered me 800 pesos' monthly wage, which at that time was very good, and I accepted the offer with joy. Unfortunately, when I was leaving the huge building, I looked at the employees sitting at their desks, and when I saw all these sour faces, serious and tense, my enthusiasm diminished considerably. I wasn't as eager to work in the bank anymore, but I needed the money, and I resigned myself to take it. By chance, that same evening I overheard somebody saying in our club that Michelin was offering a job to two veterans. The following day, I went to the Michelin main office at 1245 Paseo Colon, in Buenos Aires. When I saw all the trucks parked on the street, with people loading and unloading tires, I felt that I would like to work at that place, and I entered the building with hope. After explaining to the receptionist the reason for my visit, and of course without omitting to mention that I was a Gaullist war veteran, I was at once directed to see the director of the company, Monsieur Dupont. He received me very cordially, emphasizing that Monsieur Bruel asked him to give us, "the boys" who came back from the war, an opportunity. Monsieur Bruel was still the de Gaulle Committee president, and he had the highest prestige in the French colony for having being the first to join the Free French.

The director, after a short conversation with me, immediately called an employee who took me to different offices, where I was asked many questions. After a brief deliberation, the staff declared that I was fit to fulfill the assignment the enterprise was hiring me for. When I returned to the office of Monsieur Dupont, a short and fat smiling man in his forties, he conveyed to me that he was told that my general knowledge would give me a good opportunity to start a nice career. He said that I would start with a monthly salary of 400 pesos—that is to say, half of what I was offered at the bank. I didn't even want to take the time to think about nor analyze the difference in the wages. I accepted immediately.

When Monsieur Dupont asked me when I could start working, I answered, "We are already at the beginning of October, and I still need a few more days to finish my procedures at the French Consulate for my demobilization, but I don't want to wait until November 1st, and if it is possible, I would like to start on October 15!"

The three section chiefs, who came back to the office with me, opened their eyes wide, and Monsieur Dupont asked me if I wouldn't like to take a couple of months' rest and to cool down from all the accumulated, intense emotions of war.

He mentioned Larondo, one of my companions, who had been a pilot in our army and who also was hired at Michelin earlier, with the condition to start only at the beginning of the next year, 1946.

Everybody knew that, until then, none of us had the courage or the will to take a job, and Monsieur Dupont was staring with curiosity at me when I told him, "The war is over, and I need to make my living as soon as possible to start a normal way of life, and the sooner the better. Mainly if I get a good job! Once I finish with the paperwork still pending, I will put all my energy into my new work, and if it weren't for this obligation, I would start working as soon as tomorrow!" This outburst of mine made them laugh very much. I think they appreciated what I said, chiefly my new boss, who told me previously that he admired the Gaullists. He had personally remained a refugee in Switzerland during the war, running away to avoid living under the German occupation in France.

I came back home very happy to give this good news to my parents, who certainly had

the apprehension that they would have to take care of me for a long while. The farm we had in Derqui hadn't been sold well, and if it hadn't been for my friend Luis Menker's help—he was in Montevideo now—my father could have been taken by a scam or swindle. His business at the stock market had cooled considerably, and even though he still possessed money, he could no longer afford to spend money as he used to do.

It was a real joy at home when my parents learned that I had a steady job. Even though my parents were financially well off, I wasn't mistaken in assuming that my parents were afraid that I would be hanging around their necks, out of work for a long time. Even before the war, I had never had a chance—or rather I never tried—to earn money.

My sister was still studying at the private French Lyceum in Belgrano, one of the most expensive in Buenos Aires, whose students were children from many well-known and most reputable native and foreign families. I learned also that Maya was engaged to Enrique, my old buddy, and that they were planning to get married as soon as the preparations were ready. Enrique was studying at the La Plata Engineering University, and Teo was managing the import-export business, close to Plaza Constitucion, an organization that had been established many years before by his father.

I didn't want to mislead myself, to say that I was an exception to the rule and that I didn't feel anguish or oppression, choking myself as had all my combat companions with whom I had returned from the Old Continent, but I was going through the same mental tortures as the rest, as a consequence of the fighting.

While we were in the army in wartime, we had committed too many outrageous and vile acts as part of our normal and daily lives, and we accepted these things as a part of war. Now, everything was different, for we had returned to a country living in peace. The citizens did not know the rigor of battle, and we were feeling like "toads fallen in a stranger's well," to use an Argentine saying. We knew that we needed some more time to get mentally used to this other kind of existence and to try to live like the civilians around us. It was very difficult!

I learned that besides Wadi Pardo, two more veterans that I knew by name only committed suicide after their return. It was a high percentage, three suicides out of 150 volunteers who went to fight from Argentina.

Sometimes my nerves were about to explode, and I fought an inner battle to be in control of myself. It was strange, because I had not been a street fighter, nor a troublemaker. After my return, I had several violent and stupid wrangles that would never have happened in other times before the war.

Once, when I was walking near Montevideo Street, I reached the corner of Lavalle Street and I saw a man standing there, one of so many who stand at the corner of the streets in Buenos Aires, waiting for somebody or just standing there without anything else to do. When I passed close to this man, it appeared to me that he was staring with a challenging look at me, but I kept on walking. Suddenly, as if somebody had hit me, I stopped walking, turned my head, and saw that this onlooker was still staring at me, or perhaps in my direction. I was overtaken by such a sudden and irrepressible rage that I came back to confront the insolent fellow, asking him with a challenge, "Why are you looking at me?" The man was completely confused and didn't know what to answer. He mumbled, "I thought that I knew you!" And without even thinking about it, I struck his chin with my closed fist, knocking him down on the street. Some matrons who were standing by began hollering and running away, scared to death.

I felt ashamed, but I didn't have the patience or the desire to stop to talk to my victim, who was sitting on the sidewalk massaging his chin, which certainly was hurting very much. I had several such encounters on the streets, in bars, and especially in our veterans' club, which had become very popular with the Constitution Plaza Police Precinct. All of us learned to fight rough in the army, a very different kind of fighting from the "fistfights" we used to have before the war. In North Africa, for instance, we learned dirty hits from the Arabs, very efficient and devastating, one of them being to head-butt your enemy's jaw, knocking him down for a good while.

At home, too, I had several little problems, and I realized that the disagreements with my father were increasing and becoming very painful for both of us, because before the war we got along very well. Until recently, he had been the head of the family, and I always obeyed him. Even in Spain, when he came to pick me up in Barcelona to bring me back to Paris, I had then offered him very little resistance. My father was seeing now, however, an important change in our relationship. A sudden gap appeared between us, and I assume that any father suffers when his son escapes from his control and tutelage. I went to the war as a tamed child, not smoking, nor drinking, very respectful and obedient, but I came back as a mature man, constantly smoking my pipe and mainly drinking very much, alarming my mother. In front of our neighbors, nevertheless, during the weekends, when we were gathering in our own or another house, my father felt quite proud of me—perhaps because everybody looked at me as if I were a hero, even though sometimes I became prepotent in attitude, loud and even rude. All that behavior certainly took over when the wine I had drunk was talking instead of the real me.

One of the neighbors we became very friendly with was the Aizpiri family, who had very liberal ideas. The husband, Hector, was a member of the Radical Civic Union Party, which was completely opposed to the Peronist movement. The Aizpiris had moved a few years before to Martinez and had been waiting impatiently for my return to meet me, because my father bragged so much about me.

One Sunday, while visiting with the Aizpiri family, we learned that a big rift happened at the Casa Rosada, with President Farrell putting his Vice-President Peron under arrest. The mob was restless, and the middle class preoccupied. Usually, more coup d'etats happened in Argentina than rebellions, and almost always they originated in the barracks with army collaboration. In such cases, the officers brought their submissive and illiterate soldiers out onto Buenos Aires' streets.

Now the situation changed completely, because Peron mobilized millions of factory workers, who were ready to follow him wherever he would lead them, and that alone was creating anxiety and fear among the population, especially among the well-to-do. Even though Juan Peron was a career officer, a colonel, he learned in Italy what was already known during the days of the Roman Empire: that the real strength in a country lay in the masses, and he was leaning on them. For the first time in Argentina's history, the army felt impotent, not daring to face such a huge human wave.

When Peron delivered a speech from the Casa Rosada balcony, he usually would do so as a show, removing his jacket, lifting his shirt sleeves, and shouting to the delirious mob: "You are my shirtless, and I am one of yours! You see, I removed my jacket and we are equal!" The people believed him, because the crowd was not only naive, but also childish, when not stupid; these people were very easily seduced by sweet words and fairy-tale promises.

Chapter 3

With strong emotion, on October 15, I walked to the Martinez railroad station, only four blocks from home, to take the train to Retiro. From there, I would be riding the "colectivo" (a small transportation bus in Buenos Aires), which would take me to the corner of Paseo Colon, where the Michelin Tire building was located. I had reason to be nervous: it was my first job. I had never before worked for anybody, and my four years of military life, between Spain and the last war, had not exactly molded my temperament to be a wage-earner.

My anxiety proved needless, however, because as soon as I entered the great gate of the huge Michelin Tire building, I saw a swarming throng of people carrying papers and packages or rolling tires in a joyful and noisy atmosphere. At this site, all my accumulated tension disappeared at once.

It seemed that instructions had been given to take care of me upon my arrival, because as soon as I approached the receptionist's desk and gave her my name, she immediately called somebody on the telephone. After a little while, a man came down. He was about forty years old, short and wearing glasses. He introduced himself as Juan Meleiro. I followed him, and we went up the steps to the second floor, where the offices were, including ours. He told me that this was where I would start my career in this tire manufacturing enterprise.

At that time, even though the war was over, the natural rubber scarcity was still felt very keenly in most parts of the world. To help to solve this problem, at least partially, in Argentina a federal disposition required those who obtained the limited coupons for new tires to hand over the used ones to the factories for recycling.

So I began my apprenticeship in the tire industry. I quickly learned that the main product was latex, which originally came from Brazil but 70 percent of which now was produced in Asian countries. Taking into consideration that all the rubber-producing countries were occupied and controlled by Japan during the war, the Allies had no possibility of obtaining it during the war. Consequently, there was a major scarcity of this product.

In the United States, this problem was partially solved when synthetic rubber was invented. But even there, tires had been built for military purposes, and no surplus existed for neutral countries. For this reason, the "recuperation" system had been adopted in Argentina and many other countries, allowing the factories to scratch out the little rubber remaining on the used casings and to mix it with new latex. We could thus manufacture, as we used to say, "shoes for vehicles."

Our job with Meleiro was to reclaim from our agents the used tires that had not yet been sent to our company. I quickly became very friendly with my new working companion. I realized that the rest of the employees, about thirty of them, from all parts of the huge room looked at me in amazement. I imagined that all of them knew that I had just come back from the war. They were considering me, I assumed, without malice, but merely with curiosity.

Several times a day, an old lady with heavy make-up pushed around a cart with little cups of coffee, which at that time was almost a tradition in all shops or offices, to offer this beverage to the employees or to the occasional customers.

When at noon lunchtime came, suddenly a human wave from all the corners of the room began getting up from seats to come in my direction with the intention of welcoming me and also of introducing themselves, as usually happens when a new working companion arrives on his first day.

Among the many people there was a skinny young man with thick lenses who seemed very nervous and anxious to talk with me. When I learned that we had only one hour for lunch, for some unknown reason or no reason at all, I became agitated and I told him, loud enough to be heard by the rest of the people, "I don't have time right now!" I got up from my chair and went walking toward the exit, followed by my colleague Juan; I observed immediately that the rest of the employees remained standing silent at their places, apparently very surprised and deceived.

Juan told me that he used to eat in a restaurant located on the corner next to our building, even though some employees brought their food with them, eating it in the dining room on the lower floor. Juan and I went to that restaurant, where we found several other Michelin employees who were eating in silence, without looking at me any more. Juan Meleiro, sitting in front of me, was barely eating without saying a word, and it was easy to see that he was irritated. This quietness made me feel very uncomfortable, and after exchanging a few trivial sentences with my companion, I asked him plainly if something happened that made his humor change.

My new friend was candid, and with a sad look he told me, "Listen Michael, don't get mad at me, and don't think that I don't understand you, but from the moment we learned that you were coming to work with us, we were touched and proud to have somebody with us who went to fight against fascism. Almost all of us are liberals and enemies of dictatorship; consequently, when everybody came to meet you, mainly the young man Dante Tornesi, the Uruguayan, they couldn't wait to shake your hand. I will not hide the fact that you hurt their feelings with your cold attitude, and now they are feeling offended.

After this explanation, we kept on talking about several different topics in a relaxed and friendly manner. I thanked him for being candid with me, but I told him that he should understand that sometimes I cannot control my nerves and could become easily nasty. I agreed that he was right, that I didn't have any reason to be arrogant, especially with people who wished me well, considering that I would be working with them for who knows how many years?

After lunch, as we were walking back toward our desks, I stopped in front of Dante Tornesi, who was sitting in his chair. His face showed a profound anguish, and he did not even dare look at me. I asked him in the most natural way, "Dante, aren't you eating at the restaurant? I was expecting to see you there!" These magic words completely changed the expression on his face and also of some others who heard me, making many heads turn in my direction. We still had some more minutes before resuming our work, and from then on the atmosphere spontaneously changed for everybody into geniality and friendship. All the people present came to shake my hand, introducing themselves. In addition, they offered their services in case I needed something.

I realized that none of them asked me any indiscreet questions or mentioned the war. I assumed that they were following my friend Juan Meleiro's instructions. And so, after creating a moment of frustration among my new colleagues and uneasiness for myself, I skillfully mended my bad manners.

I came joyfully back home from my first working day, and as I approached our house, I saw my father talking with our neighbor Hector, both of them obviously waiting for me. They intended to take me to a German bar to have some beer. The best beer was served at that time at German bars, often run by people of other nationalities. We celebrated my first day at a new job, and I think it was just another excuse to drink beer, which all of us liked so much.

The third day on my job was memorable, because Cipriano Reyes, the Meat Union leader, had incited the city and suburban workers to march to the Casa Rosada to request that Farrell immediately free Juan Peron. I wasn't as yet aware of all these political intrigues, but I was impressed by the huge mass of workers passing on the streets in front of our building on Paseo Colon. They paraded for more than an hour, threatening us with their fists while cursing us badly and screaming "chickens" at us because they wanted everybody to join them on the street and go on strike.

Monsieur Dupont ordered the windows to be closed and instructed us not even to come close to them, and much less to try to antagonize this human wave agglomerated on the street. Of course, all that was a set-up, a farce, because a little while later, when half a million persons filled up the Plaza de Mayo, suddenly, as if by magic, Peron appeared at the balcony, in a shirt without a jacket, with the turned-up sleeves, thanking his "shirtless" for freeing him. He coined this expression "shirtless," looking for a similitude with the "breechless" used for the rioters during the French Revolution.

After these events, Peronism suddenly began to prevail in all spheres, and it was better not to say anything against Peron, because the Argentine Federal Police was already very efficiently performing the task of the Gestapo. I realized that in our office Juan Meleiro, and especially Dante Tornesi, were really on our side and ardent anti-fascists. The majority of the other employees didn't sympathize with the dictatorship-seeker Peron, even though they were very cautious when expressing their opinions. Suddenly, somebody new appeared as a first figure in government circles: Evita, Peron's girlfriend, or mistress, who had been a second rate, poorly-talented movie actress, mainly known by the high-ranking officers as a "call girl."

From these days forward, anyone having a slight knowledge about politics, and especially anyone endowed with a sharp sixth sense, could foresee that Argentina was heading toward a gloomy period of her history that could last for many years. In the United States, Truman, still elated by the victory over the Axis, put more than the needed pressure on Argentina through his ambassador, Spruille Braden, who completely lacked diplomatic tact. The friction between the two nations became so much deeper that often a Peronist slogan could be heard on the streets: "Whom do you prefer, Braden or Peron?" And the mob with a loud collective voice would ceaselessly be screaming, "Peron! Peron! Peron!"

The United States doesn't have career diplomats, because the ambassadors are named at random by the new President, largely for having helped him with money to win the presidential election, Democrat or Republican. That country, "The Big Brother from the North," as Simon Bolivar used to call America, realized that the nations south of Colombia and Venezuela not only hated Yankee imperialism, but also were much more tied economically and culturally to Europe. South American nations couldn't be treated as "Banana Republics," as the Spanish-speaking countries south of the Rio Grande were

called. The United States was imposing its law on South American countries, in one way or another, by intimidation or by force. Peron took advantage of the fact that Latin Americans had a feeling of powerlessness, and well indoctrinated by the Italian fascists, he played on the Argentine patriotism.

After all these events, we became accustomed to witnessing daily demonstrations. Peron declared officially that he would create the unions to protect the working classes' rights and above all to secure a retirement system, which until then didn't exist. The masses were delirious, because it was the first time that anybody claimed to be taking care of them. Of course, nobody remembered any more how much the Marxists struggled to form the unions, without always having received the masses' support. Even at that time, many of the union promoters were still rotting in prisons.

The real left was very weak, impotent, with little or no backing at all from the workers. The left received the first blow when the Marxists were officially declared the worst enemies of the people. The Marxists were systematically jailed, with the workers' approval and even with their help.

Coming back to Martinez from work, I would see my father and our neighbor Hector Aizpiri, a radical and ardent anti-Peronist, waiting for me to get together, with some other neighbors, to have beer at any German bar in the neighborhood. We spent the evenings drinking and talking politics, which had become the favorite topic of all the Argentine middle class, and, of course, my father's favorite topic too.

One weekend, we were invited to have some beer at an acquaintance's home in the vicinity. He owned a machine for draft beer, installed with pipes cooled by ice through which the beer passed, pushed by hydrogen connected to the beer barrel. This device allowed us to have draft beer at home.

We were about forty persons all together assembled on the patio. I knew some of them, mostly from the Union Civica Radical Party, and they were very much perturbed by what was happening and how quickly Peronism was growing.

We were at the end of October, the temperature was agreeable, and spring was in full blossom in the Southern Hemisphere. Most of the guests were gathered around the swimming pool, which at that time in Argentina was a sign of opulence.

Several groups were formed to talk and laugh, while four or five women helped in the kitchen and the Goychenas' (the owners) two sleep-in maids in their sexy uniforms carried around heavy trays loaded with what in Argentina is called "picada"—ham, salami, olives, cheese, crackers, etc.—which is served with the cocktail (aperitif).

Senor Goychena's brother-in-law, Rear Admiral Enrique Lombardo, was married to Senor Goychena's sister Alicia, and he was a very good friend of the Navy's Chief Rojas. I wasn't wrong in assuming that he would remain the rest of the evening talking with my father, since both were fanatics about everything related to the sea and the navy. He was quite impressed to learn that my father had been one of the chief commanders of the Russian Black Sea fleet at Sebastopol, a nomination he had received personally from President Kerensky.

Around our neighbor Hector Aizpiri gathered a group of people listening with attention to his attacks on Peronism, which he was articulating with passion. I was standing at the bar, where the draft beer device was set, when I felt that somebody was softly touching my shoulder, and turning my head, I saw that at my side was the host's sister Alicia, the admiral's wife. "I don't know how this installation works. Michael,

please, give me a glass of beer!" she said coquettishly. She had a typical Creole beauty, was short with dark long hair, and had lovely soft skin. I asked her, smiling, "How do you know my name?" To which she answered, "I knew you before I met you. My brother Andres is driving us crazy with all your war stories—Africa, Italy, you see!" I told her that I felt very flattered to receive such a compliment coming from somebody who owns such a precious little mouth.

After looking deeply into my eyes, she asked me what was on the other side of the swimming pool. I told her that it was a little house where the guests could change clothes before going to swim in the pool. Suddenly, she expressed a curiosity and asked me to go with her because she was afraid of the darkness and couldn't dare go by herself to that place. Her brother Andres had purchased the home recently, and she hadn't had the opportunity to explore all the property. When we came to the other side of the swimming pool, close to the little house and behind a big apple tree, hidden from the rest of the people whose laughter was coming sporadically to us, Alicia grabbed me by the shoulder and gave me a passionate kiss on the mouth. I remained stunned, but of course I responded with ardor to the kiss. Immediately, I was aroused and wanted to give her another kiss, but she slowly pushed me away with her hand, while saying, "Call me Monday at noon. You could see me in the evening!" Suspicious, I asked her, "And Enrique?" She assured me that he would leave early in the morning to participate in the naval maneuvers in Mar del Plata, which all the squadron performed every year. They lasted usually two to three weeks, during which time she remained home by herself.

In a low voice, she gave me her telephone number, then suddenly turned around and left in a hurry, no longer looking afraid of the darkness. Later, I saw her with a group of her friends, paying no attention to me, nor even looking in my direction once during the rest of the evening; this left me puzzled. So as not to forget the telephone number, I put it in my book immediately, still not believing that what had happened was real.

There wasn't any doubt that the luck I had in 1945 was still smiling at me. It looked like the same good fairy realized that I hadn't been with a woman for a while and that, seeing that I needed it with a burning desire, she decided to send me this coquettish, dark-haired beauty.

After spending Sunday at home, I couldn't wait for Monday to go to Michelin, because Alicia told me to call her that day, and I was quite nervous. I liked her very much. She had something distinguished about her that attracted me to her; I had felt it seldom before for any other woman, even though I had been with many very fine ladies. To be honest, I didn't exactly know what to expect during my first encounter with Alicia. I knew already by experience that women were difficult to fathom sometimes, or at least to guess their intentions.

In case I was still under the fairy's protection and might be lucky in my longing, I wanted to be prepared for any eventuality. For this reason, I asked Meleiro if he knew of any hotel by the hour. My working companion opened his eyes wide and looked at me through his glasses as if I were a strange bird. Then he said, "It looks like you work fast!" and after taking another breath, "You just came back to Argentina after more than three years and already need the address of a hotel! It is fantastic, my friend! To be honest, I don't know any, because I have a girlfriend whom I see in my apartment once a week. Why don't you ask Dante? He is young, and he must know of one!" That is what I did, and I got the address of a place close to Plaza Once. Tornesi said it was very nice, but

expensive. When noon came, I called Alicia, who answered with her melodious and sensual voice. We agreed to meet at 7 p.m. at Florida and Cordoba Street, where thousands of people pass by or wait for others in the heavy traffic.

We went to a cafe, and after sitting for a while, our conversation was becoming boring. While my companion appeared nervous, I mustered all the courage I could and told her, "Why don't we go to a place where we could be more comfortable and talk quietly?" When she said yes, that it was a good idea, I made a comment that in honesty I didn't know the place well, but that it had been recommended by a friend. I begged her in advance to forgive me if she didn't like it. We went outside on the street to take a taxi, and I gave the driver the address of the hotel by the hour.

When we came to this mysterious hotel with dim lights and a narrow entrance for the cars, once again I said to Alicia that I didn't know the place and asked her not to be angry with me if she didn't like it. I wanted to go ahead softly, playing the innocent while insisting that a companion recommended the place. Unfortunately, when we got out of the taxi, an employee with a strong Gallego accent almost shouted at me, "A room with or without bathroom?" I kept on trying to appear ingenuous, and between my teeth I mumbled, "With bathroom!"

When we entered the room, Alicia didn't even frown; it appeared that it was exactly what she was expecting, and she quietly went into the bathroom to get undressed. When she came out, she looked at me, still with my pants and jacket on. She stared at me as if I were a Martian, and I was so embarrassed that I undressed as fast as I could, trying not to appear too stupid in her eyes. She was looking at me all the time with curiosity, almost with contempt. Alicia was a woman with good sexual experience in bed, and she was very demanding and exigent. It was apparent that she was used to being with men and knew males very well in all aspects, mainly during the precise moment when she was taking her insatiable pleasure.

When we left the by-the-hour place, while riding in the taxi, she told me that we would meet the following day, but she wanted me to take her to some exciting restaurant for dinner. Then, smiling, she lowered her voice to tell me that after the meal, we would go to her apartment, because the maid was sleeping with the children in an adjacent flat and wouldn't bother us. Her self-possession never ceased to amaze me! She was always sure that what she was planning would come true, and she wouldn't even accept the idea that things could turn the other way around. She discarded all prudence in her behavior.

My parents were already worried by my style of life, because I was coming back home at 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning to get up at 7, and it was clear that I looked exhausted. At work, too, I was showing my fatigue, to the point that Juan said several times that it looked like I would fall asleep standing at any time. During the lunch break, I no longer went out to eat. I remained sleeping in a corner, not being able to resist the fatigue that was overcoming my being constantly.

I was very happy when one day Alicia told me that we had to interrupt our meeting for three days, including the weekend, because her sister was coming to visit her from Rosario, the second largest Argentine city. This dizzy adventure was fulfilling my sexuality, but it was exhausting me physically. At the same time, the affair was confusing me, because I couldn't comprehend how Alicia could take the risk of receiving me in her home, without fearing that somebody could see me. Sometimes, I would envision what I would say if Enrique, her husband, suddenly had the naval maneuvers interrupted and

would suddenly appear in the house to see us in bed. I couldn't tell him that I brought some pictures to show Alicia, or that I came to fix something in the kitchen, especially if it was midnight and we were naked. This situation was curious, unexpected, and full of danger, but in a certain way it was quite different from what I had experienced during wartime.

After a few days of rest—I should say from my obligations toward Alicia—I resumed coming to the dinner table on time at home. My mother told me that she was very preoccupied when I was coming back late at night, and she couldn't sleep for worrying that something could happen to me. Very angry, I replied to her that I wasn't a child any more, and I wanted to know where she was during the three years that I fought against the Germans whom I had to kill, so as not to be killed! I could have lost my life a hundred times a day and had to obey orders from my superior officers. Now that I am living in a peaceful country, suddenly my mother is worried because I come home late for supper! “Are you serious?” I asked her ironically.

She had told me previously that once she remained six months without any news from me during the campaign in Italy, and more than once she thought that I wasn't among the living any more. I realized that I shouldn't have said all that I did, but my conscience was overloaded with too many horrendous memories of the war to be treated as an innocent baby. My mother didn't say a word, and not even my father made a comment. But I sensed that the gap between us was widening, because they wouldn't accept that I was an adult and could live my own life without asking their permission.

To settle officially my situation with my parents, I started giving them half my wages to help them with expenses, although I knew that they didn't need my money; they accepted the money, not wanting to hurt me, but it did not bring about any change to our existing clouded and tense situation.

Alicia belonged to a very rich family, and it was clear that she was wicked and had always been spoiled, probably the reason that she was whimsical and even egotistic. She constantly wanted something new, mainly when it was related to emotions. She didn't hide from me that the only reason she went to bed with me was because I had come back from the war, and she had never met a veteran before. Trying to hurt me, she added that it wasn't because she liked me for any reason, but rather it was the novelty that had attracted her. Trying to please her and chiefly to quench her constant thirst for new and different experiences, I decided to take her to a Russian restaurant, “Volga” on Paseo Colon and Yrigoyen streets, where a Russian tszigane orchestra was playing.

Even after we came back from the war, for several months people referred to us as the “ex-warriors,” to the point that we became very popular in Buenos Aires. Wilson still told his stories about the Foreign Legion on the radio, and from time to time, articles about us would appear in the press and in magazines.

It was by chance that somebody in the Russian restaurant where I took Alicia saw my picture and an article about me in a magazine. When I was recognized, the customers began greeting me and pointing in the direction of our table, so that other patrons could look at me. The result was that while we were eating, I saw the owner of the place, a lady from Siberia, advancing toward us. She came with a waiter carrying a tray with cups and a bottle of vodka, with six musicians slowly following her, while a gypsy played a mournful song on his violin.

The Siberian lady made a moving speech, giving me a war hero's welcome, and she

congratulated me for my taste for being with such a charming lady. At the same time, the orchestra loudly played the Russian traditional music "Pay do dna!" meaning "drink to the bottom of the cup!" Needless to say, everyone in the room stood up and applauded, while I swallowed the last drop of my glass of vodka in the Russian way. All the patrons and waiters kept on applauding me, while Alicia was exhilarated to be in the company of such a celebrity. She had already consumed a lot of alcohol, an occurrence that unfortunately was too frequent with her, and when the hand-clapping subsided, she told me in low voice, "Buy a drink for all the musicians!" I became irritated, because once I had given half my wages to my parents, I was left with only 200 pesos for the entire month, and I had already spent that with her; I had to wait a while before receiving my next check. Angry, I told her that I didn't have the money. My rude answer didn't disturb her, and after putting her hand in her purse, she pushed me with her elbow under the table and put a 100-peso bill in my hand. Of course, we were very popular that night in the "Volga," and once I paid the bill, I received some extra money in the change, which was welcomed to my depleted wallet.

Alicia's husband was traveling a lot, but whether he was absent or in Buenos Aires, we were seeing each other several times a week. She was quite impudent to go out with me, as if she didn't have a family, a husband, and responsibility. I think that I was more uncomfortable than she in this situation, in which she completely lacked any virtue. It became almost a routine that from time to time she slid a 100-peso bill under the table, helping me to pay for her extravagant tastes.

Alicia was an unequalled bed companion, and it seemed that it was the only thing she looked for in me. She not only never told me that she loved me, but she liked to humiliate me, telling me about her previous adventures with other lovers. She enjoyed telling me with the minimum details about her sexual affairs with others, and she restlessly insisted that she loved "animals" like me.

In December, in Argentina as in most Latin American countries, the entire month is dedicated to the New Year's festivities. It was the time for many toasts, and Alicia decided to have a drink with me at the Alvear Palace Hotel, the most expensive in Buenos Aires. We decided to meet at the bar, where I would find her after work. When I came into the hotel and walked in the direction of the bar, I saw Alicia waiting for me with a lady friend I didn't know. When she saw me, she greeted me with a big smile, introducing her friend Maria de Talcahuano, saying that they were very close and weren't keeping any secrets between them. I could see that this Maria was a lady of high society, but I still didn't understand why Alicia invited her, because we had agreed to go to her apartment after the dinner.

Her friend was a very distinguished lady, and both of them came from the same class, so to speak. They didn't have to work and had plenty of spare time to have fun. Both ladies had already had several cocktails and were joyful, understanding that Alicia wanted to introduce her lover to her friend and confidante and to brag about me.

After being at the bar, we went into the dining room, and without respite Alicia kept on saying that I was a real hero who had killed a lot of Germans, all in a loud voice that could be heard by the people sitting around us. I realized it when I saw some annoyed men looking at me with side-glances, while the women were showed their admiration and smiling at me. Alicia was almost delirious with happiness for having succeeded in the exact purpose she wanted, to attract the general attention on the celebrity who was at her

side. Alicia was so happy that she never stopped asking me—because a lady in the company of a man never talks to waiters—to order caviar, old wine, and expensive French champagne.

When the bill was brought by the waiter on a tray, the amount was as much as half of my monthly wage, and I didn't budge. I didn't have enough money for the check, nor did I see Alicia trying to slide the habitual bank note under the table.

After an uncomfortable period we spent in silence, seeing that I wasn't moving to take care of the expenses, Alicia's friend Maria, a plump, dark-haired, but still very attractive lady in her forties, said courteously to me, "I wouldn't like to offend you Miguel, but if you will allow me, I would like to take care of this check; it has been an honor for me to have been with a war hero!"

Almost spontaneously, I said, "It is very well, Madame! I appreciate it!" After that, I saw Alicia completely change color, and it looked as though she would at any moment have an attack of hysteria. She was transformed into a wild and silent cheetah; she became pale and glared at me with hatred.

After Maria paid the bill, we went outside to catch a taxi, taking Maria first to her apartment. After getting out of the vehicle, she asked me, "Would you like me to pay the taxi?" To that I answered courteously that I had enough money for that.

When Maria left the taxi and we drove away, Alicia, without being either intimidated or ashamed by the driver's presence, exploded and covered me with insults that even a coachman would have been ashamed of, saying that she had never before in her life endured such a humiliation as she had just had experienced by virtue of my vulgar behavior. She had wanted to introduce me to her friend to brag about her new lover, a distinguished warrior, but instead of being a gentleman, I ended up acting like a stingy, lousy bum.

I reacted with anger, telling her that she must have known by now that I wasn't earning enough money to entertain her friend at the most expensive restaurant in all Buenos Aires. Our mutual insults lasted until we arrived at her place, and I guessed that I had to forget about going to her apartment, as she had planned previously.

Alicia was about to blow up when she descended from the taxi. When I was about to pay the fare to the driver, she told me sarcastically, "And don't even think about coming with me. I don't want to see you anymore, and go to hell!" She slammed the taxi's door and went inside the building, which carried in my mind so many memories of wonderful times spent with her. Still angry and not even concerned that the driver had been witness to my humiliation, I told him to drive me to the Retiro. After arriving at the railroad station, I paid the driver, a real *porteno* who winked at me and said, "One lost, ten found!" and put his foot on the accelerator. Alicia kept her word, because after that event I never saw her again, nor did she try to contact me. I called her several times, but each time she recognized my voice, she would hang up without responding.

It was evident that our neighbor Goychena learned something about our affair. He might have guessed it, or perhaps Alicia told him, but after that time he became very cold in his relationship with me. Of course, I would never mention his sister to him.

I learned several years later that Alicia divorced her husband. As for her husband, he participated very actively in the Navy's rebellion against Peron on September 19, 1955, when Admiral Rojas overthrew the dictator.

Chapter 4

The Argentine people, especially the intellectual class, were expecting somber days because many capitalists became Peron's accomplices. With his support, the capitalists created new industries that didn't exist until then, allowing them to amass fortunes overnight.

In some way, the working class benefited from the situation because newly created laws not existing until then protected the employees. Moreover, they received advantages they never dreamed of from Peronism. On the other hand, losing the incentive to perform exemplary work, in a short period, the Argentine laborers, who before the war were producing almost 70% of what European or American workers produced, in a short time produced less than 40%.

Of course, all Marxists and revolutionaries were persecuted, tortured, and herded into jails by the federal police, the new Argentine version of the Gestapo. Evita, whom at the end Peron married, saw her popularity jump miraculously, but she remained just "Evita" for the people. When she was addressing the masses, she would always say, "My dear greasy!" making them delirious with happiness.

The workers received increased wages, free health care, paid vacations, and retirement benefits, and Peron began to put forward a project to build 500,000 houses or apartments for those who didn't have lodgings. Huge schools were erected, but with neither planning nor curricula; sometimes, structures for 500 students were built in towns with fewer than 200 inhabitants.

All the completely furnished houses and apartments were delivered as a free gift to entire groups of people whom Karl Marx called "lumpen proletariat," people who had never worked in all their lives. These people, so as to survive without working and mainly to keep on drinking wine, began by selling the furniture that was in their new homes, then the doors, windows, bathtubs, etc. Once the house or the apartment was entirely torn down, they would move again to their slums.

This situation and the myth that it was possible to live without working attracted thousands of immigrants from the farmlands and beyond the borders, people of the same category who ended up creating the notorious shantytowns all around the city of Buenos Aires.

Peron also nationalized the railroads, the telephone system, and a good number of foreign enterprises, saying each time, "Now the railroads are ours! Our country is again ours." Insecurity in all sectors was dominating. The workers became insolent, and everybody was living in an atmosphere of intimidation.

The Michelin factory was located in Bella Vista, about 40 miles from Buenos Aires, where 300 workers produced tires. It was the first tire-manufacturing complex built in South America, established in 1934. Shipments of rubber (latex) began arriving from the Orient, even though some of it was still provided by Bolivia. The United States was producing synthetic rubber, but there was too much tension between the U.S. and Argentina, and the boycott against Argentina still was on.

After several months with the company, it appeared that they were happy with my performance, because one day Monsieur Dupont asked me if I would like to move to Tucuman as an inspector. I was stunned and eager to be involved in something new in a different place. I accepted with enthusiasm, because for me this move was a promotion.

Monsieur Dupont told me that he would confirm this offer in a few days.

I learned later that in the zone of Tucuman, which consisted of six provinces, our Inspector Rodriguez of that area had died a year earlier. He was crossing a dry creek with his car in the high hills close to Amacha del Valle and had been dragged by an immense wave of water that had accumulated in the mountains during the heavy rains and had come down as through a funnel. This avalanche washed Rodriguez's car away, and neither it nor Rodriguez's body had ever been found, in spite of all the efforts of a month's worth of searches.

After this tragedy, a painful situation of a personal nature arose when an employee with very little tact but no premeditated malice gave Rodriguez' wife some private letters found in Rodriguez's office. When the widow looked at these letters, she discovered with pain and sorrow that her husband until his last moment had a mistress, an affair that had been going on for years.

Monsieur Cheron, our sales manager, sent Patuchi to the north sector to replace Rodriguez. Unfortunately, this new company representative was a gambler, and at that time a casino existed in Tucuman, which Patuchi patronized frequently. One day, after having lost a fortune of all his own and borrowed money, disgusted and tired of running away from the loan sharks, he shot himself. Monsieur Cheron was already a little worried and made another attempt to fill this vacancy with a *porteno*. Once again, he didn't see his hope fulfilled, because the new man, Campora, after remaining in Tucuman and traveling for five months, came back to the capital, saying that he wasn't planning to bury himself in those backward and lonely places and he preferred to live in Buenos Aires and not move from there.

The situation was getting serious, because the north sector and Tucuman was where all the sugar refineries were, as well as many different mining companies in Salta and Jujuy. These businesses were important tire-buyers because of all their vehicles, and it was indispensable to have a representative in that area as soon as possible. Monsieur Cheron was desperate and didn't know what to do, when Monsieur Dupont, who liked me, because I was a Gaullist, said to him during a board of directors meeting, "Why not Miguel Burenko?"

When I officially received this offer to move to the north, with a big promotion, a wage increase, traveling expenses, and in addition a car, I accepted immediately. When I was ready to leave, I had to receive instructions from our chief accountant, an Italian Senor Cagliosi, who spoke Spanish with a heavy Roman accent that he was very proud of. Dante didn't like Cagliosi because during the war, he never hid his sympathy for fascism and called us "Rabbit French" instead of "Free French."

In mid-1946, I left for Tucuman with Campiori, a zone representative. I was enchanted by that city from the very first moment we arrived there, for it was also called "The Garden of the Republic." My residence would be in the city of Tucuman, and I would be traveling to the other five provinces, calling on customers, selling tires, and solving technical problems for the large transportation enterprises.

Among my first customers, later my friends, were the Hochbaum family: the older brother Mendel, the younger brother Hersh, and Stoltz, the brother-in-law. They had recently opened their tire dealership named "El Liberal," because as shrewd businessmen, they saw immediately where the money was to be made because of the scarcity of that product on the domestic market. All three of them were Polish Jews, and they learned

with delight that I participated in the last war, fighting against the Germans. Mendel was a movie-type character who told me that when he was six or seven years old, his father took him to the United States to try his luck. His father purchased a carriage pulled by a horse and sold fruit and vegetables in New York, in the Jewish quarter of Brooklyn. Times were hard, and he couldn't make it. It was after the First World War, during the depression, when life was very difficult in America. After struggling for four years in different trades and ventures, he decided to return to Poland, to Galitzia where he was from. Much later, when we became more acquainted, Hersh told me that while Mendel, his brother, was far away with his father in the States, his mother had an affair with a Ukrainian and he was born from this union. When at his return Hochbaum senior learned about what happened, being very generous and profoundly religious, he forgave his wife's betrayal. He acknowledged Hersh as his son, renewing their everyday life as if nothing had happened.

We were getting along very well together, the four of us, and at the same time, I learned a lot about business from them, because they were good teachers, especially Mendel, or Mendele, as we used to call him. They liked me because I fought in the Spanish Civil War and against fascism in World War II. We were all left-wingers, mainly concerned about Palestine, as Israel was then called. I always had been in favor of giving a land to the Jewish people, where they could live in peace. After all, they had suffered terribly through the concentration camp horrors, which will remain forever an ineffaceable shame for civilized mankind. Quickly, I became part of the group formed in Tucuman to help the Jewish terrorists who were fighting for Israel's independence. Haganah was the largest organization, while Irgun was a right-wing group organized by Vladimir Jabotinsky. The smallest group, which I preferred, was known as Stern, going by the name of its founder, Abraham Stern.

Unfortunately, Stern had collaborated with the Nazis during the war, reaching an agreement with them to fight together against English imperialism, using the axiom that "my enemy's enemy is my friend." Yitzhak Shamir had been a very efficient terrorist, and his purpose was to fight with all the means available against the colonialists to rout the English forces.

Very soon, I became very good friends with a lawyer named Jaime Movsovic, an ardent Marxist and a man of integrity who remained my friend until his death, in 1992, dying after suffering paralysis for several years following a stroke. I mourned him for many years, and I still miss him.

My life in Tucuman changed completely, not only because of my good salary and working conditions, but also because of something much more important. It was because I had a job that I could develop in my own way. I think that it was important for me to feel responsible for what I was doing, far away from my bosses' supervision, for they were 900 miles from there, and I felt a powerful sense of independence.

Something was still missing in my complete happiness: it was feminine company, because I was tired of going with prostitutes and patronizing night clubs.

At the end of 1946 and the beginning of 1947, Peron kept on spending millions of dollars and gold accumulated in the bank vaults and basements, which was the profit gained from selling meat during the war and the product of the previous government's shrewdness and good administration.

Merchandise was arriving from many ports. Money was all over, and yet until then,

not enough products could be found to satisfy the demand, giving birth to a booming black market in all sectors. When I called on any tire or car dealer, as on some other important businessmen, the reaction was always the same, and we representatives received the same answer: "Listen, Mr. Burenko, we are too busy right now to see you; money is just raining on us from all sides, and during the day, we have only to sell what our customers need. Come tonight to the Tabaris night club; that's where we do the buying—during the night!" They were saying it in a joking manner, but it was the pure truth! Both of Tucuman's night clubs were bustling with people every night, with businessmen who would remain until 4 o'clock in the morning, drinking, dancing with the call girls, but mainly doing business with salesmen or with other businessmen.

For many years, I had to go to bed when the roosters began to sing. I hated it! I think that it was then that I began systematically poisoning my body with alcohol, while intoxicating my lungs with cigar and pipe smoking, for I seldom smoked cigarettes.

Tucuman is the smallest of the sixteen Argentine provinces, but one of the richest. It is very well known for sugar cane and citrus fruits, and the inhabitants have the reputation of being good drinkers, a fact that made me feel at ease.

Maya was getting married to Enrique, and of course I asked for a leave to assist at this special event by flying to Buenos Aires. My parents organized a sumptuous wedding, a Russian-type extravaganza, with food and unlimited quantities of all kinds of beverages. It was very beautiful, we entertained a great number of good friends, and the following day, I returned to Tucuman to resume my work.

In Tucuman, I was renting a large room in the house of a family of French descent, with the condition that I not entertain women, an inconvenient stipulation, but I felt comfortable at that place and accepted the restriction. During one of my routine calls on my customers, when I happened to be at the El Liberal tire dealership, I saw Hersh talking to a beautiful dark-haired girl. She was at that time the type of woman I liked, before my taste inclined toward blondes. Joking about my taste, when I was asked if I liked dark-skinned girls, I would always say, "The darker, the better!" When Hersh saw me, perhaps with the aim of getting rid of the young lady, because the store was full of customers, he shouted to me, "Miguel, come over here; I want to introduce you to a charming girl. This is Mirta, and he is Miguel!" After that, he rushed away to take care of some impatient customers.

I learned that Mirta had just arrived in Tucuman from Cordoba and came directly to see Stoltz, Hersh's brother-in-law, but she was told that Stoltz had gone to Buenos Aires to see his wife, who did not like Tucuman and lived in Buenos Aires alone, being childless. Mendel, with the intention of getting rid of us, or perhaps to give me assistance to be alone with the dark-haired girl, when passing close to us while rolling a huge tractor tire in front of him, said to me, "Miguel, why don't you take the girl to the cafe on the other side of the street, so both of you could be more at ease, and perhaps you could comfort Mirta, who is feeling so lonely!"

I didn't wait for a second invitation, understanding that I was disturbing them in that busy hour, and I followed his suggestion, inviting Mirta to have a drink with me. She had a typical provincial beauty, emanating a strong sense of femininity mixed with an ardent sensuality. She didn't have any transportation, and after having had a cocktail in the bar, I took her back to her home in my car, or rather to the boarding house on Suipacha Street where she was staying, with the promise to pick her up in the evening for dinner.

It was the beginning of one more strange adventure in my life, and it lasted for about a year. It took me many months to find out that she was illiterate; however, she was extremely street-smart with an inborn cleverness, able to fool anyone shrewder than I. There was more in her: she was an inveterate liar, posturing and pretending to be an innocent young girl, but I soon discovered that she really was a call girl, more or less a prostitute. The only difference was that instead of being a streetwalker, she had a list of some "friends," with whom she met for money. Stoltz was one of them, and that was the reason I found her in the Liberal, where she had come to call on him as her customer.

I wouldn't say that I fell in love with her, but I was rather fascinated by her, and it was much later, when we began to have regular sex together, that I felt strongly attached to her. Even in that aspect, she had her secret, which took me several months to discover. She was sexually frigid, but in bed she could give the impression of being the most sensual and ardent woman in the world.

I don't know what happened one evening or what I did to her, but during our sexual intercourse, she began to howl like a wild animal. Her cry frightened me, because I thought that, unaware, I might have hurt her! She confessed to me later that it was the first time in her life she ever had an orgasm. She said that she never before had felt it and that she wouldn't have ever imagined that it could be so good. It was very difficult to make her come sexually, requiring from me a lot of patience and determination, although I wasn't successful in my undertaking most of the time. I didn't need her to tell me; I could see it very easily myself. And to give her credit, in that aspect she was quite honest with me and would be frank about it if she enjoyed it or not.

When we began living together, that is to say when I moved in the boarding house where she was staying, I learned that she had a three-year-old daughter. This child was from a boyfriend who dropped her when he learned that she was pregnant; his leaving her began her call-girl's career for survival. Her parents threw her out when they saw that she was about to have a baby. Mirta was lucky enough to have a good childhood friend who sheltered her in her rented room until her daughter was born. Unfortunately, both were very poor, and so as not to starve, only a few days after giving birth, Mirta began doing what her friend was doing—going with men for money. After a while, when her friend found an older married man, Mirta tried to hold a decent job. Unfortunately, the boss, her supervisor at the place where she was working, always required free sexual favors from her. She needed to make enough money to pay somebody to take care of her baby, and in spite of her repulsion, she returned to her previous occupation, going with men for money, an occupation that allowed her to make ends meet. I learned about her life, little by little, some of it told by her and some by other people.

Our sexual relationship didn't change, and in my egotistic male logic, for a long time I didn't pay very much attention to my female partner's erotic needs. Mirta, as smart as she was, discovered very soon another way to get aroused in bed with me by making me angry. She would begin by saying that my mother was a whore, then that my sister was too, until I would fume with rage and threaten to hurt her. This situation excited her, and she would keep on provoking me, until in fury I would strike her. It would usually happen when we were in bed during the love-making; when I began to slap her, suddenly she would grab me in her arms with all her strength and then have a tremendous orgasm. Immediately after, she would apologize for what she said about my mother and my sister.

After several of these scenes, I understood her strategy and I would slap her softly,

without harming her, until she reached her orgasm. I realized that she was a masochist and could enjoy sex only when mistreated. Later, when she understood that I had discovered her secret, she would directly ask me, "Hit me! Hit me, please!" I didn't want to have her baby with us, and so we found a poor woman with children who took care of the baby, providing the woman with a good remuneration.

My attraction to alcohol was increasing. It goes without saying that my job's obligation very often required me to drink with customers. Once, Monsieur Dupont came to see me in Tucuman to pay a visit to our clients, and he confirmed that to drink with the customers was not only normal but also beneficial, because it increased the friendly relationship that was very good for business. Monsieur Dupont was the typical middle-class Frenchman—skeptical, open, frank, and spitting out the truth without turning around, even if it was something really disagreeable to hear. We were getting along very well, to the point that this friendship created a lot of envy among many of our company's employees.

The turning point came when everybody complained that I received too many special favors when Monsieur Rene Lavery came to Argentina from Clermont Ferrand, Michelin's head office. He was one of the best and most efficient engineers of the enterprise. We had a devastating fiasco with the quality of the synthetic rubber tires produced by our Bella Vista factory.

We needed to solve this disastrous problem as soon as possible. The new tires, built with synthetic rubber instead of natural rubber, were blowing out after running only a few miles. It was creating turmoil and discrediting Michelin's reputation.

Monsieur Lavery had been traveling in thirty countries where the enterprise had factories, solving similar quality problems. He came to Argentina with a special assignment to take care of this serious situation. Because he didn't speak Spanish, I was chosen to work with him in this newly created Technical Department.

I was again relocated to Buenos Aires, in order to perform my new assignment as a technician and to travel as a troubleshooter across all of Argentina; I performed this duty for eight months with Monsieur Rene Lavery. His life was concentrated on tires, tubes, and vehicles, along with everything related to technical problems concerning cars and trucks. Nothing else interested him.

Because I learned a lot with him, Monsieur Dupont badly wanted me to remain in Buenos Aires as Chief of the Technical Department to handle our ever-growing tire-quality problems once Monsieur Lavery returned to France. I would have accepted this proposition with joy at the time I first returned from Europe. Now I was spoiled, and I wouldn't give up the freedom I enjoyed in Tucuman, where I was eager to return, the sooner the better. Mirta, for her part, was also delighted to return north, because she didn't like the capital and she hated not seeing me occasionally for long periods of time when I traveled with Monsieur Lavery while she remained bored and alone in the boarding house.

Even though we were living close to Martinez, in Palermo, I only occasionally visited my parents, not daring to bring Mirta along with me to their house. They remained very sad that I didn't see them often enough, and they were much more sad when they learned that I was leaving Buenos Aires to return to Tucuman.

Chapter 5

These two years, 1947 and 1948, had been very important for the history of post-World War II, during which 56 million persons died, more than half of them Russians. Nobody was listening any more to us Brigadistas, but we kept on stubbornly calling people's attention to the reality of the past war. We told them one more time that if the democracies had helped the legally elected Spanish Republic, we wouldn't have been lamenting the loss of so many human lives and deploring the shame of the concentration camps' existence.

The United States tried not to repeat the mistakes made after the First World War, when France and England harshly pressured the vanquished countries, creating bitter resentment among their inhabitants. The result of the treatment had been the advent of fascism and dictators like Hitler and Mussolini, with the normal consequence of human slaughter. On June 5, 1947, Secretary of State General Marshall introduced a financial project for the reconstruction of the vanquished and devastated countries; it was accepted with enthusiasm by everybody, with the exception of the Soviet Union, Finland, and Spain. This plan was intended to help the destroyed European countries get on their feet again, sparing them all the social unrest and also giving the United States the opportunity to consolidate its worldwide military grasp.

At the Soviet Union's instigation, and against Truman's strong opposition, the United Nations decided to give the Jewish people the land they coveted for centuries, creating the State of Israel. This decision filled all of us with an overflowing happiness. Germany was divided in two sectors by the occupation forces, the West area (by England, France, and the USA) and the East area (by the Soviet Union.)

In 1948, England, in spite of all her striving, had to abandon India and Pakistan, both of which immediately declared their independence. Czechoslovakia was occupied by the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, in Argentina, the United States named a new ambassador, James Bruce, to replace Messersmitt. The relationship between the two countries remained very tense, mainly because Argentina had been notified that not one single dollar from the Marshall plan could be used to purchase anything in Argentina. In spite of all the demagoguery and the daily speeches delivered by Peron or by Evita, the economical situation in Argentina was worsening. The workers were producing progressively less, and the middle class began closing their stores and emigrating overseas.

During the few months I spent in Buenos Aires, I again had the opportunity to be with my old friends; I was happy to learn that all of them were against Peronism. Jeannette didn't seem to be affected by the years; she was still looking good, and she had a new "friend." This friend was also a bookstore owner, and he was keeping her in her same apartment on 1717 Lavalle Street, which she now owned as a condo.

When I returned to Tucuman, I was surprised to see the changes that had occurred in such a short period of time. The Province of Tucuman was the bulwark of the Peronist movement, because of the great number of workers employed in the local heavy industry. Without any warning, my friend and comrade in arms Carlos Dalibot came to Tucuman looking for a job. I tried to help him as much as I could, but I failed in all my efforts, the reason being that he was handicapped and couldn't perform any manual work.

Then, my other war comrade, Gerald Esquerre, still known by everybody as the "Russian prince," because of his refined manners, came from Chile. Quite often, after work hours, we would gather at the Liberal, and even though both of my fighting friends were right-wingers, we wouldn't talk politics, instead drinking and eating together while remembering the past we had spent together in wartime while daydreaming about the future.

Carlos Dalibot didn't stay too long in Tucuman. He couldn't make it, and he was tired of looking for a job. He returned to Buenos Aires, where better luck awaited him. Thanks to the Veteran's Club, he succeeded in obtaining a security guard job at the French Embassy in Buenos Aires. Almost immediately, more relaxed now about his future, he married a lady he had befriended a long time ago, with whom he later had several children. I saw him many times in very casual circumstances, when I came to the capital. Nonetheless, he suffered because of his combat wounds, which limited his movements, but he never lost his good spirits, and our friendship remained very strong until the end. Gerald was a good-spirited adventurer, ready to undertake any task available, and thanks to Mendel's help, he obtained a job as a truck driver, hauling heavy merchandise all over the Argentine Republic.

I was still living with Mirta in a small apartment on Mate de Luna Avenue, but with the exception of the physical satisfaction, I had nothing else in common with her. I realized that for me she was merely a mannequin, and I was already thinking about how to get rid of her. Several different factors became intertwined in this matter, and they were both constructive, but potentially dangerous for me. While Peronism was strengthening and becoming oppressive, dispersed groups began to mushroom to criticize the dictatorship at first, then plan to take action against it. We had our own little opposition group; it met in bars at first, then in a more steady way at the Liberal after closing time, once the iron curtains were pulled down.

Sometimes we would also get together in my apartment, where we would dine, drink, and talk politics. Mirta was still illiterate; she had no hobby and was bored to death by remaining alone all day long. Consequently, she was happy for the diversion of cooking for my guests, because it was the only way for her to have some entertainment. She shortly became disappointed and bored, because instead of listening to common conversation or gossip, she heard us talking about politics, which was for her as if we were talking Greek.

Jaime Movsovich brought to our group another lawyer, Antonio Lopez, a son of a Lebanese immigrant whose parents had changed their original Arab name to a Spanish one. He was a communist, and he wasn't hiding that fact; so too was Pedro Laguna, a half-blooded Indian who was a union leader at that time and had to pretend that he was a Peronist. The most enthusiastic of all was Mendel, and even more so when we had a few glasses of wine. Hersh was enthusiastic, too, but with caution. As for Stoltz, the brother-in-law, he came only occasionally to our meetings, and even then, he would say very little or nothing at all. During our conversations, often the words *communist* or *fascist* were spoken, and even though I never belonged to the Marxist party, I liked the way it worked and was organized. I couldn't be affiliated with the Marxists because my anarchical spirit couldn't accept the Lenin party's rigid discipline. I realized that fact when I left the FAI/CNT Sebastian Faure Century in Spain to join the XIV Brigade, not being sure to the last moment whether that decision was in accordance with my

conscience and my political orientation.

Once, after our regular meeting, when I was helping Mirta dry the dishes in the kitchen, she asked me as if it were just by chance, "All of you are communists, right?" This question surprised me, because she was ignorant with regard to politics, and I became suspicious and a little bit uncomfortable, wanting to know exactly what she had in mind. While I was trying to find out how serious her question was, she kept on saying, "I was told that the communists are put in jail. They don't like Evita!" This conversation occurred at the time I was planning to leave her, and my sixth sense was advising me to watch out, because she could become dangerous if she decided to report me as a conspirator. In fact, it became a routine to learn every day how many people had been sent to jail and how many assumed enemies of Peronism the Federal Police had discovered, or which alleged plot to assassinate Peronist leaders had been broken up.

After a while, I relaxed until after a big argument with Mirta, I told her that I was tired of her and didn't want to be with her anymore. I paid two months' rent and gave her enough money to go back to live in Cordoba. I was surprised that after the many violent disputes we had had before, she unexpectedly became resigned and accepting of the split with me. I moved to a hotel, convinced that everything had been resolved in a friendly way, because we didn't see each other for a good while. One more time, I was mistaken regarding women, because I underestimated what an abandoned woman could plot, and especially a Creole. I should have indeed remembered what Nietzsche said: "There is not a more violent animal in its vengeance than a rejected woman!"

One of my acquaintances reported to me that Mirta didn't leave Tucuman, and strange as it seemed, she became involved with an officer of the Federal Police, to whom she denounced me as being a communist. My friends doubted that this union was the product of mere chance, a conjecture that was confirmed by a customer and a friend, Paulino Mendoza, with whom we spent most of our evenings in nightclubs. To protect his business, he maintained a very friendly relationship with the government. Once, when we were dining together, he told me, "Miguel, I know that you are communist, but follow my advice and be careful; the Federal Police are watching you!" No matter how much I denied that I was affiliated with the communist party, I doubt that he believed me. I thanked him nevertheless for the warning, mainly for confirming my suspicion that Mirta was behind all this mess.

Paulino, too, hated Peronism, for government agents constantly spied on his business and extorted money, but it was necessary to be very cautious then, during these dangerous times. Cipriano Reyes, the meat-packers' union leader who once got Peron out of prison in 1945, had been in turn jailed by Peron when Reyes stopped trusting his promises. The workers didn't have any fixed direction to follow; they weren't doing anything in the factories, and the owners were afraid of them. During this turbulent period of 1949, several important events happened to me. My friend and war companion Gerald Esquerre, tired of driving a truck in a job without any future and disenchanted by some problems he experienced with several Peronist leaders, decided to explore other horizons, which he hoped would be more propitious, and he decided to return to Chile. Of course, when he was leaving, we threw a big farewell party for him at the Liberal, offered by Mendel. During that occasion, we had a lot to drink, and one more time we brought back all our memories of the war and mainly of our dear Free French Forces.

Even though I was already 30 years old, it never occurred to me to get married, or

perhaps I was expecting to encounter an exceptional lady. To be honest, I was scared to get married, and many times when I went out with a girl, I would tell her that I was married, but separated. I was trying to avoid giving a woman a chance to "grab me" or talk about this marriage business. Perhaps because of my feelings of insecurity, I wanted to avoid dealing with the topic of marriage, or even thinking about it.

Thanks to Monsieur Dupont's vision, he followed my suggestion to build a Michelin warehouse in Tucuman, on 300 Junin Street, and came especially from Buenos Aires with his wife for the inauguration. Then, taking advantage of the fact that he was already in my area, he made a trip with me in the north. It was an unforgettable trip, because he and his Swiss wife were excellent traveling companions.

When we arrived in Salta, a northern city, and entered the hotel's parking lot, we heard some people speaking French, and that was how we met the Hileret family. They were the Hileret Sugar Refinery owners, and they had come from France to take care of their interests, now threatened by Peron's regime.

During the Nineteenth Century, Tucuman enjoyed a great amount of prosperity, thanks to French immigration, which, among other things, established the first sugar cane factories not only in the province but also in Argentina. Once the descendents of these Gallics became rich, they returned to France, where they spent most of their time, providing only a superficial supervision of their interests in Argentina. The same circumstance prevailed in connection with the family business interests of my childhood friend, Popol Henot, in Brazil.

We quickly became friends with the Hileret family, and we ate together at the same table in the hotel's dining-room, happy to be able to speak French. They had a beautiful twenty-year-old daughter, Agnes, who had been very much bored since the family had moved from Paris to Tucuman. Peron's government wanted to take away several thousand acres from their huge property, without any indemnity, and the Hilerets had come from France to fight for their property rights.

My boss, Monsieur Dupont, very seriously tried to convince me to court Agnes for the purpose of marrying her, because she was very rich. He was annoyed when I repeated several times that I didn't care about money. In my mind, I was recalling a similar situation that arose in Paris after the war, when with the same insistence our Marmarian and Davoudian friends wanted me to marry a rich Persian-Armenian girl.

When we returned to Tucuman, I said goodbye at the airport to Monsieur Dupont and his wife, who flew back to Buenos Aires, not knowing that I would never see him again, for he died of a stroke two months later. I missed him very much, because he had been the best boss I ever had. His death affected me greatly, because we had established a sincere friendship, even though he was the director and I was only a company employee.

I had many opportunities to see Agnes again, but I was afraid that if I began a courtship—and she was worthwhile because she was very pretty—everybody would think that I was doing it because of her money and not for love. Unfortunately, because of one of those super-libertarian, hair-splitting prejudices, I cut short our relationship, afraid that the sincerity of my motivations could be ill-interpreted.

Very soon after Monsieur Dupont's death, the new director, Monsieur Lebrun, came from Clermont Ferrand to replace him. As we learned, he had been director of Michelin in Poland, but because the Soviet Union had occupied that country and it became communist, the enterprise had been nationalized, and he had to return to France.

An important convention had been planned for all the inspectors, with the purpose of introducing us to our new boss, as we called our director. I spent a week in Buenos Aires one more time, and because my work obligations were very limited, I had more time to see my family, now enlarged. My sister Maya and her husband Enrique were living in El Palomar, where their first child, a daughter named Annie, was born into the Burenko–de Grand Pre immigrant family of exiles. Teo was already married to Delia, who had been his first sweetheart, and both had moved to Moron, where they purchased a house. I learned with happiness that all of them were living in a solid family link. Every two weeks, they got together at my parents' house in Martinez; then two weeks later, they would get together in Ramos Mejia, with the de Grand Pre family. Tante Lisel had never changed; she was always active and well organized like a good German, working without rest in their huge home, in spite of having abundant house servants' help. Mister de Grand Pre Sr. built a big workshop in the corner of his property, and he went to work there every day as if he were an employee. He had a collection of tools that would have evoked the envy of any professional carpenter, mechanic, or metalworker, and he knew how to use them, performing art as a hobby.

Paul, Tante Lisel's brother, was still living in Rio as the head of the family's Brazilian branch. We spent these family reunions together in Buenos Aires, including Christmas and New Year; they were always very emotional. Annie, being the first child born of the family's union, was greatly spoiled by all of us. We talked a lot about politics, and we looked pessimistically at the future. Mister de Grand Pre made a lot of money selling to the Russian millionaire Volkov, the owner of a maritime transportation company that used the famous Liberty Ships from the war surplus in a fishing company.

The friend of my youth and now my brother-in-law Enrique, who couldn't tolerate his father's dictatorial patronage, was planning to start working on his own, and he planned to leave the country, where life was becoming more dangerous every day.

When I returned to Tucuman, during a dinner I had with some friends in a very well known restaurant, Los dos Gordos on the Independence Square, I met a very attractive girl, Nelly, a nurse who worked at the state health department. Almost immediately, we began to go out, and I realized that she had what I was looking for. She was eight years younger than I, and she seemed to be very stable and mentally balanced, qualities that were so important to me. We got married in Montevideo the following year, and I went to live with her in the house she rented on Uruguay 1460 Street, sharing it with her mother Maria, known by everybody as "Gorda" (the fat). Nelly was very sensitive and sweet, asking me to let her mother live with us. To give her credit, Maria not only didn't disturb us, she actually took care of all the housework, leaving us free of all worry in this regard. Nelly was born in the small town of Catamarca, with a good commercial inclination; she asked me to do something on the side to complement our wages.

At that time, I was drinking a lot and was becoming a very good "Tucumano," because in that province more wine was consumed per person than in any other place in the country. One day, Nelly's uncle, Damaseno, appeared at our house. He was a huge Creole who was Maria's younger brother. He worked at the railroad and had been transferred to Tucuman. He asked permission to stay with us for a short period of time until he could find himself a place to live. His job was to go early in the morning to the locomotive enginemen's house to be sure that they were ready to go to operate their train. Later on, when my parents moved to Tucuman, my father, with his special brand of humor, gave

Damaseno the nickname "The alarm clock!"

It is almost needless to add that Nelly's uncle never left the house, where he lived at her expense until he died, some thirty years later, retired and sick. He never spent a penny in or for our house, but he behaved as if he were the owner; he was very demanding, and he had an exceptional ostrich stomach, always ready to drink and eat. A few months later, Nelly's younger brother Pacifico came from Buenos Aires. We called him "Pachi"; he had a problem at work and he too needed to have a place to stay for a short time. Like his uncle, he remained with us, and later, thanks to Nelly's help, he became a state senator. Later, she bought him a house, because she loved him very much, and to give him credit, he was a good democratic left-winger.

One day Nelly asked me if I could find among my sawmill customers some wooden bars to make broomsticks, which were scarce at the time. Many of my clients from the northern sawmills could easily provide me with this kind of wood, and I purchased several wagonloads, and we started our little industry.

One Sunday, Nelly came with me to a bankruptcy auction of an old sawmill, where we purchased complete machinery to make brooms. We purchased the house where we were living, and taking into consideration that we had a big piece of land in the back, we built a small sawmill on it. First we manufactured brooms, then crates, wooden boxes, and furniture, employing a dozen workers. Nelly resigned from her nurse's job to be able to supervise our business, because I was too busy taking care of my Michelin tire duties and had to travel a lot.

We then purchased a big truck, which Pachi drove for a short period of time. Later, we added three more trucks that he managed. Then, when charcoal was scarce, we traveled to Santiago's forest with our fleet to bring this product back to Tucuman. During the sugar cane harvest, our trucks were hauling sugar cane to the refineries. Nelly was a first-class business lady, and she invested our profit into buying several lots on which we built houses; then I purchased a 350-acre sugar cane plantation at Mista, close to the border with Santiago del Estero's Province. I received a loan from the bank for the sugar cane seeds that we planted. We dug an artesian well, indispensable for this kind of culture, and it provided several thousand gallons of water per hour to irrigate our sugar cane crop.

Maria's mother, Senora Soila, would sometimes come to visit with us from her little town of Catamarca. She was a skinny, old, enchanting lady who became my good white wine-drinking partner, the wine I was consuming at that time. Maria hated alcohol and in addition all those who drank it, perhaps because her husband, Nelly's father, was a cattleman and a gambler who had been murdered by drunkards who came to rob him when they learned that he had won a large amount of money.

And so, while both of us would be sitting in the shadow of big trees growing in the back yard of our house, drinking white wine, Maria would come screaming and scolding her mother for drinking. Then, the old lady, trying to hide the smell of the alcohol on her breath, would put her hand over her mouth and say, "Madame, I have such a toothache that I cannot take it anymore!"

History has always fascinated me, and Senora Soila told me that when she was young in Anatumaya, Santiago del Estero's province, the people still spoke Quechua, one of the Incas' Indian Empire language adopted by the local Creoles. Senora Soila had a very archaic way of telling her stories as she remembered her youth; her stories brought to

mind some adventure novels dating from the discovery of America, when Indians, Spanish, and Creoles mingled together.

Sometimes, some of Nelly's other aunts or relatives also came, and these visits would seem to never end, to the point that very often our big house was so full that we didn't have any room left for ourselves. To remedy that situation, I bought a brand new house on Mitre Avenue 1515, with a big garden and with land where we planted many varieties of trees and flowers.

Chapter 6

My little dog Bijou, to whom everybody got accustomed, was still with me, as if he were my human companion. Hersh adored him and laughingly used to call him Senor Bijou. Frequently, when I was going on a business trip and Nelly was too busy, I would leave Bijou at the Liberal, making him and Hersh very happy.

I remained close to the Hochbaums, to the point that when Juan Meleiro arrived in Tucuman to become the branch manager, I sponsored him to join our group. Often on weekends, or after work, we would take a ride in my car to sightsee the beautiful mountains close to Tucuman. The three of us liked to sing, among others the Yiddish song that Hersh taught us, "Auf die grune." Once, when two Jewish tire dealers, Kusevitzky and Blumenthal, heard us singing, they said laughingly, "Look at these three, a Jew and two goyim singing in Yiddish!"

Unexpectedly, one day Mendel's wife Rebeca came from Buenos Aires, where she was living, to see him. It seemed that by common agreement they accepted their separation, because they were not getting along, though they told friends that Rebeca didn't like to live in Tucuman.

Mendel's wife came with her two nieces, daughters of her deceased sister: Sarah, fourteen years old, and the younger Carola, twelve years old. I couldn't have predicted at that time that I would have such a lasting friendship, many years later, with this snotty little blonde girl Carola. Mendel tried to be as kind as he could be with his family, entertaining them for several days and of course driving them to the top of the Conquiya mountain, a very well-known Tucuman tourist attraction and almost an obligatory visit for anyone who would come to San Miguel de Tucuman. After his family returned to Buenos Aires, Mendel remained drunk an entire week, an occurrence that happened too often lately. He said that his wife brought her nieces to show him how beautiful they were, but the real reason was to ask him for more money, because the prices of everything were going up and both girls deserved the best education, which was impossible for Rebeca to obtain with the little help he was sending them.

Actually, the economical situation was becoming more and more difficult; the cost of living increased constantly, and Argentina, from an oil-exporting country was transformed to an importer. The deficit in the foreign import-export business was increasing daily, reaching \$150 million in 1949. The percentage of Argentine products exported was falling also. From a 40% share of the worldwide total meat export in 1930, it went down to 28% in 1950. Wheat went down from 23% to 9%, while corn fell from 64% to a mere 22%. Inflation was spiraling, prices were going up, and it was becoming more difficult to find imported merchandise, while domestic production was declining.

One day, Monsieur Lebrun, my new boss, visited us in Tucuman, and he told me in secret that the Michelin Board of Directors in Clermont Ferrand was very preoccupied because of the constantly decreasing production at our Bella Vista plant. There, the workers spent their time holding barbecues, drinking wine, and playing guitar, instead of producing tires. He told me that it had been seriously

contemplated to close the factory. Because I was a Gaullist from the Free French Forces, he wanted to know if I would accept a job in France in Clermont Ferrand if the factory's closing eventually occurred. Monsieur Lebrun liked me very much; in addition to our personal friendship, he also met my parents, with whom he spoke the Russian that he learned in Poland. That's why I didn't want to disguise my feelings, and I told him frankly that Clermont Ferrand was the last city in the world where I would move, making him laugh. He knew quite well everything about that big town, where the life was entirely related to Michelin and daily gossip was disseminated in the bars under the invisible vigilance of Big Brother, who always knew everything that was happening in any private home.

Monsieur Lebrun agreed completely with my viewpoint, but he advised me to begin by exploring new horizons, because our enterprise in the Argentine market had no future. Juan Meleiro was transferred again to Buenos Aires, where he married his long-time girlfriend. He was happy to be back in his city because the *portenos* don't like to leave Buenos Aires, and he had an important assignment to perform for the company. To replace him in Tucuman came Carlos Nogueira, a married man with two sons, a very orderly and knowledgeable employee. It wasn't yet official, but the employees already suspected that something was up in Michelin, because this uncertainty couldn't go on forever and the Big Boss from France was losing his patience, seeing that the situation in Argentina wasn't improving.

I have always been faithful to my friends, and I never stopped corresponding with all my buddies from childhood and the army; I also kept on receiving news from my companion from the Centuria Sebastian Faure from the International Brigades, Juan Mayol Ballester, who was in Vera Cruz, slowly adapting himself to Mexican life. I corresponded with my friends from France, and after a long silence, I received a letter from Betty, informing me that she had divorced her second husband and sending me the photo of her four-year-old son. She didn't say anything special, but she insisted that he was blond with blue eyes, when I knew that she and Valeri, her ex-husband, had dark hair and black eyes. I didn't realize at that time what all that was about, but gradually I figured it out that this child could have been mine.

As a routine, when finishing my work I would stop by the Liberal to talk with my friends and to have a drink with them and other acquaintances who would drop by after working hours. That day, I brought Betty's child's picture, wanting to brag about it, but unfortunately, when I came to the store, Mendel was the only one who was there, ready to pull down the metal curtains. After I entered through the half-closed door, I saw that he was arguing with Rosita, his occasional girlfriend. Mendel wasn't feeling young enough to have a mistress, and he didn't want to complicate his life by getting tied up with a woman, because he had enough complexities with his family in Buenos Aires. Nevertheless, he needed from time to time to satisfy his sexual need, and he solved this situation by paying Rosita, who was working at a night club, for her favors. Once a week, she spent her day off with him.

I missed the most important part of the argument because I came too late, but it was easy to guess that all this fuss was about money. No matter how generous Mendel was, paying her very well for her weekly favors, unfortunately, she was a drug addict who never had enough money. It seemed that this time Mendel didn't want to give her more money, because he already gave her too much, saying, "Do you realize how

much money I gave you already? With that amount, I could keep up three wives!" To which she answered him immediately, "You know that I give you in bed more pleasure than ten women together, and you know it!" Mendel was very angry; usually, he didn't have any patience with women after he slept with them, and he showed her the street from which I had just come, telling her to get out of there and to stop taking drugs. These words hurt her, because addicts hate when anybody makes a reference to their weakness, and she told him with venom, "You cannot deny your race!" insinuating that as a Jew he was stingy, to which my friend retorted without wasting a second, "And you cannot deny your profession!"

As soon as she left, Mendel exploded in imprecations, and it took me a good while to calm him, saying, "Mendele, sit down and calm down! You know with whom you are dealing. Take it from whom it comes. Just close your store and let's go have a drink somewhere!" Mendel was always preoccupied with something, and he could see the worsening economical situation in Argentina. He complained, because he started without a penny and succeeded in building the most efficient tire dealership in Tucuman. He had thirty full-time workers, and the business was going well until then, when suddenly his employees, mainly Peronists, became rude, disobedient, and nonproductive. Mendel was my friend, and I shared with him Monsieur Lebrun's secret about the closure of our Bella Vista factory. He then conveyed to me that he too was planning to close his store, because he could foresee bad times coming soon, and perhaps Buenos Aires would be a better place to survive in case of a crisis.

The year 1952 began with a bad omen for everybody! Peron and mainly Evita were monopolizing the masses with their magical speeches, even though the people little by little realized that the prices were going up, that many products were disappearing from the shelves in the stores, and that crime had increased drastically, while at the same time, personal and economic security were becoming problematic. Our personal business was going well, and I was making good money, to the point that my salary at Michelin represented only 5% of my monthly income. Nelly was a born businesswoman, and during my absence she would properly handle our different enterprises and know how to deal with our 23 employees.

In the beginning of July, when Tucuman's winter could be felt—not so much for the cold weather as for the humidity—I was ready to leave on my business trip to the north, usually lasting from two to three weeks, to call on our customers and to solve all kinds of technical problems related to the use of tires. At that time, all of us salesmen, inspectors, and commercial or industrial representatives were quite highly esteemed, because the local businessmen had little contact far away from the capital or from other important cities; not only did we sell them new products, but we also kept them up-to-date regarding business developments, finances, and politics.

In many good north Argentine towns, small businesses didn't have telephones, and as we traveled mainly by automobile, the owners appreciated our conveying to them the city's important news.

October first was the Salesman's Day, and in most hotels where many of us stayed, returning regularly several times per year, the owners prepared us a special banquet for that occasion. These events almost regularly would end up at nightclubs, which existed even in the smallest hamlet. These cabarets had dancing girls to keep you company, but

they also had rooms upstairs where the girls would take care of the customers. Many hotel owners would join us in these escapades.

I was in Salta, ready to leave for Jujuy, without knowing yet that on July 22, 1952, Evita died of cancer and that this date would be so important for me. A general commotion broke out with this news; the newspaper's headlines and front pages covered her life and death, while the people on the streets were desperate, as if the end of the world was coming. I knew that three days of mourning had been officially declared, but I had finished my work in Salta and wanted to gain time in going to Jujuy. We didn't have a telephone at home, and I couldn't call Nelly. I wanted badly to do so, because she was pregnant and I wanted to know how she was doing.

When I reached the Plaza Hotel at San Salvador Jujuy, where I had been staying for years, I saw several friends and colleagues, all somberly drinking at the bar. The hotel's owner, Juan Escudero, repeated that it was true that three days of mourning had been declared and that during all this time businesses would be closed; he pointed out that he wouldn't have any help, neither waiters nor cooks. He insisted that the bar would remain open and that the following day we could fix ourselves a barbecue in the yard, because the refrigerator was full of meat and he had an abundance of stored wine. It was necessary to make the best of a bad situation, as the Argentines say.

I found several companions at the hotel whom I had befriended during my trips. They included Pedro Charneau, who was Geniol's rep; Simon Rosenthal, a hardware salesman; Enrique Landajo, a paint rep; Jack Silovski, a middle-aged Polish Jew who was always very polite, but not so healthy; and Simon Reisman, a jewelry salesman also from Tucuman. Many others were in the hotel; all of us were representatives of businesses, because the other guests had returned hastily to their homes.

Most of us were too far away from home to go back, and none of us had finished our business trips. We were prepared to spend the enforced mourning period as best we could, as we listened to all the radio stations playing gloomy funeral music. We went for a stroll in the square and in the neighborhood streets, but we realized at once that the atmosphere was filled with sorrow and hatred. We also noticed that the Coyas Indians, or the half-blooded mestizos, looked at us with resentment, a fact that took away our desire to walk, and we returned to the hotel. Meanwhile, Juan, the hotel owner, with his wife set out on a large table in the dining-room some delicatessen cheese, sausages, and salad. They asked us to help ourselves, because they didn't have any personnel to serve us and it would be like that for three more days. We didn't wait to be coaxed, and while we were filling our plates with this cold food, we savored with pleasure the tasteful wine of Salta, very similar to the German Rhine white wine. Little by little, our mood improved and the conversation became genial.

Juan emphasized again that for the following day we would have a barbecue in the back yard; the grill was loaded up with charcoal, and the meat would be ready to be cooked as soon as we got hungry. With regard to bread, because the bakeries were closed like the rest of the country that was paralyzed in mourning, he had already reached a deal with the director of the prison, who agreed to sell him whatever he needed from the prison's kitchen, which was open because the staff needed to feed the inmates. Usually, I slept well at night, but I learned that many of my colleagues couldn't close their eyes. Some of them remained drinking at the bar until dawn.

When the following day came, July 23, at noon all sixteen of us salesmen assembled in the backyard, watching Pedro Charmeaux and Enrique Landajo handle the task of barbecuing. It was cold, because Jujuy is at an altitude of more than 5,000 feet above sea level, but we were feeling warm next to the well-kept fire. We observed the Argentine tradition of drinking red wine that is always consumed with barbecue. An hour later, we were tasting the excellent meat that our two volunteers cooked for us, while the grill was still full of more meat, as is required by Argentine tradition. It would be unthinkable to have a barbecue where all the meat would be eaten and not to have sausages, bloodwurst, ribs, sweetbread, and so on remaining on the grill; even with as much as we ate, the absence of such plentitude would have been a sign of stinginess and failure.

We didn't have anywhere to go, and the radio kept on playing the same mournful music. Our stomachs were full, but we were still thirsty, and as the hotel owner had promised us, there was plenty of wine in the cellar. We kept on drinking, while our mood got merrier; we felt very far away from the general sad and funereal feeling prevailing across the country. Some told jokes or funny stories. Then we began singing, sad songs at first, then more cheerful tunes, and somehow, a guitar appeared to accompany our melodies. I was asked to sing in French, and little by little our humor was of such a delirious happiness that we couldn't control it anymore. We knew that outside, on the streets, on the deserted square, the Creoles were praying for Evita, who for them was a saint, but mentally we were already in another world. Almost all of us were left-wing, many were members of the Radical Civic Union, and we were united in our hatred for Peronism, which was destroying a country as beautiful as Argentina.

Suddenly, what we least expected to happen really happened. The Federal Police invaded the patio.

Chapter 7

We were highly inebriated, but the invasion of the armed forces surrounding us both surprised us and sobered us up. We were astounded, still not comprehending what was happening. The officer in command told us not to talk, to remain quiet, to obey, and not to resist our arrest. The building of the Federal Police was on the same block as the hotel, and so we walked under escort to the next edifice, under the amazed looks of the few pedestrians who happened to be there.

Once inside the station, we were crowded into a cold room with a cement floor and a few chairs, forcing most of us to remain standing. The Chief of the Federal Police of Jujuy (there is one in each Province), Senor Pedro Arias, told us to remain quiet until he received new orders. The door was guarded by an armed agent who would scream to us to remain silent every time somebody opened his mouth. The few available chairs had been long ago occupied, and we remained standing. Exhausted and tired, after waiting for more than an hour, I lay down on the cold cement floor. Many were already scattered on their backs on the cement, and very few of the sixteen of us remained standing.

We were arrested in the afternoon, and it was already night. We had no food, not even a glass of water. I was so tired or perhaps lulled to sleep by the wine that I fell sound asleep and was awakened by noise and screams. By instinct, I looked at my watch, which showed the time as 3 o'clock in the morning, meaning that we had been in that room exactly ten hours. We were pushed outside on the street, where close to the sidewalks two cell-house trucks were parked, and we were thrust inside them by armed soldiers. Still half-asleep, tired, hungry, and shivering with cold, we rode to the provincial prison at the city's outskirts. We already knew this place, because the previous day I had come there with Juan and Pedro to pick up the bread for our barbecue.

The prison entrance, with all its metal gates and bars, was very depressing. We were told to stand in line, while one by one we had to fill out a personal information form. Then we had to empty our pockets, leaving everything, including our belts, on the desk. Once that was done, two short guards, mestizos or Coya Indians, grabbed a prisoner to take him somewhere. We heard screams or laments and knew that the inmates were being mistreated, and I was ready to fight until I was disabled. I knew that I couldn't win such a fight, but I knew also that once I fainted and lost consciousness, I wouldn't feel the blows any more, no matter how hard I was punished.

I saw that Simon Rosenthal and Jaime Reisman were taken to a large cell on the first floor, while my guards escorted me to a solitary cell on the second floor. When I was about to enter, I became tense, expecting blows, but nothing happened. The guards let me inside the small room and closed the door with a loud metal noise. In the little room was a bed covered with an old, worn-out dirty mattress, on which I fell down fully clothed and slept. The following day, I saw on the top of one of the four walls a little window with bars, but it was too high to permit me to see outside. The door was solid metal with a little opening through which I got my food. The cell was seven by four feet, without a table or a chair. Three times a day, I was brought food through the small opening in the door, and when I needed to go, a guard took me to the restroom, then brought me back to my cell. Every time I tried to ask him something, the Coya would put his finger on his mouth and say, "Shut up!"

I spent eight days in that cell and was beginning to get concerned, because I didn't know what had happened, nor did I know what the charge against me was. With the exception of the Coya guards, I didn't have any exterior contact with anybody. When I was going to the restroom, I could see the lower patio from my second floor, where the other inmates were assembled, sitting or walking, several of my colleagues among them. I couldn't understand why I was in solitary confinement while the others were in the big open hall.

The ninth day, under escort, I was taken to a big office where my other arrested companions were assembled. We didn't dare talk, because armed guards were watching us all the time. Suddenly, a door opened, and several civilians came in with two armed guards. One of them was older, with white hair, the director, who told us that the only function he had was to take care of the prison, without any decision-making power concerning who the inmates were under his jurisdiction. A dark-haired, middle-aged man then spoke, introducing himself as the district attorney. He told us that we were accused of celebrating Evita's death, instead of honoring her memory and mourning her death as had been decreed.

After his long speech, we were finally introduced to a big and bald man, Antonio Salomon, who agreed to be our lawyer. The director told us that he was giving Senor Salomon two hours to talk with us, after which we would return to our cells. Antonio Salomon, of Lebanese descent, offered to defend us, because none of the other lawyers had the guts to do it. The other lawyers were scared to death of having any problem with the Peronists. Salomon brought some newspapers, and on the front page appeared an article about us. It read, "In a complete state of intoxication, 16 salesmen insulted Evita's memory!" We learned that when the Peronist mob learned that we were arrested, they went to the hotel to burn our cars, but Juan, the hotel owner, told them that the cars didn't belong to us, but to other customers. Then, some underworld dregs came to the prison with the intention of lynching us, and it took the army, which had been requested, to drive them away. We ignored all that, and we understood that we had been running close to danger all that time.

Salomon said that two of the most compromised suspects were Landajo and myself. Then he asked me if I had enemies in Tucuman, because when the officials had requested references for each of us, they received very negative information about me. It was then that I realized that Mirta had something to do with all that, ready to harm me as much as she could. Our lawyer told us that both of us in solitary could from now on spend the days with the other inmates on the patio. He also told us that the owner of the largest regional product store was sending each one of us a mattress with a good bed cover, an act of generosity that impressed us and moved us very much. Salomon also offered his services to communicate with our families or to send them messages.

I was afraid to disturb Nelly with this bad news and instead decided to write to Nogueira, our branch manager, to explain to Monsieur Lebrun what had happened to me. I also asked him to use a lot of diplomacy when he told Nelly. Unfortunately, I learned later that Nogueira was so scared of Peronism that he didn't dare communicate with Nelly, nor give her my message.

Our situation with Landajo became much more bearable now, because our cells were open in the morning, and we could go outside to the patio or to eat with the rest of the group. We could also walk in the enclosed yard, which had imposing towers in each

corner and was surrounded by barbed wire and armed guards. We certainly could appreciate at once the change in our situation, mainly during meals; after we stood in line to fill our plates up with food, we could sit wherever we wanted to eat and talk with other people. It was a big improvement after I had remained ten days in solitary. I couldn't stop wondering about the large amount of food we were receiving, especially the large pieces of meat and the great amount of bread. After a short period of tension with the other inmates, who were mainly felons and criminals, we mutually tolerated each other, in an unspoken status quo compromise. These prisoners came to the conclusion that even though they despised us for being intellectuals, we were too many together for them to begin to create any antagonism, for a battle could turn out not to be in their favor.

Everybody knew the reason we were arrested, and even though most of the other prisoners were Peronists who venerated Evita as a saint, they didn't know anything about our political inclinations and didn't care. Later on, I learned through my penal system experience that inmates never talk about the reason they are condemned. If they come to talk about it at all, it is always to state their innocence.

We were a little bit more relaxed, because at least we knew that our families as well as the companies for which we worked were aware of what had happened to us. At least they knew that we didn't disappear. In spite of our painful situation, sometimes we could find a comical side, as for instance when old Jack Silovski greeted Landajo in the same fashion every morning. He would say, "Good morning, Senor Landajo, what news do you have?" This continued until one day, perhaps when Landajo woke up in bad mood, Landajo told him rudely, "Why are you asking me every morning what news I have? Didn't we by chance spend the day together? Didn't they lock us in our cells? And from where would you like me to get any news? Unless a little bird would bring it to me in the cell from outside!" Of course, a few days later the same scenario was repeated, making us laugh, while Landajo fumed. Some inmates made chess pieces from dried bread, or played cards—easy to find in any prison—and the days passed a little faster.

Sunday was visiting day, and we were surprised to see how many of our customers came to see us, bringing candies and mainly magazines or books. They told us that middle-class and intellectual people in town were indignant about what had happened to us, and only a sector of the working class, or the mob who hated us, were asking for harsh punishment of us. We learned through our visitors that a month after Evita's death, the political repression became more violent, because Peron had lost the most eloquent of his supporters, Evita's speeches. At that time, people were jailed for almost no reason, merely for speaking out against the government. Many inmates in their spare time made hand-crafted objects of art, working with wood, leather, and bull's horns, products that they sold during the Sunday visits to earn some pocket money for tobacco. I was surprised not to receive any news from Nelly, because now we were allowed to receive letters and even parcels, but then I learned that my working companion, Nogueira, didn't tell her what had happened to me. Not hearing from me, she became desperate and decided to call Monsieur Lebrun in Buenos Aires, who told to her what happened and tried to calm her.

One Sunday, in the second month of our incarceration, Nelly appeared with other visitors, telling me how she had learned about my adventure and how worried she had been all this time. As soon she learned where I was, she took the train to come see me, even though it was for only a couple of days. Also, her practical thinking came into play,

and she talked to our attorney Salomon. She was smart enough to bring money with her and give some to Salomon, who would drop by from time to time to see us. He told us that all these legal procedures were so slow, chiefly because so many people had been put in jail lately to the point that the entire judicial system was completely clogged, and not enough employees were available to expedite the cases.

Our part of the prison was reserved for dangerous convicts, but these inmates were not as dangerous as those kept in the first section, where the rebellious and violent murderers who constantly provoked daily fights were lodged. Among those who were in our building was a young man accused of rape; he was indignant, saying that it was consensual and that he was just a victim of slander. He told anyone who would listen to him that he had gone for more than a month with a girl, but when he refused to set a date for their wedding, the girl's mother denounced him to the police, claiming that he had raped her daughter. He kept on saying from morning to night that once he was set free, before going to bed with a woman, he would ask her to sign a "little paper." Being illiterate, he was still insistent about the "little paper," on which she had to write that she went to bed with him by her own free will. We also met a chronic alcoholic who drank industrial alcohol mixed with paint and who had to be sent to the hospital, where he had been saved almost by a miracle

Every evening after dinner, we returned to our cells, and from far away we could hear the noise of the guards locking each one of the doors, one after the other. It was a very gloomy noise, and this "click-click-click" was repeated also in the morning when the cells were opened. This noise of the opening and closing lock remained for many months recorded in my mind, even after I left the prison. After the two months we had spent in the jail, Salomon appeared one day and asked the director to gather us in the hall. He told us that he was about to reach an agreement with the government and that very soon we would be set free. He expected anytime to receive the details of the verdict from the judge.

Through faithful friends who came regularly to visit us, I let Nelly know that very soon we would be set free. All of us were in a much better mood as we waited for this special moment to recover our freedom. A week later, a magistrate came with Salomon and an employee from the court to read us the sentence.

Fourteen of our group were declared free, with the two and a half months they remained in prison considered their punishment. Their sentence was for drunkenness and for not respecting the mourning declared for Evita's death. Landajo and I were also set free, because we didn't have any previous records in our files. Nevertheless, we were condemned to two years of prison on probation for plotting against the President. This time could be added to any other punishment we might receive for future offenses. And so ended one more strange chapter in my life! It was painful, stupid, and senseless, but at that time one could expect anything to happen, because other people paid with their lives for much less, and I suppose that I should have been happy about this ending.

From the prison we were brought back to the Hotel de la Plaza by friends, where our relatives were waiting for us, including Nelly, and after a good dinner, we went to sleep on real beds with clean bed sheets. The following day, I went to pick up my car, which friends had hidden in a garage to avoid its being burned by Peronists. These fanatics would have done so if they had learned that it belonged to one of those inmates who "insulted Evita's memory," as our offense was labeled. I drove back to Tucuman with

Nelly. Nelly came especially to Jujuy to see me get out of the penitentiary, and she was happy that everything ended well, much better in fact than she had feared. All in all, I had a surprisingly lucky ending to this story. I couldn't leave Jujuy without thanking customers who had the kindness to visit me in prison, and of course I went to see the owners of the "Regional Products" stores who had been so thoughtful as to lend us the mattresses during our imprisonment, an act that in part had alleviated our harsh ordeal. I was also happy to have Argentine citizenship at that time; it had been granted to me the previous year, thanks to Jaime Movsovich's insistence, and he completed all the paperwork for the request without charging me a penny.

During this time of hatred, terror, demagoguery, and stupid false patriotism, foreigners were easily expelled from the country for any or even no reason at all. Many Spaniards who owned large grocery stores, even those who had lived all their lives in Argentina, were expelled for any small transgression or for anti-Peronist feelings. Most of them were from Galicia, and they received short notice about their expulsions. They had to sell their properties for almost nothing and hurriedly return to Spain with their children, who were born in Argentina and had profound family roots in that land. Peron was implacable, and this was one of the injustices committed in his name.

We returned to Tucuman in a caravan, because Enrique Landajo's car had mechanical problems and he asked Pedro Charmeaux and me to drive close behind him on the road, in case something happened to him. Anyhow, the three of us were heading in the same direction, southward. We were returning to Tucuman with Nelly, while Pedro was going to Buenos Aires and Landajo to Cordoba. It was an extremely frustrating trip, because Landajo's Studebaker's carburetor had constant problems, and it was necessary to stop several times in small towns to see mechanics who would help him repair the engine. Instead of doing the trip in a day, as it usually took, we spent two days driving. Pedro and I refused to leave Landajo half-way on the road by himself, with his malfunctioning car, chiefly because he was very upset and we were afraid that something bad could happen to him on the road.

The following day, when we arrived in Tucuman, I took Landajo to the mechanic who serviced my car, and he promised to fix the Studebaker. After this day, I never saw nor heard of him again, and I didn't know what could have happened to this traveling companion. Pedro Charmeaux and I remained friends, and we saw each other frequently during our business trips. For the period I was detained, I kept my cool, saving my energies for any emergency that could occur, including violence, fights, beatings, torture, or even a long-term sentence. I needed my presence of mind to face the reality, and for that I was putting a good face to bad weather, even though inside I was boiling with indescribable indignation at the injustice that befell us. I remembered then the Chinese saying that "A valiant man dies once, while the coward dies a thousand times!"

Most of my prison companions had been torturing themselves thinking of what could happen to them, thus draining their forces instead of saving them by remaining calm. I had seen too many strange things in my life to be morally routed. I remained quiet, because I felt that I would need all my available energy to face whatever circumstances could appear sooner or later in connection with this imprisonment. When I left the penitentiary, I still felt all the weight I was carrying inside me, but I needed more patience and more energy to get rid of this sensation. I knew that I needed to get out of the country, to go some place where I could feel free, far away from dictators.

Chapter 8

Most of my friends learned about my adventure in Jujuy, and those who shared my ideas were indignant about what happened, while the Peronists were bragging that they were happy "that justice still prevailed" and that the bastards had been punished. Nelly's brother Pachi, a fervent radical, was indignant, swearing that all this madness would end very soon, once the UCR (Radical Civic Union) took the reins of power. When I went to the Liberal upon my return to Tucuman, I was surprised to see Mendel very preoccupied, while Hersh was pale, having lost weight during these months of my absence; neither of them jumped with happiness to welcome me back from prison, as I was expecting, but I understood their attitude once I learned the reason for their depression! Shortly after I had been put in jail in Jujuy, agents from the Federal Police came to arrest Hersh, on the pretext that stolen tires had been found in their store. This accusation proved to be false, but poor Hersh remained in jail, under arrest for a week. The fear was still in him, and he couldn't hide it on his face; it was the reason for their bad mood and anxiety. I also learned that Movsovich had a similar fate, being arrested on suspicion of belonging to the communist party.

Taking into consideration that he was a well-known attorney, Movsovich had friends in all political sectors, including the court, so he had been released three days after his arrest. It looked as though the series of bad luck hadn't ended yet! When the store's metal curtains were pulled down, we walked to a restaurant to have dinner. With a profound grief, Mendel told me that the Creole Pedro Laguna, our friend, the union leader, also had a sad story. After being arrested for no apparent reason, he had been tortured for a week. He was then released with his body swollen, bruised and castrated. It was too much for him, and he couldn't cope with it. In his macho pride, he died by stabbing himself in the heart with a kitchen knife.

Mendel was ready to sell his business and move to the capital to open another kind of store with his brother-in-law, Simon Stoltz. Hersh said that he was tired of capitalism, and much more of fascism. He wanted to take advantage of the fact that Poland now had a socialist government and return to his Galitzia. The only thing he couldn't understand was that the land where he was born now belonged to the Ukraine, which was part of the Soviet Union. We remained talking very late, even after we finished our dinner in the little restaurant we had patronized on Cordoba Street. In spite of all the wine we had drunk, our mood wasn't getting merrier. It was already eleven o'clock, and in Tucuman the nightlife that was very active and lasted until dawn was just starting.

After taking leave of my friends, I walked back to my car, parked on Junin Street ready to return home. Suddenly, I saw Mirta walking from the opposite side toward me, on the same sidewalk. Just seeing her made my blood go my head, and I had to restrain myself so as to avoid doing something I would regret later on. I didn't know what to do, but I had just been released from prison, and I realized that whatever could happen now, I would always be accused of being the instigator of trouble and found guilty, if the police came, because I was on probation. I decided to ignore her and to keep on walking, but when she came close, she grabbed me with her hands, saying while looking in my eyes, "What happened! Don't you recognize me anymore? Don't worry! I don't hold any

grudge against you for all you did to me. I remember only the wonderful time I spent with you!"

Liberating myself from her emotional embrace, I told her angrily, how could she have the guts and cynicism to talk to me after what she did to me? Hearing my words, she removed her hands from my body, made a step backward, and stared at me with dismay, to the point that I was wondering if I was dreaming or if I was sick. After several minutes of mutual reproaches and incriminations, I came to believe that there was some kind of misunderstanding, because she couldn't have pretended or feigned so well. I definitely needed to clarify the situation. I had to dispel this doubt, and I suggested that we sit down in one of these crummy cafes that Mendoza Street was full of, for I didn't want to take her anywhere in my car. Once sitting in a corner of a small cafe drinking wine, we tried to untangle the truth. It took us half an hour and a bottle of wine to clarify the situation.

Mirta confirmed that when I "abandoned" her, she got together with an officer of the Federal Police, but never in any circumstance had she said anything against me. On the contrary, this new "friend" Miguel Sanini kept on wearing her out by asking constantly if I was a communist and what were my whereabouts. They remained together for six months, and seeing that she wouldn't say anything against me, he stopped interrogating her. This Santini was separated from his wife and their three children, but for sentimental reasons, they reconciled and lived together again.

Mirta said that Santini had been very good to her; and when he returned to live with his wife, he gave her money and a ticket to return to Cordoba. She hadn't seen him again in years and lost all contact with him. Mirta confirmed that Miguel Santini told her that I was on the Federal Police's list, but he told her they didn't have enough information about me and were trying to gather as much as they could. I thought that I shouldn't doubt her sincerity, the reason being that while she was speaking, tears were running down her cheeks. She insisted that the only thing she remembered of me was the good times we spent together. When we were living together, we used to go on a regular basis to the Cafe del Park, where music played, and between other songs they used to play a Spanish one with the following words: "Exactly like you did, he told me he loved me, and like you did he gave me a flower. . . the same false words of love he would tell me. . . ." We called that song, "Our song."

Laughing, while tears were running from her eyes, she remembered how fistfights broke out all over that park at night, which had been nicknamed "Parallel 38." It was when the Korean War was raging between South and North, and this topic was very popular at that time. Mirta said, still crying, how could she harm a man like me, who restored her faith in mankind, showing her all the respect given only to a decent woman, which happened for the first time in her life? She insisted that she would never forget me, and even if she went to bed with a thousand men for money, she would always keep me in a corner of her heart.

This situation was very painful for me, and I had a hard time believing that she could have done any harm to me. I was sorry for her, and before becoming too weak, I told her that it was late and I needed to return home. I took her back to the boarding house where she was staying, promising to come to see her again, which I did on several different occasions. It was perhaps the first time in my life that my sixth sense, which had never betrayed me, left me with doubt, so that I was unable to make up my mind about

what was true or what was false.

I told my friends at the Liberal that I had seen Mirta. When I related our conversation, Hersh, who was impulsive, and Simon Stotz, very quiet, both said that they didn't believe her, because she was a "curve" (slut, in Yiddish). They were convinced that she was lying, and that she was the one who betrayed me to the Federal Police. Mendel, with his analytic spirit said, "If it was Mirta, or not Mirta, what's the difference? You know, Miguel, that you are always involved with all kinds of women. Sometimes you come with a beauty, as if she were Miss Universe, and in other times you drag with you a worn-out whore that even a drunk sailor in Singapore's slum would reject! You should follow your own advice, as the saying goes in France: "cherchez la femme," because all your problems have been created by women whom you despised, dropped, or rejected!"

Chapter 9

Many people, mainly professionals and intellectuals, were leaving Argentina, and big enterprises were closing their factories and going out of business or out of the country. My friend Popol Henot kept on urging me to come to Brazil, where the economic situation was very good. Even though Getulio Vargas was a dictator, there was more freedom than in Argentina. I knew that Michelin at any time would close the factory; consequently, my plan to remain working for the company wasn't realistic any more. Time was running out, and it was necessary to make a decision as soon as possible, disregarding the fact that I was earning, with my side business, much more money than my paycheck. We had succeeded, with Nelly's expertise, in installing a productive sawmill that made wooden containers, pallets, broomsticks, and furniture, and we had a sugar cane plantation, cars, several trucks, two houses, many lots, and a good amount of money in our checking account.

Unfortunately, the actual political situation didn't give us any room to take risks without encountering at each step inconveniences and barriers created by the government for those who were striving to make money. Another important problem was growing, and that was labor unrest; but it was not the legitimate workers' quest to improve their lives. It was created by lump proletarians, by the scum who wanted everything without working, because most of them were parasites who had never worked before. Consequently, they didn't belong to the working class. At our new home, Nelly was expecting to give birth at any time, while the rest of her family, or "tribe," as I used to call them, were still living in our other house on Uruguay Street, the one I supported for many years.

At the beginning of 1953, Michelin's employees had been summoned to come to Buenos Aires for a special meeting with the director. I knew that we would be talking about the important issue of closing the factory, even though officially not a word had been said about Michelin's leaving the Argentine market. When I returned to Tucuman, I was happily surprised to learn that I was the father of a beautiful son, whom we named Jorge Cirilo.

With my friend Popol, I began analyzing the possibility of my relocation in Brazil, and not wasting time, I requested at the Brazilian Consulate an authorization to move to that country as a permanent resident. In March, my parents came to Tucuman to see their new grandchild, and we decided to take our vacations together, driving all together to Buenos Aires in my car. It was then, in a small town of Cordoba Province, where we spent the night, that we learned that Stalin had died, and that Krushchev had been designated his successor.

In Buenos Aires, we had several family reunions and dinners with the de Grand Pres, with the three children, because in addition to Annie, my sister Maya had delivered a week before a new child, a son named Enrique, junior. My brother-in-law Enrique was ready to travel to the United States to try his luck, and he had already put their home at Palomar up for sale.

Mister de Grand Pre was very pessimistic, which was strange, because he always had been an optimist. Most of us were showing a burning desire to leave the country, because we couldn't guess how long this situation of uncertainty would last.

Mister de Grand Pre also was encouraging us to leave, even though he hoped that something positive would happen, because the new U.S. President Eisenhower was sending his brother Milton to see if it was possible to get Argentina out of this blind alley, but every effort was in vain.

Once we returned to Tucuman after spending our three weeks of vacation in our traditional place, Miramar Beach, I said bluntly to Nelly that right now we had to decide about our family's future. The decision was even more crucial now that we had a son, and we couldn't keep up these parasites of her family any longer, as we had done for so many years. Indignant, Nelly said, "My family! I would never leave them; they stay with me!"

I was very much surprised by this answer and offended at the same time, because it looked to me as though I didn't have any other alternative than to go to Brazil, leaving her with her family, if she considered it more important than our marriage and our child. I decided to postpone the issue of how to split our properties and profits because, at that time, divorce didn't yet exist in Argentina; only physical separation was acceptable, not including personal properties.

Usually, time runs very fast in two opposite opportunities when we are very busy, when the time factor is not seen; or life can be monotonous, and suddenly we realize that the time passed without leaving a trace. Anyhow, be that as it may, this year 1953, full of events, went by very fast and at the same time had dragged on for too long.

In December, we traveled again to Buenos Aires with Georgito (as we called our son), who was about to be one year old. We planned to spend our vacation together with my parents, one more time in Miramar. I didn't dare tell anyone, and much less my parents, a word about my problem with Nelly, which in reality meant our definitive separation. My parents believed that I was going to Brazil to open new opportunities, after which I would bring Nelly and Georgito to our new residence.

At Michelin, where I assisted at our last meeting, it was confirmed that the Bella Vista factory had been sold to Pirelli, which would be producing electrical wires. We were told that within two months we would receive our indemnity, according to the time worked at the company; then the office would be closed for good. When I told my father that I would have to start all over again and it would not be easy, with his typical humor he said to me, "If it were easy, everybody would be doing it!" He meant by that that nothing comes without an effort in life, and it is always necessary to take some risks.

My brother-in-law Enrique, with my sister Maya and both children, moved to live with Mr. de Grand Pre in Ramos Mejia after they sold their house in Palomar and before their departure to New York, while his brother Teo was also getting ready to go the United States. Our old neighbor from Martinez, Aizpiri, told me that he envied me for leaving this wonderful country, now completely ruined by Peron's demagogy.

When we returned to Tucuman at the beginning 1954, I had already received a nice indemnity from Michelin, which was leaving the market after twenty very successful years of existence. I had already received the visa to travel to Brazil and transferred money to the Banco do Brasil, giving Popol's address and also telling all my pen pals where my mail should be directed. Popol had offered to let me stay with him until I found a new place to live. As usual, I kept close contact with my friends from my childhood, one being Robert Romanin, who was still in the army in Indochina. He was involved in a messy and desperate war, even though I regularly received news from him

that was always very optimistic.

My friends from the army also wrote to me, as did Jojo Louzon, who was in France as a Renault car dealer; I also heard from Bobby Assie, who obtained a very well-paid bureaucratic job as a chief of personnel at Pechinet. I knew that Jacques Tricot, after being discharged from the army, went to work at the Colonial Police Department and actually was police chief of Dakar in Senegal. It had been a long time since I had received news from my companion from the Spanish Civil War, Juan Mayol, but I knew that he was in Mexico, which he liked very much.

When the moment to say goodbye came, it was very sad, mainly to leave my son, who was already walking and was so close to my heart, but I wasn't feeling comfortable any more in Argentina. I was afraid that at any time in a public place some crazy guy could suddenly scream, "Kill Peron!" And if I was close, once arrested as suspicious by the police and already being on probation, I could be sent to rot in jail for years. I didn't see any other alternative but to get out of the country, much against my desire.

In April 1954, I flew from Tucuman to Santa Cruz de la Sierra in Bolivia, where I spent the night, and the following day I flew to Puerto Suarez on the Paraguay River. From there, after crossing the International Bridge over the river, we reached the Brazilian city of Corumba. With my adventurer's spirit, I wanted to ride on the train on the just- completed railroad line from that town to Sao Paulo. It was a 1200-mile trip, involving crossing tropical regions for three days.

Book 7

Brazil

Chapter 1

While on the airplane, I had already started a very interesting conversation with the gentleman seated next to me, who had planned to do exactly what I did—to take the train from Corumba to Sao Paulo. I was doing it to have a chance to better know Brazil, which had always intrigued me and where I might perhaps remain for the rest of my life; however, my new friend, Pedro Villafane, was doing it to save money, because although the trip lasted three days, it was much cheaper than flying by airplane.

Pedro was the typical Bolivian, a mixture of Spanish and Indian with the indomitable physiognomy of his Andean mountain ancestors. He was a tall young man, his tallness rare for a native; he was born in Bolivia, and his family had lived for many generations in the capital, La Paz. Trying to explain his decision to go to Brazil, he said that unfortunately the government in Bolivia was not only despotic, persecuting its enemies, real or assumed, but it had also completely ruined the country's economy. It was almost impossible for any young man who finished college as he did to become an architect or to find any kind of work. His younger brother David had already emigrated to Brazil a year ago, and David kept on encouraging Pedro to join him in Sao Paulo, where an important Bolivian refugee colony had been formed. All of these refugees were getting jobs easily, much better paying ones than what they could have gotten in their own country, if they had been lucky enough to get any kind of employment at all.

Once in Corumba, and after passing by the routine procedures of customs and immigration control, finally we felt happy to enter Brazil as legal residents of a country where we had so many expectations. We had to spend the night in that city, because the train was leaving early in the morning the following day, and once we left our bags in the hotel, we decided to explore Corumba, which was the last navigable port on the Paraguay River, whose source began to flow 250 miles north. We were in the midst of the Tropic of Capricorn jungle, and in addition to the reigning heat, the humidity was penetrating and mixed with some kind of perfume in the air, completely different from anything I had experienced before in any other places. Several traveling companions got together, some being Paraguayans who were waiting for transportation to return home to the city of Asuncion. They would be journeying by a river boat, gliding on the Paraguay River until it reached the Parana River, a tributary whose waters end up emptying into the Atlantic Ocean.

We sat around a table on a cafe's deck on a pier, close to the water, in the shadow of huge trees whose scent was inebriating, while we indulged ourselves with cold Brazilian beer. It seemed that only Pedro and I were to remain in Brazil as immigrants, while the rest were merchants who were passing through or who had come for matters related to their trades. Before leaving Tucuman, I began learning the Portuguese language, and at that point I could already speak a little, being able to communicate quite well with people. Early in the morning of the following day, our train, filled with passengers of all

types, began the long trip to Sao Paulo, crossing the Mato Grosso jungle.

Almost immediately, I realized that my companion Pedro was an advantage-taker, accepting any invitation to drink or to eat but forgetting to reciprocate. All my life I hated stingy people, remembering what my father said about them: "When you are with miserly people, you never know if you are with a friend or somebody who wants to take advantage of you!"

The third day, after covering long distances and having passed through many big cities, we finally arrived at Sao Paulo, the most populated city of Brazil and one of the most populous in the world. It seemed that Pedro's brother hadn't received his telegram sent from Corumba telling of his scheduled arrival in Sao Paulo, because the brother didn't come to greet Pedro at the railroad station, and both of us decided to stay at a not-too-expensive hotel. We found one, not far away from the railroad, whose rate was at the level of our pocket.

Pedro tried to reach his brother at work and had learned through David's friend that David had gone on a short trip related to his work and would be back within three days. As for me, I called Rio intending to let my friend Popol Henot know that I was in Sao Paulo and that very soon I would be going to see him, but nobody answered the telephone, even though I called back several times at different times of the day and night. Pedro and I were fascinated by Sao Paulo, so large and so modern, with an activity comparable to Europe. We noted at once the big class differences among the people. We could see a lot of vehicles, luxurious stores, and even very rich people, but side by side there existed extensive misery among the poorer classes.

When, after a few days, David, Pedro's brother, returned from his trip and came to pick him up at the hotel, the scene was very emotional between the two brothers. For a long while, they remained talking about the family, which remained in Bolivia, and I was surprised to hear them sometimes speaking Quechua, which sounds very close to Japanese. I thought that only peasants still spoke Aymara or Quechua, but they told me that in all social spheres in Bolivia and Peru, these old languages of the Inca Empire were still spoken, as much by the Creoles as by Indians. Realizing that I was ignorant regarding the linguistic patterns of their country, both of them explained to me that before the Spanish "invasion" of these regions, there existed until the Twelfth Century the Aymara Empire, composed of Collas, Lupacas, and Urus, and the empire's center was Tuhuanaco.

In the Fifteenth Century, the Quechuas appeared from the north, from the Cuzco region, taking over all the lands on their way and pushing out and enslaving the conquered populations, while installing the Inca Empire. The Aymara language was completely abandoned by the people, and already very few spoke it. David came with another countryman, Jacinto Ceballos, like the Villafane brothers an architect from La Paz. Both had been employed at the same small construction enterprise since their arrival in Brazil.

While the four of us ate the traditional Brazilian rice and beans at a little neighborhood restaurant, we talked about what concerned us most: work, lodging, and, of course, the opportunities available, not neglecting also to compare prices and the cost of living. Suddenly, Jacinto, nodding with his head toward the newspaper, asked David, "Do you think that this ad we saw in today's paper would interest Miguel?" Of course, I pricked up my ears at that question and asked what it was all about, then learned that

because all of them had temporary jobs, their main preoccupation every morning was to check the newspaper ads to see if something better was available.

It happened that this very morning they had seen in *O Journal de Sao Paulo* a very attractive employment opportunity for a sales manager for a metallurgical factory. None of them was interested in a sales job, in addition to the fact that the work location was in Campinas, 50 miles north of the city. Pedro had told them already that I was a mechanical engineer and that I had held a very important job at Michelin in Argentina, the similarity of which to the advertised opening being the reason this ad had been brought up.

To be honest, I wasn't very eager to remain in Sao Paulo, and I was more attracted to Rio de Janeiro, even more so since I thought that being close to my childhood friend Popol would give me a better chance to obtain a more interesting occupation. I thought that perhaps I could do something working with him. As I couldn't reach my friend Popol by telephone, I assumed that he would be out of town, and I called the Campinas number mentioned in the newspaper. To my surprise, the people there told me to come for an interview the following day.

I followed the instructions given me on the telephone, and after riding the train for an hour, I got off at the Campinas station and hailed a taxi that took me to the McHardy Metallurgical Company. I was very much impressed by the size of the enterprise, and even much more so when I learned that in the outskirts of the city the company owned two huge factories, one metallurgical and the other producing mechanical farm equipment.

After I waited for a good while at the reception desk, suddenly, a nice-looking secretary asked me to follow her to a wide and modern office. The person who received me was Senhor Henri Joinot, the owner's father, the owner being by coincidence right then in the United States on a business trip. Senhor Joinot spoke perfect French, saying that his grandfather had come to Brazil in the last century, and since then everybody in his family had been born in Brazil, in this old city of Campinas.

He was very emotional upon learning that I had participated in World War II in the Free French Forces, because he had gone as a volunteer to fight for France during World War I; although all of his family members were Brazilians, they were of French descent. We had several small cups of the strong Brazilian coffee in the office, and Senhor Joinot, who was 70 years old, even though he didn't show it, loved to talk and told me that when he came back from France in 1919, he had married a widow, a Confederate descendant whose ancestors had escaped from America after the Civil War. I confessed to him that though I loved history, I had ignored all these details, and that gave him even more desire to keep on talking and relating his and the company's history.

It was late, the company's offices were closing, and my interlocutor, having found in me a good, willing ear, invited me to dinner in a restaurant so that he could resume his story. He emphasized that his wife was very sick, for which reason he didn't invite me to his home, but that she wouldn't worry, because very often he had supper out with some friends. We ended the dinner and his presentation around ten o'clock at night, during which time I learned as follows: When the Confederates lost the Civil War in 1865, many feared that the Yankees would seek revenge against them, mistreating them and being cruel, especially toward those who had been ruthless to the north, and these Confederates preferred to emigrate to other countries.

The Brazilian Emperor, Dom Pedro II, seeing that Mexico attracted many of these routed warriors, offered them lands and consequently succeeded in enticing 20,000 former Confederates to come to Brazil between 1865 and 1880. He helped them establish sophisticated farms and industrialize Brazilian cotton, in which matters these Southerners were experts.

To make the offer even more tempting and to bring a larger number of these white immigrants, they had been offered big lots of land in the State of Sao Paulo. After several years of work, sacrifice, and efforts at the farms and colonies, these new immigrants built the city they called Americana, close to Campinas. Even now, the majority of the inhabitants of Americana are descendants of these Confederate soldiers, who bear the names of their Anglo-Saxon ancestors who emigrated to these regions. Physically, most of them resemble Brazilians very much, after so many years of mixing with the local population, but while few of them still spoke English, all of them are very proud of their ancestors.

Senhor Joinot continued to say that when he came back from the war in 1919 at the age of 34, he met his wife, who at that time was a widow who had inherited this huge metallurgical compound built by her ex-husband, who had died in a hunting accident, or, as some assume, was murdered while hunting with some friends, an issue that has never been cleared up. That is how Senhor Joinot kept on running the business, but five years ago, he retired and left it to his son. But by an old habit, or for nostalgia's sake, he still came every day to spend a few hours in his office.

He asked me to come back to Campinas within ten days, when his son Roberto would return from his trip, assuring me that I could consider the job as mine, taking into consideration my experience with Michelin. I learned that the previous sales manager had died in Minas Geraes during a mysterious accident, for which reason they needed urgently to find somebody to replace him. It was a very important enterprise, known not only in Brazil, but also in the neighboring countries, for the company manufactured boilers for merchant ships. The company owned five private airplanes and had a crew of 30 salesmen, who were traveling all over the country.

I learned later that the MacHardy Metallurgic Company at that time was the largest manufacturer of boilers for ships and locomotives in Brazil. The company also produced a large variety of agricultural equipment for all kinds of uses in the farming industry. It also owned a coffee plantation in the State of Parana.

Senhor Joinot was telling me all this to be sure that I understood that if I was really the person the company was looking for, I had a unique opportunity to build a beautiful career for my future. I returned to Sao Paulo after midnight, and walking back to my hotel from the railraod station, I was surprised to see the innumerable prostitutes on the streets, along with dense human waves of people scattered all over.

Intrigued by what I was seeing, I entered a bar, and while having a beer, I found myself surrounded by multi-colored "night girls." Their skin colors ranged from black as coal up to Nordic white with blue eyes, and passing were all the color lines in between. Because until then I hadn't yet tried a Brazilian prostitute, I was very much tempted, mainly by a little mulatto girl who was the most persistent of all, but I decided to leave it for another time.

Chapter 2

The trip from Sao Paulo to Rio de Janeiro is one of the most picturesque I had ever seen, and being a pantheist, a nature lover, I could admire it with more pleasure than anyone traveling with me. Instead of taking the train, I preferred to take the bus, because one can enjoy sightseeing better on a bus, and in a certain way, I could get a feel for the country during the several stops we had to rest and eat.

The city of Rio de Janeiro, which at that time was still the capital of Brazil, is one of the most impressive sights in the world, almost impossible to describe, and the famous Guanabara bay is so large that it could shelter all the squadrons of warships of all the nations in the world.

Postponing for another time the pleasure of seeing and enjoying the exuberant spectacle of the wild nature surrounding this "carioca" city (so is Rio de Janeiro called), I took a taxi at the bus terminal, which drove me to Copacabana, to the 172 rua Domingos Ferreira, where my friend Popol was living. I knew the address by heart, after having written it down so many times when sending letters to Popol.

At that time, all of Copacabana was a summer vacation area of Rio's suburbs, and most of the houses were a single story high. My friend's house, like all the others in that sector, was large, luxurious, and showy. I was surprised when, after ringing the door bell, I saw a young woman with a threatening aspect appear at the entrance and ask me very aggressively what I wanted.

Because my knowledge of the Portuguese language was improving, I didn't have any problem in communicating with her, and I saw with pleasure that she understood me. Trying to dispel the bad mood that this woman was carrying on her face, I gave her my name, telling her that I came to see my friend Popol, who was my childhood buddy and had offered me hospitality in his house.

Without changing her countenance, the lady standing at the doorsteps of the house told me briskly that she didn't know anything about me, and much less that I was expected. She said that she was Popol's sister-in-law, the wife of his younger brother Jorge, whom I knew very well from Neuilly s/Seine, but I didn't know that he was married. Here I was, standing on the sidewalk with my two bags at my side, while the lady, Popol's sister-in-law, didn't even have the courtesy to give me her name, but only continued saying that she didn't know anything about my coming, or whatsoever. Hiding my anger, I asked her if she could at least give me my mail, which I knew for sure had been accumulating, because I gave Popol's address for my correspondence.

The sister-in-law, irritated, said that she had ignored everything about any mail, and she was already closing the door when I stopped her in time to ask her to tell me at least when Popol Henot was returning home. She said that Popol and his wife Alcione had gone to France, and she assumed that they would be back in about three weeks; then she closed the door. I was feeling an uncontrollable anger, because I wasn't expecting to have to endure such a humiliation. I was so blinded by rage that it didn't come to my mind to tell her to convey to her husband Jorge that I was in Rio.

While a lot of garbage was boiling inside my head, suddenly I remembered the other Paul, "tante Lisel's" brother, who also was in Rio, and I started to look for his address in my book. It was a real coincidence, because Paul was living only a few blocks

from where I was now, and I headed in that direction, still dragging my bags.

This time, when I reached the apartment on the fourth floor, where my friend from Buenos Aires was living, the reception was quite different, because a light-mulatto young woman told me with a big smile that Paul was on the beach, playing volleyball, and that I could find him very easily, unless I wanted to wait for him in their home.

I didn't have any problem finding Paul, my buddy from Banfield, with whom I had played soccer so often with Enrique and Teo about fifteen years before. I learned that Paul was married to a Brazilian, the one who received me in their apartment, and that she had a very important government job. They had two children and still continued to take care of Mister de Grand Pre's business. My nerves then relaxed, seeing that all the members of the family were so kind to me in a very jovial atmosphere.

I didn't have a place to spend the night, but I remembered that when I had arrived in Rio de Janeiro by bus from Sao Paulo, close to the railroad station Roosevelt, I had seen several small hotels, and I had had my breakfast in one of them that very same day. That hotel had looked clean, and I decided to stay there. I remained one week in Rio, seeing Paul and his kind family quite often, and they took me to sightsee several interesting places in this fascinating city with the tropical outskirts. Of course, what most attracted me was the beach. Paul had the same taste as mine, and he loved the beach, especially the very well known one at Copacabana.

Understanding that I had no possibility of undertaking anything right now in Rio, I didn't have any other alternative but to return to Sao Paulo and go to Campinas to see if I could secure the job that Senhor Joinot promised me. When I returned to Sao Paulo, I went directly to the little hotel where I had stayed before, A Costa de Ouro, close to the railroad station. I still had a couple of days before going to Campinas to see Senhor Joinot's son, so I decided to pay a visit to my Bolivian friends; together, we renewed our immigrant's life.

Among the dozen Bolivians who gathered in Pedro's room, some of whom I had met previously, I was introduced to a newcomer whom I had never seen before, General Manuel Castalnedá, a political refugee persecuted by the government of Paz Estensoro.

He possessed a beautiful voice, and he sang while playing the guitar, thus putting a melancholic accent to our sad gathering of exiles. My traveling companion Pedro had already gotten a job at an architectural office, and even though he was on trial status, at least he was earning something and beginning some kind of normal life in Brazil. Little by little, I became fond of these Bolivians, who perhaps are the most timid and modest of all South American people.

Once, drinking beer, I mentioned my impression of Bolivians, and all of them, smiling, told me there was a reason for the timidity and modesty. To prove it, General Manuel Castalnedá pulled his Bolivian passport from his pocket and showed me a map printed on the second page of the document, with a legend that said "dismemberment of Bolivia." Three different colors were covering the little map, showing the three regions that had been snatched away by neighbors: in 1880 all the northern part of the country to the Pacific coast had been taken by Chile; in 1903 the territory of Acre was snatched by Brazil; and in 1935 all of Chaco was taken by Paraguay.

At other times, we would drink beer while sitting on a cafe's sidewalk, close to where the brothers Villafane lived, with the young architect Jacinto Ceballos and

General Manuel Castalnedo. We would drink, laugh, and tell jokes. Usually, we began in a good mood, but after a few bottles of the Brazilian beer that was so agreeable to our throats, our conversation would fade one more time and turn to politics, which the South Americans like to talk about so much.

Jacinto was a Marxist; he had spent some time in jail when he was a student, and he kept emphasizing that the capitalists didn't have any fatherland and that Bolivia was a living example of what he was saying. General Castalnedo, a conservative, trying to soften that opinion, retorted that the Bolivian army always fought with courage and patriotism.

"In 1880, for example," Jacinto interrupted him with anger, "our Bolivian capitalists needed money to invest in the Oruro and Potosi mines, because there was a big demand for tin and silver in the European market at that time, and what happened?" Then, after a pause, he continued, "The money came from the Chilean and European capitalists, and mainly from England. Immediately seeing that it was more convenient economically to send the metal by sea, they let Chile grab our land on the Pacific almost without a fight, and we lost it forever!"

"That's not true!" interrupted the general angrily. "Our men fought with courage!" To which, smiling, Jacinto answered cunningly, "If the higher ranking officers fought so well, how come the Conservative Party had been elected by the owners of the mines?" Without being impressed by the harsh look that the general wanted to impose on him, he continued, saying, "The same thing happened in Acre, where we had rubber plantations, but to avoid paying custom fees for exporting it to Brazil, our capitalists preferred to sell the Acre territory to Brazil, benefiting themselves economically, without concerning themselves about our country!"

While the general was boiling with rage under our apparently indifferent stare, the young man continued, "And what do you say about the war over Chaco, my dear general, a war instigated by the right-winger Busch and paid for by the Standard Oil Co, who, after this shameful, dishonest betrayal had been disclosed, ended up committing suicide? Please don't deny something known by everyone, that during the war, gas from the Standard Oil Co. was secretly shipped to Argentina, to be sold at a big profit to our enemy Paraguay!"

Seeing that the conversation was getting out of hand, and in spite of the fact that I wanted to learn about all these to-me-unknown details related to the war of Chaco, I called the waiter and asked him to bring more beer and said very loudly, so as to convey to everyone that it was time to change the topic of conversation, "Listen, my friends, tomorrow I am traveling to Campinas, and I ask all of you to wish me good luck in getting this job that you had suggested to me. These drinks are on me, and cheers!" In part, I wanted to dissolve the confrontational situation between the general and the young architect, because they were good friends and I respected both of them; but at the same time, the following day I was going for the first time since I had arrived in Brazil to try my luck at getting a job.

The next day, early in the morning, I took the train to Campinas, then a taxi that left me at the McHardy Metallurgical Company's office. The elder Senhor Henri Joinot came to pick me up at the waiting room; he closed an eye, and while walking with me to his son's office, told me that "o Senhor Roberto" said that everything seemed to work out well, and that unless something happened, I could count on the job.

Senhor Roberto was a young man of my age, very tall with a dark tan, with the naturally smiling face of a person used to seeing everything he had planned go through the way he wanted. The three of us chatted for a good while, all in Portuguese because Senhor Roberto, very much despite his father's wish, didn't speak French. An hour later, when I left the office, I received confirmation of my employment as a general sales manager, first for a three-month trial period, and then if they were satisfied with my employment, my employment would be secured. The first requirement was for me to relocate to Campinas, because when I wasn't on the road during my routine inspections, I would have to come every day to my office to be in contact with salesmen and our dealers to promote sales, to organize payments, and to increase our network of agents. I returned to Sao Paulo for the last time to pick up my my belongings and also to say goodbye to my Bolivian friends.

Campinas was an old city built by the Portuguese; it was extremely picturesque, with a lot of architectural traits reminiscent of the old European style, giving me a very agreeable perspective on the town. I made a deal with the administration of a first- class hotel located in the city's downtown, and that hotel became my permanent residence in Campinas.

In my new work, I learned very quickly about all the products that the company produced, and for that purpose, I went several times to visit the factories and industrial installations of the enterprise. I was also introduced to Senhor Roberto's brother-in-law, who at that time was the general director of the compounds, Senhor Anzio Alqueira.

In Campinas, in the hotel Dos Amigos, where I had chosen to establish my residence, I met a Frenchman descended from Catalans who was a director of the Alliance Francaise from Sao Paulo. It is a French cultural organization dedicated to promoting through its schools knowledge of the French language in all countries. My new friend's name was Claude Clausas, with whom I became very close, perhaps because we both spoke French, a skill that certainly helps very much.

Claude didn't have any means of transportation, having to rely on buses and trains, and by coincidence, when he learned that I was leaving for Belo Horizonte in my 1954 Ford pickup on an inspection tour, he asked me to take him with me, because that was where he was going anyhow. And so began a long and lasting friendship between us. I never tired of learning with interest about this fascinating country Brazil. I learned very fast about the people's habits, and at the same time I improved my knowledge of McHardy's business.

Belo Horizonte was already in a fast development process as an industrial city, because it is the capital of the State of Minas Gerais, a center of diverse mineral mines in full production. In that city, I met our local sales representative, Alfonso Perreira, an old man with very good connections and good sales skills, but for some reasons that I never understood, he never tried to become friendly with me, concealing all the time some kind of mistrust toward me. In a certain way, we were representing a status quo when I happened to come to the region to call on our clients. My functions were to promote sales and also to alleviate and solve problems that always exist in a business.

This situation was very different from those existing in other areas, where the representative was happy to see me and tried to please me, taking me to good restaurants, mainly in the evenings, and to nightclubs full of women and loud music. It was during

this very first trip that I took to Belo Horizonte with Claude that he introduced me to the family of one of his French language students, with whom he already had developed good, friendly relations.

Lita was the student, and her husband was the Swedish engineer Oleg Kruge, who worked for an arms metallurgical company. She was a charming Brazilian brunette who emanated a strong femininity. They had two beautiful children, and it seemed that they should have been very happy. I learned later that unfortunately, Oleg's mother, who was living with them, had too much power over her son, creating a negative influence on their marriage. The engineer Kruge earned good money, and they lived in a huge house taken care of by two live-in maids, giving Lita a lot of extra time to dedicate to painting, reading, and learning French. That was how the friendship began with the Director of the Alliance Francaise, Claude Clausas.

When I saw Lita for the first time, my heart stopped beating, and I felt something profound moving inside me, a reaction that kept increasing in intensity during all the succeeding times I came to see her. I immediately got along with Oleg, who was an atheist; he loved Nietzsche and believed in the Eternal Return, which meant that we had many common affinities. Meanwhile, I continued to discover Brazil. This country fascinated me constantly more and more, to the point that I was under the impression that I was starting a completely new kind of life, in an environment until now unknown to me.

The softness of the Portuguese language, which I now spoke fluently, was an enchantment to the ear, and the people's behavior was very different from that in all the other places where I had been before. All that intrigued me. It appeared that something was floating in the air, and the human factor was very strong, to the extent that even people's way of thinking was almost a form of mysticism.

When I arrived at Goiaz, where I met our regional salesman Julio Cacioli, a "paulista" (an inhabitant from Sao Paulo) descended from Italians, once more I was surprised by the richness of the diversity of the people, with so many different characters existing in that country. Julio Cacioli looked like a European transplanted to Brazil who liked his country of birth in a special and particular way, very different from the "caboclos" (natives). As a general sales manager, my job was to help our salesmen promote all our tools and equipment and at the same time to evaluate their working efficiency.

While traveling with Julio during one of my regional inspection trips, he took me to a small town called Ipora, about 100 miles from Goiania (the capital of the State of Goiaz), close to the Araguaia River. Arriving in that town and looking around, I remained open-mouthed, as if I had fallen from the moon, not knowing if I was dreaming or if all that surrounded me was real. I couldn't comprehend how this town in the midst of the jungle could have so many big stores, well-stocked with merchandise and always full of people. I was also surprised to see how many customers we had in this apparently inhospitable and remote region. I was astounded to see so many people, mainly men with large-brimmed hats on their heads, walking on the streets, wearing boots and carrying revolvers in their belts, reminding me of the American cowboy movies that I never expected to see in real life. When I asked Julio what all this was about, he told me, "A garimpo area!" By that he meant to say that we were in a region where gold and diamonds were prospected. Seeing doubt on my face and already feeling important by virtue of impressing me, he promised to take me to a small town not too far away from

there to see more of these unusual things for myself.

The following day, after we finished our inspection work, he asked me to drive on a poor earthen road at the end of the town, putting a lot of strain on my pickup, because it was more of a path in the jungle than a road.

The stores in Mauri were much more primitive and modest than in Ipora, but I saw nevertheless people pulling handkerchiefs full of diamonds from their pockets to offer them to the shopkeepers, who were standing behind their desks and looking at them through magnifying glasses, as good professional appraisers would. In another store, I saw how gold in powder was offered and sold, after being weighed in a small, special jeweler's scale, then paid for in cash. All that was fascinating!

Our most important customer in Ipora was a big mulatto, Ze Vendeiro, who was illiterate, even though he was a smart businessman who was very much respected in the region. One evening, once his store had been locked up, he decided with Julio to take me to the famous "zona," in the outskirts of the city.

After driving on bad roads between big trees, we reached a huge ranch, where an orchestra composed of three musicians was playing what was called "musica da roca" (country music). The place was full of a variety of people of all skin colors and different garments, from elegant city suits with tie and jacket to beggars' rags. Many cowboy types were sitting with noisy women, and even though the refrigerator was cooling little, if at all, and thus the beer and even the French champagne were served lukewarm, it didn't bother the patrons, who were feeling at ease and were drinking a lot in a joyful atmosphere.

Ze showed us, in the middle of the locale, which looked like a huge ranch covered with straw, about fifteen persons sitting around a big table; five of them were policemen, almost all more or less drunk. Ze told us, "See the tall, skinny one, the one who is lifting his cup and making a toast? He sold a diamond a few days ago for several hundred thousand American dollars, and now he is following the "garimpo" tradition in celebrating his success. He is paying for all the drinks, and he says that we can drink up to \$10,000 today. Tomorrow, he is flying in first class to Rio de Janeiro."

"I wouldn't be surprised if he spends all his money and comes back here before the year ends!" said Julio skeptically, an opinion that Ze approved by moving his head covered by black hair, while saying, "See the little old man, sitting by himself, over there in the corner? Well, last year he got half a million dollars for a 'stone,' which he spent on women in Sao Paulo, and now here he is back, without a nickel in his pocket!" We heard gunshots coming from the "garimpeiros" (gold prospectors) and the cops, who were celebrating and expressing their happiness by shooting into the air and of course perforating the straw roof with bullet holes.

All this scene remained very strongly engraved on my mind, and my adventurer spirit was already boiling with strange ideas, while I was planning inchoate projects that were all full of yearning. I asked Ze how all the prospecting business worked, to which he answered that first a person needed to take a concession from the government to prospect a region, or a certain part of a river, and the concession didn't cost anything. Once the place was selected, a camp had to be established, and what is called a "virada" is made, consisting of diverting an arm of the river around an island and closing the other in the form of a dam. Then, with the aid of motors and pumps, one

could pull the water from this created artificial lake. Once the river's bottom was dried, contracted people go to the bottom to collect the thin sand, where the diamonds are.

I couldn't sleep all that night, thinking about the "virada," the "garimpo," and all this adventurous life so close to me, almost within my reach. Later, on my numerous inspection trips, I discovered in the State of Parana colonies of different nationalities, such as Ukrainians, Germans, and Japanese. I was fascinated by the State of Rio Grande, with its huge cattle herds, where the famous Brazilian "gauchos" lived, a word that with the Portuguese pronunciation would be "gaucho."

After a couple of months, I had the opportunity to travel to Rio de Janeiro, where my friend Popol had returned from Paris and was sorry about his sister-in-law's confusion, but he was happy at learning that I had an interesting job. This time, he insisted that I stay at his house, and I spent a wonderful three days with him, mainly talking about our youth spent in Neuilly s/Seine. His wife, Alcyone, was quite an agreeable Brazilian lady, and the couple lived a very happy life with their two children.

During a family dinner, to which his brother Jorge also came with his wife, I didn't want to create a disagreeable situation, and I never mentioned the unpleasant encounter I had had at that same house a few months before. Popol told me that Andre Montezin owned a bar on the Place Pigalle in Paris, a known area for prostitutes, and that he loved this environment. Since Andre's first marriage to a young Swedish girl, who dropped him a few months later, he never recovered, and he changed completely; it seemed that he wished to live away from normal life. It was amazing to see this young man, the son of one of the most prestigious French painters from the Barbizon School, Pierre Montezin, slowly sinking socially. Popol also had gone to see Andre Hagron, who didn't seem to get along with his wife, who was working at a foreign consulate.

I didn't ask him about other friends from the Latin Quarter, including our Armenian friends, Davoudian, Marmarian, Kazazbachian, and others, nor about my friend from Boyardville, Robert Romanin, with whom I corresponded regularly, because Popol didn't know them. I was a little preoccupied about Robert, from whom I hadn't received any news for a long time, while I was aware that he was in Indochina, involved in a cruel war. I hoped that nothing bad had happened to him.

Later on, I had many opportunities to see my childhood friend Popol again; he certainly could have remained on the Copacabana Beach all his life. With both of us laughing, he would say, "Well, I am French, well, Baiano from Brazil and from Neuilly s/Seine," to which I would say, "Well, I am French, from the Latin Quarter, but Argentinian and Spanish also, well from Odessa anyhow!" When I came back to Campinas, I had a couple of fast affairs with girls who didn't attract me, and several times I had to resort to prostitutes, who were always available to satisfy my sensual desire.

I didn't feel tied up to anybody, and what was curious was that when I had to travel to Belo Horizonte, my heart beat very fast, and it became more and more difficult every time for me to be close to Lita, to the point that one day I decided not to see her anymore. I couldn't remain at her side without having the irresistible desire to grab her and cover her all over with kisses, but at that time, I think that I still harbored an internal shadow of decency, and I wasn't ready to betray my friend Oleg. I thought very much about all this situation, and when I had to go to Belo Horizonte, I didn't go to visit the Kruge family any more, nor call them, in an effort to avoid being tempted, and I maintained that effort for a long time.

Chapter 3

It was one of those humid, clouded, and sad mornings that most of the time begin the day in Belo Horizonte during the rainy summer seasons. The richness of the State of Minas Gerais had been discovered by the Portuguese; as soon as they took possession of this colony on the New Continent, they realized that a great amount of different minerals existed in this region's underground. For this reason came the name Minas Gerais (General Mines). The inhabitants, called "mineiros," were very industrious people who knew how to work the land; at the same time, they loved to try their luck by prospecting for gold that existed in great abundance in that state, or alternatively they would go to other places with the same purpose.

I drove my pickup carefully through the downtown's streets, which were growing in traffic at an uncontrollable pace. The mist was hiding part of the road, and I had to watch out for pedestrians who were crossing the street without looking, causing a great number of accidents. I need to confess also that my head seemed to be blowing out as a consequence of my drunkenness from my previous night, the product of my drinking with some salesmen in a local nightclub. I was driving slowly, trying not to hit any of those careless mestizos who were walking on the streets, as if traffic laws didn't exist.

Suddenly, I reduced my already-slow driving speed even further, because I thought that somebody was calling me, or at least saying my name; anyhow, I was looking for a place to park my vehicle. I badly needed to get out of my pickup and have a drink to settle my stomach. I heard my name being called again, this time louder, as I was stopping my car close to the curb. Before I even had time to open the door, when I turned my head I saw the face of the smiling, beautiful Lita, who was looking ironically at me. Her black hair contrasted tremendously with her white, silk-like skin and her red, sensual lips. She kept on smiling while leaning against the pickup's window, and she said, "What happened? Why did you disappear for so long? It has already been almost half a year that we haven't seen you!"

While I was getting out of my vehicle, she kept on reproaching me for my lack of consideration toward friends who always treated me with love. I was trying hard to find an excuse that would explain my negligence toward them, and without knowing it, she helped me, saying, "You will not leave me standing here in the middle of the street, I assume?" All her reproaches, spoken with her sensual voice, were like music to my ears, and they made me shiver.

The main street of Belo Horizonte, like those of most of the important cities, was full of cafes, where the Brazilians loved to sit down during most of their spare time and drink with their friends, and I didn't have any problem in finding a quite elegant one where I invited Lita to have a drink.

The place being crowded with people, we had difficulty in finding a table; it was noon, and the employees from this entire commercial area were coming to have a drink before luncheon. The atmosphere was joyful; everybody was talking at the same time, laughing, screaming, and constantly moving from one place to the next, rediscovering friends seen only a couple of hours before. Once we were seated, I ordered the waiter to bring a Cinzano for Lita and a gin for me, hoping it would help my hangover and my headache.

"Very well!" Lita kept on saying, pretending to be angry. "Tell me what happened. How many times we asked your friend Claude about you, but he was always very evasive, and that was why we never insisted. We never could understand why you never came back to see us, because we took for granted that we had found in you a new friend. You cannot imagine how much Oleg missed you, especially all your conversations about Nietzsche and your atheism, which I hate because I am a good Catholic and go to church!"

"I have been very busy all this time, and I haven't come here for a good while!" I lied to her, because I was calling on my Belo Horizonte customers every other month. I realized that I hadn't convinced her, because otherwise she wouldn't have insisted, cornering me, because she knew through Claude that I wasn't telling her the truth, and that made me feel uncomfortable. The recriminations never stopped, and after I had three aperitifs, already with my clear head, I told her very quietly but bluntly, "You are the cause of everything!" Jumping from her seat, Lita gave me a look as if it were charged with fire and indignantly asked me, "How me? What do you mean by that?"

"Because I love you," I said with a guilty voice, with a strange feeling showing in my eyes.

"I forbid you to say these kinds of things!" answered Lita. "It doesn't make any sense!" But she realized that she had to control herself, because by lifting her voice she had already attracted the attention of two ladies who were sitting, bored, close to our table, anxious to listen to gossip and not missing one word of our conversation.

Trembling and nervous, Lita asked me, "Could we take a ride some place? I need to calm down! Take me for a ride!" Very close to Belo Horizonte are beautiful hills thick with exotic vegetation, and that was where it came to my mind to take her. In silence, we left the noisy cafe and went to where my pickup was parked. Once sitting inside, I drove north by a small road, close to a hill surrounded by trees, in the foreground the beautiful sight of mountains appearing from far away. After driving for half an hour, I stopped my vehicle, and without feeling any resistance, I grabbed Lita forcefully in my arms and gave her a passionate kiss on the mouth.

After that, everything happened as in a dream. Without even the slightest hint of resistance from her, and without a word said, we both were engulfed in an uncontrollable animal sensual instinct that invaded all our senses. We kept having sex on the seat of my pickup, without any awareness that it was daytime and that we weren't too far away from the road, from which peasants could have come to us, for they were strolling in a silent, fast pace in all directions. Then I remembered a "mineiro" saying that God protects drunkards, children, and lovers.

To be truthful, we weren't in danger of being discovered by the people "da roca (farmers)," because they were timid by nature, and even if they had seen us, they would have passed by, without even trying to look at us. The danger was being seen by people from the city, who would have to satisfy their curiosity by coming close to us to see what was going on, and there was even the chance that some could try to assault us, rape Lita, and rob us.

Many years had passed since the war ended, and I wasn't a soldier any more, but until then, I preserved the arrogance acquired during that time, ignoring or despising any kind of danger when it came to satisfying my sensual pleasure. "Now you see why I didn't want to come to see you?" I said to my companion, who was putting her wrinkled

garments, dispersed on the seat, back on, that I had removed from her a little bit before. Without saying a word, she looked at me as only a Brazilian woman in love can. Lita was for many generations a direct descendant of Portuguese blood born in Brazil, without any Indian or Negro blood.

"Now you see that I couldn't go to your house!" I said again with affection, because after our lovemaking it was superfluous to treat each other as just acquaintances.

"Can you understand that I couldn't restrain the passion that you injected in me!" I kept on saying with anxiety.

"You are crazy!" said Lita with a coquettish smile. "I confess that I loved you from the very first moment I saw you entering our house! And since then I never stopped loving you, and now that I have you, I will never leave you!" Seeing doubt in my face, she continued, "You can keep coming to our home as you did before, as if nothing happened, the same thing as you did previously. Oleg will never learn about us! In addition to that, we sleep in different bedrooms, and it has been more than a year since we had any sexual relations!"

I remained stunned, and to tell the truth, even though I loved her, I was surprised to see how easily she was taking all that and accepting almost immediately a situation that had baffled and scared me for months. I have a very well-developed sixth sense—I know myself—and I was feeling that Oleg one day would realize that I loved his wife and that she was my mistress, just by seeing us together. All my life it has been impossible for me to hide the feelings growing inside my heart from people surrounding me.

"Now I need to return home!" I heard Lita's soft voice speaking to me, breaking the self-absorption in which I was sunk, and I had to make an effort to realize that I wasn't dreaming, because she was at my side and all that I knew had happened had actually happened. Already completely dressed and buttoning her blouse, she kept on saying, "The children will come back from school, and I need to feed them! Take me back home, and by the way, you could say hello to my mother-in-law Gertrude, who has never stopped asking about you."

It was very painful for me to accede to such a suggestion, because I am not an actor, nor am I diplomatic or any kind of politician, and I never learned how to feign or to hide my emotions. I always had the impression that anybody could read me as if I were an open book, see what was going on inside myself, and see my emotions, but this time I found that Lita was right. I obeyed her; I went to greet her mother-in-law, who wanted to see me more out of curiosity than out of sympathy. I lied, telling her that I had been so busy that only now could I come back to Belo Horizonte.

Once I accomplished this painful obligation, I went back satisfied to the Royal Hotel where I always stayed when passing by Belo Horizonte. After taking a shower and getting quickly dressed, I went to join my colleague salesmen at the bar before dinner time. All South Americans like to talk about politics, but nobody does so more than Argentines or Brazilians, perhaps because it is a Spanish and Portuguese inheritance. At that time, we were still commenting about the suicide of President Getulio Vargas, who had run Brazil as dictator for so long. Most of the salesmen had democratic ideas, bragging about the qualities and honesty of Juscelino Kubitchek, who was campaigning for the next presidential elections against the conservative general Juarez Tavora.

At that time, the interior of Brazil wasn't as advanced as it is now. Very few

asphalt roads existed then; the majority were dirt roads, impossible to travel during the summer rainy season. Many rivers didn't have bridges and were crossed by float boats moved by motors or even by oars.

Communications weren't established and many businesses didn't have proper telephones. All these factors had already been encountered in Argentina, mainly in the north, and they united the salesmen and made them very important to the merchants. Not only were we bringing them the products to satisfy their customers' demand, but in addition, we were offering them new tools or merchandise that could bring them more profits, not to mention all the gossip we were telling about deals and political intrigues, as well as new jokes.

The distances we covered were enormous, and our trips lasted up to four weeks at a time, without returning home; consequently, the weekends were spent far away from the family, and most of the time in the local nightclubs. Some inveterate gamblers would remain playing cards for money, while others had girlfriends to take care of and to entertain, like the sailors who had women in each port of call. At mid-century, we were received by the businessmen as people who could give them ideas on how to improve their trade and especially to make more money.

Most of the salesmen traveled by bus or train, or by "pirua," a small van a little bit more expensive to hire, because they carried only a few passengers. Most trucks and even some passenger cars would offer anyone a ride for a fee paid in advance. Those who had private transportation were considered first class salesmen, and they usually represented important enterprises or corporations; the other, poorer colleagues were always courting our friendship to take advantage of free rides with us.

Lita had her own post office box, unknown by Oleg, and that would allow me to correspond regularly with her and also to inform her when I would be arriving in Belo Horizonte. Usually, in the past I had stayed only a day in that city, but since my affair with Lita began, I managed to stay several days and often the weekends when Oleg was busy at the factory. He had a very important job at that compound, which was producing weapons for the army, and sometimes he was requested to remain without leaving the complex for several days in a row, chiefly when the smelting furnaces were in full production.

The plant was located 50 miles from Belo Horizonte, and to reach it, it was necessary to ride by almost impassable dirt roads, requiring several hours to cover that small distance. For this reason, Oleg very often chose to remain at work for several days and later to receive the same number of vacation days as a compensation, days he could spend at home. With all these factors in mind, Lita and I could plan our agendas, because as sales manager I fixed my own travel schedules.

Sometimes, I could arrive in Belo Horizonte when we knew that Oleg wouldn't come home that night, and we would spend it together, Alita telling Gertrude that she was going to visit some cousins in Ouro Preto or that she would stay overnight with a lady friend. That particular evening, I was waiting for Lita in my car, parked two blocks from her home to avoid being seen by Gertrude, who like all mothers-in-law would immediately have had suspicions that the daughter-in-law was betraying her son, and of course in that case, she wouldn't have been wrong.

Lita came a few minutes later, and I appreciated her punctuality, so rare among Latins, and especially with women. Lita was walking all radiant on the sidewalk,

wearing a very showy green-colored dress that fit her perfectly. I saw also that she had a lot of make-up on her little face, making her look like a teenager. No one could have said that she was a mother of two children, a girl of eight and a ten-year-old boy. Following a very French habit, I always gave a nickname to all ladies with whom I was involved, and so as not to change, I began calling Lita "Smutty Girl," a nickname she loved so much that she retained it the whole time we shared our sentimental feelings, almost a year.

That night, after having dinner at a very luxurious restaurant that I patronized close to the river, I then took my companion to an isolated area, which I had spotted before, and we abandoned ourselves to wild sex. It was late, and we were worn out from kissing, hugging, and love-making, when I realized how late it was and that it was time to take her back to her house. Lita tried to calm me, saying that her bedroom was on the other side of the house, and if she did not make any noise returning home, her mother-in-law would never learn when she came back. It was dawn already when I returned to my hotel, and even though I was exhausted, I couldn't get any rest for constantly thinking of Lita and still feeling her perfumed skin, so sensual and soft, on my body.

In that puritanical epoch, I wouldn't have been allowed to bring a woman to any hotel in South America without presenting a marriage license. That was the reason why we made love in my car, unless I took her to one of the hotels by the hour, where the prostitutes went, but I couldn't insult Lita by taking her to such a place. I still couldn't comprehend, nor mentally swallow, this happiness that befell me, nor could I believe this sexuality she exhibited in bed, something I had never seen before in any other woman. It was a loving bewilderment that Lita gave me, possessing all my senses, not only by her naked, voluptuous body, but also by her eager physical, almost professional participation in this kingdom of Eros.

It was as if I were subjugated, and it was very painful for me when the moment of separation came, a reaction that forced me to remain more and more in Belo Horizonte, under different pretexts. In Campinas, my boss was getting nervous while seeing me spend so much time in that city. Lita, as usual, was going to her French lessons at the Alliance Francaise, and Claude kept coming regularly to Belo Horizonte, but I always tried not to make my trips coincide with his, looking to avoid taking the chance of his learning about my affair with his student.

For New Year's Eve, the coming of 1955, Oleg decided to celebrate, as he did every year, at home, because we were both atheists and wouldn't celebrate Christmas with other friends. He also invited Claude, who too would be in town. I wasn't eager to remain with Oleg that night, but Lita insisted so very much, saying that we should do it for appearances' sake, so that in case somebody saw us together on the streets, everybody would know that I was a family friend.

Oleg was a real Nordic, and Lita confessed that her Brazilian friends nicknamed him "the Swedish Fish," but everybody recognized that he was an exceptional professional, and he had so many common philosophical ideas with me. He liked Darwin, and he loved to study trigonometry while drinking gin.

I couldn't understand that, and he tried to explain it to me: "As you can read Bakunin, I read publications related to mathematics, as Einstein used to do; in addition, I love, among other things, to drink gin while I study!" To which Lita would say, "Yes! A bottle of gin every evening!" and we would laugh again. Something else united us: it was

the drinking; my alcohol consumption was increasing day by day, but at that time I still thought that I could control it. Oleg also liked to drink, and perhaps it was a good excuse. We spent a wonderful evening, all of us, including the two other Swedish couples, who consumed a great amount of beverages. These Nordics intrigued me; they would drink great amounts of hard liquor, with a preference for gin, vodka, and whiskey; and even the fat mother-in-law Gertrude didn't remain far behind in this respect, but none of them would show a sign of happiness, as do the Latin people by singing, dancing, laughing, telling jokes, and enjoying themselves.

Claude and I wanted to sing some French songs, but nobody would follow us, and we had to abandon our idea of injecting some joy into the atmosphere. I kept saying very loudly to everybody that the next morning I was leaving to continue my business trip, so as to throw Oleg off, for I knew he was going to the military compound for urgent work, while Lita and I had arranged beforehand to spend the New Year's first day together.

I went to bed in the hotel almost at dawn, and as usual when I had too much to drink, my head seemed to blow up, when I heard that somebody was knocking at my door. When I opened it, I couldn't believe that it was Lita in person, who was standing at the entrance of my room and looking at me with her natural smile. I couldn't believe it, because as already noted, the prevailing puritanical morality didn't allow women to come to see men in their rooms, unless married to them. Lita, seeing me, jumped on me and was kissing me all over, including my lips and face, while she was saying, "Mine! Mine! Mine, you are mine," pressing her little sensual and perfumed body with strength against me.

I was full of hatred toward the maid, who was pretending to do the cleaning on the floor but at the same time was watching us out of the corner of her eye and would have warned the front desk if she had seen Lita entering my room. Very much against my desire, I had to interrupt these sweet love demonstrations, and I asked Lita to wait for me in the hotel hall while I got dressed, and then we could go someplace as we had planned beforehand. When I went down to the hall, I saw several colleagues of mine, trying their luck by flattering her, but they left her alone when they realized that she was waiting for me.

We both went walking to the garage, where my vehicle was; I opened the door to let Lita get in, but she was still standing and smiling like a real little "Smuttty Girl" while turning in a mysterious way some keys between her fingers.

"And what?" I asked her, without understanding.

"Come on, you don't have any imagination!" was her answer. With my hangover, which made me feel like my head weighed a ton, I moved my head to show that I couldn't guess what all that was about! She kept turning the keys in her hand and, annoyed, I told her, "O.K. I see keys in your hand, and what?" She was looking at me now disappointedly, as if I were mentally retarded, and finally said, angry and pouting, "Yes, little dummy, these are keys, and keys open doors, and these keys can open a house door, and inside the house there is a bed, do you understand now?"

She explained to me later that a lady friend of hers had given her the keys to a weekend house that she owned, in case she needed it to spend the day with me. When I asked Lita what she had said to her friend to get the keys, she looked at me mockingly and said, "I told her that I needed to spend a day with my lover!"

I learned that the lady who had lent us her house also had a lover and used it when her husband was away on business trips. Both of them were very close friends and confidantes. It was in a summer vacation area for wealthy people, over the Velho River, in the town of Sabara, surrounded by beautiful houses and chalets hidden by big trees, ideal for weekends.

After driving less than an hour, we arrived at an almost deserted town, because people were still celebrating the New Year in the city and very few lived permanently in this hamlet. The little house we entered was one of these vacation dwelling places, without any pretense of luxury, used just to spend a few days to run away from Belo Horizonte's summer heat.

We were delighted to be in a place to ourselves, to have a real bed where we could make love with comfort, and not on the seat of my pickup while always running the risk of being seen by somebody unscrupulous who could jeopardize our lives or at least create problems for Lita if she were recognized. We had gone to Sabara in such a hurry that we didn't even think of bringing something to eat with us, and to our dismay we found the fridge not only empty of food, but we also couldn't find anything to drink. After exhausting our energies in our exercises of love-making, and after a short nap that followed, because we were completely worn out, we woke up as hungry as wolves.

We rushed to get dressed and went to explore the neighborhood. Nothing was close to us, and we had to drive several miles to find a small grocery store, where a bearded "mineiro" fixed us a few cheese sandwiches, which we ate with cold beer under the storekeeper's scrutinizing look. We went back to our blessed little house, where after renewing our love-making to the breaking point and exhausting all our physical resistance, we fell asleep.

I don't remember when we started sleeping, but it was beautiful to wake up and feel Lita's soft body touching mine; she had already awakened and was staring with love at me with her black eyes, with her same-colored hair, while she caressed my face, her shoulders and her well-formed breasts white like milk. She needed to be back before dawn, fearing that Gertrude could wake up and wouldn't find her home. It was about five o'clock in the morning, and we were approaching the deserted streets of Belo Horizonte when, passing close to an old church, which was on a square, Lita suddenly asked me to stop my pickup for a little while.

"I need to pray!" she told me. "Please wait for me, it will take only ten minutes!" I knew that she was a practicing Catholic, but we never talked about religion, because she knew that I was an atheist.

I parked my vehicle in the completely empty square, with no people around; it was too early for people to be moving about. I became sad, thinking that now Lita, as a believer, would feel guilty about betraying her husband; a decent woman, with two children, right then must be kneeling, praying, and asking her God to forgive her sin. I thought that it must be terrible for a believer to carry such a load of guilt that the church's laws were putting on anybody's shoulders who would dare to disobey them. Inside myself, I was very sorry for her, and at the same time I felt a profound compassion for Lita, whom I already loved so much.

After a quarter of an hour, she came out of the church all smiling, serene with satisfaction, and while she was climbing into my pickup, I asked her, a little bit uncomfortable, "Did you go to ask forgiveness from God for betraying your husband?"

Lita jumped on my Ford's seat, looked at me with her humid, illuminated eyes, and with all the emotion she could gather, she said softly, almost crying, "No! I went to ask the Virgin for you to never stop loving me!"

I couldn't say anything to her. I was too moved! Here at my side was this married woman with two children, who had spent all night with her lover and who went to the church to ask the Virgin for him to never stop loving her! I was feeling confused, but also—I need to confess it—tremendously flattered and happy at the same time! I couldn't believe it, and one more time I was convinced that all the religions tried to deform the human instincts, but I knew that the strength of our atavism is more powerful than any purism. I felt at the same time something very strong inside myself, and I realized that it was my heart beating with emotion as a result of what Lita had said to me.

When I left her at the corner of her house, I looked with love at how with her childlike steps the "Smutty Girl" went to her mansion, but this time without turning her head to look at me, not even once. I was returning to Campinas, knowing that I wouldn't see her again before a month, and I felt pain to have to bear such a long separation.

Chapter 4

I was very anxious when I returned to Belo Horizonte, because it had become difficult for me to live without Lita. I had already been in that city for six days, instead of continuing my trip to Goiaz, already much overdue, but I felt as if I was in a spider's web, and it was impossible to shake the feeling from me.

A very important festivity was celebrated every year at the Spanish Social Club in Belo Horizonte, and many salesmen were invited to participate in it, because it was a local event that reunited government authorities and all the city's prominent businessmen. Senhor Garcia, one of the most important merchants and also our company's agent, belonged to the club's board of directors, and he had prepared a special table for Oleg, Lita, and some important people, among whom I was also included. Senhor Garcia was a middle-aged bachelor, and I assumed that he always had been in love with Lita, and I even suspected that at one time he had been her lover, judging by the way he looked sighingly when he was close to her. We spent a very pleasant time together, eating good food, drinking a lot most of the night, and also dancing frequently.

Without my knowing why, suddenly Lita asked me if I could take her home, because she wanted to be sure that everything was well there, for both maids had had their day off, and Gertrude usually was sound asleep at night as if knocked out. It was after midnight, and Oleg approved Lita's request. We were driving on Belo Horizonte's empty streets in my Ford, heading to her house.

"Do you have enough gas to reach Sao Paulo?" Lita very nervously asked me.

"Why Sao Paulo?" I asked her, intrigued.

Then, not being able to control herself anymore, she broke into loud crying, put her head on my shoulder, and between sobs, in intermittent words, she said to me, "I am tired of this life! . . . I love you, and I would like to remain with you! . . . I barely see you, and I don't have anything in common with my husband, who doesn't even see me! When I am with you, you awake inside me so much passion, and so much desire to live, which disappears immediately as soon as you leave! . . . I cannot take it any more! I don't have enough strength to keep on living such a miserable life!"

"What about your children?" I asked, almost scared, because I wasn't expecting anything like this reaction.

"I told you already that I don't care about anything any more! I told you already that you are the only thing that is important for me! Without you, my life is sterile, is empty, is lost without any meaning!"

I kept on driving slowly on the deserted streets, because it was very late, and I didn't know what to do, what to say, or what I was supposed to rely on. I loved her too, but I wasn't expecting that she would suggest such an idea as to throw us in an adventure without any economic security, nor even certainty of her own feelings.

I thought that she was passing through an emotional moment, perhaps because of an argument with her husband, and was ready to take a desperate decision; but after we relocated together in Sao Paulo, or in any other country, sooner or later she would reproach me that by my fault she had abandoned her children! In addition to that, was I ready to take such a step? I needed more time to think seriously, to analyze, and perhaps later to make up my mind. To calm her, I told her that if after a month she still felt the

same, then we could plan to live together; but for the time being, we couldn't just embark on an unknown future, because I didn't even have a steady place of my own, and we should know exactly where we would like to live.

After kissing and caressing her, I succeeded in calming my little friend, who dried her tears with my handkerchief, and we went back to the Spanish Club, where all our table companions became aware of Lita's emotional state of mind. With her feminine presence of spirit, she said that she was disturbed because her little girl—whom we didn't see, not having gone to her house—had some fever. It was a very awkward situation, and the husband, who talked little but drank a lot, as a good Scandinavian who respects himself said, "Better we go back home!" This decision was taken so fast that none of us had time to react, while the couple was already heading toward the exit door.

I remained with my friends very upset, sad, and preoccupied with what would happen to Lita. Seeing her disturbed, inside myself I was afraid that she could take some unfathomable steps and by them jeopardize everything, and I became very gloomy, as usually happened when I couldn't foresee the outcome of a situation. The following day, without saying goodbye to anybody, I left the city, driving in the direction of the State of Goiaz, where I had a very important case to take care of, an overdue case in which a customer owing us too much money seemed unable to pay. My adventure with Lita had been going on for several months. At that time, Belo Horizonte was still a small city, and of course, it wasn't impossible that some gossip would start running about my affair with her.

More than once, Lita assured me that she hadn't slept with her husband for more than a year, that they had had separate bedrooms from the very moment Gertrude, her mother-in-law, decided to come from Sweden to live with them. I didn't know whether to believe her or not, but I opted to trust her, because it made me feel better.

I have a strongly-developed sixth sense that has helped me to survive dangerous situations in my risky and crazy life, and by instinct, I was already feeling that Oleg suspected something about us. When after six weeks I returned to Belo Horizonte, I asked Lita if there was any other city where she could invent a reason to go and where we could stay together. She told me that quite often she went to Ouro Preto to see a homeopathic doctor who was taking care of some of her feminine health problems. And that was how we decided to go to that city within two days, because Oleg was at home most of the time, and we couldn't see each other at ease without taking unreasonable risks of being seen together by some of their acquaintances. Following the dictate of my instinct, I also asked her not to mention to Oleg that I was in town.

Two days later, I was standing at the Ouro Preto railroad station, waiting for Lita's train to arrive at any time. I always loved trains, and I traveled a lot by this means in several different continents. Now, with all this modernism, I miss them and seeing a train brings too much nostalgia to my mind. Hearing from far away the typical noise of the approaching locomotive, I felt my heart shudder, and mustering all my energies, I forced myself to come down. Once the train came to a stop, I went on looking at each one of the wagon's windows, expecting to see the radiant and smiling little Lita's face, with her habitual make-up, wearing some colorful, showy dress, as usual. When I located her, I was surprised and couldn't believe that she would be so preoccupied, and while coming down the steps to the platform, even before she gave me a kiss, she said, "Do you know what Oleg said to me when he took me to the railroad station, at the last moment when

the train was already leaving? He said, 'Send my regards to Miguel!' How do you see it?"

I was as much surprised as she was, because I didn't expect her husband to realize yet what was going on between us, and much less that he could have any suspicion that we would be seeing each other in Ouro Preto! At the same time, I knew that he was too smart not to perceive our mutual affection. To calm her, I instructed her to tell Oleg once back in Belo Horizonte that she followed his advice, and by coincidence, when she saw me in Ouro Preto, I invited her to have lunch with me, after she saw her doctor.

Lita remained very sad and upset, and once we were in the hotel room, which I had reserved in advance, saying that my wife was coming with me, she sat on the bed's corner, without moving, all the time looking at me with imploring eyes. "Misha," she said after a long silence, "I think that he knew everything about us a long while ago, or perhaps the witch of his mother insinuated it to him, because the previous day, he said to me that he had decided to return to Sweden with the children. He said that I could come with them or remain in Brazil, as I wished!"

I realized that she was expecting me to say something, that now the moment had come to take the big final decision, and that she hoped that I would ask her to stay with me. I am sure that I would have done it in other circumstances, if the children hadn't been between us. Both children were adorable; they were blond, with blue eyes, and behaved with real Nordic manners, and not like Latins. I was feeling that sooner or later, one day she would reproach me, telling me that it was my fault she had lost her kids, and she would be throwing it in my face constantly. Lita was still waiting, sitting on the bed all dressed as she came, and I could see that she didn't trust my feelings any more and had doubts about my decision.

"When is he planning to move to Sweden?" I asked her, and without waiting for an answer I said, "You know that I love you, but I cannot take the moral responsibility of separating you from your children, because I know that one day you will regret it and reproach me with it!"

"I was expecting it!" said Lita with a sad pout, then continued with an expression that was supposed to be a smile: "I still have hope that you will change your mind and decide definitely to remain with me! I pray for that! Why don't we take advantage of this beautiful day, and without thinking about the future just enjoy ourselves? I am sure that with God's will, you will be mine, really mine, forever!"

We spent a day and a night as a real honeymoon, happy like pigeons, without even once mentioning the topic that so much preoccupied both of us. The following day, I took Lita to the railroad station, where she boarded the train going back to Belo Horizonte.

At that time, I didn't know that I would never see her again! She was leaving, and I would never more see this adorable little woman. For a very long time after that, I still could see in my mind, as if in a movie, as if through clouds, my little "Smutty Girl's" hand waving goodbye to me from the wagon's window and disappearing in space.

By nature, I am extremely cautious, and I always try to anticipate the future. I asked Lita by letter sent to the city's General Post Office (Poste Restante) to let me know if something important happened. Few people had telephones at home at that time in Brazil, and it was the only possible way we could communicate. When I came back to Belo Horizonte the following month, the first thing I did was to go to the post office to

ask if there was any message for me. The employee handed me a letter whose handwriting I knew so well.

Lita's letter's content surprised me and later gave me deep pain. She was conveying to me that it was impossible for her to see me; because of the departure preparations, she wasn't able to get out, because Oleg was at home, but she would send me a letter to Campinas. She promised to explain everything in more detail and to plan how we could see each other again, because she still had faith that God would make the best decision for both of us.

Needless to say, I was jittery and didn't feel like staying there any longer. I had business to attend to with customers in that city, but I had a crazy premonition to go away from there, to leave immediately, and I invented for myself an excuse to do so by trying to believe that nothing special was requiring my presence any more in Belo Horizonte. I checked out of the hotel, without even occupying the room I had reserved in advance, and I left for Victoria, driving to the remote State of Espiritu Santo.

Three weeks later, returning to my residence, Hotel Dos Amigos in Campinas, I saw among the pack of letters handed to me one from Lita. I went at once rushing into my room to read it. She told me that the same day of my last arrival in Belo Horizonte, Oleg was already aware of our plan, from having called the hotel where he knew I usually stayed and being told that I had a reservation.

Lita kept on saying in her letter that she saw how Oleg, putting a revolver in his pocket, said that he was going to the hotel to "have a little conversation with Miguel!" It appeared that Oleg came to the hotel fifteen minutes after I left for Victoria, and I recalled how my instinct was warning me not to dwell in Belo Horizonte and to resume my trip, a decision that saved my life. I was confused with pain, and chiefly with a feeling of guilt for Lita, who had put her love and her life in my hands, and that I had betrayed her by rejecting her. I also felt like a delinquent for having betrayed Oleg's friendship. I understood that I had hurt him very much, because it was obvious that he was leaving Belo Horizonte because of me, abandoning a beautiful home, quitting a wonderful and well-paid job that gave him a prestigious social position in town, besides my having morally wounded him by virtue of his losing a friend and trust in his wife.

When I returned to Belo Horizonte a few weeks later, not having heard any more from Lita, I went to see our common friend Garcia. After talking about business and trivial things, I asked him as if by coincidence about the Kruges and was surprised to see him looking coldly at me, while saying, "You know that they returned to Sweden, and Lita told me that until the last moment, she was expecting to receive important news from you!"

I remained very saddened by what I learned, which obviously by logic I should have expected. I understood also that Garcia knew of our affair, because he had always been very close to Lita, who would have told him, for which reason he gave me a cold shoulder.

After my business trip, when I came back to Campinas, a long letter from Lita was awaiting me in the Hotel Dos Amigos. In this emotional last message, Lita told me that everything was over between us, due to my lack of commitment. When Oleg asked her, after the house had been sold and they were all packed up, if she wanted to move to Stockholm or remain in Brazil, she didn't have any other alternative but to follow him. She told me that she still didn't know if I was right or wrong about her children, but she

loved me above everything, even more than her children, and would have sacrificed anything just to remain with me. Now, feeling abandoned, she was as if waking up from a fairy tale dream, recognizing that it was the end of a wonderful romance, and she begged me not to try to contact her, nor to send her messages. She had faith in God and the Virgin, who would give her the necessary courage to overcome this suffering, and she also was asking God to bless me!

This letter disturbed me tremendously, and I realized that I had to live with this feeling of guilt the rest of my life. But as the years passed, I remembered more the smiling little "Smutty's" face than the sad end of our love.

Chapter 5

Time passed, and we already were in May 1955. For the first time in many years now, Brazil would be enjoying a new democratic government, because Juscelino Kubitschek, the liberal party candidate, had been elected president. I was in Sao Paulo with my Bolivian friends; in a certain way we threw a farewell party, because the following day I was leaving for the State of Goiaz to plunge head-on into a new adventure, the "garimpo" this time.

Between the money I transferred from Argentina—which I never touched—my savings, and the profits I made through lucky speculations, I had in the Banco do Brazil half a million dollars in my checking account, not counting the four lots on the Ipanema Beach, close to Copacabana, that I purchased by following my friend Popol's advice.

In the course of time, as part of my work requirement, I came back to the State of Goiaz several times, and my intrigue grew each time I headed to Ipora, or to any other region where the "garimpeiros" were camping. Many times during my trips in that region, I ran into a large government group of geologists and scientists who were trying to locate an appropriate ground in the State of Goiaz to build a new Brazilian capital. The site they were looking for was supposed to have an agreeable climate for the future inhabitants, good earth for growing fruits and vegetables, and above all abundant drinking water. The Brazilians wanted to emulate the Americans, who transferred their capital from Philadelphia to Washington. The government already had a name for the future capital: Brasilia.

During several of my trips to Ipora, our customer, Ze Vendeiro, and his friend, a fat mulatto named Zacharia, convinced me to join their partnership in a diamond-prospecting adventure on the Araguaia River. They had already secured a concession from the government on the spot opposite where the famous "stone" called "Getulio Vargas" had been found, a 700-carat diamond.

As a partner, I had to supply a complete outfit of gear, with pumps, diesel motors, drums, tools, and other equipment that I had already purchased and that my Bolivian friend Pedro Villafane helped me to ship by train to Goiania. From there, we would haul all the supplies by trucks to Ipora; then it would be carried through the jungle by carts pulled by oxen up to the Araguaia River, about 80 miles, a trip that would take about three days.

I had resigned already from my work as general sales manager at McHardy, giving Senhor Roberto and much more his father Monsieur Henri Joinot a big jolt; he begged me not to get involved in such a dangerous undertaking as garimpo and to remain working for them, where I had a brilliant future. Our salesman, Julio Cacioli, from Goiania, had encouraged me very much to go ahead, telling me that if he were younger, he would have joined me. We had to hurry up, because it was only during the dry season of the year, or winter time, that this operation could be undertaken. It was the period when all the garimepeiros were trying their luck.

In summer, the tropical rains were so abundant that the water grew to such a great volume that the shores were overflowing. Most of the jungle and even sometimes entire towns were flooded, making it impossible to move at all and completely

unthinkable to work in diamond prospecting.

The following day, I was going on a two-day trip by train from Sao Paulo to Goiania. From there, I would be traveling to Ipora with the trucks, which would be loaded with my equipment. The worst part was when I would be walking in the jungle, following our carts pulled by oxen.

Ze was our main capitalist, with a commitment to send us the necessary food by river or by carts, consisting chiefly of rice, beans, coffee, and sugar, in addition to supplying my drums with diesel, part of my expenses. The money to buy beef from local farms to feed our people would also come from my pocket. Zacharia was the third partner; he wasn't putting up any money but would be our supervisor as the virada "Chief," with the responsibility of keeping order among the personnel and of being sure that food and tools were available and the work was done. I also learned later that his main function was the recuperation of diamonds found by the "garimpeiros."

Ze was too occupied as a businessman to leave his stores and his work in order to remain with us in the jungle, but he sent in his place a faithful and very efficient foreman who was experienced in building dams. His name was Brito, a man short in stature but built like a rock. He used to say in Portuguese that he was the strongest man in the world, and it was difficult to doubt it after seeing him breaking huge rocks or carrying entire big trees on his shoulders.

When I arrived at our camp, tired from walking several days in the jungle and eaten up by mosquitoes, I was surprised to see that the place was already occupied by about three dozen men, some building shacks, others marking the spots for the erection of the future dam, and some cutting huge trees for the same purpose. In this place, as in all others where there is an island, the river ran on both sides. Our island was almost a mile long and a hundred yards in width.

The "virada" consisted of building two dams on both extreme parts of one side of the island, thus creating an artificial lake of about half a mile long by sixty yards wide, while all the water was diverted to run on the other side. The river had places that were more than ten yards deep. That was how we found our camp at our arrival, with people busy building the dams. First, they would place some kind of hanging bridge from the shore to the island; then, they would place trunks, branches, leaves, and all kind of vegetation to fill it up, the whole to be covered by dirt until completion of the dam.

Once this side of the shore had a barrier made, the workers would do the same thing about half a mile farther on, so that with a dam on both sides sealed, the lake was created. It would become our working place and also our hope of becoming rich. As soon as both dams were finished and closed, my pumps would start sucking the water from this artificial lake, pouring it on the other side of the island, where the river would now be flowing. The main camp was already built on the other shore of the river, almost a mile from the "virada" (dam). The first person whom I saw at my arrival was my partner Zacaria, with the foreman Brito, surrounded by all the "garimpeiros," who, curious, interrupted their work and came to see me, not so much because I was one of the owners, but rather because I was a foreigner.

I was also surprised to see Ze, who came riding a horse with plans to stay a couple of days with us and to see how the camp was handled, where fifteen shacks had already been built. Big stakes were buried in the dirt and a roof was built with wood and covered by banana and other types of leaves, then tied up by tropical creepers, because

ropes were expensive. I also had been introduced to our three lady-cooks, who I learned later were prostitutes who usually came to try their luck—not in their profession, but at the diamond prospection "virada." The "garimpo" is a world apart; it is some kind of utopian republic, where nobody recognizes hierarchy, obligation, or loss of freedom. The three "ladies" were introduced to me, as if they were from high society: Tereza, a young black girl, small and fat, who seemed to be the "chef"; Victoria, white, pretty, even though not too young any more, tall, not talkative; and Alvira, a very middle-aged light mulatto who was the only one bearing on her face the trace of her real profession.

I was going from surprise to surprise and also to confusion, because I wanted to know how the entire organization worked and what all these employees' status was, as well as by whom and how they were paid. I was an important part of this enterprise; I spent many thousands of dollars on it, and it was obvious that I needed to have my curiosity satisfied and to know where I stood.

It took me a while to become familiar with the situation, and little by little I understood exactly how the "virada" functioned. I learned with surprise that nobody in the camp was our employee; the "garimpeiros" are all free from any employer obligation, and when we accept them to work with us, they reserve the right to leave us any day they please, with no obligation, contract, or limitations. The "garimpeiros" never missed an opportunity to emphasize that all of them were free people. Usually, they were known by their first names alone, a practice that tended to justify my assumption that most of them were hiding from justice. They never used their last names, and most of the time they had nicknames. Very soon, I also had mine, "Motorista" or "Argentino" ("motor driver" or "the Argentinian".)

As owners, we had the duty of drying the lake after the dams had been built, so that the "garimpeiros" could go in the river bed to clean it of rocks and old trunks in order to reach the thin sand that usually covers the river's slate. The diamond is an old coal, formed through millions of years, very heavy and over time penetrating the earth more and more during the rains, when the water softens the dirt until the diamond reaches the shale, which all rivers have. No geological maps exist in Brazil from other epochs in these regions, and nobody knows for sure if the river had always flowed on the same bed floor or by any other route through the millions and millions of years.

As mining exploitation owners, our obligation was to feed our people and to let them work at will, not even watching them, because they were free to choose their own schedule and their own working spot and wouldn't accept receiving orders. Each one of them, sometimes two, but never more than three adventurers, would rake the fine sand from the river's floor and carry it to the shore, to protect it from water avalanches that almost on a regular basis would break through the dam, destroying part of the structure and carrying everything away.

The thin sand was handled with extreme care as a possible fortune-keeper; it was washed up over three superimposed sieves of different sizes: the first, on the top, with larger opening gaps, trapped the bigger stones; when the top sieve was removed, the second, smaller one underneath held smaller stones; and when the second sieve was removed, the bottom one, with a fine sieve, usually could gather diamonds, with luck.

Once I almost created a riot by provoking a loud laughter among a group of "garimpeiros" gathered during a smoking break, because I asked them how they could recognize a raw diamond. Then a huge, sullen mulatto with a big knife under his belt

volunteered to show me something. After washing the last of the three sieves, he turned it upside down, splashing the sand on the ground, as if he were laying an omelette on a plate from a frying pan. Then he made a few steps backward to get a better look at me; as a matter of fact, everyone else present did too, and some even stopped smoking, so engulfed were they in staring at me, because for them my ignorance was stunning.

Suddenly, in curiosity, pointing to a little milky-colored stone, I asked, "What is that?" Everybody again cracked up with even louder laughter, saying in chorus to me, "See how fast you learn? You have already recognized a diamond, because this is a diamond!"

When a "garimpeiro" found a raw diamond, he had the obligation to offer it to the "virada" owners, and the value was divided in this way: 40% for him, 40% for the owners of the virada, and 20 % for the "motor." For example, if the "stone" had been evaluated by our buyer at \$1,000, the "garimpeiro" received \$400, and the rest was ours. Now he wasn't bound to sell it to us; his obligation was only to show it, and he was free to sell it to whomever he wanted. However, in any case, he still owed us \$600, which he needed to bring us if he wanted to stay alive. I didn't know anything about all these rules at that time. I learned the rules much later, because usually Ze, Zacharia, or Brito were doing the buying.

No radio, telephone, electricity, or road existed there; only wild animals and untamable Indians were our neighbors. A few miles farther from us, other "viradas" existed, and we would socialize, visiting each other mainly on Sunday, because that day was sacred for the "garimpeiros" and nobody would dare to work. They were more superstitious than religious, and they respected several biblical holidays. On Sunday, itinerant dealers would also come to call on us, bringing their wares on a mule's back, including all kinds of trinkets but mainly the Brazilian alcohol "cachaza," made of sugar cane. Prostitutes came too, and it was possible to receive their favors on "credit." I think that because of my fear of catching a venereal disease, I abstained from sex for the first time in my life during all these long months.

The news spread at an inconceivable, almost unbelievable speed, as if by magic, and everyone in the region would learn that, for example, so-and-so didn't accept \$1,000, offered for his "stone" by the owners of a "virada"—that is to say that he rejected the \$400 that would have been his share. His story would already be known by everyone in the region when he offered his "stone" to other merchants, other "virada" owners, or itinerant diamond dealers who were wandering in these regions, on horseback with their bodyguards, because the operations were done in cash only. Most of the time in these cases, the lucky "garimpeiro" would receive smaller offers than those he had received from where he was working—perhaps \$800 from one, then \$600 from another, and when the "garimpeiro," tired, would come back to us, our buyer would tell him that the original offer of \$1,000 had expired, and now he couldn't offer more than \$500. It meant that instead of getting \$400, as offered at the beginning, he still would owe \$100 to the "virada." I learned about all these laws of the jungle much later, after the end of our adventure, and I lamented not having known them, because I would have objected. Now, I don't know what result would have come from my objection.

When I asked Ze, much later, what would happen if a "garimpeiro," in a similar case, escaped with the "stone," Ze and many other jungle adventurers laughed in my face. They explained to me that in the "garimpo" existed an unwritten law of honor

by which at the first attempt to sell a stolen diamond, the “garimpeiro” would be killed and the “stone” returned to the owner. No two diamonds look alike, and when a “garimpeiro” took a look at a “stone,” he would never forget it, because it would remain engraved in his memory, and he would be able to identify it at any time. I was very much impressed by the laws of this new world where I was living now. Even though most of these people were illiterate, they knew and respected these laws and eventually would help to kill anybody who would fail to honor the rules of their world.

When I asked how our “cooks” were paid, after everyone stopped laughing I had the explanation. They laughed very easily, because like all primitive people, it was inadmissible for them to believe that somebody from “outside” would ignore their laws, and for that they felt superior while they taught the rules.

Every morning, a bucket of the soft sand was gathered for each one of the cooks, and it was “washed” once a week. The cooks went through the same procedures in selling their “stones.”

In all this region, the adventurers were armed with huge knives; few owned a revolver, and of course, I wouldn't part with the Smith & Wesson hanging on my belt, with a hunting knife on the side. I had a big-game shotgun in my cabin, loaded with bullets for large animals, which were abundant in this jungle and included tigers, caimans, and others.

The Brazilians, especially those from inland “caboclos,” are very much different from the rest of the Latinos on the Continent. By their behavior, even though it would seem to be derisive, they showed a more Anglo temperament by their coolness, in addition to their natural and inconsistent susceptibility; they were always easily offended, and when offended, they sought revenge at once.

I was surprised when I saw our first “garimpeiro” dead; he was buried in a distant place from our camp, where they decided to locate our cemetery. I was told that he had an “argument” with another so-and-so, but luck hadn't been on his side this time. This kind of settling of accounts usually happened during the night, and one of the combatants wouldn't be alive by dawn. We were far away from the closest town, and even in Ipora no steady policemen existed, for which reason the dead were simply buried as if nothing had happened, and nobody would even talk about it. We already had three graves in our cemetery; all these people were superstitious, and they would never leave a grave without placing a cross on it, even a rustic, primitive one.

The first night, I slept on a hammock that had been lent to me, and early in the morning of the following day, I put on my shorts and went to swim in the river, while everyone stared with curiosity at me, until Brito asked me in a laconic voice, “Aren't you afraid of the piranhas?” I almost drowned when I heard these words, and much more was I afraid when I heard that the river was full of these man-devouring fish. Trembling, I swam immediately as fast as I could to the shore, to be received by the raucous laughter of everybody. They found it funny that somebody could ignore that the piranhas were everywhere. It looked as though I was becoming popular among our people, which was a good omen. They built a shack a little bit larger than the others for me on the island, close to the place where my pumps and motors would be installed. I didn't have any hammock; besides, I didn't like hammocks, so Brito built an improvised bed for me, with palm tree leaves as a mattress.

My shack was the only one on the entire island, and I saw many askance looks

in my direction, because all these people with whom I would be living for many months were very superstitious and had a terrorizing fear of spirits, about whom they used to talk as if they were living among them as neighbors. There existed the “woman in the black dress,” who was very dangerous, the dwarf with a steel-like fist, the vaporous man scaring people, and many more. At the place where we camped would also sometimes appear a man wearing a white shirt who was murdered many years ago and whose ghost came back every night, always washing his soft sand in the sieve, with the “shoo-shoo” noise. The ‘garimpeiros’ couldn’t understand how I could remain by myself in a place like this at night.

Once again, it was a factor that increased my ever-growing popularity, which was good. My alcoholic habit was getting stronger, and because I liked to drink by myself, I didn’t really care for company. I had my revolver under my cover and a very handy shotgun close to me and hanging above the bed. I always trusted my sixth sense, and I wouldn’t even think of bragging that I felt I was doing something special by living alone on that island, almost a mile from our camp; in any case, the thought didn’t disturb my sleep at all, because I always slept like a baby.

The dam was ready, my pumps were installed, and everybody surrounded me. We had at that time close to a hundred “garimpeiros” working in our “virada,” and for that occasion everybody was ready to celebrate with a bottle of beer or “cachaza” (Brazilian alcohol), coming to enjoy the spectacle of my huge diesel motors as they moved the pumps to drain all the dam’s water with the five-inch hoses.

Finally, this so-expected moment came. I cranked the motor with a “cigar” to ignite the diesel, and after a wild roar, my engines began spinning and the pumps began to throw a big jet of water from the dam into the other side of the river, running through a previously built channel. Everyone began to holler, scream, and dance, and those who had guns fired them into the air.

It took me three days and nights to dry all the water from the dam, and only then could our men get down in the river’s bed to begin cleaning out the rocks and debris to reach the soft sand where the diamonds could be found. Ze promised to come for this special occasion of inauguration, but he didn’t. We learned later that his son killed a man in Ipora, and Ze was doing everything he could to present the case as one of self-defense, and not as a murder. He sent us a message explaining that for some time he wouldn’t be able to come to see us, but that Zacharia would be taking care of any problem that would arise. Every day, more “garimpeiros” were coming to our camp looking for new opportunities, and our crew grew to 160 workers.

I had to buy a cow a week to feed all these people, and sometimes I could gather some other kind of food from the local farmers, because Ze was busy trying to save his son’s life and we had to take care of our needs ourselves.

Unfortunately, after a couple of months, we hadn’t as yet found any diamond more than four carats, while the expenses were growing. Water began infiltrating our dam, and my motors couldn’t pump all the water that was entering it. I decided to acquire another, more powerful motor, sending a check for it to my friend Pedro Villafane in Sao Paulo. Unfortunately, we lost three entire weeks waiting before we received the new equipment.

Chapter 6

August had been a very bad month for us, and especially for me. The real head of our enterprise was Ze; he had the brains to manage our business, but unfortunately, for the time being, we couldn't count on him nor on his help. He was too busy with his son's destiny, because the man the son had killed belonged to an important family of leaders; the victim was very much entangled with politicians and "jagunzos," the local criminal mafia that had a strong influence in Goiania.

Now, the only one I could rely on was Zacharia, even though many times I had to restrain myself to avoid having an argument with him because of his violent personality. Our men hated him, and more than one had the thought of squaring accounts with him at the first opportunity. Unfortunately, he ended up creating his own problem as a result of his nasty nature. It happened once that when visiting one of the few farmers living a few miles from us, he had a bitter dispute with him, and being trigger-happy, Zacharia killed his interlocutor. Taking advantage of the surprise factor, he ran away from the house while everyone was still looking at the dead relative. By lucky chance, he found a saddled horse tied outside, and he mounted it and escaped. We learned what had happened the same day, when six riders who came to our camp looking for him told us. We didn't hear from Zacharia again, learning only through circulating rumors that he had run away and was hiding in Rio Verde.

Now, as a result of all these circumstances, I remained by myself, not only without Ze, but now also without Zacharia. I had to lead 170 men who actually were working in our camp. I didn't know how to manage the enterprise, and I couldn't count on any other money but mine, which was melting away quickly.

Coincidence or not, in addition to all my other worries, we had several fights among our people, resulting in an increase in the number of crosses in our cemetery, now totaling thirty-five. Our men were leaving our camp, angry because they couldn't find diamonds; and something unusual even occurred: two of our cooks left us, the big black Tereza and the white Victoria, both saying that, as "raparigas" (sluts), they could make much more money without having to cook for these dirty "garimpeiros" who were coming to lie down with them in their beds for free, without giving a "cruzeiro." Only the mulatto Alvira remained with us, saying that she had the feeling that she would get a big "stone," which she would sell for a lot of money and then live the rest of her life without working, while raising a family.

The main wall of the dam, as a result of the water infiltrations, ended up breaking, and a huge wave razed all our "virada," carrying away all my motors and the pumps. It was a real disaster. Actually, the only one on whom I could rely was Brito, even though his intellectual ability was very limited. Many of our original men left because they didn't want to waste their time repairing our "virada," while our cemetery already had fifty graves. These adventurers could kill each other for the least thing.

I assume that they didn't touch me out of pure superstition, seeing me as so different! Often they would ask me if I wasn't afraid to be by myself on the island at night, with all the ghosts around. I would tell them, laughing, that I was not at all afraid and that I became very friendly with the man with the white shirt, to the extent that almost every night we would play cards and drink "cachaza" together.

On a regular basis, when I would wake up in the middle of the night to

urinate, I would never forget to fire a few shots in the air with my gun. When the following day my people inquired what had happened and who was shooting at whom, very nonchalantly I would tell them that the woman in black and the dwarf with the iron fist came to our little group, and it was a good opportunity to celebrate. For the “garimpeiros,” I was a mystical person. I let a long beard grow, and something especially unheard of, I didn't go with women, nor was I a homosexual. I knew that many of these ambulant prostitutes had syphilis, and I remained abstinent all these months, the longest period of celibacy of my life.

In September, with a crew consisting of a bunch of new people, we had our dam repaired; the motors I purchased from Sao Paulo were already working at full speed in sucking the water from the “virada,” and we were trying our luck again.

We counted in our camp 150 “garimpeiros” now, more than 100 of whom were newcomers. Most came from northern states, where there was a devastating drought, such as in Ceara, where unemployment was also high. This group was made up of blonds with blue eyes, descendants from the Dutch, who invaded Brazil in the eighteenth century. After they had been defeated, many of them remained in that country. Nonetheless, so many years later, a lot of them still retained their pure ethnic look. Among these blond newcomers was a young man who didn't seem to be physically strong, although his look showed decisiveness, and he was highly respected by his friends. He had an argument with Brito, who reproached him that he wasn't handling the axe correctly.

This young descendant of Scandinavia behaved like any other primitive, walking shoeless like the rest of his companions. He said to Brito, "Are you trying to teach me how to use tools?" Then he threw his axe on the ground and walked away.

I saw Brito a little bit later with a bundle of effects on his shoulder coming to me to say goodbye, explaining that Gustavo would kill him if he remained. I was greatly surprised, because Brito was strong like a fortress, a rock, while the "louro" (blond) didn't seem to be physically a match for his strength, in spite of his piercing look, which inspired respect.

It was too much for me! I had enough of my own problems; I didn't feel able to manage the “virada” by myself, and furious, not being able to control my nerves, I let my "macho" querulous character get out. I screamed at our foreman, telling him that I wouldn't let him leave the camp; but Brito was firm, and it was visible on his face that he was scared of Gustavo, who meanwhile was standing some hundred yards away, looking at us but because of the distance unable to hear our conversation, or rather my screaming.

By the jungle laws, when an argument happened between two people and one of them leaves, the fight is considered over, and the one remaining is the victor. Gustavo was intensely watching Brito to see if he was leaving or would remain to face him.

I couldn't take any more. I had already spent several hundred thousand dollars in feeding these adventurers and in buying motors, pumps, and diesel fuel; now the dam was repaired and we could once again try our luck. I was without anybody who could help me, and I couldn't afford to lose my foreman. He was the only one who could handle the situation in case of a dam rupture, or who knew how to face and solve other “virada” problems.

I told Brito to remain standing where he was, in the shadow of a big tree, and I went toward Gustavo, while screaming and insulting him for bringing me problems by

threatening my foreman. When I arrived close to him, the blond from Ceara said in a calm voice that he had had a “violent” argument with Brito, who had insulted him, telling him that he wasn't holding the axe correctly and not giving him any alternative but to kill Brito if he wouldn't leave the camp.

Boiling with anger, I told Gustavo that I would kill him if he so much as tried to give a bad look at Brito, and pulling my revolver, I shot five times in the air. Then, looking straight in his eyes, I told him that the sixth bullet left in the gun was for him, if he wouldn't obey me. This unusual attitude of mine surprised and impressed all the curious “garimpeiros” who happened to be at the place, and using more of my bullying threats, I succeeded in securing Gustavo's word that he wouldn't touch Brito.

Without even waiting for his comments, like a good trained actor, knowing that everyone was watching me, I returned to Brito, who was still standing under the tree. I told him that he had my word that Gustavo would not touch him. With that, I saved my foreman's life and also my peace of mind.

The wind was blowing strong that day, and I was worried about my new diesel motor, which wasn't cranking. I realized too late that I had forgotten to buy a battery; to turn on the motor, it was necessary to introduce a piece of burning paper (vulgarly called a “cigar”) into the starter, and that would crank the motor.

Almost all the 150 men from our camp were assembled around my installations, watching my unsuccessful attempts to put the motors to work. None of them had anything else to do, because the damming was flooded, and it was impossible to perform any prospecting task. These men didn't have any amusement in this jungle, and for them it was fun to watch how I was dealing with my motors.

They were looking at this scene as if it were a movie, and I had to hide my anger as much as I could, pretending that I didn't care, even though I always hate being watched while doing something. Each time I got inside my shack to light the “cigar,” thus being protected from the wind, and went outside toward my motors, the wind would immediately extinguish the flame, forcing me to repeat the same operation over and over.

During one of these attempts, when I was getting out of my shack and running eagerly toward my motors with a burning piece of paper, I stumbled against a huge mulatto from Bahia, who didn't see me coming. The encounter was so violent that I knocked him down and he fell to the ground! In Brazil, even a wrong word said in a wrong moment could put anybody's life in jeopardy, much like a death sentence; to push somebody like the “Baiano,” who had just been released from hard time in a prison, with a reputation of cruelty, was like courting a disaster or death.

I feigned ignoring the incident and kept on lighting my little pieces of paper to run to my motors. Suddenly, after almost an hour of attempts, the motors cranked and the pumps began throwing huge flows of water from the flooded dam into the other branch of the river. I saw also, out of the corner of my eye, that the “garimpeiros” standing around me began slowly to move aside, little by little returning to their camp. I watched how the “Baiano” became white with anger, got up on his feet from the floor, and disappeared with the rest of the people crossing the improvised hanging bridge, which united my island with the river's shore.

Without bragging, I can say that very seldom have I felt the feeling of fear; the perception of terror, anguish, and desperation, yes, and I have felt those many times in my life; but never fear! It didn't mean that I was ready to be slaughtered by whomever, or

that I would remain unworried when confronted by an imminent danger. I knew from experience that I should expect any kind of slick murderous attempt from the "Baiano" at any time. I didn't sleep well that night, first because I had to fill up my motors with diesel every four hours, and second because my senses were acute in expectation of possible danger.

I never parted from my Smith & Wesson, which was constantly hanging on my belt, close to my hunting knife, and I had my loaded shotgun very handy in my shack. Usually, when my engines were working, I remained close to them, and instead of going to our "little town" for breakfast, there was always somebody from the kitchen who would bring it to me early in the morning, allowing me to watch the motors. That's where my nickname "motorista" came from, meaning "the motor man." At dawn, I was surprised to see on the other side of the shore, crossing the suspended bridge, the "Baiano" coming toward my place.

I assumed that he came to settle accounts with me; I was ready, and I was expecting him without moving, prepared to pull my gun from my belt if I had seen him threatening me. My other surprise was to see that the "Baiano" was carrying the tray on which my breakfast was usually brought. He kept coming in my direction, while we both stared at each other's eyes with determination. When he was a few steps from me, with a smile he said, "I brought your coffee, senhor!"

I had studied psychology at the Sorbonne, and I knew that all human beings don't react the same way in the same situation. All depends on atavistic instincts, blood heredity, the acquired character, and very much on the culture.

If the "Baiano" were an educated city man, I would have told him, "Listen, buddy, yesterday I was kind of upset with my motors, which wouldn't crank; if I knocked you down, it was just by chance, without meaning it, and I hope you don't mind!" If I had said these words at that place to a man with the Baiano's background, he would without any doubt have pulled his knife-sword that he always carried on the back side of his belt to kill me immediately. For him, it would have been the proof of recognition that I had offended him and that I deserved to be punished.

My behavior was indeed more in accordance with the circumstances, applying the laws of the jungle, and I screamed to him, "Son of a dog, leave the tray over on that stone, go inside my shack and pull a bottle of "cachaza" from under my bed, bring two cups from my night table, and let's have a few drinks together!"

From this very precise moment, the beginning of a strange friendship was established. We emptied the bottle, and from there on, he became my protective guard, not allowing anybody even to give me a bad look without being threatened with his huge knife. From that day, he was the one, and only he, who would every morning bring my breakfast, constantly vigilant, protecting me from anybody who would intend to hurt me or even look funny at me, as a real bodyguard would have done.

A couple of weeks later, like many other "garimpeiros," I caught a tropical diarrhea, which is believed to be transmitted by the contaminated river water we drank. I felt like dying, exhausted, because I couldn't control my stomach any longer, and it was emptied every ten minutes.

I woke up tired in the morning, dirty, and without appetite, and I hardly had enough energy to get out of my bed to fill up my motors with diesel every four hours so that they could continue pumping the water that was entering by infiltrations of the dam.

Seeing me sick, my "Baiano" friend suffered as if I were his son or his father, and one early morning, all dressed up for a bush expedition, he told me that he was going into the jungle to look for something to cure me.

He came back late at night, bringing some crust or some kind of tree bark in his pocket, and he assured me it cured diarrhea. He explained that it was very difficult to find in the jungle the right tree, whose trunk is covered by this kind of medicinal bark. He boiled these pieces of crust at once in water and gave me the liquid to drink. Three days later, I was completely cured! From then on, we became inseparable, to the point that many times, instead of returning to his shack in the camp, he would remain with me, sleeping on the floor of my hut.

Another "garimpeiro" who stuck close to me was a very clear mulatto, a gay, who instead of wearing shorts like most did, wore a woman's mini-skirt. He was very intelligent and seemed to come from a nice family, judging by his good manners. His name was Oswaldo, and he had been a student in Manaus, the capital of the State of Amazona, where he had had a lamentable love affair with an Englishman who dropped him for an ordinary street boy. He never entered into details about his sad experience until one evening the three of us drank a lot of "cachaza." I always inspired confidence in homosexuals, who more than once would find in me a good listener. This time, I inspired that confidence, too; Oswaldo told us that he couldn't take the suffering from losing his lover, so when he had been abandoned, he dropped everything, including his studies, and ran away from his very rich parents' home, deciding to lead an adventurer's life in the jungle with the "garimpeiros," where he felt happy.

The ambulant merchants brought their goods only on Sunday, mainly alcoholic beverages; and some of the "garimpeiros" who had business inclinations and owned some money would buy booze from them to resell it during the week to their colleagues for a remarkable profit.

Every evening, I had in my hut some thirsty visitors, who could remain until late at night to talk and mainly to drink "cachaza," of which I had an abundant supply. One of these nights, we were all gathered in my hut with my inseparable "Baiano," Oswaldo, and a new friend, a neighboring middle-aged farmer, a mixture of Japanese and mestizo whose name was Tanaka, along with three more men from our "virada." The farmer had come before to see me on other occasions, and several times he had sold some cattle for our kitchen.

The jungle laws were strict, and they didn't allow anybody to close the entrance of any shack to anyone, even if his presence wasn't pleasant. It was a question, as a sort of bush diplomacy, of making the intruder feel, without offending him, that everybody would have been better off without his being there. That night the conversation was very interesting, and once again we talked about politics, a subject so dear to Brazilians.

In the jungle, politics was limited to local problems, and very seldom was there mention made about the government, and we completely ignored international problems. That night, nevertheless, we enlarged the scope of our topics to worldwide questions. To my great surprise, Tanaka began to talk with such knowledge about historic events that I remained open-mouthed. After a quarter of an hour, the three garimpeiros who dropped by to have a drink left bored, or perhaps they left because I stopped serving cachaza, maybe guessing that their presence wasn't wanted and that I was trying to get rid

of them.

Suddenly, Tanaka asked me if it was true that I was in the Spanish Civil War! I didn't remember that I had told that to him, or it could be that I had said it to somebody when I had had a drink too many, which happened quite often, and it had been repeated to him. We began then to have a very animated political and ideological conversation about World War I and the following consequences, a topic into which Oswaldo also entered. The poor Baiano was lost; he couldn't understand anything of what we were talking about, but seeing that I was pulling another bottle from under my bed, he became animated and kept on smiling while trying not to appear as ignorant.

I was surprised to learn that Tanaka, a paulista (from Sao Paulo) with the rank of lieutenant in the army, had participated with Captain Luis Carlos Prestes, who was a communist, in the famous rebellion against the despotic Brazilian government. It put the whole country in turmoil for three years and came to be known as the movement of the "Prestes Column."

In 1927, harassed by the entire army, the rebels were annihilated, and the few survivors took refuge in Bolivia, where they were disbanded. Prestes always had been one of my heroes, and I was elated to talk to somebody who not only knew him, but who had also participated with him in his historic rebellion. I knew that Prestes had been known as "the Romantic Revolutionary" who, as Tanaka told me, after spending a few years in Bolivia, sneaked back into Brazil; there, with other Marxists' help, he continued to plot, until he organized another rebellion that broke out in 1935. This revolt was ill-planned, ending in a real disaster. It left many dead and apprehended revolutionaries, including the head of the movement, Prestes, whom Tanaka worshipped but who was also among the prisoners thrown in jail.

I knew that the one called "Knight of Hope" spent many years in prison, systematically tortured and humiliated, while his wife equally suffered a constant physical and moral oppression. Tanaka said with pride that now his friend Luis Carlos Prestes had been elected a Senator representing the Communist Party and lived in Niteroi. He told us that his old boss had offered several times to bring him to Rio de Janeiro to continue working for the revolutionary cause. "I am dying," Tanaka said sadly with a bitter smile; he was shaking and barely could move, and he was weak and his skin was already of a yellow color. He was affected by one of those incurable tropical blood diseases. After a while, he added, "Let younger people follow our paths—Lenin's paths—that Luis Carlos followed so well!"

With a lot of details, Tanaka gave us a little history lecture, commenting that he was very disappointed with the people in general, and not only with the Brazilians, but with all the proletarians. Getulio Vargas had been installed as dictator by the military in a regime lasting from 1930 to 1934. That same year, in spite of his oppression of the working class, during free elections, he had once again been elected president, remaining on the job until 1945, when a rebellion removed him from power. Now, one more time, also in free elections, he had again been elected as president in 1951, until the day he committed suicide in 1954. Tanaka had a lot of resentment against the United States, which always backed Vargas just because he fought communism.

In our "virada" only a small number of diamonds had been found, and they were sent to Ipora to be purchased by Ze, whom we all trusted. We had already 170 men working now in the dam, while our kitchen staff was completed by two newcomers.

Because of the water infiltrations, my pumps were working almost every day and needed my constant attention. I lost track of the money I was spending, until one day I received a letter from Sao Paulo from the Bank of Brazil, forwarded to me by Ze. I learned with dismay that nothing was left of the half million dollars I had in my checking account when I went into the jungle. I realized also that little or no provisions were sent to us by Ze and that all the food and other expenses were paid by me. It was our obligation to feed our people and provide them with all the necessary tools related to our prospecting, in addition to which I was paying for the diesel swallowed on a daily basis by my motors. I needed more money; and I sent the "Baiano" to Ipora—the closest Post Office—to dispatch a telegram to my friend Popol, asking him to lend me some forty thousand dollars, with a promise to repay it at the first opportunity.

The old-timer adventurers comforted me, saying that all "garimpeiros" were hearty gamblers and should never despair until the last moment. More than once, a million-dollar stone had been found on the last day of the "virada." One stone, only one, was enough; it was a question of the stone's size and of luck!

On another occasion, while we were drinking cachaza, the four of us, Baiano, Oswaldo, Tanaka, and I, commented about the Brazilian farmers' habits of burning large tracts of bushes. They set fire to the trees, instead of cutting them, to be able later to plant seeds between the burned trunks and branches, because it would take several years before they could plow the earth. Tanaka and Oswaldo were complaining that very soon the Brazilian climate would change completely, because without trees, we would have less rain and consequently less vegetation, until the earth would become sterile.

We had been breathing smoke already for four days; it was coming from some bushes burned by farmers, and we had to watch ourselves and not let the flames come too close to our camp. I was very restless, constantly fearing the fire could reach my drums full of diesel oil, with a resulting disaster.

Once, when we were talking about several different topics, suddenly Oswaldo asked me what I thought about homosexuality. I told him that to be honest I liked women, but I didn't have any authority to judge what grown-up people did in intimacy, whether with the same or the opposite sex. This question never bothered me, and I always considered it as a personal matter; moreover, I had a lot of homosexual friends, and I loved them for what they were, as people, without meddling in their private lives.

Tanaka left the three of us, when suddenly I caught Oswaldo's glance at Baiano; then both of them looked at me. When Oswaldo heard my answer, apparently leaving him satisfied, I saw him staring with persistence at the Baiano. Suddenly "Baiano" got up on his feet and left even without taking leave of me, something he had never done before, while saying to Oswaldo, "vamos embora" (let's go), and both left without even looking at me.

I wasn't trying to be nice by saying that homosexuals didn't bother me; during all my life, I have seen them in many places. I lived among them in the army, and I could say that since my childhood, I always knew that they existed, and nothing else mattered! This question never troubled me, and I don't understand why this topic is so important for some people!

What is curious is that in certain circumstances, men go together not from being homosexuals, but for want of women, as it happened in the ancient Greek army or the Roman Legions, in the Colonial Army, in prisons, and also in the "viradas," where for

months the great majority of men are together and when they need to satisfy their sexual desire, they did it always with available gays. I wouldn't call such people homosexuals, not even heterosexuals, because in normal situations, they got married and wouldn't choose men if they could have women. Of course, the "female" homosexuals were what they were in any circumstance, and they had a good time in viradas.

Chapter 7

Listening carefully to the everyday talks that constantly developed around me, I learned very fast that the “virada” lasted only during the dry season and ended at the end of November, when tropical rains would start pouring down, creating great volumes of water that overflowed the rivers and broke the dams. I was feeling very low and deceived, but I opted to follow the older garimpeiros' advice and remained calm at my watch until the first rains came.

From the very first days of October the bad omens started. I received a bundle of letters, brought once a week with other products from Ipora and sent by Ze. Several were from Argentina; my parents were preoccupied about me, Nelly was conveying that Georgito was growing, Popol confirmed that he made the money deposit in my bank, and finally there was a letter from France from my friend Robert Romanin's father, from whom I hadn't received news for almost a year. The letter said, “My dear Misha, your childhood friend Robert doesn't exist anymore! A few months ago, his joyful life ceased to exist! He was one of the last victims of the Indochina war. His body was brought to our Mouftarde quarter and buried with members of our family in the old cemetery. Receive a hug and a kiss from an afflicted father, wishing you luck, in whatever you are doing!” This letter disturbed me, perhaps even more than the bad news brought by the Baiano saying that the dam had a breach and half of our virada was flooded.

By neglect, our men, instead of keeping their tools on the shore, had left them on the bottom of the now-flooded river—hundreds of axes, shovels, hammers, sieves, and other instruments. This meant that I would have another unexpected extra expense; fortunately, I could buy all of it in Goiania, and it could reach us in ten days, instead of ordering it from Sao Paulo, which would have taken several weeks. Rito was fuming, and he blamed the Ceara people, mainly Gustavo, for not taking care of the dam. In addition to all the money it would cost me, it would let the garimpeiros be idle for many days before they received the necessary tools to repair the dam, not to mention the waste of time while we were unable to “wash” the thin sand, where the diamonds usually are. It would take five days to repair the dam, and only then could I put my motors to work to pump the water out of the virada. I was getting neurasthenic and becoming disheartened.

I had heard mentioned many times the name of a “jagunzo” (hired killer), Alfredo dos Santos, who was living in the area; and without knowing why, it irritated me. A complete legend had been built about him—that he was a professional murderer and already had the blood of 132 dead on his hands. I don't know if I had been always courageous, but I know that never or seldom had I been daring, but this man, whose name was constantly mentioned as if he were a hero, bothered me, or perhaps I was envious of him. With the knowledge that I hadn't anything else to do for at least a week while the dam's rupture was repaired, I decided to go see this famous Alfredo dos Santos, about whom everybody talked so much.

I might have taken that decision when Carlos Vega, a businessman, came to our camp with his four-wheel traction jeep, similar to those we had during the war, and offered to take me halfway to where Alfredo dos Santos lived. From there, the “jagunzo's” house was about a day's walk. Of course, in the jungle everything is known,

and everybody knew that I was going to see dos Santos. Many were already burying me in their minds, knowing how fast he was on the trigger. The only one who trusted me was the Baiano, who lectured me to be very quiet and vigilant, because this dos Santos was determined and fast.

Brazil is a fascinating country, mainly the inland, and it was much more so half a century ago. People lived a very primitive type of life, close to nature, with a mixture of myth and fantastic superstitions. Without roads, telephones, or electricity, the people communicated long distances almost by a magical way, a process that would be almost impossible to explain today.

I will always remember how I approached the big stone house that dos Santos had in a small hamlet of a few dwellings. While I kept my finger on my Smith & Wesson's trigger, I wouldn't take my sight off the tall and skinny man who was standing, all dressed in tie, jacket, and hat, and observing me from far away. When I came closer, he made a few steps forward, saying more than asking me, "Senhor motorista? If I am not mistaken, this is Miguel Burenko!" When I confirmed that he wasn't mistaken, he gave me his hand, introducing himself: "Alfredo dos Santos, at your service!"

He led me to his house, pretty well decorated with nice furniture, where he was living with his mother and a maid. He asked the maid to show me to my room on the second floor, telling me to take all the time I needed to clean myself up and later to come down to have a drink. I was completely disconcerted; I didn't know how he learned that I was coming, nor could I understand the kindness of his reception; and I was above all puzzled to know what his intentions would be later on. Half an hour later, already wearing the only clean spare shirt I had brought, I went down the steps to the floor where the living room was.

Alfredo was waiting for me, and without removing his jacket, in spite of the reigning heat, he rushed to introduce me to his mother, a lady with a very distinguished manner, elegantly dressed, perhaps from the time of her youth. We accommodated ourselves in the living room, and the maid served us cocktails. Senhora Cintia had a Cointreau, while both of us had whiskey on the rocks.

I still couldn't fathom what all that was about, because my intention was to come to see a quarrelsome man with whom I should perhaps have a kind of movie-type cowboy argument, while I was received by a man with the most civilized manners ever seen. I learned from dos Santos that they belonged to one of the oldest Brazilian families, and because of the vicissitudes of life, their fortune had changed; ashamed of not being able to see their friends with the same style of living and elegance they had had before, they decided to withdraw from the world and to come to hide in Goiaz, where they had been living for ten years.

Both were erudite, had been to Europe several times, and spoke French fluently. Alfredo was a great admirer of the Romans, and scattered in the room were several imitations from that time and small reproductions of statues. The dinner went very well, also served by the same old maid, who never opened her mouth. I spent a night without sleeping, thinking that perhaps Alfredo had planned to kill me while I was in bed; but nothing happened. The following morning, we had breakfast together, and I didn't have anything else to do but return to my virada.

Before leaving, when I asked Alfredo how he had learned about my coming, he told me that in that region, he knew everything that was happening because he had a

certain political leverage and knew how to use it. He didn't say that to intimidate me; on the contrary, it was with the intention of satisfying my curiosity. When we parted, and while I was walking with my little bag on my shoulders, he said, "It is a shame that we live so far from each other, and I understand that you are planning to return to Argentina; otherwise, we could have been good friends!"

So ended one more adventure, which I could call a cowboy episode, but I need to acknowledge that I had been living under such pressure in the virada that my mind was about to blow up, impelling me to have some violent emotions, for which reason I came to see dos Santos.

I had that emotion for which I came, but in a different way: it was rather calming and refreshing, and now it was difficult for me to believe that this Alfredo, a real gentleman, was a professional murderer. It was out of the question to ask Alfredo anything about his profession—if it was true that he had killed 132 persons—even though the McHardy salesman whom I saw again in Goiania confirmed that he was very dangerous, and the salesman had a hard time believing that I was still alive.

Of course, very soon the rumor that I had gone to see dos Santos was known in all the region—not only that I went to see him, but that he not only didn't kill me, but we had become friends. Knowing that the rumors were running very fast there, I bragged about dos Santos and his mother, because I knew that my comments would come back to them, and in a certain way, that was how I thanked them for this unexpected, agreeable hospitality. Needless to say, when I returned to our camp, the Baiano was exploding with pride and glory, telling anybody who would listen to him how "his motorista" went to see dos Santos, who didn't dare fight with me.

The breach in the dam was already repaired, and I immediately put the pumps to work, because now at any time the ordered tools would be arriving. Everyone was anxious to start working, because very little time was left before the rainy season, which could start at any time.

When I came back, I also received some unexpected bad news; it was with sadness that I learned that the good-looking blond, Nordic Gustavo had been found dead. They found him close to his shack, lying on the ground, with a big knife in his heart, which was still there. With the rest of all our people, I went to our little cemetery, where his body had been carried for the burial. I read some sentences from Oswaldo's bible that he held under my eyes. Not having in all this jungle an available priest, it was by tradition the virada's boss's obligation to lead the funeral ceremony, and none of our people would even assume that I could dare refuse to do it.

The garimpeiros couldn't understand what being an atheist meant; they thought that I belonged to a religious sect from another kind of belief. Yet, I didn't come to the virada to give theology seminars, but to find diamonds, and most of the time I avoided any argument about beliefs. When I asked them how many dead we already had in our cemetery, the answer was seventy, and the number of crosses was still multiplying. From time to time, we would "wash" one or another stone, but none of them was more than four carats. I understood that unless a miracle happened, I was about to lose all the money I had in this adventure. In spite of all the support I received from older prospectors, I sensed that the garimpeiros were frustrated, feeling that our virada was cursed, and most of them already had lost all expectation.

We saw the final result at mid-November, when the heavy rains began, first

slow, then heavy, and ending with a tropical downpour that knocked down everything that the flow of water would find on its way. Because of my lack of experience, I didn't remove my motors and pumps in time, and when the avalanche of a wave of water passed over it, it not only broke our entire dam, but it also dragged along all my installations, which were wiped out as if by a gigantic broom.

The Baiano was inconsolable, not so much for his own sake, because his life was the *garimpo's*—not knowing anything else—and he hoped to have more luck the following year. He was afflicted for me, fearing that it would affect me for the rest of my life and especially that I would lose all interest in coming back for another *virada*, while he was already dreaming that we would be reunited again the next year. He also felt guilty for not warning me to remove my motors and pumps on time, for they could have been saved. Ze, by a message, let me know that he had already sent a wagon pulled by oxen from Ipora to bring back my equipment, not knowing yet that everything had been lost in the water.

Before leaving the camp, which now looked desolated, I sent Oswaldo to bring Tanaka to join us for our last farewell. It was the same steady little group who joined me, Tanaka, Oswaldo, and of course the Baiano, to whom I gave as a gift my shotgun that he coveted so much.

We had a lot of *cachaza* to drink, while outside the rain was pouring and the drops of water were knocking with noise on my shack's palm-tree-leaf roof, where I would spend the last night. The flow of water was growing and was already flooding the island, which would be completely washed out by the river's current in a few days. Tanaka knew that I had participated in WW II, and he told us that his only son was in the Brazilian Expeditionary Corps, which had been sent to Italy at the end of 1944 to fight against the Germans. A little drunk, he became sentimental and told us with a mixture of sadness and pride, "The Brazilian Army sent to Italy was made up of 25,000 soldiers, of whom 451 were killed and 2,000 wounded on the battlefield. Among the 451 dead was my son, the only son I had. My wife died about ten years later, and here I am, lonely and sick, ready to join my ancestors, who are waiting for me!"

Tanaka coerced me to promise him to do two things: one day soon to come back to see him, before he passed away; and secondly to go see on his behalf his hero, Luis Carlos Prestes, who was in Niteroi. Of course, I promised him to deliver his wish; unfortunately, I didn't keep my word, because I didn't go to see Prestes, which I wanted to so badly; and as for his first wish, I never had any desire to go back into the jungle, even to see my friend Tanaka again.

It was a very painful farewell! Oswaldo cried like a little woman, while the huge Baiano remained silent as tears ran down his ruddy face, and Tanaka stared at me with a disturbed look. We gave a big hug to each other, wishing each other good luck, even though each one of us guessed that we would never see each other again.

The following day, I mounted into the carriage pulled by oxen, sent by Ze, and we began our return to Ipora. It took us three days to cover the 100 miles. With us, with my blessing, were traveling six other *garimpeiros*, through whom I learned that the same morning, Brito's beheaded corpse was found, close to the river. They told me that now we had 72 crosses in our little cemetery, where the dead would rest forever and probably nobody would ever come to pay them a visit. After remaining so long in the jungle, once I saw Ipora, I remained under the impression that I was in a big capital, with

all the illuminated stores, paved roads, and vehicles running on the streets.

The first thing I did was to see Ze, who told me that Zacharia disappeared and nobody ever heard from him; everybody assumed that he went to live in another state, because in Goiaz the police were looking for him. Regarding his own son, who had killed a man in self-defense, as Ze emphasized, he had gotten him out of jail, paying a heavy bond, and for his protection sent him to Belo Horizonte.

We both complained about our bad luck and mainly about all my lost money. Ze gave me some cruzeiros, enough to return to Sao Paulo, in addition to a brute four-carat diamond, with three others slightly smaller, which according to him was all that my share came to. During my spare time, I washed about half a pound of gold, with the intention of making a bracelet for my mother. I suspected that much more money should have been collected from the sale of the diamonds, even though I knew that only small ones had been found; I decided that a few dollars, more or less, wouldn't get me back my invested money. I planned to return to Goiania by bus the following day, but Ze insisted on having a farewell party in my honor in the cabaret in the famous "zona."

I remained penniless, but after a few drinks, the music, women's presence, and the general atmosphere, and after seeing again some garimpeiros I had met during my stay in that viradas region—all woke up in me a certain emotion. By chance, Julio Cacioli, McHardy's salesman, was also in town, and he had also been invited by Ze, with some other colleagues.

Once again, sitting around the big table in the middle of the night club was a group of noisy garimpeiros drinking and talking with animation, largely because one of them had sold a stone for half a million dollars, and, following the local tradition, was paying for everybody's drinks. Ze grabbed my arm, showing with his head a corner where the same old man that I had seen the previous year was sitting by himself. He didn't seem to have had better luck this time, and he was spending the few cruzeiros he made in a virada by drinking cachaza alone. "He will be back in the garimpo the next year!" said Ze, with his good knowledge of local customs.

The following day, Julio Cacioli and I took the bus to Goiania. He would then be continuing the trip to Campinas, where a salesmen's meeting had been called by the owners Joinot. If, after so many months in the jungle, Ipora seemed to me like a city, when I arrived in Goiania, I was for sure feeling as if I were in New York. I liked Goiania very much; it had a strange resemblance to the Far West, or at least what we know of that region through the western cowboy movies.

Cacioli told me that he could find a good buyer for my Smith & Wesson in Sao Paulo and would forward me the money after the sale. I didn't need the revolver any more, and it was even dangerous to carry it without a permit in the city, although many didn't care and kept one; so I handed my gun to my ex-colleague from McHardy. It was the last time I saw Julio and also my Smith & Wesson. I never received the promised money, nor the gun, in spite of all the letters I sent him.

I stayed, as I used to before, by habit in the Hotel dos Viajantes (Salesmen's hotel), and after leaving my bag in my room, I went down to the street for a stroll. Without realizing it, while walking, I came to a big park in the outskirts, very neglected but full of people of all ages, colors, and categories. In a flat corner without trees, a merry-go-round, horses, and other attractions were installed, and children invaded them under the parents' scrutinizing look, who at the same time were talking with their friends.

From this place came a beautiful Brazilian samba music, followed by Mexican melodies. Almost at the same time of my arrival, the sound of a Mexican song that I liked very much, "La Malaguena," began flowing in the air. The words of this song always made me sigh: "how pretty are your eyes. . .under the eyebrows. . .they want to look at me. . .but you don't allow them even to blink. "

I remained, listening to the music and watching the children playing, while I was leaning against a telephone pole, profoundly absorbed in my thoughts and very moved by this melody. In all this multitude hanging around and passing in front of me, I realized later, were a lot of prostitutes offering their favors to lonely men, who possibly came to this place with the purpose of seeing them. Several of these "ladies" had already come hounding me, but I used the magic sentence I had learned in the Latin Quarter in Paris: "I don't have money!" And they would let me alone, leaving me without insisting. There was also a light mulatto girl who approached me several times; nonetheless, I kept repeating the same magic sentence, but it looked like she didn't believe that I couldn't have money, and she apparently believed that I just wanted to get rid of her.

I understood very quickly that the merry-go-round had a very limited choice of records, because every fifteen minutes the same music would play again. That was why I remained leaning against the pole, expecting to listen one more time to my preferred song "La Malaguena," which I had already heard three times. It was making me very emotional and was appeasing the pain of remaining without money, with a very uncertain and problematic future in front of me.

The same young mulatto came once again to stop in front of me, and with a smile said or perhaps asked if I would buy her a beer. Following her game, smiling I said to her, "I told you already that I don't have money to go with you, and much less to buy you a beer!" She retorted, pursing her lips, while imitating my mocking voice, "And what about if I offer you a beer, because I hate to drink alone; would you accept the invitation?"

Almost without thinking twice, at once I told her that in this case I would accept with pleasure! I don't know why, but at that instant, the memory of the German prostitute of the Latin Quarter came to my mind, the one who went with me several times without asking for money. I always had the feeling that I attracted the whores! Once we were drinking beer together, sitting in the park at a little bar, I thanked her for her kindness and asked her the reason for giving me this preference.

Suddenly, the young mulatto girl pulled her hand from under the table and gave it to me, introducing herself. "Terezinha," she said, and while shaking her hand I said, "Miguel," beginning that way a friendship that lasted more than a week. Terezinha explained to me that she had been very much impressed by the pain reflected on my face while listening to the Mexican music, and she had a crazy desire to talk with somebody like me, who still could be sentimental in the corrupted world in which we were living now. I told her that I was returning from a virada on the Araguaia River, where I had left a fortune, all of my money; and I was returning now to Sao Paulo, to see what I could do in the future or to get a job, because I remained without a cruzeiro.

Very patiently, Terezinha asked me if I was in hurry to leave Goiaz or if somebody was waiting for me in Sao Paulo. When I gave her a negative answer, she offered me the opportunity to spend a few days with her at her place. She had planned to take some days off anyhow, having saved enough money to live without "working" as

long as a month.

That was how, after spending the night with her in her little boarding house room, I began having another type of experience, a different type, a very strange one this time. When we woke up the following morning, Terezinha said that she had a few things to take care of until dinner time, and she suggested that I go to my hotel to pick up my belongings.

When my new little companion was dressed and left the room, I was about to do the same thing, when I saw a bottle of cachaza on the little bed table. As I had drunk a lot of beer the previous day with Terezinha during our introduction ceremony, I had awakened with a tremendous hangover. While getting dressed, I drank a few swigs from the tempting bottle, and it made me feel better. But once outside, the fresh suffocating hot air and the alcohol came to my head again. I badly needed to have a drink, and while walking toward the hotel to pick up my bag, I was looking for a place where I could have a cold beer to satisfy my thirst.

Walking distracted on the sidewalk, I unintentionally bumped into somebody who cursed me badly, and when he turned round toward me, ready to fight, I saw that I was face to face with Alfredo dos Santos. We both stopped, looked at each other, and cracked up laughing, because neither of us was expecting to see the other here in Goiania.

"What are you doing here?" we said together at the same time, and we laughed again, because this scene was very comical, to the point that some pedestrians stopped walking to watch us, expecting to see something strange that they could later tell their friends about. It was close to noon, and we decided to have a cocktail somewhere, but Alfredo selected a luxurious place for the occasion, saying that I would be his guest.

When I began telling him about the virada, he interrupted me to say that he already knew everything about it. He knew everything that happened in all the region, and he also knew that I was returning to Argentina, because Peron had been removed from the government. At first I couldn't understand him, and I asked him to repeat what he had said—that Peron was no longer in power! I couldn't believe it! I had remained so isolated in the jungle during all these long months that truly I didn't know what was going on in the world. Dos Santos suggested to me to go to the *O Journal de Goiaz* redaction and ask for permission to browse in the newspapers from about two months old. I was very nervous and emotional at the same time, but I kept on drinking without control, one beer after another, until Alfredo said kindly to me, "Miguel, I think that you are drinking too much; you are screaming too loud when talking, and your hands are shaking!"

These words wounded me as if with a knife, because as the good alcoholic that I was becoming, I didn't accept any criticism from anybody. I became rude, telling him to keep his observations to himself, because I didn't need them, and in addition, I didn't want anybody to give me advice.

At the start, I hadn't realized it, but I saw later that everyone in the restaurant was looking at us; most of the people knew dos Santos as a killer and were amazed that he let me insult him without reacting, the way he always used to do.

There came a moment when a word was said and another was returned, as we began using offensive expressions, and in my drunkenness I regretted already that I didn't have the Smith & Wesson with me any longer, for I had given it to Cacioli. I observed several times Alfredo opening his vest, so as to be able to pull his gun more easily if needed. Suddenly my friend got up, took his hat, threw several bills on the table to pay

the check, and said quietly to me, "I think that it would be better for you not to cross my way, because perhaps on another occasion it is possible that I wouldn't have the patience to restrain myself. I hope you understood me!" And he left the restaurant with his quiet military steps, without hurrying.

When I turned my head, I realized that a profound silence was reining in the entire restaurant, and I heard a lady mumbling, "This one had been really lucky!" Alfredo wasn't the first friend, nor the last, that I lost due to my alcoholic intransigence, which transformed my personality and pushed me to act in a completely irrational way. I left the establishment staggering, and instead of going to the hotel first, I went to the *O Journal de Goiaz* newspaper office.

I certainly must have smelled of alcohol, because at first I was received very coldly at the redaction office; then I explained that the only thing I wanted to see was some papers from September 1955, when Peron had been thrown out of the government. Sitting in front of a table, covered by newspapers covering the past few months, I learned what happened in Argentina while I was at the virada on the Araguaia River. My head was exploding, but learning that this beautiful country where I had spent my youth was returning to democracy gave me joy. I remained there several hours reading, and I learned that already the previous year, in 1954, when a metallurgical workers' strike against Peron occurred, he accused the Church of inciting the people with publications in the Catholic Action against his government. In March 1955, when the contract with Standard Oil had been signed, anti-Peronists had taken to the streets, accusing him of selling the national patrimony. Then began the clergy's persecution, with the arrest and jailing of priests. The June 11 Corpus Christi procession had been prohibited. Ignoring Peron's threats, 100,000 persons marched in Buenos Aires' streets. Five days later, Peron organized a counter-demonstration with the unions, gathering on the de Mayo square.

The Navy opened fire against the demonstrators, trying to destroy the Casa Rosada and killing several hundred participants. Angry, the Peronist mob attacked the churches, burning some of them. While the Army remained neutral; the Navy, headed by Admiral Isaac Rojas, disembarked the marines in Buenos Aires, and Peron took refuge in Paraguay at first, then went to Spain, receiving political asylum from Franco.

From September to November, power had been assumed by General Eduardo Lonardi, and in November by Pedro Aramburu, who restored democracy. I was surprised that my jungle friend Tanaka, who knew everything that was happening in the world, hadn't said a word about what was going on in Argentina.

At that precise point, I made up my mind to return to Buenos Aires. When I returned with my bag, which I went to pick up at the Hotel dos Viajantes, Terezinha was already expecting me with several bottles of beer. I wanted to return immediately to Argentina; I didn't say a word about it to her, but kept on drinking without rest. I didn't have enough energy to make a decision, and for the time being I kept on living the easy life of a parasite. The days were passing monotonously; Terezinha didn't want me to leave, and even though she swore that she wasn't "working" any more, I had my own suspicions, mainly whenever she said that she had to take care of some urgent business and disappeared for a few hours.

All my life I had been scared—it was almost a terror—of catching syphilis, and I always recall that in my days in the Latin Quarter, when we had the Caucase restaurant, my mother would often show to me some of the student customers, who she

assumed were syphilitics, alcoholics, or drug addicts. The condition of these customers scared me, and now that I was with a whore, I never stopped thinking about the danger. I asked Terzinha one day if she wasn't afraid of venereal diseases. At that time, of course, nobody would use condoms, and Terezinha assured me that every two weeks she went for her own sake to the hospital to have her blood checked, chiefly because it was a free service offered by the municipality. She was very open in referring to her profession, telling me that she was from a good family from the State of Parana; she had graduated from a dancing academy, but her high school sweetheart dropped her when he learned that she was pregnant. Her family kicked her out of the house, and she had to take refuge at some friends' home. She borrowed some money for the abortion and tried to start a new life in her profession, dancing. She went for interviews, answering many ads that were looking for young girls for ballet or any other kind of job related to dancing.

Unfortunately, every time, she was promised a job if she would go to bed with the person who was in charge of hiring. After several similar experiences, she realized that if she could do it for free, she would rather do it for money. Quite often in show business and theatres, she met older men who directly offered her money to go to bed with her. First she found an aged bald man who saw her once a week, until his wife got wind of her, came to see her, and started a fight, after which she ended up being dropped by her old friend. After a few of these experiences, Terezinha realized that the only place available for her was the street, as some of her girlfriends were already doing. At that time, she had been a streetwalker two years, thinking that one day she could find somebody who would marry her and take her far, far away to start a new life.

I assumed that that search for a husband was the reason that pushed her to invite me, thinking that being white, I would be more trustworthy than the dark-skins, whom she distrusted. Many times, I heard mulatto prostitutes insulting each other, using the color issue to hurt—"Dirty black!" "More black than me you are, and you are going only with very dark color men!" "I am lighter than you, and you are envious, because the white men prefer me for my light skin color!" "I never went to bed with anybody whose skin color was darker than mine!" The days were running, and suddenly I realized that I had already spent ten days in that place as a parasite, without doing anything. November was ending, and I planned to spend New Year's Eve with my parents in Martinez. I couldn't get rid of Terezinha, who didn't even want to listen when I talked about my need to leave. I had to resort to a lie, telling her that I urgently needed to settle an important situation in Sao Paulo, and I would come to pick her up later to go to live with her in another state. I didn't tell her anything about my plan to return to Argentina; I just insisted that we would be together very soon.

Chapter 8

From the wagon's window, I was looking fondly at Terezinha's little light brown face, on which tears were running while she waved her hand as my train was leaving the station. She believed that it was a short separation, but I knew that it was forever, because I didn't intend to return to Goiaz. As with all the women I met in my life, I should be eternally grateful for the love they gave me, but Terezinha was different, because in her prostitute's candor she put me on a pedestal. I didn't want to think what would happen to her, once she understood after a while that I was gone forever.

The noise of the wheels spinning over the rails always produced something nostalgic in me, something the new generations will never understand, but at that time it was an enchantment for me that I listened to for two days and two nights, until we reached Sao Paulo's railroad station. I remained there only a couple of days to say goodbye to my Bolivian friends. We got together once again at the brothers Villafane's room, because it was cheaper to do that than to go to a bar or cafe

It looked like each one of them was settled, and they asked me with curiosity about my expedition in the garimpo. General Manuel Castelneda, the only Bolivian who hadn't yet found a job, said ironically to me, "And so, you spent half a million dollars in that expedition, without obtaining anything! You have to be crazy!" I answered him with calm, "All of you spend some cruzeiros to go to the movie theater, to see a film of adventure that lasts one hour, while I lived it during almost ten months!" Everybody agreed with me, and the general apologized. Instead of taking the train, I always preferred to travel by bus to Rio de Janeiro, because the sightseeing is much more impressive that way.

My childhood friend Popol Henot was very much concerned about the money I had lost in the jungle, and as I saw later, he was also thinking of the money he lent me. I was candid and told him that I couldn't pay him right now, but if he thought that the four lots I owned on the Ipanema beach could compensate him, I could transfer them to him! That's what we did!

When more than a quarter of a century later, I came from the States to see him again with my American wife Birdie, he took us to the Ipanema Beach, where these lots were. I couldn't recognize the place; everywhere appeared beautiful mansions and tall buildings with condos. When I asked Popol if the value of those lots that I gave him covered my debt, he said, "Many times!"

When I arrived to see Popol from Sao Paulo, he handed me a bunch of letters that had come from France and Argentina and were sent to his address. My parents asked me to come back home as soon as possible, because they missed me so much. I also went to see Paulo, Tante Liesel's brother, who was just divorced from his wife. A few years later, I learned that he died at a very young age. Popol Henot's brother also died, but at that time I wasn't so much concerned about people dying, until I got older and many friends of my own age began passing away.

I had a good time with Popol, going again to his "fazenda" (ranch); then we went to see his friends from Niteroi, the Cimafonte family, and of course I wouldn't miss this occasion to go swim at the Copacabana Beach. That beach had been widened very much, as the avenue itself had been, and now huge buildings and luxurious hotels stood

along it.

Once when we were sitting at Popol's house and drinking the delicious domestic beer, I told him that I was intrigued that the black prostitutes in Brazil insult each other by using the darkness of their skin as a measure. I never noticed that rivalry among blacks in France, nor in Africa, where they seemed to be more united. My childhood friend not only agreed with me, but he told me what happened a few years ago in Bahia, a state where 90% are black. The French government, to please the majority of the population, sent a black consul general to Salvador, the state's capital. The reaction was most unexpected, because all the colored, mulatto, and black citizens demonstrated on the street in front of the French Consulate, protesting France's insult to them. They were screaming about how the French dared insult them by sending them a black consul. Angry, they asked if by chance France couldn't spare a white consul for their city. To repair this mistake, the French government called the black consul back to Paris, replacing him with another consul, who not only was white, but was blond to boot. Popol ended his story by saying that this blond consul had been the most popular French consul in all Brazil.

Popol's sister Fabienne was married to a Brazilian who was descended from a Swiss family. Oswaldo Ballarin, a retired Nestle general director, was an incomparable intellectual who until his advanced age kept on learning new foreign languages, the last Japanese, which was added to the other eight he spoke fluently at the age of 84. One more time, I understood how much Popol missed Paris, as I did, and we spent entire evenings just talking about Neuilly s/Seine, about friends, and about the past.

I remained without money; but I didn't want to sell the diamonds that I was carrying with me, thinking that I would get a better price in Buenos Aires. I didn't want to get rid of the gold in powder that I intended to use to make a bracelet for my mother either, and I was ashamed to ask for more money from Popol or from my father. To buy a ticket to return to Buenos Aires by ship, I decided to sell my Longines golden watch with the golden band that my father gave me in Paris for my graduation. Unfortunately, I was cheated, because I received very little for this memorable gift my father gave me in my youth, but it was enough to buy a ticket in third class in a transatlantic going from Rio de Janeiro to Buenos Aires, with a stop in Montevideo.

This departure from Rio de Janeiro was very emotional, and no matter how many misfortunes I had endured in Brazil, deep inside I was satisfied, because I had experienced many different emotions.

A few days before I left, I received a letter from my army buddy Jacques Tricot, who at that time was police chief in Dakar. He asked me to be his just-born daughter Evelyn's godfather. It was a difficult situation, because I was at that time living in Brazil and returning to Argentina. It was too late for me to travel to Africa and arrive on time for the christening, but Jacques received a special exemption from Senegal's bishop, and I didn't need be present at the ceremony to be her godfather. I was full of joy, because it showed one more time that our friendship ties were strong. Morally, I was feeling that I should reciprocate this attention, and I went to a jeweler in Rio, where I exchanged one of my three-carat diamonds for a golden cross bearing four small diamonds. A friend of Popol who was traveling back to France by ship, with a port call in Dakar, volunteered to deliver my gift to Jacques for my god-daughter. Later, when I was already back in Argentina, I received a letter from my FFF friend thanking me for the

gift, mentioning that the cross was so beautiful that during a governor's banquet in Dakar, his wife wore it on her neck.

I was happy to be back in Argentina, where democracy had been restored, and I was also happy to see my parents again, whom I had missed. Traveling in third class on this ship was even worse than when we came back from the war on the *Groix*. As usual, aboard were a lot of emigrants from Spain, mainly from Galicia, and others from Italy and Eastern Europe, who were coming to Argentina to start a new life or to join relatives who already were established there.

This journey was very quiet, without vicissitudes, and I believe that my organism had a break with regard to alcohol. I felt that I was drinking too much, and even Popol reproached me several times. Of course, I wouldn't fight over that with my childhood friend, and I accepted these critiques without saying a word.

Early on the morning on December 10, our boat *Montevideo* arrived in Buenos Aires. Among the multitude of people on the pier, I located all my family and Tante Liesel, with Mr. de Grand Pre. It was very emotional, and so as to avoid letting them know that I had traveled in third class, I climbed the steps to the deck and came down to the wharf with the first class passengers.

Book 8

Argentina Again

Chapter 1

In South America, the most animated month of the year is December, when everyone is getting ready to celebrate Christmas and New Year's Eve. I believe that in Argentina these holidays are commemorated very much as they are in France, as much more of a social and family event than as a religious one.

My old friend and now brother-in-law, Enrique, had just received another important assignment at the Otis Elevator Company and would be leaving very soon with all his family for the Middle East. Teo and Delia were also ready to travel, in their case to the United States. Our combined families were eager to celebrate the coming New Year at my parents' house in Martinez before all these displacements occurred.

December is a very hot month in the Southern Hemisphere, and most people gather on their patios on these occasions so as to see their fireworks flares flying, and they can hear their neighbors' voices. I am sure that my mother had become aware of my drinking problem since my return from Brazil, and very gently she reproached me about it. In an invariable way, I kept repeating to her that it was only momentary, the result of my being under extreme stress from looking for a job and thinking about my future.

I had been lucky to sell the diamonds I had brought from Brazil at a good price, thanks to a friend from the French War Veterans Association, Ross, a retired jeweler with good connections in the trade. He also introduced me to a good goldsmith who transformed the gold powder that I washed in our virada into a beautiful bracelet for my mother, which she loved.

As had been the case when we returned from the war, I became accustomed to spending a lot of time at the Veterans Club, at 1435 Santiago del Estero. There, I again saw a lot of old friends who were more or less as I was, looking for an opportunity. We were very happy that Peron was gone, and we hoped to secure good jobs in the near future. Some of my friends were already settled; Landajo, for instance, who had worked with me for a few years at Michelin Tire Corporation, now was selling books for a publisher. Mauricio Solovey, with two other partners, Corti and Masoto, formed an import and export corporation. Carlos Dalibot was already working as a concierge at the French Embassy, and Robert Jacob, who after a year of recuperating from his war stress, was working at the French Bank of Rio de la Plata, with many others.

We drank a lot in our club, and often we had fights that originated because of the alcohol we consumed. We still were talking about our war experience, but we also understood that these memories wouldn't pay our bills, nor did we kid ourselves into living with illusions. I was constantly moving from one place to the next. I went to see my friend from Tucuman, Hersh Hochbaum, who had married a divorced lady. Her first husband was a Jew from Varsovia like herself who had served in the Polish army organized by the Soviet Union. After the war, the couple, with their little girl, came to Argentina as immigrants, but he drank too much and couldn't hold a steady job. Then came a moment when Betty, the wife, tired of their poverty, dropped him, taking Liliana her daughter, already a precocious child, with her.

Once separated, she obtained a divorce, because her husband understood the

situation and didn't put up any opposition. He didn't care about anything any more and decided to return to Poland, knowing that she wouldn't go with him because of too many bad memories she had accumulated in living with him. I also learned that the Hochbaum brothers had split as partners after they sold the tire dealership in Tucuman. All of them returned to Buenos Aires, where a few months later Simon died. He had always been very frail, and when he caught pneumonia, he was too weak to resist it and passed away. Mendel couldn't remain idle; with the money he obtained from selling the Liberal in Tucuman, he opened a new business on the Avenida del Trabajo, which he called a "disassembling store." He bought vehicles damaged in accidents for almost nothing, removed the good parts from them, and sold the parts at a low price that still allowed him to make a good profit. He didn't like to work by himself, saying that "A partner puts up the money and takes care of my business for free; that's much better than any good employee!" He very easily found a partner, a young countryman born in Argentina, David Stein, very timid but with money he inherited from his father.

When the partnership with his brother was dissolved, Hersh made up his mind to return to Poland. It was now a communist country, something he wanted; nonetheless, he didn't realize that the town where he was born had been annexed by the Soviet Union and wasn't part of Poland any more. In addition, he didn't speak Russian.

While he was waiting to receive permission to return to Poland, believing he would make his dream true to live in a socialist society, Hersh offered his services for the time being to work for free at the Polish Consulate in Buenos Aires. He waited a year without receiving his entrance visa, because his town of birth wasn't in Poland any more and consequently he couldn't be considered a Polish citizen. Hersh accepted the situation with resignation and decided to remain in Argentina.

Very dejected, he left the Polish Consulate, where he had wasted more than a year working for free; at the same time, it was where he met Betty. It was by chance that he was at the desk when she came to obtain her daughter's birth certificate. After going out for several months, they came to the conclusion that they were getting along well and that Hersh loved children, lavishing attentions and gifts on Liliana, and his conduct gave Betty the courage to accept his marriage proposition. I learned all about that by letters, because I never stopped corresponding with the Hochbaums during all the time I spent in Brazil.

When I went to the address where I had been sending my letters to Hersh, I found a little shop that Betty opened with the money given to her by her brand-new husband; she called it Odds and Ends. She was a shrewd businesswoman, buying pieces of different sizes and types of textile at the factories at a very low price and then cutting them into pieces of three yards each to sell in her store. When I entered the little shop, I saw among several customers my friend Hersh, who, with his Eastern European exuberance, very noisily never stopped demonstrating his pleasure at seeing me again. He was interrupting Betty's sales, but it was time to close the shop, and very reluctantly she decided to be introduced to me by Hersh. As they were closing the store, their ten-year-old daughter Liliana came in. I realized immediately that she was an extremely intelligent child.

I knew that Mendel was expecting us at his new place on the Avenida del Trabajo, where we went by taxi. It was truly a very great pleasure to give a hug to Mendel, who had prepared several bottles of beer in advance for our arrival, to celebrate our reunion. I

was surprised to see at his side a beautiful young blond girl with blue eyes; she turned out to be the same Carola, Mendel's niece, whom I had met a few years ago in Tucuman. At that time, she hadn't looked as if she would grow up to be so pretty, with a sensual figure, elegance, and agreeable manners.

We remained several hours at the "disassembling shop," drinking beer, and with the metal curtains already down, we were remembering the old days, bringing ourselves up to date by telling each other what we had done during these three years that we hadn't seen one other. To celebrate July 9th, Argentina's Independence Day, Betty invited me to spend the weekend in Rivadavia, where they lived. She told me that I could remain overnight at their home, because Martinez, where I was staying with my parents, was very far away, and we could also socialize until very late together.

When I came to Hersh's house that day, I saw Betty very busy in the kitchen, helped by her daughter Liliana and another black-haired girl, Gabriela, who shook my hand. David Stein was already there, too, and with Hersh the three of us drank beer while we talked in the living room. When I lamented that Mendel couldn't come, I was told that he was expecting a shipment of scrap and damaged cars, from which he would salvage the still-good parts. Knowing that Betty was having a party, he gave permission to his partner to come and enjoy the holiday with us.

David Stein seemed to me very interesting and well-educated, though he was very religious and intransigent in his ideas, provoking constant bickering with Hersh, who always wanted to persuade everybody that only the Marxist system could resolve social problems. When we came to talking politics, we analyzed with passion the situation at the Suez Canal, which Egyptian President Nasser had nationalized in June, followed by Israel's occupation of the Sinai.

A little later, the ladies announced that dinner was ready, and for the first time I had an opportunity to chat with Gabriela. She was small, very feminine, with dark hair and a pale face. What was at first glance attractive in her were her black eyes, hopping and very expressive, while penetrating inside the person she would be talking to. She had nice manners and a sad smile, as if sorry or forced. I learned that she was Betty's best friend, and Betty had invited her knowing that David liked her, wanting to give him an opportunity to court her. I learned also that Gabriela, during the war, had been interned with her mother and her small baby brother in Bergen Belsen concentration camp. When the Soviet troops liberated the camp, the three took advantage of the confusion reigning at that time to retreat along with a huge human wave to France, where they had a distant relative. Her father had disappeared at the beginning of the war, but they learned later that after running away, he succeeded in reaching the Red Army and enlisted in the Polish army organized by the Soviets. They learned much later, when they were in Argentina, that the father had died fighting against the Nazis. Gabriela's mother, Rebecca, met another Polish Jewish refugee, Jacob Rotstein, in Buenos Aires, and after an assiduous courtship, he ended up coming to live with her and her two children. Both of them made their living by painting and selling their canvasses to private collectors or to art galleries. Gabriela worked as a bookkeeper at a women's apparel shop.

The following day, David left early, because he had promised Mendel to help him classify the parts removed from the junk cars, while all of us got together in the kitchen for breakfast. The conversation was about David, whom Betty as much as Gabriela was mocking, to which I objected, telling them that for me, he seemed to be such a nice young

man. It was then that the little ten-year-old Liliana said very seriously to me, "You think that, because you are not a woman!" It provoked such an uproar that we couldn't stop laughing. This little girl said it with great conviction, as if she were an adult woman with good experience.

In the afternoon, I returned, along with Gabriela, to Buenos Aires, taking the train. I had heard that Betty had called her "Gabrisha," and she explained that it was her Polish nickname. I didn't waste any time in getting a date to see her in a few days, and after seeing each other a couple of times, we went to bed. I liked her very much, and it looked like it was mutual, because she tried to please me by all means and at every opportunity. When I learned that she had lived for a year in Paris and spoke excellent French, we switched our conversation to that language.

I wasn't as yet working, and I was spending the last pesos I still had from the sale of my "stones," mainly to go to hotels by the hour, because Gabrisha was living with her mother, her brother, and the step-father, while I was still with my parents in Martinez, and we couldn't spend the nights in either of our own places.

One of those evenings that I spent drinking at the French Veteran's Club, I told my war companion Miguel Angel Ferreira that until now I hadn't found a job, and I had been looking for one since I came back from Brazil. All of us knew already that Ferreira, not being able to find a job after the war and disturbed and dejected, had returned to France to enlist again in the Foreign Legion. It was when he reached the barracks in the South of France that he realized that the great majority of new recruits were German war veterans, many of them possibly war criminals. Disgusted by the idea of having been in the Foreign Legion, so dear to his memory, where he fought against the Nazis, and now serving in the same unit with those he had fought against made him change his mind, and he returned to Argentina.

He was from Cordoba, and although he had lived a long time in Buenos Aires, his native town's accent never left him. I heard him say once that his ancestors were "maranos" (the term applied to Jews who converted to Christianity in order to avoid being burned during the Spanish Inquisition). His ancestors came to the New Continent with many other Jews, where the religious persecution wasn't as bad as in Spain. Ferreira told us that even now, his family had conserved documents confirming what he told us. He told us that his folks for several centuries went to church on Sunday to listen the mass; but on Friday evening, in secret at sunset, they would gather to have a service in Hebrew at some private home.

Thanks to our common friend Mauricio Solovey, also from the FFF, having joined in 1942, Ferreira got a job. Solovey really achieved success, and he was making a lot of money. When I shared my preoccupation with Ferreira, he advised me to go see this friend, who had recently opened a big hardware store on Humberto Primo and Peru street, and he might help me to get a job.

Ferreira adored Solovey, saying, "It was long before his business was booming that I came to Mauricio to tell him that I was looking for a job. Mauricio told me that he didn't have any to give me, but he asked me how much money I needed for my expenses. When I told him that I needed 200 pesos per month, he said, 'Come see me the first day of every month, and I will give you that much money!' Mauricio kept his word, and for six months, until I found a job, he helped me!"

After a few more drinks, Ferreira said to me, "Now I am working for him in his

hardware store!" Mauricio seldom drank, but he liked the club's ambience, where he could mingle with his war-time friends. After listening to me, Solovey said, "I know that you worked for Michelin, and we need a sales manager to promote our Fersamat, S.A. hardware products!"

Once I began working at Fersamat S.A., I was earning enough money to rent a house in Moron, on the outskirts of the capital. So as not to change my habit, now that we were living together, I gave Gabriela the French nickname of "Coco." As soon as we moved to Moron, Gabriela lost her job and stayed home, smoking and reading books, because she didn't know how to cook, and much less did she like to take care of the house. She was very good in bed, and I was satisfied; the food problem never worried me, for very often we ate out.

At Fersamat, I learned very quickly the names, the uses, and the prices of all the tools, products, and implements of hardware, and I was ready to travel on the road to take orders from our customers. It seemed that I was doing a good job, because not only Mauricio but also his partners were happy with my sale promotions.

One evening after work, instead of returning home to Moron, I went to see Mendel at his shop to have a few beers with him. The curtains of his store were already down, and when I entered by the door, I found inside Mendel with his niece Carola. She was stunning and more radiant than ever. I never learned if she knew that I would come to see her uncle that night. We had a few bottles of beer together; then Carola said that she needed to go back home, because she was getting up very early in the morning to go to her work. She was working for a wine distributor company in Palermo.

Mendel was almost drunk and opted to sleep on the sofa of his office, not feeling able to return to his home. He asked me to walk Carola to the subway station, because the area wasn't very safe for a girl alone. When we left Mendel, both of us decided instead to have a bottle of beer in a cafe that we encountered on our way to the subway station.

Carola, all smiles, confessed that she didn't have to go to work the following morning, which was an inventory day, and only the staff participated in taking inventory, and she had her day free. She had told her uncle that she needed to get up early because she wanted to be alone with me, and that was the first excuse that came to her mind. She confessed that since she was a little girl and had seen me in Tucuman, she always wanted to be with me, feeling now very happy to be by my side. After we remained silent a short while, she said that she wanted to ask me something for this time only, and after that, she would never see me again. As the good fool that I become sometimes when I am with a woman I like, I asked her what she wanted. Smiling and teasing me, she said that she would like to spend all night with me, only once. Until then, I never had been faithful to any woman—friend, mistress, wife, or whatsoever—but I thought that it would be a real sin to miss such an opportunity to be with a woman, especially with one who was asking me to do so. I had missed too many of these chances in the past, when I was young, and I wanted to recapture the lost opportunities.

In the hotel by the hour that we easily found in the area, it was another first-class experience: Carola, during the intercourse, was very sensual, and she emitted low screams like a little animal, an action that exhilarated me. Suddenly, she turned her head and began an inconsolable sobbing, while she repeated, "Never more, never more do I want to be with you. I couldn't take it!"

I calmed her down the best I could, telling her that I would always be accessible

to her whenever she needed me, and she should not take it so tragically. Then, as a good Casanova, I added, "I didn't go to fight against the Germans to let a little Jewish girl shed painful tears now!" I realized later that what I said then didn't make any sense, but she loved this sentence and remembered it for many years, always mentioning it.

I wanted badly to spend the following day also with her, but I had Fersamat's store keys, and I knew that the 15 employees would be waiting for me at the door. So, early in the morning of the following day, when we parted, we promised to see each other again in a few days, exchanging our work telephone numbers, because neither of us had a telephone at home.

When I returned home in the evening, I told Gabriela one of those stories that are enough to make one start sleeping while standing against a wall, but I think that she believed me. I told her that one of my friends had had a big problem with his wife and that several of us decided to see her and to try to convince her that everything was just a misunderstanding, and that as a result we restored peace at their home. The bad part of this lie was that after a good while, I had already forgotten what I told Gabriela, and when one day she asked me if I had heard from this friend, whom I had helped on the night I didn't come to spend the night at home, I asked her, "What friend?"

I was sorry for Gabriela, and at the same time I wrote in my book that I carried in secret for a short time with me, "She is like a wet and abandoned little bird that inspires pity; but for how long is it possible to give heat to a wet and defenseless bird that doesn't want to change its luck?" My alcohol was dominating me more and more, even though I knew that it was the reason why I did a lot of insane things, including offenses and hurting people. I think that I also did much harm to "Coco" with my inconsiderate and unjustifiable behavior.

I never had been envious, but very often I had been jealous in my life! To be envious, two persons are needed, as in "I envy somebody for his intelligence." To be jealous is a three-person involvement, as in "I am jealous of A, whom B loves more than me." More than once, I would torture "Coco" with her past, asking ceaseless indiscreet questions. I learned that when she left the concentration camp, she was so weak and famished that her periods came several years later than the normal time, a fact that even doctors had a hard time believing. It was proven that it was a general process of growing retardation in all women who went through the concentration camps, mainly due to the poor nutrition.

She met a Polish student in Paris with whom she had a love affair, and he dropped her later without a word. She said that a Georgian deserter from the Red Army, suspected of having fought on the German side, raped her on the deck of the boat that brought her family from France to Argentina. She was too scared to denounce him, because he threatened to kill her if she said a word.

Later, Betty, who loved gossip, told me that Gabriela had had an affair with a certain young man called Samuel the previous year. Gabriela's mother, a conservative lady, backed by her step-father, reproached her for going out with somebody who hadn't been introduced to her. Trying to regain her peace of mind, she asked Samuel to come to her home to have a cup of tea and to meet her family. They waited for him until very late, but he never came, nor did he try to see her ever again. Humiliated, hurt, and depressed, she locked herself in the kitchen during the night and opened the gas, with the intention of committing suicide. It was her step-father who woke up during the night to go to the

restroom and smelled a strange smell and noticed the lights on in the kitchen. When he saw his step daughter leaning on the table through the window, he understood what had happened, broke the window, turned off the gas, and called an ambulance.

A little while after their arrival, they discovered that Gabrishia had tuberculosis, and she was sent to a sanatorium in Cordoba, where she spent eight months. I was stunned every time I learned how hard this girl's life had been since her birth, and I was ashamed of myself for not being able to make her happy.

In the concentration camp, they had been saved from the gas chamber because her mother, a very good seamstress, was sent with Gabrishia, then only ten years old, to the tailoring facility for German soldier uniforms, where they sewed buttons on military jackets all day long. After a while, her mother became smart enough to hide some already finished and counted jackets. The following day, she would put them together with the pile of her recently sewn jackets, thereby increasing her daily quota. Because of the large number of uniforms she delivered daily, she was rewarded with an extra food ration that allowed her to feed her hidden son. It was prohibited to have small, unproductive children at that camp, and almost all had already been sent to the gas chamber. The mother succeeded in hiding her son, carrying him on her shoulder in a bag, as if it were part of the limited amount of personal effects they could have in the camp. When passing the guard, the German soldiers would often hit the bags with sticks to check the contents, and her brother inside would suffer this punishment without even opening his mouth, scared to death of being discovered. The poor little George received so many blows that he got used to them, knowing at his early age that any scream would be a death sentence.

When Coco was telling me all these sad stories, I was really sorry for her and felt a profound compassion for her, but on the other hand, I couldn't understand why she was living in such complete self-neglect, mental and physical, and it was alienating me. She would seldom take a shower, and sometimes she would remain the day long without combing her long black hair.

From the moment she came to live with me, she left her job and spent her time smoking one cigarette after the next, while reading constantly, with our German shepherd lying at her side. The kitchen remained uncleaned, with all the dirty pots, pans, and dishes scattered all around. She wasn't drinking; she hated it, perhaps a Jewish atavism, afraid of alcohol and drunks, but to please me, she would force herself to drink to keep me company, knowing in advance that afterward she would be sick for a couple of days. These evenings, when they didn't end up in a fight, were the most pleasant, because Coco was very smart, having acquired so much knowledge through her constant reading. She was eager and passionate to learn, and with her prodigious memory, helped by a very well-balanced intelligence, she would mention interesting things she read in the books, making her company very agreeable.

Once, talking about Hersh, whom she had met when she was a full-time employee at the Polish consulate, she said that he fell in love with Betty at the very first moment he saw her. It was when she came to the legation for her daughter's birth certificate. He was the one who obtained that document, paying all the corresponding expenses out of his own pocket. He also helped her achieve vindication at the Buenos Aires Jewish Federation, which learned that Betty had worked with the Gestapo during the German occupation of Poland. During this tragic epoch, when the Nazis put the Jews in concentration camps, Betty, who was blonde with blue eyes, made the most important

gamble of her life, thanks to her instinct of survival. One day, wearing good make-up and dressing very well and elegantly, she went to the German Army headquarters in Warsaw, saying that she was Aryan from the Silesia area, the German territory that had been given to Poland after the First World War. She offered her services as an interpreter, because she spoke perfect German, Russian, and French, in addition to Polish. That was how she spent the painful years 1939 to 1944, working for the Gestapo as an interpreter in Warsaw until the Red Army liberated Poland. A lot of mystery still persists to this day, but some rumors ran that Betty had been a Gestapo officer's mistress. Too many Polish and Jewish people knew that she worked for the Gestapo, and she couldn't deny it and was very scared of reprisals.

When Warsaw was liberated by the Soviet Army and the Polish Liberation Army, equipped by the Red Army, entered the city, Betty was one of the first to greet the victors. Being a daring woman, during the victors' parade, Betty jumped and almost suffocated a young Polish officer by kissing him; he turned out also to be a Jew from Warsaw, and she married him two months later.

After the war, she was still afraid to bump into somebody who could recognize her and denounce her as a traitor. She convinced her brand-new husband to emigrate to Argentina. That's how the three of them left Poland; Lilian, the daughter, was already born, and Vassik had been discharged from the army. But what Betty was trying to hide in Poland was discovered in Buenos Aires when some other Polish Jews recognized her and denounced her to the Jewish Federation, accusing her of having worked with the Germans during wartime.

When called to explain her background at the Buenos Aires Jewish Center, she confirmed that first of all she had wanted by any means to save her life, because she didn't want to perish in a concentration camp. At the same time, thanks to her interpreter's job, she had saved many Jews interrogated by the Gestapo, giving in her translation the answers that she knew would benefit the victims. She insisted that she had helped many Jews and saved many lives, thanks to her job with the Gestapo, and that instead of judging her, she should be congratulated.

After many deliberations, the members of the Jewish Federation Investigation Committee had left her alone, and the issue had been classified. Betty, always looking for some kind of advantage, learned in 1958 that the German government was making reparation payments to Jews who had been in concentration camps, and she asked Gabrisha to be her witness. Coco refused to lie in her favor, testifying that she was with them in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. Betty had been married for several months to Hersch now, and completely calmed regarding her reputation and especially her financial security, she radiated happiness.

Even though I knew that Coco loved me, I found her too fatalistic; she wasn't fighting for her love. When I went to Cordoba on a business trip and she learned that I had taken Carola with me, the only reaction she had was that I should have taken her, because she needed a vacation in the mountains of Cordoba, where the air is so pure and badly needed by her sick lungs. I began to be rude to her, and my mother hated her for no reason at all, saying that I was drinking because she wasn't making me happy. At that time, I didn't have a good relationship with my parents, bringing them too many concerns. They were also very preoccupied with my sister Maya and her family, in the Middle East and constantly facing problems, especially now that Egypt was occupying

the Suez canal.

To bring some peace with my parents, I decided to celebrate New Year's Eve at our Veterans Club. My parents agreed to join us there, saying that after dinner we could return, the four of us, to Martinez, taking the minibus N* 60, whose run began at Plaza Constitucion, close to our club, and passed two blocks from where they lived. The celebration was full of joy, friendship, and pleasant memories, in which Gabrishia and my parents participated with all my war comrades. It was very late at night when we decided to return to Martinez, and we went to stand in line where the colectivo 60, the minibus in Buenos Aires, was departing.

Suddenly, I heard yells coming from a group of drunks also standing in queue far behind us, accusing us of cheating in the waiting line. They screamed, "Stay in line, you s.o.b." I turned my head and returned the insults, then after a while forgot about this incident. When the minibus came, I saw that those who insulted us were three men and three women, and I suspected that they would try to create a problem. We were in the bus already, and I was happy to see that my parents had been lucky enough to find a seat for themselves. Then, by instinct, I turned my head and saw the antagonistic group climbing into the minibus. I wanted to anticipate events, and I made a forward movement to face the first of them, a big Creole, who, still insulting me, was putting his foot on the last step to get into the minibus. Without giving him a chance to react, I hit his lower jaw with my forehead, knocking him out, and I watched him fall to the floor. It's a blow that I learned from the Arabs in North Africa. The next belligerent was an even bigger guy than the first one, who, seeing what happened to his buddy, came after me as soon as he climbed into the vehicle. I approached him before he could react and hit him in the throat with my closed fist. It made him lose his balance, and he staggered breathlessly among the angry people who were working with their elbows to get on the bus. Most of the passengers were annoyed by these drunks' blocking the entrance, and they pushed them around, until their friends, still standing on the street, pulled them out, laying them down in a faint on the street. So as to avoid problems and a waste of time if police happened to appear, which could be anytime, the minibus driver drove his half-empty vehicle away.

My father thanked the driver for being so nice by leaving the place, thus avoiding inconveniences for me. My father asked me then, a little bit angry but very proud at the same time, where I had learned this hitting with the head. "That's how we used to fight when we were kids in Odessa!" he said. Meanwhile, my mother was completely upset and kept on saying, "Misha, you are a bandit!"

Gabrisha was terrified and was shaking, not knowing whether to be happy or to get ready for the worst. She never felt secure at my side; her ever-moving little eyes were constantly on the watch, expecting something to happen at any time. Nothing that I could have done would have surprised her.

So began the year 1957, without too many changes but with a succession of some routine and foreseen events, along with some others that were different. Mauricio's corporation, in addition to the hardware warehouse and the import-export business, extended its activities to producing wine. It was a happy time, when Argentina, with President Pedro Aramburu, succeeded in improving the country's economic situation and consolidating the country's understanding with the United States. The dollar, however, which before Peron was worth less than two pesos, was now close to 50 pesos, with an even larger gap on the black market.

After a while, perhaps because of my not being happy with what I was doing at Fersamat and also my living in Buenos Aires, or possibly not being satisfied with living with Coco, one more time, following the whim of my thirst for new emotions and without thinking twice, I decided to change jobs and my environment. I knew perfectly well the Argentine north, and I could easily secure, with a little effort, manufactured products directly from factories to sell as a freelance representative working on commission. Coco didn't approve my move, because she would remain alone at home much longer, and she was a tremendously frightened person.

I returned to Tucuman, which had always been a little bit my city. The first thing I did was to see Georgito, my son, Nelly, and her family. She really had hit it and was prospering economically; putting our sugar cane plantation in Mista to work, she also bought a nice house for herself. As was easy to anticipate, all her tribe (as I used to call them), mother, brother, Uncle Damaseno, with some other relatives, still were living as usual with her.

I realized immediately that a slick work had been done on my son Georgito, who was trying to avoid me, full of hatred infused by some members of the family. I learned later that Nelly's brother and her uncle always spoke bad about me to my son during all his childhood, putting negative feelings about me in his young mind.

Chapter 2

I had always been attracted by the Argentine north, especially Tucuman, where I lived for many years, and I knew all that region very well. I had a lot of friends, customers, and a son there, and I felt at home in that region. Once, passing through Salta, I learned that a Hollywood movie producer had come to shoot the movie *Taras Bulba*, with the script taken from Gogol's novel, which I had liked so much when I read it in my youth in Paris. The actors were lodged at the Tourism Hotel in the city, and once, going there with another rep to have a drink, I met Tony Curtis at the bar, and I came to have a friendly conversation with Yul Brynner. Brynner's life was a little bit like mine; descended from White Russian emigrants, he grew up in Paris, and he was delighted to speak French and Russian with me. Later, the old and short Sokoloff came to join us. Both, laughing, told me that I could be working in the movie as an "extra," as a cossack, because they badly needed people who spoke Russian. I was too drunk at that time to be aware whether they were speaking seriously or if it was just a joke. Perhaps that day's drunkenness deprived me of an opportunity that everyone on earth most covets: to be a movie actor. On many other occasions, my colleagues begged me to go talk to the shaven-headed actor who would take me to Hollywood, but by pride or stupidity, I never followed their suggestion.

I remained with my trade, because I was a good salesman and I succeeded in making good commissions on my third-class merchandise sales. My trips lasted from four to five weeks; then I would return to Buenos Aires to remain a month preparing for the next business trip. My relationship with Gabrishia wasn't improving, and in an almost impudent way, I was going with Carola, who showed me a wonderful time.

My parents kept on living their routine kind of life in Martinez, but I never could restore the previous candid and friendly relationship I had with my father, many years before. I visited the Veteran's Club regularly; in a certain way, it was also my home, where I could meet many companions who still had the same state of mind as mine. I was feeling very comfortable in that atmosphere; we were living in some kind of different world, known by us only, and we didn't want to abandon it.

I became a very good friend of Jean Zona, owner of one of the best French restaurants in Buenos Aires, Coq au Vin. He was a Corsican who had served as a paratrooper in the French Colonial Army in Africa, and he was a good guy, mainly a good drinking companion. He took very little care of his business, which was under the control of his wife Emilie and also the control of a certain Rene Lavigne, whom they called a partner. I learned that this partner put all the money in the business and was a discreet friend of Jean's wife. My new friend was very popular in the Club, and everybody called him Jeannot.

Rene Lavigne, a World War I veteran, was a Buenos Aires stock broker who enjoyed the confidence of large international enterprises that entrusted to him amounts of capital to be invested. I learned later what everyone knew—that he was vulnerable with a certain type of women like Emilie, who could pull all the money she wanted out of him, with an apparent indifference on my new friend Jeannot's part.

Rene Lavigne had been married, but his wife dropped him after their daughter was born. Many evil tongues in the club said that his daughter was born as a product of

the unique sexual encounter he had with a woman in his life. Gossip runs without reasons sometimes; the mumble went on that he was completely impotent but liked young women, who took advantage of his weakness. He was almost a financial genius, but at the same time a passive toy in women's hands.

When the war began, France drafted her citizens living overseas up to the age of 30, and Lavigne, with 300 other countrymen, was sent by ship to Dakar in 1940, to be incorporated into the French army. When their ship reached that port, they learned with awe that on June 17, Marshal Petain had signed France's rendition and thereby ended the war. So as not to fall under Nazi boots, which at once occupied the country and the French colonies, orders were given to the ship to turn around and to return to Buenos Aires. There, all of them became war veterans and were admitted as members into the club. Many of them received medals for bravery—some even received more than those of us who spent years on the battlefields.

Many years later, when I was living in Atlanta, I learned that poor Lavigne, eager to satisfy his "little female friends," who gave him a special type of sexual gratification in exchange for his money, began to impinge on the capital given to him to be invested at the stock market. Then came the inevitable moment when he was requested to give an account of the funds that were supposed to have been invested. Too much of it was missing, and Lavigne couldn't return it, and he went onto the tenth floor of the Stock Market building and jumped to his death from there. I had always been sorry for this small man with thick glasses, very educated and courteous, who worked so hard to improve our Veteran's Club administration. At that time, he was the club's treasurer, and to his credit, in spite of all his problems, not one peso of the club's money was missing when he died.

So passed very quickly the year 1957, which had been so important for the Soviet Union, which sent the first artificial satellite of 184 pounds into space, frightening the Pentagon. Then, the United States, putting forth a tremendous effort, succeeded in putting into space a smaller, grapefruit-sized 30-pound satellite. The New Year 1958 saw us all again reunited in Buenos Aires, because my sister Maya, with Enrique and their two children, 8-year-old Annie and 5-year-old Ricky, came to spend a few weeks with us. After the holidays, they would be returning to Lebanon, where my brother-in-law was holding an important Otis Company assignment. Once again, we were in Martinez or Ramos Mejia, with our family dinners or just reunions, as we used to have them twenty years ago. Tante Liesel, as usual, was very busy, and Mister de Grand Pre was joyful, still working at his shop as a hobby, as if he were holding a full-time job. I asked Nelly to bring our son Georgito from Tucuman, to let the cousins meet each other. Unfortunately, it was the only occasion that they remained together for a few days, because later, in spite of all my efforts, I never could convince them to keep in contact.

Teo and Delia returned from the United States; they hadn't been as lucky as Enrique, and they went back to work in the import-export business. Once the holidays were over, Maya left with her family, and after all these celebrations, evoking unforgettable memories of family events lived together, each one of us returned to his own life. I returned north, on one of those business trips. I wasn't a first-class salesman any more; I didn't have a car, and I moved by train or by bus. The Bermejo River now was crossed on a brand new bridge, and not by raft moved by Mataco Indians, as in my earlier time. On the other side of the river was the little city of Embarcacion, with the

Tobas and Matacos Indian reservations; two hotels, mainly patronized by salesmen; and, of course, the "cabaret," with the consumer women always ready to please the customers in their adjacent little rooms, which couldn't be missing.

While sharing a meal with four more salesmen in the Bermejo Hotel's dining room, we were attracted by three pretty, pleasant girls sitting at the next table from ours. It was Saturday, and we knew that the town's city hall had organized a fund-raising ball at the Social Club for the volunteer firefighters. Considering me as the most daring of our group, my colleagues almost pushed me toward the table next to ours, with the instruction to invite the girls to come to dance with us at the club.

I didn't have any problem coming close to the three girls, who received me smiling, introducing themselves as school teachers from the Rivadavia little school from the Salta Chaco. They were taking advantage of a couple of vacation days to go to the provincial capital to handle questions related to their school. Two of the girls agreed to come with us to the town's event; the third didn't feel well and opted to return to her room for a rest; moreover, she was married, and I assumed that was the reason she didn't come. Through the eyes game, very much used in these tropical regions, I knew already who would be with me. She was the school principal, about thirty years old, with brown hair, and her name was Mirta Paez. The other one was a much younger blonde named Deborah, who at once stuck on with my friend Gonzalez, nicknamed "the mute," or also known by "Melinda," from the famous movie about a little mute girl, which was so popular at that time. Our friend gained that nickname because he would never stop talking, especially with women.

At night, we reached the huge club's hall, filled up with people, where the town's musicians were producing a deafening noise with the purpose of inciting the couples to dance. Everybody was dancing, drinking, and collecting money for the volunteer firefighters. Mirta introduced to me the priest of the only Catholic church in Embarcacion, Father Giovanni, whom she knew because he came twice a month to Rivadavia to administer the religious service. The town was too small to have a steady priest; nevertheless, the church was a large and a very old one. The little Italian priest Giovanni, who was sitting with some local businessmen, was surprised to learn that I had participated in World War II and especially that I was in the Italian campaign. He too had fought during the last war, but as a chaplain in the Italian army. He was a good patriot, an ardent fascist, but at the same time he was a very good drinking companion, learned, with interesting conversational skills. When remembering our battles in Italy, the little priest, already topsy, said suddenly to me, "I was a battalion chaplain, but during the attacks I always was at the front with our men, and more than once when an officer was put out of combat, I would take a machine-gun and would lead our brave soldiers!" Seeing an ironical smile on my face, he said half-angry to me, "If I had seen you then, I would have cut you in half with my automatic Beretta!"

I didn't know what he did or what happened to my "mute" friend, but after the priest took leave, we remained alone with Mirta at our table, and I became oversweet with her. Nothing else could be done so far, because the three girls were sharing the same room in the hotel, while "Melinda" was my roommate. I knew that the school teachers were going to Salta the following day, but Mirta would spend the night with me in Oran, where I was heading to call on some important clients. We both spent an unforgettable night full of voluptuousness the next day in Oran; then, we saw each other again in Salta,

until the painful moment to part came. Mirta had to return to Rivadavia, a town where the people were still living a century behind the time, but that she liked and bragged so much about.

Returning to Buenos Aires, I had a very intense correspondence with Mirta, even though I was still seeing Carola, who was encouraging me to leave Gabrishia. When I shared my decision with Hersh and Betty, they approved my resolution and were surprised that I didn't do it before. I was puzzled at seeing Betty backing me so much, and I understood that she was jealous to see me with Gabrishia, to the point that one day she said to me, "Misha, how could you have lived so long with somebody who never took a shower?"

In May 1958, Arturo Frondizi from the Radical Civic Union Party won the nation's presidency and began running the country democratically. A month later, I returned to Salta, not so much for my business but because Mirta and I agreed to meet each other there. I learned with pleasure that she had made up her mind not to return to her little school in Rivadavia, and almost spontaneously we decided to live together.

I wrote Gabriela that I regretted what had happened, but I couldn't control my feelings; moreover, I wrote that I wasn't attracted to her any longer, thinking that the best for both of us was to split. I sent her some money for her expenses and for the rent. A month later, I received a letter from Gabriela, saying that she had foreseen all that and had been expecting this moment to happen at any time. She wasn't surprised at my decision and said that it was like an abscess that was growing, ready to blow out at any time. I didn't see "Coco" anymore, this "little wet bird," even though the memory of this romantic girl, with her life ruined by circumstances, filled me with a sense of guilt. I was guilty of not being able to give her happiness, which she deserved and needed so badly.

About twenty years later, when I was living in Houston, Texas, I felt a severe guilt and a prick of conscience every time concentration camps were mentioned, mainly Bergen-Belsen or the Ghetto of Warsaw. Several years before, I had helped Hersh come to Houston from Israel, where he went from Argentina. He couldn't adapt himself to the religious strain imposed on the population of Israel, and he asked me to pay his trip to the States. I asked him then to help me locate Gabriela, which he did through his niece Carola and his step-daughter Liliana, who remained living in Buenos Aires. I learned what had happened to "Coco" from the painful moment of our separation, or rather when I dropped her. It appeared that shortly after, she met at a friend's party a countryman Mayrot, whom she married a year later. Her husband was a businessman established in the United States, who after finishing his deals, returned with his newlywed wife to Detroit, where his store was. He was very successful at the beginning, but after a while, due to his drinking habit, his health worsened and he neglected his business. When he died, still a drunk, his business was in bankruptcy, and he left his wife in a state bordering on poverty.

Liliana wrote to Coco that I wanted to talk to her, and when I called Gabriela on the telephone in Detroit, the first thing she asked me was to speak English with her. Not having had the opportunity to speak French for so many years, she had almost forgotten that language, which she regretted very much. She told me that she had been a widow four years, living on her husband's Social Security. Her economic situation at that time was very precarious, with the possibility of losing her house, since she was not able to afford the expenses. I told her that indirectly I was feeling a little guilty for her sufferings

and asked her earnestly if she could forgive me, which she did at once. I also told her that I would like to see her in Detroit to give her some money. To my surprise, while speaking on the telephone her voice changed, indicating that somehow she was upset. After a short silence, she implored, "I don't want you to see me! I am ugly! I am old and deformed by arthritis, with a twisted arm that was hurt during a burglary. The thieves took everything I had!"

I remained startled and mute; then, reacting after a short while, I asked her to calm down, promising not to come see her but instead to send her \$2,000 to help her, but for that I needed to know her address. Feeling more relieved and I assumed happy too because of my commitment, she told me about her life and about her brother Jorge, who was still living with her mother at the same apartment in Buenos Aires, while Jacob Rotstein her step-father had died a few years earlier. Gabriela always liked to talk, telling me that she was still receiving a small help from the German government, part of the payment made to those who were in concentration camps during WW II. The Jewish Federation too was helping her, allowing her to have a decent kind of life. Then, suddenly laughing, certainly remembering something that could have looked comical for her, she said to me, "You know that during the Yom Kippur holidays many members of the Jewish community ask me if I have been fasting, and I tell them that for four years I had been fasting in advance, in Bergen- Belsen!" Like me, she was an atheist, and I understood that she wanted to let me know that she hadn't changed.

I called her several more times, and on four different occasions I sent her money as I promised. One day, nevertheless, while I was trying to reach her by telephone, I heard a recording saying that the line had been disconnected. I wrote her several letters, which came back with the usual label "Moved, without leaving an address!"

Still trying to get in touch with her, I asked Hersh in Houston, as well as Carola and Liliana in Buenos Aires, about her whereabouts, but nobody could give me any information about "Coco," who I assumed was gone. I never saw her again, but all that happened many years after what I am relating now.

Chapter 3

In 1959, I was already living with Mirta in the colony of Santa Rosa. All of us freedom-lovers learned with happiness that Fidel Castro, with his fighting companion "Che" Guevara, routed the Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista, who was forced to escape to the Dominican Republic. Urutua had been named President of the Cuban Provisional Government and Castro was named Prime Minister, promising to have free elections as soon as possible.

Mirta obtained a teacher's job at the town's public school, located close to the Bermejo River, in the Province of Salta. It was a recently populated region where it never froze, allowing the harvest of vegetables in wintertime, including tomatoes, grown only in the summertime in Buenos Aires. The harvest was shipped now to that important market, with a big profit for the local farmers. Most of these landowners were Spaniards from Galicia, but by the Argentine habit, they were called "gallegos" (Galicians). This entire area had a large amount of accumulated money, and these settlers, most of them coming from a poor origin, wanted their children to have a good education. They were always ready to spend all kinds of money on the little local school.

We rented a room at the town's only hotel, the owner being a Bolivian, Cirilo Tapia. With his wife Antonia, they had a six-year-old son, whom they worshiped, to the point that they were ready to do anything to make a distinguished man out of him. By chance, an old unemployed Swiss adventurer was staying in this recently built, brand-new hotel, because the colony itself was only five years old. He was broke, with no family nor future, but he baffled the Tapias by his aristocratic manners. The Tapias came from a poor family of Colla Indians, who worked hard and saved money to be able to build this hotel with forty rooms, a large dining room, a bar, and a store on the side. Not even in their dreams would they have dared to think that they could own what they had now. They wanted badly for their son to jump to a higher social rank and become a respected gentleman, from poor sugarcane-cutter parents that they were. The Swiss, Laurent Deschamps, fascinated them with his behavior, and to give him credit, his manners were refined, impressing everyone in town.

For Laurent one day came the sad moment when he had to pay his hotel's bill, which was already several months overdue. He didn't know what to do, fearing that all this mess could end up in a scandal, or even worse, with jail. One morning, very hesitant, he came to Cirilo's office, with the intention of asking him for a little extension of time to pay his debt, because he didn't have, nor was he expecting to have, such money. To his surprise, even before he opened his mouth, the hotel owner asked him to sit down. Still not recovered from his wonder, he barely could believe what he heard the Colla saying to him: "Senor Deschamps, I heard the rumor that you intend to leave our colony, and I hope you are not coming to pay your bill with the intention of abandoning us." Seeing that the Swiss was getting nervous, Tapia continued talking with an almost imploring voice. "I have a proposition for you! Please don't feel offended for what I have to say! I know that you don't have any family here in the colony, and we don't have family either; but we want badly for our Carlitos to grow up with a grandfather. We would like to adopt you and have you to be part of our family, with the only commitment to make a gentleman as you are out of our little son!"

I think that Laurent Deschamps, who also was an atheist, possibly had a quarrel inside himself with his Voltairean conviction, seeing in all that occurred something of a divine intervention, or a miracle, that solved his economic problem. From that day, in the Hotel Santa Rosa was born a brand new grandfather, with the obligation to help Carlitos with his homework, to watch his manners, and to be his mentor; in compensation, he would have complete freedom to live with the family in the hotel, to eat, drink, and feel at home. Sometimes, bored, Laurent would go to the bar to help the barman, not forgetting to fill up his own glass when serving a customer, and I suspect that more than once some bills would end up lost in his pocket, instead of going to lie in the cash register.

I recognized that the Swiss had a distinguished behavior and was very educated, with an ample knowledge of literature, as of life itself. He, too, had gone to Brazil to look for gold and diamonds and unfortunately ended up with the same bad luck as I had. One of those hot tropical evenings, after dinner, Mirta and I were sitting with him on the terrace, as we liked to do, drinking ice-cold beer to which he was treating us while talking not only about politics, but about general matters. We loved to extend the subjects of our conversation about philosophy, including the future of mankind. Despite the fact that Laurent was an atheist, poor and very educated, he was a right-winger, approving dictatorship and despising Marxism. We would always argue about that, without going to extremes or getting angry. The three of us being tolerant about other people's ideas, we would just talk and argue in a friendly way.

Mirta loved these get-togethers; she wouldn't miss them for all the money in the world, because the three of us were getting along very well, perhaps because we were the only intellectuals in all the region. Once, when Laurent was very tipsy, he told us that when he left Zurich to go to the Brazilian "garimpo," he had taken out an important life insurance policy, naming his daughter, his only child, as beneficiary, for she had been recently abandoned by her husband and was living in Switzerland.

A year later, in Brazil, when he was returning by bus from the jungle with empty hands, a terrible accident occurred with worldwide repercussions when the vehicle in which he was a passenger fell into the Parana River, leaving ten dead and even more wounded. It had been suspected that a criminal scheme had been behind this accident, related to some kind of drug deals. Laurent didn't get into details, perhaps because he had had too much to drink, or it could have been for personal reasons, but the fact is that this news reached Switzerland. He learned by chance from the newspapers that the insurance company paid a large amount of money to the victims' relatives. Because by mistake his name appeared on the list of the dead, instead of somebody else who traveled with him and was killed, his daughter was qualified to receive a good amount of money.

So that his daughter, without any revenue and with her three children to support, could enjoy this badly needed money, he never tried to contact her or let her know that he was still alive, fearing that the insurance company, learning about his survival, would ask her to return that money. That was the reason he decided to remain forever in the New Continent, without returning to his country, which he was missing every day more and more. His original idea was to go to Brazil to try his luck in the "garimpo," taking a year's vacation without pay from the University of Zurich, where he was a history professor, then planning to return to have an easy life in his country. He knew that he wouldn't ever be able to return to his Switzerland. Mirta, with her humoristic spirit, gave him the nickname of "The Dead Swiss," which we used among

ourselves.

The colony of Santa Rosa was a huge area of big farms, with a very small commercial center built around a square. It was very difficult for me to have any lucrative activity in this region. In addition to that, we now had a new problem, because the school principal requested Mirta to bring her a wedding certificate, which we didn't have, even though everybody in town believed that we were married, because we were living together.

There came a moment when this situation became unbearable for Mirta, and not being able to "legalize" her situation, she opted to resign from her teacher's job, before being expelled. That time's morals wouldn't tolerate having a woman living in sin with a man, while giving lessons to innocent children. Once, visiting Oran, a small tropical city not too far from the colony, Mirta decided to call on a nun at the Sacred Heart girls' school, who many years ago had been her teacher at the same college in Rosario, where she studied. This friendship between them had never faded, but it rather increased, especially when Mirta in turn became herself a teacher, knowing consequently that Sister Albertina—that was her name—was a professor in Oran. That was how Mirta learned that the Sacred Heart School in Oran was looking for a literature professor for the high school. Albertina promised to help her secure the job, if she was willing to relocate to Oran. It goes without saying that Mirta accepted the offer immediately, and we moved to Oran. We never returned to the colony of Santa Rosa, even though we were only 60 miles from there. Consequently, we never saw the town again, nor the "Gallego" farmers who were enriching themselves visibly, the Tapia family, and our new friend, the Swiss Deschamps.

By a strange coincidence, I learned about him many years later, when I was already living in the States and came to spend a month in Tucuman. At that time, my older son Georgito was married and had two children, while the younger Michael was still a student at the University of Tucuman. The fact was that my son owned an amusement enterprise, renting slot machines for gambling and jukeboxes to bars in several provinces in the north. Once a month, Georgito would go with his mechanic in his pickup to collect the money earned by his machines, and at the same time his mechanic would repair those in need of it. When he left on his trip north, I didn't have anything special to do, because my wife Birdie hadn't as yet arrived in Tucuman from Atlanta, where she still was tied up with her women's apparel store, and I accepted the invitation to go with him.

It was an unforgettable trip, because after so many years, I was seeing again all these places where I had spent such a wonderful time in my adult life by traveling as a salesman. I was very happy to learn that we would also pass through the colony of Santa Rosa, where we would spend the night. Arriving there, I couldn't believe that this town had become such a nice little city where Georgito had a great number of his slot machines placed in the many bars existing there. It was just by hazard that we stayed overnight in one of those small hotels located at the town's entrance. After registration, when we talked to the hotel owner, a big fat young man whom I heard being called Carlos, I asked him if by chance he knew Tapia, who many years ago owned a hotel in the colony. He looked at me with surprise, then suddenly jumped on me, and while hugging me he said, "You are Senor Miguel! I recognized you at once!"

It happened that he was Cirilo Tapia's son, Carlitos, whom I had known as a

child. We sat at a table to drink some beer with him, my son Georgito, and his mechanic Juan, who joined us. I observed then that the rest of the customers sitting around in the bar were looking at me with respect, as they were listening to what Carlitos was saying about me. Then he got up and disappeared for a short while, going some place in a hurry, from where he came back, almost dragging his wife and his three children with him, whom he introduced to me with pride. He brought also an old photo that I had taken with my camera a long time ago, in which he was standing, with his "grandfather" Laurent Deschamps. When I asked him what had happened to the Swiss, he became very sad and confessed that he had come to love this grandfather so much that he felt even more tied to him than to his own parents. Unfortunately, a few years later, without any reason, not even leaving a note, he hanged himself with a rope in his room. So ended the story of the "Dead Swiss."

Carlitos continued bringing me up to date on all that had happened after I left the colony. With regard to his parents, he told me that after they made a good amount of money with the hotel, at the time the only one existing in this constantly growing town, luck overnight had turned its shoulder to them. Suddenly, there had appeared everywhere in the colony of Santa Rosa several luxurious hotels, with which they weren't able to compete. Their little hotel went into decline, remaining empty most of the time. When the Tapia father decided to sell it, they learned that he didn't have the property deed, nor ownership papers. In his ignorance, Tapia believed that just building the hotel on a vacant lot, which he was told by a settler didn't belong to anybody, would automatically give him the possession of the land. He had paid all the taxes regularly, but nobody until then told him that his hotel was on the city's property.

The only thing Carlitos' parents could save, before being evicted by the authorities, was the furniture and the little cash they kept in a wooden box in their room, because Cirilo Tapia never learned how to open a bank checking account, nor did he trust such an account. Not having any more money to pay for Carlitos' studies at the college, they called him back from Salta to the colony. All together, the three of them worked hard in a fast food restaurant they opened, and they saved some money that, added to what remained in the wooden box, had allowed them to buy a lot legally this time, on which they built the little hotel where they were now. Three years later, Carlitos' parents died, with a few months' interval between both of them, Carlitos' not knowing if it was of pain or perhaps because of old age. That was how Carlitos became the only heir to the hotel.

When we left the following day, he didn't want to charge me for the room. I took leave from the young Tapia family with emotion, wishing them a lot of luck, and I followed Georgito on his business trip. All that happened twenty years after I moved from the colony, and of course I couldn't have imagined that all these things would happen.

With Mirta, we established our new residence in San Ramon of the Nueva Oran, renting two rooms in a boarding house—one as our bedroom, and the other as my photo processing laboratory. I realized immediately that the schools in that region didn't have pictures of classes, and I went to every one of them to talk with the principals about interesting the students' parents in having a picture of their children taken with all the class, with the option to have individual pictures. As a compensation, I gave as a gift to each teacher an enlargement of the class photo and also a personal photo.

At the beginning, I gave my rolls to be developed at Oran's photo shop; then after buying all the necessary equipment, I did all the work myself, with the result that I increased the quality of the photos and at the same time brought myself more profit. While Mirta was teaching at the Sacred Heart School, I kept peddling a few third-category products, always carrying my camera with me and going to the schools to take group pictures, or occasionally to weddings, while also taking pictures of some sportive or other festival events, activities that brought a reasonable income to support our style of living.

I became very friendly with the nuns at the Sacred Heart, where Mirta was teaching, and chiefly with sister Albertina, who loved, in a platonic way, to flirt with me. They all believed that we were married, and they never asked Mirta to provide the marriage certificate. The other one who really became a good friend of mine was the Superior Mother Justine, who despite being a French woman older than I, constantly said that I reminded her of her father in France. I had let a beard grow to have another look.

The Sacred Heart College was the most expensive in the region, and the students, girls from wealthy families, loved my photos, for which reason I was available almost daily to see if someone needed a photo or if a celebration or a party was planned where a photographer would be needed. One day, the Superior Mother Justine shared with me the fact that they would be renovating the College's church, and they were trying to work out how to collect money for the expenses. Needless to say, I wasn't stupid enough to confess to the nuns or to the students that I was an atheist, because I would have lost my most important source of revenue, which was this religious college.

About the fund-raising for the church renovation, I suggested to the Superior Mother to organize a special festivity, asking all the students' parents to donate valuable things that could be sold at auction, as it is done with antiques, thus bringing in a lot of money. My idea delighted the nuns, and they promised to follow my advice, when suddenly Mother Justine, remembering something, went to her office to pick up a cardboard box that she brought to show me. Before opening it, she said that two years ago, she went in pilgrimage to the Vatican in Rome, where they had given her some two hundred pieces of religious objects as souvenirs for her students; she had misplaced them, then had forgotten about them. It contained all kinds of crosses, virgins, saints, chains, and other items from the Catholic church. She asked me if it could be sold, because they badly needed money for the church's renovation, and she wanted to know if all these items from the Vatican were worth some 2,000 pesos.

I am not always very bright in business matters, but sometimes a bulb is lit up in my head, and in that moment I saw at once the possibility of selling all these "sacred" things. I told her that with the only purpose of helping her raise funds for the church, I would give her not 2,000, but 4,000 pesos instead. The Superior Mother remained mute, because she thought that I would bargain with her, and she was already prepared to let me have it for half the price she asked, when, surprised, she heard me offering her two times this sum. A few days later, I left on a business trip by train, in the direction of Tartagal, descending at every station to call on each one of the "mom and pop" stores owned by "Turks"— so are called the Syrians and the Lebanese, whose parents came before the First World War, arriving in Argentina with Turkish passports because their country at that time was part of the Ottoman Empire. This nickname of "Turks" branded them forever in most of Latin America. I showed to each businessman only four or five of my

religious pieces, saying that they were sacred ornaments coming from the Vatican and that they were blessed by the Pope himself, and I said that the price was only 100 pesos each. Then I would go to the next shop, making the same offer, being smart enough not to sell these Pope-blessed things to more than three shops per town.

It took me only a few days to sell, with a good profit, all the 200 religious objects, and I came to call again on Justine. It turned out that the Superior Mother hadn't been candid with me, because by chance, she told me she found 200 more of these relics, which I also purchased. This operation was repeated twice. Each time, she said that she couldn't remember where they were hidden. She was so impressed by the money I was giving her that she promised to go again at the first opportunity to the Vatican to bring back more of these religious objects. After that, for a long period of time, many of my customers kept on asking me when I would have more of these blessed-by-the-Pope objects, on which they made a good profit, making me regret not having sold them at a higher price.

In Oran, where I was spending a lot of time with my photographer's activity, I saw again an old acquaintance, the "Fat" Moya, whom I hadn't seen in a while. When I was working at Michelin, very often, as I did with so many others, I would give him a ride in my car, in spite of knowing that he was a swindler. He lived in Tucuman and was distributing a little magazine, which existed only thanks to the ads he was selling. He was always well dressed, with tie and jacket, no matter how hot it was in this tropical area and in spite of his fatness. Usually, he would be followed by a secretary, whose only duty was to hold his briefcase. He would enter in a store introducing himself as Peron's personal friend, which he substantiated by producing photos, not only of himself with the "leader," but with all the renowned Peronists. I could never verify if these photos were genuine or falsified, but Carlos Moya was one of the most comical people I ever met in my life, and that was the reason I tolerated him. He was short and fat, loving to take "Mussolini"-type attitudes, impressing his audience with his loud voice and his good diction, able to talk for hours without saying anything. For instance, "They lie, while we say the true! It's the end of the intimidation era; we will prove that the people's conscience will never bend, because history will show in the future that we always followed the right path, being the irrefutable and doubtless proof of our righteous procedures. . !" The title of his publication was "The Righteous," which had, in addition to the ads that he would obtain by coercion, some written articles, which were the same as his speeches. With his imposing presence, his attire, his strong voice, the photos, and his manners, he impressed the children of these poor and ignorant Middle Eastern immigrants, who would pay good money for the ads, in addition to taking a subscription to the magazine.

Very often, he would also coerce and frighten psychics and handreaders, extracting money from them. He would come without warning with his secretary to their lodging to whisper that the police were about to break into their house to arrest them for practicing witchcraft. They would be put in jail, unless they gave him money to intercede for them. A cop was standing guard on the corner of the street and would come any time to catch them, unless they gave him all the hidden money; the police would find that money offensive and would put them in jail. The poor "witches" were scared to death and would give him all the money they had, just to get rid of him and his impressive and intimidating presence. So they could be able to continue with their curative and healing jobs.

When I would bump into him on Sunday in any city where I was spending the weekend, the "Fat Moya" invariably would go to church to confession, because he was an ardent Catholic. Quite often, returning from the Sunday mass, he would sit at my side in a sidewalk cafe, joining me for a cold beer, and all exuberant, he would say, "You know, Miguel! I made my confession to the priest who sent me to say ten 'Ave Marias' and twenty 'Pater Nostre' prayers. I swear that I am feeling a new man now: calm, with my soul alleviated and in peace!" The following Monday, he would return to his routine swindling practice, without any pity or remorse, knowing very well that come next Sunday, he would be able to confess again his sin to any priest, this God's Ambassador who had the power to forgive any kind of crime by virtue of a gift of money and by some magic prayers, thus erasing all his faults.

When Peron fell, Moya, as if by enchantment, became radical, Peronism's enemy, and was about to launch a new left-wing publication, but the most important aspect was already missing: it wasn't any longer possible to impress people. Little by little, when his saved money was spent, he went downhill socially and economically. There was no danger that at any time he would think of going to work, as everybody else was doing, because he had gotten used to this easy life with fast money. Many years later, in one of my visits back to Argentina, I saw him as a bum in the streets of Tucuman, still very fat and dirty, without having shaved, and drunk. It wasn't easy for me to recognize this dissolved human being from the elegant swindler who used to travel in the north many years ago. I didn't have any interest in renewing our artificial acquaintance originated by my curiosity, and I passed by, without saying a word. I don't think that at that time he was in a condition to recognize me; he was too drunk, sitting in the city's main square on the sidewalk, with a half-empty bottle in his hand.

Living in Oran, I saw again an interesting person, Ricardo Camin, a native of the Province of Entre Rios who came to the Province of Salta with dubious purpose, but who already owned several thousand acres of land on the Bermejo River. He was desperate to obtain money from the bank to create something like the Colony of Santa Rosa in the tropical area where his property was and to plant tomatoes in winter to be sold in Buenos Aires, when the price was very high. He was a good bottle-buddy, and with similar buddies, we would be sitting in an outside cafe, drinking cold beer, while criticizing and reconstructing the entire world according to our pattern.

While drinking wine or beer, we would look with complacency at the beautiful Indian Chiriguano, attired with their colorful and showy primitive clothes, while their wives, with a lot of make-up, always laughing, would invade Oran after payday. They came to the city from the San Martin Sugar Refinery, the largest Argentine sugar producer, with bills in their hands, an entire month's wages for cutting sugar cane, money that would vanish in a couple of days in trinkets and alcohol.

We had in Oran the Guemes Gaucho's Club (Guemas is a folk hero in an Argentine saga). This organization was subsidized by the San Martin Refinery with money and especially with horses for the several cowboy-type parades during the town's festivity. Most of the members belonged to the well-to-do class that spent most of their time drinking beer. In spite of my limited economical situation, they admitted me to drink with them when I was in Oran.

In December 1960, when the Sacred Heart College closed for the summer, Mirta, who hated the heat, suggested that we spend our vacation at her family's house in El

Trebol, in the Province of Santa. Her father, David Paez, was retired from the railroad, and her mother managed her little clinic that she called "maternity," helping the women in their labor, because the town was too small to have a steady doctor. Her brother David, or Davicito, as his father called him, was an attorney living in Rosario, in the house Mirta had bought with her teacher's savings.

Chapter 4

We spent Christmas with Mirta's family and the many friends they had. This friendly farmer's atmosphere, where everybody was so kind, so relaxed, behaving in an almost European way, made me feel the difference with our life in the tropics. El Trebol town had been formed by descendants of Italian emigrants who are good peasants, mastering an advanced knowledge about agriculture, and every farm had modern equipment—tractors, harvesters, threshers, etc.

I didn't expect any sympathy from Mirta's parents for me for several reasons, the most important of them being the fact that we weren't married, and also because at that time I drank too much. The only ones who loved me in the family were Mirta's little ten-year-old niece Alicia and her brother, fourteen-year-old Alberto. Many years later, Alicia, as a young student at the University of Tucuman, would be arrested for her socialist ideas, and she disappeared forever, after being tortured by the federal police under the military dictatorship.

After Christmas, we went to Buenos Aires, because I liked to celebrate the New Year's Eve with my parents. Once again, we were ready to receive the 1961 New Year at the Veteran's Club, where I loved the atmosphere and felt so comfortable with all my comrades-in-arms. Mirta was tired of small towns and was trying to convince me to remain in the capital, so close to Rosario, where she could visit with her family more often. Once we made up our mind to settle in Buenos Aires, she never stopped saying that she would never be able to obtain a teaching job if we did not legalize our status. She badly needed the marriage certificate to obtain the professorship that had been offered to her at the Buenos Aires University. We were still undecided where to go; it was the end of February, and Mirta had to make up her mind whether she wanted to return to Oran, to the Sacred Heart School, or to remain in Buenos Aires.

We were staying at my parents' house, and one day Mirta showed me the *Nacion* newspaper, a publication that my father had received since we arrived in Argentina in 1937. In the ads section was an offer for a sales manager position to promote the sale of agricultural equipment. The following day, I went to 666 Pellegrini Street, on the 5th floor, introducing myself at the desk as a candidate for the job. It was a Japanese enterprise, Nichimen, which represented many factories of its home country, and the company needed a sales manager for Kubota tractors. After waiting a short time, I was escorted by an employee to the company's General Director, Mister Endo, whom I heard called by everyone Endo-san; Adachi-san, the General Sales Manager, was also there.

After an hour's meeting, in which the two questioned me about my background, with interruptions several times to discuss topics related to organization and sales promotions, Endo-san told me that my ten years of working for Michelin was the best recommendation I had, and he wanted me to start working for them immediately. I wasn't very excited about this prospect, for I wanted badly to return to my tropics, where I had so many drinking buddies, although my parents with whom we were living encouraged me to take the job. Mirta was trembling and anxious, because she had a good chance to receive her nomination as a university professor in Buenos Aires and wanted me to accept. That's how we began a new life, Mirta teaching at the University and I

working at Nichimen. Once again, we lodged in a hotel, this time close to the Constitution square, not too far from Santiago del Estero Street, where our Veteran's Club was located. Very quickly, I learned that the Japanese had a very peculiar way of dealing in business. Nichimen was representing about eight Japanese factories, selling their products overseas. The manufacturers didn't have any other alternative but to deliver their merchandise to them, because these corporations, or trusts, owned banks, insurance companies, and transportation, and it was completely impossible to do business without passing through these associations, which dominated the Japanese market, like Marubeni, Mitsubishi, Nichimen, and others.

Nichimen, in which I began working, sold cars, motorcycles, tractors, and boats; it bought and sold iron, steel, foodstuff products, textiles, machinery, and whatever was requested. In addition to the Director Endo-san and the Manager Adachi-san, whom I had met already, there were about twenty other Japanese working there, sitting behind their desks scattered on all the building's 5th floor. Six Argentine secretaries also worked there, in addition to us, the four "whites," "executives," or "Occidentals" as they called us: Reggie Rosen, who was sales manager for ore and metal products; Jimmy McCormick, manager of food products; Pedro de Soto, manager for Honda vehicles; and I, manager for Kubota tractors.

Immediately, I put all my heart in the work, because I was very well paid, and for transportation we had several cars with chauffeurs, always ready to take us wherever we needed to go. I went to school to learn Japanese, which I came to master quite well, making my Asian bosses happy. I studied intensively everything related to industrial products like tractors and outboard motors, whose sales I would be promoting in Argentina.

From the very beginnings, I suggested installing a plant to build tractors. Although all the parts would come from Japan, by the fact that they would be assembled locally they would be considered as the products of Argentine industry and thus exempt from tax. My bosses liked this idea, which was approved, and at once we began building a tractor assembly plant in Avellaneda, in the south side of the capital.

From the first days at my work, I befriended the two Englishmen born in Argentina: Reggie, an English Jew, who also participated in WW II in the British Army in the Pacific; and Jimmy McCormick, of English descent, born in Argentina. We never could become friends with the "porteno" Pedro Soto, who seemed prepotent to us, but I think it was rather because he didn't like to drink in the bars. The three of us loved to drink, and every evening after work we got together at the neighborhood bars.

I understood quickly that the Japanese didn't care if their employees drank, as long as they performed their obligations. I was also very surprised to learn something new when we received a guest from Osaka, where the Kubota tractors were made. We went with the engineer Teneki-san and my bosses Endo-san and Adachi-san to a Chinese restaurant on Cordoba Street for lunch, only three blocks from our office.

The Chinese waiter, seeing that our guest from Osaka had a hard time in reading the menu written in Spanish, came to him and wrote some Chinese signs on a piece of paper that Teneki-san, satisfied, read smiling while approving with an "Ah! Ah!" Endo-san, who was watching amused, explained to me that both countries have the same written characteristic symbols that they understood in reading them, but they couldn't communicate orally because the sounds were different. After a while, I began taking my

new friends to my Veteran's Club, which they liked very much, and later on I took the Japanese there as well, and they were delighted.

Now, living in Buenos Aires, I considered it normal to see my girlfriend Carola again, with whom I renewed our love-making. Mirta knew that I remained very often drinking with my friends, and she was used to seeing me returning home late. Mirta was very intellectual and was writing a lot, in addition to the university tasks that absorbed a lot of her time, including preparing her lectures and bringing herself up to date on the news. Consequently, it didn't bother her to see me coming home late.

The French School warship *Jeanne d'Arc*, which toured around the world once a year with the cadets, future navy officers, moored once a year at the Buenos Aires port for a few days, and of course our Veteran's Club as per habit had a banquet for them, with dancing. We always asked the Alliance Francaise to send us as many young girls available as they had to welcome our sailors. I would never fail to go to this event, and Mirta too was ready to assist with me, because she liked dancing. We also invited Carola, whom Mirta knew, without knowing that she was my mistress. Unfortunately, a day before, I learned that I was being sent to San Juan to sign an important contract with our new agent, who sold our Kubota products. Very sad, I told Carola to go by herself, because she would have a wonderful time with all these young sailors. She didn't want to go, saying that she wouldn't go any place without me and that besides she didn't know anybody at the club and was afraid to be bored. I told her that she had a good opportunity to practice her French with the sailors, a language that she had gone to learn at the Alliance Francaise only to please me. I insisted so much that she accepted, but I never learned later how it went for her and if she had a good time, because when I returned from my trip, I didn't see her again, despite all my efforts to reach her. Concerned because I hadn't heard from her, I called the winery where she worked, and I was surprised to learn that she wasn't working at that place any more, because she had gone overseas.

I didn't have her address; I knew only that she was living with an aunt, where I didn't dare go, fearing creating problems for her, and I also avoided going to places where Mirta's friends could see me. After two months without hearing from her, I lost all hope of seeing her again, because I didn't want to be impudent enough to go see Mendel to ask him about his niece. I wasn't talking with him, as a consequence of a stupid drunkards' argument. We never said it, but the real, veiled truth was that Mendel resented seeing me, a married man, going out with his niece, a fact that he learned through Carola's indiscretion. Carola told her sister Sarah that she had gone to Cordoba with me, and Sarah repeated it to Mendel.

Once, during lunch time, walking on Suipach Street to a small restaurant where I used to go, I found myself face to face with Carola. She looked like a ghost, with tired eyes, emaciated face, and worn-out appearance, walking without seeing anybody. When I grabbed her arm, passing close to her, she lifted her eyes and looked at me as if she was seeing me for the first time. With the intention of escaping from the crowd that was pushing us onto the street, I invited her to come with me to share a meal, which she accepted automatically without any enthusiasm.

"You look like a being in love!" I said jokingly, chiefly to say something and to break the silence, to which she looked at me with surprise, and it was her turn now to ask me, "How do you know it?" While we were eating (at least I was, because Carola

barely touched the food on her plate), slowly, as if with a corkscrew little by little, I pulled from her the story of what had happened to her during all this time that I hadn't seen her.

She began crying suddenly, or at least the tears were running down her cheeks, without a sob; it always made me very uncomfortable when I saw a woman crying. "That's your fault!" she said briskly to me with reproach. "Why did you send me to this French Cadets' reception?" I was looking at her without understanding, nor knowing what to say, but almost immediately she continued, "It was there that I met Paul, a cadet, and I fell in love with him! We spent three unforgettable days together, while his ship was mooring in the port. Nobody ever made love to me as he did! What a man! Then, when his school-frigate left for Montevideo, I took the Mihanovich boat and crossed the Rio de la Plata, to spend three more days with him in Uruguay; then I followed him to Rio de Janeiro, until I ran out of money!" she sighed, then ended up saying, "I would have followed him to the end of the world, if I had enough money!"

I remained very intrigued with this story, without feeling jealousy, because Carola always had been a bed companion only, without my loving her with my heart. I was sorry for her, but I couldn't remain there any longer, because I needed to be back at my office for an important meeting, and I asked her to call me anytime at my work to continue our conversation. She was leaving, without even giving me a goodbye kiss, when suddenly she stopped, and turning her head toward me, she said in a listless voice, "You know that my uncle died last month?" I became pale, and even though I heard what she said, I asked her, "You said that Mendel died?" She confirmed, moving her head, and without saying another word she walked away.

Her depression lasted several months, until Carola realized that she had to face reality, because her Paul never wrote her a letter, and, not knowing his address, she sent several letters to the War Ministry in Paris, to be delivered to the school-frigate *Jeanne d'Arc*, but all of them came back to her. I knew from experience that this cadet had a "Carola" in each port where his ship moored, and perhaps after a good while she too would understand it. It is hardly worth mentioning that after a few more months, our love-making resumed; but this time, as a punishment, I had to endure her detailed descriptions of the love prowess she had performed with "her" Paul in bed. Needless to say, it made me envious, but not jealous, because I considered myself very good in bed, or at least many women with experience told me I was.

At my work, I learned something new about Japanese people. It was when, with Endo-san and Adachi-san, we were entertaining three engineers who came from Osaka from the Kubota factory. For this occasion, we took them to the most expensive and most elegant night club of Buenos Aires, Tabaris. We arrived at that place in two of our cars, driven by chauffeurs, who would remain with the cars while we were having a good time in the cabaret. I was, as the Asians said, the only "Occidental" in our group of six. Even though all of them spoke very good English, which I understood, they persisted in speaking in their language, without paying any attention to us. I said "to us," because they invited half a dozen girls to sit at our table, and they were consuming in our company. The Japanese not only wouldn't dance with them or even touch them, but they ignored the girls completely, without looking at them, as if they didn't exist. All of them had had a lot to drink already and restlessly laughed, I assumed at some jokes they were telling. Then, from time to time, remembering that we were there, they would call the

waiter, and pointing at us with a finger one by one, they would order, "Whiskey! Whiskey!"

The girls were saying, "Why did they ask us to sit with them, if they don't talk to us and they don't dance!" I was also feeling frustrated at being neglected, because I didn't understand enough Japanese to follow their conversation; but I told the girls that they shouldn't complain about making fast and easy money, drinking this sugared water that was served as whiskey, and collecting the chips, without doing anything.

When we finished our entertainment at two o'clock in the morning, one of the cars drove Adachi-san to his home and the guests to the hotel where they stayed. I was in the other car with Endo-san, who lived in Palermo, a very expensive area. En route, as we still were thirsty, we stopped at a bar to have the last drink of the night. Endo-san said that, it being too late for me to return home, I could spend the night in his house, which I accepted because I was worn out.

While drinking and talking about different topics, I said that our Occidental women didn't want to take care of the family any more; they wanted to be soldiers, truck drivers, and firefighters, one reason I admired the Oriental women, who conserved a great deal of femininity and family attachment. It seemed that Endo-san incorrectly interpreted what I meant; he thought that I wanted to relegate women to the servant status, because he said, "You are right; I am drinking here, while my wife is at home waiting for me. It's a Japanese tradition!"

When we arrived at his condo, which occupied all of the tenth floor, the elevator stopped at his apartment, and his wife received us at the door, wearing a kimono, and she greeted us, bowing profoundly. Once seated in his living room, Endo-san decided that we still could have another drink, even though it was already past three in the morning. He asked me, "Shall we have a whiskey, or a Japanese sake?" To which I said, "We are in a Japanese house; we should drink Japanese sake!" Endo-san then, more shouting than asking, told his wife to bring us the beverage. After a short while, she came back with a tray, on which was a bottle with warm sake and two cups, which she put on the little living room table. Endo-san asked me again, "Shall we listen to Argentine tango or Japanese music?" to which again I replied, "We are in a Japanese home, and we should listen to Japanese music!" Then, after a short while, I heard a noise sounding like a cat's meow, which turned out to be the Japanese music.

Half an hour later, my Oriental boss decided that it was time to go to bed, and his wife showed me to the sumptuously decorated guest room. In the immaculately clean private bathroom were not only all kinds of towels and soaps, but also shaving foam, cologne, and a toothbrush. On my bed lay silk pajamas prepared for me. After sleeping only a few hours, we got up, took a shower, and had breakfast, served this time by an Argentine maid. We had to hurry, because in the garage the chauffeur was already waiting to drive us to Nichimen's office.

Japanese companies pay very well; they don't care about expenses, letting their executives travel in first class and stay in the best hotels, but they completely enslave their employees, as I could see in my own case. Once, after our Saturday morning meeting, Adachi-san said briskly to me, "Tomorrow, you are going to Mendoza, where we sold thirty trolleybuses. This deal will be signed by the city's mayor, and you have to be there!" When I asked how long I would remain in Mendoza, my boss answered, "Could be one day, or could be two weeks; we will see once there, and we too are going

soon!" I asked then if it was possible to travel to Mendoza a day later, because the following day I had a commitment; friends were coming for dinner. Adachi-san, immutable, said, "You take the telephone, you call your guests, and tell them, no more dinner!"

This dependency situation was wearing me out, because I needed some more time to spend for myself, my wife, and my friends at the club. I said several times to Endo-san and Adachi-san that I would be forced to resign from Nichimen if I wasn't told of a trip at least two days before I was to make it. Both of them, smiling, promised that they would do it in the future, but the same situation persisted and was repeating constantly, until one day I decided to remain in the club, asking a friend of mine to call Nichimen, saying that I was sick.

I repeated this operation for a week, and when later Jean Zonza called the Japanese again, he told me that they wanted me to call them urgently. I was happy, assuming that finally they wanted to tell me that I was fired, exactly what I wanted badly.

I immediately called Marta, Endo-san's private secretary, a Japanese born in Argentina, who conveyed to me that everybody at Nichimen was very much concerned about my health. The boss had already called the Japanese Embassy's doctor asking him to see me, and that doctor was waiting for me. I felt cornered. I didn't have enough guts to drop my Japanese employers, who were so concerned about my health, and the following day I returned to my office. Without wasting time, I organized a business trip to the north to promote our Kubota tractors. We aligned a caravan with several trucks, carrying diverse mechanical units, tractors, and tools. With me was coming Takina, the Japanese chief mechanic, born in Argentina, and his two helpers.

It was the end of March 1962, at the beginning of fall, when the earth was prepared for planting, an ideal time to show the worth of our Kubota tractors in the farmland.

Mirta had a two-week Easter vacation, and she asked me to take her with us (the more so since she already knew Takina.) That's how I came back to my Capricorn tropics, where I felt so at ease and where we began our demonstrations with the Kubota tractors in Salta and Jujuy provinces. We became good friends with Takina, who was more Argentine than Japanese in his behavior; he liked to drink wine, and we had a lot of it every evening at the hotels where we stayed, after we returned from our promotional work in the farms.

I was happy to see again many friends in Oran, especially Camin, who was impressed by our Kubota tractor and willing to buy two of them at once; but as usual, he didn't have the money. He introduced us in Pichanal to an agent for Kozel and Co, who purchased four Kubotas, because Camin promised him to buy two as soon as the bank would give him the necessary credit. Camin kept on saying that the future of Argentina's agriculture was on the Bermejo River, with its freeze-free temperatures, allowing the harvesting of vegetables year-round; then farmers could ship them to Buenos Aires in winter.

Chapter 5

In the international arena, several important events had happened during the previous two years. In 1961, Cuban fascists, armed by the CIA, invaded Cuba but were routed by Castro's revolutionary forces, which killed 400 of them and took 1.100 prisoners who later were exchanged for pharmaceutical products paid by the USA. It was also the year of one more Russian stupidity, the building of the Berlin Wall, with its ominous reputation and even worse consequences.

The following year came the Cuban missile crisis, during which the crude peasant Khrushchev, the head of the Soviet Union, after many polemics, finally came to an agreement with President John Kennedy, thus freeing the world of the sinister prospect of a general destruction.

After thinking a lot about it, Mirta and I decided to get married, without any ceremony or party, and only to solve the disagreeable problem she had to endure in the teaching institutions. This "little piece of paper," so important for the educational administration, she could show now. By the end of 1962, we were back in Buenos Aires, and Mirta was ready to travel to Rosario's University, where she had a professor's position.

My friend Jeannot divorced his wife Amelie and went to live with Eve, a young Argentine girl who knew how to make an easy buck, and that quality didn't seem to bother her companion. Rene Lavigne, who had a weakness for Amelie, after the divorce refused to put more money in the Coq au Vin restaurant that Jeannot finally closed.

We had a good understanding, the four of us, when Mirta came to Buenos Aires; otherwise, I would drink with my buddies at the club, and when she returned to Rosario, many times I would come to stay with Jeannot and Eve in their empty restaurant. Jeannot was one of the best French chefs in Buenos Aires, and to celebrate the New Year 1963, he prepared a real banquet for us and for my ex-professor of anthropology, the world-renowned Enrique Palavecino. I took advantage of this event to tell Mirta that I had decided to return to Oran to try my luck with Camin in these new lands over the Bermejo River.

The money I received from Nichimen, because finally they let me go, giving me a good bonus, was invested in buying 50 acres from Camin, close to his property. I had seriously made up my mind to take a chance on this adventure. I had seen so many of these "Gallegos" making fortunes in a couple of years at the Santa Rosa colony, so that I came to ask myself, why couldn't we create a similar colony and get rich as Camin was forecasting?

I dispelled Mirta's worry, assuring her that she didn't need to change anything in her routine, at least for a year, until we saw what happened at the Bermejo River. Two days later, I was back in Oran with my new partner Camin, in the company of a young "porteno," Jacinto Gomez, who officially was Camin's manager but more bluntly was just a caretaker of his property in the jungle. As usual, in Oran we drank red wine until late at night with the Guemes Gauchos, who wished us good luck when we took leave in the hotel, because early the following day we were leaving for the jungle.

In the morning, almost at dawn, we started our trip in a hauling truck, the three of us sitting with the driver. In addition to provisions, food, and tools taken by

Camin to his farm, the Kubota tractor was on the flatbed, very firmly tied up, which he swore had been purchased in Pichanal at the Kozel and Co. dealership. It was a mystery to me, and only later was I told that it was the product of a scam, done under my nose and without my knowledge, between the agent and Camin. The agent purchased the four tractors, but he never paid Nichimen. At that time, I wasn't aware of anything, and when I learned about it, I became furious, but it was too late. I was in Tucuman, very far from the swindlers, ready to emigrate to the USA.

The distance from Oran to the Padre Lozano railroad station, the closest from the famous Camin's ranch, wasn't very far, but no roads existed there. It was a dirt and sand path on which the truck most of the trip advanced at a walking speed. It took us an entire day to cover 100 miles and reach this celebrated Mister Camin's farm, a place considered as the beginning of the Salta Chaco's jungle.

We were too tired to explore where we were, and we entered a house where, in the darkness, Camin showed us several folding cots, on which we lay down all dressed and went to sleep, without opening our eyes the night long. When I woke up, I couldn't believe what I was seeing in this huge house, with a dirt floor and without a roof, with bricks scattered all over. In a corner stood a big table, with all kinds and sizes of chairs around it. Only one corner of this dwelling was covered by pieces of metal sheets; that was where Camin's bed was, and all the rest remaining roofless. I realized immediately that I was the only one still in bed, because nobody else was inside this roofless house, and I heard voices coming from outside mixed with all kinds of noises. I assumed that my companions were unloading the truck.

When I met Camin outside the roofless house, he hurried to introduce me to another member of our "colony," a thirty-year-old, skinny, flanky native from Mendoza, Francisco Ricciardi. All this atmosphere reminded me a little bit of our "virada" on the Araguaia River, with the difference that I was under the impression that we were better organized in Brazil; nonetheless, we lived much deeper inside the jungle at the "virada." The truck, once unloaded, immediately returned to Oran, while Jacinto Gomez, with his expressive philosopher's face, insisted on taking me to the Bermejo (Pink) River, only a mile distant from there. It's a wide river, wider than the Araguaia, though apparently not as deep, and in it ran a reddish-colored water, from which its name came.

Jacinto repeated what Mirta had already told me about what happened a century ago, when the accumulated water coming from the ceaseless tropical rains flooded all the region. After the storm subsided, to everybody's surprise, people found the Bermejo River divided in two, with one arm running now 20 miles south from its river bed; while in the north was born a new arm of water, flowing on a new bed for 120 miles east, until it reached and joined the original Bermejo River. This newly born river was called El Teuco. This natural cataclysm created a big problem for the port of Rivadavia, where Mirta had been a school principal for several years. At the end of the Nineteenth Century, it had been an important port of the region, where ships came from Europe; at that time, it had become a prosperous international business center, constantly expanding, before the disaster occurred. Now the port of Rivadavia is located as far as twelve miles from the river, with only ten percent of the original population. After so many years, debris and parts of ships scattered on mounds of sand remain spread all around in that area, which used to be an important and active port. The inhabitants, by habit, yet call this decaying city a "port," but it actually is only a sort of advanced fortress in the jungle, far

away from civilization.

The inhabitants also call themselves "Chaquenos" (from Chaco), or "Spanish," or "people," or even "Christians," to distinguish themselves from the Mataco Indians, whom they just call "Indians," treating them with contempt, sometimes little better than they treat domestic animals. Mirta told me so much about this Salta's Chaco and the Rivadavia port that I was anxious to see it for myself.

That's the place where Jacinto discovered the joy of fishing, and since then he could remain entire days just enjoying this sport. Bermejo was really a fisherman's paradise, with a great variety of all sizes of fish, like the surubi, sometimes weighing more than 200 pounds, the tastiest fish I ever ate. Jacinto never tired of repeating that he understood now why General MacArthur came every year to the Parana River to fish for the dorado, one of the most difficult to catch and the toughest fighter.

The foodstuff came from Oran, or Embarcacion, unless somebody was willing to pay twice the price at a little local store about a mile from our camp, run by "Gordo Gomez" (Fat Gomez) and his family.

Not too far from Camin's roofless house was a shack that Jacinto built himself, and he invited me to share it with him, because he had an extra folding bed and the shack at least had a straw roof. Slightly farther from him, Francisco Ricciardi from Mendoza had his own cabin. He seemed to be an educated person, and I couldn't understand what he was doing in this jungle, working without wages on this farm, with only the hope that one day he would participate in the profits. I could much better understand the "porteno" Jacinto Gomez, because I learned through Camin that he came from Buenos Aires to the jungle to drown memories of an unfortunate love affair that still tormented him. Camin met him in Oran, in the same hotel where he stayed, and he saw from his window how Jacinto, in the room across, was lifting his revolver to his head with the intention of committing suicide. Without wasting an instant, Camin ran to his room, knocked down the door, and snatched the gun from the surprised Jacinto, thereby saving his life. Once Jacinto was pacified by Camin's kind words and politician-like ability to talk, they went to the bar to have a drink, where meanwhile he convinced Jacinto to at least give going to live amongst nature a try to see if his heart's wounds could be healed.

Jacinto, who had never left Buenos Aires, couldn't have suspected that nature existed, and little by little he fell in love with the jungle and the river, deciding to remain at that place the rest of his life. We very quickly became friends with the "porteno," who discovered a new life in the jungle, saying laughingly that he was a "Porteno Tarzan." I asked him if he ever contemplated getting married, because as young as he was, it was certain that he needed to be with a female sometimes. With the smile of a really satisfied man, he confessed that he had this problem solved. He told me, almost bragging, that a mile from there lived a widow who still was "good," sharing her small house with her old and deaf parents, circumstances that enabled him to visit her during the night, while they were sleeping. This kind of agreement was convenient for both of them, as they were able to satisfy their sexual need and at the same time avoid losing their freedom.

Once I almost fell on the floor from surprise, and I nearly lost my respect for Jacinto when one day, walking close to the river, he pointed with his finger at his "girlfriend," standing among other people. She was at least a sixty-year-old brutish

peasant, skinny and tall, with wrinkled skin, and I couldn't reconcile myself to the idea of seeing this good-looking porteno making love to this monster. Jacinto, looking at the reflection of repugnance on my face, said, very proud of himself, that the performance was done in the darkness, so as not to wake up her parents; and not seeing her, he could imagine whatsoever he wanted, even thinking that he was lying with Marilyn Monroe. Since then, everybody to whom I told the story mentioned Jacinto's girlfriend by the movie actress' name. It was already a tradition when greeting him to ask, "How is Marilyn Monroe?" or, "When you see her, don't forget to give Marilyn Monroe a kiss on my part!" This in-love jungle lady, bumping by chance into Jacinto close to the "Gordo Alvarez" store, or at any other place where their paths would cross, would always show a smile of beatitude.

We very seldom shopped at this little store with the over-inflated prices, and we did so only when something important or urgent was needed, like cigarettes or wine; no matter how much we would bring from Oran, we never had enough wine to quench our thirst. Jacinto couldn't live without cigarettes; he was a heavy smoker, and despite all the big supply of cigarettes Camin would bring from Oran, it was never enough for him, and he had to buy more at the "Gordo Alvarez" store. The cigarette was the best gift that could ever be given to Jacinto.

I noticed that Ricciardi never went to the little grocery store, and Jacinto confided to me that the previous year Ricciardi had a scuffle with Alvarez, during which they almost killed each other, and since then, he never put his feet back in that store. Showing concern, Jacinto said, "I wouldn't be surprised if one day they find Alvarez dead!" This comment didn't surprise me, because the shopkeeper, with his prepotence, was driving everybody crazy, and I was afraid that one day I could lose my patience and have to square accounts with him. His big black dog, always standing close to his owner's grocery, made me nervous, because he didn't like me. It was all the more unusual in that children and animals were always striving to come close to me, with the exception of this dog.

Most of us were armed, because the closest police precinct was in Embarcacion, and we had to rely only on ourselves for our protection. Once I went to this store to buy wine, and the dog, standing at the door, jumped on me and tore my pants, an act that made the "Fat" laugh, as well as the few other patrons standing there. I am sure that nobody expected it, but even before the dog finished tearing the fabric of my pants, he was lying dead on the floor, hit by a bullet from my Smith & Wesson that I always carried, it being my preferred brand. This offense was too much for the "Fat," who rushed toward me with a threatening attitude, thinking that I would run away. I remained still, expecting him, standing without moving, while looking straight into his eyes; with my right hand ready to grab the handle of my gun again. The grocer was perplexed by my coldness, and he continued screaming in my direction, but without approaching me. After listening for a few minutes to what he had to say, at the moment when he was taking a breath to say something else, I interrupted him, saying quietly, "Listen, you fat pig, words don't impress me; if you are a man, get outside to square our accounts as machos," then screaming, "Right now!"

When I saw him chilled, as if paralyzed, not knowing what to do, I covered him with insults in front of his patrons, grabbed the bottles of wine I had ordered from the counter, and shouted, "I don't pay for this wine; it's for the damage done to my pants, and

if in the future I see you just making a bad face at me, that night you will not lie in your bed, but in a wooden box!" and I left. Of course, in our camp everyone learned about what happened at the grocery store, and the "Mendocino" Francisco, angry, said, "Why didn't you kill him!"

I learned that a few miles from us was an English religious mission, which was helping the Toba and Mataco Indians not only to pray and read the Bible, but also teaching them different artisan skills, including agriculture, and right then they were plowing the mission's land, ready to plant. We too, after assembling our Kubota tractor, began plowing a large extension of land. Taking advantage of the fact that I didn't have any specific obligation that day, I went to visit this English mission, which was about two hours' walking distance from us. I was very well received by the five members of the mission, all of them thirty- to forty-year-old Englishmen. Of course, they didn't miss the opportunity to ask me to have the traditional English cup of tea with them and were delighted to learn that I was part of the 8th English Army in World War II. They consisted of two married couples and a bachelor named Johnny. Betty, a beautiful blonde, was the wife of the tall Peter, the mission's pastor, while Dick and his young wife Catharine, like the single Johnny, were plain missionaries.

I was impressed by what they had achieved. Both tribes, Toba and Mataco, were living separately in two towns, but come Sunday, they would assemble together to pray in the huge church, which was covered by a straw roof, in the open air, without walls. Johnny was a learned young man who seemed to be lost in this environment. I saw him as very effeminate, and I was sorry for him, because as a homosexual, he wasn't in the appropriate place to find himself a companion. I went many times more to visit this mission, but I was under the impression that Johnny assumed that I was coming to see him and that we might be intimate, a strange situation that made me uncomfortable. After a short while, I had a real proof of it when once I came to visit the mission and Catherine, who was cleaning the church, said bluntly to me, "Your friend Johnny is not home; he went to Embarcacion to retrieve a parcel of bibles sent to us from England!" Since that time, not willing to give any hope to Johnny or to create misunderstandings, I stopped visiting the mission.

On my way back, when I was close to our farm, I saw that we were planting tomatoes with the help of fifteen Mataco Indians. I was also surprised to see a big John Deere tractor standing there. I knew that it belonged to two neighbor ladies who lived ten miles from us, close to the Padre Lozano railroad station.

Among several persons standing around I saw the little Arturo Anchano from Salta, who was that railroad station's chief. Actually, he was the sole railroad station employee to take care of all the chores, without any help, watching four trains a day passing by. The trains seldom stopped, only when passengers were coming or leaving. I learned that Camin's friend, the topographer Andres Rodriguez, had come by train with a girlfriend, a tanned-skin fat lady called Maria. Arturo asked his neighbors Laura and her daughter Teresa to be kind enough to give them a ride on their tractor to our farm. Nobody in the region owned a vehicle, and no roads existed for vehicles in any case; most of the transportation, if it wasn't by horse, was made by tractors.

These two ladies were very polite, and they were respected in the area for having the guts to take care of their farm by themselves, with four employees living in an adjacent house and Indians hired for the harvest. I was acquainted with these nice,

coquettish ladies, whose faces always reflected an urgent need of masculine company. Men (at least marriageable ones) were scarce in that region, and the women would always put on a lot of make-up, trying to be attractive wherever they were going, if they were likely to see men. We tried to welcome our visitors the best we could, because all of them intended to spend the night with us. We knew that the topographer, whom everyone called "Negro," had come to stay for a while with us. By pure coincidence, we had plenty of fish to eat; it was a 150-pound surubi that Jacinto had caught that same morning, and by even a more strange coincidence, wine wasn't missing. By a local tradition, usually the visitors brought wine when coming to see neighbors.

We decided to grill the fish close to the river, because it was a beautiful full-moon night, and "Mendocino" promised to bring his guitar to allow the Mejia ladies to entertain us with their sublime voices. I spent one of the most memorable nights of my life close to the river, whose water was running with a melodious whisper. Little by little, the "rococo frogs" (bullfrogs) approached our fire. Bullfrogs were almost sacred in the jungle for their catching up to 3,000 mosquitoes a day. It was considered a sin to kill one of these mosquito-eating frogs in this insect-infested region. In Chaco's small towns, people kept rococo frogs inside their houses, as if they were pets like dogs or cats. Other little animals also came close to the fire, such as the "vizcacha" (a large South American rodent) and often snakes, while we drank wine and ate the delicious surubi that Jacinto cooked to perfection.

In proportion to the consumed wine, the happiness of our spirits increased, and after dinner, the sentimental, melodious chords of Francisco's guitar, delighting us with his musician's skill, came to break the nocturnal silence. We heard the music of local northern folkloric dances—chacarera, sambas and others—whose words the ladies Mejia sang to our delight with their sweet voices in tune. Nobody was tired any more, despite the fact that everybody had worked hard the day long. This place was too beautiful, in the midst of tropical nature, for us to feel tired, and I think that as more wine was consumed, we already had in mind how to apportion the women sitting there among us.

Fortunately, it was a full moon, whose light illuminated the half-mile road to our lodging. Even though we walked with dignity, we nevertheless were stumbling, and Jacinto, who drank less than any of us, was carrying the picnic equipment we brought to the river. It was when we were close to our camp that I figured out who would spend the night with whom. About "Negro" there wasn't any doubt that he would remain in Camin's house with Maria. I was already deluding myself by thinking that the always-smiling Teresa would stay with me. I was sure to a such point that I asked Jacinto if he could visit Marilyn Monroe that night and leave me alone in his shack. I had the impression that Teresa liked my company, because during the entire evening she laughed so much at all my jokes that I was almost sure to spend the night with her, savoring in advance the possession of her body.

But who understands women? Francisco, who didn't open his mouth during the whole evening, just playing the guitar, had been selected by the young lady, and without any vacillation she followed him to his hut, without his inviting her. Now, the slick old Camin, without anybody noticing it, had settled everything with Teresa's mother Laura, who went with him to his roofless house. The railroad station chief, Arturo Anchano, who came by motorcycle, had to return to his job at Pedro Lozano, and half-drunk, he left us, swaying on his bike. I remained by myself in Jacinto's shack, and when

he returned at dawn, he was surprised at not finding Teresa, still half-naked, playing with me, as he had expected.

Two months later, Mirta let me know that she intended to spend a few weeks with me, because she had made arrangements to visit her friends at Rivadavia, where she wanted me to go with her. This prospect made me happy, because we had a very good understanding; it wasn't one of those violent passions, but a plain mixture of eroticism and platonism, interwoven with intellectual emotions.

I loved Rivadavia from the moment I arrived at this "port," and I was surprised to see the people living such a natural life a century behind the times. They knew it, because they traveled to Oran, even to Salta, the capital of the province, where they could easily see the difference in lifestyles, but they were a very proud people and were happy to be where they lived, which was important for them.

The region was plagued with wild animals, including tigers, onza cats (a type of cheetah), and yacares (South American crocodiles) in the lagoons, and I lamented not having time enough to go hunting, a sport I still liked so much at that time. After this short vacation, Mirta returned to Rosario, while we were getting ready to harvest; it was the most crucial and anxious moment of our adventure, after which we would split the profit of our crop among us. I took advantage of having the handy "Negro," who was a surveyor, to locate and check the 50 acres I had purchased from Camin. It happened that when the lady Laura Mejia came in a carriage pulled by two horses to visit Camin, I asked her to lend me her four-wheeled vehicle with horses for the day. I decided with "Negro" to take Jacinto with us, for he knew the region and could locate my property. I don't know how they did it, but "Negro" and Jacinto found the lot, which was in the midst of a small hamlet, where a dozen buildings were, with an army of children playing and with animals, goats, sheep, horses, cows, and pigs scattered all over.

We were greeted by a middle-aged Creole with a rough expression in his look, who already knew our surveyor. It was the Moreno family's property, because they assured me that they had been living there for more than a century. They didn't have the property deeds, but they considered themselves owners of these lands, because they had been living and working on them all this time. I remained open-mouthed, learning that the property Camin had sold me was occupied by the Moreno family, who, without doubt, wouldn't abandon it. When they learned that Camin had sold it to me, the older brother Moreno said that I was wasting my time if I thought that this land was mine; they would never leave it and were ready to fight for it.

I was raving and was about to say something disagreeable, but Jacinto kicked me discreetly with his foot, and looking around, I realized that about twelve men were surrounding us; moreover, we were in the jungle, where human life was worthless and people disappeared every day without leaving any trace, and I shut up.

We drank "mate" (tropical tea) prepared by the women; then we took leave coldly but politely and returned to our camp at dusk. The first thing I did at our arrival was to jump on Camin; but he said quietly that all these lands were occupied by people living there without deeds, and it was easy to evict them by requesting Oran's authority. It was the first time I saw Camin firm, with determination; he cut my complaints short, saying that now we couldn't waste our time in childish matters, when the tomato and pepper harvest was around the corner. It would give us a lot of money, because the central market in Buenos Aires promised to buy all of our production as soon as we

collected it.

Senora Mejia, after spending the night with Camin, on the following day, early in the morning, was heading back to her farm with "Negro," who asked her to give him a ride to the Pedro Lozano railroad station to board the train to Oran. In Chaco, as I learned, there existed as in Brazil the same unwritten jungle laws. As soon as the topographer left with Laura Mejia, we were already coveting, like scavengers, to share the "fat" Maria. She didn't have any attraction that would wake up any feeling in a man, but she was a female whom we needed, because sometimes we would remain a long time without any woman. The most interesting part of the story was that she didn't seem to care what happened, nor did she complain about having a different man from the previous day in her bed when she woke up in the morning.

Wintertime in these regions is always very agreeable, and chiefly it is almost freeze-free, but with a changing weather. Camin told us that within two weeks we would harvest the fruit of our efforts. We were waiting, admiring the green tomatoes and peppers that would be transformed very soon into a lot of money. While we were plowing, a Kubota tractor's blade had broken, and we never had an opportunity to repair it, leaving it for a future time, because we had a spare one. With the aim of changing the atmosphere and giving a break to my organism, which had been daily gouged with alcohol, I told Camin that since I was not doing anything special now except for waiting, I decided to go to Embarcacion to weld the broken blade. It wasn't a heavy part; I could carry it with me, and again I took advantage of senora Mejia's kindness when she passed by with her carriage, an event that happened quite often lately, asking her to give me a ride to the Padre Lozano railroad station.

It is impossible to describe the pleasure I felt upon arriving at the Bermejo hotel, after spending several months in the jungle. It was so rewarding to have a shower with hot water, to sleep in a real bed, and to be served tasty, well prepared dishes at a table. The blade was welded already, but instead of returning at once, I preferred to stay one more day in Embarcacion. Strolling on the sidewalk, suddenly I realized that I was close to the only church in Embarcacion, and I decided to pay a visit to the little priest Father Giovanni.

I knew that he was very learned, and I remembered that once we had begun a conversation concerning alcohol, but he had been interrupted and never had a chance to resume it. My excess of drinking without control was already preoccupying me, and I wanted badly to continue our conversation about this vice. No words can describe the happiness with which the little Jesuit received me; we immediately had a cup of coffee and later a delicious lunch, served by his old mestizo maid.

After the meal, without evasion, I said to him briskly, "Father Giovanni, do you remember that once we were talking about alcohol during one of our meetings, and just when you were about to tell me something, we were interrupted, and you never had an opportunity to resume our conversation? Remember?" The little Italian priest loved to talk, chiefly to show his schooling and his knowledge, and he was delighted to have an opportunity to be brilliant.

"Listen, my friend Miguel, I know everything about alcohol; I studied the matter and can explain to you in the minutest details about everything related to beverages. Not long ago, I received a few boxes of a good red wine, sent to me from Italy by relatives living in Piedmont; let's have a drink, and I will answer your question!"

In summary, the fact was that in a few hours we emptied several bottles of this tasty red wine shipped from Italy. The priest was completely drunk but would never stop talking, until at six o'clock some kids came to knock at his door, saying, "Padre! Padre! It is a mass hour, the people are waiting at the church!" To which Father Giovanni, swaying, came slowly close to the door, where the children were standing and said, "To the devil with the mass. I am with a friend; tell the people that there is no mass today!" Then, realizing that he had been too rude to the kids, he went after them asking them to come back, and he gave each one of them a candy that he kept for this purpose in a big box close to the door.

For three days, without interruption, we drank father Giovanni's wine while talking, but we neglected to eat, or ate very little, to the limping old maid's despair, who was excelling herself at fixing special plates for us, trying to impress us Europeans. We drank until we finished all the wine supply of several boxes, containing ten bottles each; during all this time, no mass had been said in town. The fourth day, I woke up with a tremendous headache, lying lazily on the priest's living room sofa. The limit of my resistance had been reached, and without having a desire even for a cup of coffee, I told my Jesuit friend that I needed to go back to our farm. I wanted to catch the train going to Formosa, with a stop at Padre Lozano.

When we parted, after having given each other a big hug, I advised Father Giovanni to take care of his flock as soon as possible. He knew that I was an atheist, but we had been feeling so happy to be together that we never spoke about religion or theology, and I was grateful to him for never trying to convert me, conserving in such a way a "bottle intellectual friendship," as he laughingly used to call it. That's how my first attempt to understand why I was drinking too much ended, and perhaps I also missed the opportunity to learn how to stop drinking.

I arrived in the afternoon at Pedro Lozano, and the plump railroad station chief Arturo, very grave and concerned, offered to give me a ride to our camp on his bike. I was surprised by his seriousness! While riding on his motorcycle over these corrugated and full-of-potholes roads, constantly jumping and shaking, Arturo asked me where I had been the past few days. He was surprised then to learn that I wasn't aware of the freeze that suddenly had fallen over all the region, including the colony of Santa Rosa, killing and destroying overnight everything planted! These unexpected words sobered me up at once, though I still couldn't grasp the meaning nor fathom the span of the consequences. Once we reached the roofless house, Arturo let me descend, taking immediate leave without even staying with us for a glass of wine, on the pretext that he needed to be back at the station, which I didn't understand until I entered the house and saw Camin. He was sitting in his dining room, shabby and dirty, with an empty look, holding a glass of wine in his trembling hand. It was the first time I saw him without his habitual smile on his lips. He looked like a Camin caricature, and not any longer the adventurer, the funny and the happy-trigger man he used to be. When he saw and recognized me, he gave me a look with a wasted smile, and I realized that he was completely drunk. So were Jacinto, Francisco, "Negro," who had come back from Oran, and even Maria, who sat crushed on a chair, with her fat legs wide open, also holding a glass of wine.

Camin, still immovable, never stopped mumbling, "They were so pretty, the red tomatoes, as were the green peppers, and I couldn't stop looking at them. I would have remained forever looking at them! If only I had known what would happen, I would

have harvested them, but the weather seemed so good that nobody would have ever guessed that a freeze was about to fall on us. It came suddenly, during the night, and when we went to the camp, illuminating our way with our flashlights, we could watch, astonished, while our tomatoes and peppers were withering before our eyes, and from red and green, they became black and spongy!"

Nobody spoke; we remained silent, while Camin, after refilling his glass with wine, continued, "Everything is lost! From a fortune that was at a hand's reach only two days ago, nothing is left today! Nothing, absolutely nothing!" I learned later through Jacinto the details of the anxiety all of them went through during those four days that I was in Embarcacion, drinking with the priest.

As everybody told me, it had been like a huge dark blanket that fell over the planted camp, transforming the vegetables into garbage, as if by magic. It is impossible to describe the suffering reflected in each face, and as far as I was concerned, I realized that I had wasted a year without practically achieving anything, with the exception of having had a vagabond's and a drunkard's life, remaining now completely broke. As if that wasn't enough, the following day, four riders came to our camp from the mounted police, who wanted to talk with me about the "Fat Alvarez's" death. Because of everyone's preoccupation about the disaster that had occurred at our farm, nobody had told me that the shopkeeper had been killed. Somebody had shot him twice in the head, and because some customers had heard me threatening him a few days before, when his dog tore my pants, they denounced me to the police.

The sergeant, followed by his three men with Indian traits, wanted to take me as prisoner and were ready to jump on me. It was very well known that these mounted police were brutish illiterates who could pull a confession out of anyone, beating them or leaving the body mutilated, when it was not dead. When the "milicos" (as they were called in Chaco), huge and almost square monsters, were ready to grab me, all of us pulled our guns. We said to the riders that they wouldn't take anybody from our farm without a judge's order, besides the fact that I had just come back to the Bermejo River after spending four days in Embarcacion at the time the crime had been committed. The four "gorillas," more scared by the word *judge* than by our guns, said that they would investigate the matter and it was better for me not to leave the place until the situation was cleared up.

Not all the people of the region were farmers; most of them had been living there for one or two centuries and were mainly cattlemen, an easier way to earn a living because they preferred to avoid working hard. They didn't like us; we were the intruders, with a different mode of living, and not only were they not sorry about our disaster, but they were happy, because they assumed it would deter us as a good lesson and we would leave the Bermejo River forever, never to return.

Camin remained in the camp with his two helpers, Jacinto and Francisco, as did a few more farmer adventurers from other lots, wishing to give it another try with Mother Nature, but most of the people, including me, left the jungle forever.

I didn't want to run away before I had cleared up my situation, and after the police chief from Salta received confirmation that I was in Embarcacion when the crime had been committed, a fact testified to by Father Giovanni, I was declared free of any accusation, and I could go wherever I wanted.

Chapter 6

One more time I had been defeated by adversity, but I was already in Rosario, where we moved into Mirta's house and where Mirta's brother David had been living for a long while. Mirta continued to teach at the provincial university, while her brother was building a promising career as an attorney. We were ready for the coming New Year 1964, for which occasion, to our great delight, Jeannot came with Eve to keep us company.

David was an ardent anti-Yankee and a great Bolivar admirer; the latter in his own time had warned the Latin Americans about the danger that would come from "The Big Brother from the North!" Bolivar predicted that the United States, emboldened by its prepotence, would end up the same way as Carthage, which had been completely erased from the earth by the Romans. For my brother-in-law, American imperialism was the biggest danger ever faced by mankind, not only for the American continent's but for the entire world's peace. He was such an anti-Yankee that many years later, when he once traveled to a convention in Canada, his plane stopped at Miami, but he refused to go to the airport to stretch his legs, not wishing to put his feet on a land that was enslaving the Latin Americans.

Jeannot, too, loved to talk about politics; nonetheless, he was a harsh anti-Marxist with right-wing tendencies. His politics didn't deter us from entertaining ourselves for entire days drinking beer or wine, while defending with passion, but without hatred, our ideas. After celebrating the New Year festivities, our visitors were ready to return to their home in Buenos Aires, or rather to the closed restaurant where they lived; at the last moment, I decided to join them, while Mirta went to El Trebol to spend some time with her parents.

It was then, while in Buenos Aires, that Jeannot and I lived a life of complete abandon, perhaps the worst moment of my life, where alcohol was our only preoccupation. Jeannot had an impressive cellar, full of the best wines accumulated from the time when the restaurant was still operating. Now, to survive, we sold bottles of old French wine, cognac, or champagne, little by little, case after case, thereby giving us the means to live a few weeks with pocket money or to go have a drink at our club, where we never stopped seeing our friends.

I didn't know how Eve, once in a while, managed to come back with money, though I suspected it, but I never had an opportunity to talk about it, and after all, I didn't care. Sometimes I would go see my parents in Martinez, and it was visible that they didn't approve of my way of living, which was putting even more strain on our already cold relationship. They told me suddenly that they had decided to put their house up for sale, with the intention of going to live with Maya and Enrique in the United States. After a short time of indecision, I made up my mind to return to Tucuman for a short visit, which became prolonged indefinitely. I always felt so comfortable in that city, where I lived some of my happiest years.

Nelly had gone into the hotel business, and as usual all the tribe was still living with her, or rather from her. It was with a profound sadness that I learned about "Gorda's" death, Nelly's mother, whom I loved so much. Nelly mourned her mother with anguish; so did Pachi, her brother, and especially Georgito, my son.

I succeeded one more time in securing representations from hardware factories to peddle their products in the north, and I was ready to call on my old customers. The following year, 1965, Mirta became a professor at the University of Tucuman, where we moved again, renting a little house close to the Park 9 de Julio. I always maintained a friendly relationship with Nelly, and it was curious to see us sometimes eating together with the rest of the tribe.

My parents, after selling their house, received a visa to the United States, thanks to Maya and Enrique's help, and they were already living with them in New Jersey. I saw the same phenomenon repeated many times during my life, cases similar to my parents', getting to an old age and going to live with their children. Without exception, the result is always the same: inconveniences, disturbance, followed in many cases by mutual reproaches, all ending by separation with resentments. For my parents, many factors came to complicate this situation: after living so many years in Argentina, they had gotten used to that country. They spoke good Spanish, had many friends in Argentina, and enjoyed an independent and proper social life. Maya and Enrique, on the other hand, were living in Haworth, a small New Jersey town with separated houses, American style, with little or no contact with neighbors. They had a very pleasant life with their American friends, but my parents didn't speak English, they didn't drive, and they didn't own a car; consequently, not having proper transportation, they lived confined in the house. The tension was building up on both sides, and after staying eight months with their daughter, no matter how much Maya tried to make their life pleasant, they realized that they had made a big mistake by leaving Argentina, where they decided to return.

At that time, Nelly, taking advantage of an opportunity that she would never let pass, had just purchased a nice little house in a highly residential outskirts area of Tucuman at a low price. She offered it to my parents, who were returning from the States, because it would keep the extended family together, and mainly it was good for Georgito, their grandson, with whom my parents had a good understanding.

This trip of my parents to the United States had a big influence on my later decision to emigrate to that country. My father, with whom my relationship improved, encouraged me to do it. Despite the fact that my father didn't like the American style of living, he said that if he were young, he would go there to try his luck. He said that it was a country where anybody had more opportunities than in any other country in the world, as long as you were not an idealist, because the Americans worshiped the "green god" dollar and were not interested in social justice. He kept saying that even though I wasn't young any more, I could find something to do over there, instead of wasting my time and vegetating in Tucuman, without any future.

After living for so long in the Southern Hemisphere, I was perhaps influenced by this perception that the United States and its "Yankee Imperialism" was the proletariat's enemy. We also saw Americans coming to Argentina to escape the draft and run away from the horrors of the Vietnam war, blaming their own country for being the aggressor and for being racist. Anyhow, I learned that Teo and Delia were going to see Maya in the summer, and my father encouraged me to go see my sister and at the same time see the United States.

Our family celebrated New Year's Eve 1966 in Tucuman, and my parents, very respected by Nelly's tribe, told us all that Argentina was their country of adoption, where they would remain forever. It was easy to see that my parents were at ease living in

Tucuman, where they received daily attention from Nelly, from her family, and from new friends, the number of which was increasing day by day.

I never stopped writing to my Chilean companion in arms, and Gerald always asked me to come visit him in Concepcion. I learned that he was married, had two sons, and had made his dream come true, owning several two-motor Beechcraft airplanes with which to carry the mail and passengers to different places. Taking advantage of an opportunity, or perhaps creating it, I decided to see my friend from the war in Concepcion, for I hadn't seen him since he came to Tucuman twenty years before.

It was an intense emotion that I felt upon seeing my friend Gerald again, who reciprocated my feeling when he met me at Santiago's airport. After hugging each other a long while, we rode in his car to Concepcion, where he was living with his family. We also went to see our other comrade in arms, Rene, who also with emotion introduced me to his own family. We remained very late eating, drinking, and chiefly talking, remembering all the good moments we lived in wartime, engraved in our memory, and we decided not to mention the bad times we experienced. I learned through Gerald that Rene was still suffering the psychological effects of the three months he spent as a war prisoner in a German camp in Alsace, where his lungs deteriorated, leaving his health forever fragile.

Of course, the many friends and relatives they called to the party that had been organized in my honor looked at us as if we were real heroes, making us feel at ease. Gerald decided to spend a few days alone with me, choosing to take me to Santiago de Chile, Valparaiso, Vina del Mar, and other beautiful resorts on the Pacific Ocean, which I had a chance to admire for the first time in my life. We spent ten unforgettable days feeling young again, like when we were soldiers, drinking and mingling with women whom we encountered on our way and whom Gerald, as usual, knew how to charm. He hadn't changed, remaining the "Russian Prince" in his behavior and his manners. We had many intimate conversations, and I learned with pain that Gerald was divorcing his wife. I don't know if he wanted to precipitate the divorce, but he was alleging that his wife was mentally disturbed.

After returning to Argentina from this memorable trip, I maintained contact with the "Russian Prince," learning of his divorce, then of his new marriage to a girl much younger than he, Patty, with whom he fathered a girl; then I stopped receiving letters from him.

I was living in Houston, Texas, when Patty informed me that Gerald, during a routine flight and while piloting one of his Beechcraft planes, crashed in the sea without anyone's knowing why. Only after several days of search were his body and those of the five other passengers, who were flying from Concepcion to Santiago de Chile, recovered. I was shocked when I read about this sad news. A few years later, I learned also through his children that the other companion in arms, Rene Genestier, died after a prolonged illness.

Chapter 7

Since my return to live in Tucuman, I had plenty of opportunities to see my parents. My father too loved white wine, and after dinner, which often I would have with my parents in Marcos Paz, we would sit together in the living room to talk about everything. We didn't have a topic we couldn't touch, and my mother, who used to go to bed early, said that it was inconceivable to have a father talking with his son until two or three o'clock in the morning.

My father had an exceptional memory, and we both liked to talk about the period of the Russian Revolution. More than once, he shared with me that after the Communist Revolution broke out in November 1917, he had remained undecided to the last moment. He wasn't sure, and during the rest of his life he doubted if he had done the right thing in joining the White Army to fight against Communists, instead of being part of the Red Army, as many of his friends were and even as some Kerensky followers, who previously had participated in the February Revolution, did.

From the very beginning, when the Communists took power, my father was convinced by certain aspects of Lenin's behavior that even though Lenin was an idealist with a steel will, at the same time he didn't show any consideration for human lives. The only thing that seduced many, including my father, was the tremendous organizational power the Bolsheviks had; they knew how to impose order, a quality they demonstrated from the start. Without agreeing with Trotsky about his "Permanent Revolution theory," my father couldn't help but admire his ability to organize the Red Army. My father said slowly, pronouncing each word with emotion, "Trotsky took a mob of illiterate peasants and brutish factory workers, and with them he built an army that defeated the best military strategists of that epoch. Not only did he rout us professional warriors, but he also defeated armies from fifteen other countries—French, English, American, Japanese, Czech, Polish, and many more. He was a genius!" Despite the fact that my father didn't agree with the anarchists, and even despised them, he never forgave Lenin for what he did to the anarchist leader Prince Kropotkin, who also fought against the Tsar's tyranny. Kropotkin was old, living in exile in Switzerland for a long time, but he came to Russia in the first days of the Revolution to see if he could collaborate with the Communists. He wanted to help build a better world for the working class, considering that on both sides they were inspired by Marx. Lenin, after receiving him kindly, thanked him for his offer, and the following day, Lenin sent his security forces to raid all the Moscow anarchist centers, taking thousands of prisoners; many of them were shot without trials, and the rest were sent to Siberia. As for "the little old man," as Makhno called his adored Kropotkin, Lenin sent him, with his ailing wife, into exile in a small town in the Urals, where they starved to death. I had already heard something like that before told to me during my youth in the Latin Quarter by my anarchist friend Jacques Trambeau.

My father also never forgave Lenin, when Lenin escaped an assassination attempt that left him wounded, for letting the "Cheka," the forerunner of the KGB, shoot 3,200 suspected persons, without any trials. Lenin declared that it was necessary to institute a Red Terror to fight back against the Whites' terrorism. My father also came to talk about the famous Social Democrat terrorist Boris Savinkov, who directed the murder of many governors and police chiefs who were convicted for their cruelty and

perseverance in persecuting the revolutionaries. When Lenin took power and the Soviet Union was created, Savinkov had the same luck as Kerensky, Makhno, and Kropotkin, who had offered at the beginning to cooperate with the Communists. Savinkov had one of the best secret revolutionary organizations in Europe, and when threatened in 1920, he escaped to Paris, where he immediately organized terroristic cells inside Russia to fight the Bolsheviks. No matter how much skill Dzhzerzhinski's agents used, they couldn't put their hands on the subversive Savinkov's conspirators, until two of his faithful collaborators, for money or for some other reason, set a trap. They made him believe that a very important terroristic operation was about to happen in Russia, and it was of the utmost importance for him to be present to make the final arrangements.

Savinkov, in his enthusiasm, trusted his friends and went illegally to Russia in June 1925, where the secret police were already waiting for him and arrested him. The worst part was that after inhuman tortures were inflicted on him, he confessed officially that he recognized the Communists, and of course a month later, he died in jail, without any explanation, but everybody understood that it was the "Cheka's" work.

My father told me that at that time a big uproar ran among the exiles overseas with regard to that event, which puzzled them, and for a long while the Russian refugees remained divided about Savinkov, some calling him a traitor, and others a victim. If my father had some doubts about Lenin's intentions, it was with uncontrollable hatred that he expressed himself against Stalin, who, in his opinion, usurped power and became a real Russian people's executioner. This was the period of my life when I had more intimacy, more understanding, and more love with my parents, as we renewed again our friendship that had been interrupted for many years. We spent the holidays in Tucuman, and I think that my parents fell in love with that city, because they found in Nelly, her family, and the general atmosphere a real feeling of home, something they were always looking for.

My father had a very peculiar philosophy about life; he was an atheist, but nonetheless he called himself a "Voltairian," and he believed in the "Eternal Return," meaning that life, like the world or universe, never had been created, but rather had always existed and always will exist, in one way or another, eternally changing and renovating, without beginning nor end. He liked to mention what the French scientist Lavoisier said: "Nothing is created, nothing is lost, everything is transformed!" For those who expressed doubts about his thinking, mainly those who believed in creation who would ask him how he could explain this theory, my father, who was very bright, answered, "Could you have asked Christopher Columbus during his lifetime to explain how the television works? Now we know it, just as in the future we will learn what is mystery now!" He also used to say, "God is a road milestone, which is constantly being pushed farther back by science!" He used to say, when I was complaining about something that was very difficult to achieve, "If it were easy, anybody would be doing it!"

He also had a very peculiar concept about his own age. My mother was diabetic, almost blind, and once a week, he rode the bus from Marcos Paz to a supermarket to buy grocery products, even though Nelly was constantly bringing everything they needed. Once, coming back from his shopping trip, I found him very irritated, and when I asked him about this change of mood, he said that an old man was traveling in the bus, a very old and shabby man who barely could remain standing,

because no seat was available. "Everybody was very upset by this old man, and we were relieved when he descended from the bus." When I asked him how old this old man was, angrily he answered, "He must have been at least sixty years old!" to which, very surprised, I told him, "But you are 74 years old!" He seemed indignant at my observation and said, as if answering a stupid question, "But I am different!" For him, anybody over sixty years of age was "an old man."

My private life with Mirta continued to be more one of comradeship, because we had a lot in common intellectually, without any other affinities. During the summer vacations, her niece Alicia came from El Trebol to visit with us. She was a sweet little girl; like Mirta, she already was a left-winger, very active in politics. I could never have imagined that this teenager, who was becoming a pretty little woman, would become a real revolutionary later on. When she was ready to return home to Rosario and we went to take her to the railroad station, I couldn't have guessed that I would never see this precocious girl again. When Peron came back to Argentina in 1973, the famous "dirty war" began, when people were disappearing, which also occurred with Alicia. It had happened many years later, after I was living in the United States, when Alicia came to visit her aunt Mirta in Tucuman. Because she was known by the Federal Police for her ideas, they arrested her, tortured her, raped her, and killed her, without leaving any trace of this young girl. Later, for many years, Mirta tried to find an indication or to learn what really happened to her or where she was buried, but all her efforts were to no avail.

I made up my mind to go to the United States in summertime, when my niece Annie and my nephew Ricky would be on vacation, and Enrique would take some days off to be with all of us, including Teo and Delia, as we had already planned. When my brother-in-law, David, Mirta's brother, learned about my project to go to the States, he got upset and tried to dissuade me. He said that the Yankees were scavengers, ready to grab any piece of land from a weak country; they had already invaded Haiti and Santo Domingo, and they had plotted Panama's independence from Colombia to be able to build a canal. They had invaded Nicaragua, Honduras, and Cuba, keeping Puerto Rico for themselves. When the socialist Arbenz was elected President in Guatemala in 1954, the CIA removed him, protecting the interests of the American fruit companies that dominated all of Central America, as if it were a colony.

All that was said while we were drinking wine, and never before had I seen David as angry as he was that day. Far from trying to contradict him, I approved his statements, but at the same time I emphasized that the American people were very good. It was the last time I went to Rosario and the last time I ever saw David, who continued to harbor a grudge against me and never gave me his new address after he got married and moved to a new house.

With Mirta, after exchanging sour and baseless reproaches with each other in our correspondence, we interrupted our writing spontaneously. It took me twenty years to realize that I didn't have any reason to punish Mirta with my silence, in addition to which I remembered that while living with her, I hadn't always been very nice to her. My conscience was screaming inside me, telling me that it was time to repent. I had lost contact with her, and one more time I resorted to Hersh for his help, for I was seeing him often since he came to Houston from Israel. He transferred my petition to his niece Carola and his step-daughter Liliana, who, after her mother Betty died, returned to Argentina, where she felt more at ease than in the United States. Hersh didn't remain a

widower for too long, marrying an American lady after a short while.

Once Mirta had been located, thanks to so many friends, I took advantage of my vacation and went to Buenos Aires to see her. After twenty years without seeing each other, we both found changes in ourselves; we had aged, but we kept making compliments to each other. The very first day I saw Mirta, I asked her to forgive me for abandoning her and for punishing her with this long silence. The four of us had a nice dinner, because my old friend Carola and Liliana were there with us. It was a delight to evoke the past times we lived, and I felt gratified and happy to come back to Argentina. Before returning to Houston, while we were at the Ezeiza airport of Buenos Aires, where Carola and Liliana came to say goodbye, both of them laughed and said that Mirta told them, "Miguel now is a saint!"

I kept on writing to Mirta for some time; then, not receiving answers to my letters, I sent her a post card saying, "Please don't die!" I don't know if it was once again a premonition or whatever, but the fact was that two months later David sent me a letter without a return address, saying that Mirta had died of cancer.

Arturo Illia was still President in Argentina, but he didn't change anything; he was succeeded by General Juan Carlos Onganía, a reactionary right-winger. I saw the future of that beautiful country very bleakly, and I was happy to be living in the United States, where thousands of disenchanted Argentines had moved.

I always liked aviation, and when living in Tucuman, I used to fly our old Piper, while I also remained in close contact with friends from the Aviation Club of Tucuman; one of them was Emilio Paez de la Torre, who in the end became a prominent judge in that city. Of course, my friendship with Jaime Movsovich remained, along with friendships with some others, even though the times for free spirits weren't as good as they used to be in the past. Not only was I ready to go to the United States physically, but I was preparing myself mentally for this change in my life.

Book 9

America

Chapter 1

A few days before my departure for America, I dined with my parents at their Marcos Paz home, and I felt a special atmosphere of family love and mutual understanding concerning opinions and ideals.

When I was ready to leave, my father, very seriously but with an ironical smile said, "Listen Misha! You already screwed two countries where you lived: France, which was the first power in the world when we arrived there, became a shameful nation, surrendering to Germany without fighting during the "funny war," then obeyed their new masters, the Nazis, by delivering them thousands of Jews to be cremated. Then you came to Argentina, one of the most economically stable and rich countries of the New Continent, with huge gold reserves, exporting 40% of all the worldwide meat market. And again you brought the jinx when Peron came and ruined this nation completely, economically and morally. I hope you will not bring bad luck to the United States with your presence, because it is the third country where you are going, and there is a saying, "no two without three." Of course, we laughed at this joke, and my mother, who liked to have the last word, said that then all of us have to be blamed for what happened to France and Argentina. Finally, in June 1966, I went to America, to see it and to make up my own mind about that nation.

I will not hide the emotion that invaded me when flying over Manhattan in our approach to the Kennedy airport. I was stunned at looking at all these skyscrapers with a bird's eye view, buildings that until now I had seen only in the movies. I was impressed by everything and staring with wide-open eyes, while the taxi crossed the city from the airport to the bus terminal at 42nd Street. I followed Enrique's instructions; because of his business commitments, he couldn't come to welcome me at the airport, but he told me where to take the bus. From the terminal I took the bus to Hayworth, in New Jersey, where my sister was living with all her family.

Teo and Delia had already arrived, and it was a real treat to have friends of almost thirty years all together. Delia said, "We are together again, like the old times, and our niece and nephew, who weren't born then, look like the neighbor's children," a comment that made us laugh. I had an unquenchable desire to know, to see, to understand, and chiefly to verify if the South American animosity toward the United States was justified. Here, everything was so interesting to me emotionally, and the city itself was seducing me with a special charm. I think that Paris and New York are the only two cities that have such particular and impressive personalities.

Thanks to Enrique's patience, we went with the entire family to visit the Long Island beaches, to stroll in parks, and to participate in the July 4th celebration in the same little town of Hayworth, where fireworks were displayed at night. After exploring New York for a month, I went to Chicago to visit a young American friend's mother. I had met

him in Buenos Aires; he was a draft-dodger who refused to go to fight in Vietnam and escaped with so many more to Argentina. When he learned that I was going to the States, he told me to go see his mother in Chicago. Johnny's mother, Mindy, was a forty-year-old, very appealing woman who certainly expected from me some initiative to reach intimacy, but unfortunately, due to my emotional state of mind, I didn't grasp her expectations and lamentably I disappointed her, failing to please her as she was expecting. When later I conveyed to my friends at the Veteran's Club what had happened, nobody believed me, and it was Mirta who had to convince them, saying, "You know what a braggard Misha is, and if he says he didn't have anything with her, it is because he didn't go to bed with Johnny's mother!" I think that most of my friends remained with doubt about this adventure, but certainly my Casanova reputation suffered tremendously.

After remaining a few days with Mindy in Chicago—I was seeing her only in the evening, because she worked—I continued my trip to Minneapolis. David was an avid radio amateur, and he gave me the address of a family living in Minnesota. His radio friend had already been told about my visit, and her father came to greet me at the Greyhound bus terminal. The Nansen family was descended from Norwegians, as most of the immigrants in that state came from Scandinavia, bringing from their natal country advanced agriculture and especially hygiene and cleanliness. The father, Ian, was an electrician, just retired, and while driving me to their home in his car, he told me that it was his daughter Elizabeth who corresponded by radio with David. Ian considered it very important for his daughter to be busy because she had polio, and apart from the university, where she studied, she didn't have any other entertainment.

When we arrived at their house, I saw Dorothy in a wheelchair, and her mother, of Polish descent, also had a twisted arm, certainly because of polio, too. I remained three days with these wonderful people in their extremely clean house. They were so proud of their city that Ian was never too tired to show me around. When we went to see the Mississippi River, he insisted that I remove my shoes and walk in the water close to the shore; he said it was for luck, because I could brag now that I had been there and had put my feet in the Mississippi River.

I realized that the Americans are very patient with handicapped people, treating them not only with consideration, but with a special attention that I hadn't seen in any other country before. When we talked politics, all of them, including some invited friends, stated that they were against the Vietnam war; but taking into consideration that Johnson had been elected President, they had to back him until the next elections.

I was getting more and more enthusiastic about everything I was seeing around me. I was attracted to the United States, and I felt that I would be happy living in this great, liberal, and democratic country. When I returned to Hayworth, my sister Maya told me that if I liked it so much, why didn't I come to live in the States, especially since it seemed that the new Argentine government would be very repressive. I never tired of walking the Manhattan streets, watching people and buildings, and little by little, as if by magnetism, it was getting under my skin, this huge city of cement and steel.

As a result of my innate curiosity to observe, the first thing I noticed was the systematic racial segregation reigning in all American spheres. The Blacks wouldn't associate with Latinos, and the whites would mix very little with any other ethnic group. I saw also that the American Black's behavior was very different from that in Africa, France, Brazil, and other countries, where they live in great number. It seemed to me that

American Blacks acted in a very fictitious way, as actors on the stage, always on guard and constantly suspicious at the same time.

Enrique, when he left me in downtown Manhattan, warned me not to go wandering beyond 7th Avenue and not to go to 8th Avenue, which could be dangerous. I hadn't realized, or perhaps I didn't want to see, that very soon I would be fifty years old, but by virtue of the fact that my brother-in-law had told me where the dangerous area was, it's exactly where I went, disregarding his warning. I regretted it in a certain way, because all the favorable impressions that I had received from this enchanting city were soiled by the unexpected spectacle I came to witness. I saw a young white man walking on 41st Street, close to 8th Avenue, pass close to a half-empty parking lot, where he was attacked by a lurking gang of a dozen Blacks who beat him and took everything he had on him. The poor youngster screamed, cried, and begged for pity, but the assailants kept on hitting him, then ran away with the spoils, leaving him half-naked on the sidewalk.

I couldn't believe that such a thing would happen in the middle of the day, with so many people all around. I was on the other side of the street, watching the assault, and most curious it was that two white men standing at my side were looking with fear at this horrendous spectacle. When I asked them if we shouldn't do something, one of them said to me, "You must be crazy!" and both of them walked away.

French people are individualistic, but when an emergency arises or when there is a need to help an unknown person, they are always ready to intervene. After this episode, I understood that Americans were completely immersed in their own lives, with a complete lack of interest in whatever happened at their side. I understood also that in the States, each one is only taking care of himself, and nobody has time or the interest to be moved by other people's problems. In spite of all these negative aspects, thanks to my inquisitive spirit, I continued to examine everything I saw around me, and more than ever I decided to take a chance and come to live in that country, so different from all the others I had known.

I went to Newark to the immigration office to ask about my possibilities of remaining in the States. After waiting for more than an hour in line, behind Central Americans and Blacks from Caribbean Islands, a white officer, very polite, told me that these immigration questions were resolved by the consulate of the country where I was living, which meant that I had to return to Argentina to request a residency. I was a little disappointed, but I realized that the American people's strength came from determination and persistence, and I decided to emulate them.

My return to Argentina was just temporary, and I didn't expect it would take so long. My father always said, "If it were easy, everybody would be doing it!" He told me also that only the most stubborn and willful people succeeded in America. I saw, nevertheless, an anomaly existing in American life. Contrary to the immigration I had seen in France, where people like my father came with high educations, those who came to the USA were mostly poor and without education. And as curious as it could be, these same barefooted and hungry emigrants who came to America, once they became rich, and many did, became the worst working-class exploiters and bloodsuckers. Once they make money, they forgot the times when they were starving, and then most of them become genuinely indignant at the poor, whom they call lazy, looking with contempt at those who need help. These *nouveau riches*, once in politics, are the first to deny the working class the minimum wage, such social security as health care, universal free

education, and a good retirement. Their common expression is, "With my money!" That's the American paradox.

When I received my residence documents, delivered by the American Consulate in Buenos Aires, I said goodbye to my family and my friends. The last day I spent with my parents in Marcos Paz was the most moving I ever had in my entire life. We wouldn't stop talking, and my father said constantly that we were "The last of the Mohicans!" When by chance I mentioned to my father my trip to Chicago and bragged about the draft-dodger Johnny, because he didn't want to go to Vietnam, my father told me ironically, "And so, you consider your Johnny as a hero? It's impossible to fight for an ideal or against a government by abandoning the country! The real heroes are all these kids who remained in the United States, beaten by the police and struggling against a rotten administration! Unless it is a case similar to ours, when we were completely routed and forced to run away to avoid torture and death, not having any other alternative but to leave the country!"

Then, after a moment of reflection, he continued, "I admire those who remained fighting, because those who opt to run away are cowards! I am sorry, but for me, your Johnny is a coward! In Russia, for instance, Trotsky—whose ideas I don't share—no matter how much he had been threatened, he refused to leave Russia and had to be expelled by the Cheka!" At that time, Stalin didn't dare liquidate Trotsky; war was around the corner, and he didn't want to alienate the workers' opinion.

Sadness prevailed as I left, and I could never have guessed that I was seeing my father for the last time. A few months later, at the age of 75, he abandoned this world, as he used to say, "To become something different with the Eternal Return, which always existed and will never end; nothing is created and nothing disappears; I will always exist in the Universe, I say exist and not live!"

In Buenos Aires too, before my going overseas, my comrades from the Veterans' Club held a big farewell party for me, everybody wishing me good luck. Many envied me, saying that there was no more future in Argentina and that I was smart to leave the country. Jeannot, encouraged by Eve, at the last moment said that he would join me very soon in America.

Chapter 2

This time, I would be in the United States on my own, because Maya went with all her family to Beirut, Lebanon, where Enrique had been named director of the Otis Elevator Co., and I had to fend for myself. From the Kennedy airport, I took a taxi to the Mayflower hotel, where a previous reservation had been made. After a short while following my arrival, I realized that this hotel wasn't right for my pocket, and I moved three days later to the Mansfield hotel, on 50th Street, between Broadway and 8th Avenue. It was a much more modest hotel, but the price was more in accordance with my circumstances, even though the area was too noisy and visibly insecure.

During the first three nights, I couldn't close my eyes, moved by the emotion that overtook all my senses. My room was on the sixth floor, and through the window I could see the Empire State Building, with all the lights on around the clock. The sirens of police cars, ambulances, and fire trucks broke the silence all night long. I could also hear the howlings of prostitutes and drunkards coming from the street. I was filled with a strange sensation, and I had never expected to be impressed to such a point.

I came to the States with \$5,000, which I deposited in Citibank the following day, feeling that I could remain idle a couple of months. I wanted to enjoy these feelings, which many times I had experienced in watching American movies! I don't know why at that time, perhaps because of thoughtlessness, tiredness, or exhaustion, I didn't want to think that I was living in the most capitalistic country in the world. I wasn't seeing close to me, just at my side, the most beautiful of American youth, the hippies, the Black Power activists, and the anti-militarists, who were being thrashed by the police for protesting against the Vietnam war. I didn't listen to their unheard screams, those freedom lovers who needed to be supported by veteran revolutionaries like me. It was, perhaps, the only moment of hesitation in my life, when I did not side with the fighters for freedom and socialism. It seemed that I was living in another world. I didn't pay enough attention to North Vietnam's stunning Tet offensive, leaving the Marines desperate while defending the US Embassy in Saigon. I shouldn't have been indifferent to these brave Vietnamese who, after defeating the French at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, had enough stamina to fight against the strongest nation in the world. It was the time of the presidential elections, and what I had feared happened: Nixon was elected, an event that meant that the Vietnam war would intensify. Years later, Reagan and Thatcher called this capitalistic phase "neoliberalism."

A month later, I was surprised by Jeannot's arrival in New York, and every evening we would both be strolling on Broadway, amazed at and enjoying this special feeling of living in America. Jeannot had in mind to open a French restaurant, but very soon he understood that it wasn't so easy to get a loan, and very much against his wish, he began working as a chef in a Manhattan French restaurant. I found him very disappointed and depressed, and I realized also that he was drinking more than usual, while I hadn't had a drink in several months, making me feel good, though I was afraid that at any time I would succumb again to the temptation with the very well-known, ominous consequences.

I saw once in the ads section of the *France-Amerique* newspaper that employees were needed at the Les Crepes restaurant chain. Guided more by curiosity than by need, I

went to the indicated address. The owner of these restaurants, Madame Lafontaine, asked me if I had ever worked in a restaurant, to which I said, "No." She asked me then if I could cook, receiving one more time a "No" from me. Then she asked me if I knew something about restaurant administration, receiving the same negative answer from me, and I was already considering leaving this place, seeing that this ad wasn't for me. Suddenly Madame Lafontaine, looking in my eyes, asked me, always in French, if I could start working immediately. I was surprised by this question, but smiling, she said, "I can see that you are intelligent, and I know that you will learn the trade very quickly, because we urgently need a manager for our New Haven branch. The previous one was a drunkard who left us without warning, and we don't have anybody to replace him. I am sure you will like it; it is a nice place in Connecticut, and you will have a wage of \$200 per week, in addition to a commission on the sales, including all your food and drinks."

New Haven is an old traditional city, and when I arrived at the restaurant, I realized that the majority of our personnel were French or Latinos, making my work easier. All of them very soon found out that I was a beginner in the job, and they tried to help me as much as they could. Many times after closing the restaurant, I went to have a drink with cooks or waiters, from whom I learned something very important about American women. They told me that a completely different strategy should be applied with the native females. I should first of all remember, if I happen to have a date with an American lady, that they are scared of romantics. The best thing to do was to remain cool, without using the courtship methods of Latin America, not even to try to hold her hand, an act that would usually make the American women uncomfortable. The time would come—my new etiquette teachers were saying—when she would take the initiative and touch my hand, saying the famous, "Your place or my place?"

I am able to corroborate that my teachers were right after my very first personal experience, and I remained grateful to them for saving me some important time that is usually wasted in seducing a Latin American lady. The first time I went on a date with an American girl, a beautiful blonde named Clementine, whom I met at the Mad Russian, a cafe with music, we drank, we danced, and I didn't say a word, being a good learner, not even trying to touch her hand; half an hour later, she told me that she lived very close to the place and that we could go to her apartment. We spent a beautiful night together, unforgettable; American women are very experienced and sensual in bed. When the following morning, once dressed and ready to part, I asked her when we could meet again, she just looked at me and said, "We will see, goodbye!" I had a crazy desire to jump and give her a big kiss of gratitude, because when you spend a night with a Latin lady, you belong to her forever, and she doesn't let you go.

Something that happened several years later comes to my mind, when a married American friend of mine living in Miami acquired a Latin mistress and asked me once, "Listen, Michael, you lived so many years in South America; what can you tell me about the Latin women?" to which I told him, "The most difficult is how to get rid of them; they will fight to not let you go!" He became pale, scared of having problems when the time to break with his little Latin girlfriend came.

I started to work as a manager of the restaurant Les Crepes in New Haven, where I moved the following day, as agreed with Madame Lafontaine. By my parents' experience from operating the Caucase restaurant in the Latin Quarter, I knew that it was a very demanding occupation, but until then I didn't realize how much more enslaving it

was in the United States. I had to work an average of twelve hours a day, not only managing the restaurant, but also taking care of supplies, provisions, and beverages, in addition to checking the food quality, doing the employees' payroll, greeting the customers when the receptionist had her day off, taking care of the bookkeeping, and making late bank deposits. My only day off was Sunday, when the restaurant was closed, because it was in a mall, and all the offices around it also closed that day.

One day, by coincidence, when I was talking with a steady customer, I learned that Michelin Tire Co. had just moved to Long Island and was hiring. I made up my mind to see if I could get a job in that company again, because I recognized that I would never get used to the restaurant business, and much less to being a manager. The following day, as I did every morning, I talked with Madame Lafontaine, telling her as if by the way that I had important business to finish and I needed to take a day off. Our barman, who was very efficient, could replace me during that time. Michelin Tire was housed in a huge building in Lake Success, in Long Island, about forty minutes by train from Manhattan. When I arrived at the place, I told the receptionist that I was looking for a job in the company, and I showed her an old Michelin Tire business card that I had saved from Argentina. She left with my calling card, and almost immediately I was received by the vice-director, Marc Baumont. He was delighted to learn that I had worked for ten years with the company in Argentina, and especially that I had spent much time with the very well-known engineer Rene Lavery. Monsieur Baumont asked the personnel manager to come to his office, and in no time I was incorporated into the Technical Service. I would begin to work on January 27, 1969, or within two months, and I accepted the offer with enthusiasm. It was noon and lunch time, so when I was leaving the boss's office, a French employee who witnessed our meeting invited me to eat with him. I didn't pay him much attention; I just remembered seeing him working in Monsieur Baumont's office. He heard all our conversation and wanted above all to shake my hand for having fought in the Free French Forces during the war.

While eating in a restaurant in that industrial district, my new admirer couldn't stop wondering that Rene Lavery had been my boss in Argentina, because Rene had stayed an entire year working with the company in the United States on a special assignment related to the tire's quality problems, his speciality. I realized that Lavery was respected everywhere he had worked, being one of Michelin's best engineers. This fact was confirmed by Maurice Enssau, my host, a middle-aged man, short and fat, with whom with time I became good friends. He said also that Michelin was producing the best tires in the world, but in the human aspect—he looked around and warned me in a low voice to be careful—it was a huge, cruel machine without a human heart. "Can you imagine," whispered Maurice and again peered around, to see if other Michelin employees were around, "during the war, while you were fighting against the Nazis, Michelin was manufacturing tires for the German Wehrmacht!" I already knew it, because about that topic I had many arguments with Lavery in Argentina, who said impudently, "So as to be able to produce tires for the French consumers—who so badly needed them—we had the obligation to deliver eighty per cent of our production to the German army; and we didn't have another choice, because we couldn't leave the French people without tires!"

At that time I didn't want to argue, because I respected Lavery very much, in spite of his efforts to convince me that Marshal Petain did the right thing in declaring Paris

"an open city," avoiding its destruction by German bombs. "Paris is an historical city, and we couldn't take the risk of seeing it erased!" I answered angrily that London, Moscow, Warsaw, and other cities invaded and destroyed by the Nazis were also historical! I tried always to avoid arguments with Lavery, because in addition to the fact that we were getting along well, I was learning a lot from him, with the result that I acquired in our guild the distinction of being known as a knowledgeable tire engineer. After a good while, when I became very close with Maurice Enssau, he told me that when Monsieur Baumont hired me, he sent a telegram to Clermont Ferrand, Michelin's main office, asking for my references while working in Argentina. Then, laughing, he said that the answer came as, "Michel Burenko, good tire engineer, efficient employee, but likes women too much!"

When the people at Les Crepes learned that I was leaving my manager's job, it was one more stroke of misfortune for Madame Lafontaine. She said that it looked like her New Haven branch was cursed, as that was where all her problems originated; when it wasn't a search for a manager, some other kind of disagreeable problem would occur. I moved again from the State of Connecticut to the State of New York, to Great Neck, where I rented an apartment at 8 Welwyn Road, ten minutes by car from Lake Success, where I would be working.

As a result of my long experience in the rubber industry, almost at once I felt again in my natural environment, because I knew my trade very well. I felt at ease working in that industry, where the efficient American system was applied, allowing everything to be done faster and easier. As long as I had French, American, or English bosses, everything went well, without any kind of problem, but unfortunately, when Monsieur Baumont was transferred to France, a new German director, Herr Klingmann, was sent to us. Everybody knew that I had fought in the Free French Forces during WW II, and almost from the beginning I noticed an antagonism from the German employees, who had served in the German army or in the Hitler youth.

I spent my first vacation in Tucuman, where everybody was happy to see me, and I was relaxed upon seeing that after my father's death, Nelly brought my mother to live with her, on Suipacha Street, where she was treated like a queen. My relationship with my son seemed to improve slowly, too slowly, and I didn't yet see any warm feeling from him for me. When I returned from my vacation, I was told at my work that I would be relocated to Houston, Texas, to be in charge of testing tires in the Central zone. Jeannot, meanwhile, not seeing any future in his work and not ready to adapt himself to the monotony of kitchen work, decided to return to Buenos Aires.

During our farewell party in a Manhattan restaurant, we met two light mulatto girls from Guadeloupe who were sitting close to our table and talked French. Jeannot didn't pay too much attention to the one who was sitting close to him, while I was intrigued by the one who was close to me, Juliette Dubuisson. She was much younger than I and lived with the only relative she had in New York, an old aunt; she worked as a cashier at Macy's. It was certainly the most painful and most incongruous adventure of my entire life, because at that time I was drinking out of control, and Juliette was slick to the point that she coaxed me without my realizing it for several years. I never understood it, nor could I remember why—certainly I was drunk that day—but the fact was that one day I found myself married to her.

At the end of 1970, I drove down to Houston, Texas, to 2606 West 18th Street,

where I had rented an apartment that would be my home for the time being. I made the trip by car, driving my brand new Oldsmobile with care, having already lost two beautiful vehicles that had been completely smashed during accidents while I was drunk. I loved Texas from the very first moment I arrived in that state, and even now I believe that it is the best state in the United States. It looks more like a country than a state, completely different from the rest of the country or from any other country. The following year, I had enough money to buy my first house in Houston, at 11207 Ensbrook Rd., in the southwest part of the city, in a nice middle-class neighborhood, with many Latinos. Everything was enchantment and seduction in Texas: the people, the climate, and especially the contagion of everybody's apparent happiness, where drinking out of control didn't seem to bother anybody.

My new working friends became Albert Sandy, a native of California, and Don Grosser, a several-generations Texan of Norwegian descent. The three of us, every Friday after work, used to go to the Coliseum to watch wrestling and drink beer, ending the night at any of the numerous go-go-girls places surrounding the area. Once, one of my bosses, Mister Peterson, came from Lake Success, and with him, once our test tire inspection was over, we went to eat in the downtown area. Later, we went to drink at different bars; even though Peterson was already tipsy, he insisted on having some more. He didn't know that Texans always wore their cowboy hats, as I had mine on, including the traditional boots.

Peterson suddenly became vulgar and rude, complaining loudly and demanding to know why "these Texans" had their hats on inside houses, an offense in New York. I realized that some patrons were looking at him and becoming nervous; one of them even asked me if "He," pointing at Peterson with his head, was with me. I told him that He "was a nice guy, but he had had one too many!" The huge Texan told me, while showing an unfriendly smile on his face, to be careful, before something bad could happen to Peterson. Peterson was already out of control, and impelled by the alcohol he had inside his organism, he came close to this big Texan, telling him, "Remove your hat, cowboy!" If it hadn't been such a serious situation, it could have been laughable to watch the fat-short New Yorker, with his easy-going face, playing the "macho" with the wicked-looking, tall, lanky Texan. Reaching the end of his patience and being observed by everyone in the bar, the Texan looked at both of us and said to Peterson very slowly, "Listen, my Yankee friend, we Texans remove our hats only on two occasions: first, when we go to bed with a lady; second, when we start a fight!" We were looked at by everybody in the building with an ironical smile, while the Texan was removing his hat, ready to put it on a table. Then I reacted, putting my hand on his elbow, saying to him, "Listen my friend, Houston is my home, and I feel like a Texan too, but my friend from New York is a good guy, but he is drunk! Don't get upset; I will take him out of here!" and I grabbed Peterson by his arm with strength, he not comprehending what had happened, and I dragged him out of the bar, to the loud sound of applause coming from the spectators, which we heard when we were reaching the street.

The Texans are so particular that I found much similarity in their behavior to my own, deeply rooted inside myself, and I felt as if I had been living with them all my life. If I had to believe in reincarnation, I would certainly have believed that in my previous life I was a cowboy from Texas. I think that the Texas police is the best in all the states, tolerant and paternalistic with drunks. Many times I was stopped by the police while driving inebriated, and instead of giving me a ticket, they would tell me to go back home

or to go to rest to a hotel.

Of course, they weren't as tolerant with people from other states. When I entered Texas for the first time in driving from New York, with my car bearing plates from New York, I was stopped immediately by the police. They gave me a ticket for speeding, even though all the cars were passing me. Then later, with Texas plates on my car, I could drive as I wanted, completely drunk without any problem or without being bothered. When many years later, I moved to Georgia and drove slowly to Houston with Georgia plates on my car, as soon as I crossed the Texas border, I was stopped by a policeman on a motorcycle, who gave me a ticket for speeding.

I loved to spend the weekends in Galveston, where the people were swimming, eating, playing, and especially drinking. They were always smiling, especially the Texas women, who seeing that they were looked at, without exception would say, "Hi!" with a very friendly and sensual flare. This state in size is almost one and a half times larger than France or Spain, with a natural incomparable beauty, vast plains with an Asian look, mountains with snow in wintertime, as in Amarillo, with a coast full of beautiful beaches, including Corpus Christi, Padre Island, and others. There was also the incomparable excitement of living close to the Mexican border, where quite often I would spend weekends by myself or with friends. This entire region with its Tex-Mex population reminded me very much of North Argentina, but with much more activity and progress. Texas also has an infinity of typical cities, like Dallas and Lubbock, not to mention Houston, the state capital Austin, or the historical San Antonio. I think that it was there that I lived the best years of my life, in spite of having to endure a series of disagreeable situations, egotism, and constant fights with my mulatto wife.

Michelin didn't as yet have a test tire driving track, and every year we would rent an entire shop in Las Vegas for six weeks, where three French test drivers would come from Clermont Ferrand to test our own and competitors' tires. These tests were made while driving at different speeds, on all terrains with all kinds of tires of various quality and brands. I loved to participate in these test-driving performances, which were very exciting. It was done until 1974, when the speed limit, until then non-existent, was introduced in Nevada and some other states. It was the time when the Arab countries imposed an oil boycott against the West for its support of Israel.

I was the head of the American group, in charge of all the operations related to new tire- testing, and I had several other important responsibilities that I liked. Once I met a prostitute in a gambling casino, Gretchen, of German origin, who came to the States after marrying an American soldier who was stationed in Germany. He had met her in a Frankfurt night club, but once he came back to the States, he dropped her, discovering that she was a drug addict. Actually, she was living with a Black who had abandoned his family for her. In other words, he was her pimp; he seldom worked and lived off the money she earned. She drank a lot, for which reason we got along at first sight. She was very bright, intelligent, and quite educated, but I found out only later about her drug addiction.

Our affair was very short-lived, and once, after an argument, she disappeared, but not before stealing my credit cards, on which she charged several thousands dollars, which I had to pay back in order to keep good credit with my bank. I never saw her again, and as a matter of fact, she wasn't the first prostitute who robbed me while I was drunk, something that fortunately never happened when I was sober.

Chapter 3

In March 1973, the last American troops left South Vietnam. And whatever is said against Jane Fonda, I never stopped admiring her for her guts and her belief. In 1974, President Nixon resigned, and the victorious North Vietnamese soldiers smashed through the gates of Independence Palace in Saigon, defeating the South Vietnamese. We Free French veterans expected it, because if the French Colonial Army, the best at that time, had been defeated by Vietnam, no other army in the world could beat them on the battlefield, no matter how sophisticated they were.

The same year, as an American citizen, I realized that I hadn't seen my mother for several years, and I decided to visit her during my vacation. Before I left for Argentina, I learned with pain that Mister de Grand Pre had died at the age of 93. In Buenos Aires, once again I was reunited with Tante Liesel, Teo, and Delia. Then I went to Tucuman to see my mother, who wanted to come to live with me in the States. I was received as if it were a holiday, because aside from seeing my mother, Nelly, and my son (already married), I saw a lot of old friends, one of them my old buddy Movsovich.

My mother told me that she wanted to spend her last years close to her son, and I agreed to take her back to Houston with me. My drinking habit hadn't diminished, and my relationship wasn't getting any better with Juliette, who decided now to pursue her studies at Houston University, categorically refusing to work and demanding that I keep taking care of her. My situation at work, as I was surrounded by all these German ex-Nazis who were full of hatred and who fought against me during the war, wasn't helping to improve my standing with Michelin. With all this turmoil coming from several sides, I have to confess that unfortunately I neglected my mother. I traveled a lot as a part of my job, and I didn't realize that during my absence, Juliette was making my mother's life miserable. Because of diabetes, my mother was half-blind, and she wasn't self-sufficient due to her age. I know that I should have taken better care of her, and I accept the blame, but at that time I didn't realized how reckless I was.

After a period of indecision we decided with Maya, who was in Beirut, to send my mother to Lebanon, where she might find better treatment. My mother stayed for eight months with me, then five months with Maya, but after a short period of time, she became convinced that she couldn't rely on her children. Disappointed and frustrated, she returned to Argentina, where Nelly received my mother like a real daughter, which she always had been for her.

I never stopped corresponding with my friends, with the exception of my Spanish Civil War comrade Juan Mayol; I lost contact with Juan because I had a rented car stolen from me in Kansas City, with all my belongings, including my black book with his address. Bobby Assie and I never interrupted writing to each other, sharing all the aspects of our private lives. Bobby didn't complain about his economic situation, because he was very well paid as a personnel manager at Pechinet; his problem was more of a physiological and sexual nature with regard to the weaker sex. During all the years I knew Bobby, he always attracted the most beautiful women wherever we went, and his attractiveness to women forced us to be cautious before introducing our girlfriends to him. I think we were plain envious of his success with the girls. When he left the hospital with a missing leg and a twisted arm, the women suddenly lost all interest for him. Then

began his psychological problem. On several different occasions when he had an opportunity to take a woman to bed, he sensed the occasional partner's aversive looks toward him when the partner saw the mutilated part of his body. It brought me back in memory to my own experience, when I was wounded in the Libyan desert and I scared a whore with my scars in an Alexandria brothel.

Bobby, trying to avoid this humiliating situation, on other occasions when taking a lady to bed would explain to her how he had lost his leg and that he had had to wear a prosthetic limb since then. This tactic didn't work either, because as a result of feminine curiosity, the lady would never fail to ask him about how the mechanism worked. She would brag about how good it was, telling him that she never would have guessed when seeing him dressed that one of his legs was missing. Anyhow, no matter how hard he tried, each time he was undressing he would catch a look of curiosity directed at his body, as if it were a phenomenon worthwhile to look at, and he had to endure indiscreet questions about the mechanism of his leg. After several more attempts, followed by a series of unsuccessful experiences to satisfy his erotism, he came to the conclusion that for him nothing worked with women.

In one of the last letters, he wrote to me with joy that something new had happened in his life, something that would allow him from now on to have a normal sexual life. It had occurred by chance, when once he invited several friends to a party at his apartment in Paris. They had a wonderful time, ate well, and had a lot of wine to drink, until the end of the reunion, when his guests left. Then he realized that a young Spaniard named Luis, who came with somebody, still was there asleep on a sofa. It was late; Luis had missed the last subway, and Bobby offered him the chance to spend the night with him. Of course, as a bachelor, he had but one bed, which they shared. It seemed that something happened during the night while they were lying together, and since then, Luis had moved to live with Bobby as his new and permanent "friend."

At the beginning of 1975, my war companion announced that he was coming to visit me with his "friend" Luis, with whom he said I could speak Spanish. The sexual preferences never bothered me, and I was happy for my buddy that he found a solution to his sexual problem. His "friend" Luisito—as he was called—was a very nice guy, even though when speaking, he mixed French with Spanish words. In spite of that, he was very sociable and an excellent cook. He, too, before becoming a homosexual, had been straight, was married, and had been very successful with women. Very proud of himself, Luis showed us a picture of a very well known American movie actress, with whom he had an affair while she was living in Madrid. On the back of the photo, which he always carried with him, was written in English, "To my friend Luis," and it was signed, Ava Gardner.

We spent a wonderful time together, even though I was dreading Luisito's "little woman's" reaction, for he was extremely jealous of my friendship with Bobby. He wanted to be always the most important person in the world for Bobby. From this situation began intrigues, and of course Juliette was adding fuel to the flame to the extent that this situation became unbearable for all of us. The worst of all was that after spending three weeks at home, where I offered them a friendly hospitality, they returned to Le Cannet, on the Cote d'Azur, where they had lived since Bobby took his retirement; Bobby was angry and resentful, and he broke our friendship of many years.

Several things were deteriorating in different sectors of my life, not only with my

friends from France, my mother, and my wife, but especially with Michelin. On one occasion, a new boss, also a German who bragged that he belonged to the "Hitlerjunge" during the war, Herr Hinderberger, came from Lake Success to our Houston branch. He asked me once to write a report about different tire brands' recapability (how many times a tire could be retreaded), in comparison to Michelin's tires. When I asked him if he wanted a detailed report, Herr von Hinderberger told me in front of two other employees, Micky Zambellas and Billy Graeter, "We Germans are enemies of long reports. During the last war, we killed six million Jews, and we never made a report about it!"

When I heard these words, I felt that my blood stopped circulating in my veins, and a profound oppression took over my entire being, but I did not yet know what to do. I am of a slow reaction, but I know myself pretty well, and I know that I can become dangerous when I lose a grip on myself. I become blind like the bull seeing red, completely unmanageable, for I was unable to calm myself. I said immediately that I wasn't feeling well and that I had to see a doctor at once. When I left the office, I didn't know what to do—whether to return and to kill this s.o.b. Nazi or to leave Michelin, which was employing such fascists! Still undecided, when I returned the following day to my office, Hinderberger had already left and returned to Lake Success.

A month later, I received a letter from my boss Klingmann, announcing to me that I had been relocated to Atlanta. I was removed from the Technical Division and was transferred to the Leasing Department, a real demotion.

In November 1975, I left for Atlanta, while Juliette remained in our house in Houston to pursue her studies at the university.

Arriving from Texas, I didn't have a favorable impression of Georgia, and my impression of Atlanta was even worse, because it was far away from the sea, which I liked so much. But after living several years in Atlanta, not only did I become fond of this multiracial city, but it became definitely my city forever. I didn't feel comfortable at Michelin's Atlanta branch either, where everybody knew that I had been transferred and demoted. My new job was to travel in six southeastern states to check on the tires that were leased to important bus and trucking companies. Needless to say, my new boss was also a German, Carl Stenzal, who never expressed his political opinions, thus allowing us to have good relationship. My previous boss, Torban, had fought against us in the Wehrmacht, but he wasn't a Nazi and he was also a good working companion.

Of all my business trips, I liked going to Florida the most, because at least in Miami, after my work was done, I could enjoy the beach and go swim. After a short while, I bought a two-story house in Jonesboro, at 8964 Saddlewood Drive, south of Atlanta, where Juliette came to spend her winter vacation and also to celebrate New Year's Eve. The tension between both of us was about to explode, for which reason we hadn't made any plan for the festivities. We had been drinking a lot, and instead of celebrating, Juliette unexpectedly began insulting me, saying that I wasn't giving her enough money to live comfortably in Houston. Out of control, and without any reason, she screamed at me that I was a stingy old bag of wind who "didn't want to die." I answered her back that she was a lazy, ungrateful parasite who didn't recognize what I had done for her. Then, out of control, with a mad look in her eyes and while screaming, she tried to hit me with a bottle.

This humiliating and shameful fight ended up as a scandal in our new neighborhood. It was followed by court intervention, and a lawyer friend of mine handled

this case, which ended in April 1976, when we received our legal divorce papers at the Clayton County courthouse. I didn't want to drag this nauseating situation out any longer, and I therefore accepted the settlement she wanted, giving her my house in Houston (all paid for), a brand new car, all the furniture, and a good amount of money.

Now, I could start to breathe again, after having lived a hell of a life with Juliette. I learned later that she had always taken advantage of me, betraying me with other men. Several months after the divorce, she began calling me, but I made it clear that everything was over between us and that I didn't want to see her ever again. Already living by myself in my big house, I had a new experience in the form of an American-style affair, "your place or my place," with two different ladies. I cannot omit to mention these two cases, both of them of a short duration, one in Atlanta and the other in Miami. During both adventures with these forty-year-old Southern ladies, I never stopped being impressed by their independent spirit, which for me was a new and a different kind of feminism. These ladies wanted my company only as a way to satisfy their sexual need, without ever talking about love or commitment and without asking me for money. I was also surprised to see that usually they wanted to share the restaurant bills, offers that of course I never accepted. The two ladies were different in their personalities, but they had a similar attitude of independence. When they left, one by one, they said goodbye with a cold kiss, one leaving for Virginia and the other returning to California. They didn't even show any interest in corresponding with me or in asking me to come see them. I discovered in these ladies a new kind of woman whom I never came across in Europe, Africa, or in Latin America.

Chapter 4

I always felt very comfortable with two ethnic groups, the French and all Latins, including Argentines, Spaniards, Mexicans, and others. From the very moment I had arrived in Houston, I became a member of the Alliance Francaise and the Casa Argentina. As soon as I came to Atlanta, I joined these organizations there, too. I made many friends at the Latin American Association, where I became vice-president in 1977. That year, in May, we had a Latin American judges and attorneys convention in Atlanta, celebrating with many parties in different private Latin American homes.

Norma, a Puerto Rican lady married to an American, was a member of the board of directors of the Latin American Association; she organized a reception at her house, and the members living in Atlanta were asked to pick up our guests from the convention center and bring them to her home. When I came to Norma's house with my three Argentine lawyers, several dozen guests were already mingling there, mostly men and very few women. I saw close to Norma a slim, blonde American lady with blue eyes, who turned out to be her neighbor and friend, whom she had asked to come to help her out, because she couldn't take care of so many guests. This blonde lady immediately attracted my attention and created an unexplainable magnetism and a feeling in my inner soul that in all my previous years I had never experienced, nor would I ever experience it again. I knew at once she would be my love and soulmate for the remainder of my life. Unfortunately, during the agitation and uproar created by the loud music customary in Latinos' gatherings, I barely could talk to her. Norma told me that Bernice, her neighbor, was leaving for a two-week vacation to Mexico, and there was no way I could see her before her departure.

I waited impatiently, with the two weeks seeming like two years. I never stopped thinking about Norma's blonde neighbor, and for the first time in my life, I was feeling like a teenager, thinking that she would not be at all attracted to me. Two weeks passed, and I made the call. After many calls and long phone conversations, a couple of months had passed, and she agreed to join me for dinner: it was on May 28, 1977. Bernice later became my wife, and almost immediately, I began to call her "Birdie," because she was a curious observer and as vivacious as a sparrow. She was not only a beautiful, alert woman, but she also knew how to follow a conversation of any kind with interest, and I found that she had a wonderful outlook on life itself, while being elegant. She was the wife inside my being, the one I had always dreamed of having. I understood that Birdie was the first woman in my life with whom I was honestly and profoundly in love; she was made for me.

Early in the morning on September 28, 1977, Nelly called me from Tucuman to tell me that my mother had died. The previous day, as usual, my mother had dined with all her family; she had looked good, laughed a lot, and had her glass of wine as usual. Then she went to bed and never woke up. She died at the age of 84 and was buried in the city's cemetery alongside my father's grave. I came to believe that she decided to stop living, as old people often can do. She dreamt of spending her last years with her children, but realizing that she couldn't count on them, she willed herself to die. I remained for a long time crushed by remorse and pain.

Even though I was drinking a lot, I never neglected my work, to the point

that many of our customers, such as Ronnie Round in Harlingen and Ronnie Friedman in Tampa, always considered me one of the best tire engineers in the USA. That was the reason I was surprised to see myself being harassed at Michelin. I learned that several years before, on another occasion, an inspector working with test tires had had problems in the company and ended up dead in Long Island. The local police declared that it was a suicide, even though his body had sixteen knife wounds. I had an office at the Motor Convoy of Hapeville, to which Michelin was leasing the truck tires. I don't know if I began having suspicions or just strange ideas, but the fact was that one day in November, when I came late to my work, I saw the mechanics at the Motor Convoy looking at the window of my office, where there was a bullet hole in the window close to my desk. Not far from there, Interstate 75 passed, and it was possible for anybody driving on this highway to shoot at my office from a passing vehicle. The question was whether the shot was casual or intentional, whether the shot was made in the direction of my office to hit me. The mechanics surrounding me looked at me with compassion, for they believed that the bullet was meant for me and that I had been saved only by coming late as a result of having made a call on a customer.

I realized that something was up against me, mainly when my boss Stenzal informed me that I had been transferred to the warehouse on Jimmy Carter Boulevard. I began the year 1978 as a plain worker, wearing a uniform and loading and unloading tires.

With Bernice, whom I called "Birdie," the passion was increasing daily, but sometimes, unfortunately, it was clouded by my alcohol abuse. Birdie had a very strong character, formed possibly by her having had her first-class ladies' apparel store for many years, with a lot of employees to direct. Her store was very well known, because she brought the most exquisite and latest models from the best domestic and European manufacturers.

After working several months loading and unloading tires as a simple hand in the Norcross Michelin warehouse, I realized that I was like a squirrel in a cage. I talked to my then-lawyer Jim White, who advised me to start a lawsuit at once against Michelin. He said that I didn't deserve such humiliating treatment after working for ten years in the States as a senior field engineer in the company and the same amount of time in Argentina, only to become a simple hand in a warehouse. Trying to see if it was a misunderstanding or whether a plot had been organized against me, I wrote a letter to Monsieur Francois Michelin, the owner and president of Michelin in France. I explained how the Nazis were imposing themselves, and I also mentioned the insult made against the Jews by Hinderberger.

A couple of weeks later, I received an order from Lake Success to come immediately to that office. I was happy, thinking that the "big boss" from Clermont Ferrand would rehabilitate an old employee like me, and I was optimistic as I took the plane to New York.

I was received at our main office in Lake Success by the new director, Monsieur Paul Gorce, and a sales manager. I realized at once that I was completely wrong in my optimism that the injustice committed against me would be repaired. Both of my "bosses" were serious, with tense faces, and they greeted me coldly, telling me that the "big boss," Francois Michelin, had forwarded my letter to them. Very solemn, they told me that they would like to give me some advice: it was to return at once to Atlanta

and to obey my superiors, if I didn't want the situation to worsen for me. Then they emphasized that I shouldn't have this crazy idea to write to the "big boss" again. They dismissed me without even shaking my hand, only saying that I should return immediately to Atlanta.

As soon as I came back home, I went to see Jim White, my attorney, whom I still trusted at that time, and we began a lawsuit against Michelin. It was another painful situation in my life, because my friends considered me crazy for trying to sue a big corporation, and I understood then that my case was lost even before it began. At that time, Jim White drank as much as I did, and he was completely incompetent, not knowing how to present my case to the court. It became unraveled, then lost in the complicated web of American justice. His ineptitude and negligence were so patent that he missed the opportunity to send my case to a jury, where without any doubt I would have won. The time then wasn't as favorable either, because if it were now I would have received my compensation for the humiliation that Michelin inflicted on me, and mainly for letting their German executives insult the Jews killed in the Holocaust. Since then, too much water has run under the bridge, and it is too late to cry about spilled milk!

The incompetence and lack of honesty on Jim White's part was discovered later on in 1998, when he was disbarred by the Georgia Bar Association. But where I was concerned, I remained unemployed, and I lost the special retirement benefit from Michelin, and in that company's vendetta, executives always gave me bad references when I needed to apply for a new job. If I would mention Michelin as a reference, the company either would not give any references or else it would give bad ones, and if I would omit that I worked for that company, my possible employer would ask me, "What did you do during the last twenty years?"

I had to sell my house, but I didn't want to sell my lands in Texas nor the properties I had in Argentina. I went for a short period of time to work for Kelly-Springfield in Houston, but I came back to Atlanta, because I couldn't live far away from Birdie.

Back in Atlanta and still with my alcoholic inclination, I tried several different trades for a living, but without any real result. I knew that women don't like losers, and I felt that I was going down physically and morally.

In 1980, I went to Argentina to see if I could do something on our sugar cane plantation in Mista, but after a couple of months, I realized that it was a project of several years. I thought also that I could work with my son Georgito, who was renting his Wurlitzer jukeboxes to be played in bars.

I was again like a squirrel in a cage, and I went to Buenos Aires at the crucial moment of my life. July 4th is Independence Day in the United States, and as an American citizen I participated in the festivities at the American embassy, getting drunk. Then came July 9th, the Argentine Independence Day, and feeling also Argentine, I got drunk again in our Veterans Club, with my old friend Jeannot. When July 14, Bastille Day, came, an event we used to celebrate with special splendor in the club, I found again a very good opportunity to drink to excess, to the point that Jeannot had to take me to his house, because I couldn't manage myself. Every time, more and more I felt that something wrong was happening with me.

I don't know, and even now I don't remember how it happened, but I found myself suddenly in a Miami motel room. When I got up and looked around, I found the

room full of empty bottles, and looking at myself in the mirror, I shivered to see the horrible face reflected in it. I was hungry, dirty, and shaking, and I looked like a ghost.

It was August 14, 1980, and without losing a single minute, I called Birdie in Atlanta, telling her that I was putting myself in her hands and that she could do whatever she wanted, because I couldn't take it any more; I was defeated. Very moved, Birdie told me to take the first plane available and come back to Atlanta.

I don't know why, but Jimmy McCormick's image came to my mind. I had seen him in Buenos Aires before I left for the States; he was just coming out of an alcoholic treatment center at the English Hospital. Then, a few years later, I saw another colleague from Nichimen, Reggie Rosen, at the Longchamps bar, in New York, and he told me that Jimmy died six months after he left the rehabilitation center. While we were drinking a Scotch, Reggie made this comment: "Sometimes it is difficult to stop drinking, and I think that's the reason why Jimmy died!" The day following my conversation with Birdie, I drove to the Miami airport in a car I had rented; it had been parked all this time in front of my room, and I still don't remember how it or I got there!

Birdie was already expecting me at the Atlanta airport, saying that she was taking me to the Doctor and Physicians Hospital. That was how I was booked in an alcoholic rehabilitation center on August 15, 1980, a date that remained engraved in my mind for the rest of my life. It was unforgettable, like the date of my second birth.

Chapter 5

Of all the good things that happened to me as a result of meeting Birdie, in addition to the pleasure of being at her side, the most important was being sent to the hospital to be cured of this alcoholic calamity that had enslaved me for so long.

Unfortunately, it was only in 1954 that finally alcoholism had been recognized as a medical malady, almost twenty years after Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob Smith founded Alcoholics Anonymous. Before that, for centuries, alcoholism had been considered as a lack of will, a sin, a curse, a perversion or whatever.

I am convinced that having been interned in the hospital wasn't enough to arrest my sickness without the help I received from an anonymous self-help organization to which I had been introduced while in the treatment center. This organization adopts a few simple principles, understandable to anyone at a normal intelligence level, and those principles allowed me, along with thousands of others, to achieve sobriety. The most important principles are as follows: Live one day at a time. Yesterday is gone and cannot be changed, for it is history. Tomorrow is unknown, it is a mystery, but today belongs to me, and today I take the decision not to drink. Nevertheless, it is important not to forget that "today" will be "yesterday" tomorrow, and then we will not be able to change it. I need to make amends to all the people I harmed, so as to be at peace with myself, and to help another alcoholic who still suffers. Bill Wilson said that the Alcoholics Anonymous program was a simple program for complicated people. More than ten years before going to a treatment center, I knew already that I couldn't stop drinking, for I had tried by all the ways and means to control my drinking, but to no avail. I need to be with people like myself, people who suffer the same disease, to feel the human magnetism of those who have suffered the consequences of alcoholism, for they are the only ones who can understand us.

Three weeks later, when I left the hospital, I already had a different outlook on the world and on life; I began going to the meetings, and I followed the steps of recovery, living one day at a time, without changing my atheism whatsoever. I understood that to help myself I needed to be involved with helping other alcoholics or drug addicts, and I began going once a week as a volunteer to the federal penitentiary in Atlanta. It was the time when in 1980 President Carter received with open arms 125,000 Cuban refugees, the famous "Marielitos." When these immigrants invaded the Florida shores, everybody understood that Castro had taken advantage of this situation to humiliate the United States by sending us the unadaptable, the mentally retarded, and the homosexuals, depleting his jails by letting most of the worst criminals go to Florida. After a short period of time, these same Cuban refugees were in jails again, this time in United States prisons. Many of them were alcoholics, and in 1980, I became the founder of the first self-help Spanish language group at the federal penitentiary of Atlanta, where I came to help along with other American alcoholics; I undertook this task seriously and with dedication for the following 19 years, without interruption.

A year later, these 1,800 Cuban inmates from the penitentiary in Atlanta rebelled against their detention, burning part of the prison, at a cost of a hundred million dollars. The rebellion lasted ten days, and once the uprising was quelled, all of the participants were scattered to other prison centers. It is known that in the United States about 70% of all inmates are put in jail for crimes committed while under the influence of

alcohol or drugs, and if they were helped to stop drinking, they would again become productive, happy, free citizens, instead of rotting in prisons.

About 10% of the American population has an alcohol problem similar to mine. It was during the meetings when we shared experiences that I learned about the human sufferings created by this poison we drank. I heard once an old "recuperating alcoholic" saying that his priest told him that he would go to hell if he kept on drinking, and he answered that he was right now in hell and wanted to get out of there. I heard many times poor and sick alcoholics saying that after spending the night in a shelter that cost one dollar, their major preoccupation during all the next day, especially in winter, was how to get a dollar for the coming night's shelter fee.

In 1985, I assisted the International Convention of A.A. in Montreal, which attracted 65,000 people. I heard a Mexican Catholic priest who, crying, told us about his fight with alcohol. He couldn't stop drinking, and sometimes he would go during the night to his little church to kneel in front of the Virgin, asking her what he had done to be punished so much with this alcoholic sin. He thought of killing himself, but one day he discovered the AA and stopped drinking, and since then, still being a good Catholic priest, he was grateful to this organization that gave him back his sobriety and especially his dignity. I heard another story of a big truck driver who told how he went with all his family on vacation while drunk and how he suddenly woke up in a hospital all bandaged. He was told that he had had an accident in which his wife and their three children were killed. Since then, he had joined AA, and he never had another drink.

In our group that went to the Atlanta penitentiary to work with alcoholics, I met somebody who could only be found in a book; he was called "Big Jack" and had been sober for forty years. He had received in that same prison the "message" (that's what we call it when somebody explains the steps of sobriety), and since then he had been doing what he called "restitution work," helping other alcoholics. "Big Jack," as his name suggests, was a huge man, and he certainly must have been a very attractive man when he was young. At the age of thirteen, while he was living in California, the ladies would pay him at that time \$1,000 to spend the weekend with him. He would say that he learned while very young that it was in the bank that the money was, and he robbed seventeen banks and forty-three gas stations. He spent a total of thirty years in different prisons in the correctional system, and still later, at the age of 80, he had the scars of the chain gangs on his ankles. Hard labor had been abolished about forty years ago in the USA.

"Big Jack" never worked in his entire life, and when at the age of 70 he got a cashier's job at a parking lot, he framed his first paycheck. Realizing that he had harmed too many people, mainly women who provided him money, "Big Jack" changed completely, deciding to help them as much as he could. He used to say, "When a woman is released from a jail, who is waiting for her outside? Pimps and drug pushers!" In what he called restitution, "Big Jack" would go to greet these poor wrecks at the prison, knowing that they were very vulnerable and would always be susceptible to returning to their underworld life. He took them to a shelter when they were released, where with his help they could learn a profession, and after that he would try to find them a decent job. His efforts had been crowned by success, because two Georgia governors and three Atlanta city mayors had congratulated him for his admirable deeds. "Big Jack" died serene in his bed at the age of 88, with 50 years of sobriety. We will never forget him.

My life changed too. I wasn't a slave of the bottle any more; I could live my

life without the fear of falling into temptation and being crippled by booze. Now came the moment to think about the material part of life, which I had neglected. I tried to help Birdie in her ladies apparel store, but I said that I would kill two or three women a day if I had to deal with these whimsical ladies. American women, it seemed then to me, or at least many of them, were spoiled, egotistical, exigent, and the most conceited in the world. Even though I didn't know anything about Birdie's business, I suggested to her to go to Europe to look for new and "dernier cri" (the utmost refinement) showy models for her boutique, the most luxurious in Atlanta.

I hadn't realized that it had been thirty years since I had been in Paris, and it was a good opportunity to go back to see all my old friends. Because of the Lebanese civil war, my sister Maya had moved several years before to Paris, where she was living with all her family close to de Place de l'Etoile. I became very emotional when I breathed the special air of Paris, the city of my youth; Birdie, with her natural kindness and her American practical spirit, suggested that we get all my friends together by inviting them to a banquet we organized in the Napoleon Hotel.

In addition to my sister and my brother-in-law Enrique, both Davoudian brothers, Jean and Robert, came to the banquet, along with their wives Marie and Agnes; also present were Suzanne and Serge Azarian, my war comrade Jojo Louzon with his wife Odile, and the other FFF veterans, including Jacques Tricot, with his wife Danielle, and some more French and American friends. This banquet was sensational and moving; it was so good to be with all these friends, relatives, and my two war comrades. The business side of the trip turned out to be very profitable, because Birdie returned to Atlanta with first-class showy dresses, and after this trip, it became a routine for her to go buy overseas.

I still had some more childhood friends whom I couldn't reach for my party and I was eager to see, and we organized another dinner for them. It was at Porte de Lilas, where Dede Montezin lived. He came with Mireille, his girlfriend, a distinguished lady who spent all the war time in Indochina, where her former husband was a functionary. Also attending were Andre Hagron, with Jackie his wife, and Claude Lanzemberg, who had recently lost his young wife. Once again reunited, we remembered our youth, while eating seafood and drinking wine, with the exception of me, who settled for sipping a soft drink. Needless to say, I returned to Neuilly s/Seine to walk on Perronet Street and visit the old neighborhood. I went to see the house where we lived for so many years. It was in the Latin Quarter, where I liked to walk, and I revisited my "Boul Mich," which forever will hold a place inside my heart. We spent a memorable time, in spite of the humidity, because Paris has nasty weather in wintertime.

My friend Dede had come down in the world very much physically and materially; he was living now on his father's paintings, the work of the famous painter Pierre Montezin from the Barbezou school. I couldn't have foreseen then that it was the last time I would see him. A few years later, I received a letter from Andre Hagron, who gave me the bad news. Dede, being very sick, went to the hospital for his check-up, and his girlfriend reproached herself for not looking inside the bag he carried with more care. The fact was that when on the fourth day he was told that his malady wasn't curable, he pulled a gun hidden in his bag and shot himself.

I had the feeling that it was only the beginning of other similar lamentable cases of friends disappearing, one after the next. We were getting old!

Chapter 6

I was very much missing my profession—tires and transportation—and when driving on the highways and seeing one of those huge eighteen-wheelers, trucks and trailers, I would always say that it was "the love of my life."

As it was practically impossible for me to find a good job, I decided to work as an independent consultant in my trade, and without any effort I began working as such with NTDRA of Washington (National Tire Dealers and Retreaders Association). For several years, I was appointed as a consultant for a similar Mexican association, ANDELLAC, bringing the latest news related to the tire industry to their annual convention in Acapulco in November. I was also selling used tire retreading equipment on commission for Wilson Tire of Atlanta. I participated, too, with ISCE, in building important tire retreading plants in Grenada, Jamaica, Costa Rica, Argentina, Brazil, and other countries. When I went for a three-month assignment to build a retreading plant for Construtora Andrade Gutierrez S.A. from Belo Horizonte, the largest building company in the world, I took advantage of being in Brazil to see again my childhood friend Popol Henot, who was still living in Rio de Janeiro.

I realized that both of us had aged, and we lamented the loss of our friend Dede Montezin, with whom we always had such fun during our childhood. The following year, in 1983, I convinced my wife Birdie to come with me to Brazil for her buying trip and at the same time have the opportunity to meet my old friend Popol and his wife Alcyone. It was also the last time I saw this buddy, because after a stroke and a prolonged sickness that affected his brain, he died paralyzed.

I went with Birdie to Argentina, too, visiting my family in Tucuman, and we never skipped our annual buying trips to Europe.

Once back in Atlanta, to my great surprise, late at night I received a telephone call from Juliette, angering me in the extreme. Birdie was at my side in the bed, and I was talking on the telephone with the person whom I wanted to see least in all the world. Juliette said that she was sorry to call me so late, but she wanted to ask me to do her a favor, saying, "If you are asked if I was violent, please tell them that I wasn't!" She was pleading on the other end of the line, and half-asleep, I asked her jokingly, "What happened? Did you kill somebody?" I heard then a strange noise on the telephone, and very angrily, she screamed, "Don't ever dare say that, you hear!"

I asked her not to call me ever again and I hung up, now awake and angry, while I gave a vague explanation to Birdie. I tried to sleep but couldn't for the rest of that night.

I possess a profound sixth sense and was feeling that this nighttime telephone call wasn't forecasting anything good, a foreboding that was confirmed two weeks later. I received another long distance telephone call; this time I was at home by myself, because Birdie as usual was at her boutique Norman's. The call came from the California Police Department, asking me if I knew Juliette, and when I said, yes, I was told that I would be subpoenaed by the Ontario court and that I should be ready to travel to that city. When the subpoena papers came, I traveled to the small town of Ontario in California to see the two police officers whose names were on my citation. Sergeant Rhonda and Detective Jaymstone received me very courteously, explaining the reason for

which I had been called. It was with a lot of details that they described a horrible crime in which Juliette had been involved.

After we divorced, she had married a Pakistani dentist, and she came to live with him in Ontario. After one of the frequent arguments they had, she killed him, shooting him twice with a .38 caliber pistol. She became scared, not knowing how to get rid of this big heavy corpse, so she went to the hardware store to buy a big butcher's knife. Then she returned to the hotel where all this tragedy occurred and cut her ex-husband into eight pieces with the knife. She put all these human parts in several garbage bags, carried them into the trunk of her car, and left for Mexico. At the Mexican border, the Mexican soldiers, smelling a strange odor, discovered the plastic bags and opened them, seeing inside the horrifying spectacle and the macabre content. The American police were called, and Juliette was taken back to Ontario for a murder investigation. When I asked the officers with repulsion if it was possible that Juliette could have done such a thing, Sergeant Rhonda, who was a fat little man, explained with a comical emphasis, in spite of the sadness of this situation, "You see!" he said. "She is a skinny little woman, while the husband was a big guy, and she couldn't drag him to her car; she didn't have enough strength. Then she decided to cut him in pieces, which were easier to carry out!"

While returning to the hotel, reserved in advance for me by the court, I was thinking that I had been lucky, because the same terrible thing could have happened to me. Juliette and I had many arguments together, and she could have killed me while I was asleep and gotten rid of me the same way. The following day, on July 27, 1983, I was received at the court by the State of California D.A. Dennis Stout, who told me that I had been called to be a witness in this case.

During the court session, the D.A. asked me several questions, and so did Juliette's lawyer. All of them wanted to determine if she had been violent while we were living together, and after I made my deposition to the judge, which lasted half an hour, they let me go. I went back to the hotel with a dry throat and a sour taste in my mouth to pack, and without wasting another day, I returned to Atlanta. Little by little, all this disagreeable episode was obliterated from my memory, and I kept very busy, dedicated to Birdie, to my job, and to trying to enjoy a happy life.

Every single day, I could realize all the benefits I was harvesting, thanks to my sobriety. Life was beautiful, and my social relationship with everybody became much more pleasant; I was having fewer and fewer of the unexplainable or unforeseen problems that had always cropped up during my drinking days.

I succeeded in getting in touch with my Brigadista companions from the Spanish Civil War again, mainly with the Americans who fought in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. I was so happy and very much moved to be back with the brave comrades who fought for the same cause in Spain. It brought back to my mind strong memories of an important period of my life. The VALB (Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade) had an annual dinner in February on the West Coast and another on the last Sunday of April in New York. It was with emotion that I went with Birdie to New York to participate in this memorable event.

Once again I met real heroes, like Gabby Rosenstein, who lived in Santa Monica, California; Milt Wolff, the last commander of the battalion; Ed Balchovsky, Moe Fishman, Abe Smorodin, Norman Pearlman, Abe Osheroff, Lou Gordon, James

Yates, Steve Nelson, Jake Kramer, Blas Padrino, and so many more.

I assume that my attachment to Jacques Grunblatt, a Polish Jew, was because he lived in France and we spoke about our dear Latin Quarter in French. He was from a poor family and came to France to study medicine. Not having money to survive while studying in the college, he worked washing dishes in restaurants and slept where he could for several years, until the day when he became a doctor. With the title in his pocket, it was the moment to begin making money, but the Civil War broke out in Spain. Jacques, without thinking twice, volunteered to go to the battlefield to fight fascism and to help the Republican cause, instead of thinking of his own welfare. When the Republicans were defeated because of the so-called democracies' cowardice, Jacques Grunblatt found himself, with hundreds of thousands of Brigadistas and Republican refugees, in French concentration camps. After a short while, the German army occupied half of France, while Jacques tried to secure a visa to go to the United States, a privilege that had been denied to him and to most other anti-fascists. Desperate, he wrote to many other Latin American countries asking for asylum.

The Germans at that time occupied all of France, and as a Jew, if apprehended, he would have been sent to an extermination camp. But almost miraculously, two weeks before the Germans reached the south of France where Jacques was waiting, Mexico sent him a political refugee visa and therefore saved his life. Jacques, for the rest of his life, remained grateful to Mexico, and to pay back this priceless favor, he remained practicing medicine for ten years in that country. By a strange coincidence, he met an American tourist lady from New York who came every year to Mexico to spend her vacation. When they saw each other, it was love at first sight, and once married, they went to North Creek, in the State of New York, where he opened his doctor's practice. For many years he remained the only doctor there, and Jacques bragged that half of the population of that town were born in his arms. He was loved to such an extent there that a town square bears his name.

Jacques never forgot Mexico, spending all his vacations in that country, and it was where he was buried when he died. Jacques, this little man with the fragile appearance, was a real hero, and when he died I cried like a baby.

Gabby Rosenstein also became a close friend of mine; as a matter of fact, he was my first friend from the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, Moe Fishman being the next.

With Bill Wheeler it was a special situation, because he and I became like brothers. It began in 1984, when we went with a group of VALB veterans to deliver to the Sandinista government 37 ambulances that they needed so badly in their fight against the bandit "contras," armed by the C.I.A. Reagan threatened to put us in jail if we dared go to Nicaragua, but our group of fifteen flew to Mexico, and from there to Managua, without our passports bearing the stamp of Nicaragua.

Bill Wheeler was another hero, a revolutionary, a union man, who in 1932, during the Depression, when the Soviet Union needed qualified workers, went to that Marxist country to help it build socialism. He remained for three years in Russia, where he felt so good and especially so useful to the Russians by virtue of his knowledge. Unfortunately, he had a disagreement with his first wife to the point that they decided to divorce, but she insisted on doing it in the United States, where they returned in 1936.

A few months later, after he returned to the States, the Spanish Civil War broke out, and of course, Bill, as a good Marxist, considered that his duty was to go fight

for the Spanish democracy. He was wounded in a leg during the first encounter with Franco's army, and he was sent to New York to be cured. Once he left the hospital, instead of remaining in the States, where the economic situation was improving, he went back to Spain to be reunited with his fighting comrades, saying that the war wasn't over. The same thing happened again, when he was wounded for the second time; then, once cured, he returned to Spain to fight. He never bragged about anything, and it was much later that I learned that he had a captain's rank in the International Brigades. I never met anybody so modest as Bill Wheeler. When World War II came, Bill, due to his wounds, was exempt from the draft, but he insisted so much that he was inducted into the Navy, where he became a chief petty officer.

A few years ago, Bill came from California to Athens, Georgia, with his wife Ione and their daughter, and it is there where he died. It was another very painful day for me; I will never forget this modest hero who became so close to me. I doubt that the new generation will appreciate the grandeur of these exceptional souls who went to fight, disinterested, for an ideal, for a cause, without seeking any material reward. It would be impossible to mention all the outstanding and unselfish people I met, not only in the United States, but also in many parts of the world. How could we forget Francois Mazou, from France, Pedro Merino, from Spain, and also Emilio Alvarez Canosa, with whom I participated in the bloody battle of Jarama, which gave so much prestige to the International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War.

I don't have enough words to express the love I had for the little old Cuban Blas Padrino, another brave man who was covered with glory. Unfortunately, I saw him only once a year, in New York during our annual dinner, and I took advantage of his company. He was 93 years old when he told me once that he had just returned from Spain. Seeing him so frail, I asked him if he went by himself, to which very angrily he answered, "Why? Did you want me to go with a baby-sitter?" He was also an atheist, and once he said something about prayer that caught my attention, trying to understand how the believers interpret and what meaning they give to prayers. "What is the prayer for the believer?" said Blas lifting his head, because being so short he always had to lift his head while talking to people. "Is it that the believer praying is giving an order to God to do something? Now, if God is so powerful, he is supposed to know everything and doesn't need anybody to remind him what to do! Or is prayer a bribe? Could we change God's will with our prayers, or buy his will by putting candles on the altar?" None of the believers I asked this question gave me a reasonable answer to how prayers can change God's mind.

Padrino was a great Simon Bolivar admirer, like my ex-brother-in-law David, and talking about the "contras" in Nicaragua, armed by Reagan, he said one more time something that I had heard before: "Be aware of the Big Brother from the North!" He didn't agree with the American prepotence in foreign policy and said that it couldn't last forever by bombing Grenada, Nicaragua, Panama, Iraq, or Africa, and one day something bad could happen. At that time, Blas and David's speculations seemed ridiculous, but with time I began to think that they weren't wrong.

In my private life with Birdie, it was a constant honeymoon, and I was acquiring a new family, such as her sister Beverly, my sister-in-law, a real "cordon bleu" who spent many hours cooking gourmet meals for AIDS victims. And my brother-in-law Jack Circle, who was like my brother, a very skilled businessman who after closing his

stores in St. Louis came to enjoy his retirement in Florida. We were very united, in spite of being distant when it came to politics. I was incorporated with love into the Diamond, Klayman, Deutsch, and other families connected to Birdie. Her parents also were wonderful. Blanche, her mother, was a distinguished lady; and Lou Wasserman, her step-father, my father-in-law, was one of the most admirable men I ever met. For Lou, there were no bad people, and I never heard him saying that somebody, whatsoever he did, was bad. I learned a lot from him and his kindness; his knowledge of human nature was astonishing. He would always say good things to people, and once, when I asked him why he did it, he answered very seriously, "It makes them happy, and it doesn't cost anything!" This statement was so profound that it almost sounded comical; but he was right; you can make people happy with love that doesn't cost anything. Birdie had two sons, Joel and Brad, in addition to Beverly, her daughter, whom I always treated with consideration as if she were mine too. I was one of the few who really understood Beverly and her internal struggles to adapt to the real life! Beverly became very successful in her artistic work, marrying Marc Taylor, an Australian gentleman dealing with hotel management, and both had a beautiful daughter, Madison, our granddaughter, whom we were seeing often in Santa Monica where they lived.

I resumed with ardor my profession in the tire business, adding import-export activities that allowed me to travel a lot, to Birdie's delight. I also continued to maintain good relationships with my people in Tucuman, with Nelly, and also with her other son Miguel, but I never could come close to my older son Georgito. I tried to be close to my grandchildren, paying for their trips to see us in the USA or Europe and giving them gifts. For a long time, I couldn't understand them, but I realized that their strange family environment and their parents' divorce affected them very much. With time, I came to know them better when they grew up, and we achieved with my granddaughters, Natalia and Ivonne, a good understanding, especially with Birdie, whom they called their American grandma.

When traveling to Buenos Aires, we would never miss going to see my fellow Free French war veterans. I was happy to see Jeannot, who actually was managing the club's restaurant. It was during my trip in 1989 that I saw him for the last time, because after we left, I learned that he had died.

Chapter 7

Faithful to my friends, I decided to renew my friendship with my comrade-in-arms Bobby Assie. After so many years since we interrupted our correspondence, I wrote him, and after a while I received his letter, as if nothing wrong had happened between us. When, in September 1985, I went with Birdie for her buying trip to the International Apparel Show in Porte de Versailles, in Paris, we decided afterward to go to see my friend from the army, Jojo Louzon, in Chaumont, where he owned an important Peugeot dealership. He had certainly made it, money-wise, and was living in a large mansion with his wife Odyle.

Unfortunately, the weather didn't help us; it was very cold, but nevertheless the four of us had a wonderful time. From there, we went to the Cote d'Azur, to Le Cannet, close to Cannes, where Bobbie and Luisito owned a beautiful condo. While we were driving south, the weather became warmer as we approached the Mediterranean. Birdie, during her buying trip, needed to see some dress manufacturers in Nice, and so we mixed business with pleasure, moving and exploring from Nice to Monte Carlo, San Remo, and all the Cote d'Azur. Apparently, my old friendship with Bobby had been restored, and none of us mentioned the moments of tension of our last days together in Houston. A few years later, Bobby and Luisito came to visit us in Atlanta, but unfortunately the confrontation arose again, accompanied by bad moods and nasty behavior. After they spent what for us was three painful weeks at our home, both returned to France without a word of gratitude. It was a few days later that we received, at Birdie's store, a telegram directed to Norman's that read, "Thank you for your hospitality!" signed by Bobby and Luisito; I found the sentiment very ordinary, if not insulting. So ended my friendship with one of my comrades-in-arms as a result of Luis's gossip and jealous conniption fit. He could never accept that Bobby, the love of his life, could have any kind of feelings for somebody else. We never tried to contact each other, and I remained forever without news from the ex-Sergeant Chief Bobby Assie, ignoring completely what happened to him and his friend Luisito.

In Atlanta, we had a Soviet Union exposition featuring information about that country and its culture, art, and industry, and it provided me with a good chance to establish a friendly relationship with those in charge of this event. In the long run, we signed a business-cultural deal with the Tver Technical University of the same city, with the purpose of sending American students anxious to learn the Russian language there. While our family had lived overseas, we came to accept that Russia was an out-of-bounds country for us. I was surprised, therefore, when I received from the Soviet Union an invitation to come to Tver to sign our final student exchange agreement. It was 1989, when Gorbotchev was preaching the famous "Glasnost" and "Perestroika," concepts that finally destroyed the Soviet Union.

Everything happened so fast that I hesitated at first; then I said to myself, why not go to my parents' country and visit Odessa, where I was born? It was at the end of May when I traveled to my ancestors' country, but I never expected to find such cold weather as what prevailed there. I flew from Atlanta to the Sheremetievo airport, where Alex Malin, whom I had met in Atlanta, was waiting for me, along with Valerie Sourinsky, the vice-rector of the Tver Technological Institute, the one I would be dealing

with about our contract.

The car trip from Moscow to Tver, spanning 100 miles, was very interesting, and I was moved to see the famous Russian "Isbas" decorated with colorful paints and aligned on both sides of the road. The entire country seemed to me to be very sad and abandoned; most of the houses were in serious need of restoration outside, while inside everything looked deteriorated and rotten, sometimes even dirty. People were poorly dressed and tense; their faces showed irritation because of the accumulated burden they carried within themselves. All this tiredness disappeared in the evening, when huge human masses went to the numerous restaurants providing music, where they behaved in an extravagant way, almost artificially, forcing themselves to prove that they were enjoying the life.

Unfortunately, the following morning, when going to work, the same rigidity would appear on their faces again, without any smile on their lips. I don't know why, but the memory of Texas came to my mind, where the people walked the day long, with a constant smile on their faces.

One of Birdie's customers we met in Moscow during the Goodwill Games was a lady working at the local TV station, and she gave me her address. Her name is Taubkina Mila, with whom we immediately became friends. Mila had an old longing to come to live in the United States, which was her dream. She was working very hard with an American TV station and was able to travel a lot, especially to Paris, where her daughter married a Frenchman who was living there. Mila, because of her work obligation, came many times to New York and also to Atlanta, a city that she liked so much, and she stayed with us. During Gorbachev's government, many things happened besides the destruction of the Soviet Union; all the inhabitants tried to adapt themselves to the capitalistic life. Mila had a very sharp inclination for business, and she once brought from Russia a huge number of paintings, forming a partnership with an American.

They were planning to make a killing, because Mila would be buying these paintings cheaply in Russia and selling them for a big profit in Atlanta. Mila was very enthusiastic, and she went several times to Russia to bring more of these paintings, which Mister Johnson, her partner, sold at his gallery that he rented on a commercial street. Unfortunately, this Mister Johnson turned out to be a swindler, and one day he disappeared with all her paintings, leaving Mila with a big debt, because she took all this art work from the Russian artists on consignment, and she now had to pay them back. After spending thousands of dollars on attorneys, without any hope of moving ahead in this sad situation, she lost all faith in recovering the paintings or the money. She decided to give up and to return to Russia to keep working in her television profession. Mila had more bad experiences in the States; once, she broke her shoulder in falling from a bed, and in another case, she spent a fortune fixing her denture in Atlanta, and it broke as soon as she returned to Moscow. That day, we talked on the telephone, and I asked her if she still wanted to move to the United States, to which she answered, "No, Misha! It looks like it is not so easy to make it in the States, and despite all the problems we have in Russia, here I know my way around, and I think that I will remain here forever!"

I couldn't have gone to Russia without also visiting Odessa, where I met Aliosha, Ana's son, who had emigrated to Atlanta a few years before with a group of Russian Jews. Aliosha took me to the opera, which impressed me very much, and even

though I was forcing myself to remember, I couldn't recall anything of what I was seeing around me. I liked everything in that city, especially the port, with its famous Potemkin steps, and the downtown.

Once we came to Slobotka, I could locate our house, thanks to the description my mother had given me of it many times: "Slobodka is in the outskirts of Odessa, erected over catacombs, where it is not possible to build two-story houses, but ours was the only building with two floors in the entire area, and it is easy to locate. Putting your back toward the church, called the "New Church," it is the first house on the left-hand street, number 5." That's how, following my mother's instructions, I found our street, Matiushenko, and the #5 address was the only two-story building in which I had lived more than 60 years before. Everything around me seemed so small, and I was so moved that I wanted to leave the place at once, without extending my anxiety. I had read a lot about the decay in Soviet society, and I thought it was mere right-wing propaganda, but I had the chance to see it myself and to wonder how the people could live amid such a deterioration, which certainly was reflected in their faces. Everyone was poorly dressed; they were rude, and I couldn't help thinking of the White Russians I knew in Paris, who were the cream of the nobility in their thinking and their manners. I couldn't find a common tie, cultural or intellectual, with this unfriendly and vulgar people who were elbowing me in the streets. Corruption was latent and visible everywhere—a black market with currency, stolen goods, even historical antiques, plus prostitution and parasitism, with legions of bureaucrats crowded everywhere. I returned to Atlanta very dejected, and I later became even much more dejected when I returned to Russia at the time when the perverted, corrupt, alcoholic Boris Yeltsin had been elected the first President of Russia. I couldn't help but consider the Russian people as the most stupid on earth. I couldn't understand how a nation that suffered despotism for 300 years under the Romanov tsars, then 70 years of tyranny in the name of Marxism, which had never before existed in the Soviet Union, could come to this. When at last the people had a chance, in 1990, to transform the country into a civilized democratic state, once again they voted to give dictatorial powers to the inept drunkard, the shameless parasite Yeltsin.

Now Russian destiny will be set back a century, and more than ever Russia will be "Africa with atomic bombs!" Suddenly, a powerful Soviet Union with 260 million inhabitants was transformed in a couple of years into a poor country where 140 million were starving, and Russia was losing provinces that always were part of the country but now were becoming independent states, including Ukraine, Bielorus, and also the oil-rich Caspian sea nations of the Caucasus and Asia, thanks to the savior Yeltsin.

Suddenly, in my mind appeared the memory of my father, who I thought would be turning upside down in his grave in witnessing the destruction of the country he loved so much. But instead, I saw his ghost smiling ironically and saying to me, "Listen, you Fantzuz; don't take anything for granted. Russia is eternal and will never disappear! If such a nation as ours could survive 240 years of Tartar slavery and the slaughter of ninety percent of the population, then in one way or another it will also survive this turmoil!"

All the great corporations of the United States of America were jumping with happiness, while the world proletariat, which had lost faith in Russian communism, not only didn't see any possible relief of their sufferings coming anytime soon, but also lost faith in those who promised to improve the workers' and exploited masses' lives.

"The world keeps on spinning," as an Argentinian tango says, and even though the international situation was becoming unstable, invisible forces out of anyone's control were already dominating mankind's destiny.

It was in this state of mind that I received unexpected good news from France. Usually, French people don't like to travel overseas without a special reason, and no matter how many times I invited my friends Hagron, Lanzenberg, Tricot, and Louzon to come visit us in Atlanta, all of them answered that they felt very comfortable at home where they lived and didn't have any desire to move. It was then that I learned with pleasure that Jojo Louzon was coming with his wife Odyle to Boston to assist with the wedding of his favorite niece, who as a student at a university in that city had found a husband.

With great effort, I convinced Jojo and Odyle to come to Atlanta after the wedding to be with us, taking advantage of the fact that they would already be in the States. This event made me forget my preoccupations about Russia, and I put all my effort into planning to accommodate my guests, Jojo and Odyle.

We went with our guests to the most interesting and historical places of Atlanta, a city that had been completely erased by General Sherman from the Union army during the American Civil War in 1864. In that war, 730,000 combatants died; this loss is more than the United States lost in all the following foreign wars combined, in spite of the fact that at that time the country had only 36 million inhabitants.

Birdie, in her American extravagance, suggested that we go to Florida. Jojo was already sick, and Odyle, who is a professional nurse, was taking care of giving him his medications. I could then appreciate the sacrifice my friend was making in coming to see me, in spite of his sufferings. So as not to tire Jojo too much, we made the trip to Boca Raton in two days, rather than the usual one day we took in traveling to visit our brother-in-law Jack and Birdie's sister Beverly.

The six of us enjoyed being together and visiting beautiful Florida, including the Holocaust monument in Miami. As usual, my preferred place was the beach, which by atavism always attracted me to the sea. Jojo, too, was like me, because several generations of his family were born in Sfax on the Mediterranean sea.

When my friends returned to France, I felt uneasy, and my sixth sense was trying to convey something to me, something I understood when shortly afterward I received a letter from Odyle. Jojo couldn't see any more; he had cancer and stomach problems, making it completely impossible for him to enjoy the beautiful castle they had bought in the small town of Ginasservis, close to Marseilles.

One morning, when Odyle went to buy something in this town of 900 inhabitants, close to where they lived, upon her return home she found her husband, my comrade in arms who had been like a brother to me, lying dead on the floor, after shooting himself in the mouth with a gun to end his terrible sufferings. When we were serving in the Army of the Desert, I had heard more than once old soldiers from the Colonial Army or the Foreign Legion saying, "Some stupid people want to commit suicide by shooting themselves in their head, which many times leaves them blind! If you want to finish with yourself, put the gun in your mouth and blow your goddamned brains away, once and forever!" Jojo was a special kind of person; he lived like a hero and died by the law of the soldiers of the desert.

Chapter 8

I think that Birdie cried at least a year after in 1991 she closed her beautiful ladies apparel store, the most luxurious in Atlanta, even though she realized later on that she now had more freedom to travel, which she liked so much.

My sister Maya and her husband Enrique bought a comfortable condo in Laguna Hills in California, wishing to be closer to their children, Annie and Ricky, and their granddaughter Tania, who lived there. That's where they spent six months in the wintertime, to return to Paris for another six months in the summertime. When once I asked my sister if they weren't tired of these back and forth trips, she told me, "When we are in Paris, we go on vacations to California, and after spending the winter in Laguna Hills, we go on vacation to Paris for the summer! It's very simple." As in my case, Paris was her home, but she couldn't take that city's winter humidity.

We learned with grief that Teo, Enrique's brother, had died in Argentina; he was the only one of our "gang" who remained living in that country, with his wife Delia.

Birdie suffered very much from back pains, diagnosed by the doctors as arthritis. It was then that I remembered Dax, where a long time ago all our family used to take our mother for her hot water and mud treatment. Birdie wasn't any longer tied up with her boutique, as she had been for 38 years, and I suggested to her that we go to this well-known spa; this region my family used to visit more than 60 years ago, when my sister and I were children, exerted in my mind a special attraction. It was not far away from Dax, in Saint Jean de Luz, where I heard for the first time the guns thundering on the other side of the border, during the Spanish Civil War.

Before leaving for France, I received from Moe Fishman of the VALB office in New York a suggestion from the Abraham Lincoln Brigade's veterans to see Francois Mazou, a French Brigadista living in Pau, close to Dax, with whom I was already corresponding.

We spent three pleasant weeks in Dax, healing our bones in this spa, and at the same time we made frequent trips to the Atlantic Ocean's beaches, without missing Saint Jean de Luz and of course going to meet Francois Mazou in Pau. After a few more meetings, we became very close friends.

Thanks to this comrade who had been a French battalion commissar in the XIV International Brigade during the Spanish Civil War, I learned about Carl Einstein, who fought as I did in the Durruti anarchist army. He certainly had been one of the oldest volunteers, because he came to fight when he was 52 years old. He was a very well-known intellectual in France whose work is kept at the Georges Pompidou Museum in Paris, being one of the initiators of the cubism movement in painting. When the Spanish Republic was crushed by international fascism, as a consequence of the cowardice of the so-called European and American democracies (who didn't even allow the legally elected Spanish government to buy arms), Einstein, with many thousands of other defeated freedom fighters, escaped to France. Unfortunately, instead of asylum, the French police detained him and interned him first at the Argeles-sur-mer concentration camp, then in Merignac. After escaping from the camp, then being captured, he escaped again. He was too tired to run away without any hope, and he jumped from the Lestelle-Betherram bridge into the strong current of the River Pau.

His body was recovered by local people and buried in the small town of Boeil Bezing's Catholic cemetery. Usually, people who commit suicide are not allowed to be buried in Catholic cemeteries, and much less Jews like Carl Einstein. Nevertheless, that's where he is buried, and the tombstone bears the following legend: "Carl Einstein, born April 2, 1885 in Neuwied, Germany, ended his life on July 5th, 1940 to escape the Nazi persecution." It was with a profound emotion that we bowed with Francois Mazou in front of this intellectual freedom fighter's grave, on which Birdie placed flowers.

Francois told us that every morning anonymous hands cover his grave with flowers. I have the honor to be on the Board of Directors of the Carl Einstein Association, whose purpose, thanks to Mme. Lilian Meffre, is to let everyone in Europe know the idealistic struggle of this intellectual fighter.

When my comrade in arms Jacques Tricot learned that I was in Dax, he drove with his wife Danielle from Pamiers to come to see us. Jacques, too, had a very exciting life after he left the army. I am sure that he had a lot of adventures tracking criminals in the jungle during his Colonial Police days, especially during the war of Argelia, which in a way was a version of the French Vietnam. I liked my friend Jacques very much, and especially his optimistic cynicism, very much in the French spirit.

I don't think that I succeeded in having a really good and strong relationship with my grandchildren, and once I asked Jacques, who also was a grandfather, how his relationships with his grandchildren were. After smiling and staring for a short while at me with his sarcastic look, he said, "Excellent, I never see them!" We cracked up with laughter, and I realized that Jacques wasn't getting older mentally, because he remained the same "hard-hearted" man I knew during the war. Jacques' first wife, my god-daughter's mother Evelyne, whom I never came to know, had been coaxed by the Mormons and ended up leaving him, an event that increased his cynicism about mankind.

In Paris, we saw again our old friends Robert and Jean Davoudian and their wives, along with Serge and Suzanne, and of course my sister and her husband Enrique.

When we returned to Atlanta, we organized our life so as to enjoy it as much as we could, because we had plenty of time for it. After a short period of sickness, my father-in-law Lou Wasserman, whom I loved so much, died a few months before his 90th birthday. I will never forget the last time I saw him in Chesterfield, close to St. Louis, where he was interned, and the strange look he gave me when he kissed me goodbye. His favorite expressions remained circulating for a long while after he died, such as, "What difference does it make?" "It makes them happy, and it doesn't cost anything." "You can say it again!" "If you are happy, I am happy!" Two years later, we took Birdie's mother Blanche to be buried at her husband's side in the St. Louis cemetery. The poor woman spent nine years in a nursing home, because after a stroke, she remained partly paralyzed, a condition that constantly changed her personality. When we went to see her, we never knew if she would be smiling, crying, screaming, or insulting us. I cannot forget one time when we came to visit her, and after looking at both of us, she suddenly nodded her head toward me and asked Birdie, "Who is this son of a bitch?" Of course, the following day when she saw us, she kept saying how much she loved me, and she said the habitual, "Michael, please shave your beard; you are such a good-looking man, but with your beard you are scaring the women!" The day she died, I was alone with her in the room, and when she closed her eyes, ready to leave us forever, she still was

holding my hand in hers. I don't know why, but at that precise moment the image of my mother, who died far away from me, came to my mind. With Maya, we would remember her very often, especially when we would be laughing about her and she would say to us, "What do you think, that I was born old? I too was young, and you will become old also!"

We also quite often saw Jack and Beverly's daughters, who lived in Canada. Both were artists and well-married to intellectuals. Juanita's daughter Sofia always had been my favorite niece, being the only little creature who always showed her love for me, without expecting any reciprocation. She was just happy to be at my side, calling me with tenderness "tata."

In Atlanta, we had many friends, like Ike Saporta, a Greek Jew who had been persecuted by the Nazis and came to the States after the war. He was a professor at Georgia Tech until his retirement. He loved to sketch nature and especially women, and he remained a faithful left-winger until the last moment of his life, dying at the age of 85 with a smile on his face.

Another friend of our group is Morgan Stanford, an old Southerner whose ancestors came to Georgia many generations before he was born. He was a labor lawyer, which was not only a daring occupation but also a very dangerous one, especially in Atlanta, where defending the working class exploited by the corporations or Blacks half a century ago, when racism and the KKK were still powerful, was highly unpopular. It was something very unusual for a white Southerner, but Morgan always was a left-wing Democrat and also an atheist. Bill Wheeler, my companion Brigadista, was also part of our gang as long as he lived, and he would come to have lunch with us, driving from Athens (Georgia), where he had moved from California. We had also a younger fifty-year-old friend, Robert Searfoss, from Missouri, as Birdie was. Robert was like most Americans his age, searching for the meaning of life and confusing material success, translated into dollars, with internal spiritual satisfaction, striving to be happy in life and at peace with himself. He is a nice young man who loves us, and we enjoy his company.

As for me, I became completely absorbed by politics, helping any democratic or socialist movement in Latin America, including Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala, and opposing the embargo against Cuba imposed by the senile Jesse Helms. I was also very active in several groups and organizations that fought the exploitation of the poor and minorities by the rich and the corporations.

I came to hate Nixon, and even more Reagan, but I came to feel a profound contempt for Clinton, who betrayed all those of us who had helped him to become President. He never cared for the American people, and he completely sold out to the arms manufacturers and the corporations; his main concern was how he would be seen in the history. For me, he is the most trifling, cowardly, blood-thirsty, selfish, and egoistic President we have had in decades.

The American Constitution is a joke: if the President of the United States puts his hand on a woman's buttock, he can be tried by the Supreme Court and even impeached. On the other hand, the President cannot name an ambassador without somebody like Jesse Helms' approval, just as the President cannot increase the minimum wage ten cents without the permission of Congress. Nevertheless, the President of the United States, without asking anybody's permission, as Commander in Chief, (even if he is a draft-dodger) can order the bombing of Serbia, our only ally in the Balkans in World War II, to distract attention from a sexual scandal. He can send our planes to slaughter civilians

from any country he wishes, as he did in Iraq, Somalia, Afghanistan, Sudan, and other countries.

The President, by miscalculation, can at any time begin a world war, almost without restrictions. I hope it will be corrected one day, because our planet is sprinkled with atomic bombs, and no time would be left for retaliation. I don't know if it is a result of my age or the wisdom that comes with maturity, but I am becoming skeptical. The Argentine saying that "The Devil is not smart for being a Devil; he is smart for being old!" comes now to my mind, and perhaps it can be applied to me now.

I am very angry at the American capitalists, much more than at the European version. On the Old Continent, the people from the upper class had always been wealthy. They defend their riches, considering them as a normal family belonging, because they never lived in poverty nor knew what poverty was.

On the other hand, in America most of the barefooted and humble immigrants who came to these shores were running away from hunger, from countries where they had been exploited, brutalized, and humiliated. Unfortunately, as soon as many of these ex-victims became capitalists, instead of recalling their hungry brethren and helping poor people from their own class, they become the worst exploiters and bloodsuckers of workers on earth. In many cases, to achieve their fortunes they acted as strike-breakers, ignoring the unions and even betraying them. This fantastic reputation about the proverbial American generosity is just another joke, because the new capitalists (*nouveaux riches*) give money to charity not so much out of generosity, but for the tax benefit. Worse are many children of these barefooted immigrants, who, born in the States and now with college degrees, become overnight chauvinists and capitalist imperialists whose sole aim is the conquest of markets for their products, even if force has to be used.

Just consider slavery, which was abolished in France in 1789 and in the civilized world by 1848; it officially existed in the United States until 1864, and unofficially it existed until not too long ago. It is difficult to conceive that slavery was fomented by a great number of these same starving immigrants or their children who ran away from their countries over being abused physically and morally. Once in the States, however, after making money, they chose to enrich themselves even more by promoting this repugnant bondage, a thousand times worse than any they suffered in their own country.

Some of these descendants of the barefooted immigrant parents became "Robber Barons" in the Nineteenth Century and needed cheap labor to build the railroads. Few slaves existed in California at that time, and not enough poor skilled immigrants were available; so with the just-coined expression of "American genius," the new "builders" found out that it was cheaper to bring Chinese workers directly from Asia through unscrupulous contractors. Once the work was done and the Chinese brought as cattle to lay rails weren't needed anymore, their employers tried to expel them from America. Not only did the Chinese resist, but even more of them arrived, until Congress, to please the capitalists, voted to stop Asian immigration into the United States, a ban that lasted for fifty years. The pretext was to protect American workers' jobs, but it was only one more excuse for racism.

Since my childhood, America always had been in my imagination the most beautiful country for freedom, kindness, generosity, and warm feelings. For two centuries there arrived in America the most intelligent and the most productive people from the Old Country. They built America; the Germans brought the advanced technology, the Irish

and Scandinavians their farming skill, the Italians their house-building talents, the Slavics their creative ability, and the Jewish immigrants created the garment industry. Many Jews who came in the beginning of 1900 were revolutionaries escaping from tsarist Russia; they organized cooperatives, worker groups; they created unions and campaigned for the Black people's emancipation. A third of those who fought in the Spanish Civil War in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade were Jewish. The "American dream" was real, when the bread-earner was part of the working class as an electrician, a mechanic, a carpenter, a bricklayer, a truck driver, a clerk, an employee, or as a teacher, while the wife remained at home taking care of the family. Their life was pleasant and secure; they owned their house, had two cars, and money for the children to go to college, and they were taking vacations every year! Where are they now?

I don't know if I was deluded, dreaming of something that never existed, or if the country changed. If I should write a book, I would use as a title for it, "I Used to Live in America," by which I mean the America I knew forty years ago, the country that changed so much after World War II that I cannot compare it any more to the actual America, where the corporations run the nation, spending more in arms than all the other countries together.

Our country has more millionaires than any other nation in the world, with the richest capitalists able to spend \$10,000.00 a day; we also have 45 million persons who live on less than \$10,000.00 a year, without health insurance, because we need the money made on these workers' sweat to open new markets for our corporations, in a constant quest for expansion. The American worker's standard of living is lower now than it was thirty years ago, under the indifferent eyes of the union bosses, many of whom are controlled by the Mafia. And who cares about the five million human beings in the judicial system, two million in prisons, and three million on parole!

In the human aspect, in general, the common American people are the most generous and kind on earth, but unfortunately, they are indifferent to politics, without any incentive to vote, accepting of being led by greedy opportunists supported by big corporations, Wall Street, and arms merchants. In any democratic country, the citizens vote on Sunday, while we vote on Tuesday, because the capitalists want to be sure that the workers will not vote as a result of being unable to afford missing a payday. It seems that Europe is watching us, because after the elections, I received an e-mail from a French friend saying, "What did you Americans do wrong to be punished with a president like Bush?"

Nobody remembers any more the more than three million dead Vietnamese killed during our Vietnam invasion; and I don't know how much longer we would remain indifferent if it were to happen that Washington got us involved in any worse adventure. There has never existed in history a prepotent nation that dominated the world too long. I don't know what will happen during this third millenium if we keep pushing the rest of mandkind around at will.

That doesn't mean that I am proud of the working class, either; on the contrary, during the Spanish Civil War, only 42,000 of us went to fight for that country's democracy, while several billion from the working class looked at us in amazement, sometimes neutral, if not indifferent.

Chapter 9

At the beginning of 1996, a general uproar surged among us Brigadistas when we learned through the AABI (Association of International Brigade Friends) in Spain that the Congress in Madrid had unanimously approved the granting of Spanish citizenship to all those who fought in the International Brigades during the Civil War. The statute was signed on January 19 by King Juan Carlos.

We were planning to celebrate in November, and during our annual VALB dinner in April 1996 in New York, it was our favorite topic, which we talked about with emotion. To settle all the details of this homage, two ladies heading that organization, Dolores Cabra and Ana Perez, came from Madrid to our reunion. I was one of the few who could speak Spanish, and through my friend, General Pedro Mateo Merino, from Madrid, I learned that the celebration in our honor would be held during eight days in November 1996.

I think that it was one of the most memorable events that I ever experienced. We learned that of the 42,000 volunteers who came to fight in Spain 60 years ago, 700 were still alive, of whom 170 were living in the States.

About 200 of us from different cities of America, including 60 veteran Brigadistas, flew with happiness and emotion to Spain. We knew that we would be well received, but when we arrived at the airport of Madrid on November 5th, we remained stunned by the surprise of seeing the throng of jubilant well-wishers carrying red flags and many black and red flags, while the city's walls were all wrapped with revolutionary posters and the people were playing our wartime songs. It was impossible to describe the Spanish people's emotion; they were waiting for us, cheering and hugging us in every corner of the airport and the city. We had the same reception at the hotel Convenciones, where we would be staying during our sojourn in Madrid. We learned that more than a thousand persons came from 23 different countries, including 370 veterans of the Civil War, some so old and infirm that they had to be pushed in wheelchairs. My attention was attracted to the many young girls and boys, mixed with older people, who took care of our well-being. I was told that all of them were student volunteers who left their classes or took vacation time to be with us. The older people were professors, intellectuals, or workers who took days off to make our stay more pleasant. The transportation enterprises carried us for free, with the drivers giving us their time. So did many other organizations, telephone companies, hotels, and other service employees work for free, just to participate in this homage in our honor. The AABI had been collecting money for that purpose for more than a year; they needed it to cover all our lodging and food expenses. I was charmed by these young and fragile-seeming students of both sexes who wouldn't let us lift even the smallest package without grabbing it from us to carry it wherever we wanted to take it. Watching all these kids, I had the inspiration to apply the "gorriones" (sparrows) nickname to them, and they liked it very much.

We people coming from Georgia tried to stick together, among whom were Jesse Crawford, a young admirer of the Brigadistas, and Bill Wheeler, with his wife Ion. Judith Montell, a movie producer living in California, came to join our group. I saw many times my friends Abe Osheroff, Abe Smorodin, and many other American, Russian, French, Irish, and English Brigadistas, including some from other countries.

I was very moved when the following day we went by bus to the Jarama bridge, where so much blood of young proletarian volunteers had been shed in their fight against international fascism. We formed a big crowd from different nations, and many found friends they hadn't seen in years, meetings accompanied by all kinds of exclamations, screaming, and hugging that would seem never to end. I found there Milt Wolff, the last commander of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade; the Polish hero Eugeniusz Szyr; and my old friend Francois Mazou, with his cigarette butt hanging on his lower lip, even though his doctor had told him not to smoke.

There reigned in this scene an intense atmosphere of emotions, feelings, and especially memories that we were carrying inside ourselves, like diamonds that were shining in our hearts. Everything went into a "crescendo," the music, the voices, and emotions. It was even much more intense at the stadium the same evening, where 12,000 persons were cheering us, hugging us, and showing a profound respect and love bordering on veneration.

No words could ever describe these moments we lived during this entire week, and the pinnacle of my visit was reached in Barcelona, where I was asked to talk at the university. In front of almost a thousand students, I said, "The Spanish youth is beautiful, and it is without fear that we can entrust them with the torch of freedom, which is becoming a little bit too heavy for us to carry! I tell you, keep on fighting for your ideal, and don't worry so much about materialistic and ephemeral acquisitions. Don't ever weaken in your struggle for democracy, for human dignity, and against exploitation, and you will have much more satisfaction once you attain our old age! It is a sublime feeling to be able to look at anybody in the eyes, to live in peace with yourself, and to have your conscience pure for having accomplished your man's duty, fighting without rest for the proletariat and mankind." Now in my old age, after many years of despair and drowned laments, witnessing many young people lacking enthusiasm, fortunately at the dawn of the Twenty-first Century I see with emotion a surge of a spiritual beauty in the younger generation. I can see it everywhere now, invading the streets to protest against globalization, international imperialism, racism, and exploitation.

Once again my memory goes back to the glorious days of my student's life, in my beloved "Boul Mich," now so far away. Beauty will always exist in the idealistic youth.

So ended Miguel Kirilovich Burenko's manuscript; he was known by many, but nobody ever saw him again. No matter how much effort I put into finding him or how many people I contacted who knew him, including many of those whom he mentioned in his manuscript, he never came back, and I never saw him ever again.