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Note regarding the appendix: Given the length of the educator’s guide and its accompanying appendix, we have elected to separate the two documents. Please see the LAII website (<http://laih.unm.edu/outreach/lesson.php>) to access the appendix.

Slideshow of Images	2
Literature: Los de Abajo (Spanish version)	28
Literature: The Underdogs (English version)	96
Literature: “Death of an Assassin”	228
Primary Documents	244
Plan of San Luis Potosí (English & Spanish)	245
Plan of Ayala (English & Spanish)	257
Plan of Guadalupe (English & Spanish)	267

SLIDESHOW OF IMAGES



Núm. 5337 | Francisco Villa rodeado de niños en su hacienda de Canutillo



Núm. 6055 | Elementos de tropa villista en descanso tocan guitarra, retrato de grup



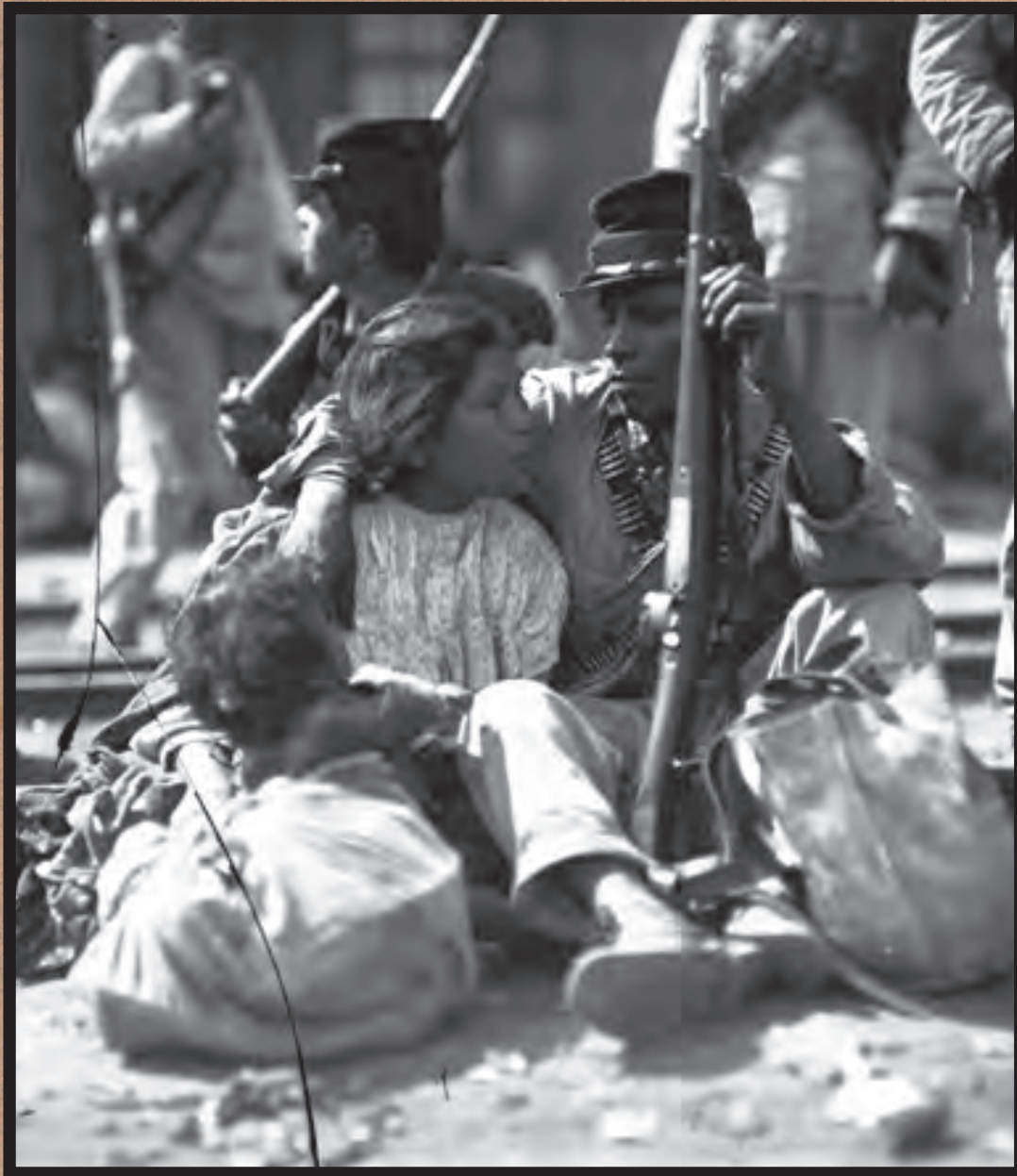
Núm. 6349 | Soldaderas en el estribo de un vagón en Buenavista



Núm. 6734 | Francisco Villa y Ornelas fuman junto a árbol



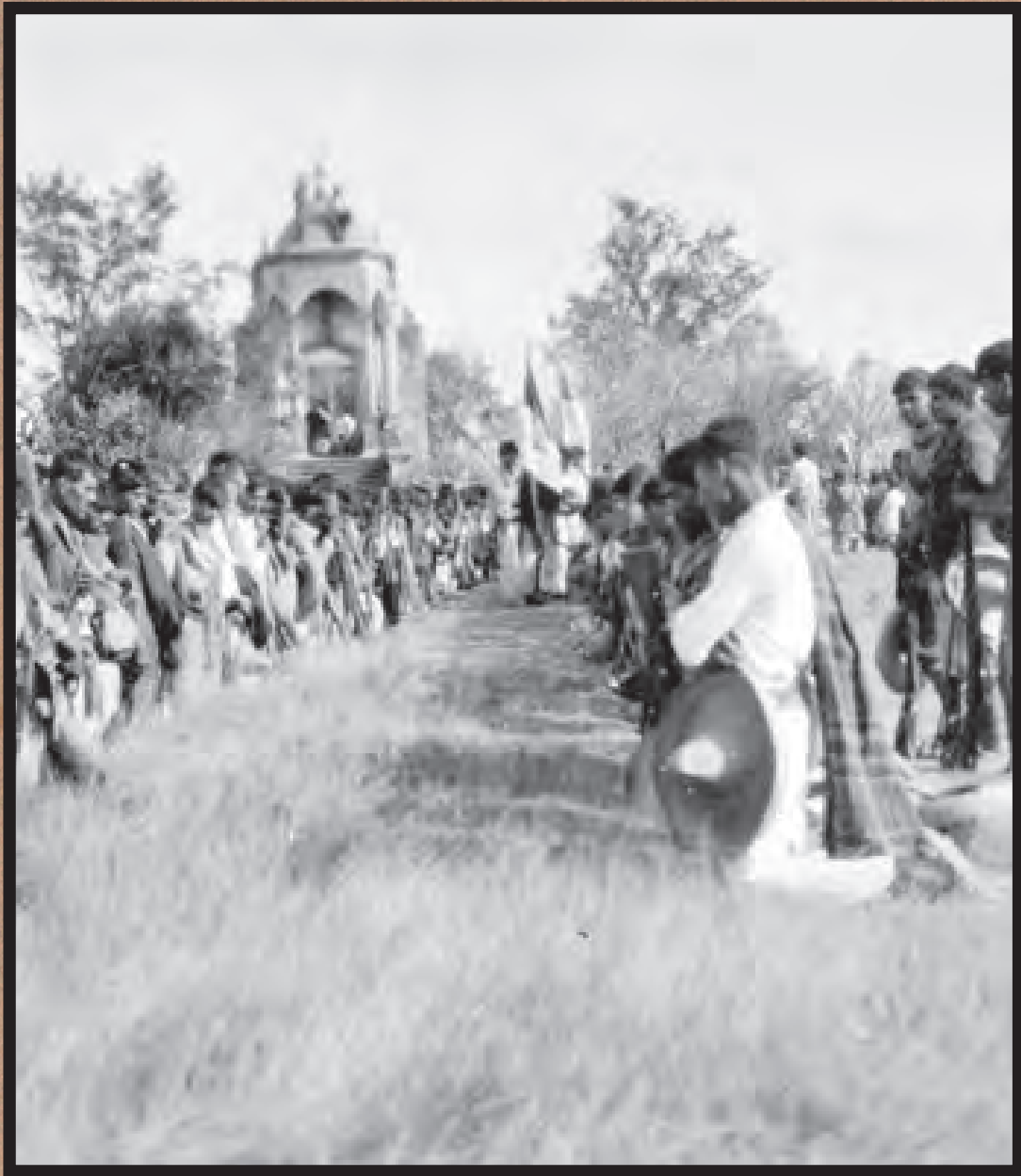
Núm. 32673 | Federales embarcan caballería en un carro jaula



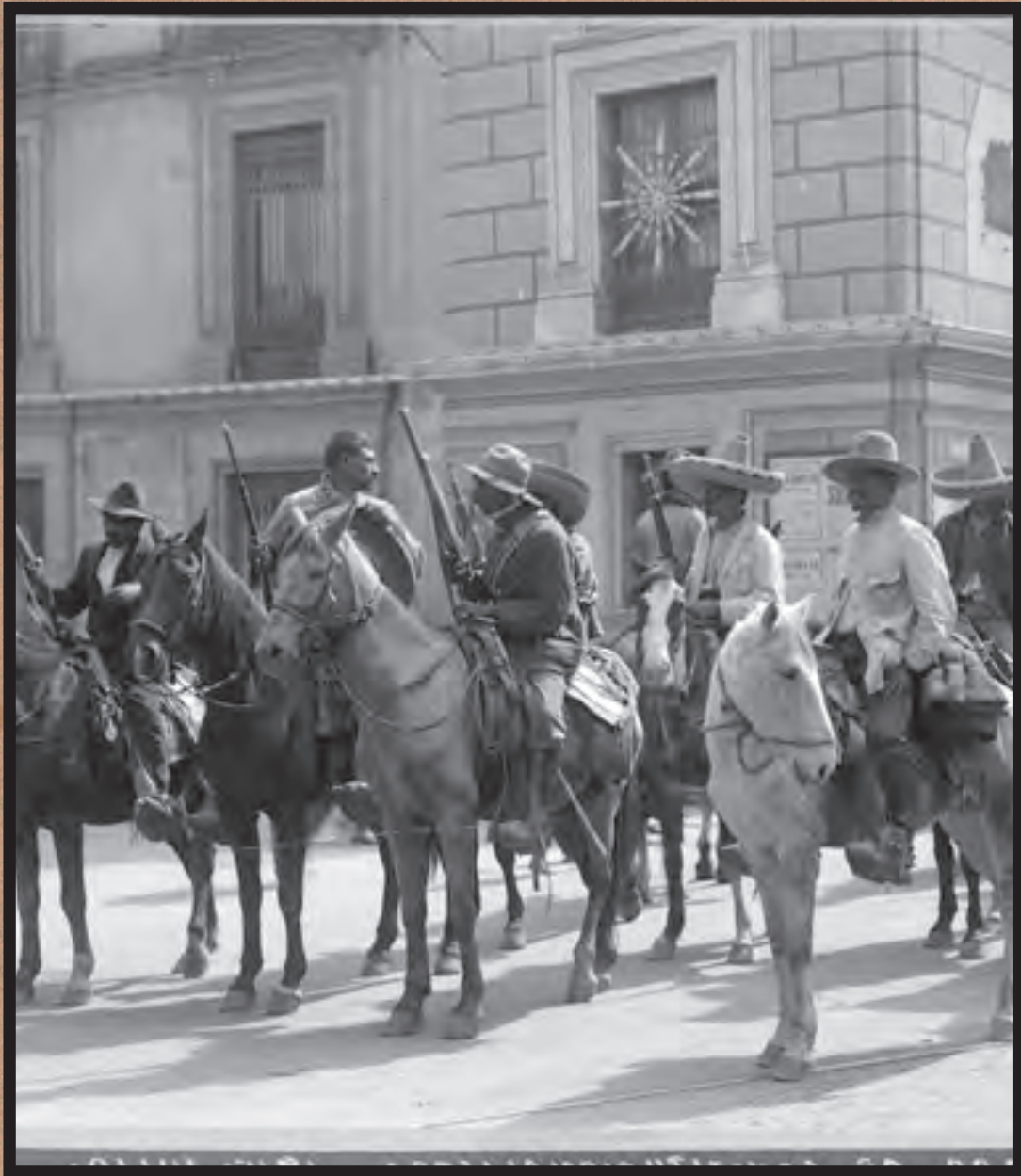
Núm. 5015 | Soldado federal con su familia



Núm. 5075 | Tropas federales en la estación de Buenavista antes de salir a combate



Núm. 5214 | Tropas cristeras durante ceremonia religiosa



Núm. 6734 | Francisco Villa y Ornelas fuman junto a árbol



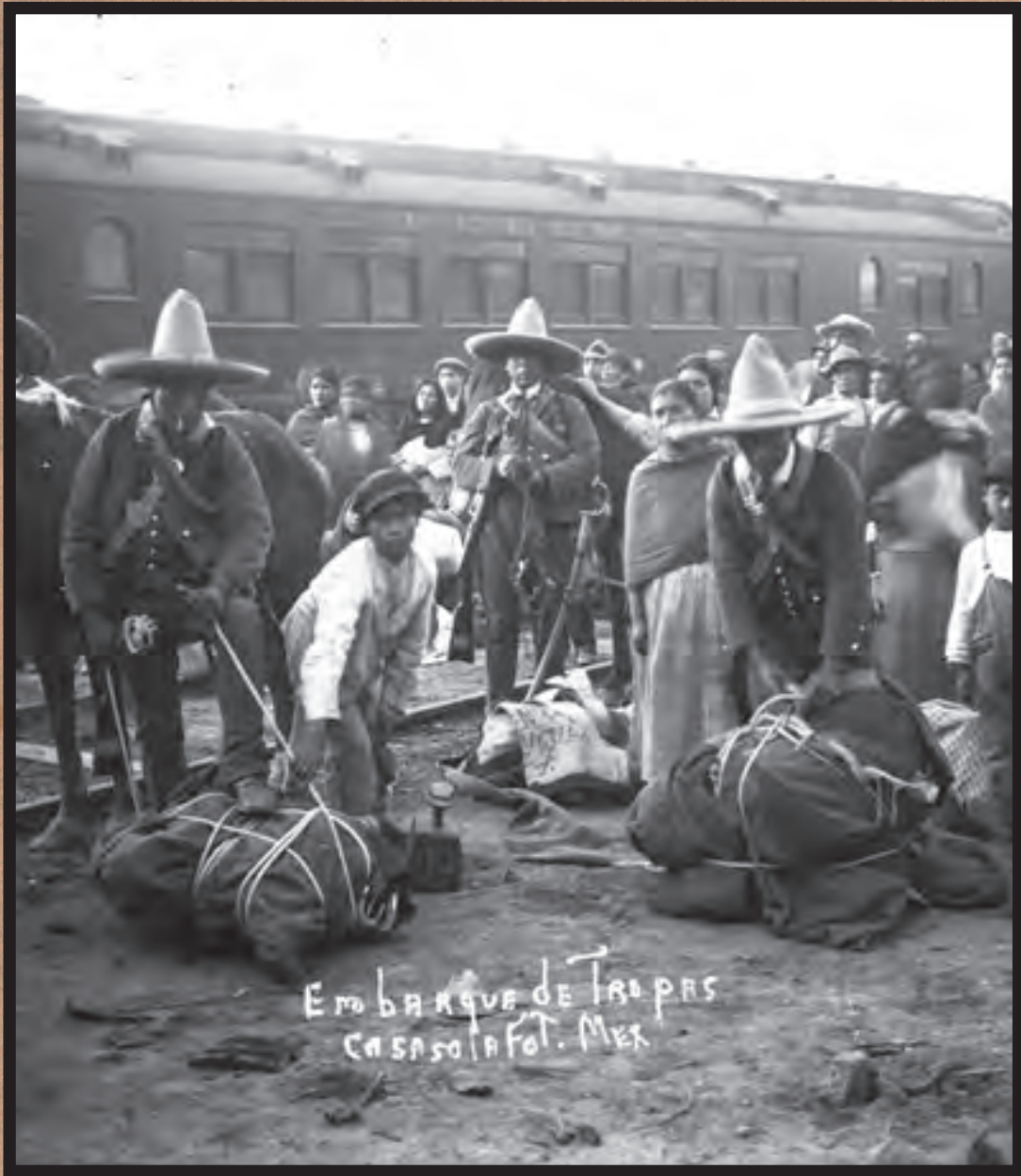
Núm. 5227 | Francisco Villa conversa con Elías Torres



Núm. 5251 | Francisco León de la Barra y su esposa, visitan
la escuela de Artes y Oficios para señoritas



Núm. 5281 | Hombres juntos a estación ferroviaria después de haber sido incendiada



Embarque de Tropas
CASA SOLA FOT. MEX

Núm. 5291 | "Embarque de tropas" en ferrocarril



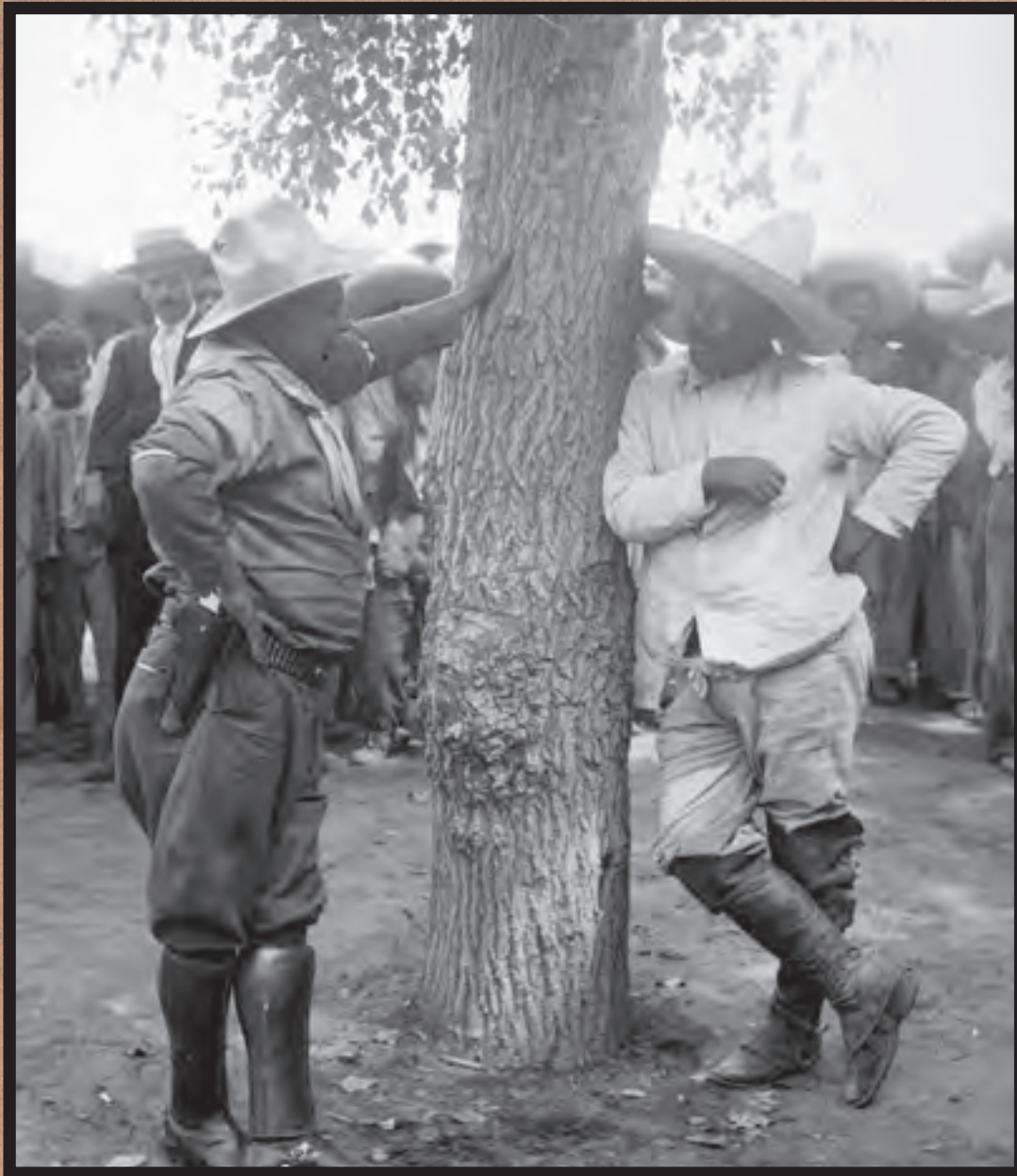
Núm. 5316 | Francisco Villa e hijo montan a caballo afuera
de la capilla de la Hacienda de Canutillo



Núm. 3622 | "Soldado yaqui de centinela"



Núm. 5694 | Francisco Villa, Miguel Trillo y sus hijos en la hacienda de Canutillo



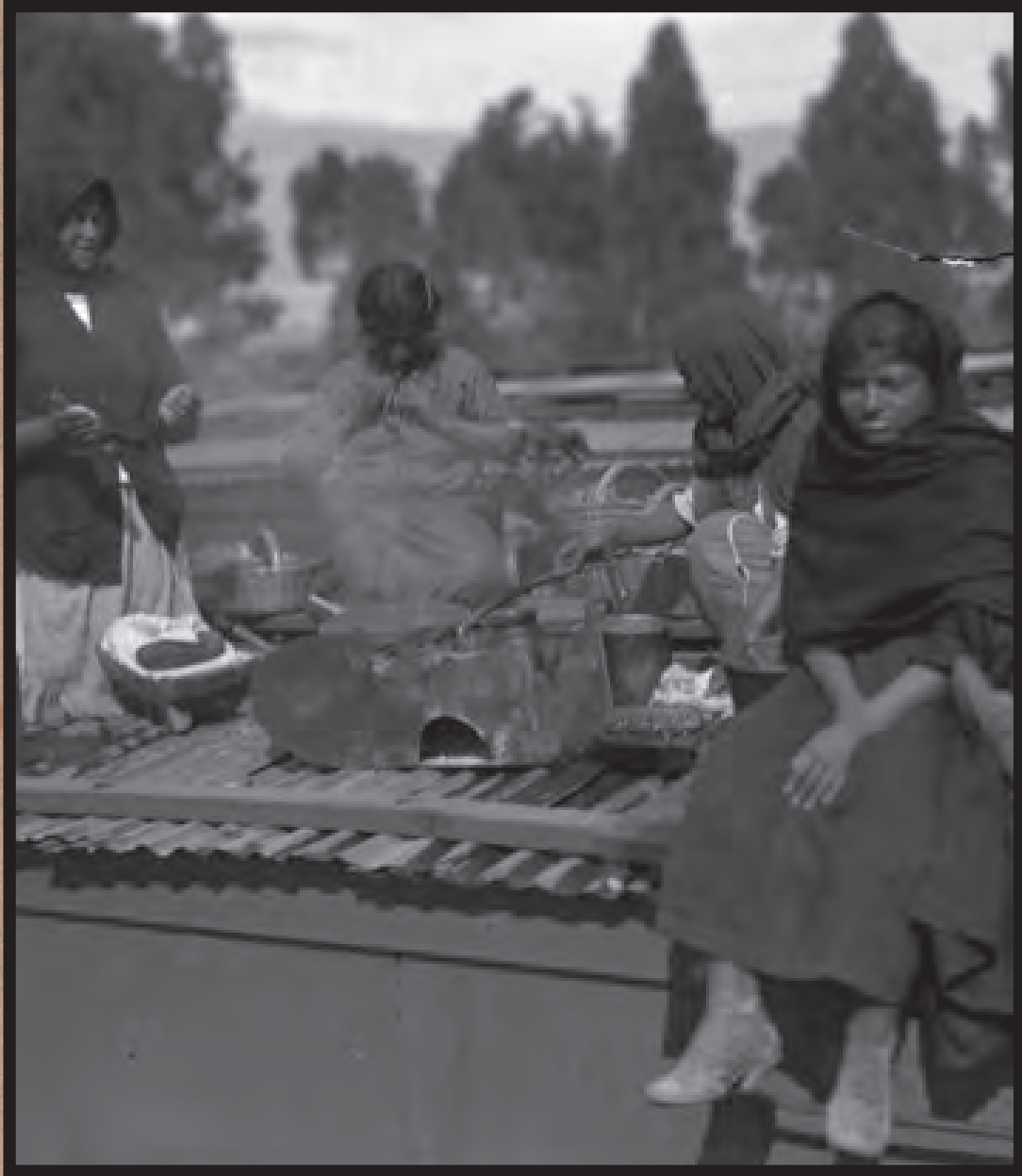
Núm. 5697 | Francisco Villa durante su rendición, conversa con Eugenio Martínez



Núm. 5710 | Revolucionarios zapatistas en una calle, retrato de grupo



Núm. 5708 | Rurales comen en compañía de mujeres y niños en el exterior de una casa



Núm. 6388 | Soldaderas preparan comida en el techo de vagón de tren



Núm. 7744 | Carmen Serdán, retrato



Núm. 5754 | Soldado federal se despide de mujeres desde la ventanilla de un vagón



Núm. 5899 | Campesinos presencian desfile de zapatistas en Cuernavaca



Núm. 5904 | Villista carga rifles en el hombro mientras se dirige a cuartel,
después de la toma de Cd. Juárez



Núm. 6251 | Soldados se asean en los patios de una estación de ferrocarril

LITERATURE:
LOS DE ABAJO

Los de Abajo
Mariano Azuela

Los de abajo



MARIANO AZUELA



PRIMERA PARTE

I

—Te digo que no es un animal... Oye cómo ladra *el Palomo*... Debe ser algún cristiano...

La mujer fijaba sus pupilas en la oscuridad de la sierra.

— ¿Y que fueran siendo federales? —repuso un hombre que, en cuclillas, yantaba en un rincón, una cazuela en la diestra y tres tortillas en taco en la otra mano.

La mujer no le contestó; sus sentidos estaban puestos fuera de la casuca.

Se oyó un ruido de pesuñas en el pedregal cercano, y *el Palomo* ladró con más rabia.

— Sería bueno que por sí o por no te escondieras, Demetrio.

El hombre, sin alterarse, acabó de comer; se acercó un cántaro y, levantándolo a dos manos, bebió agua a borbotones. Luego se puso en pie.

— Tu rifle está debajo del petate —pronunció ella en voz muy baja.

El cuartito se alumbraba por una mecha de sebo. En un rincón descansaban un yugo, un arado, un otate y otros aperos de labranza. Del techo pendían cuerdas sosteniendo un viejo molde de adobes, que servía de cama, y sobre mantas y desteñidas hilachas dormía un niño. Demetrio ciñó la cartuchera a su cintura y levantó el fusil. Alto, robusto, de faz bermeja, sin pelo de barba, vestía camisa y calzón de manta, ancho sombrero de soyate y guaraches.

Salió paso a paso, desapareciendo en la oscuridad impenetrable de la noche.

El Palomo, enfurecido, había saltado la cerca del corral. De pronto se oyó un disparo, el perro lanzó un gemido sordo y no ladró más.

Unos hombres a caballo llegaron vociferando y maldiciendo. Dos se apearon y otro quedó cuidando las bestias.

—¡Mujeres..., algo de cenar!... Blanquillos, leche, frijoles, lo que tengan, que venimos muertos de hambre.

— ¡Maldita sierra! ¡Sólo el diablo no se perdería!

— Se perdería, mi sargento, si viniera de borracho como tú...

Uno llevaba galones en los hombros, el otro cintas rojas en las mangas.

—¿En dónde estamos, vieja?... ¡Pero con unal... ¿Esta casa está sola?

—¿Y entonces, esa luz?... ¿Y ese chamaco?... ¡Vieja, queremos cenar, y que sea pronto! ¿Sales o te hacemos salir?

—¡Hombres malvados, me han matado mi perro!... ¿Qué les debía ni qué les comía mi pobrecito *Palomo*?

La mujer entró llevando a rastras el perro, muy blanco y muy gordo, con los ojos claros ya y el cuerpo suelto.

— ¡Mira nomás qué chapetes, sargento!... Mi alma, no te enojas, yo te juro volverte tu casa un palomar; pero, ¡por Dios!...

No me mires airada...

No más enojos...

Mírame cariñosa, luz de mis ojos, acabó cantando el oficial con voz aguardentosa.

— Señora, ¿cómo se llama este ranchito? —preguntó el sargento.

—Limón —contestó hosca la mujer, ya soplando las brasas del fogón y arrimando leña.

— ¿Conque aquí es Limón?... ¡La tierra del famoso Demetrio Macías!... ¿Lo oye, mi teniente? Estamos en Limón.

— ¿En Limón?... Bueno, para mí... ¡plin!... Ya sabes, sargento, si he de irme al infierno, nunca mejor que ahora..., que voy en buen caballo. ¡Mira nomás qué cachetitos de morenal... ¡Un perón para morderlo!...

— Usted ha de conocer al bandido ese, señora... Yo estuve junto con él en la Penitenciaría de Escobedo.

— Sargento, tráeme una botella de tequila; he decidido pasar la noche en amable compañía con esta morenita... ¿El coronel?... ¿Qué me hablas tú del coronel a estas horas?... ¡Que vaya mucho a...! Y si se enoja, pa mí... ¡plin!... Anda, sargento, dile al cabo que desensille y eche de cenar. Yo aquí me quedo... Oye, chatita, deja a mi sargento que fría los blanquillos y caliente las gordas; tú ven acá conmigo. Mira, esta carterita apretada de billetes es sólo para ti. Es mi gusto. ¡Figúrate! Ando un poco borrachito por eso, y por eso también hablo un poco ronco... ¡Como que en Guadalajara dejé la mitad de la campanilla y por el camino vengo escupiendo la otra mitad!... ¿Y qué le hace...? Es mi gusto. Sargento, mi botella, mi botella de tequila. Chata, estás muy lejos; arrímate a echar un trago. ¿Cómo que no?... ¿Le tienes miedo a tu... marido... o lo que sea?... Si está metido en algún agujero dile que salga..., pa mí ¡plin!... Te aseguro que las ratas no me estorban.

Una silueta blanca llenó de pronto la boca oscura de la puerta.

—¡Demetrio Macías! —exclamó el sargento despavorido, dando unos pasos atrás.

El teniente se puso de pie y enmudeció, quedóse frío e inmóvil como una estatua.

— ¡Mátalos! —exclamó la mujer con la garganta seca.

— ¡Ah, dispense, amigo!... Yo no sabía... Pero yo respeto a los valientes de veras.

Demetrio se quedó mirándolos y una sonrisa insolente y despreciativa plegó sus líneas.

— Y no sólo los respeto, sino que también los quiero... Aquí tiene la mano de un amigo... Está bueno, Demetrio Macías, usted me desaira... Es porque no me conoce, es porque me ve en este perro y maldito oficio... ¡Qué quiere, amigo!... ¡Es uno pobre, tiene familia numerosa que mantener! Sargento, vámonos; yo respeto siempre la casa de un valiente, de un hombre de veras.

Luego que desaparecieron, la mujer abrazó estrechamente a Demetrio.

— ¡Madre mía de jalea! ¡Qué susto! ¡Creí que a ti te habían tirado el balazo!

— Vete luego a la casa de mi padre —dijo Demetrio. Ella quiso detenerlo; suplicó, lloró; pero él, apartándola dulcemente, repuso sombrío:

—Me late que van a venir todos juntos.

— ¿Por qué no los mataste?

—¡Seguro que no les tocaba todavía!

Salieron juntos; ella con el niño en los brazos.

Ya a la puerta se apartaron en opuesta dirección. La luna poblaba de sombras vagas la montaña.

En cada risco y en cada chaparro, Demetrio seguía mirando la silueta dolorida de una mujer con su niño en los brazos.

Cuando después de muchas horas de ascenso volvió los ojos, en el fondo del cañón, cerca del río, se levantaban grandes llamaradas.

Su casa ardía...

II

Todo era sombra todavía cuando Demetrio Macías comenzó a bajar al fondo del barranco. El angosto talud de una escarpa era vereda, entre el peñascal veteadado de enormes resquebrajaduras y la vertiente de centenares de metros, cortada como de un solo tajo.

Descendiendo con agilidad y rapidez, pensaba:

"Seguramente ahora sí van a dar con nuestro rastro los federales, y se nos vienen encima como perros. La fortuna es que no saben veredas, entradas ni salidas. Sólo que alguno de Moyahua anduviera con ellos de guía, porque los de Limón, Santa Rosa y demás ranchitos de la sierra son gente segura y nunca nos entregarían... En Moyahua está el cacique que me trae corriendo por los cerros, y éste tendría mucho gusto en verme colgado de un poste del telégrafo y con tamaña lengua de fuera..."

Y llegó al fondo del barranco cuando comenzaba a clarear el alba. Se tiró entre las piedras y se quedó dormido.

El río se arrastraba cantando en diminutas cascadas; los pajarillos piaban escondidos en los pitahayos, y las chicharras monorrítmicas llenaban de misterio la soledad de la montaña.

Demetrio despertó sobresaltado, vadeó el río y tomó la vertiente opuesta del cañón. Como hormiga arriera ascendió la crestería, crispadas las manos en las peñas y ramazones, crispadas las plantas sobre las guijas de la vereda.

Cuando escaló la cumbre, el sol bañaba la altiplanicie en un lago de oro. Hacia la barranca se veían rocas enormes rebanadas; prominencias erizadas como fantásticas cabezas africanas; los pitahayos como dedos anquilosados de coloso; árboles tendidos hacia el fondo del abismo. Y en la aridez de las peñas y de las ramas secas, albeaban las frescas rosas de San Juan como una blanca ofrenda al astro que comenzaba a deslizar sus hilos de oro de roca en roca.

Demetrio se detuvo en la cumbre; echó su diestra hacia atrás; tiró del cuerno que pendía a su espalda, lo llevó a sus labios gruesos, y por tres veces, inflando los carrillos, sopló en él. Tres silbidos contestaron la señal, más allá de la crestería frontera.

En la lejanía, de entre un cónico hacinamiento de cañas y paja podrida, salieron, unos tras otros, muchos hombres de pechos y piernas desnudos, oscuros y repulidos como viejos bronce.

Vinieron presurosos al encuentro de Demetrio. —¡Me quemaron mi casa! —respondió a las miradas interrogadoras.

Hubo imprecaciones, amenazas, insolencias. Demetrio los dejó desahogar; luego sacó de su camisa una botella, bebió un tanto, limpióla con el dorso de su mano y la pasó a su inmediato. La botella, en una vuelta de boca en boca, se quedó vacía. Los hombres se relamieron.

— Si Dios nos da licencia —dijo Demetrio—, mañana o esta misma noche les hemos de mirar la cara otra vez a los federales. ¿Qué dicen, muchachos, los dejamos conocer estas veredas?

Los hombres semidesnudos saltaron dando grandes alaridos de alegría. Y luego redoblaron las injurias, las maldiciones y las amenazas.

—No sabemos cuántos serán ellos —observó Demetrio, escudriñando los semblantes—. Julián Medina, en Hostotipaquillo, con media docena de pelados y con cuchillos afilados en el metate, les hizo frente a todos los cuicos y federales del pueblo, y se los echó...

—¿Qué tendrán algo los de Medina que a nosotros nos falte? —dijo uno de barba y cejas espesas y muy negras, de mirada dulzona; hombre macizo y robusto.

—Yo sólo les sé decir —agregó— que dejo de llamarme Anastasio Montañés si mañana no soy dueño de un máuser, cartuchera, pantalones y zapatos. ¡De veras!... Mira, Codorniz, ¿voy que no me lo crees? Yo traigo media docena de plomos adentro de mi cuerpo... Ai que diga mi compadre Demetrio si no es cierto... Pero a mí me dan tanto miedo las balas, como una bolita de caramelo. ¿A que no me lo crees?

—¡Que viva Anastasio Montañés! —gritó el Manteca.

— No —repuso aquél—; que viva Demetrio Macías, que es nuestro jefe, y que vivan Dios del cielo y María Santísima.

— ¡Viva Demetrio Macías! —gritaron todos.

Encendieron lumbre con zacate y leños secos, y sobre los carbones encendidos tendieron trozos de carne fresca. Se rodearon en torno de las llamas, sentados en cuclillas, olfateando con apetito la carne que se retorció y crepitaba en las brasas.

Cerca de ellos estaba, en montón, la piel dorada de una res, sobre la tierra húmeda de sangre. De un cordel, entre dos huizaches, pendía la carne hecha cecina, oreándose al sol y al aire.

— Bueno —dijo Demetrio—; ya ven que aparte de mi treinta-treinta, no contamos más que con veinte armas. Si son pocos, les damos hasta no dejar uno; si son muchos aunque sea un buen susto les hemos de sacar.

Aflojó el ceñidor de su cintura y desató un nudo, ofreciendo del contenido a sus compañeros.

— ¡Sal! —exclamaron con alborozo, tomando cada uno con la punta de los dedos algunos granos.

Comieron con avidez, y cuando quedaron satisfechos, se tiraron de barriga al sol y cantaron canciones monótonas y tristes, lanzando gritos estridentes después de cada estrofa.

III

Entre las malezas de la sierra durmieron los veinticinco hombres de Demetrio Macías, hasta que la señal del cuerno los hizo despertar. Pancraccio la daba de lo alto de un risco de la montaña.

— ¡Hora sí, muchachos, pónganse changos! —dijo Anastasio Montañés, reconociendo los muelles de su rifle.

Pero transcurrió una hora sin que se oyera más que el canto de las cigarras en el herbazal y el croar de las ranas en los baches.

Cuando los albores de la luna se esfumaron en la faja débilmente rosada de la aurora, se destacó la primera silueta de un soldado en el filo más alto de la vereda. Y tras él aparecieron otros, y otros diez, y otros cien; pero todos en breve se perdían en las sombras. Asomaron los fulgores del sol, y hasta entonces pudo verse el despeñadero cubierto de gente: hombres diminutos en caballos de miniatura.

—¡Mírenlos qué bonitos! —exclamó Pancraccio—. ¡Anden, muchachos, vamos a jugar con ellos!

Aquellas figuritas movedizas, ora se perdían en la espesura del chaparral, ora negreaban más abajo sobre el ocre de las peñas.

Distintamente se oían las voces de jefes y soldados. Demetrio hizo una señal: crujieron los muelles y los resortes de los fusiles.

— ¡Hora! —ordenó con voz apagada.

Veintiún hombres dispararon a un tiempo, y otros tantos federales cayeron de sus caballos. Los demás, sorprendidos, permanecían inmóviles, como bajorrelieves de las peñas.

Una nueva descarga, y otros veintiún hombres rodaron de roca en roca, con el cráneo abierto.

— ¡Salgan, bandidos!... ¡Muertos de hambre! —¡Mueran los ladrones nixtamaleros!...

—¡Mueran los comevacas!...

Los federales gritaban a los enemigos, que, ocultos, quietos y callados, se contentaban con seguir haciendo gala de una puntería que ya los había hecho famosos.

—¡Mira, Pancraccio —dijo el Meco, un individuo que

sólo en los ojos y en los dientes tenía algo de blanco—; ésta es para el que va a pasar detrás de

aquel pitayo!... ¡Hijo de...! ¡Tomal... ¡En la pura calabaza! ¿Viste?... Hora pal que viene en el caballo tordillo... ¡Abajo, pelón!...

—Yo voy a darle una bañada al que va horita por el filo de la vereda... Si no llegas al río, mocho infeliz, no quedas lejos... ¿Qué tal?... ¿Lo viste?...

— ¡Hombre, Anastasio, no seas malo!... Empréstame tu carabina... ¡Ándale, un tiro nomás!...

El Manteca, la Codorniz y los demás que no tenían armas las solicitaban, pedían como una gracia suprema que les dejaran hacer un tiro siquiera.

—¡Asómense si son tan hombres!

—Saquen la cabeza... ¡hilachos *piojosos*!

De montaña a montaña los gritos se oían tan claros como de una acera a la del frente.

La Codorniz surgió de improviso, en cueros, con los calzones tendidos en actitud de torear a los federales. Entonces comenzó la lluvia de proyectiles sobre la gente de Demetrio.

— ¡Huy! ¡Huy! Parece que me echaron un panal de moscos en la cabeza —dijo Anastasio Montañés, ya tendido entre las rocas y sin atreverse a levantar los *ojos*.

—¡Codorniz, fijo de un...! ¡Hora adonde les dije! —rugió Demetrio.

Y, arrastrándose, tomaron nuevas posiciones.

Los federales comenzaron a gritar su triunfo y hacían cesar el fuego, cuando una nueva granizada de balas los desconcertó.

— ¡Ya llegaron más! —clamaban los soldados. Y presa de pánico, muchos volvieron grupas resueltamente, otros abandonaron las caballerías y se encaramaron, buscando refugio, entre las peñas. Fue preciso que los jefes hicieran fuego sobre los fugitivos para restablecer el orden.

—A los de abajo... A los de abajo —exclamó Demetrio, tendiendo su treinta-treinta hacia el hilo cristalino del río.

Un federal *cayó* en las mismas aguas, e indefectiblemente siguieron cayendo uno a uno a cada nuevo disparo. Pero sólo él tiraba hacia el río, y por cada uno de los que mataba, ascendían intactos diez o veinte a la otra vertiente.

—A los de abajo... A los de abajo —siguió gritando encolerizado.

Los compañeros se prestaban ahora sus armas, y haciendo blancos cruzaban sendas apuestas.

— Mi cinturón de cuero si no le pego en la cabeza al del caballo prieto. Préstame tu rifle, Meco...

— Veinte tiros de máuser y media vara de chorizo por que me dejes tumbar al de la potranca mora... Bueno... ¡Ahoral... ¿Viste qué salto dio?... ¡Como venado!...

— ¡No corran, mochos!... Vengan a conocer a su padre Demetrio Macías...

Ahora de éstos partían las injurias. Gritaba Pancraccio, alargando su cara lampiña, inmutable como piedra, y gritaba el Manteca, contrayendo las cuerdas de su cuello y estirando las líneas de su rostro de *ojos* torvos de asesino.

Demetrio siguió tirando y advirtiendo del grave peligro a los otros, pero éstos no repararon en su voz desesperada sino hasta que sintieron el chicoteo de las balas por uno de los flancos.

— ¡Ya me quemaron! —gritó Demetrio, y rechinó los dientes—. ¡Hijos de...! Y con prontitud se dejó resbalar hacia un barranco.

Faltaron dos: Serapio el charamusquero y Antonio el que tocaba los platillos en la Banda de Juchipila.

— A ver si se nos juntan más adelante —dijo Demetrio.

Volvían desazonados. Sólo Anastasio Montañés conservaba la expresión dulzona de sus ojos adormilados y su rostro barbado, y Pancracio la inmutabilidad repulsiva de su duro perfil de prognato.

Los federales habían regresado, y Demetrio recuperaba todos sus caballos, escondidos en la sierra.

De pronto, la Codorniz, que marchaba adelante, dio un grito: acababa de ver a los compañeros perdidos, pendientes de los brazos de un mezquite.

Eran ellos Serapio y Antonio. Los reconocieron, y Anastasio Montañés rezó entre dientes:

— Padre nuestro que estás en los cielos...

— Amén —rumorearon los demás, con la cabeza inclinada y el sombrero sobre el pecho.

Y apresurados tomaron el cañón de Juchipila, rumbo al norte, sin descansar hasta ya muy entrada la noche. La Codorniz no se apartaba un instante de Anastasio. Las siluetas de los ahorcados, con el cuello flácido, los brazos pendientes, rígidas las piernas, suavemente mecidos por el viento, no se borraban de su memoria. Otro día Demetrio se quejó mucho de la herida. Ya no pudo montar su caballo. Fue preciso conducirlo desde allí en una camilla improvisada con ramas de robles y haces de yerbas.

— Sigue desangrándose mucho, compadre Demetrio —dijo Anastasio Montañés. Y de un tirón arrancóse una manga de la camisa y la anudó fuertemente al muslo, arriba del balazo.

— Bueno —dijo Venancio—; eso le para la sangre y le quita la dolencia.

Venancio era barbero; en su pueblo sacaba muelas y ponía cáusticos y sanguijuelas. Gozaba de cierto ascendiente porque había leído *El judío errante* y *El sol de mayo*. Le llamaban *el Doctor*, y él, muy pagado de su sabiduría, era hombre de pocas palabras.

Turnándose de cuatro en cuatro, condujeron la camilla por mesetas calvas y pedregosas y por cuevas empinadísimas.

Al mediodía, cuando la calina sofocaba y se obnubilaba la vista, con el canto incesante de las cigarras se oía el quejido acompasado y monocorde del herido.

En cada jacalito escondido entre las rocas abruptas, se detenían y descansaban.

— ¡Gracias a Dios! ¡Un alma compasiva y una gorda topeteada de chile y frijoles nunca faltan! —decía Anastasio Montañés eructando.

Y los serranos, después de estrecharles fuertemente las manos encallecidas, exclamaban:

— ¡Dios los bendiga! ¡Dios los ayude y los lleve por buen camino!... Ahora van ustedes; mañana correremos también nosotros, huyendo de la leva, perseguidos por estos condenados del gobierno, que nos han declarado guerra a muerte a todos los pobres; que nos roban nuestros puercos, nuestras gallinas y hasta el maicito que tenemos para comer; que queman nuestras casas y se llevan nuestras mujeres, y que, por fin, donde dan con uno, allí lo acaban como si fuera perro del mal.

Cuando atardeció en llamaradas que tiñeron el cielo en vivísimos colores, pardearon unas casucas en una explanada, entre las montañas azules. Demetrio hizo que lo llevaran allí.

Eran unos cuantos pobrísimos jacaes de zacate, diseminados a la orilla del río, entre pequeñas sementeras de maíz y frijol recién nacidos.

Pusieron la camilla en el suelo, y Demetrio, con débil voz, pidió un trago de agua.

En las bocas oscuras de las chozas se aglomeraron chomites incoloros, pechos huesudos, cabezas desgñadas y, detrás, ojos brillantes y carrillos frescos.

Un chico gordinflón, de piel morena y reluciente, se acercó a ver al hombre de la camilla; luego una vieja, y después todos los demás vinieron a hacerle ruedo.

Una moza muy amable trajo una jícara de agua azul. Demetrio cogió la vasija entre sus manos trémulas y bebió con avidez.

— ¿No quiere más?

Alzó los ojos: la muchacha era de rostro muy vulgar, pero en su voz había mucha dulzura.

Se limpió con el dorso del puño el sudor que perlaba su frente, y volviéndose de un lado, pronunció con fatiga:

— ¡Dios se lo pague!

Y comenzó a tiritar con tal fuerza, que sacudía las yerbas y los pies de la camilla. La fiebre lo aletargó.

—Está haciendo sereno y eso es malo pa la calentura —dijo señá Remigia, una vieja enchomitada, descalza y con una garra de manta al pecho a modo de camisa.

Y los invitó a que metieran a Demetrio en su jacal.

Pancracio, Anastasio Montañés y la Codorniz se echaron a los pies de la camilla como perros fieles, pendientes de la voluntad del jefe.

Los demás se dispersaron en busca de comida. Señá Remigia ofreció lo que tuvo: chile y tortillas. — Afigúrense..., tenía güevos, gallinas y hasta una chiva parida; pero estos malditos federales me limpiaron. Luego, puestas las manos en bocina, se acercó al oído de Anastasio y le dijo:

— ¡Afigúrense..., cargaron hasta con la muchachilla de señá Nieves!...

V

La Codorniz, sobresaltado, abrió los ojos y se incorporó. —¿Montañés, oíste?... ¡Un balazo!... Montañés... Despierta...

Le dio fuertes empellones, hasta conseguir que se removiera y dejara de roncar.

— ¡Con un...! ¡Ya estás moliendo!... Te digo que los muertos no se aparecen... —balbució Anastasio despertando a medias.

—¡Un balazo, Montañés!...

— Te duermes, Codorniz, o te meto una trompada...

— No, Anastasio; te digo que no es pesadilla... Ya no me he vuelto a acordar de los ahorcados. Es de veras un balazo; lo oí clarito...

— ¿Dices que un balazo?... A ver, daca mi máuser...

Anastasio Montañés se restregó los ojos, estiró los brazos y las piernas con mucha flojera, y se puso en pie.

Salieron del jacal. El cielo estaba cuajado de estrellas y la luna ascendía como una fina hoz. De las casucas salió rumor confuso de mujeres asustadas, y se oyó el ruido de armas de los hombres que dormían afuera y despertaban también.

— ¡Estúpido!... ¡Me has destrozado un pie!

La voz se oyó clara y distinta en las inmediaciones.

— ¿Quién vive?...

El grito resonó de peña en peña, por crestones y hondonadas, hasta perderse en la lejanía y en el silencio de la noche.

— ¿Quién vive? —repitió con voz más fuerte Anastasio, haciendo ya correr el cerrojo de su máuser.

— ¡Demetrio Macías! —respondieron cerca.

— ¡Es Pancracio! —dijo la Codorniz regocijado. Y ya sin zozobras dejó reposar en tierra la culata de su fusil.

Pancracio conducía a un mozalbete cubierto de polvo, desde el fieltro americano hasta los toscos zapatones. Llevaba una mancha de sangre fresca en su pantalón, cerca de un pie.

— ¿Quién es este curro? —preguntó Anastasio.

— Yo estoy de centinela, oí ruido entre las yerbas y grité: "¿Quién vive?" "Carranzo", me respondió este vale... "¿Carranzo...? No conozco yo a ese gallo..." Y toma tu Carranzo: le metí un plomazo en una pata...

Sonriendo, Pancracio volvió su cara lampiña en solicitud de aplausos.

Entonces habló el desconocido.

— ¿Quién es aquí el jefe?

Anastasio levantó la cabeza con altivez, enfrentándosele.

El tono del mozo bajó un tanto.

— Pues yo también soy revolucionario. Los federales me cogieron de leva y entré a filas; pero en el combate de anteayer conseguí desertarme, y he venido, caminando a pie, en busca de ustedes.

— ¡Ah, es federal!... —interrumpieron muchos, mirándolo con pasmo.

—¡Ah, es mocho! —dijo Anastasio Montañés—. ¿Y por qué no le metiste el plomo mejor en la mera chapa?

—¡Quién sabe qué mitote trai! ¡Quesque quere hablar con Demetrio, que tiene que icirle quién sabe cuánto!... Pero eso no le hace, pa todo hay tiempo como no arrebatan —respondió Pancracio, preparando su fusil.

— Pero ¿qué clase de brutos son ustedes? —profirió el desconocido.

Y no pudo decir más, porque un revés de Anastasio lo volteó con la cara bañada en sangre.

—¡Fusilen a ese mocho!...

—¡Hórquenlo!...

— ¡Quémenlo..., es federal!...

Exaltados, gritaban, aullaban preparando ya sus rifles.

— ¡Chist..., chist..., cállense!... Parece que Demetrio habla —dijo Anastasio, sosegándolos.

En efecto, Demetrio quiso informarse de lo que ocurría e hizo que le llevaran al prisionero.

— ¡Una infamia, mi jefe, mire usted..., mire usted! —pronunció Luis Cervantes, mostrando las manchas de sangre en su pantalón y su boca y su nariz abotagadas.

— Por eso, pues, ¿quién jijos de un... es usted? —interrogó Demetrio.

— Me llamo Luis Cervantes, soy estudiante de medicina y periodista. Por haber dicho algo en favor de los revolucionarios, me persiguieron, me atraparon y fui a dar a un cuartel...

La relación que de su aventura siguió detallando en tono declamatorio causó gran hilaridad a Pancracio y al Manteca.

— Yo he procurado hacerme entender, convencerlos de que soy un verdadero correligionario...

— ¿Corre... qué? —inquirió Demetrio, tendiendo una oreja.

— Correligionario, mi jefe..., es decir, que persigo los mismos ideales y defendiendo la misma causa que ustedes defienden.

Demetrio sonrió:

— ¿Pos cuál causa defendemos nosotros?...

Luis Cervantes, desconcertado, no encontró qué contestar.

— ¡Mi' qué cara pone!... ¿Pa qué son tantos brincos?... ¿Lo tronamos ya, Demeterio? —preguntó Pancracio, ansioso.

Demetrio llevó su mano al mechón de pelo que le cubría una oreja, se rascó largo rato, meditabundo; luego, no encontrando la solución, dijo:

— Sálganse... que ya me está doliendo otra vez... Anastasio, apaga la mecha. Encierren a ése en el corral y me lo cuidan Pancracio y Manteca. Mañana veremos.

VI

Luis Cervantes no aprendía aún a discernir la forma precisa de los objetos a la vaga tonalidad de las noches estrelladas, y buscando el mejor sitio para descansar, dio con sus huesos quebrantados sobre un montón de estiércol húmedo, al pie de la masa difusa de un huizache. Más por agotamiento que por resignación, se tendió cuan largo era y cerró los ojos resueltamente, dispuesto a dormir hasta que sus feroces vigilantes le despertaran o el sol de la mañana le quemara las orejas. Algo como un vago calor a su lado, luego un respirar rudo y fatigoso, le hicieron estremecerse; abrió los brazos en torno, y su mano trémula dio con los pelos rígidos de un cerdo, que, incomodado seguramente por la vecindad, gruñó.

Inútiles fueron ya todos sus esfuerzos para atraer el sueño; no por el dolor del miembro lesionado, ni por el de sus carnes magulladas, sino por la instantánea y precisa representación de su fracaso.

Sí; él no había sabido apreciar a su debido tiempo la distancia que hay de manejar el escalpelo, fulminar latrofaciosos desde las columnas de un diario provinciano, a venir a buscarlos con el fusil en las manos a sus propias guaridas. Sospechó su equivocación, ya dado de alta como subteniente de caballería, al rendir la primera jornada. Brutal jornada de catorce leguas, que lo dejaba con las caderas y las rodillas de una pieza, cual si todos sus huesos se hubieran soldado en uno. Acabólo de comprender ocho días después, al primer encuentro con los rebeldes. Juraría, la mano puesta sobre un Santo Cristo, que cuando los soldados se echaron los máuseres a la cara, alguien con estentórea voz había clamado a sus espaldas: "¡Sálvese el que pueda!" Ello tan claro así, que su mismo brioso y noble corcel, avezado a los combates, había vuelto grupas y de estampida no había querido detenerse sino a distancia donde ni el rumor de las balas se escuchaba. Y era cabalmente a la puesta del sol, cuando la montaña comenzaba a poblarse de sombras vagarosas e inquietantes, cuando las tinieblas ascendían a toda prisa de la hondonada. ¿Qué cosa más lógica podría ocurrírsele si no la de buscar abrigo entre las rocas, darles reposo al cuerpo y al espíritu y procurarse el sueño? Pero la lógica del soldado es la lógica del absurdo. Así, por ejemplo, a la mañana siguiente su coronel lo despierta a broncos puntapiés y le saca de su escondite con la cara gruesa a mojicones. Más todavía: aquello determina la hilaridad de los oficiales, a tal punto que, llorando de risa, imploran a una voz el perdón para el fugitivo. Y el coronel, en vez de fusilarlo, le larga un recio puntapié en las posaderas y le envía a la impedimenta como ayudante de cocina.

La injuria gravísima habría de dar sus frutos venenosos. Luis Cervantes cambia de chaqueta desde luego, aunque sólo *in mente* por el instante. Los dolores y las miserias de los desheredados alcanzan a conmoverlo; su causa es la causa sublime del pueblo subyugado que clama justicia, sólo justicia. Intima con el humilde soldado y, ¡qué más!, una acémila muerta de fatiga en una tormentosa jornada le hace derramar lágrimas de compasión.

Luis Cervantes, pues, se hizo acreedor a la confianza de la tropa. Hubo soldados que le hicieron confidencias temerarias. Uno, muy serio, y que se distinguía por su temperancia y retraimiento, le dijo: "Yo soy carpintero; tenía mi madre, una viejita clavada en su silla por el reumatismo desde hacía diez años. A medianoche me sacaron de mi casa tres gendarmes; amanecí en el cuartel y anochece a doce leguas de mi pueblo... Hace un mes pasé por allí con la tropa... ¡Mi madre estaba ya debajo de la tierra!... No tenía más consuelo en esta vida... Ahora no le hago falta a nadie. Pero, por mi Dios que está en los cielos, estos cartuchos que aquí me cargan no han de ser para los enemigos... Y si se me

hace el milagro (mi Madre Santísima de Guadalupe me lo ha de conceder), si me le junto a Villa..., juro por la sagrada alma de mi madre que me la han de pagar estos federales".

Otro, joven, muy inteligente, pero charlatán hasta por los codos, dipsómano y fumador de marihuana, lo llamó aparte y, mirándolo a la cara fijamente con sus ojos vagos y vidriosos, le sopló al oído: "Compadre..., aquéllos..., los de allá del otro lado..., ¿comprendes?... aquéllos cabalgan lo más granado de las caballerizas del Norte y del interior, las guarniciones de sus caballos pesan de pura plata... Nosotros, ¡pst!..., en sardinas buenas para alzar cubos de noria..., ¿comprendes, compadre? Aquéllos reciben relucientes pesos fuertes; nosotros, billetes de celuloide de la fábrica del asesino... Dije..."

Y así todos, hasta un sargento segundo contó ingenuamente: "Yo soy voluntario, pero me he tirado una plancha. Lo que en tiempos de paz no se hace en toda una vida de trabajar como una mula, hoy se puede hacer en unos cuantos meses de correr la sierra con un fusil a la espalda. Pero no con éstos `mano'..., no con éstos..."

Y Luis Cervantes, que compartía ya con la tropa aquel odio solapado, implacable y mortal a las clases, oficiales y a todos los superiores, sintió que de sus *ojos* caía hasta la última telaraña y vio claro el resultado final de la lucha.

—¡Mas he aquí que hoy, al llegar apenas con sus correligionarios, en vez de recibirle con los brazos abiertos lo encapillan en una zahúrda!

Fue de día: los gallos cantaron en los jacales; las gallinas trepadas en las ramas del huizache del corral se removieron, abrían las alas y esponjaban las plumas y en un solo salto se ponían en el suelo.

Contempló a sus centinelas tirados en el estiércol y roncando. En su imaginación revivieron las fisonomías de los dos hombres de la víspera. Uno, Pancracio, agüerado, pecoso, su cara lampiña, su barba saltona, la frente roma y oblicua, untadas las orejas al cráneo y todo de un aspecto bestial. Y el otro, el Manteca, una piltrafa humana: *ojos* escondidos, mirada torva, cabellos muy lacios cayéndole a la nuca, sobre la frente y las orejas; sus labios de escrofuloso entreabiertos eternamente.

Y sintió una vez más que su carne se achinaba.

VII

Adormilado aún, Demetrio paseó la mano sobre los crespos mechones que cubrían su frente húmeda, apartados hacia una oreja, y abrió los *ojos*.

Distinta oyó la voz femenina y melodiosa que en sueños había escuchado ya, y se volvió a la puerta.

Era de día: los rayos del sol dardeaban entre los popotes del jacal. La misma moza que la víspera le había ofrecido un apastito de agua deliciosamente fría (sus sueños de toda la noche), ahora, igual de dulce y cariñosa, entraba con una olla de leche desparramándose de espuma.

—Es de cabra, pero está regüena... Andele, nomás aprébela...

Agradecido, sonrió Demetrio, se incorporó y, tomando la vasija de barro, comenzó a dar pequeños sorbos, sin quitar los *ojos* de la muchacha.

Ella, inquieta, bajó los suyos.

—¿Cómo te llamas?

— Camila.

—Me cuadra el nombre, pero más la tonadita...

Camila se cubrió de rubor, y como él intentara asirla por un puño, asustada, tomó la vasija vacía y se escapó más que de prisa.

— No, compadre Demetrio —observó gravemente Anastasio Montañés—; hay que amansarlas primero... ¡Hui!, pa las lepras que me han dejado en el cuerpo las mujeres!... Yo tengo mucha experiencia en eso...

— Me siento bien, compadre —dijo Demetrio haciéndose el sordo—; parece que me dieron fríos; sudé mucho y amanecí muy refrescado. Lo que me está fregando todavía es la maldita herida. Llame a Venancio para que me cure.

— ¿Y qué hacemos, pues, con el curro que agarré anoche? —preguntó Pancracio.

—¡Cabal, hombre!... ¡No me había vuelto a acordar!...

Demetrio, como siempre, pensó y vaciló mucho antes de tomar una decisión.

—A ver, Codorniz, ven acá. Mira, pregunta por una capilla que hay como a tres leguas de aquí. Anda y róbele la sotana al cura.

— Pero ¿qué va a hacer, compadre? —preguntó Anastasio pasmado.

— Si este curro viene a asesinarme, es muy fácil sacarle la verdad. Yo le digo que lo voy a fusilar. La Codorniz se viste de padre y lo confiesa. Si tiene pecado, lo trueno: si no, lo dejo libre.

— ¡Hum, cuánto requisito!... Yo lo quemaba y ya —exclamó Pancracio despectivo.

Por la noche regresó la Codorniz con la sotana del cura. Demetrio hizo que le llevaran el prisionero.

Luis Cervantes, sin dormir ni comer en dos días, entraba con el rostro demacrado y ojeroso, los labios descoloridos y secos.

Habló con lentitud y torpeza.

—Hagan de mí lo que quieran... Seguramente que me equivoqué con ustedes...

Hubo un prolongado silencio. Después:

—Creí que ustedes aceptarían con gusto al que viene a ofrecerles ayuda, pobre ayuda la mía, pero que sólo a ustedes mismos beneficia... ¿Yo qué me gano con que la revolución triunfe o no?

Poco a poco iba animándose, y la languidez de su mirada desaparecía por instantes.

—La revolución beneficia al pobre, al ignorante, al que toda su vida ha sido esclavo, a los infelices que ni siquiera saben que si lo son es porque el rico convierte en oro las lágrimas, el sudor y la sangre de los pobres...

—¡Bah!..., ¿y eso es como a modo de qué?... ¡Cuando ni a mí me cuadran los sermones! —interrumpió Pancracio.

— Yo he querido pelear por la causa santa de los desventurados... Pero ustedes no me entienden..., ustedes me rechazan... ¡Hagan conmigo, pues, lo que gusten!

— Por lo pronto nomás te pongo esta reata en el gaznate... ¡Mi' qué rechonchito y qué blanco lo tienes!

—Sí, ya sé a lo que viene usted —repuso Demetrio con desabrimiento, rascándose la cabeza—. Lo voy a fusilar, ¿eh?...

Luego, volviéndose a Anastasio:

— Lévenselo..., y si quiere confesarse, tráiganle un padre...

Anastasio, impasible como siempre, tomó con suavidad el brazo de Cervantes.

—Véngase pa acá, curro...

Cuando después de algunos minutos vino la Codorniz ensotado, todos rieron a echar las tripas.

— ¡Hum, este curro es repicolargo! —exclamó—. Hasta se me figura que se rió de mí cuando comencé a hacerle preguntas.

—Pero ¿no cantó nada?

— No dijo más que lo de anoche...

— Me late que no viene a eso que usted teme, compadre —notó Anastasio.

— Bueno, pues denle de comer y ténganlo a una vista.

VIII

Luis Cervantes, otro día, apenas pudo levantarse. Arrastrando el miembro lesionado vagó de casa en casa buscando un poco de alcohol, agua hervida y pedazos de ropa usada. Camila, con su amabilidad incansable, se lo proporcionó todo.

Luego que comenzó a lavarse, ella se sentó a su lado, a ver curar la herida, con curiosidad de serrana.

—¡Oiga, ¿y quién lo insirió a curar?... ¿Y pa qué jirvió la agua?... ¿Y los trapos, pa qué los coció?... ¡Mire, mire, cuánta curiosidá pa todo!... ¿Yeso que se echó en las manos?... ¡Pior!... ¿Aguardiente de veras?... ¡Ande, pos si yo creiba que el aguardiente nomás pal cólico era güeno!... ¡Ah!... ¿De moo es que usted iba a ser dotor?... Ja, ja, jal... ¡Cosa de morirse uno de risal... ¿Y por qué no le regüelve mejor agua fría?... ¡Mi' qué cuentos!... ¡Quesque animales en la agua sin jervir!... ¡Fuchi!... ¡Pos cuando ni yo miro nadal...

Camila siguió interrogándole, y con tanta familiaridad, que de buenas a primeras comenzó a tutearlo.

Retraído a su propio pensamiento, Luis Cervantes no la escuchaba más.

"¿En dónde están esos hombres admirablemente armados y montados, que reciben sus haberes en puros pesos duros de los que Villa está acuñando en Chihuahua? ¡Bah! Una veintena de encuerados y piojosos, habiendo quien cabalgara en una yegua decrépita, matadura de la cruz a la cola. ¿Sería verdad lo que la prensa del gobierno y él mismo habían asegurado, que los llamados revolucionarios no eran sino bandidos agrupados ahora con un magnífico pretexto para saciar su sed de oro y de sangre? ¿Sería, pues, todo mentira lo que de ellos contaban los simpatizadores de la revolución? Pero si los periódicos gritaban todavía en todos los tonos triunfos y más triunfos de la federación, un pagador recién llegado de Guadalajara había dejado escapar la especie de que los parientes y favoritos de Huerta abandonaban la capital rumbo a los puertos, por más que éste seguía aúlla que aúlla: 'Haré la paz cueste lo que cueste'. Por tanto, revolucionarios, bandidos o como quisiera llamárseles, ellos iban a derrocar al gobierno; el mañana les pertenecía; había que estar, pues, con ellos, sólo con ellos."

—No, lo que es ahora no me he equivocado —se dijo para sí, casi en voz alta.

— ¿Qué estás diciendo? —preguntó Camila—; pos si yo creiba ya que los ratones te habían comido la lengua.

Luis Cervantes plegó las cejas y miró con aire hostil aquella especie de mono enchomitado, de tez bronceada, dientes de marfil, pies anchos y chatos.

—¿Oye, curro, y tú has de saber contar cuentos? Luis hizo un gesto de aspereza y se alejó sin contestarla.

Ella, embelesada, le siguió con los ojos hasta que su silueta desapareció por la vereda del arroyo.

Tan abstraída así, que se estremeció vivamente a la voz de su vecina, la tuerta María Antonia, que, figoneando desde su jacal, le gritó:

—¡Epa, tú!... dale los polvos de amor... A ver si ansina cal...

— ¡Pior!... Ésa será usted...

— ¡Si yo quijjeral... Pero, ¡fuche!, les tengo asco a los curros...

—Señá Remigia, empréstemme unos blanquillos, mi gallina amaneció echada. Allí tengo unos señores que quieren almorzar.

Por el cambio de la viva luz del sol a la penumbra del jacalucho, más turbia todavía por la densa humareda que se alzaba del fogón, los ojos de la vecina se ensancharon. Pero al cabo de breves segundos comenzó a percibir distintamente el contorno de los objetos y la camilla del herido en un rincón, tocando por su cabecera el cobertizo tiznado y brillante.

Se acurrucó en cuclillas al lado de señá Remigia y echando miradas furtivas adonde reposaba Demetrio, preguntó en voz baja:

— ¿Cómo va el hombre?... ¿Aliviado?... ¡Qué güeno!... ¡Mire, y tan muchacho!... Pero en toavía está retedescolorido... ¡Ah!... ¿De moo es que no le cierra el balazo?... Oiga, señá Remigia, ¿no quiere que le hagamos alguna lucha?

Señá Remigia, desnuda arriba de la cintura, tiende sus brazos tendinosos y enjutos sobre la mano del metate y pasa y repasa su nixtamal.

—Pos quién sabe si no les cuadre —responde sin interrumpir la ruda tarea y casi sofocada—; ellos train su dotor y por eso...

— Señá Remigia —entra otra vecina doblando su flaco espinazo para franquear la puerta—, ¿no tiene unas hojitas de laurel que me dé pa hacerle un cocimiento a María Antonia?... Amaneció con el cólico...

Y como, a la verdad, sólo lleva pretexto para curiosear y chismorrear, vuelve los ojos hacia el rincón donde está el enfermo y con un guiño inquiere por su salud.

Señá Remigia baja los ojos para indicar que Demetrio está durmiendo...

— Ande, pos si aquí está usted también, señá Pachita..., no la había visto...

— Güenos días le dé Dios, ña Fortunata... ¿Cómo amanecieron?

—Pos María Antonia con su "superior"... y, como siempre, con el cólico...

En cuclillas, pónese cuadril a cuadril con señá Pachita.

—No tengo hojas de laurel, mi alma —responde señá Remigia suspendiendo un instante la molienda; aparta de su rostro goteante algunos cabellos que caen sobre sus ojos y hunde luego las dos manos en un apaste, sacando un gran puñado de maíz cocido que chorrea una agua amarillenta y turbia—. Yo no tengo; pero vaya con señá Dolores: a ella no le faltan nunca yerbitas.

—Na Dolores dende anoche se jue pa la cofradía. A sigún razón vinieron por ella pa que jue a sacar de su cuidado a la muchachilla de tía Matías.

— ¡Ande, señá Pachita, no me lo digal...

Las tres viejas forman animado corro y, hablando en voz muy baja, se ponen a chismorrear con vivísima animación.

— ¡Cierto como haber Dios en los cielos!...

— ¡Ah, pos si yo jui la primera que lo dije: "Marcelina está gorda y está gorda"! Pero naiden me lo quería creer...

— Pos pobre criatura... ¡Y pior si va resultando con que es de su tío Nazario!...

—¡Dios la favorezca!...

—¡No, qué tío Nazario ni qué ojo de hachal... ¡Mal ajo pa los federales condenados!...

— ¡Bah, pos aistá otra enfelizada más!...

El barullo de las comadres acabó por despenar a Derríetrio.

Asilenciáronse un momento, y a poco dijo señá Pachita, sacando del seno un palomo tierno que abría

el pico casi sofocado ya:

— Pos la mera verdá, yo le traiba al señor estas sustancias..., pero sigún razón está en manos de médico...

— Eso no le hace, señá Pachita...; es cosa que va por juera...

—Señor, dispense la parvedá...; aquí le traigo este presente —dijo la vejarruca acercándose a Demetrio—. Pa las morragias de sangre no hay como estas sustancias...

Demetrio aprobó vivamente. Ya le habían puesto en el estómago unas piezas de pan mojado en aguardiente, y aunque cuando se las despegaron le vaporizó mucho el ombligo, sentía que aún le quedaba mucho calor encerrado.

— Ande, usté que sabe bien, señá Remigia —exclamaron las vecinas.

De un otate desensartó señá Remigia una larga y encorvada cuchilla que servía para apear tunas; tomó el pichón en una sola mano y, volviéndolo por el vientre, con habilidad de cirujano lo partió por la mitad de un solo tajo.

—¡En el nombre de Jesús, María y José! —dijo señá Remigia echando una bendición. Luego, con rapidez,

aplicó calientes y chorreando los dos pedazos del palomo sobre el abdomen de Demetrio.

—Ya verá cómo va a sentir mucho consuelo...

Obedeciendo las instrucciones de señá Remigia, Demetrio se inmovilizó encogiéndose sobre un costado.

Entonces señá Fortunata contó su cuita. Ella le tenía muy buena voluntad a los señores de la revolución. Hacía tres meses que los federales le robaron su única hija, y eso la tenía inconsolable y fuera de sí.

Al principio de la relación, la Codorniz y Anastasio Montañés, atejonados al pie de la camilla, levantaban la cabeza y, entreabierta la boca, escuchaban el relato; pero en tantas minucias se metió señá Fortunata, que a la mitad la Codorniz se aburrió y salió a rascarse al sol, y cuando terminaba solemnemente: "Espero de Dios y María Santísima que ustedes no han de dejar vivo a uno de estos federales del infierno", Demetrio, vuelta la cara a la pared, sintiendo mucho consuelo con las sustancias en el estómago, repasaba un itinerario para internarse en Durango, y Anastasio Montañés roncaba como un trombón.

X

—¿Por qué no llama al curro pa que lo cure, compadre Demetrio? —dijo Anastasio Montañés al jefe, que a diario sufría grandes calosfríos y calenturas—. Si viera, él se cura solo y anda ya tan aliviado que ni cojea siquiera.

Pero Venancio, que tenía dispuestos los botes de manteca y las planchuelas de hilas mugrientas, protestó:

— Si alguien le pone mano, yo no respondo de las resultas.

— Oye, compa, ¡pero qué dotor ni qué naa eres tú!... ¿Voy que ya hasta se te olvidó por qué viniste a dar aquí? —dijo la Codorniz.

— Sí, ya me acuerdo, Codorniz, de que andas con nosotros porque te robaste un reloj y unos anillos de brillantes —repuso muy exaltado Venancio.

La Codorniz lanzó una carcajada.

— ¡Siquiera!... Pior que tú corriste de tu pueblo porque envenenaste a tu novia.

— ¡Mientes!...

— Sí; le diste cantáridas pa...

Los gritos de protesta de Venancio se ahogaron entre las carcajadas estrepitosas de los demás.

Demetrio, avinagrado el semblante, les hizo callar; luego comenzó a quejarse, y dijo:

—A ver, traigan, pues, al estudiante.

Vino Luis Cervantes, descubrió la pierna, examinó detenidamente la herida y meneó la cabeza. La ligadura de manta se hundía en un surco de piel; la pierna, abotagada, parecía reventar. A cada movimiento, Demetrio ahogaba un gemido. Luis Cervantes cortó la ligadura, lavó abundantemente la herida, cubrió el muslo con grandes lienzos húmedos y lo vendó.

Demetrio pudo dormir toda la tarde y toda la noche. Otro día despertó muy contento.

—Tiene la mano muy liviana el curro —dijo. Venancio, pronto, observó:

— Está bueno; pero hay que saber que los curros son como la humedad, por dondequiera se filtran. Por los curros se ha perdido el fruto de las revoluciones.

Y como Demetrio creía a ojo cerrado en la ciencia del barbero, otro día, a la hora que Luis Cervantes lo fue a curar, le dijo:

—Oiga, hágalo bien pa que cuando me deje bueno y sano se largue ya a su casa o adonde le dé su gana.

Luis Cervantes, discreto, no respondió una palabra.

Pasó una semana, quince días; los federales no daban señales de vida. Por otra parte, el fíjol y el maíz abundaban en los ranchos inmediatos; la gente tal odio tenía a los federales, que de buen grado proporcionaban auxilio a los rebeldes. Los de Demetrio, pues, esperaron sin impaciencia el completo restablecimiento de su jefe.

Durante muchos días, Luis Cervantes continuó mustio y silencioso.

—¡Qué se me hace que usted está enamorado, curro! —le dijo Demetrio, bromista, un día, después de la curación y comenzando a encariñarse con él.

Poco a poco fue tomando interés por sus comodidades. Le preguntó si los soldados le daban su ración de carne y leche. Luis Cervantes tuvo que decir que se alimentaba sólo con lo que las buenas viejas del rancho querían darle y que la gente le seguía mirando como a un desconocido o a un intruso.

—Todos son buenos muchachos, curro —repuso Demetrio—; todo está en saberles el modo. Desde mañana no le faltará nada. Ya verá.

En efecto, esa misma tarde las cosas comenzaron a cambiar. Tirados en el pedregal, mirando las nubes crepusculares como gigantescos cuajarones de sangre, escuchaban algunos de los hombres de Macías la relación que hacía Venancio de amenos episodios de *El judío errante*. Muchos, arrullados por la meliflua voz del barbero comenzaron a roncar; pero Luis Cervantes, muy atento, luego que acabó su plática con extraños comentarios anticlericales, le dijo enfático:

— ¡Admirable! ¡Tiene usted un bellissimo talento!

— No lo tengo malo —repuso Venancio convencido—; pero mis padres murieron y yo no pude hacer carrera.

— Es lo de menos. Al triunfo de nuestra causa, usted obtendrá fácilmente un título. Dos o tres semanas de concurrir a los hospitales, una buena recomendación de nuestro jefe Macías..., y usted, doctor... ¡Tiene tal facilidad, que todo sería un juego!

Desde esa noche, Venancio se distinguió de los demás dejando de llamarle curro. Luisito por aquí y Luisito por allí.

XI

—Oye, curro, yo quería icirte una cosa... —dijo Camila una mañana, a la hora que Luis Cervantes iba por agua hervida al jacal para curar su pie.

La muchacha andaba inquieta de días atrás, y sus melindres y reticencias habían acabado por fastidiar al mozo, que, suspendiendo de pronto su tarea, se puso en pie y, mirándola cara a cara, le respondió:

— Bueno... ¿Qué cosa quieres decirme?

Camila sintió entonces la lengua hecha un trapo y nada pudo pronunciar; su rostro se encendió como un madroño, alzó los hombros y encogió la cabeza hasta tocarse el desnudo pecho. Después, sin moverse y fijando, con obstinación de idiota, sus ojos en la herida, pronunció con debilísima voz:

—¡Mira qué bonito viene encarnando ya!... Parece botón de rosa de Castilla.

Luis Cervantes plegó el ceño con enojo manifiesto y se puso de nuevo a curarse sin hacer más caso de ella.

Cuando terminó, Camila había desaparecido.

Durante tres días no resultó la muchacha en parte alguna. Señá Agapita, su madre, era la que acudía al llamado de Luis Cervantes y era la que le hervía el agua y los lienzos. El buen cuidado tuvo de no preguntar más. Pero a los tres días ahí estaba de nuevo Camila con más rodeos y melindres que antes.

Luis Cervantes, distraído, con su indiferencia envalentonó a Camila, que habló al fin:

—Oye, curro... Yo quería icirte una cosa... Oye, curro; yo quiero que me repases *La Adelita... pa... ¿A que no me adivinas pa qué?... Pos pa cantarla mucho, mucho, cuando ustedes se vayan, cuando ya no estés tú aquí..., cuando andes ya tan lejos, lejos..., que ni más te acuerdes de mí...*

Sus palabras hacían en Luis Cervantes el efecto de una punta de acero resbalando por las paredes de una redoma.

Ella no lo advertía, y prosiguió tan ingenua como antes:

i —¡Anda, curro, ni te cuento!... Si vieras qué malo es el viejo que los manda a ustedes... Ai tienes nomás lo que me sucedió con él... Ya sabes que no quere el tal Demetrio que naiden le haga la comida más que mi mamá y que naiden se la lleve más que yo... Güeno; pos Potro día entré con el champurrao, y ¿qué te parece que hizo el viejo e porra? Pos que me pepena de la mano y me la agarra juerte, fuerte; luego comienza a

pellizcarme las corvas... ¡Ah, pero qué plieque tan güeno le he echao!... "¡Epa, pior!... ¡Estése quieto!... ¡Pior, viejo malcriado!... ¡Suélteme..., suélteme, viejo sinvergüenza!" Y que me doy el reculón y me le zafo, y que ai voy pa juera a toa carrera... ¿Qué te parece nomás, curro?

Jamás había visto reír con tanto regocijo Camila a Luis Cervantes.

— Pero ¿de veras es cierto todo lo que me estás contando?

Profundamente desconcertada, Camila no podía responderle. Él volvió a reír estrepitosamente y a repetir su pregunta. Y ella, sintiendo la inquietud y la zozobra más grandes, le respondió con voz quebrantada:

— Sí, es cierto... Y eso es lo que yo te quería icir... ¿Qué no te ha dao coraje por eso, curro?

Una vez más Camila contempló con embeleso el fresco y radioso rostro de Luis Cervantes, aquellos ojos glaucos de tierna expresión, sus carrillos frescos y rosados como los de un muñeco de porcelana, la tersura de una piel blanca y delicada que asomaba abajo del cuello, y más arriba de las mangas de una tosca camiseta de lana, el rubio tierno de sus cabellos, rizados ligeramente.

— Pero ¿qué diablos estás esperando, pues, boba? Si el jefe te quiere, ¿tú qué más pretendes?...

Camila sintió que de su pecho algo se levantaba, algo que llegaba hasta su garganta y en su garganta se anudaba. Apretó fuertemente sus párpados para exprimir sus ojos rasos; luego limpió con el dorso de su mano la humedad de los carrillos y, como hacía tres días, con la ligereza del cervatillo, escapó.

XII

La herida de Demetrio había cicatrizado ya. Comenzaban a discutir los proyectos para acercarse al Norte, donde se decía que los revolucionarios habían triunfado en toda línea de los federales. Un acontecimiento vino a precipitar las cosas. Una vez Luis Cervantes, sentado en un picacho de la sierra, al fresco de la tarde, la mirada perdida a lo lejos, soñando, mataba el fastidio. Al pie del angosto crestón, alagartados entre los jarales y a orillas del río, Pancracio y el Manteca jugaban baraja. Anastasio Montañés, que veía el juego con indiferencia, volvió de pronto su rostro de negra barba y dulces ojos hacia Luis Cervantes y le dijo:

— ¿Por qué está triste, curro? ¿Qué piensa tanto? Venga, arrímese a platicar...

Luis Cervantes no se movió; pero Anastasio fue a sentarse amistosamente a su lado.

— A usted le falta la bulla de su tierra. Bien se echa de ver que es de zapato pintado y moñito en la camisa... Mire, curro: ai donde me ve aquí, todo mugriento y desgarrado, no soy lo que parezco... ¿A que no me lo cree?... Yo no tengo necesidad; soy dueño de diez yuntas de bueyes... ¡De veras!... Ai que lo diga mi compadre Demetrio... Tengo mis diez fanegas de siembra... ¿A que no me lo cree?... Mire, curro; a mí me cuadra mucho hacer repelar a los federales, y por eso me tienen mala voluntad. La última vez, hace ocho meses ya (los mismos que tengo de andar aquí), le metí un navajazo a un capitancito faceto (Dios me guarde), aquí, merito del ombligo... Pero, de veras, yo no tengo necesidad... Ando aquí por eso... y por darle la mano a mi compadre Demetrio.

— ¡Moza de mi vida! —gritó el Manteca entusiasmado con un albur. Sobre la sota de espadas puso una moneda de veinte centavos de plata.

— ¡Cómo cree que a mí nadita que me cuadra el juego, curro!... ¿Quiere usted apostar?... ¡ándele, mire; esta viborita de cuero suena todavía! —dijo Anastasio sacudiendo el cinturón y haciendo oír el choque de los pesos duros.

En éstas corrió Pancracio la baraja, vino la sota y se armó un altercado. Jácara, gritos, luego injurias. Pancracio enfrentaba su rostro de piedra ante el del Manteca, que lo veía con ojos de culebra, convulso como un epiléptico. De un momento a otro llegaban a las manos. A falta de insolencias suficientemente incisivas, acudían a nombrar padres y madres en el bordado más rico de indecencias.

Pero nada ocurrió; luego que se agotaron los insultos, suspendióse el juego, se echaron tranquilamente un brazo a la espalda y paso a paso se alejaron en busca de un trago de aguardiente.

—Tampoco a mí me gusta pelear con la lengua. Eso es feo, ¿verdad, curro?... De veras, mire, a mí nadie me ha mentao a mi familia... Me gusta darme mi lugar. Por eso me verá que nunca ando chacoteando... Oiga, curro —prosiguió Anastasio, cambiando el acento de su voz, poniéndose una mano sobre la frente y de pie—, ¿qué polvareda se levanta allá, detrás de aquel cerrito? ¡Caramba! ¡A poco son los mochos!... ¡Y uno tan desprevenido!... Véngase, curro; vamos a darles parte a los muchachos.

Fue motivo de gran regocijo:

— ¡Vamos a toparlos! —dijo Pancracio el primero.

—Sí, vamos a toparlos. ¡Qué pueden traer que no lleven!...

Pero el enemigo se redujo a un hatajo de burros y dos arrieros.

— Párenlos. Son arribeños y han de traer algunas novedades —dijo Demetrio.

Y las tuvieron de sensación. Los federales tenían fortificados los cerros de El Grillo y La Bufa de Zacatecas. Decíase que era el último reducto de Huerta, y todo el mundo auguraba la caída de la plaza.. Las familias salían con precipitación rumbo al sur; los trenes iban colmados de gente; faltaban carruajes y carretones, y por los caminos reales, muchos, sobrecogidos de pánico, marchaban a pie y

con sus equipajes a cuestas. Pánfilo Natera reunía su gente en Fresnillo, y a los federales "ya les venían muy anchos los pantalones".

— La caída de Zacatecas es el *Requiescat in pace* de Huerta —aseguró Luis Cervantes con extraordinaria vehemencia—. Necesitamos llegar antes del ataque a juntarnos con el general Natera.

Y reparando en el extrañamiento que sus palabras causaban en los semblantes de Demetrio y sus compañeros, se dio cuenta de que aún era un don nadie allí.

Pero otro día, cuando la gente salió en busca de buenas bestias para emprender de nuevo la marcha, Demetrio llamó a Luis Cervantes y le dijo:

—¿De veras quiere irse con nosotros, curro?... Usted es de otra madera, y la verdad, no entiendo cómo pueda gustarle esta vida. ¿Qué cree que uno anda aquí por su puro gusto?... Cierto, ¿a qué negarlo?, a uno le cuadra el ruido; pero no sólo es eso... Siéntese, curro, siéntese, para contarle. ¿Sabe por qué me levanté?... Mire, antes

de la revolución tenía yo hasta mi tierra volteada para sembrar, y si no hubiera sido por el choque con don Mónico, el cacique de Moyahua, a estas horas andaría yo con mucha priesa, preparando la yunta para las siembras... Pancracio, apéate dos botellas de cerveza, una para mí y otra para el curro... Por la señal de la Santa Cruz... ¿Ya no hace daño, verdad?...

XIII

—Yo soy de Limón, allí, muy cerca de Moyahua, del puro cañón de Juchipila. Tenía mi casa, mis vacas y un pedazo de tierra para sembrar; es decir, que nada me faltaba. Pues, señor, nosotros los rancheros tenemos la costumbre de bajar al lugar cada ocho días. Oye uno su misa, oye el sermón, luego va a la plaza, compra sus cebollas, sus jitomates y todas las encomiendas. Después entra uno con los amigos a la tienda de Primitivo López a hacer las once. Se toma la copita; a veces es uno condescendiente y se deja cargar la mano, y se le sube el trago, y le da mucho gusto, y ríe uno, grita y canta, si le da su mucha gana. Todo está bueno, porque no se ofende a nadie. Pero que comienzan a meterse con usted; que el policía pasa y pasa, arrima la oreja a la puerta; que al comisario o a los auxiliares se les ocurre quitarle a usted su gusto... ¡Claro, hombre, usted no tiene la sangre de horchata, usted lleva el alma en el cuerpo, a usted le da coraje, y se levanta y les dice su justo precio! Si entendieron, santo y bueno; a uno lo dejan en paz, y en eso paró todo. Pero hay veces que quieren hablar ronco y golpeado... y uno es lebroncito de por sí... y no le cuadra que nadie le pele los ojos... Y, sí señor; sale la daga, sale la pistola... ¡Y luego vamos a correr la sierra hasta que se les olvida el difuntito!

"Bueno. ¿Qué pasó con don Mónico? ¡Faceto! Muchísimo menos que con los otros. ¡Ni siquiera vio correr el gallo!... Una escupida en las barbas por entrometido, y pare usted de contar... Pues con eso ha habido para que me eche encima a la federación. Usted ha de saber del chisme ése de México, donde mataron al señor Madero y a otro, a un tal Félix o Felipe Díaz, ¡qué sé yo!... Bueno: pues el dicho don Mónico fue en persona a Zacatecas a traer escolta para que me agarraran. Que diz que yo era maderista y que me iba a levantar. Pero como no faltan amigos, hubo quien me lo avisara a tiempo, y cuando los federales vinieron a Limón, yo ya me había pelado. Después vino mi compadre Anastasio, que hizo una muerte, y luego Pancracio, la Codorniz y muchos amigos y conocidos. Después se nos han ido juntando más, y ya ve: hacemos la lucha como podemos."

—Mi jefe —dijo Luis Cervantes después de algunos minutos de silencio y meditación—, usted sabe ya que aquí cerca, en Juchipila, tenemos gente de Natera; nos conviene ir a juntarnos con ellos antes de que tomen Zacatecas. Nos presentamos con el general...

—No tengo genio para eso... A mí no me cuadra rendirle a nadie.

—Pero usted, sólo con unos cuantos hombres por acá, no dejará de pasar por un cabecilla sin importancia. La revolución gana indefectiblemente; luego que se acabe le dicen, como les dijo Madero a los que le ayudaron: "Amigos, muchas gracias; ahora vuélvanse a sus casas..."

— No quiero yo otra cosa, sino que me dejen en paz para volver a mi casa.

— Allá voy... No he terminado: "Ustedes, que me levantaron hasta la Presidencia de la República, arriesgando su vida, con peligro inminente de dejar viudas y huérfanos en la miseria, ahora que he conseguido mi objeto, váyanse a coger el azadón y la pala, a medio vivir, siempre con hambre y sin vestir, como estaban antes, mientras que nosotros, los de arriba, hacemos unos cuantos millones de pesos."

Demetrio meneó la cabeza y sonriendo se rascó:

— ¡Luisito ha dicho una verdad como un templo! —exclamó con entusiasmo el barbero Venancio.

— Como decía —prosiguió Luis Cervantes—, se acaba la revolución, y se acabó todo. ¡Lástima de tanta vida segada, de tantas viudas y huérfanos, de tanta sangre vertida! Todo, ¿para qué? Para que unos cuantos bribones se enriquezcan y todo quede igual o peor que antes. Usted es desprendido, y dice: "Yo no ambiciono más que volver a mi tierra". Pero ¿es de justicia privar a su mujer y a sus hijos de la fortuna que la Divina Providencia le pone ahora en sus manos? ¿Será justo abandonar a la patria en estos momentos solemnes en que va a necesitar de toda la abnegación de sus hijos los humildes para que la salven, para que no la dejen caer de nuevo en manos de sus eternos detentadores y verdugos, los caciques?... ¡No hay que olvidarse de lo más sagrado que existe en el mundo para el hombre: la familia y la patria!...

Macías sonrió y sus ojos brillaron.

— ¿Qué, será bueno ir con Natera, curro?

— No sólo bueno —pronunció insinuante Venancio—, sino indispensable, Demetrio.

—Mi jefe —continuó Cervantes—, usted me ha simpatizado desde que lo conocí, y lo quiero cada vez más, porque sé todo lo que vale. Permítame que sea enteramente franco. Usted no comprende todavía su verdadera, su alta y nobilísima misión. Usted, hombre modesto y sin ambiciones, no quiere ver el importantísimo papel que le toca en esta revolución. Mentira que usted ande por aquí por don Mónico, el cacique; usted se ha levantado contra el caciquismo que asola toda la nación. Somos elementos de un gran movimiento social que tiene que concluir por el engrandecimiento de nuestra patria. Somos instrumentos del des-tino para la reivindicación de los sagrados derechos del pueblo. No peleamos por derrocar a un asesino miserable, sino contra la tiranía misma. Eso es lo que se llama luchar por principios, tener ideales. Por ellos luchan Villa, Natera, Carranza; por ellos estamos luchando nosotros.

— Sí, sí; cabalmente lo que yo he pensado —dijo Venancio entusiasmadísimo.

— Pancracio, apéate otras dos cervezas...

XIV

—Si vieras qué bien explica las cosas el curro, compadre Anastasio —dijo Demetrio, preocupado por lo que esa mañana había podido sacar en claro de las palabras de Luis Cervantes.

— Ya lo estuve oyendo —respondió Anastasio—. La verdad, es gente que, como sabe leer y escribir, entiende bien las cosas. Pero lo que a mí no se me alcanza, compadre, es eso de que usted vaya a presentarse con el señor Natera con tan poquitos que semos.

—¡Hum, es lo de menos! Desde hoy vamos a hacerlo ya de otro modo. He oído decir que Crispín Robles llega a todos los pueblos sacando cuantas armas y caballos encuentra; echa fuera de la cárcel a los presos, y en dos por tres tiene gente de sobra. Ya verá. La verdad, compadre Anastasio, hemos tonteado mucho. Parece a manera de mentira que este curro haya venido a enseñarnos la cartilla.

—¡Lo que es eso de saber leer y escribir!...

Los dos suspiraron con tristeza.

Luis Cervantes y muchos otros entraron a informarse de la fecha de salida.

—Mañana mismo nos vamos —dijo Demetrio sin vacilación.

Luego la Codorniz propuso traer música del pueblito inmediato y despedirse con un baile. Y su idea fue acogida con frenesí.

— Pos nos iremos —exclamó Pancracio y dio un aullido—; pero lo que es yo ya no me voy solo... Tengo mi amor y me lo llevo.

Demetrio dijo que él de muy buena gana se llevaría también a una mozuela que traía entre ojos, pero que deseaba mucho que ninguno de ellos dejara recuerdos negros, como los federales.

—No hay que esperar mucho; a la vuelta se arregla todo —pronunció en voz baja Luis Cervantes.

— ¡Cómo! —dijo Demetrio—. ¿Pues no dicen que usted y Camila...?

— No es cierto, mi jefe; ella lo quiere a usted... pero le tiene miedo...

—¿De veras, curro?

— Sí; pero me parece muy acertado lo que usted dice: no hay que dejar malas impresiones... Cuando regresemos en triunfo, todo será diferente; hasta se lo agradecerán.

— ¡Ah, curro!... ¡Es usted muy lanza! —contestó Demetrio, sonriendo y palmeándole la espalda.

Al declinar la tarde, como de costumbre, Camila bajaba por agua al río. Por la misma vereda y a su encuentro venía Luis Cervantes.

Camila sintió que el corazón se le quería salir.

Quizá sin reparar en ella, Luis Cervantes, bruscamente, desapareció en un recodo de peñascos.

A esa hora, como todos los días, la penumbra apagaba en un tono mate las rocas calcinadas, los ramajes quemados por el sol y los musgos secos. Soplaban un viento tibio en débil rumor, meciendo las hojas lanceoladas de la tierna milpa. Todo era igual; pero en las piedras, en las ramas secas, en el aire embalsamado y en la hojarasca, Camila encontraba ahora algo muy extraño: como si todas aquellas cosas tuvieran mucha tristeza.

Dobló una peña gigantesca y carcomida, y dio bruscamente con Luis Cervantes, encaramado en una roca, las piernas pendientes y descubierta la cabeza.

— Oye, curro, ven a decirme adiós siquiera.

Luis Cervantes fue bastante dócil. Bajó y vino a ella.

—¡Orgullosa!... ¿Tan mal te serví que hasta el habla me niegas?...

— ¿Por qué me dices eso, Camila? Tú has sido muy buena conmigo... mejor que una amiga; me has cuidado como una hermana. Yo me voy muy agradecido de ti y siempre lo recordaré.

—¡Mentiroso! —dijo Camila transfigurada de alegría—. ¿Y si yo no te he hablado?

— Yo iba a darte las gracias esta noche en el baile.

— ¿Cuál baile?... Si hay baile, no iré yo...

— ¿Por qué no irás?

—Porque no puedo ver al viejo ese... al Demetrio.

— ¡Qué tonta!... Mira, él te quiere mucho; no pierdas esta ocasión que no volverás a encontrar en toda tu vida. Tonta, Demetrio va a llegar a general, va a ser muy rico... Muchos caballos, muchas alhajas, vestidos muy lujosos, casas elegantes y mucho dinero para gastar... ¡Imagínate lo que serías al lado de él!

Para que no le viera los ojos, Camila los levantó hacia el azul del cielo. Una hoja seca se desprendió de las alturas del tajo y, balanceándose en el aire lentamente, cayó como mariposita muerta a sus pies. Se inclinó y la tomó en sus dedos. Luego, sin mirarlo a la cara, susurró:

—¡Ay, curro... si vieras qué feo siento que tú me digas eso!... Si yo a ti es al que quero... pero a ti nomás... Vete, curro; vete, que no sé por qué me da tanta vergüenza... ¡Vete, vete!...

Y tiró la hoja desmenuzada entre sus dedos angustiosos y se cubrió la cara con la punta de su delantal.

Cuando abrió de nuevo los ojos, Luis Cervantes había desaparecido.

Ella siguió la vereda del arroyo. El agua parecía espolvoreada de finísimo carmín; en sus ondas se removían un cielo de colores y los picachos mitad luz y mitad sombra. Miríadas de insectos luminosos parpadeaban en un remanso. Yen el fondo de guijas lavadas se reprodujo con su blusa amarilla de cintas verdes, sus enaguas blancas sin almidonar, lamida la cabeza y estiradas

las cejas y la frente; tal como se había ataviado para gustar a Luis.

Y rompió a llorar.

Entre los jarales las ranas cantaban la implacable melancolía de la hora.

Meciéndose en una rama seca, una torcaz lloró también.

XV

En el baile hubo mucha alegría y se bebió muy buen mezcal.

—Extraño a Camila —pronunció en voz alta Demetrio.

Y todo el mundo buscó con los ojos a Camila.

— Está mala, tiene jaqueca —respondió con aspereza señá Agapita, amoscada por las miradas de malicia que todos tenían puestas en ella.

Ya al acabarse el fandango, Demetrio, bamboleándose un poco, dio las gracias a los buenos vecinos que tan bien los habían acogido y prometió que al triunfo de la revolución a todos los tendría presentes, que "en la cama y en la cárcel se conoce a los amigos".

— Dios los tenga de su santa mano —dijo una vieja.

—Dios los bendiga y los lleve por buen camino —dijeron otras.

Y María Antonia, muy borracha:

—¡Que güelvan pronto... pero re pronto!...

Otro día María Antonia, que aunque cacariza y con una nube en un ojo tenía muy mala fama, tan mala que se aseguraba que no había varón que no la hubiese conocido entre los jarales del río, le gritó así a Camila:

— ¡Epa, tú!... ¿Qué es eso?... ¿Qué haces en el rincón con el rebozo liado a la cabeza?... ¡Huy!... ¿Llorando?... ¡Mira qué ojos! ¡Ya pareces hechicera! ¡Vaya... no te apures!... No hay dolor que al alma llegue, que a los tres días no se acabe.

Señá Agapita juntó las cejas, y quién sabe qué gruñó para sus adentros.

En verdad, las comadres estaban desazonadas por la partida de la gente, y los mismos hombres, no obstante díceres y chismes un tanto ofensivos, lamentaban que no hubiera ya quien surtiera el rancho de carneros y terneras para comer carne a diario. ¡Tan a gusto que se pasa uno la vida comiendo y bebiendo, durmiendo a pierna tirante a la sombra de las peñas, mientras que las nubes se hacen y deshacen en el cielo!

— ¡Mírenlos otra vez! Allá van —gritó María Antonia—; parecen juguetes de rinconera.

A lo lejos, allá donde la breña y el chaparral comenzaban a fundirse en un solo plano aterciopelado y azuloso, se perfilaron en la claridad zafirina del cielo y sobre el filo de una cima los hombres de Macías en sus escuetos jamelgos. Una ráfaga de aire cálido llevó hasta los jacales los acentos vagos y entrecortados de *La Adelita*.

Camila, que a la voz de María Antonia había salido a verlos por última vez, no pudo contenerse, y regresó ahogándose en sollozos.

María Antonia lanzó una carcajada y se alejó.

"A mi hija le han hecho mal de ojo", rumoreó seña Agapita, perpleja.

Meditó mucho tiempo, y cuando lo hubo reflexionado bien, tomó una decisión: de una estaca clavada en un poste del jacal, entre el Divino Rostro y la Virgen de Jalpa, descolgó un barzón de cuero crudo que servía a su marido para uncir la yunta y, doblándolo, propinó a Camila una soberbia golpiza para sacarle todo el daño.

En su caballo zaino, Demetrio se sentía rejuvenecido; sus ojos recuperaban su brillo metálico peculiar, y en sus mejillas cobrizas de indígena de pura raza corría de nuevo la sangre roja y caliente.

Todos ensanchaban sus pulmones como para respirar los horizontes dilatados, la inmensidad del cielo, el azul de las montañas y el aire fresco, embalsamado de los aromas de la sierra. Y hacían galopar sus caballos, como si en aquel correr desenfrenado pretendieran posesionarse de toda la tierra. ¿Quién se acordaba ya del severo comandante de la policía, del gendarme gruñón y del cacique enfatuado? ¿Quién del mísero jacal, donde se vive como esclavo, siempre bajo la vigilancia del amo o del hosco y sañudo mayordomo, con la obligación imprescindible de estar de pie antes de salir el sol, con la pala y la canasta, o la mancera y el oate, para ganarse la olla de atole y el plato de frijoles del día?

Cantaban, reían y ululaban, ebrios de sol, de aire y de vida.

El Meco, haciendo cabriolas, mostraba su blanca dentadura, bromeaba y hacía payasadas.

— Oye, Pancracio —preguntó muy serio—; en carta que me pone mi mujer me notifica que izque ya tenemos otro hijo. ¿Cómo es eso? ¡Yo no la veo dende tiempos del señor Madero!

— No, no es nada... ¡La dejaste enhuevada!

Todos ríen estrepitosamente. Sólo el Meco, con mucha gravedad e indiferencia, canta en horrible falsete:

Yo le daba un centavo y ella me dijo que no... Yo le daba medio y no lo quiso agarrar.

Tanto me estuvo rogando hasta que me sacó un rial. ¡Ay, qué mujeres ingratas, no saben considerar!

La algarabía cesó cuando el sol los fue aturdiendo.

Todo el día caminaron por el cañón, subiendo y bajando cerros redondos, rapados y sucios como cabezas tiñosas, cerros que se sucedían interminablemente.

Al atardecer, en la lejanía, en medio de un lomerío azul, se esfumaron unas torrecillas acanteradas; luego la carretera polvorienta en blancos remolinos y los postes grises del telégrafo.

Avanzaron hacia el camino real y, a lo lejos, descubrieron el bulto de un hombre en cucullas, a la vera. Llegaron hasta allí. Era un viejo haraposo y mal encarado. Con una navaja sin filo remendaba trabajosamente un guarache. Cerca de él pacía un borrico cargado de yerba.

Demetrio interrogó:

— ¿Qué haces aquí, abuelito?

— Voy al pueblo a llevar alfalfa para mi vaca. —¿Cuántos son los federales?

—Sí..., unos cuantos; creo que no llegan a la docena. El viejo soltó la lengua. Dijo que había rumores muy graves: que Obregón estaba ya sitiando a Guadalajara;

Carrera Torres, dueño de San Luis Potosí, y Pánfilo Natera, en Fresnillo.

— Bueno —habló Demetrio—, puedes irte a tu pueblo; pero cuidado con ir a decir a nadie una palabra de lo que has visto, porque te trueno. Daría contigo aunque te escondieras en el centro de la tierra.

—¿Qué dicen, muchachos? —interrogó Demetrio cuando el viejo se había alejado.

—¡A darles!... ¡A no dejar un mocho vivo! —exclamaron todos a una.

Contaron los cartuchos y las granadas de mano que el Tecolote había fabricado con fragmentos de

tubo de hierro y perillas de latón.

— Son pocos —observó Anastasio—; pero los vamos a cambiar por carabinas.

Y, ansiosos, se apresuraban a seguir delante, hincando las espuelas en los ijares enjutados de sus agotadas recuas.

La voz imperiosa de Demetrio los detuvo.

Acamparon a la falda de una loma, protegidos por espeso huizachal. Sin desensillar, cada uno fue buscando una piedra para cabecera.

XVI

A medianoche, Demetrio Macías dio la orden de marcha. El pueblo distaba una o dos leguas, y había que dar un albazo a los federales.

El cielo estaba nublado, brillaban una que otra estrella y, de vez en vez, en el parpadeo rojizo de un relámpago, se iluminaba vivamente la lejanía.

Luis Cervantes preguntó a Demetrio si no sería conveniente, para el mejor éxito del ataque, tomar un guía o cuando menos procurarse los datos topográficos del pueblo y la situación precisa del cuartel.

—No, curro —respondió Demetrio sonriendo y con un gesto desdeñoso—; nosotros caemos cuando ellos menos se lo esperen, y ya. Así lo hemos hecho muchas veces. ¿Ha visto cómo sacan la cabeza las ardillas por la boca del tusero cuando uno se los llena de agua? Pues igual de aturdidos van a salir estos mochitos infelices luego que oigan los primeros disparos. No salen más que a servirnos de blanco.

— ¿Y si el viejo que ayer nos informó nos hubiera mentido? ¿Si en vez de veinte hombres resultaran cincuenta? ¿Si fuese un espía apostado por los federales?

—¡Este curro ya tuvo miedo! —dijo Anastasio Montañés.

— ¡Como que no es igual poner cataplasmas y lavativas a manejar un fusil! —observó Pancracio.

— ¡Hum! —repuso el Meco—. Es ya mucha plática...! Pa una docena de ratas aturdidas!

— No va a ser hora cuando nuestras madres sepan si parieron hombres o qué —agregó el Manteca.

Cuando llegaron a orillas del pueblito, Venancio se adelantó y llamó a la puerta de una choza.

—¿Dónde está el cuartel? —interrogó al hombre que salió, descalzo y con una garra de jorongo abrigando su pecho desnudo.

— El cuartel está abajito de la plaza, amo —contestó.

Mas como nadie sabía dónde era abajito de la plaza, Venancio lo obligó a que caminara a la cabeza de la columna y les enseñara el camino.

Temblando de espanto el pobre diablo, exclamó que era una barbaridad lo que hacían con él.

—Soy un pobre jornalero, señor; tengo mujer y muchos hijos chiquitos.

—¿Y los que yo tengo serán perros? —repuso Demetrio.

Luego ordenó:

—Mucho silencio, y uno a uno por la tierra suelta a media calle.

Dominando el caserío, se alzaba la ancha cúpula cuadrangular de la iglesia.

— Miren, señores, al frente de la iglesia está la plaza, caminan nomás otro tantito pa abajo, y allí mero queda el cuartel.

Luego se arrodilló, pidiendo que ya le dejaran regresar; pero Pancracio, sin responderle, le dio un culatazo sobre el pecho y lo hizo seguir delante.

— ¿Cuántos soldados están aquí? —inquirió Luis Cervantes.

— Amo, no quiero mentirle a su mercé; pero la verdá, la mera verdá, que son un titipuchal...

Luis Cervantes se volvió hacia Demetrio que fingía no haber escuchado.

De pronto desembocaron en una plazoleta. Una estruendosa descarga de fusilería los ensordeció. Estremeciéndose, el caballo zaino de Demetrio vaciló sobre las piernas, dobló las rodillas y cayó pataleando. El Tecolote lanzó un grito agudo y rodó del caballo, que fue a dar a media plaza, desbocado.

Una nueva descarga, y el hombre guía abrió los brazos y cayó de espaldas, sin exhalar una queja. Anastasio Montañés levantó rápidamente a Deme

trio y se lo puso en ancas. Los demás habían retrocedido ya y se amparaban en las paredes de las casas.

— Señores, señores —habló un hombre del pueblo, sacando la cabeza de un zaguán grande—, lléguenles por la espalda de la capilla... allí están todos. Devuélvanse por esta misma calle, tuerzan sobre su mano zurda, luego darán con un callejoncito, y sigan otra vez adelante a caer en la mera espalda de la capilla.

En ese momento comenzaron a recibir una nutrida lluvia de tiros de pistola. Venían de las azoteas cercanas.

— ¡Hum —dijo el hombre—, ésas no son arañas que pican!... Son los curros... Métanse aquí mientras se van... Esos le tienen miedo hasta a su sombra.

— ¿Qué tantos son los mochos? —preguntó Demetrio.

— No estaban aquí más que doce; pero anoche traiban mucho miedo y por telégrafo llamaron a los de delantito. ¡Quién sabe los que serán!... Pero no le hace que sean muchos. Los más han de ser de leva, y todo es que uno haga por voltearse y dejan a los jefes solos. A mi hermano le tocó la leva condenada y aquí lo train. Yo me voy con ustedes, le hago una señal y verán cómo todos se vienen de este lado. Y acabamos nomás con los puros oficiales. Si el señor quisiera darme una armita...

—Rifle no queda, hermano; pero esto de algo te ha de servir —dijo Anastasio Montañés tendiéndole al hombre dos granadas de mano.

El jefe de los federales era un joven de pelo rubio y bigotes retorcidos, muy presuntuoso. Mientras no supo a ciencia cierta el número de los asaltantes, se había mantenido callado y prudente en extremo; pero ahora

que los acababan de rechazar con tal éxito que no les habían dado tiempo para contestar un tiro siquiera, hacía gala de valor y temeridad inauditos. Cuando todos los soldados apenas se atrevían a asomar sus cabezas detrás de los pretils del pórtico, él, a la pálida claridad del amanecer, destacaba airoosamente su esbelta silueta y su capa dragona, que el aire hinchaba de vez en vez.

—¡Ah, me acuerdo del cuartelazo!...

Como su vida militar se reducía a la aventura en que se vio envuelto como alumno de la Escuela de Aspirantes al verificarse la traición al presidente Madero, siempre que un motivo propicio se presentaba, traía a colación la hazaña de la Ciudadela.

—Teniente Campos —ordenó enfático—, baje usted con diez hombres a chicotearme a esos bandidos que se esconden... ¡Canallas!... ¡Sólo son bravos para comer vacas y robar gallinas!

En la puertecilla del caracol apareció un paisano. Llevaba el aviso de que los asaltantes estaban en un corral, donde era facilísimo cogerlos inmediatamente.

Eso informaban los vecinos prominentes del pueblo, apostados en las azoteas y listos para no dejar

escapar al enemigo.

—Yo mismo voy a acabar con ellos —dijo con impenitencia el oficial. Pero pronto cambió de opinión. De la puerta misma del caracol retrocedió:

—Es posible que esperen refuerzos, y no será prudente que yo desampare mi puesto. Teniente Campos, va usted y me los coge vivos a todos, para fusilarlos hoy mismo al mediodía, a la hora que la gente esté saliendo de la misa mayor. ¡Ya verán los bandidos qué ejemplares sé poner!... Pero si no es posible, teniente Campos,

acabe con todos. No me deje uno solo vivo. ¿Me ha entendido?

Y, satisfecho, comenzó a dar vueltas, meditando la redacción del parte oficial que rendiría: "Señor ministro de la Guerra, general don Aureliano Blanquet.—México.—Hónrome, mi general, en poner en el superior conocimiento de usted que en la madrugada del día... una partida de quinientos hombres al mando del cabecilla H... osó atacar esta plaza. Con la violencia que el caso demandaba, me fortifiqué en las alturas de la población. El ataque comenzó al amanecer, durando más de dos horas un nutrido fuego. No obstante la superioridad numérica del enemigo, logré castigarlo severamente, infligiéndole completa derrota. El número de muertos fue el de veinte y mayor el de heridos, a juzgar por las huellas de sangre que dejaron en su precipitada fuga. En nuestras filas tuvimos la fortuna de no contar una sola baja.—Me honro en felicitar a usted, señor ministro, por el triunfo de las armas del gobierno. ¡Viva el señor general don Victoriano Huerta! ¡Viva México!"

"Y luego —siguió pensando— mi ascenso seguro a 'mayor'." Y se apretó las manos con regocijo, en el mismo momento en que un estallido lo dejó con los oídos zumbando.

XVII

—¿De modo es que si por este corral pudiéramos atravesar saldríamos derecho al callejón? —preguntó Demetrio.

—Sí; sólo que del corral sigue una casa, luego otro corral y una tienda más adelante —respondió el paisano.

Demetrio, pensativo, se rascó la cabeza. Pero su decisión fue pronta.

—¿Puedes conseguir un barretón, una pica, algo así como para agujerear la pared?

—Sí, hay de todo...; pero...

—¿Pero qué?... ¿En dónde están?

—Cabal que al están los avíos; pero todas esas casas son del patrón, y...

Demetrio, sin acabar de escucharlo, se encaminó hacia el cuarto señalado como depósito de la herramienta.

Todo fue obra de breves minutos.

Luego que estuvieron en el callejón, uno tras otro, arrimados a las paredes, corrieron hasta ponerse detrás del templo.

Había que saltar primero una tapia, en seguida el muro posterior de la capilla.

"Obra de Dios", pensó Demetrio. Y fue el primero que la escaló.

Cual monos, siguieron tras él los otros, llegando arriba con las manos estriadas de tierra y de sangre. El resto fue más fácil: escalones ahuecados en la mampostería les permitieron salvar con ligereza el muro de la capilla; luego la cúpula misma los ocultaba de la vista de los soldados.

—Párense tantito —dijo el paisano—; voy a ver dónde anda mi hermano. Yo les hago la señal..., después sobre las clases, ¿eh?

Sólo que no había en aquel momento quien reparara ya en él.

Demetrio contempló un instante el negrear de los capotes a lo largo del pretil, en todo el frente y por los lados, en las torres apretadas de gente, tras la baranda de hierro.

Se sonrió con satisfacción, y volviendo la cara a los suyos, exclamó:

— ¡Horal...

Veinte bombas estallaron a un tiempo en medio de los federales, que, llenos de espanto, se irguieron con los ojos desmesuradamente abiertos. Mas antes de que pudieran darse cuenta cabal del trance, otras veinte bombas reventaban con fragor, dejando un reguero de muertos y heridos.

—¡Tavía no!... ¡Tavía no!... Tavía no veo a mi hermano... —imploraba angustiado el paisano.

En vano un viejo sargento increpa a los soldados y los injuria, con la esperanza de una reorganización salvadora. Aquello no es más que una correría de ratas dentro de la trampa. Unos van a tomar la puertecilla de la escalera y allí caen acribillados a tiros por Demetrio; otros se echan a los pies de aquella veintena de espectros de cabeza y pechos oscuros como de hierro, de largos calzones blancos desgarrados, que les bajan hasta los guaraches. En el campanario algunos luchan por salir, de entre los muertos que han caído sobre ellos.

— ¡Mi jefe! —exclama Luis Cervantes alarmadísimo—. ¡Se acabaron las bombas y los rifles están en el corral! ¡Qué barbaridad!...

Demetrio sonríe, saca un puñal de larga hoja reluciente. Instantáneamente brillan los aceros en las manos de sus veinte soldados; unos largos y puntiagudos,

otros anchos como la palma de la mano, y muchos pesados como marrazos.

—¡El espía! —clama en son de triunfo Luis Cervantes—. ¡No se los dije!

— ¡No me mates, padrecito! —implora el viejo sargento a los pies de Demetrio, que tiene su mano armada en alto.

El viejo levanta su cara indígena llena de arrugas y sin una cana. Demetrio reconoce al que la víspera los engañó.

En un gesto de pavor, Luis Cervantes vuelve bruscamente el rostro. La lámina de acero tropieza con las costillas, que hacen *crac, crac*, y el viejo cae de espaldas con los brazos abiertos y los ojos espantados.

— ¡A mi hermano, no!... ¡No lo maten, es mi hermano! —grita loco de terror el paisano que ve a Pancraccio arrojarse sobre un federal.

Es tarde. Pancraccio, de un tajo, le ha rebanado el cuello, y como de una fuente borbotan dos chorros escarlata.

— ¡Mueran los juanes!... ¡Mueran los mochos!...

Se distinguen en la carnicería Pancraccio y el Manteca, rematando a los heridos. Montañés deja caer su mano, rendido ya; en su semblante persiste su mirada dulzona, en su impasible rostro brillan la ingenuidad del niño y la amoralidad del chacal.

—Acá queda uno vivo —grita la Codorniz.

Pancraccio corre hacia él. Es el capitancito rubio de bigote borgoñón, blanco como la cera, que, arrimado a un rincón cerca de la entrada al caracol, se ha detenido por falta de fuerzas para descender.

Pancraccio lo lleva a empellones al pretil. Un rodilla

zo en las caderas y algo como un saco de piedras que cae de veinte metros de altura sobre el atrio de la iglesia.

—¡Qué bruto eres! —exclama la Codorniz—, si la malicio, no te digo nada. ¡Tan buenos zapatos que le iba yo a avanzar!

Los hombres, inclinados ahora, se dedican a desnudar a los que traen mejores ropas. Y con los despojos se visten, y bromean y ríen muy divertidos.

Demetrio, echando a un lado los largos mechones que le han caído sobre la frente, cubriéndole los ojos, empapados en sudor, dice:

¡Ahora a los curros!

XVIII

Demetrio llegó con cien hombres a Fresnillo el mismo día que Pánfilo Natera iniciaba el avance de sus fuerzas sobre la plaza de Zacatecas.

El jefe zacatecano lo acogió cordialmente.

—¡Ya sé quién es usted y qué gente trae! ¡Ya tengo noticia de la cuereada que han dado a los federales desde Tepic hasta Durango!

Natera estrechó efusivamente la mano de Macías, en tanto que Luis Cervantes peroraba:

—Con hombres como mi general Natera y mi coronel Macías, nuestra patria se verá llena de gloria.

Demetrio entendió la intención de aquellas palabras cuando oyó repetidas veces a Natera llamarle "mi coronel".

Hubo vino y cervezas. Demetrio chocó muchas veces su vaso con el de Natera. Luis Cervantes brindó "por el triunfo de nuestra causa, que es el triunfo sublime

de la justicia; porque pronto veamos realizados los ideales de redención de este nuestro pueblo sufrido y noble, y sean ahora los mismos hombres que han regado con su propia sangre la tierra los que cosechen los frutos que legítimamente les pertenecen".

Natera volvió un instante su cara adusta hacia el parlanchín, y dándole luego la espalda, se puso a platicar con Demetrio.

Poco a poco, uno de los oficiales de Natera se había acercado fijándose con insistencia en Luis Cervantes. Era joven, de semblante abierto y cordial.

— ¿Luis Cervantes?...

— ¿El señor Solís?

— Desde que entraron ustedes creí conocerlo... Y, ¡vamos!, ahora lo veo y aún me parece mentira.

— Y no lo es...

—¿De modo que...? Pero vamos a tomar una copa; venga usted...

— ¡Bah! —prosiguió Solís ofreciendo asiento a Luis Cervantes—. ¿Pues desde cuándo se ha vuelto usted revolucionario?

— Dos meses corridos.

— ¡Ah, con razón habla todavía con ese entusiasmo y esa fe con que todos venimos aquí al principio!

— ¿Usted los ha perdido ya?

—Mire, compañero, no le extrañen confidencias de buenas a primeras. Da tanta gana de hablar con gente de sentido común, por acá, que cuando uno suele encontrarla se le quiere con esa misma ansiedad con que se quiere un jarro de agua fría después de caminar con la boca seca horas y más horas bajo los rayos del sol... Pero, francamente, necesito ante todo que usted me explique... No comprendo cómo el corresponsal de *El País* en tiempo de Madero, el que escribía furibundos

artículos en *El Regional*, el que usaba con tanta prodigalidad del epíteto de bandidos para nosotros, milite en nuestras propias filas ahora.

—¡La verdad de la verdad, me han convencido! —repuso enfático Cervantes.

— ¿Convencido?...

Solís dejó escapar un suspiro; llenó los vasos y bebieron.

—¿Se ha cansado, pues, de la revolución? —preguntó Luis Cervantes esquivo.

— ¿Cansado?... Tengo veinticinco años y, usted lo ve, me sobra salud... ¿Desilusionado? Puede ser.

— Debe tener sus razones...

— "Yo pensé una florida pradera al remate de un camino... Y me encontré un pantano." Amigo mío: hay hechos y hay hombres que no son sino pura hiel... Y esa hiel va cayendo gota a gota en el alma, y todo lo amarga, todo lo envenena. Entusiasmo, esperanzas, ideales, alegrías..., ¡nada! Luego no le queda más: o se convierte usted en un bandido igual a ellos, o desaparece de la escena, escondiéndose tras las murallas de un egoísmo impenetrable y feroz.

A Luis Cervantes le torturaba la conversación; era para él un sacrificio oír frases tan fuera de lugar y tiempo. Para eximirse, pues, de tomar parte activa en ella, invitó a Solís a que menudamente refiriera los hechos que le habían conducido a tal estado de desencanto.

— ¿Hechos?... Insignificancias, naderías: gestos inadvertidos para los más; la vida instantánea de una línea que se contrae, de unos ojos que brillan, de unos labios que se pliegan; el significado fugaz de una frase que se pierde. Pero hechos, gestos y expresiones que, agrupados en su lógica y natural expresión, constituyen e integran una mueca pavorosa y grotesca a la vez de una raza... ¡De una raza irredentable... —Apuró un nuevo vaso de vino, hizo una larga pausa y prosiguió—: Me preguntará que por qué sigo entonces en la revolución. La revolución es el huracán, y el hombre que se entrega a ella no es ya el hombre, es la miserable hoja seca arrebatada por el vendaval...

Interrumpió a Solís la presencia de Demetrio Macías, que se acercó.

— Nos vamos, curro...

Alberto Solís, con fácil palabra y acento de sinceridad profunda, lo felicitó efusivamente por sus hechos de armas, por sus aventuras, que lo habían hecho famoso, siendo conocidas hasta por los mismos hombres de la poderosa División del Norte.

Y Demetrio, encantado, oía el relato de sus hazañas, compuestas y aderezadas de tal suerte, que él mismo no las conociera. Por lo demás, aquello tan bien sonaba a sus oídos, que acabó por contarlas más tarde en el mismo tono y aun por creer que así habíanse realizado.

— ¡Qué hombre tan simpático es el general Natera! —observó Luis Cervantes cuando regresaba al mesón—. En cambio, el capitancillo Solís... ¡qué latal...

Demetrio Macías, sin escucharlo, muy contento, le oprimió un brazo y le dijo en voz baja:

—Ya soy coronel de veras, curro... Y usted, mi secretario...

Los hombres de Macías también hicieron muchas amistades nuevas esa noche, y "por el gusto de habernos conocido", se bebió hartos mezcal y aguardiente. Como no todo el mundo congenia y a veces el alcohol es mal consejero, naturalmente hubo sus diferencias; pero todo se arregló en buena forma y fuera de la cantina, de la fonda o del lupanar, sin molestar a los amigos.

A la mañana siguiente amanecieron algunos muertos: una vieja prostituta con un balazo en el ombligo y dos reclutas del coronel Macías con el cráneo agujereado. Anastasio Montañés le dio cuenta a su jefe, y éste, alzando los hombros, dijo:

— ¡Psch!... Pos que los entierren...

—Allí vienen ya los gorrudos —clamaron con azoro los vecinos de Fresnillo cuando supieron que el asalto de los revolucionarios a la plaza de Zacatecas había sido un fracaso.

Volvía la turba desenfrenada de hombres requema. dos, mugrientos y casi desnudos, cubierta la cabeza con sombreros de palma de alta copa cónica y de inmensa falda que les ocultaba medio rostro.

Les llamaban los gorrudos. Y los gorrudos regresaban tan alegremente como habían marchado días antes a los combates, saqueando cada pueblo, cada hacienda, cada ranchería y hasta el jacal más miserable que encontraban a su paso.

— ¿Quién me merca esta maquinaria? —pregonaba uno, enrojecido y fatigado de llevar la carga de su "avance".

Era una máquina de escribir nueva, que a todos atrajo con los deslumbrantes reflejos del niquelado.

La "Oliver", en una sola mañana, había tenido cinco propietarios, comenzando por valer diez pesos, depreciándose uno o dos a cada cambio de dueño. La verdad era que pesaba demasiado y nadie podía soportarla más de media hora.

— Doy peseta por ella —ofreció la Codorniz.

— Es tuya —respondió el dueño dándosela prontamente y con temores ostensibles de que aquél se arrepintiera.

La Codorniz, por veinticinco centavos, tuvo el gusto de tomarla en sus manos y de arrojarla luego contra las piedras, donde se rompió ruidosamente.

Fue como una señal: todos los que llevaban objetos pesados o molestos comenzaron a deshacerse de ellos, estrellándolos contra las rocas. Volaron los aparatos de cristal y porcelana; gruesos espejos, candelabros de latón, finas estatuillas, tibores y todo lo redundante del "avance" de la jornada quedó hecho añicos por el camino.

Demetrio, que no participaba de aquella alegría, ajena del todo al resultado de las operaciones militares, llamó aparte a Montañés y a Pancrancio y les dijo:

—A éstos les falta nervio. No es tan trabajoso tomar una plaza. Miren, primero se abre uno así..., luego se va juntando, se va juntando..., hasta que ¡zas!... ¡Y ya!

Y, en un gesto amplio, abría sus brazos nervudos y fuertes; luego los aproximaba poco a poco, acompañando el gesto a la palabra, hasta estrecharlos contra su pecho.

Anastasio y Pancrancio encontraban tan sencilla y tan clara la explicación, que contestaron convencidos:

— ¡Esa es la mera verdad!... ¡A éstos les falta ñervo!...

La gente de Demetrio se alojó en un corral.

—¿Se acuerda de Camila, compadre Anastasio? —exclamó suspirando Demetrio, tirado boca arriba en el estiércol, donde todos, acostados ya, bostezaban de sueño.

— ¿Quién es esa Camila, compadre?

— La que me hacía de comer allá, en el ranchito... Anastasio hizo un gesto que quería decir: "Esas cosas de mujeres no me interesan a mí".

— No se me olvida —prosiguió Demetrio hablando y con el cigarro en la boca—. Iba yo muy retemalo. Acababa de beberme un jarro de agua azul muy fresquecita. "¿No quere más?", me preguntó la prietilla... Bueno, pos me quedé rendido del calenturón, y too fue estar viendo una jícara de agua azul y oír la vocecita: "¿No quere más?"... Pero una voz, compadre, que me sonaba en las orejas como organillo de plata... Pancrancio, tú ¿qué dices? ¿Nos vamos al ranchito?

— Mire, compadre Demetrio, ¿a que no me lo cree? Yo tengo mucha experiencia en eso de las viejas... ¡Las mujeres!... Pa un rato... ¡Y mi' qué rato!... ¡Pa las lepras y rasguños con que me han

marcao el pellejo! ¡Mal ajo pa ellas! Son el enemigo malo. De veras, compadre, ¿voy que no me lo cree?... Por eso verá que ni... Pero yo tengo mucha experiencia en eso.

— ¿Qué día vamos al ranchito, Pancracio? —insistió Demetrio, echando una bocanada de humo gris.

— Usté nomás dice... Ya sabe que allí dejé a mi amor...

—Tuyo... y no —pronunció la Codorniz amodorrado.

— Tuya... y mía también. Güeno es que seas compadecido y nos la vayas a trair de veras — rumoreó el Manteca.

— Hombre, sí, Pancracio; trate a la tuerta María Antonia, que por acá hace mucho frío —gritó a lo lejos el Meco.

Y muchos prorrumpieron en carcajadas, mientras el Manteca y Pancracio iniciaban su torneo de insolencias y obscenidades.

XX

—¡Que viene Villa!

La noticia se propagó con la velocidad del relámpago.

—¡Ah, Villal... La palabra mágica. El gran hombre que se esboza; el guerrero invicto que ejerce a distancia ya su gran fascinación de boa.

— ¡Nuestro Napoleón mexicano! —exclama Luis Cervantes.

— Sí, "el Aguila azteca, que ha clavado su pico de acero sobre la cabeza de la víbora Victoriano Huerta"... Así dije en un discurso en Ciudad Juárez —habló en tono un tanto irónico Alberto Solís, el ayudante de Natera.

Los dos, sentados en el mostrador de una cantina, apuraban sendos vasos de cerveza.

Y los gorrudos de bufandas al cuello, de gruesos zapatones de vaqueta y encallecidas manos de vaquero, comiendo y bebiendo sin cesar, sólo hablaban de Villa y sus tropas.

Los de Natera hacían abrir tamaña boca de admiración a los de Macías.

¡Oh, Villal... ¡Los combates de Ciudad Juárez, Tierra Blanca, Chihuahua, Torreón!

Pero los hechos vistos y vividos no valían nada. Había que oír la narración de sus proezas portentosas, donde, a renglón seguido de un acto de sorprendente magnanimidad, venía la hazaña más bestial. Villa es el indomable señor de la sierra, la eterna víctima de todos los gobiernos, que lo persiguen como una fiera; Villa es la reencarnación de la vieja leyenda: el bandido providencia, que pasa por el mundo con la antorcha luminosa de un ideal: ¡robar a los ricos para hacer ricos a los pobres! Y los pobres le forjan una leyenda que el tiempo se encargará de embellecer para que viva de generación en generación.

— Pero sí sé decirle, amigo Montañés —dijo uno de los de Natera—, que si usted le cae bien a mi general Villa, le regala una hacienda; pero si le choca..., ¡nomás lo manda fusilar!...

¡Ah, las tropas de Villa! Puros hombres norteños, muy bien puestos, de sombrero tejano, traje de kaki nuevecito y calzado de los Estados Unidos de a cuatro dólares.

Y cuando esto decían los hombres de Natera, se miraban entre sí desconsolados, dándose cuenta cabal de sus sombrerazos de soyate podridos por el sol y la humedad y de las garras de calzones y camisas que medio cubrían sus cuerpos sucios y empiojados.

— Porque ahí no hay hambre... Traen sus carros apretados de bueyes, carneros, vacas. Furgones de ropa; trenes enteros de parque y armamentos, y comestibles para que reviente el que quiera.

Luego se hablaba de los aeroplanos de Villa.

— ¡Ah, los airoplanos! Abajo, así de cerquita, no sabe usted qué son; parecen canoas, parecen chalupas; pero

que comienzan a subir, amigo, y es un ruidazo que lo aturde. Luego algo como un automóvil que va muy recio. Y haga usted de cuenta un pájaro grande, muy grande, que parece de repente que ni se bulle siquiera. Y aquí va lo mero bueno: adentro de ese pájaro, un gringo lleva miles de granadas. ¡Afigúrese lo que será eso! Llega la hora de pelear, y como quien les riega maíz a las gallinas, allí van puños y puños de plomo pa'1 enemigo... Y aquello se vuelve un camposanto: muertos por aquí, muertos por allí, y ¡muertos por todas partes!

Y como Anastasio Montañés preguntara a su interlocutor si la gente de Natera había peleado ya junto con la de Villa, se vino a cuenta de que todo lo que con tanto entusiasmo estaban platicando sólo de oídas lo sabían, pues que nadie de ellos le había visto jamás la cara a Villa.

— ¡Hum..., pos se me hace que de hombre a hombre todos semos iguales!... Lo que es pa mí naiden es más hombre que otro. Pa peliar, lo que uno necesita es nomás tantita vergüenza. ¡Yo, qué soldado ni qué nada había de ser! Pero, oiga, al donde me mira tan desgarrao... ¿Voy que no me lo cree? Pero, de veras, yo no tengo necesidá...

— ¡Tengo mis diez yuntas de bueyes!... ¿A que no me lo cree? —dijo la Codorniz a espaldas de Anastasio, remedándolo y dando grandes risotadas.

XXI

El atronar de la fusilería aminoró y fue alejándose. Luis Cervantes se animó a sacar la cabeza de su escondrijo,

en medio de los escombros de unas fortificaciones, en lo más alto del cerro.

Apenas se daba cuenta de cómo había llegado hasta allí. No supo cuándo desaparecieron Demetrio y sus hombres de su lacto. Se encontró solo de pronto, y luego, arrebatado por una avalancha de infantería, lo derribaron de la montura, y cuando, todo pisoteado, se enderezó, uno de a caballo lo puso a grupas. Pero, a poco, caballo y montados dieron en tierra, y él sin saber de su fusil, ni del revólver, ni de nada, se encontró en medio de la blanca humareda y del silbar de los proyectiles. Y aquel hoyanco y aquellos pedazos de adobes amontonados se le habían ofrecido como abrigo segurísimo.

— ¡Compañero!...

— ¡Compañero!...

— Me tiró el caballo; se me echaron encima; me han creído muerto y me despojaron de mis armas... ¿Qué podía yo hacer? —explicó apenado Luis Cervantes.

— A mí nadie me tiró... Estoy aquí por precaución..., ¿sabe?...

El tono festivo de Alberto Solís ruborizó a Luis Cervantes.

— ¡Caramba! —exclamó aquél—. ¡Qué machito es su jefe! ¡Qué temeridad y qué serenidad! No sólo a mí, sino a muchos bien quemados nos dejó con tamaña boca abierta.

Luis Cervantes, confuso, no sabía qué decir.

— ¡Ah! ¿No estaba usted allí? ¡Bravo! ¡Buscó lugar seguro a muy buena horal... Mire, compañero; venga para explicarle. Vamos allí, detrás de aquel picacho. Note que de aquella laderita, al pie del cerro, no hay más vía accesible que lo que tenemos delante; a la derecha la vertiente está cortada a plomo y toda maniobra es imposible por ese lado; punto menos por la izquierda: el ascenso es tan peligroso, que dar un solo paso en falso es rodar y hacerse añicos por las vivas aristas de las rocas. Pues bien; una parte de la brigada Moya nos tendimos en la ladera, pecho a tierra, resueltos a

avanzar sobre la primera trinchera de los federales. Los proyectiles pasaban zumbando sobre nuestras cabezas; el combate era ya general; hubo un momento en que dejaron de foguearnos. Nos supusimos que se les atacaba vigorosamente por la espalda. Entonces nosotros nos arrojamos sobre la trinchera. ¡Ah, compañero, fíjese!... De media ladera abajo es un verdadero tapiz de cadáveres. Las ametralladoras lo hicieron todo; nos barrieron materialmente; unos cuantos pudimos escapar. Los generales estaban lívidos y vacilaban en ordenar una nueva carga con el refuerzo inmediato que nos vino. Entonces fue cuando Demetrio Macías, sin esperar ni pedir órdenes a nadie, gritó:

—¡Arriba, muchachos!...

—¡Qué bárbaro! —clamé asombrado.

"Los jefes, sorprendidos, no chistaron. El caballo de Macías, cual si en vez de pesuñas hubiese tenido garras de águila, trepó sobre estos peñascos. '¡Arriba, arriba!', gritaron sus hombres, siguiendo tras él, como venados, sobre las rocas, hombres y bestias hechos uno. Sólo un muchacho perdió pisada y rodó al abismo; los demás aparecieron en brevísimos instantes en la cumbre, derribando trincheras y acuchillando soldados. Demetrio lazaba las ametralladoras, tirando de ellas cual si fuesen toros bravos. Aquello no podía durar. La desigual

dad numérica los habría aniquilado en menos tiempo del que gastaron en llegar allí. Pero nosotros nos aprovechamos del momentáneo desconcierto, y con rapidez vertiginosa nos echamos sobre las posiciones y los arrojamos de ellas con la mayor facilidad. ¡Ah, qué bonito soldado es su jefe!"

De lo alto del cerro se veía un costado de la Bufa, con su crestón, como testa empenachada de altivo rey azteca. La vertiente, de seiscientos metros, estaba cubierta de muertos, con los cabellos enmarañados, manchadas las ropas de tierra y de sangre, y en aquel hacinamiento de cadáveres calientes, mujeres haraposas iban y venían como famélicos coyotes esculcando y despojando.

En medio de la humareda blanca de la fusilería y los negros borbotones de los edificios incendiados, refulgían al claro sol casas de grandes puertas y múltiples ventanas, todas cerradas; calles en amontonamiento, sobrepuestas y revueltas en vericuetos pintorescos, trepando a los cerros circunvecinos. Y sobre el caserío risueño se alzaba una alquería de esbeltas columnas y las torres y cúpulas de las iglesias.

—¡Qué hermosa es la revolución, aun en su misma barbarie! —pronunció Solís conmovido. Luego, en voz baja y con vaga melancolía:

—Lástima que lo que falta no sea igual. Hay que esperar un poco. A que no haya combatientes, a que no se oigan más disparos que los de las turbas entregadas a las delicias del saqueo; a que resplandezca diáfana, como una gota de agua, la psicología de nuestra raza, condensada en dos palabras: ¡robar, matar!... ¡Qué chasco, amigo mío, si los que venimos a ofrecer todo nuestro entusiasmo, nuestra misma vida por derribar a un miserable asesino, resultásemos los obreros de un enorme pedestal donde pudieran levantarse cien o doscientos mil monstruos de la misma especie!... ¡Pueblo sin ideales, pueblo de tiranos!... ¡Lástima de sangre!

Muchos federales fugitivos subían huyendo de soldados de grandes sombreros de palma y anchos calzones blancos.

Pasó silbando una bala.

Alberto Solís, que, cruzados los brazos, permanecía absorto después de sus últimas palabras, tuvo un sobresalto repentino y dijo:

—Compañero, maldito lo que me simpatizan estos mosquitos zumbadores. ¿Quiere que nos alejemos un poco de aquí?

Fue la sonrisa de Luis Cervantes tan despectiva, que Solís, amoscado, se sentó tranquilamente en una peña.

Su sonrisa volvió a vagar siguiendo las espirales de humo de los rifles y la polvareda de cada casa derribada y cada techo que se hundía. Y creyó haber descubierto un símbolo de la revolución en aquellas nubes de humo y en aquellas nubes de polvo que fraternalmente ascendían, se abrazaban, se confundían y se borraban en la nada.

—¡Ah —clamó de pronto—, ahora sí!...

Y su mano tendida señaló la estación de los ferrocarriles. Los trenes resoplando furiosos, arrojando espesas columnas de humo, los carros colmados de gente que escapaba a todo vapor.

Sintió un golpecito seco en el vientre, y como si las piernas se le hubiesen vuelto de trapo, resbaló de la piedra. Luego le zumbaron los oídos... Después, oscuridad y silencio eternos...

SEGUNDA PARTE

I

Al champaña que ebulle en burbujas donde se descompone la luz de los candiles, Demetrio Macías prefiere el límpido tequila de jalisco.

Hombres manchados de tierra, de humo y de sudor, de barbas crespas y alborotadas cabelleras, cubiertos de andrajos mugrientos, se agrupan en torno de las mesas de un restaurante.

—Yo maté dos coroneles —clama con voz ríspida y gutural un sujeto pequeño y gordo, de sombrero galoneado, cotona de gamuza y mascada solferina al cuello—. ¡No podían correr de tan tripones: se tropezaban con las piedras, y para subir al cerro, se ponían como jitomates y echaban tamaña lengual... "No corran tanto, mochos —les grité—; párense, no me gustan las gallinas asustadas... ¡Párense, pelones, que no les voy a hacer nacial... ¡Están dados!" da!, ¡ja!, ¡ja'... La comieron los muy... ¡Paf, paf! ¡Uno para cada uno... y de veras descansaron!

—A mí se me jue uno de los meros copetones —habló un soldado de rostro renegrado, sentado en un ángulo del salón, entre el muro y el mostrador, con las piernas alargadas y el fusil entre ellas—. ¡Ah, cómo traiba oro el condenado! Nomás le hacían visos los galones en las charreteras y en la mantilla. ¿Yyo?... ¡El muy burro lo dejé pasar! Sacó el paño y me hizo la contraseña, y yo me quedé nomás abriendo la boca. ¡Pero apenas me dio campo de hacerme de la esquina, cuando aistá a bala y halal... Lo dejé que acabara un cargador... ¡Hora voy yo!... ¡Madre mía de pipa, que no le fierre a este jijo de... la mala palabra! ¡Nada, nomás dio el estampido!... ¡Traiba muy buen cuaco! Me pasó por los ojos como un relámpago... Otro prohe que venía por la misma calle me la pagó... ¡Qué maroma lo he hecho dar!

Se arrebatan las palabras de la boca, y mientras ellos refieren con mucho calor sus aventuras, mujeres de tez aceitunada, ojos blanquecinos y dientes de marfil, con revólveres a la cintura, cananas apretadas de tiros cruzados sobre el pecho, grandes sombreros de palma a la cabeza, van y vienen como perros callejeros entre los grupos.

Una muchacha de carrillos teñidos de carmín, de cuello y brazos muy trigueños y de burdísimo continente, da un salto y se pone sobre el mostrador de la cantina, cerca de la mesa de Demetrio.

Este vuelve la cara hacia ella y choca con unos ojos lascivos, bajo una frente pequeña y entre dos bandos de pelo hirsuto.

La puerta se abre de par en par y, boquiabiertos y deslumbrados, uno tras otro, penetran Anastasio Montañés, Pancracio, la Codorniz y el Meco.

Anastasio da un grito de sorpresa y se adelanta a saludar al charro pequeño y gordo, de sombrero galoneado y mascada solferina.

Son viejos amigos que ahora se reconocen. Yse abrazan tan fuerte que la cara se les pone negra.

—Compadre Demetrio, tengo el gusto de presentarle al güero Margarito... ¡Un amigo de veras!... ¡Ah, cómo quiero yo a este güero! Ya lo conocerá, compadre... ¡Es reteacahao!... ¿Te acuerdas, güero, de la penitenciaría de Escobedo, allá en jalisco?... ¡Un año juntos!

Demetrio, que permanecía silencioso y huraño en medio de la alharaca general, sin quitarse el puro de entre los labios rumoreó tendiéndole la mano:

— Servidor...

— ¿Usted se llama, pues, Demetrio Macías? —preguntó intempestivamente la muchacha que sobre el mostrador estaba meneando las piernas y tocaba con sus zapatos de vaqueta la espalda de

Demetrio.

— A la orden —le contestó éste, volviendo apenas la cara.

Ella, indiferente, siguió moviendo las piernas descubiertas, haciendo ostentación de sus medias azules.

— ¡Eh, Pintada!... ¿Tú por acá?... Anda, baja, ven a tomar una copa —le dijo el güero Margarito.

La muchacha aceptó en seguida la invitación y con mucho desparpajo se abrió lugar, sentándose enfrente de Demetrio.

— ¿Conque usted es el famoso Demetrio Macías que tanto se lució en Zacatecas? —preguntó la Pintada.

Demetrio inclinó la cabeza asintiendo, en tanto que el güero Margarito lanzaba una alegre carcajada y decía:

— ¡Diablo de Pintada tan listal... ¡Ya quieres estrenar general!...

Demetrio, sin comprender, levantó los ojos hacia ella; se miraron cara a cara como dos perros desconocidos que se olfatean con desconfianza. Demetrio no pudo sostener la mirada furiosamente provocativa de la muchacha y bajó los ojos.

Oficiales de Natera, desde sus sitios, comenzaron a bromear a la Pintada con dicharachos obscenos. Pero ella, sin inmutarse, dijo:

—Mi general Natera le va a dar a usted su aguilita... ¡Andele, chóquelal...

Y tendió su mano hacia Demetrio y lo estrechó con fuerza varonil.

Demetrio, envanecido por las felicitaciones que comenzaron a lloverle, mandó que sirvieran champaña.

—No, yo no quiero vino ahora, ando malo —dijo el güero Margarito al mesero—; tráeme sólo agua con hielo.

— Yo quiero cle cenar con tal de que no sea chile ni frijol, lo que jaiga —pidió Pancracio.

Siguieron entrando oficiales y poco a poco se llenó el restaurante. Menudearon las estrellas y las barras en sombreros de todas formas y matices; grandes pañuelos de seda al cuello, anillos de gruesos brillantes y pesadas leopoldinas de oro.

— Oye, mozo —gritó el güero Margarito—, te he pedido agua con hielo... Entiende que no te pido limosna... Mira este fajo de billetes: te compro a ti y... a la más vieja de tu casa, ¿entiendes?... No me importa saber si se acabó, ni por qué se acabó... Tú sabrás de dónde me la traes... ¡Mira que soy muy corajudo!... Te digo que no quiero explicaciones, sino agua con hielo... ¿Me la traes o no me la traes?... ¡Ah, no?... Pues toma...

El mesero cae al golpe cle una sonora bofetada.

— Así soy yo, mi general Macías; mire cómo ya no me queda pelo de barba en la cara. ¿Sabe por qué? Pues porque soy muy corajudo, y cuando no tengo en quen descansar, me arranco los pelos hasta que me baja el coraje. ¡Palabra de honor, mi general; si no lo hiciera así, me moriría del puro berrinche!

— Es muy malo eso de comerse uno solo sus corajes —afirma, muy serio, uno de sombrero de petate como cobertizo de jacal—. Yo, en Torreón, maté a una vieja que no quiso venderme un plato de enchiladas. Estaban de pleito. No cumplí mi antojo, pero siquiera descansé.

—Yo maté a un tendajonero en el Parral porque me metió en un cambio dos billetes de Huerta —dijo otro de estrellita, mostrando, en sus dedos negros y callosos, piedras de luces refulgentes.

— Yo, en Chihuahua, maté a un tío porque me lo topaba siempre en la misma mesa y a la misma hora, cuando yo iba a almorzar... ¡Me chocaba mucho!... ¡Qué quieren ustedes!...

— ¡Hum!... Yo maté...

El tema es inagotable.

A la madrugada, cuando el restaurante está lleno de alegría y de escupitajos, cuando con las hembras norteñas de caras oscuras y cenicientas se revuelven jovencitas pintarrajeadas de los suburbios de la ciudad, Demetrio saca su repetición de oro incrustado de piedras y pide la hora a Anastasio Montañés.

Anastasio ve la carátula, luego saca la cabeza por una ventanilla y, mirando al cielo estrellado, dice:

— Ya van muy colgadas las cabrillas, compadre; no dilata en amanecer.

Fuera del restaurante no cesan los gritos, las carcajadas y las canciones de los ebrios. Pasan soldados a caballo desbocado, azotando las aceras. Por todos los rumbos de la ciudad se oyen disparos de fusiles y pistolas.

Y por en medio de la calle caminan, rumbo al hotel, Demetrio y la Pintada, abrazados y dando tumbos.

II

—¡Qué brutos! —exclamó la Pintada riendo a carcajadas—. ¿Pos de dónde son ustedes? Si eso de que los soldados vayan a parar a los mesones es cosa que ya no se usa. ¿De dónde vienen? Llega uno a cualquier parte y no tiene más que escoger la casa que le cuadre y ésa agarra sin pedirle licencia a naiden. Entonces ¿pa quién jue la revolución? ¿Pa los catrines? Si ahora nosotros vamos a ser los meros catrines... A ver, Pancraccio, presta acá tu marrazo... ¡Ricos... tales!... Todo lo han de guardar debajo de siete llaves.

Hundió la punta de acero en la hendidura de un cajón y, haciendo palanca con el mango rompió la chapa y levantó astillada la cubierta del escritorio.

Las manos de Anastasio Montañés, de Pancraccio y de la Pintada se hundieron en el montón de cartas, estampas, fotografías y papeles desparramados por la alfombra.

Pancraccio manifestó su enojo de no encontrar algo que le complaciera, lanzando al aire con la punta del guarache un retrato encuadrado, cuyo cristal se estrelló en el candelabro del centro.

Sacaron las manos vacías de entre los papeles, profiriendo insolencias.

Pero la Pintada, incansable, siguió descerrajando cajón por cajón, hasta no dejar hueco sin escudriñar.

No advirtieron el rodar silencioso de una pequeña caja forrada de terciopelo gris, que fue a parar a los pies de Luis Cervantes.

Este, que veía todo con aire de profunda indiferencia, mientras Demetrio, despatarrado sobre la alfombra, parecía dormir, atraído con la punta del pie la cajita, se inclinó, rascóse un tobillo y con ligereza la levantó.

Se quedó deslumbrado: dos diamantes de aguas purísimas en una montadura de filigrana. Con prontitud la ocultó en el bolsillo.

Cuando Demetrio despertó, Luis Cervantes le dijo:

— Mi general, vea usted qué diabluras han hecho los muchachos. ¿No sería conveniente evitarles esto?

—No, curro... ¡Pobres!... Es el único gusto que les queda después de ponerle la barriga a las balas.

— Sí, mi general, pero siquiera que no lo hagan aquí... Mire usted, eso nos desprestigia, y lo que es peor, desprestigia nuestra causa...

Demetrio clavó sus ojos de aguilucho en Luis Cervantes. Se golpeó los dientes con las uñas de dos dedos y dijo:

— No se ponga colorado... ¡Mire, a mí no me cuente!... Ya sabemos que lo tuyo, tuyo, y lo mío, mío. A usted le tocó la cajita, bueno; a mí el reloj de repetición.

Y ya los dos en muy buena armonía, se mostraron sus "avances".

La Pintada y sus compañeros, entretanto, registraban el resto de la casa.

La Codorniz entró en la sala con una chiquilla de doce años, ya marcada con manchas cobrizas en la frente y en los brazos. Sorprendidos los dos, se mantuvieron atónitos, contemplando los montones de libros sobre la alfombra, mesas y sillas, los espejos descolgados con sus vidrios rotos, grandes marcos de estampas y retratos destrozados, muebles y hibelots hechos pedazos. Con ojos ávidos, la Codorniz buscaba su presa, suspendiendo la respiración.

Afuera, en un ángulo del patio y entre el humo sofocante, el Manteca cocía elotes, atizando las brasas con libros y papeles que alzaban vivas llamaradas.

— ¡Ah —gritó de pronto la Codorniz—, mira lo que me fallé!... ¡Qué sudaderos pa mi yegual...

Y de un tirón arrancó una cortina de peluche, que se vino al suelo con todo y galería sobre el copete finamente tallado de un sillón.

— ¡Mira, tú... cuánta vieja encuerada! —clamó la chiquilla de la Codorniz, divertidísima con las láminas de un lujoso ejemplar de la *Divina Comedia*—. Esta me cuadra y me la llevo.

Y comenzó a arrancar los grabados que más llamaban su atención. Demetrio se incorporó y tomó asiento al lado de Luis Cervantes. Pidió cerveza, alargó una botella a su secretario, y de un solo trago apuró la suya. Luego, amodorrado, entrecerró los ojos y volvió a dormir.

— Oiga —habló un hombre a Pancracio en el zaguán—, ¿a qué hora se le puede hablar al general?

— No se le puede hablar a ninguna; amaneció crudo —respondió Pancracio—. ¿Qué quiere?

— Que me venda uno de esos libros que están quemando.

— Yo mesmo se los puedo vender.

— ¿A cómo los da?

Pancracio, perplejo, frunció las cejas:

— Pos los que tengan monitos, a cinco centavos, y los otros... se los doy de pilón si me merca todos.

El interesado volvió por los libros con una canasta pizcadora.

—¡Demetrio, hombre, Demetrio, despierta ya —gritó la Pintada—, ya no duermas como puerco gordo! ¡Mira quién está aquí!... ¡El güero Margarito! ¡No sabes tú todo lo que vale este güero!

—Yo lo aprecio a usted mucho, mi general Macías, y vengo a decirle que tengo mucha voluntad y me gustan mucho sus modales. Así es que, si no lo tiene a mal, yo me paso a su brigada.

— ¿Qué grado tiene? —inquirió Demetrio.

— Capitán primero, mi general.

—Véngase, pues... Aquí lo hago mayor.

El güero Margarito era un hombrecillo redondo, de bigotes retorcidos, ojos azules muy malignos que se le perdían entre los carrillos y la frente cuando se reía. Ex mesero del Delmónico de Chihuahua, ostentaba ahora tres barras de latón amarillo, insignias de su grado en la División del Norte.

El güero colmó de elogios a Demetrio y a sus hombres, y con esto bastó para que una caja de cervezas se vaciara en un santiamén.

La Pintada apareció de pronto en medio de la sala, luciendo un espléndido traje de seda de riquísimos encajes.

— ¡Nomás las medias se te olvidaron! —exclamó el güero Margarito desternillándose de risa.

La muchacha de la Codorniz prorrumpió también en carcajadas.

Pero a la Pintada nada se le dio; hizo una mueca de indiferencia, se tiró en la alfombra y con los propios pies hizo saltar las zapatillas de raso blanco, moviendo muy a gusto los dedos desnudos, entumecidos por la opresión del calzado, y dijo:

— ¡Epa, tú, Pancracio!... Anda a traerme unas medias azules de mis "avances".

La sala se iba llenando de nuevos amigos y viejos compañeros de campaña. Demetrio, animándose, comenzaba a referir menudamente algunos de sus más notables hechos de armas.

— Pero ¿qué ruido es ése? —preguntó sorprendido por el afinar de cuerdas y latones en el patio de la casa.

—Mi general —dijo solemnemente Luis Cervantes—, es un banquete que le ofrecemos sus viejos amigos y compañeros para celebrar el hecho de armas de Zacatecas y el merecido ascenso de usted a general.

III

—Le presento a usted, mi general Macías, a mi futura —pronunció enfático Luis Cervantes, haciendo entrar al comedor a una muchacha de rara belleza.

Todos se volvieron hacia ella, que abría sus grandes *ojos* azules con azoro.

Tendría apenas catorce años; su piel era fresca y suave como un pétalo de rosa; sus cabellos rubios, y la expresión de sus *ojos* con algo de maligna curiosidad y mucho de vago temor infantil.

Luis Cervantes reparó en que Demetrio clavaba su mirada de ave de rapiña en ella y se sintió satisfecho.

Se le abrió sitio entre el güero Margarito y Luis Cervantes, enfrente de Demetrio.

Entre los cristales, porcelanas y búcaros de flores, abundaban las botellas de tequila.

El Meco entró sudoroso y renegando, con una caja de cervezas a cuestas.

— Ustedes no conocen todavía a este güero —dijo la Pintada reparando en que él no quitaba los ojos de la novia de Luis Cervantes—. Tiene mucha sal, y en el mundo no he visto gente más acabada que él.

Le lanzó una mirada lúbrica y añadió:

— ¡Por eso no lo puedo ver ni pintado!

Rompió la orquesta una rumbosa marcha taurina. Los soldados bramaron de alegría.

— ¡Qué menudo, mi general!... Le juro que en mi vida he comido otro más bien guisado —dijo el güero Margarito, e hizo reminiscencias del Delmónico de Chihuahua.

—¿Le gusta de veras, güero? —repuso Demetrio—. Pos que le sirvan hasta que llene.

— Ese es mi mero gusto —confirmó Anastasio Montañés—, y eso es lo bonito; de que a mí me cuadra un guiso, como, como, hasta que lo eructo.

Siguió un ruido de bocazas y grandes tragantadas. Se bebió copiosamente."

Al final, Luis Cervantes tomó una copa de champaña y se puso de pie:

—Señor general...

— ¡Hum! —interrumpió la Pintada—. Hora va de discurso, y eso es cosa que a mí me aburre mucho. Voy mejor al corral, al cabo ya no hay qué comer.

Luis Cervantes ofreció el escudo de paño negro con

una aguilita de latón amarillo, en un brindis que nadie entendió, pero que todos aplaudieron con estrépito.

Demetrio tomó en sus manos la insignia de su nuevo grado y, muy encendido, la mirada brillante, relucientes los dientes, dijo con mucha ingenuidad:

— ¿Y qué voy a hacer ahora yo con este zopilote?

—Compadre —pronunció trémulo y en pie Anastasio Montañés—, yo no tengo que decirle...

Transcurrieron minutos enteros; las malditas palabras no querían acudir al llamado del compadre Anastasio. Su cara enrojecida perlaba el sudor en su frente, costrosa de mugre. Por fin se resolvió a terminar su brindis:

—Pos yo no tengo que decirle... sino que ya sabe que soy su compadre...

Y como todos habían aplaudido a Luis Cervantes, el propio Anastasio, al acabar, dio la señal, palmeando con mucha gravedad.

Pero todo estuvo bien y su torpeza sirvió de estímulo. Brindaron el Manteca y la Codorniz.

Llegaba su turno al Meco, cuando se presentó la Pintada dando fuertes voces de júbilo. Chasqueando la lengua, pretendía meter al comedor una bellísima yegua de un negro azabache.

— ¡Mi "avance"! ¡Mi "avance"! —clamaba palmeando el cuello enarcado del soberbio animal.

La yegua se resistía a franquear la puerta; pero un tirón del cabestro y un latigazo en el anca la hicieron entrar con brío y estrépito.

Los soldados, embebecidos, contemplaban con mal reprimida envidia la rica presa.

— ¡Yo no sé qué carga esta diabla de Pintada que siempre nos gana los mejores "avances"! — clamó el güero Margarito—. Así la verán desde que se nos juntó en Tierra Blanca.

—Epa, tú, Pancracio, anda a traerme un tercio de alfalfa pa mi yegua —ordenó secamente la Pintada. Luego tendió la sogá a un soldado.

Una vez más llenaron los vasos y las copas. Algunos comenzaban a doblar el cuello y a entrecerrar los ojos; la mayoría gritaba jubilosa.

Y entre ellos la muchacha de Luis Cervantes, que había tirado todo el vino en un pañuelo, tornaba de una parte a la otra sus grandes ojos azules, llenos de azoro.

—Muchachos —gritó de pie el güero Margarito, dominando con su voz aguda y gutural el vocerío—, estoy cansado de vivir y me han dado ganas ahora de matarme. La Pintada ya me hartó... y este querubincito del cielo no arrienda siquiera a verme...

Luis Cervantes notó que las últimas palabras iban dirigidas a su novia, y con gran sorpresa vino a cuentas de que el pie que sentía entre los de la muchacha no era de Demetrio, sino del güero Margarito.

Y la indignación hirvió en su pecho.

— ¡Fíjense, muchachos —prosiguió el güero con el revólver en lo alto—; me voy a pegar un tiro en la merita frente!

Y apuntó al gran espejo del fondo, donde se veía de cuerpo entero.

— ¡No te buigas, Pintadal...

El espejo se estrelló en largos y puntiagudos fragmentos. La bala había pasado rozando los cabellos de la Pintada, que ni pestañeó siquiera.

IV

Al atardecer despertó Luis Cervantes, se restregó los *ojos* y se incorporó. Se encontraba en el suelo duro, entre los tuestos del huerto. Cerca de él respiraban ruidosamente, muy dormidos, Anastasio Montañés, Pancracio y la Codorniz.

Sintió los labios hinchados y la nariz dura y seca; se miró sangre en las manos y en la camisa, e instantáneamente hizo memoria de lo ocurrido. Pronto se puso de pie y se encaminó hacia una recámara; empujó la puerta repetidas veces, sin conseguir abrirla. Mantúvose indeciso algunos instantes.

Porque todo era cierto; estaba seguro de no haber soñado. De la mesa del comedor se había levantado con su compañera, la condujo a la recámara; pero antes de cerrar la puerta, Demetrio, tambaleándose de borracho, se precipitó tras ellos. Luego la Pintada siguió a Demetrio, y comenzaron a forcejear. Demetrio, con *los ojos* encendidos como una brasa y hebras cristalinas en los burdos labios, buscaba con avidez a la muchacha. La Pintada, a fuertes empujones, lo hacía retroceder.

—¡Pero tú qué!... ¿Tú qué?... —ululaba Demetrio irritado.

La Pintada metió la pierna entre las de él, hizo palanca y Demetrio *cayó* de largo, fuera del cuarto. Se levantó furioso.

—¡Auxilio!... ¡Auxilio!... ¡Que me matal...

La Pintada cogía vigorosamente la muñeca de Demetrio y desviaba el cañón de su pistola.

La hala se incrustó en los ladrillos. La Pintada seguía

berreando. Anastasio Montañés llegó detrás de Demetrio y lo desarmó.

Este, como toro a media plaza, volvió sus *ojos* extraviados. Le rodeaban Luis Cervantes, Anastasio, el Manteca y otros muchos.

—¡Infelices!... ¡Me han desarmado!... ¡Como si pa ustedes se necesitaran armas!

Y abriendo los brazos, en brevísimos instantes volteó de narices sobre el enladrillado al que alcanzó.

¿Y después? Luis Cervantes no recordaba más. Seguramente que allí se habían quedado bien aporreados y dormidos. Seguramente que su novia, por miedo a tanto bruto, había tomado la sabia providencia de encerrarse.

"Tal vez esa recámara comunique con la sala y por ella pueda entrar", pensó.

A sus pasos despertó la Pintada, que dormía cerca de Demetrio, sobre la alfombra y al pie de un confidente colmado de alfalfa y maíz donde la yegua negra cenaba.

— ¿Qué busca? —preguntó la muchacha—. ¡Ah, sí; ya sé lo que quiere!... ¡Sinvergüenzal... Mire, encerré a su novia porque ya no podía aguantar a este condenado de Demetrio. Coja la llave, allí está sobre la mesa.

En vano Luis Cervantes buscó por todos los escondrijos de la casa.

— A ver, curro, cuénteme cómo estuvo eso de esa muchacha.

Luis Cervantes, muy nervioso, seguía buscando la llave.

—No coma ansia, hombre, allá se la voy a dar. Pero cuénteme... A mí me divierten mucho estas cosas. Esa currita es igual a usted... No es pata rajada como nosotros.

— No tengo qué contar... Es mi novia y ya.

— da, ja, jal... ¡Su novia y... no! Mire, curro, adonde usted va yo ya vengo. Tengo el colmillo duro. A esa pobre la sacaron de su casa entre el Manteca y el Meco; eso ya lo sabía...; pero usted les ha de haber dado por ella... algunas mancuernillas chapeadas... alguna estampita milagrosa del Señor de la

Villita... ¿Miento, curro?... ¡Que los hay, los hay!... ¡El trabajo es dar con ellos!... ¿Verdad?

La Pintada se levantó a darle la llave; pero tampoco la encontró y se sorprendió mucho.

Estuvo largo rato pensativa.

De repente salió a toda carrera hacia la puerta de la recámara, aplicó un *ojo* a la cerradura y allí se mantuvo inmóvil hasta que su vista se hizo a la oscuridad del cuarto. De pronto, y sin quitar los *ojos*, murmuró:

—¡Ah, güero... jijo de un...! ¡Asómese nomás, curro!

Y se alejó, lanzando una sonora carcajada.

— ¡Si le digo que en mi vida he visto hombre más acabado que éste!

Otro día por la mañana, la Pintada espío el momento en que el güero salía de la recámara a darle de almorzar a su caballo.

— ¡Criatura de Dios! ¡Anda, vete a tu casa! ¡Estos hombres son capaces de matarte!... ¡Anda, corre!...

Y sobre la chiquilla de grandes *ojos* azules y semblante de virgen, que sólo vestía camisón y medias, echó la frazada piojosa del Manteca; la cogió de la mano y la puso en la calle.

— ¡Bendito sea Dios! —exclamó—. Ahora sí... ¡Cómo quiero yo a este güero!

V

Como los potros que relinchan y retozan a los primeros truenos de mayo, así van por la sierra los hombres de Demetrio.

—¡A Moyahua, muchachos!

— A la tierra de Demetrio Macías.

— ¡A la tierra de don Mónico el cacique!

El paisaje se aclara, el sol asoma en una faja escarlata sobre la diafanidad del cielo.

Vanse destacando las cordilleras como monstruos alagartados, de angulosa vertebradura; cerros que parecen testas de colosales ídolos aztecas, caras de gigantes, muecas pavorosas y grotescas, que ora hacen sonreír, ora dejan un vago terror, algo como presentimiento de misterio.

A la cabeza de la tropa va Demetrio Macías con su Estado Mayor: el coronel Anastasio Montañés, el teniente coronel Pancracio y los mayores Luis Cervantes y el güero Margarito.

Siguen en segunda fila la Pintada y Venancio, que la galantea con muchas finezas, recitándole poéticamente versos desesperados de Antonio Plaza.

Cuando los rayos del sol bordearon los pretilos del caserío, de cuatro en fondo y tocando los clarines, comenzaron a entrar a Moyahua.

Cantaban los gallos a ensordecer, ladraban con alarma los perros; pero la gente no dio señales de vida en parte alguna.

La Pintada azuzó su yegua negra y de un salto se puso codo a codo con Demetrio. Muy ufana, lucía vestido de seda y grandes arracadas de oro; el azul pálido del

talle acentuaba el tinte aceitunado de su rostro y las manchas cobrizas de la avería. Perniabierta, su falda se remangaba hasta la rodilla y se veían sus medias deslavadas y con muchos agujeros. Llevaba revólver al pecho y una cartuchera cruzada sobre la cabeza de la silla.

Demetrio también vestía de gala: sombrero galoneado, pantalón de gamuza con botonadura de plata y chamarra bordada de hilo de oro.

Comenzó a oírse el abrir forzado de las puertas. Los soldados, diseminados ya por el pueblo, recogían armas y monturas por todo el vecindario.

— Nosotros vamos a hacer la mañana a casa de don Mónico —pronunció con gravedad Demetrio, apeándose y tendiendo las riendas de su caballo a un soldado—. Vamos a almorzar con don Mónico... un amigo que me quiere mucho...

Su Estado Mayor sonríe con risa siniestra.

Y, arrastrando ruidosamente las espuelas por las banquetas, se encaminaron hacia un caserón pretencioso, que no podía ser sino albergue de cacique.

— Está cerrada a piedra y cal —dijo Anastasio Montañés empujando con toda su fuerza la puerta.

— Pero yo sé abrir —repuso Pancraccio abocando prontamente su fusil al pestillo.

— No, no —dijo Demetrio—; toca primero.

Tres golpes con la culata del rifle, otros tres y nadie responde. Pancraccio se insolenta y no se atiene a más órdenes. Dispara, salta la chapa y se abre la puerta.

Vense extremos de faldas, piernas de niños, todos en dispersión hacia el interior de la casa.

— ¡Quiero vino!... ¡Aquí, vino!... —pide Demetrio con voz imperiosa, dando fuertes golpes sobre la mesa.

—Siéntense, compañeros.

Una señora asoma, luego otra y otra, y entre las faldas negras aparecen cabezas de niños asustados. Una de las mujeres, temblando, se encamina hacia un aparador, sacando copas y botellas y sirve vino.

—¿Qué armas tienen? —inquire Demetrio con aspereza.

— ¿Armas?... —contesta la señora, la lengua hecha trapo—. ¿Pero qué armas quieren ustedes que tengan unas señoras solas y decentes?

—¡Ah, solas!... ¿Y don Mónico?...

—No está aquí, señores... Nosotras sólo rentamos la casa... Al señor don Mónico nomás de nombre lo conocemos.

Demetrio manda que se practique un cateo.

— No, señores, por favor... Nosotras mismas vamos a traerles lo que tenemos; pero, por el amor de Dios, no nos falten al respeto. ¡Somos niñas solas y decentes!

—¿Y los chamacos? —inquire Pancraccio brutalmente—. ¿Nacieron de la tierra?

Las señoras desaparecen con precipitación y vuelven momentos después con una escopeta astillada, cubierta de polvo y de telarañas, y una pistola de muelles enmohecidas y descompuestas.

Demetrio se sonríe:

— Bueno, a ver el dinero...

—¿Dinero?... Pero ¿qué dinero quieren ustedes que tengan unas pobres niñas solas?

Y vuelven sus ojos suplicatorios hacia el más cercano de los soldados; pero luego los aprietan con horror: ¡han visto al sayón que está crucificando a Nuestro Señor

Jesucristo en el vía crucis de la parroquial... ¡Han visto a Pancraccio!...

Demetrio ordena el cateo.

A un tiempo se precipitan otra vez las señoras, y al instante vuelven con una cartera apollillada, con unos cuantos billetes de los de la emisión de Huerta.

Demetrio sonr e, y ya sin m as consideraci n, hace entrar a su gente.

Como perros hambrientos que han olfateado su presa, la turba penetra, atropellando a las se oras, que pretenden defender la entrada con sus propios cuerpos. Unas caen desvanecidas, otras huyen; los chicos dan gritos.

Pancracio se dispone a romper la cerradura de un gran ropero, cuando las puertas se abren y de dentro salta un hombre con un fusil en las manos.

—  Don M nico! —exclaman sorprendidos.

—  Hombre, Demetrio!...  No me haga nada!...  No me perjudique!...  Soy su amigo, don Demetrio!...

Demetrio Mac as se r e socarronamente y le pregunta si a los amigos se les recibe con el fusil en las manos.

Don M nico, confuso, aturdido, se echa a sus pies, le abraza las rodillas, le besa los pies:

—  Mi mujer!...  Mis hijos!...  Amigo don Demetrio!...

Demetrio, con mano tr mula, vuelve el rev lver a la cintura.

Una silueta dolorida ha pasado por su memoria. Una mujer con su hijo en los brazos, atravesando por las rocas de la sierra a medianoche y a la luz de la luna... Una casa ardiendo...

 V monos!...  Afuera todos! —clama sombr amente.

Su Estado Mayor obedece; don M nico y las se oras le besan las manos y lloran de agradecimiento.

En la calle la turba est  esperando alegre y dicharachera el permiso del general para saquear la casa del cacique.

—Yo s  muy bien d nde tienen escondido el dinero, pero no lo digo —pronuncia un muchacho con un cesto bajo el brazo.

—  Hum, yo ya s ! —repite una vieja que lleva un costal de raspa para recoger "lo que Dios le quiera dar"—. Est  en un altito; all  hay muchos triques y entre los triques una petaquilla con dibujos de concha...  All  mero est  lo g eno!...

— No es cierto —dice un hombre—; no son tan tarugos para dejar as  la plata. A mi modo de ver, la tienen enterrada en el pozo en un tanate de cuero.

Y el gent o se remueve, unos con sogas para hacer sus fardos, otros con hateas; las mujeres extienden sus delantales o el extremo de sus rebozos, calculando lo que les puede caber. Todos, dando las gracias a Su Divina Majestad, esperan su buena parte de saqueo.

Cuando Demetrio anuncia que no permitir  nada y ordena que todos se retiren, con gesto desconsolado la gente del pueblo lo obedece y se disemina luego; pero entre la soldadesca hay un sordo rumor de desaprobaci n y nadie se mueve de su sitio.

Demetrio, irritado, repite que se vayan.

Un mozalbete de los  ltimos reclutados, con alg n aguardiente en la cabeza, se r e y avanza sin zozobra hacia la puerta.

Pero antes de que pueda franquear el umbral, un disparo instant neo lo hace caer como los toros heridos por la puntilla.

Demetrio, con la pistola humeante en las manos, inmutable, espera que los soldados se retiren.

—Que se le pegue fuego a la casa —orden  a Luis Cervantes cuando llegan al cuartel.

Y Luis Cervantes, con rara solicitud, sin transmitir la orden, se encarg  de ejecutarla personalmente.

Cuando dos horas despu s la plazuela se ennegrec  de humo y de la casa de don M nico se alzaban enormes lenguas de fuego, nadie comprend  el extra o proceder del general.

VI

Se habían alojado en una casona sombría, propiedad del mismo cacique de Moyahua.

Sus predecesores en aquella finca habían dejado ya su rastro vigoroso en el patio, convertido en estercolero; en los muros, desconchados hasta mostrar grandes manchones de adobe crudo; en los pisos, demolidos por las pesuñas de las bestias; en el huerto, hecho un reguero de hojas marchitas y ramajes secos. Se tropezaba, desde el entrar, con pies de muebles, fondos y respaldos de sillas, todo sucio de tierra y bazofia.

A las diez de la noche, Luis Cervantes bostezó muy aburrido y dijo adiós al güero Margarito y a la Pintada, que bebían sin descanso en una banca de la plaza.

Se encaminó al cuartel. El único cuarto amueblado era la sala. Entró, y Demetrio, que estaba tendido en el suelo, los ojos claros y mirando al techo, dejó de contar las vigas y volvió la cara.

—¿Es usted, curro?... ¿Qué trae?... Ande, entre, siéntese.

Luis Cervantes fue primero a despabilar la vela, tiró luego de un sillón sin respaldo y cuyo asiento de mimbres había sido sustituido con un áspero cotense. Chirriaron las patas de la silla y la yegua prieta de la Pintada bufó, se removió en la sombra describiendo con su anca redonda y tersa una gallarda curva.

Luis Cervantes se hundió en el asiento y dijo:

—Mi general, vengo a darle cuenta de la comisión... Aquí tiene...

—¡Hombre, curro... si yo no quería eso!... Moyahua casi es mi tierra... ¡Dirán que por eso anda uno aquí!... —respondió Demetrio mirando el saco apretado de monedas que Luis le tendía.

Este dejó el asiento para venir a ponerse en cuclillas al lado de Demetrio. Tendió un sarape en el suelo y sobre él vació el talego de hidalgos relucientes como ascuas de oro.

—En primer lugar, mi general, esto lo sabemos sólo usted y yo... Y por otra parte, ya sabe que al buen sol hay que abrirle la ventana... Hoy nos está dando de cara; pero ¿mañana?... Hay que ver siempre adelante. Una bala, el reparo de un caballo, hasta un ridículo resfrío... ¡y una viuda y unos huérfanos en la miseria!... ¿El gobierno? ja, ja, ja!... Vaya usted con Carranza, con Villa o con cualquier otro de los jefes principales y hábleles de su familia... Si le responden con un puntapié... donde usted ya sabe, diga que le fue de perlas... Y hacen bien, mi general; nosotros no nos hemos levantado en armas para que un tal Carranza o un tal Villa lleguen a presidentes de la República; nosotros peleamos en defensa de los sagrados derechos del pueblo, pisoteados por el vil cacique... Y así como ni Villa, ni Carranza, ni ningún otro han de venir a pedir nuestro consentimiento para pagarse los servicios que le están prestando a la patria, tampoco nosotros tenemos necesidad de pedirle licencia a nadie.

Demetrio se medio incorporó, tomó una botella cerca de su cabecera, empinó y luego, hinchando los carrillos, lanzó una bocanada a lo lejos.

—¡Qué pico largo es usted, curro!

Luis sintió un vértigo. La cerveza regada parecía avivar la fermentación del basurero donde reposaban: un tapiz de cáscaras de naranjas y plátanos, carnosas cortezas de sandía, hebreros núcleos de mangos y bagazos de caña, todo revuelto con hojas enchiladas de tamales y todo húmedo de deyecciones.

Los dedos callosos de Demetrio iban y venían sobre las brillantes monedas a cuenta y cuenta.

Repuesto ya, Luis Cervantes sacó un botecito de fosfatina Fallières y volcó dijes, anillos, pendientes y otras muchas alhajas de valor.

—Mire, mi general; si, como parece, esta bola va a seguir, si la revolución no se acaba, nosotros tenemos ya lo suficiente para irnos a brillarla una temporada fuera del país —Demetrio meneó la cabeza negativamente—. ¿No haría usted eso?... Pues ¿a qué nos quedaríamos ya?... ¿Qué causa

defenderíamos ahora?

- Eso es cosa que yo no puedo explicar, curro; pero siento que no es cosa de hombres...
- Escoja, mi general —dijo Luis Cervantes mostrando las joyas puestas en fila.
- Déjelo todo para usted... De veras, curro... ¡Si

viera que no le tengo amor al dinero!... ¿Quiere que le diga la verdad? Pues yo, con que no me falte el trago y con traer una chamaquita que me cuadre, soy el hombre más feliz del mundo.

—ja, ja, jal... ¡Qué mi general!... Bueno, ¿y por qué se aguanta a esa sierpe de la Pintada?

—Hombre, curro, me tiene hartó; pero así soy. No me animo a decírselo... No tengo valor para despacharla a... Yo soy así, ése es mi genio. Mire, de que me cuadra una mujer, soy tan boca de palo, que si ella no comienza..., yo no me animo a nada —y suspiró—. Ahí está Camila, la del ranchito... La muchacha es fea; pero si viera cómo me llena el ojo...

—El día que usted quiera, nos la vamos a traer, mi general.

Demetrio guiñó los ojos con malicia.

- Le juro que se la hago buena, mi general...
- ¿De veras, curro?... Mire, si me hace esa valedura, pa usté es el reló con todo y leopoldina de oro, ya que le cuadra tanto.

Los ojos de Luis Cervantes resplandecieron. Tomó el bote de fosfatina, ya bien lleno, se puso en pie y, sonriendo, dijo:

—Hasta mañana, mi general... Que pase buena noche.

VII

—¿Yo qué sé? Lo mismo que ustedes saben. Me dijo el general: "Codorniz, ensilla tu caballo y mi yegua mora. Vas con el curro a una comisión". Bueno, así fue: salimos de aquí a mediodía y, ya anocheciendo, llegamos

al ranchito. Nos dio posada la tuerta María Antonia... Que cómo estás tanto, Pancrancio... En la madrugada me despertó el curro: "Codorniz, Codorniz, ensilla las bestias. Me dejas mi caballo y te vuelves con la yegua del general otra vez para Moyahua. Dentro de un rato te alcanzo". Yya estaba el sol alto cuando llegó con Camila en la silla. La apeó y la montamos en la yegua mora.

— Bueno, y ella, ¿qué cara venía poniendo? —preguntó uno.

—¡Hum, pos no le paraba la boca de tan contental...

— ¿Y el curro?

— Callado como siempre; igual a como es él.

—Yo creo —opinó con mucha gravedad Venancioque si Camila amaneció en la cama de Demetrio, sólo fue por una equivocación. Bebimos mucho... ¡Acuérdense!... Se nos subieron los espíritus alcohólicos a la cabeza y todos perdimos el sentido.

— ¡Qué espíritus alcohólicos ni qué!... Fue cosa convenida entre el curro y el general.

—¡Claro! Pa mí el tal curro no es más que un...

— A mí no me gusta hablar de los amigos en ausencia —dijo el güero Margarito—; pero sí sé decirles que de dos novias que le he conocido, una ha sido para... mí y la otra para el general...

Y prorrumpieron en carcajadas.

Luego que la Pintada se dio cuenta cabal de lo sucedido, fue muy cariñosa a consolar a Camila.

— ¡Pobrecita de ti, pláticame cómo estuvo eso! Camila tenía los ojos hinchados de llorar.

— ¡Me mintió, me mintió!... Fue al rancho y me dijo: "Camila, vengo nomás por ti. ¿Te sales conmigo?"

¡Hum, dígame si yo no tendría ganas de salirme con él! De quererlo, lo quiero y lo reguero... ¡Míreme tan encanijada sólo por estar pensando en él! Amanece y ni ganas del metate... Me llama mi mama al almuerzo, y la gorda se me hace trapo en la boca... ¡Y aquella pinción!... ¡Y aquella pinción! .. .

Y comenzó a llorar otra vez, y para que no se oyeran sus sollozos se tapaba la boca y la nariz con un extremo del rebozo.

— Mira, yo te voy a sacar de esta apuración. No seas tonta, ya no llores. Ya no pienses en el curro... ¿Sabes lo que es ese curro?... ¡Palabral... ¡Te digo que nomás para eso lo trae el general!... ¡Qué tontal... Bueno, ¿quieres volver a tu casa?

— ¡La Virgen de Jalpa me ampare!... ¡Me mataría mi mama a palos!

—No te hace nada. Vamos haciendo una cosa. La tropa tiene que salir de un momento a otro; cuando Demetrio te diga que te prevengas para irnos, tú le respondes que tienes muchas dolencias de cuerpo, y que estás como si te hubieran dado de palos, y te estiras y bostezas muy seguido. Luego te tientas la frente y dices: "Estoy ardiendo en calentura". Entonces yo le digo a Demetrio que nos deje a las dos, que yo me quedo a curarte y que luego que estés buena nos vamos a alcanzarlo. Y lo que hacemos es que yo te pongo en tu casa buena y sana.

VIII

Ya el sol se había puesto y el caserío se envolvía en la tristeza gris de sus calles viejas y en el silencio de terror de sus moradores, recogidos a muy buena hora, cuando

Luis Cervantes llegó a la tienda de Primitivo López a interrumpir una juerga que prometía grandes sucesos. Demetrio se emborrachaba allí con sus viejos camaradas. El mostrador no podía contener más gente. Demetrio, la Pintada y el güero Margarito habían dejado afuera sus caballos; pero los demás oficiales se habían metido brutalmente con todo y cabalgaduras. Los sombreros galoneados de cóncavas y colosales faldas se encontraban en vaivén constante; caracoleaban las ancas de las bestias, que sin cesar removían sus finas cabezas de ojazos negros, narices palpitantes y orejas pequeñas. Y en la infernal alharaca de los borrachos se oía el resoplar de los caballos, su rudo golpe de pesuñas en el pavimento y, de vez en vez, un relincho breve y nervioso.

Cuando Luis Cervantes llegó, se comentaba un suceso banal. Un paisano, con un agujerito negruzco y sanguinolento en la frente, estaba tendido boca arriba en medio de la carretera. Las opiniones, divididas al principio, ahora se unificaban bajo una justísima reflexión del güero Margarito. Aquel pobre diablo que yacía bien muerto era el sacristán de la iglesia. Pero, ¡tonto!... la culpa había sido suya... ¿Pues a quién se le ocurre, señor, vestir pantalón, chaqueta y gorrita? ¡Pancraccio no puede ver un catrín enfrente de él!

Ocho músicos "de viento", las caras rojas y redondas como soles, desorbitados los ojos, echando los bofes por los latones desde la madrugada, suspenden su faena al mandato de Cervantes.

—Mi general —dijo éste abriéndose paso entre los montados—, acaba de llegar un propio de urgencia. Le ordenan a usted que salga inmediatamente a perseguir a los orozquistas.

Los semblantes, ensombrecidos un momento, brillaron de alegría.

—¡A Jalisco, muchachos! —gritó el güero Margarito dando un golpe seco sobre el mostrador.

— ¡Aprevénganse, tapatías de mi alma, que allá voy! —gritó la Codorniz arriscándose el sombrero.

Todo fue regocijo y entusiasmo. Los amigos de Demetrio, en la excitación de la borrachera, le ofrecieron incorporarse a sus filas. Demetrio no podía hablar de gusto. "¡Ah, ir a batir a los orozquistas!... ¡Habérselas al fin con hombres de veras!... ¡Dejar de matar federales como se matan liebres o guajolotes!"

- Si yo pudiera coger vivo a Pascual Orozco —dijo el güero Margarito—, le arrancaba la planta de los pies y lo hacía caminar veinticuatro horas por la sierra...
 - ¿Qué, ése fue el que mató al señor Madero? —preguntó el Meco.
 - No —repuso el güero con solemnidad—; pero a mí me dio una cachetada cuando fui mesero del Delmónico en Chihuahua.
 - Para Camila, la yegua mora —ordenó Demetrio a Pancracio, que estaba ya ensillando.
 - Camila no se puede ir —dijo la Pintada con prontitud.
 - ¿Quién te pide a ti tu parecer? —repuso Demetrio con aspereza.
 - ¿Verdá, Camila, que amaneciste con mucha dolencia de cuerpo y te sientes acalenturada ahora?
 - Pos yo..., pos yo..., lo que diga don Demetrio...
 - ¡Ah, qué guaje!... Di que no, di que no... —pronunció a su oído la Pintada con gran inquietud.
 - Pos es que ya le voy cobrando voluntá..., ¿lo cree?... —contestó Camila también muy quedo.
- La Pintada se puso negra y se le inflamaron los carrillos; pero no dijo nada y se alejó a montar la yegua que le estaba ensillando el güero Margarito.

IX

El torbellino del polvo, prolongado a buen trecho a lo largo de la carretera, rompióse bruscamente en masas difusas y violentas, y se destacaban pechos hinchados, crines revueltas, narices trémulas, ojos ovoides, impetuosos, patas abiertas y como encogidas al impulso de la carrera. Los hombres, de rostro de bronce y dientes de marfil, ojos flameantes, blandían los rifles o los cruzaban sobre las cabezas de las monturas.

Cerrando la retaguardia, y al paso, venían Demetrio y Camila; ella trémula aún, con los labios blancos y secos; él, malhumorado por lo insulso de la hazaña. Ni tales orozquistas, ni tal combate. Unos cuantos federales dispersos, un pobre diablo de cura con un centenar de ilusos, todos reunidos bajo la vetusta bandera de "Religión y Fueros". El cura se quedaba allí bamboleándose, pendiente de un mezquite, y en el campo, un reguero de muertos que ostentaban en el pecho un escudito de bayeta roja y un letrero: "¡Detente! ¡El Sagrado Corazón de Jesús está conmigo!"

— La verdá es que yo ya me pagué hasta de más mis sueldos atrasados —dijo la Codorniz mostrando los relojes y anillos de oro que se había extraído de la casa cural.

—Así siquiera pelea uno con gusto —exclamó el Manteca entreverando insolencias entre cada frase—. ¡Ya sabe uno por qué arriesga el cuero!

Y cogía fuertemente con la misma mano que empuñaba las riendas un reluciente resplandor que le había arrancado al Divino Preso de la iglesia.

Cuando la Codorniz, muy perito en la materia, examinó codiciosamente el "avance" del Manteca, lanzó una carcajada solemne:

— ¡Tu resplandor es de hoja de lata!...

— ¿Por qué vienes cargando con esa roña? —preguntó Pancracio al güero Margarito, que llegaba de los últimos con un prisionero.

— ¿Saben por qué? Porque nunca he visto bien a bien la cara que pone un prójimo cuando se le aprieta una reata en el pescuezo.

El prisionero, muy gordo, respiraba fatigado; su rostro estaba encendido, sus ojos inyectados y su

frente goteaba. Lo traían atado de las muñecas y a pie.

— Anastasio, préstame tu reata; mi cabestro se revienta con este gallo... Pero, ahora que lo pienso mejor, no... Amigo federal, te voy a matar de una vez; vienes pensando mucho. Mira, los mezquites están muy lejos todavía y por aquí no hay telégrafo siquiera para colgarte de algún poste.

Y el güero Margarito sacó su pistola, puso el cañón sobre la tetilla izquierda del prisionero y paulatinamente echó el gatillo atrás.

El federal palideció como cadáver, su cara se afiló y sus ojos vidriosos se quebraron. Su pecho palpitaba tumultuosamente y todo su cuerpo se sacudía como por un gran calosfrío.

— El güero Margarito mantuvo así su pistola durante segundos eternos. Y sus ojos brillaron de un modo extraño, y su cara regordeta, de inflados carrillos, se encendía en una sensación de suprema voluptuosidad.

— ¡No, amigo federal! —dijo lentamente retirando el arma y volviéndola a su funda—, no te quiero matar todavía... Vas a seguir como mi asistente... ¡Ya verás si soy hombre de mal corazón!

— Y guiñó malignamente sus ojos a sus inmediatos.

— El prisionero había embrutecido; sólo hacía movimientos de deglución; su boca y su garganta estaban secas.

— Camila, que se había quedado atrás, picó el ijar de su yegua y alcanzó a Demetrio:

— ¡Ah, qué malo es el hombre ese Margarito!... ¡Si viera lo que viene haciendo con un preso!

— Y refirió lo que acababa de presenciar.

— Demetrio contrajo las cejas, pero nada contestó. La Pintada llamó a Camila a distancia.

— —Oye, tú, ¿qué chismes le traes a Demetrio?... El güero Margarito es mi mero amor... ¡Pa que te lo sepas!... Yya sabes... Lo que haiga con él, hay conmigo. ¡Ya te lo aviso!...

— Y Camila, muy asustada, fue a reunirse con Demetrio.

X

La tropa acampó en una planicie, cerca de tres casitas alineadas que, solitarias, recortaban sus blancos muros sobre la faja púrpura del horizonte. Demetrio y Camila fueron hacia ellas.

Dentro del corral, un hombre en camisa y calzón blanco, de pie, chupaba con avidez un gran cigarro de hoja; cerca de él, sentado sobre una losa, otro desgranaba maíz, frotando mazorcas entre sus dos manos, mientras que una de sus piernas, seca y retorcida, remataba en algo como pezuña de chivo, se sacudía a cada instante para espantar a las gallinas.

—Date prisa, Pifanio —dijo el que estaba parado—; ya se metió el sol y todavía no bajas al agua a las bestias.

Un caballo relinchó fuera y los dos hombres alzaron la cabeza azorados.

Demetrio y Camila asomaban tras la barda del corral.

— Nomás quiero alojamiento para mí y para mi mujer —les dijo Demetrio tranquilizándolos.

Y como les explicara que él era el jefe de un cuerpo de ejército que iba a pernoctar en las cercanías, el hombre que estaba en pie, y que era el amo, con mucha solicitud los hizo entrar. Y corrió por un apaste de agua y una escoba, pronto a barrer y regar el mejor rincón de la troje para alojar decentemente a tan honorables huéspedes.

—Anda, Pifanio; desensilla los caballos de los señores.

El hombre que desgranaba se puso trabajosamente en pie. Vestía unas garras de camisa y chaleco, una piltrafa de pantalón, abierto en dos alas, cuyos extremos, levantados, pendían de la cintura.

Anduvo, y su paso marcó un compás grotesco. —Pero ¿puedes tú trabajar, amigo? —le preguntó Demetrio sin dejarlo quitar las monturas.

— ¡Pobre —gritó el amo desde el interior de la troje—, le falta la fuerzal... ¡Pero viera qué bien desquita

el salario!... ¡Trabaja dende que Dios amanece!... ¡Qué ha que se metió el sol..., y mírelo, no para todavía!

Demetrio salió con Camila a dar una vuelta por el campamento. La planicie, de dorados barbechos, rapada hasta de arbustos, se dilatava inmensa en su desolación. Parecían un verdadero milagro los tres grandes fresnos enfrente de las casitas, sus cimas verdinegras, redondas y ondulosas, su follaje rico, que descendía hasta besar el suelo.

— ¡Yo no sé qué siento por acá que me da tanta tristeza! —dijo Demetrio.

— Sí —contestó Camila—; lo mismo a mí.

A orillas de un arroyuelo, Pifanio estaba tirando rudamente de la soga de un bimbalete. Una olla enorme se volcaba sobre un montón de hierba fresca, y a las postreras luces de la tarde cintilaba el chorro de cristal desparramándose en la pila. Allí bebían ruidosamente una vaca flaca, un caballo matado y un burro.

Demetrio reconoció al peón cojitranco y le preguntó:

—¿Cuánto ganas diario, amigo?

—Diez y seis centavos, patrón...

Era un hombrecillo rubio, escrofuloso, de pelo lacio y ojos zarcos. Echó pestes del patrón, del rancho y de la perra suerte.

— Desquitas bien el sueldo, hijo —le interrumpió Demetrio con mansedumbre—. A reniega y reniega, pero a trabaja y trabaja.

Y volviéndose a Camila.

— Siempre hay otros más pencos que nosotros los de la sierra, ¿verdad?

—Sí —contestó Camila.

Y siguieron caminando.

El valle se perdió en la sombra y las estrellas se escondieron.

Demetrio estrechó a Camila amorosamente por la cintura, y quién sabe qué palabras susurró a su oído. —Sí —contestó ella débilmente.

Porque ya le iba cobrando "voluntá".

Demetrio durmió mal, y muy temprano se echó fuera de la casa.

"A mí me va a suceder algo", pensó.

Era un amanecer silencioso y de discreta alegría. Un tordo piaba tímidamente en el fresno; los animales removían las basuras del rastrojo en el corral; gruñía el cerdo su somnolencia. Asomó el tinte anaranjado del sol, y la última estrellita se apagó.

Demetrio, paso a paso, iba al campamento.

Pensaba en su yunta: dos bueyes prietos, nuevecitos, de dos años de trabajo apenas, en sus dos fanegas de labor bien abonadas. La fisonomía de su joven esposa se reprodujo fielmente en su memoria: aquellas líneas dulces y de infinita mansedumbre para el marido, de indomables energías y altivez para el extraño. Pero cuando pretendió reconstruir la imagen de su hijo, fueron vanos todos sus esfuerzos; lo había olvidado.

Llegó al campamento. Tendidos entre los surcos, dormían los soldados, y revueltos con ellos, los

caballos echados, caída la cabeza y cerrados los ojos.

—Están muy estragadas las remudas, compadre Anastasio; es bueno que nos quedemos a descansar un día siquiera.

—¡Ay, compadre Demetrio!... ¡Qué ganas ya de la sierra! Si viera..., ¿a que no me lo cree?... pero naditita que me jallo por acá... ¡Una tristeza y una murrial... ¡Quién sabe qué le hará a uno faltal...

— ¿Cuántas horas se hacen de aquí a Limón?

— No es cosa de horas: son tres jornadas muy bien hechas, compadre Demetrio.

—¡Si viera!... ¡Tengo ganas de ver a mi mujer!

No tardó mucho la Pintada en ir a buscar a Camila:

— ¡Újule, újule!... Sólo por eso que ya Demetrio te va a largar. A mí, a mí mero me lo dijo... Va a traer a su mujer de veras... Yes muy bonita, muy blanca... ¡Unos chapetes!... Pero si tú no te quieres ir, pue que hasta te ocupen: tienen una criatura y tú la puedes cargar...

Cuando Demetrio regresó, Camila, llorando, se lo dijo todo.

— No le hagas caso a esa loca... Son mentiras, son mentiras...

Y como Demetrio no fue a Limón ni se volvió a acordar de su mujer, Camila estuvo muy contenta y la Pintada se volvió un alacrán.

XI

Antes de la madrugada salieron rumbo a Tepatitlán. Diseminados por el camino real y por los barbechos, sus siluetas ondulaban vagamente al paso monótono y acompasado de las caballerías, esfumándose en el tono perla de la luna en menguante, que bañaba todo el valle.

Se oía lejanísimo ladrar de perros.

— Hoy a mediodía llegamos a Tepatitlán, mañana a Cuquío, y luego..., a la sierra —dijo Demetrio.

—¿No sería bueno, mi general —observó a su oído Luis Cervantes—, llegar primero a Aguascalientes?

— ¿Qué vamos a hacer allá?

—Se nos están agotando los fondos...

— ¡Cómo!... ¿Cuarenta mil pesos en ocho días?

— Sólo en esta semana hemos reclutado cerca de quinientos hombres, y en anticipos y gratificaciones se nos ha ido todo —repuso muy bajo Luis Cervantes.

— No; vamos derecho a la sierra... Ya veremos... —¡Sí, a la sierra! —clamaron muchos.

— ¡A la sierral... ¡A la sierral... No hay como la sierra.

La planicie seguía oprimiendo sus pechos; hablaron de la sierra con entusiasmo y delirio, y pensaron en ella como en la deseada amante a quien se ha dejado de ver por mucho tiempo.

Clareó el día. Después, una polvareda de tierra roja se levantó hacia el oriente, en una inmensa cortina de púrpura incendiada.

Luis Cervantes templó la brida de su caballo y esperó a la Codorniz.

— ¿En qué quedamos, pues, Codorniz?

— Ya le dije, curro: doscientos por el puro reló...

— No, yo te compro a bulto: relojes, anillos y todas las alhajitas. ¿Cuánto?

La Codorniz vaciló, se puso descolorido; luego dijo con ímpetu:

—Deque dos mil papeles por todo.

Pero Luis Cervantes se dejó traicionar; sus ojos brillaron con tan manifiesta codicia, que la Codorniz volvió sobre sus pasos y exclamó pronto:

— No, mentiras, no vendo nada... El puro reló, y eso porque ya debo los doscientos pesos a Pancracio, que anoche me ganó otra vez.

Luis Cervantes sacó cuatro flamantes billetes de "dos caritas" y los puso en manos de la Codorniz.

— De veras —le dijo—, me intereso al lotecito... Nadie te dará más de lo que yo te dé.

Cuando comenzó a sentirse el sol, el Manteca gritó de pronto:

— Güero Margarito, ya tu asistente quiere pelar gallo. Dice que ya no puede andar.

El prisionero se había dejado caer, exhausto, en medio del camino.

— ¡Calla! —clamó el güero Margarito retrocediendo—. ¿Conque ya te cansaste, simpático? ¡Pobrecito de ti! Voy a comprar un nicho de cristal para guardarte en una rinconera de mi casa, como Niño Dios. Pero es necesario llegar primero al pueblo, y para esto te voy a ayudar.

Y sacó el sable y descargó sobre el infeliz repetidos golpes.

— A ver la reata, Pancracio —dijo luego, brillantes y extraños los ojos.

Pero como la Codorniz le hiciera notar que ya el federal no movía ni pie ni mano, dio una gran carcajada y dijo:

— ¡Qué bruto soy!... ¡Ahora que lo tenía enseñado a no comer!...

—Ahora sí, ya llegamos a Guadalajara chiquita —dijo Venancio descubriendo el caserío risueño de Tepatitlán, suavemente recostado en una colina.

Entraron regocijados; a las ventanas asomaban rostros sonrosados y bellos ojos negros.

Las escuelas quedaron convertidas en cuarteles. Demetrio se alojó en la sacristía de una capilla abandonada.

Después los soldados se desperdigaron, como siempre, en busca de "avances", so pretexto de recoger armas y caballos.

Por la tarde, algunos de los de la escolta de Demetrio estaban tumbados en el atrio de la iglesia rascándose la barriga. Venancio, con mucha gravedad, pecho y espaldas desnudos, espulgaba su camisa.

Un hombre se acercó a la barda, pidiendo la venia de hablar al jefe.

Los soldados levantaron la cabeza, pero ninguno le respondió.

— Soy viudo, señores; tengo nueve criaturas y no vivo más que de mi trabajo... ¡No sean ingratos con los pobres!...

—Por mujer no te apures, tío —dijo el Meco, que con un cabo de vela se embadurnaba los pies—; ai traímos a la Pintada, y te la pasamos al costo.

El hombre sonrió amargamente.

—Nomás que tiene una maña —observó Pancraccio, boca arriba y mirando el azul del cielo—: apenas mira un hombre, y luego luego se prepara.

Rieron a carcajadas; pero Venancio, muy grave, indicó la puerta de la sacristía al paisano.

Este, tímidamente, entró y expuso a Demetrio su queja. Los soldados acababan de "limpiarlo". Ni un grano de maíz le habían dejado.

— Pos pa qué se dejan —le respondió Demetrio con indolencia.

Luego el hombre insistió con lamentos y lloriqueos, y Luis Cervantes se dispuso a echarlo fuera insolentemente. Pero Camila intervino:

— ¡Ande, don Demetrio, no sea usted también mal alma; déle una orden pa que le devuelvan su maíz!...

Luis Cervantes tuvo que obedecer; escribió unos renglones, y Demetrio, al calce, puso un garabato.

— ¡Dios se lo pague, niña!... Dios se lo ha de dar de su santísima gloria... Diez fanegas de maíz, apenas pa comer este año —clamó el hombre, llorando de agradecimiento. Y tomó el papel y a todos les besó las manos.

Iban llegando ya a Cuquío, cuando Anastasio Montañés se acercó a Demetrio y le dijo:

—Ande, compadre, ni le he contado... ¡Qué travieso es de veras el güero Margarito! ¿Sabe lo que hizo ayer con ese hombre que vino a darle la queja de que le habíamos sacado su maíz para nuestros caballos? Bueno, pos con la orden que usted le dio fue al cuartel. "Sí, amigo, le dijo el güero; entra para acá; es muy justo devolverte lo tuyo. Entra, entra... ¿Cuántas fanegas te robamos?... ¿Diez? ¿Pero estás seguro de que no son más que diez?... Sí, eso es; como quince, poco más o menos... ¿No serían veinte?... Acuérdate bien... Eres muy pobre, tienes muchos hijos que mantener. Sí, es lo que digo, como veinte; ésas deben haber sido... Pasa por acá; no te voy a dar quince, ni veinte. Tú nomás vas contando... Una, dos, tres... Y luego que ya no quieras, me dices: ya." Y saca el sable y le ha dado una cintareada que lo hizo pedir misericordia.

La Pintada se caía de risa.

Y Camila, sin poderse contener, dijo:

—¡Viejo condenado, tan mala entrañal... ¡Con razón no lo puedo ver!

Instantáneamente se demudó el rostro de la Pintada. —¿Y a ti te da tos por eso?

Camila tuvo miedo y adelantó su yegua.

La Pintada disparó la suya y rapidísima, al pasar atropellando a Camila, la cogió de la cabeza y le deshizo la trenza.

Al empujón, la yegua de Camila se encabritó y la muchacha abandonó las riendas por quitarse los cabellos de la cara; vaciló, perdió el equilibrio y cayó en un pedregal, rompiéndose la frente.

Desmorecida de risa, la Pintada, con mucha habilidad, galopó a detener la yegua desbocada.

—¡Ándale, curro, ya te cayó trabajo! —dijo Pancraccio luego que vio a Camila en la misma silla de Demetrio, con la cara mojada de sangre.

Luis Cervantes, presuntuoso, acudió con sus materiales de curación; pero Camila, dejando de sollozar, se limpió los ojos y dijo con voz apagada:

—¿De usted?... ¡Aunque me estuviera muriendo! ¡Ni agual...

En Cuquío recibió Demetrio un propio.

—Otra vez a Tepatlán, mi general —dijo Luis Cervantes pasando rápidamente sus ojos por el oficio—. Tendrá que dejar allí la gente, y usted a Lagos, a tomar el tren de Aguascalientes.

Hubo protestas calurosas; algunos serranos juraron que ellos no seguirían ya en la columna, entre gruñidos, quejas y rezongos.

Camila lloró toda la noche, y otro día, por la mañana, dijo a Demetrio que ya le diera licencia de volverse a su casa.

— ¡Si le falta voluntá!... —contestó Demetrio hosco.

—No es eso, don Demetrio; voluntá se la tengo y mucha..., pero ya lo ha estado viendo... ¡Esa mujer!...

—No se apure, hoy mismo la despacho a... Ya lo tengo bien pensado.

Camila dejó de llorar.

Todos estaban ensillando ya. Demetrio se acercó a la Pintada y le dijo en voz muy baja:

— Tú ya no te vas con nosotros.

— ¿Qué dices? —inquirió ella sin comprender.

— Que te quedas aquí o te largas adonde te dé la gana, pero no con nosotros.

— ¿Qué estás diciendo? —exclamó ella con asombro—. ¿Es decir, que tú me corres? ja, ja, jal... ¿Pues qué... tal serás tú si te andas creyendo de los chismes de ésa...!

Y la Pintada insultó a Camila, a Demetrio, a Luis Cervantes y a cuantos le vinieron a las mientes, con tal energía y novedad, que la tropa oyó injurias e insolencias que no había sospechado siquiera.

Demetrio esperó largo rato con paciencia; pero como ella no diera trazas de acabar, con mucha calma dijo a un soldado:

— Echa fuera esa borracha.

— ¡Güero Margarito! ¡Güero de mi vida! ¡Ven a defenderme de éstos...! ¡Anda, güerito de mi corazón!... ¡Ven a enseñarles que tú eres hombre de veras y ellos no son más que unos hijos de...!

Y gesticulaba, pateaba y daba de gritos.

El güero Margarito apareció. Acababa de levantarse; sus ojos azules se perdían bajo unos párpados hinchados y su voz estaba ronca. Se infirmó del sucedido y, acercándose a la Pintada, le dijo con mucha gravedad:

—Sí, me parece muy bien que ya te largues mucho a la... ¡A todos nos tienes hartos!

El rostro de la Pintada se granitificó. Quiso hablar, pero sus músculos estaban rígidos.

Los soldados reían divertidísimos; Camila, muy asustada, contenía la respiración.

La Pintada paseó sus ojos en torno. Y todo fue en un abrir y cerrar de ojos; se inclinó, sacó una hoja aguda y brillante de entre la media y la pierna y se lanzó sobre Camila.

Un grito estridente y un cuerpo que se desploma arrojando sangre a borbotones.

— Mátenla —gritó Demetrio fuera de sí.

Dos soldados se arrojaron sobre la Pintada que, esgrimiendo el puñal, no les permitió tocarla.

— ¡Ustedes no, infelices!... Mátame tú, Demetrio —se adelantó, entregó su arma, irguió el pecho y dejó caer los brazos.

Demetrio puso en alto el puñal tinto en sangre; pero sus ojos se nublaron, vaciló, dio un paso atrás. Luego, con voz apagada y ronca, gritó:

— ¡Lárgate!... ¡Pero luego!...

Nadie se atrevió a detenerla.

Se alejó muda y sombría, paso a paso.

Y el silencio y la estupefacción lo rompió la voz aguda y gutural del güero Margarito:

—¡Ah, qué bueno!... ¡Hasta que se me despegó esta chinche!...

XIII

En la medianía del cuerpo

una daga me metió,

sin saber por qué

ni por qué sé yo...

El sí lo sabía, pero yo no...

Y de aquella herida mortal

mucha sangre me salió,

sin saber por qué

ni por qué sé yo...

El sí lo sabía, pero yo no...

Caída la cabeza, las manos cruzadas sobre la montura, Demetrio tarareaba con melancólico acento la tonadilla obsesionante.

Luego callaba; largos minutos se mantenía en silencio y pesaroso.

— Ya verá cómo llegando a Lagos le quito esa murria, mi general. Allí hay muchachas bonitas para darnos gusto —dijo el güero Margarito.

—Ahora sólo tengo ganas de ponerme una borrachera —contestó Demetrio.

Y se alejó otra vez de ellos, espoleando su caballo, como si quisiera abandonarse todo a su tristeza.

Después de muchas horas de caminar, hizo venir a Luis Cervantes:

— ¿Oiga, curro, ahora que lo estoy pensando, yo qué pitos voy a tocar a Aguascalientes?

—A dar su voto, mi general, para presidente provisional de la República.

—¿Presidente provisional?... Pos entonces, ¿qué... tal es, pues, Carranza?... La verdad, yo no entiendo estas políticas...

Llegaron a Lagos. El güero apostó a que esa noche haría reír a Demetrio a carcajadas.

Arrastrando las espuelas, las chivarras caídas abajo de la cintura, entró Demetrio a "El Cosmopolita", con Luis Cervantes, el güero Margarito y sus asistentes.

— ¿Por qué corren, curros?... ¡No sabemos comer gente! —exclamó el güero.

Los paisanos, sorprendidos en el mismo momento de escapar, se detuvieron; unos, con disimulo, regresaron a sus mesas a seguir bebiendo y charlando, y otros, vacilantes, se adelantaron a ofrecer sus respetos a los jefes.

— ¡Mi general!... ¡Mucho gusto!... ¡Señor mayor!...

— ¡Eso es!... Así me gustan los amigos, finos y decentes —dijo el güero Margarito.

— Vamos, muchachos —agregó sacando su pistola jovialmente—; ahí les va un buscapiés para que lo toreen.

Una bala rebotó en el cemento, pasando entre las patas de las mesas y las piernas de los señoritos, que saltaron asustados como dama a quien se le ha metido un ratón bajo la falda.

Pálidos, sonrían para festejar debidamente al señor mayor. Demetrio despliega apenas sus labios, mientras que el acompañamiento lanza carcajadas a pierna tendida.

— Güero —observa la Codorniz—, a ése que va saliendo le prendió la avispa; mira cómo cojea

El güero, sin parar mientes ni volver siquiera la cara hacia el herido, afirma con entusiasmo que a treinta pasos de distancia y al descubrir le pega a un cartucho de tequila.

— A ver, amigo, párese —dice al mozo de la cantina. Luego, de la mano lo lleva a la cabecera del patio del hotel y le pone un cartucho lleno de tequila en la cabeza.

El pobre diablo resiste, quiere huir, espantado, pero el güero prepara su pistola y apunta.

—¡A tu lugar... tasajo! O de veras te meto una calientita.

El güero se vuelve a la pared opuesta, levanta su arma y hace puntería.

El cartucho se estrella en pedazos, bañando de tequila la cara del muchacho, descolorido como un muerto.

— ¡Ahora va de veras! —clama, corriendo a la cantina por un nuevo cartucho, que vuelve a colocar sobre la cabeza del mancebo.

Torna a su sitio, da una vuelta vertiginosa sobre los pies, y al descubrir, dispara.

Sólo que ahora se ha llevado una oreja en vez del cartucho.

Y apretándose el estómago de tanto reír, dice al muchacho:

— Toma, chico, esos billetes. ¡Es cualquier cosa! Eso se quita con tantita árnica y aguardiente...

Después de beber mucho alcohol y cerveza, habla Demetrio:

— Pague, güero... Ya me voy...

— No traigo ya nada, mi general; pero no hay cuidado por eso... ¿Qué tanto se te debe, amigo?

—Ciento ochenta pesos, mi jefe —responde amablemente el cantinero.

El güero salta prontamente el mostrador, y en dos manotadas derriba todos los frascos, botellas y cristalería.

—Ai le pasas la cuenta a tu padre Villa, ¿sabes?

— Oiga, amigo, ¿dónde queda el barrio de las muchachas? —pregunta tambaleándose de borracho, a un sujeto pequeño, correctamente vestido, que está cerrando la puerta de una sastrería.

El interpelado se baja de la banqueta atentamente para dejar libre el paso. El güero se detiene y lo mira con impertinencia y curiosidad:

— Oiga, amigo, ¡qué chiquito y qué bonito es usted!... ¿Cómo que no?... ¿Entonces yo soy mentiroso?... Bueno, así me gusta... ¿Usted sabe bailar los enanos?... ¿Qué no sabe?... ¡Resabe!... ¡Yo lo conocí a usted en un circo! ¡Le juro que sí sabe y muy rebién!... ¡Ahora lo verá!...

El güero saca su pistola y comienza a disparar hacia los pies del sastre, que, muy gordo y muy pequeño, a cada tiro da un saltito.

— ¿Ya ve cómo sí sabe bailar los enanos?

Y echando los brazos a espaldas de sus amigos, se hace conducir hacia el arrabal de gente alegre, marcando su paso a balazos en los focos de las esquinas, en las puertas y en las casas del poblado. Demetrio lo deja y regresa al hotel, tarareando entre los dientes:

En la medianía del cuerpo una daga me metió,

sin saber por qué

ni por qué sé yo...

Humo de cigarro, olor penetrante de ropas sudadas, emanaciones alcohólicas y el respirar de una multitud; hacinamiento peor que el de un carro de cerdos. Predominaban los de sombrero tejano, toquilla de galón y vestidos de kaki.

— Caballeros, un señor decente me ha robado mi petaca en la estación de Silao... Los ahorros de toda mi vida de trabajo. No tengo para darle de comer a mi niño.

La voz era aguda, chillona y plañidera; pero se extinguía a corta distancia en el vocerío que llenaba el carro.

—¿Qué dice esa vieja? —preguntó el güero Margarito entrando en busca de un asiento.

— Que una petaca... que un niño decente... —respondió Pancracio, que ya había encontrado las rodillas de unos paisanos para sentarse.

Demetrio y los demás se abrían paso a fuerza de codos. Y como los que soportaban a Pancracio prefirieran abandonar los asientos y seguir de pie, Demetrio y Luis Cervantes los aprovecharon gustosos.

Una señora que venía parada desde Irapuato con un niño en brazos sufrió un desmayo. Un paisano se aprontó a tomar en sus manos a la criatura. El resto no se dio por entendido: las hembras de tropa ocupaban dos o tres asientos cada una con maletas, perros, gatos y cotorras. Al contrario, los de sombrero tejano rieron mucho de la robustez de muslos y laxitud de pechos de la desmayada.

—Caballeros, un señor decente me ha robado mi petaca en la estación de Silao... Los ahorros de toda

mi vida de trabajo... No tengo ahora ni para darle de comer a mi niño...

La vieja habla de prisa y automáticamente suspira y solloza. Sus ojos, muy vivos, se vuelven de todos lados. Y aquí recoge un billete, y más allá otro. Le llueven en abundancia. Acaba una colecta y adelanta unos cuantos asientos:

— Caballeros, un señor decente me ha robado mi petaca en la estación de Silao...

El efecto de sus palabras es seguro e inmediato.

— ¡Un señor decente! ¡Un señor decente que se roba una petaca! ¡Eso es incalificable! Eso despierta un sentimiento de indignación general. ¡Oh, es lástima que ese señor decente no esté a la mano para que lo fusilen siquiera cada uno de los generales que van allí!

—Porque a mí no hay cosa que me dé tanto coraje como un curro ratero —dice uno, reventando de dignidad.

—¡Robar a una pobre señora!

— ¡Robar a una infeliz mujer que no puede defenderse!

Y todos manifiestan el enternecimiento de su corazón de palabras y de obra: una insolencia para el ladrón y un bilimboque de cinco pesos para la víctima.

— Yo, la verdad les digo, no creo que sea malo matar, porque cuando uno mata lo hace siempre con coraje; ¿pero robar?... —clama el güero Margarito.

Todos parecen asentir ante tan graves razones; pero, tras breve silencio y momentos de reflexión, un coronel aventura su parecer:

— La verdad es que todo tiene sus "asigunes". ¿Para qué es más que la verdad? La purita verdad es que yo he

— robao... y si digo que todos los que venemos aquí hemos hecho lo mesmo, se me afigura que no echo mentiras...

—¡Hum, pa las máquinas de coser que yo me robé en México! —exclamó con ánimo un mayor—. Junté más de quinientos pesos, con ser que vendí hasta a cincuenta centavos máquina.

—Yo me robé en Zacatecas unos caballos tan finos, que dije acá para mí: "Lo que es de este hecho ya te armaste, Pascual Mata; no te vuelves a apurar por nada en los días que de vida te quedan" —dijo un capitán desmolado y ya blanco de canas—. Lo malo fue que mis caballos le cuadraron a mi general Limón y él me los robó a mí.

—¡Bueno! ¡A qué negarlo, pues! Yo también he robado —asintió el güero Margarito—; pero aquí están mis compañeros que digan cuánto he hecho de capital. Eso sí, mi gusto es gastarlo todo con las amistades. Para mí es más contento ponerme una papalina con todos los amigos que mandarles un centavo a las viejas de mi casa...

El tema del "yo robé", aunque parece inagotable, se va extinguiendo cuando en cada banca aparecen tendidos de naipes, que atraen a jefes y oficiales como la luz a los mosquitos.

Las peripecias del juego pronto lo absorben todo y caldean el ambiente más y más; se respira el cuartel, la cárcel, el lupanar y hasta la zahúrda.

Y dominando el barullo general, se escucha, allá en el otro carro:

—Caballeros, un señor decente me ha robado mi petaca...

Las calles de Aguascalientes se habían convertido en basureros. La gente de kaki se removía, como las abejas a la boca de una colmena, en las puertas de los restaurantes, fonduchos y mesones, en las mesas de comistrajos y puestos al aire libre, donde al lado de una hatea de chicharrones rancios se alzaba un montón de quesos mugrientos.

El olor de las frituras abrió el apetito de Demetrio y sus acompañantes. Penetraron a fuerza de empujones a una fonda, y una vieja desgredada y asquerosa les sirvió en platos de barro huesos de cerdos nadando en un caldillo claro de chile y tres tortillas correosas y quemadas. Pagaron dos pesos por cada uno, y al salir Pancrancio aseguró que tenía más hambre que antes de haber entrado.

—Ahora sí —dijo Demetrio—: vamos a tomar consejo de mi general Natera.

Y siguieron una calle hacia la casa que ocupaba el jefe norteño.

Un revuelto y agitado grupo de gentes les detuvo el paso en una bocacalle. Un hombre que se perdía entre la multitud clamaba en sonsonete y con acento uncioso algo que parecía un rezo. Se acercaron hasta descubrirlo. El hombre, de camisa y calzón blanco, repetía: "Todos los buenos católicos que recen con devoción esta oración a Cristo Crucificado se verán libres de tempestades, de pestes, de guerras y de hambres..."

—Este sí que la acertó —dijo Demetrio sonriendo.

El hombre agitaba en alto un puñado de impresos y decía:

—Cincuenta centavos la oración a Cristo Crucificado, cincuenta centavos...

Luego desaparecía un instante para levantarse de nuevo con un colmillo de víbora, una estrella de mar,

un esqueleto de pescado. Y con el mismo acento rezandero, ponderaba las propiedades medicinales y raras virtudes de cada cosa.

La Codorniz, que no le tenía fe a Venancio, pidió al vendedor que le extrajera una muela; el güero Margarito compró un núcleo negro de cierto fruto que tiene la propiedad de librar a su poseedor tan bien del rayo como de cualquier "malhora", y Anastasio Montañés una oración a Cristo Crucificado, que cuidadosamente dobló y con gran piedad guardó en el pecho.

—¡Cierto como hay Dios, compañero; sigue la bola! ¡Ahora Villa contra Carranza! —dijo Natera.

Y Demetrio, sin responderle, con los ojos muy abiertos, pedía más explicaciones.

—Es decir —insistió Natera—, que la Convención desconoce a Carranza como primer jefe y va a

elegir un presidente provisional de la República... ¿Entiende, compañero?

Demetrio inclinó la cabeza en señal de asentimiento.

— ¿Qué dice de eso, compañero? —interrogó Natera. Demetrio se alzó de hombros.

— Se trata, a lo que parece, de seguir peleando. Bueno, pos a darle; ya sabe, mi general, que por mi lado no hay portillo.

— Bien, ¿y de parte de quién se va a poner? Demetrio, muy perplejo, se llevó las manos a los cabellos y se rascó breves instantes.

— Mire, a mí no me haga preguntas, que no soy escuelante... La aguilita que traigo en el sombrero usted me la dio... Bueno, pos ya sabe que nomás me dice: "Demetrio, haces esto y esto... ¡y se acabó el cuento!"

TERCERA PARTE

I

"El Paso, Tex., mayo 16 de 1915.

Muy estimado Venancio:

Hasta ahora puedo contestar su grata de enero del corriente año debido a que mis atenciones profesionales absorben todo mi tiempo. Me recibí en diciembre pasado, como usted lo sabe. Lamento la suerte de Pancracio y del Manteca; pero no me extraña que después de una partida de naipes se hayan apuñalado. ¡Lástima: eran unos valientes! Siento en el alma no poder comunicarme con el güero Margarito para hacerle presente mi felicitación más calurosa, pues el acto más noble y más hermoso de su vida fue ése... ¡el de suicidarse!

Me parece difícil, amigo Venancio, que pueda usted obtener el título de médico que ambiciona tanto aquí en los Estados Unidos, por más que haya reunido suficiente oro y plata para comprarlo. Yo le tengo estimación, Venancio, y creo que es muy digno de mejor suerte. Ahora bien, me ocurre una idea que podría favorecer nuestros mutuos intereses y las ambiciones justas que usted tiene por cambiar de posición social. Si usted y yo nos asociáramos, podríamos hacer un negocio muy bonito. Cierto que por el momento yo no tengo fon

dos de reserva, porque todo lo he agotado en mis estudios y en mi recepción; pero cuento con algo que vale mucho más que el dinero: mi conocimiento perfecto de esta plaza, de sus necesidades y de los negocios seguros que pueden emprenderse. Podríamos establecer un restaurante netamente mexicano, apareciendo usted como el propietario y repartiéndonos las utilidades a fin de cada mes. Además, algo relativo a lo que tanto nos interesa: su cambio de esfera social. Yo me acuerdo que usted toca bastante bien la guitarra, y creo fácil, por medio de mis recomendaciones y de los conocimientos musicales de usted, conseguirle el ser admitido como miembro de la Salvation Army, sociedad respetabilísima que le daría a usted mucho carácter.

No vacile, querido Venancio; véngase con los fondos y podemos hacernos ricos en muy poco tiempo. Sírvase dar mis recuerdos afectuosos al general, a Anastasio y demás amigos.

Su amigo que lo aprecia, Luis Cervantes."

Venancio acabó de leer la carta por centésima vez, y, suspirando, repitió su comentario:

—¡Este curro de veras que la supo hacer!

—Porque lo que yo no podré hacerme entrar en la cabeza —observó Anastasio Montañés— es eso de que tengamos que seguir peleando... ¿Pos no acabamos ya con la federación?

Ni el general ni Venancio contestaron; pero aquellas palabras siguieron golpeando en sus rudos cerebros como un martillo sobre el yunque.

Ascendían la cuesta, al tranco largo de sus mulas, pensativos y cabizbajos. Anastasio, inquieto y terco, fue

con la misma observación a otros grupos de soldados, que reían de su candidez. Porque si uno trae un fusil en las manos y las cartucheras llenas de tiros, seguramente que es para pelear. ¿Contra quién? ¿En favor de quiénes? ¡Eso nunca le ha importado a nadie!

La polvareda ondulosa e interminable se prolongaba por las opuestas direcciones de la vereda, en un hormiguero de sombreros de palma, viejos kakis mugrientos, frazadas musgas y el negrear movedizo de las caballerías.

La gente ardía de sed. Ni un charco, ni un pozo, ni un arroyo con agua por todo el camino. Un vaho de fuego se alzaba de los blancos eriales de una cañada, palpitaba sobre las crespas cabezas de los huizaches y las glaucas pencas de los nopales. Y como una mofa, las flores de los cactus se abrían frescas, carnosas y encendidas las unas, aceradas y diáfanas las otras.

Tropezaron al mediodía con una choza prendida a los riscos de la sierra; luego, con tres casucas regadas sobre las márgenes de un río de arena calcinada; pero todo estaba silencioso y abandonado. A la proximidad de la tropa, las gentes se escurrían a ocultarse en las barrancas.

Demetrio se indignó:

— A cuantos descubran escondidos o huyendo, cójanlos y me los traen ordenó a sus soldados con voz desafinada.

— ¡Cómo!... ¿Qué dice? —exclamó Valderrama sorprendido—. ¿A los serranos? ¿A estos valerosos que no han imitado a las gallinas que ahora anidan en Zacatecas y Aguascalientes? ¿A los hermanos nuestros que desafían las tempestades adheridas a sus rocas como la madrepeña? ¡Protesto!... ¡Protesto!...

Hincó las espuelas en los ijares de su mísero rocín y fue a alcanzar al general.

—Los serranos —le dijo con énfasis y solemnidad—son carne de nuestra carne y huesos de nuestros huesos... "Os ex osibus meis et caro de carne mea"... Los serranos están hechos de nuestra madera... De esta madera firme con la que se fabrican los héroes...

Y con una confianza tan intempestiva como valiente, dio un golpe con su puño cerrado sobre el pecho del general, que sonrió con benevolencia.

¿Valderrama, vagabundo, loco y un poco poeta, sabía lo que decía?

Cuando los soldados llegaron a una ranchería y se arremolinaron con desesperación en torno de casas y jacales vacíos, sin encontrar una tortilla dura, ni un chile podrido, ni unos granos de sal para ponerle a la tan aborrecida carne fresca de res, ellos, los hermanos pacíficos, desde sus escondites, impasibles los unos con la impasibilidad pétrea de los ídolos aztecas, más humanos los otros, con una sórdida sonrisa en sus labios untados y ayunos de barba, veían cómo aquellos hombres feroces, que un mes antes hicieran retemblar de espanto sus míseros y apartados solares, ahora salían de sus chozas, donde las hornillas estaban apagadas y las tinajas secas, abatidos, con la cabeza caída y humillados como perros a quienes se arroja de su propia casa a puntapiés.

Pero el general no dio contraorden y unos soldados le llevaron a cuatro fugitivos bien trincados.

II

—¿Por qué se esconden ustedes? —interrogó Demetrio a los prisioneros.

—No nos escondemos, mi jefe; seguimos nuestra vereda.

— ¿Adónde?

— A nuestra tierra... Nombre de Dios, Durango.

— ¿Es éste el camino de Durango?

— Por los caminos no puede transitar gente pacífica ahora. Usted lo sabe, mi jefe.

— Ustedes no son pacíficos; ustedes son desertores. ¿De dónde vienen? —prosiguió Demetrio observándolos con ojo penetrante.

Los prisioneros se turbaron, mirándose perplejos sin encontrar pronta respuesta.

— ¡Son carranclanes! —notó uno de los soldados.

Aquello devolvió instantáneamente la entereza a los prisioneros. No existía más para ellos el terrible enigma que desde el principio se les había formulado con aquella tropa desconocida.

—¿Carrancistas nosotros? —contestó uno de ellos con altivez—. ¡Mejor puercos!...

— La verdad, sí, somos desertores —dijo otro—; nos le cortamos a mi general Villa de este lado de Celaya, después de la cuereada que nos dieron.

—¿Derrotado el general Villa?... ja!, ija!, jja!... Los soldados rieron a carcajadas.

Pero a Demetrio se le contrajo la frente como si algo muy negro hubiera pasado por sus ojos.

— ¡No nace todavía el hijo de la... que tenga que derrotar a mi general Villa! —clamó con insolencia un veterano de cara cobriza con una cicatriz de la frente a la barba.

Sin inmutarse, uno de los desertores se quedó mirándolo fijamente, y dijo:

—Yo lo conozco a usted. Cuando tomamos Torreón, usted andaba con mi general Urbina. En Zacatecas venía ya con Natera y allí se juntó con los de Jalisco... ¿Miento?

El efecto fue brusco y definitivo. Los prisioneros pudieron entonces dar una detallada relación de la tremenda derrota de Villa en Celaya.

Se les escuchó en un silencio de estupefacción.

Antes de reanudar la marcha se encendieron lumbres donde asar carne de toro. Anastasio Montañés, que buscaba leños entre los huizaches, descubrió a lo lejos y entre las rocas la cabeza tusada del caballuco de Valderrama.

—¡Vente ya, loco, que al fin no hubo pozole!... —comenzó a gritar.

Porque Valderrama, poeta romántico, siempre que de fusilar se hablaba, sabía perderse lejos y durante todo el día.

Valderrama oyó la voz de Anastasio y debió haberse convencido de que los prisioneros habían quedado en libertad, porque momentos después estaba cerca de Venancio y de Demetrio.

— ¿Ya sabe usted las nuevas? —le dijo Venancio con mucha gravedad.

— No sé nada.

— ¡Muy serias! ¡Un desastre! Villa derrotado en Celaya por Obregón. Carranza triunfando por todas partes. ¡Nosotros arruinados!

El gesto de Valderrama fue desdeñoso y solemne como de emperador:

—¿Villa?... ¿Obregón?... ¿Carranza?... ¡X... Y... Z...! ¿Qué se me da a mí?... ¡Amo la revolución como amo al volcán que irrumpe! ¡Al volcán porque es volcán; a la revolución porque es revolución!... Pero las piedras que quedan arriba o abajo, después del cataclismo, ¿qué me importan a mí?...

Y como al brillo del sol de mediodía reluciera sobre su frente el reflejo de una blanca botella de tequila, volvió grupas y con el alma henchida de regocijo se lanzó hacia el portador de tamaña maravilla.

—Le tengo voluntá a ese loco —dijo Demetrio sonriendo—, porque a veces dice unas cosas que lo ponen a uno a pensar.

Se reanudó la marcha, y la desazón se tradujo en un silencio lúgubre. La otra catástrofe venía realizándose callada, pero indefectiblemente. Villa derrotado era un dios caído. Y los dioses caídos ni son dioses ni son nada.

Cuando la Codorniz habló, sus palabras fueron fiel trasunto del sentir común:

—¡Pos hora sí, muchachos... cada araña por su hebral...

III

Aquel pueblecillo, a igual que congregaciones, haciendas y rancherías, se había vaciado en Zacatecas y Aguascalientes.

Por tanto, el hallazgo de un barril de tequila por uno de los oficiales fue acontecimiento de la magnitud

del milagro. Se guardó profunda reserva, se hizo mucho misterio para que la tropa saliera otro día, a la madrugada, al mando de Anastasio Montañés y de Venancio; y cuando Demetrio despertó al son de la música, su Estado Mayor, ahora integrado en su mayor parte por jóvenes ex federales, le dio la noticia del descubrimiento, y la Codorniz, interpretando los pensamientos de sus colegas, dijo axiomáticamente:

—Los tiempos son malos y hay que aprovechar, porque "si hay días que nada el pato, hay días que ni agua bebe".

La música de cuerda tocó todo el día y se le hicieron honores solemnes al barril; pero Demetrio estuvo muy triste, "sin saber por qué, ni por qué sé yo", repitiendo entre clientes y a cada instante su estribillo.

Por la tarde hubo peleas de gallos. Demetrio y sus principales jefes se sentaron bajo el cobertizo del portalillo municipal, frente a una plazuela inmensa, poblada de yerbas, un quiosco vetusto y podrido y las casas de adobe solitarias.

—¡Valderrama! —llamó Demetrio, apartando con fastidio los ojos de la pista—. Venga a cantarme *El enterrador*.

Pero Valderrama no le oyó, porque en vez de atender a la pelea monologaba extravagante, mirando ponerse el sol tras de los cerros, diciendo con voz enfática y solemne gesto:

—¿Señor, Señor, bueno es que nos estemos aquí!... Levantaré tres tiendas, una para ti, otra para Moisés y otra para Elías."

—¡Valderrama! —volvió a gritar Demetrio. Cántame *El enterrador*.

—Loco, te habla mi general —lo llamó más cerca uno de los oficiales.

Y Valderrama, con su eterna sonrisa de complacencia en los labios, acudió entonces y pidió a los músicos una guitarra.

—¡Silencio! —gritaron los jugadores.

Valderrama dejó de afinar. La Codorniz y el Meco soltaban ya en la arena un par de gallos amarrados de largas y afiladísimas navajas. Uno era retinto, con hermosos reflejos de obsidiana; el otro, giro, de plumas como escamas de cobre irisado a fuego.

La huelga fue brevísima y de una ferocidad casi humana. Como movidos por un resorte, los gallos se lanzaron al encuentro. Sus cuellos crespos y encorvados, los ojos como corales, erectas las crestas, crispadas las patas, un instante se mantuvieron sin tocar el suelo siquiera, confundidos sus plumajes, picos y garras en uno solo; el retinto se desprendió y fue lanzado patas arriba más allá de la raya. Sus ojos cíe cinabrio se apagaron, cerráronse lentamente sus párpados coriáceos, y sus plumas esponjadas se estremecieron convulsas en un charco de sangre.

Valderrama, que no había reprimido un gesto de violenta indignación, comenzó a templar. Con los primeros acentos graves se disipó su cólera. Brillaron sus ojos como esos ojos donde resplandece el brillo de la locura. Vagando su mirada por la plazoleta, por el ruinoso quiosco, por el viejo caserío, con la sierra al fondo y el cielo incendiado como lecho, comenzó a cantar.

Supo darle tanta alma a su voz y tanta expresión a las cuerdas de su vihuela, que, al terminar, Demetrio había vuelto la cara para que no le vieran los ojos.

Pero Valderrama se echó en sus brazos, lo estrechó fuertemente y, con aquella confianza súbita que a todo el mundo sabía tener en un momento dado, le dijo al oído:

— ¡Cómaselas! ... ¡Esas lágrimas son muy bellas!

Demetrio pidió la botella y se la tendió a Valderrama.

Valderrama apuró con avidez la mitad, casi de un sorbo; luego se volvió a los concurrentes y, tomando una actitud dramática y su entonación declamatoria, exclamó con los ojos rasos:

— ¡Y de ahí cómo los grandes placeres de la revolución se resolvían en una lágrimal...

Después siguió hablando loco, pero loco del todo, con las yerbas empolvadas, con el quiosco

podrido, con las casas grises, con el cerro altivo y con el cielo inconmensurable.

IV

Asomó Juchipila a lo lejos, blanca y bañada de sol, en medio del frondaje, al pie de un cerro elevado y soberbio, plegado como turbante.

Algunos soldados, mirando las torrecillas de Juchipila, suspiraron con tristeza. Su marcha por los cañones era ahora la marcha de un ciego sin lazarillo; se sentía ya la amargura del éxodo.

— ¿Ese pueblo es Juchipila? —preguntó Valderrama.

Valderrama, en el primer periodo de la primera borrachera del día, había venido contando las cruces diseminadas por caminos y veredas, en las escarpaduras de las rocas, en los vericuetos de los arroyos, en las márgenes del río. Cruces de madera negra recién barnizada,

cruces forjadas con dos leños, cruces de piedras en montón, cruces pintadas con cal en las paredes derruidas, humildísimas cruces trazadas con carbón sobre el canto de las peñas. El rastro de sangre de los primeros revolucionarios de 1910, asesinados por el gobierno.

Ya a la vista de Juchipila, Valderrama echa pie a tierra, se inclina, dobla la rodilla y gravemente besa el suelo.

Los soldados pasan sin detenerse. Unos ríen del loco y otros le dicen alguna cuchufleta.

Valderrama, sin oír a nadie, reza su oración solemnemente:

—juchipila, cuna de la revolución de 1910, tierra bendita, tierra regada con sangre de mártires, con sangre de soñadores... de los únicos buenos! ...

—Porque no tuvieron tiempo de ser malos —completa la frase brutalmente un oficial ex federa! le va pasando.

Valderrama se interrumpe, reflexiona, frunce el ceño, lanza una sonora carcajada que resuena por las peñas, monta y corre tras el oficial a pedirle un trago de tequila.

Soldados mancos, cojos, reumáticos y tosigosos dicen mal de Demetrio. Advenedizos de banqueta causan alta con barras de latón en el sombrero, antes de saber siquiera cómo se coge un fusil, mientras que el veterano fogueado en cien combates, inútil ya para el trabajo, el veterano que comenzó de soldado raso, soldado raso es todavía.

Y los pocos jefes que quedan, camaradas viejos de Macías, se indignan también porque se cubren las bajas del Estado Mayor con señoritines de capital, perfumados y peripuestos.

— Pero lo peor de todo —dice Venancio— es que nos estamos llenando de ex federales.

El mismo Anastasio, que de ordinario encuentra muy bien hecho todo lo que su compadre Demetrio hace, ahora, en causa común con los descontentos, exclama:

— Miren, compañeros, yo soy muy claridoso... y yo le digo a mi compadre que si vamos a tener aquí a los federales siempre, malamente andamos... ¡De veras! ¿A que no me lo creen?... Pero yo no tengo pelos en la lengua, y por vida de la madre que me parió, que se lo digo a mi compadre Demetrio.

Y se lo dijo. Demetrio lo escuchó con mucha benevolencia, y luego que acabó de hablar, le contestó:

—Compadre, es cierto lo que usted dice. Malamente andamos: los soldados hablan mal de las clases, las clases de los oficiales y los oficiales de nosotros... Y nosotros estamos ya pa despachar a Villa y a Carranza a la... a que se diviertan solos... Pero se me figura que nos está sucediendo lo que a aquel peón de Tepatitlán. ¿Se acuerda, compadre? No paraba de rezongar de su patrón, pero no paraba de trabajar tampoco. Y así estamos nosotros: a reniega y reniega y a mátenos y mátenos... Pero eso no hay que decirlo, compadre...

—¿Por qué, compadre Demetrio?...

— Por yo no sé... Porque no... ¿ya me entiende? Lo que ha de hacer es dármele ánimo a la gente. He recibido órdenes de regresar a detener una partida que viene por Cuquío. Dentro de muy poquitos días tenemos que darnos un encontronazo con los carranclanes, y es bueno pegarles ahora hasta por debajo de la lengua.

Valderrama, el vagabundo de los caminos reales,

que se incorporó a la tropa un día, sin que nadie supiera a punto fijo cuándo ni en dónde, pescó algo de las palabras de Demetrio, y como no hay loco que coma lumbre, ese mismo día desapareció como había llegado.

V

Entraron a las calles de Juchipila cuando las campanas de la iglesia repicaban alegres, ruidosas, y con aquel su timbre peculiar que hacía palpitar de emoción a toda la gente de los cañones.

—Se me figura, compadre, que estamos allá en aquellos tiempos cuando apenas iba comenzando la revolución, cuando llegábamos a un pueblito y nos repicaban mucho, y salía la gente a encontrarnos con músicas, con banderas, y nos echaban muchos vivas y hasta cohetes nos tiraban —dijo Anastasio Montañés.

— Ahora ya no nos quieren —repuso Demetrio. —¡Sí, como vamos ya de "rota batida"! —observó la Codorniz.

—No es por eso... A los otros tampoco los pueden ver ni en estampa.

— Pero ¿cómo nos han de querer, compadre? Y no dijeron más.

Desembocaban en una plaza, frente a la iglesia octogonal, burda y maciza, reminiscencia de tiempos coloniales.

La plaza debía haber sido jardín, a juzgar por sus naranjos escuetos y roñosos, entreverados entre restos de bancas de hierro y madera.

Volvió a escucharse el sonoro y regocijante repique.

Luego, con melancólica solemnidad, se escaparon del interior del templo las voces melifluas de un coro femenino. A los acordes de un guitarrón, las doncellas del pueblo cantaban los "Misterios".

—¿Qué fiesta tienen ahora, señora? —preguntó Venancio a una vejarruca que a todo correr se encaminaba hacia la iglesia.

—¡Sagrado Corazón de Jesús! —repuso la beata medio ahogándose.

Se acordaron de que hacía un año ya de la toma de Zacatecas. Y todos se pusieron más tristes todavía.

Igual a los otros pueblos que venían recorriendo desde Tepic, pasando por Jalisco, Aguascalientes y Zacatecas, Juchipila era una ruina. La huella negra de los incendios se veía en las casas destechadas, en los pretilos ardidos. Casas cerradas; y una que otra tienda que permanecía abierta era como por sarcasmo, para mostrar sus desnudos armazones, que recordaban los blancos esqueletos de los caballos diseminados por todos los caminos. La mueca pavorosa del hambre estaba ya en las caras terrosas de la gente, en llama luminosa de sus ojos que, cuando se detenían sobre un soldado, quemaban con el fuego de la maldición.

Los soldados recorren en vano las calles en busca de comida y se muerden la lengua ardiendo de rabia. Un solo fonducho está abierto y en seguida se aprieta. No hay frijoles, no hay tortillas: puro chile picado y sal corriente. En vano los jefes muestran sus bolsillos reventando de billetes o quieren ponerse amenazadores.

—¡Papeles, sí!... ¡Eso nos han traído ustedes!... ¡Pos eso coman!... —dice la fondera, una viejota insolente, con una enorme cicatriz en la cara, quien cuenta que

"ya durmió en el petate del muerto para no morir de un susto".

Y en la tristeza y desolación del pueblo, mientras cantan las mujeres en el templo, los pajarillos no cesan de piar en las arboledas, ni el canto de las currucas deja de oírse en las ramas secas de los naranjos.

VI

La mujer de Demetrio Macías, loca de alegría, salió a encontrarlo por la vereda de la sierra, llevando de la mano al niño.

¡Casi dos años de ausencia!

Se abrazaron y permanecieron mudos; ella embargada por los sollozos y las lágrimas.

Demetrio, pasmado, veía a su mujer envejecida, como si diez o veinte años hubieran transcurrido ya. Luego miró al niño, que clavaba en él sus ojos con azoro. Y su corazón dio un vuelco cuando reparó en la reproducción de las mismas líneas de acero de su rostro y en el brillo flamante de sus ojos. Y quiso atraerlo y abrazarlo; pero el chiquillo, muy asustado, se refugió en el regazo de la madre.

—¡Es tu padre, hijo!... ¡Es tu padre!...

El muchacho metía la cabeza entre los pliegues de la falda y se mantenía huraño.

Demetrio, que había dado su caballo al asistente, caminaba a pie y poco a poco con su mujer y su hijo por la abrupta vereda de la sierra.

—¡Hora sí, bendito sea Dios que ya veniste!... ¡Ya nunca nos dejarás! ¿Verdad? ¿Verdad que ya te vas a quedar con nosotros?...

La faz de Demetrio se ensombreció.

Y los dos estuvieron silenciosos, angustiados.

Una nube negra se levantaba tras la sierra, y se oyó un trueno sordo. Demetrio ahogó un suspiro. Los recuerdos afluían a su memoria como una colmena.

La lluvia comenzó a caer en gruesas gotas y tuvieron que refugiarse en una rocallosa covacha.

El aguacero se desató con estruendo y sacudió las blancas flores de San Juan, manojos de estrellas prendidos en los árboles, en las peñas, entre la maleza, en los pitahayos y en toda la serranía.

Abajo, en el fondo del cañón y a través de la gasa de la lluvia, se miraban las palmas rectas y cimbradoras; lentamente se mecían sus cabezas angulosas y al soplo del viento se desplegaban en abanicos. Y todo era serranía: ondulaciones de cerros que suceden a cerros, más cerros circundados de montañas y éstas encerradas en una muralla de sierra de cumbres tan altas que su azul se perdía en el zafir.

—¡Demetrio, por Dios!... ¡Ya no te vayas!... ¡El corazón me avisa que ahora te va a suceder algo!... Y se deja sacudir de nuevo por el llanto.

El niño, asustado, llora a gritos, y ella tiene que refrenar su tremenda pena para contentarlo.

La lluvia va cesando; una golondrina de plateado vientre y alas angulosas cruza oblicuamente los hilos de cristal, de repente iluminados por el sol vespertino.

—¿Por qué pelean ya, Demetrio?

Demetrio, las cejas muy juntas, toma distraído una piedrecita y la arroja al fondo del cañón. Se mantiene pensativo viendo el desfiladero, y dice:

—Mira esa piedra cómo ya no se para...

VI

Fue una verdadera mañana de nupcias. Había llovido la víspera toda la noche y el cielo amanecía entoldado de blancas nubes. Por la cima de la sierra trotaban potrillos brutos de crines alzadas y colas tensas, gallardos con la gallardía de los picachos que levantan su cabeza hasta besar las nubes.

Los soldados caminan por el abrupto peñascal contagiado de la alegría de la mañana. Nadie piensa en la artera bala que puede estarlo esperando más adelante. La gran alegría de la partida estriba cabalmente en lo imprevisto. Y por eso los soldados cantan, ríen y charlan locamente. En su alma rebulle el alma de las viejas tribus nómadas. Nada importa saber adónde van y de dónde vienen; lo necesario es caminar, caminar siempre, no estacionarse jamás; ser dueños del valle, de las planicies, de la sierra y de todo lo que la vista abarca.

Arboles, cactus y helechos, todo aparece acabado de lavar. Las rocas, que muestran su ocre como el orín las viejas armaduras, vierten gruesas gotas de agua transparente.

Los hombres de Macías hacen silencio un momento. Parece que han escuchado un ruido conocido: el estallar lejano de un cohete; pero pasan algunos minutos y nada se vuelve a oír.

—En esta misma sierra —dice Demetrio—, yo, sólo con veinte hombres, les hice más de quinientas bajas a los federales.

Y cuando Demetrio comienza a referir aquel famoso hecho de armas, la gente se da cuenta del grave peligro que va corriendo. ¿Conque si el enemigo, en vez de estar a dos días de camino todavía, les fuera resultando escondido entre las malezas de aquel formidable barranco, por cuyo fondo se han aventurado? Pero ¿quién sería capaz de revelar su miedo? ¿Cuándo los hombres de Demetrio dijeron: "Por aquí no caminamos"?

Y cuando comienza un tiroteo lejano, donde va la vanguardia, ni siquiera se sorprenden ya. Los reclutas vuelven grupas en desenfrenada fuga buscando la salida del cañón.

Una maldición se escapa de la garganta seca de Demetrio:

—¡Fuego!... ¡Fuego sobre los que corran!... ¡A quitarles las alturas! —ruge después como una fiera.

Pero el enemigo, escondido a millaradas, desgrana sus ametralladoras, y los hombres de Demetrio caen como espigas cortadas por la hoz.

Demetrio derrama lágrimas de rabia y de dolor cuando Anastasio resbala lentamente de su caballo sin exhalar una queja, y se queda tendido, inmóvil. Venancio cae a su lado, con el pecho horriblemente abierto por la ametralladora y el Meco se desbarranca y rueda al fondo del abismo. De repente Demetrio se encuentra solo. Las balas zumban en sus oídos como una granizada. Desmonta, arrástrase por las rocas hasta encontrar un parapeto, coloca una piedra que le defienda la cabeza y, pecho a tierra, comienza a disparar.

El enemigo se disemina, persiguiendo a los raros fugitivos que quedan ocultos entre los chaparros.

Demetrio apunta y no yerra un solo tiro... ¡Paf!... ¡Pan... ¡Pan...

Su puntería famosa lo llena de regocijo; donde pone

el ojo pone la bala. Se acaba un cargador y mete otro nuevo. Y apunta...

El humo de la fusilería no acaba de extinguirse. Las cigarras entonan su canto imperturbable y misterioso; las palomas cantan con dulzura en las rinconadas de las rocas; ramonean apaciblemente las vacas.

La sierra está de gala; sobre sus cúspides inaccesibles cae la niebla albísima como un crespón de nieve sobre la cabeza de una novia.

Y al pie de una resquebrajadura enorme y suntuosa, como pórtico de vieja catedral, Demetrio Macías, con los ojos fijos para siempre, sigue apuntando con el cañón de su fusil...

LITERATURE:
THE UNDERDOGS

The Underdogs

by Mariano Azuela

Mariano Azuela, the first of the "novelists of the Revolution," was born in Lagos de Moreno, Jalisco, Mexico, in 1873. He studied medicine in Guadalajara and returned to Lagos in 1909, where he began the practice of his profession. He began his writing career early; in 1896 he published *Impressions of a Student* in a weekly of Mexico City. This was followed by numerous sketches and short stories, and in 1911 by his first novel, *Andres Perez, maderista*.

Like most of the young Liberals, he supported Francisco I. Madero's uprising, which overthrew the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz, and in 1911 was made Director of Education of the State of Jalisco. After Madero's assassination, he joined the army of Pancho Villa as doctor, and his knowledge of the Revolution was acquired at firsthand. When the counterrevolutionary forces of Victoriano Huerta were temporarily triumphant, he emigrated to El Paso, Texas, where in 1915 he wrote *The Underdogs (Los de abajo)*, which did not receive general recognition until 1924, when it was hailed as the novel of the Revolution.

But Azuela was fundamentally a moralist, and his disappointment with the Revolution soon began to manifest itself. He had fought for a better Mexico; but he saw that while the Revolution had corrected certain injustices, it had given rise to others equally deplorable. When he saw the self-servers and the unprincipled turning his hopes for the redemption of the underprivileged of his country into a ladder to serve their own ends, his disillusionment was deep and often bitter. His later novels are marred at times by a savage sarcasm

During his later years, and until his death in 1952, he lived in Mexico City writing and practicing his profession among the poor.

The Underdogs

by Mariano Azuela

A Novel of the Mexican Revolution

Translated by E. Munguia, Jr.
Original Title: LOS DE ABAJO

PART ONE

"How beautiful the revolution!
Even in its most barbarous aspect it is beautiful,"
Solis said with deep feeling.

I

"That's no animal, I tell you! Listen to the dog barking! It must be a human being."

The woman stared into the darkness of the sierra.

"What if they're soldiers?" said a man, who sat Indian-fashion, eating, a coarse earthenware plate in his right hand, three folded tortillas in the other.

The woman made no answer, all her senses directed outside the hut. The beat of horses' hoofs rang in the quarry nearby. The dog barked again, louder and more angrily.

"Well, Demetrio, I think you had better hide, all the same."

Stolidly, the man finished eating; next he reached for a cantaro and gulped down the water in it; then he stood up.

"Your rifle is under the mat," she whispered.

A tallow candle illumined the small room. In one corner stood a plow, a yoke, a goad, and other agricultural implements. Ropes hung from the roof, securing an old adobe mold, used as a bed; on it a child slept, covered with gray rags.

Demetrio buckled his cartridge belt about his waist and picked up his rifle. He was tall and well built, with a sanguine face and beardless chin; he wore shirt and trousers of white cloth, a broad Mexican hat and leather sandals.

With slow, measured step, he left the room, vanishing into the impenetrable darkness of the night.

The dog, excited to the point of madness, had jumped over the corral fence.

Suddenly a shot rang out. The dog moaned, then barked no more. Some men on horseback rode up, shouting and sweating; two of them dismounted, while the other hung back to watch the horses.

"Hey, there, woman: we want food! Give us eggs, milk, beans, anything you've got! We're starving!"

"Curse the sierra! It would take the Devil himself not to lose his way!"

"Guess again, Sergeant! Even the Devil would go astray if he were as drunk as you are."

The first speaker wore chevrons on his arm, the other red stripes on his shoulders.

"Whose place is this, old woman? Or is it an empty

house? God's truth, which is it?"

"Of course it's not empty. How about the light and that child there? Look here, confound it, we want to eat, and damn quick too! Are you coming out or are we going to make you?"

"You swine! Both of you! You've gone and killed my dog, that's what you've done! What harm did he ever do you? What did you have against him?"

The woman reentered the house, dragging the dog behind her, very white and fat, with lifeless eyes and flabby body.

"Look at those cheeks, Sergeant! Don't get riled, light of my life: I swear I'll turn your home into a dovecot, see?"

"By God!" he said, breaking off into song:

"Don't look so haughty, dear,
Banish all fears,
Kiss me and melt to me,
I'll drink up your tears!"

His alcoholic tenor trailed off into the night.

"Tell me what they call this ranch, woman?" the sergeant asked.

"Limon," the woman replied curtly, carrying wood to the fire and fanning the coals.

"So we're in Limon, eh, the famous Demetrio Macias' country, eh? Do you hear that, Lieutenant? We're in Limon."

"Limon? What the hell do I care? If I'm bound for hell, Sergeant, I might as well go there now. I don't mind, now that I've found as good a remount as this! Look at the cheeks on the darling, look at them! There's a pair of ripe red apples for a fellow to bite into!"

"I'll wager you know Macias the bandit, lady? I was

in the pen with him at Escobedo, once."

"Bring me a bottle of tequila, Sergeant: I've decided to spend the night with this charming lady. . . . What's that? The colonel? . . . Why in God's name talk about the colonel now? He can go straight to hell, for all I care. And if he doesn't like it, it's all right with me. Come on, Sergeant, tell the corporal outside to unsaddle the horses and feed them. I'll stay here all night. Here, my girl, you let the sergeant fry the eggs and warm up the tortillas; you come here to me. See this wallet full of nice new bills? They're all for you, darling. Sure, I want you to have them. Figure it out for yourself. I'm drunk, see: I've a bit of a load on and that's why I'm kind of hoarse, you might call it. I left half my gullet down Guadalajara way, and I've been spitting the other half out all the way up here. Oh well, who cares? But I want you to have that money, see, dearie? Hey, Sergeant, where's my bottle? Now, little girl, come here and pour yourself a drink. You won't, eh? Aw, come on! Afraid of your--er--husband . . . or whatever he is, huh? Well, if he's skulking in some hole, you tell him to come out. What the hell do I care? I'm not scared of rats, see!"
Suddenly a white shadow loomed on the threshold.

"Demetrio Macias!" the sergeant cried as he stepped back in terror.

The lieutenant stood up, silent, cold and motionless as a statue.

"Shoot them!" the woman croaked.

"Oh, come, you'll surely spare us! I didn't know you were there. I'll always stand up for a brave man."

Demetrio stood his ground, looking them up and down, an insolent and disdainful smile wrinkling his face.

"Yes, I not only respect brave men, but I like them. I'm proud and happy to call them friends. Here's my hand on it: friend to friend." Then, after a pause: "All right, Demetrio Macias, if you don't want to shake hands, all right! But it's because you don't know me, that's why, just because the first time you saw me I was

doing this dog's job. But look here, I ask you, what in God's name can a man do when he's poor and has a wife to support and kids? . . . Right you are, Sergeant, let's go: I've nothing but respect for the home of what I call a brave man, a real, honest, genuine man!"

When they had gone, the woman drew close to Demetrio.

"Holy Virgin, what agony! I suffered as though it was you they'd shot."

"You go to father's house, quick!" Demetrio ordered. She wanted to hold him in her arms; she entreated, she wept. But he pushed away from her gently and, in a sullen voice, said, "I've an idea the whole lot of them are coming."

"Why didn't you kill 'em?"

"Their hour hasn't struck yet."

They went out together; she bore the child in her arms. At the door, they separated, moving off in different directions.

The moon peopled the mountain with vague shadows. As he advanced at every turn of his way Demetrio could see the poignant, sharp silhouette of a woman pushing forward painfully, bearing a child in her arms.

When, after many hours of climbing, he gazed back, huge flames shot up from the depths of the canyon by the river. It was his house, blazing. . . .

II

Everything was still swathed in shadows as Demetrio Macias began his descent to the bottom of the ravine. Between rocks striped with huge eroded cracks, and a squarely cut wall, with the river flowing below, a narrow ledge along the steep incline served as a mountain trail.

"They'll surely find me now and track us down like dogs," he mused. "It's a good thing they know nothing about the trails and paths up here. . . . But if they got someone from Moyahua to guide them . . ." He left the sinister thought unfinished. "All the men from Limon or Santa Rosa or the other nearby ranches are on our side: they wouldn't try to trail us. That cacique who's chased and run me ragged over these hills, is at Mohayua now; he'd give his eyeteeth to see me dangling from a telegraph pole with my tongue hanging out of my mouth, purple and swollen. . . ."

At dawn, he approached the pit of the canyon. Here, he lay on the rocks and fell asleep.

The river crept along, murmuring as the waters rose and fell in small cascades. Birds sang lyrically from their hiding among the pitaya trees. The monotonous, eternal drone of insects filled the rocky solitude with mystery.

Demetrio awoke with a start. He waded the river, following its course which ran counter to the canyon; he climbed the crags laboriously as an ant, gripping root and rock with his hands, clutching every stone in the trail with his bare feet.

When he reached the summit, he glanced down to see the sun steeping the valley in a lake of gold. Near the canyon, enormous rocks loomed protrudent, like fantastic Negro skulls. The pitaya trees rose tenuous, tall, like the tapering, gnarled fingers of a giant; other trees of all sorts bowed their crests toward the pit of the abyss. Amid the stark rocks and dry branches, roses bloomed like a white offering to the sun as smoothly, suavely, it unraveled its golden threads, one by one, from rock to rock.

Demetrio stopped at the summit. Reaching backward, with his right arm he drew his horn which hung at his back, held it up to his thick lips, and, swelling his cheeks out, blew three loud blasts. From across the hill close by, three sharp whistles answered his signal.

In the distance, from a conical heap of reeds and dry straws, man after man emerged, one after the other, their legs and chests naked, lambent and dark as old bronze.

They rushed forward to greet Demetrio, and stopped before him, askance.

"They've burnt my house," he said.

A murmur of oaths, imprecations, and threats rose among them.

Demetrio let their anger run its course. Then he drew a bottle from under his shirt and took a deep swig; then he wiped the neck of the bottle with the back of his hand and passed it around. It passed from mouth to mouth; not a drop was left. The men passed their tongues greedily over their lips to recapture the tang of the liquor.

"Glory be to God and by His Will," said Demetrio, "tonight or tomorrow at the latest we'll meet the Federals. What do you say, boys, shall we let them find their way about these trails?"

The ragged crew jumped to their feet, uttering shrill cries of joy; then their jubilation tamed sinister and they gave vent to threats, oaths and imprecations.

"Of course, we can't ten how strong they are," said Demetrio as his glance traveled over their faces in scrutiny.

"Do you remember Medina? Out there at Hostotipaquillo, he only had a half a dozen men with knives that they sharpened on a grindstone. Well, he held back the soldiers and the police, didn't he? And he beat them, too."

"We're every bit as good as Medina's crowd!" said a tall, broad-shouldered man with a black beard and bushy eyebrows.

"By God, if I don't own a Mauser and a lot of cartridges, if I can't get a pair of trousers and shoes, then my name's not Anastasio Montanez! Look here, Quail, you don't believe it, do you? You ask my partner Demetrio if I haven't half a dozen bullets in me already. Christ! Bullets are marbles to me! And I dare you to contradict me!"

"Viva Anastasio Montanez," shouted Manteca.

"All right, all right!" said Montanez. "Viva Demetrio Macias, our chief, and long life to God in His heaven and to the Virgin Mary."

"Viva Demetrio Macias," they all shouted.

They gathered dry brush and wood, built a fire and placed chunks of fresh meat upon the burning coals. As the blaze rose, they collected about the fire, sat down Indian-fashion and inhaled the odor of the meat as it twisted on the crackling fire. The rays of the sun, falling about them, cast a golden radiance over the bloody hide of a calf, lying on the ground nearby. The meat dangled from a rope fastened to a huizache tree, to dry in the sun and wind.

"Well, men," Demetrio said, "you know we've only twenty rifles, besides my thirty-thirty. If there are just a few of them, we'll shoot until there's not a live man left. If there's a lot of 'em, we can give 'em a good scare, anyhow."

He undid a rag belt about his waist, loosened a knot in it and offered the contents to his companions. Salt. A murmur of approbation rose among them as each took a few grains between the tips of his fingers.

They ate voraciously; then, gluttoned, lay down on the ground, facing the sky. They sang monotonous, sad songs, uttering a strident shout after each stanza.

III

In the brush and foliage of the sierra, Demetrio Macias and his threescore men slept until the halloo of the horn, blown by Pancraccio from the crest of a peak, awakened them.

"Time, boys! Look around and see what's what!"

Anastasio Montanez said, examining his rifle springs. Yet he was previous; an hour or more elapsed with no sound or stir save the song of the locust in the brush or the frog stirring in his mudhole. At last, when the ultimate faint rays of the moon were spent in the rosy dimness of the dawn, the silhouette of a soldier loomed at the end of the trail. As they strained their eyes, they could distinguish others behind him, ten, twenty, a hundred. . . . Then, suddenly, darkness swallowed them up. Only when the sun rose, Demetrio's band realized that the canyon was alive with men, midgets seated on miniature horses.

"Look at 'em, will you?" said Pancracio. "Pretty, ain't they? Come on, boys, let's go and roll marbles with 'em."

Now the moving dwarf figures were lost in the dense chaparral, now they reappeared, stark and black against the ocher. The voices of officers, as they gave orders, and soldiers, marching at ease, were clearly audible. Demetrio raised his hand; the locks of rifles clicked. "Fire!" he cried tensely.

Twenty-one men shot as one; twenty-one soldiers fell off their horses. Caught by surprise, the column halted, etched like bas-reliefs in stone against the rocks.

Another volley and a score of soldiers hurtled down from rock to rock.

"Come out, bandits. Come out, you starved dogs!"

"To bell with you, you corn rustlers!"

"Kill the cattle thieves! Kill 'em!"

The soldiers shouted defiance to their enemies; the latter, giving proof of a marksmanship which had already made them famous, were content to keep under cover, quiet, mute.

"Look, Pancracio," said Meco, completely black save for his eyes and teeth. "This is for that man who passes that tree. I'll get the son of a . . ."

"Take that! Right in the head. You saw it, didn't you, mate? Now, this is for the fellow on the roan horse. Down you come, you shave-headed bastard!"

"I'll give that lad on the trail's edge a shower of lead. If you don't hit the river, I'm a liar! Now: look at him!"

"Oh, come on, Anastasio don't be cruel; lend me your rifle. Come along, one shot, just one!"

Manteca and Quail, unarmed, begged for a gun as a boon, imploring permission to fire at least a shot apiece. "Come out of your holes if you've got any guts!"

"Show your faces, you lousy cowards!"

From peak to peak, the shouts rang as distinctly as though uttered across a street. Suddenly, Quail stood up, naked, holding his trousers to windward as though he were a bullfighter flaunting a red cape, and the soldiers below the bull. A shower of shots peppered upon Demetrio's men.

"God! That was like a hornet's nest buzzing overhead," said Anastasio Montanez, lying flat on the ground without daring to wink an eye.

"Here, Quail, you son of a bitch, you stay where I told you," roared Demetrio.

They crawled to take new positions. The soldiers, congratulating themselves on their successes, ceased firing when another volley roused them.

"More coming!" they shouted.

Some, panic-stricken, turned their horses back; others, abandoning their mounts, began to climb up the mountain and seek shelter behind the rocks. The officers had to shoot at them to enforce discipline.

"Down there, down there!" said Demetrio as he leveled his rifle at the translucent thread of the river.

A soldier fell into the water; at each shot, invariably a soldier bit the dust. Only Demetrio was shooting in that direction; for every soldier killed, ten or twenty of them, intact, climbed afresh on the other side.

"Get those coming up from under! Los de Abajo! Get the underdogs!" he screamed.

Now his fellows were exchanging rifles, laughing and making wagers on their marksmanship.

"My leather belt if I miss that head there, on the black horse! "

"Lend me your rifle, Meco."

"Twenty Mauser cartridges and a half yard of sausage if you let me spill that lad riding the bay mare. All right! Watch me.... There! See him jump! Like a bloody deer."

"Don't run, you half-breeds. Come along with you! Come and meet Father Demetrio!"

Now it was Demetrio's men who screamed insults. Manteca, his smooth face swollen in exertion, yelled his lungs out. Pancraccio roared, the veins and muscles in his neck dilated, his murderous eyes narrowed to two evil slits.

Demetrio fired shot after shot, constantly warning his men of impending danger, but they took no heed until they felt the bullets spattering them from one side.

"Goddamn their souls, they've branded me!" Demetrio cried, his teeth flashing.

Then, very swiftly, he slid down a gully and was lost....

IV

Two men were missing, Serapio the candymaker, and Antonio, who played the cymbals in the Juchipila band.

"Maybe they'll join us further on," said Demetrio.

The return journey proved moody. Anastasio Montanez alone preserved his equanimity, a kindly expression playing in his sleepy eyes and on his bearded face. Pancraccio's harsh, gorillalike profile retained its repulsive immutability.

The soldiers had retreated; Demetrio began the search for the soldiers' horses which had been hidden in the sierra.

Suddenly Quail, who had been walking ahead, shrieked. He had caught sight of his companions swinging from the branches of a mesquite. There could be no doubt of their identity; Serapio and Antonio they certainly were. Anastasio Montanez prayed brokenly.

"Our Father Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come..."

"Amen," his men answered in low tones, their heads bowed, their hats upon their breasts. . . .

Then, hurriedly, they took the Juchipila canyon northward, without halting to rest until nightfall.

Quail kept walking close to Anastasio unable to banish from his mind the two who were hanged, their dislocated limp necks, their dangling legs, their arms pendulous, and their bodies moving slowly in the wind.

On the morrow, Demetrio complained bitterly of his wound; he could no longer ride on horseback. They were forced to carry him the rest of the way on a makeshift stretcher of leaves and branches.

"He's bleeding frightfully," said Anastasio Montanez, tearing off one of his shirt-sleeves and tying it tightly about Demetrio's thigh, a little above the wound.

"That's good," said Venancio. "It'll keep him from bleeding and stop the pain."

Venancio was a barber. In his native town, he pulled

teeth and fulfilled the office of medicine man. He was accorded an unimpeachable authority because he had read *The Wandering Jew* and one or two other books. They called him "Doctor"; and since he was conceited about his knowledge, he employed very few words.

They took turns, carrying the stretcher in relays of four over the bare stony mesa and up the steep passes.

At high noon, when the reflection of the sun on the calcareous soil burned their shoulders and made the landscape dimly waver before their eyes, the monotonous, rhythmical moan of the wounded rose in unison with the ceaseless cry of the locusts. They stopped to rest at every small hut they found hidden between the steep, jagged rocks.

"Thank God, a kind soul and tortillas full of beans and chili are never lacking," Anastasio Montanez said with a triumphant belch.

The mountaineers would shake calloused hands with the travelers, saying:

"God's blessing on you! He will find a way to help you all, never fear. We're going ourselves, starting tomorrow morning. We're dodging the draft, with those damned Government people who've declared war to the death on us, on all the poor. They come and steal our pigs, our chickens and com, they bum our homes and carry our women off, and if they ever get hold of us they'll kill us like mad dogs, and we die right there on the spot and that's the end of the story!"

At sunset, amid the flames dyeing the sky with vivid, variegated colors, they descried a group of houses up in the heart of the blue mountains. Demetrio ordered them to carry him there.

These proved to be a few wretched straw huts, dispersed all over the river slopes, between rows of young sprouting corn and beans. They lowered the stretcher and Demetrio, in a weak voice, asked for a glass of water.

Groups of squalid Indians sat in the dark pits of the huts, men with bony chests, disheveled, matted hair, and ruddy cheeks; behind them, eyes shone up from floors of fresh reeds.

A child with a large belly and glossy dark skin came close to the stretcher to inspect the wounded man. An old woman followed, and soon all of them drew about Demetrio in a circle.

A girl sympathizing with him in his plight brought a jicara of bluish water. With hands shaking, Demetrio took it up and drank greedily.

"Will you have some more?"

He raised his eyes and glanced at the girl, whose features were common but whose voice had a note of kindness in it. Wiping his sweating brow with the back of his palm and turning on one side, he gasped:
"May God reward you."

Then his whole body shook, making the leaves of the stretcher rustle. Fever possessed him; he fainted.

"It's a damp night and that's terrible for the fever," said Remigia, an old wrinkled barefooted woman, wearing a cloth rag for a blouse.

She invited them to move Demetrio into her hut.

Pancraccio, Anastasio Montanez, and Quail lay down beside the stretcher like faithful dogs, watchful of their master's wishes. The rest scattered about in search of food.

Remigia offered them all she had, chili and tortillas.

"Imagine! I had eggs, chickens, even a goat and her kid, but those damn soldiers wiped me out clean."

Then, making a trumpet of her hands, she drew near Anastasio and murmured in his ear:

"Imagine, they even carried away Senora Nieves'

little girl!"

V

Suddenly awakening, Quail opened his eyes and stood up.

"Montanez, did you hear? A shot, Montanez! Hey, Montanez, get up!"

He shook him vigorously until Montanez ceased snoring and in turn woke up.

"What in the name of . . . Now you're at it again, damn it. I tell you there aren't ghosts any more," Anastasio muttered out of a half-sleep.

"I heard a shot, Montanez!"

"Go back to sleep, Quail, or I'll bust your nose."

"Hell, Anastasio I tell you it's no nightmare. I've forgotten those fellows they hung, honest. It's a shot, I tell you. I heard it all right."

"A shot, you say? All right, then, hand me my gun."

Anastasio Montanez rubbed his eyes, stretched out his arms and legs, and stood up lazily.

They left the hut. The sky was solid with stars; the moon rose like a sharp scythe. The confused rumor of women crying in fright resounded from the various huts; the men who had been sleeping in the open, also woke up and the rattle of arms echoed over the mountain.

"You cursed fool, you've maimed me for life."

A voice rang clearly through the darkness.

"Who goes there?"

The shout echoed from rock to rock, through mound and over hollow, until it spent itself at the far, silent reaches of the night.

"Who goes there?" Anastasio repeated his challenge louder, pulling back the lock of his Mauser.

"One of Demetrio's men," came the answer.

"It's Pancracio," Quail cried joyfully. Relieved, he rested the butt of his rifle on the ground.

Pancracio appeared, holding a young man by the arms; the newcomer was covered with dust from his felt hat to his coarse shoes. A fresh bloodstain lay on his trousers close to the heel.

"Who's this tenderfoot?" Anastasio demanded.

"You know I'm on guard around here. Well, I hears a noise in the brush, see, and I shouts, 'Who goes there?' and then this lad answers, 'Carranza! Carranza!' I don't know anyone by that name, and so I says, 'Carranza, hell!' and I just pumps a bit of lead into his hoof."

Smiling, Pancracio turned his beardless head around as if soliciting applause.

Then the stranger spoke:

"Who's your commander?"

Proudly, Anastasio raised his head, went up to him and looked him in the face. The stranger lowered his tone considerably.

"Well, I'm a revolutionist, too, you know. The Government drafted me and I served as a private, but I managed to desert during the battle the day before yesterday, and I've been walking about in search of you all."

"So he's a Government soldier, eh?" A murmur of incredulity rose from the men, interrupting the stranger.

"So that's what you are, eh? One of those damn half-breeds," said Anastasio Montanez. "Why the hell didn't you pump your lead in his brain, Pancracio?"

"What's he talking about, anyhow? I can't make head nor tail of it. He says he wants to see Demetrio and that he's got plenty to say to him. But that's all right: we've got plenty of time to do anything we damn well please so long as you're in no hurry, that's all," said Pancracio, loading his gun.

"What kind of beasts are you?" the prisoner cried. He could say no more: Anastasio's fist, crashing down upon his face, sent his head turning on his neck, covered with blood.

"Shoot the half-breed!"

"Hang him!"

"Bum him alive; he's a lousy Federal."

In great excitement, they yelled and shrieked and were about to fire at the prisoner.

"Sssh! Shut up! I think Demetrio's talking now," Anastasio said, striving to quiet them. Indeed, Demetrio, having ascertained the cause of the turmoil, ordered them to bring the prisoner before him.

"It's positively infamous, senior; look," Luis Cervantes said, pointing to the bloodstains on his trousers and to his bleeding face.

"All right, all right. But who in hell are you? That's what I want to know," Demetrio said.

"My name is Luis Cervantes, sir. I'm a medical student and a journalist. I wrote a piece in favor of the revolution, you see; as a result, they persecuted me, caught me, and finally landed me in the barracks."

His ensuing narrative was couched in terms of such detail and expressed in terms so melodramatic that it drew guffaws of mirth from Pancraccio and Manteca.

"All I've tried to do is to make myself clear on this point. I want you to be convinced that I am truly one of your coreligionists. . . ."

"What's that? What did you say? Car . . . what?" Demetrio asked, bringing his ear close to Cervantes.

"Coreligionist, sir, that is to say, a person who possesses the same religion, who is inspired by the same ideals, who defends and fights for the same cause you are now fighting for."

Demetrio smiled:

"What are we fighting for? That's what I'd like to know."

In his disconcertment, Luis Cervantes could find no reply.

"Look at that mug, look at 'im! Why waste any time, Demetrio? Let's shoot him," Pancraccio urged impatiently.

Demetrio laid a hand on his hair which covered his ears, and stretching himself out for a long time, seemed to be lost in thought. Having found no solution, he said:

"Get out, all of you; it's aching again. Anastasio put out the candle. Lock him up in the corral and let Pancraccio and Manteca watch him. Tomorrow, we'll see.

VI

Through the shadows of the starry night, Luis Cervantes had not yet managed to detect the exact shape of the objects about him. Seeking the most suitable resting-place, he laid his weary bones down on a fresh pile of manure under the blurred mass of a huizache tree. He lay down, more exhausted than resigned, and closed his eyes, resolutely determined to sleep until his fierce keepers or the morning sun, burning his ears, awakened him. Something vaguely like warmth at his side, then a tired hoarse breath, made him shudder. He opened his eyes and feeling about him with his hands, he sensed the coarse hairs of a large pig which, resenting the presence of a neighbor, began to grunt.

All Luis' efforts to sleep proved quite useless, not only because the pain of his wound or the bruises on his flesh smarted, but because he suddenly realized the exact nature of his failure.

Yes, failure! For he had never learned to appreciate exactly the difference between fulminating sentences of

death upon bandits in the columns of a small country newspaper and actually setting out in search of them, and tracking them to their lairs, gun in hand. During his first day's march as volunteer lieutenant, he had begun to suspect the error of his ways--a brutal sixty miles' journey it was, that left his hips and legs one mass of raw soreness and soldered all his bones together. A week later, after his first skirmish against the rebels, he understood every rule of the game. Luis Cervantes would have taken up a crucifix and solemnly sworn that as soon as the soldiers, gun in hand, stood ready to shoot, some profoundly eloquent voice had spoken behind them, saying, "Run for your lives." It was all crystal clear. Even his noble-spirited horse, accustomed to battle, sought to sweep back on its hind legs and gallop furiously away, to stop only at a safe distance from the sound of firing. The sun was setting, the mountain became peopled with vague and restless shadows, darkness scaled the ramparts of the mountain hastily. What could be more logical then, than to seek refuge behind the rocks and attempt to sleep, granting mind and body a sorely needed rest?

But the soldier's logic is the logic of absurdity. On the morrow, for example, his colonel awakened him rudely out of his sleep, cuffing and belaboring him unmercifully, and, after having bashed in his face, deprived him of his place of vantage. The rest of the officers, moreover, burst into hilarious mirth and holding their sides with laughter begged the colonel to pardon the deserter. The colonel, therefore, instead of sentencing him to be shot, kicked his buttocks roundly for him and assigned him to kitchen police.

This signal insult was destined to bear poisonous fruit. Luis Cervantes determined to play turncoat; indeed, mentally, he had already changed sides. Did not the sufferings of the underdogs, of the disinherited masses, move him to the core? Henceforth he espoused the cause of Demos, of the subjugated, the beaten and baffled, who implore justice, and justice alone. He became intimate with the humblest private. More, even, he shed tears of compassion over a dead mule which fell, load and all, after a terribly long journey.

From then on, Luis Cervantes' prestige with the soldiers increased. Some actually dared to make confessions. One among them, conspicuous for his sobriety and silence, told him: "I'm a carpenter by trade, you know. I had a mother, an old woman nailed to her chair for ten years by rheumatism. In the middle of the night, they pulled me out of my house; three damn policemen; I woke up a soldier twenty-five miles away from my hometown. A month ago our company passed by there again. My mother was already under the sod! . . . So there's nothing left for me in this wide world; no one misses me now, you see. But, by God, I'm damned if I'll use these cartridges they make us carry, against the enemy. If a miracle happens (I pray for it every night, you know, and I guess our Lady of Guadalupe can do it all right), then I'll join Villa's men; and I swear by the holy soul of my old mother, that I'll make every one of these Government people pay, by God I will."

Another soldier, a bright young fellow, but a charlatan, at heart, who drank habitually and smoked the narcotic marihuana weed, eyeing him with vague, glassy stare, whispered in his ear, "You know, partner . . . the men on the other side ... you know, the other side . . . you understand . . . they ride the best horses up north there, and all over, see? And they harness their mounts with pure hammered silver. But us? Oh hell, we've got to ride plugs, that's all, and not one of them good enough to stagger round a water well. You see, don't you, partner? You see what I mean? You know, the men on the other side-they get shiny new silver coins while we get only lousy paper money printed in that murderer's factory, that's what we get, yes, that's ours, I tell you!"

The majority of the soldiers spoke in much the same tenor. Even a top sergeant candidly confessed, "Yes, I enlisted all right. I wanted to. But, by God, I missed the right side by a long shot. What you can't make in a lifetime, sweating like a mule and breaking your back in peacetime, damn it all, you can make in a few months just running around the sierra with a gun on your back, but not with this crowd, dearie, not with this lousy outfit"

Luis Cervantes, who already shared this hidden, im-

placably mortal hatred of the upper classes, of his officers, and of his superiors, felt that a veil had been removed from his eyes; clearly, now, he saw the final outcome of the struggle. And yet what had happened? The first moment he was able to join his coreligionists, instead of welcoming him with open arms, they threw him into a pigsty with swine for company.

Day broke. The roosters crowed in the huts. The chickens perched in the huizache began to stretch their wings, shake their feathers, and fly down to the ground.

Luis Cervantes saw his guards lying on top of a dung heap, snoring. In his imagination, he reviewed the features of last night's men. One, Pancracio, was pock-marked, blotchy, unshaven; his chin protruded, his forehead receded obliquely; his ears formed one solid piece with head and neck--a horrible man. The other, Manteca, was so much human refuse; his eyes were almost hidden, his look sullen; his wiry straight hair fell over his ears, forehead and neck; his scrofulous lips hung eternally agape. Once more, Luis Cervantes felt his flesh quiver.

VII

Still drowsy, Demetrio ran his hand through his ruffled hair, which hung over his moist forehead, pushed it back over his ears, and opened his eyes.

Distinctly he heard the woman's melodious voice which he had already sensed in his dream. He walked toward the door.

It was broad daylight; the rays of sunlight filtered through the thatch of the hut.

The girl who had offered him water the day before, the girl of whom he had dreamed all night long, now came forward, kindly and eager as ever. This time she carried a pitcher of milk brimming over with foam.

"It's goat's milk, but fine just the same. Come on now: taste it."

Demetrio smiled gratefully, straightened up, grasped the clay pitcher, and proceeded to drink the milk in little gulps, without removing his eyes from the girl. She grew self-conscious, lowered her eyes.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Camilla "

"Ah, there's a lovely name! And the girl that bears it, lovelier still!"

Camilla blushed. As he sought to seize her wrist, she grew frightened, and Picking up the empty pitcher, flew out the door.

"No, Demetrio," Anastasio Montanez commented gravely, "you've got to break them in first. Hmm! It's a hell of a lot of scars the women have left on my body. Yes, my friend, I've a heap of experience along that line."

"I feel all right now, Compadre." Demetrio pretended he had not heard him. "I had fever, and I sweated like a horse all night, but I feel quite fresh today. The thing that's irking me hellishly is that Goddamn wound. Can Venancio to look after me."

"What are we going to do with the tenderfoot we caught last night?" Pancraccio asked.

"That's right: I was forgetting all about him."

As usual, Demetrio hesitated a while before he reached a decision.

"Here, Quail, come here. Listen: you go and find out where's the nearest church around here. I know there's one about six miles away. Go and steal a priest's robe and bring it back."

"What's the idea?" asked Pancraccio in surprise.

"Well, I'll soon find out if this tenderfoot came here to murder me. I'll tell him he's to be shot, see, and Quail will put on the priest's robes, say that he's a priest and hear his confession. If he's got anything up his sleeve, he'll come out with it, and then I'll shoot him. Otherwise I'll let him go."

"God, there's a roundabout way to tackle the question. If I were you, I'd just shoot him and let it go at that," said Pancracio contemptuously.

That night Quail returned with the priest's robes; Demetrio ordered the prisoner to be led in. Luis Cervantes had not eaten or slept for two days, there were deep black circles under his eyes; his face was deathly pale, his lips dry and colorless. He spoke awkwardly, slowly: "You can do as you please with me. . . . I am convinced I was wrong to come looking for you."

There was a prolonged silence. Then:

"I thought that you would welcome a man who comes to offer his help, with open arms, even though his help was quite worthless. After all, you might perhaps have found some use for it. What, in heaven's name, do I stand to gain, whether the revolution wins or loses?"

Little by little he grew more animated; at times the languor in his eyes disappeared.

"The revolution benefits the poor, the ignorant, all those who have been slaves all their lives, all the unhappy people who do not even suspect they are poor because the rich who stand above them, the rich who rule them, change their sweat and blood and tears into gold. . .

"Well, what the hell is the gist of all this palaver? I'll be damned if I can stomach a sermon," Pancracio

broke in.

"I wanted to fight for the sacred cause of the oppressed, but you don't understand . . . you cast me aside. . . . Very well, then, you can do as you please

with me!"

"All I'm going to do now is to put this rope around your neck. Look what a pretty white neck you've got."

"Yes, I know what brought you here," Demetrio interrupted dryly, scratching his head. "I'm going to have you shot!"

Then, looking at Anastasio he said:

"Take him away. And . . . if he wants to confess, bring the priest to him."

Impassive as ever, Anastasio took the prisoner gently by the arm.

"Come along this way, Tenderfoot."

They all laughed uproariously, when a few minutes later, Quail appeared in priestly robes.

"By God, this tenderfoot certainly talks his head off," Quail said. "You know, I've a notion he was having a bit of a laugh on me when I started asking him questions."

"But didn't he have anything to say?"

"Nothing, save what he said last night."

"I've a hunch he didn't come here to shoot you at all, Compadre," said Anastasio.

"Give him something to eat and guard him."

VIII

On the morrow, Luis Cervantes was barely able to get up. His injured leg trailing behind him, he shuffled from hut to hut in search of a little alcohol, a kettle of

boiled water and some rags. With unfailing kindness, Camilla provided him with all that he wanted.

As he began washing his foot, she sat beside him, and, with typical mountaineer's curiosity, inquired:

"Tell me, who learned you how to cure people? Why did you boil that water? Why did you boil the rags? Look, look, how careful you are about everything! And what did you put on your hands? Really. . . . And why did you pour on alcohol? I just knew alcohol was good to rub on when you had a bellyache, but . . . Oh, I see! So you was going to be a doctor, huh? Ha, ha, that's a good one! Why don't you mix it with cold water? Well, there's a funny sort of a trick. Oh, stop fooling me . . . the idea: little animals alive in the water unless you boil it! Ugh! Well, I can't see nothing in it myself."

Camilla continued to cross-question him with such familiarity that she suddenly found herself addressing him intimately, in the singular tu. Absorbed in his own thoughts, Luis Cervantes had ceased listening to her. He thought:

Where are those men on Pancho Villa's payroll, so admirably equipped and mounted, who only get paid in those pure silver pieces Villa coins at the Chihuahua mint? Bah! Barely two dozen half-naked mangy men, some of them riding decrepit mares with the coat nibbled off from neck to withers. Can the accounts given by the Government newspapers and by myself be really true and are these so-called revolutionists simply bandits grouped together, using the revolution as a wonderful pretext to glut their thirst for gold and blood? Is it all a lie, then? Were their sympathizers talking a lot of exalted nonsense?

If on one hand the Government newspapers vied with each other in noisy proclamation of Federal victory after victory, why then had a paymaster on his way from Guadalajara started the rumor that President Huerta's friends and relatives were abandoning the capital and scuttling away to the nearest port? Was Huerta's, "I shall have peace, at no matter what cost," a meaningless growl? Well, it looked as though the

revolutionists or bandits, call them what you will, were going to depose the Government. Tomorrow would therefore belong wholly to them. A man must consequently be on their side, only on their side.

"No," he said to himself almost aloud, "I don't think I've made a mistake this time."

"What did you say?" Camilla asked. "I thought you'd lost your tongue. . . . I thought the mice had eaten it up!"

Luis Cervantes frowned and cast a hostile glance at this little plump monkey with her bronzed complexion, her ivory teeth, and her thick square toes.

"Look here, Tenderfoot, you know how to tell fairy stories, don't you?"

For all answer, Luis made an impatient gesture and moved off, the girl's ecstatic glance following his retreating figure until it was lost on the river path. So profound was her absorption that she shuddered in nervous surprise as she heard the voice of her neighbor, one-eyed Maria Antonia, who had been spying from her hut, shouting:

"Hey, you there: give him some love powder. Then he might fall for you."

"That's what you'd do, all right!"

"Oh, you think so, do you? Well, you're quite wrong! Faugh! I despise a tenderfoot, and don't forget it!"
Ho there, Remigia, lend me some eggs, will you? My chicken has been hatching since morning. There's some gentlemen here, come to eat."

Her neighbor's eyes blinked as the bright sunlight poured into the shadowy hut, darker than usual, even, as dense clouds of smoke rose from the stove. After a few minutes, she began to make out the contour of the various objects inside, and recognized the wounded man's stretcher, which lay in one corner, close to the ashy-gray galvanized iron roof.

She sat down beside Remigia Indian-fashion, and, glancing furtively toward where Demetrio rested, asked in a low voice:

"How's the patient, better? That's fine. Oh, how young he is! But he's still pale, don't you think? So the wound's not closed up yet. Well, Remigia, don't you think we'd better try and do something about it?"

Remigia, naked from the waist up, stretched her thin muscular arms over the corn grinder, pounding the corn with a stone bar she held in her hands.

"Oh, I don't know; they might not like it," she answered, breathing heavily as she continued her rude task. "They've got their own doctor, you know, so--"

"Hallo, there, Remigia," another neighbor said as she came in, bowing her bony back to pass through the opening, "haven't you any laurel leaves? We want to make a potion for Maria Antonia who's not so well today, what with her bellyache."

In reality, her errand was but a pretext for asking questions and passing the time of day in gossip, so she turned her eyes to the corner where the patient lay and, winking, sought information as to his health.

Remigia lowered her eyes to indicate that Demetrio was sleeping.

"Oh, I didn't see you when I came in. And you're here too, Panchita? Well, how are you?"

"Good morning to you, Fortunata. How are you?"

"All right. But Maria Antonia's got the curse today and her belly's aching something fierce."

She sat Indian-fashion, with bent knees, huddling hip to hip against Panchita.

"I've got no laurel leaves, honey," Remigia answered, pausing a moment in her work to push a mop of hair back from over her sweaty forehead. Then, plunging

her two hands into a mass of corn, she removed a handful of it dripping with muddy yellowish water. "I've none at all; you'd better go to Dolores, she's always got herbs, you know."

"But Dolores went to Cofradia last night. I don't know, but they say they came to fetch her to help Uncle Matias' girl who's big with child."

"You don't say, Panchita?"

The three old women came together forming an animated group, and speaking in low tones, began to gossip with great gusto.

"Certainly, I swear it, by God up there in heaven."

"Well, well, I was the first one to say that Marcelina was big with child, wasn't I? But of course no one would believe me."

"Poor girl. It's going to be terrible if the kid is her uncle's, you know!"

"God forbid!"

"Of course it's not her uncle: Nazario had nothing to do with it, I know. It was them damned soldiers, that's who done it."

"God, what a bloody mess! Another unhappy woman!"

The cackle of the old hens finally awakened Demetrio. They kept silent for a moment; then Panchita, taking out of the bosom of her blouse a young pigeon which opened its beak in suffocation, said:

"To tell you the truth, I brought this medicine for the gentleman here, but they say he's got a doctor, so I suppose--"

"That makes no difference, Panchita, that's no medicine anyhow, it's simply something to rub on his body."

"Forgive this poor gift from a poor woman, senor,"

said the wrinkled old woman, drawing close to Demetrio, "but there's nothing like it in the world for hemorrhages and suchlike."

Demetrio nodded hasty approval. They had already placed a loaf of bread soaked in alcohol on his stomach; although when this was removed he began to be cooler, he felt that he was still feverish inside.

"Come on, Remigia, you do it, you certainly know how," the women said.

Out of a reed sheath, Remigia pulled a long and curved knife which served to cut cactus fruit. She took the pigeon in one hand, turned it over, its breast upward, and with the skill of a surgeon, ripped it in two with a single thrust.

"In the name of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph," Remigia said, blessing the room and making the sign of the cross; next, with infinite dexterity, she placed the warm bleeding portions of the pigeon upon Demetrio's abdomen.

"You'll see: you'll feel much better now."

Obedying Remigia's instructions, Demetrio lay motionless, crumpled up on one side.

Then Fortunata gave vent to her sorrows. She liked these gentlemen of the revolution, all right, that she did --for, three months ago, you know, the Government soldiers had run away with her only daughter. This had broken her heart, Yes, and driven her all but crazy.

As she began, Anastasio Montanez and Quail lay on the floor near the stretcher, their mouths gaping, all ears to the story. But Fortunata's wealth of detail by the time she had told half of it bored Quail and he left the hut to scratch himself out in the sun. By the time Fortunata had at last concluded with a solemn "I pray God and the Blessed Virgin Mary that you are not sparing the life of a single one of those Federals from hell," Demetrio, face to wall, felt greatly relieved by the stomach cure, and was busy thinking of the best route by which to proceed to Durango. Anastasio Mon-

tanez was snoring like a trombone.

X

Why don't you call in the tenderfoot to treat you, Compadre Demetrio," Anastasio Montanez asked his chief, who had been complaining daily of chills and fever. "You ought to see him; no one has laid a hand to him but himself, and now he's so fit that he doesn't limp a step."

But Venancio, standing by with his tins of lard and his dirty string rags ready, protested:

"All right, if anybody lays a hand on Demetrio, I won't be responsible."

"Nonsense! Rot! What kind of doctor do you think you are? You're no doctor at all. I'll wager you've already forgotten why you ever joined us," said Quail.

"Well, I remember why you joined us, Quail," Venancio replied angrily. "Perhaps you'll deny it was because you had stolen a watch and some diamond rings."

"Ha, ha, ha! That's rich! But you're worse, my lad; you ran away from your hometown because you poisoned your sweetheart."

"You're a Goddamned liar!"

"Yes you did! And don't try and deny it! You fed her Spanish fly and . . ."

Venancio's shout of protest was drowned out in the loud laughter of the others. Demetrio, looking pale and sallow, motioned for silence. Then, plaintively:

"That'll do. Bring in the student."

Luis Cervantes entered. He uncovered Demetrio's

wound, examined it carefully, and shook his head. The ligaments had made a furrow in the skin. The leg, badly swollen, seemed about to burst. At every move he made, Demetrio stifled a moan. Luis Cervantes cut the ligaments, soaked the wound in water, covered the leg with large clean rags and bound it up. Demetrio was able to sleep all afternoon and all night. On the morrow he woke up happy.

"That tenderfoot has the softest hand in the world!" he said.

Quickly Venancio cut in:

"All right; just as you say. But don't forget that tenderfoots are like moisture, they seep in everywhere. It's the tenderfoots who stopped us reaping the harvest of the revolution."

Since Demetrio believed in the barber's knowledge implicitly, when Luis Cervantes came to treat him on the next day he said:

"Look here, do your best, see. I want to recover soon and then you can go home or anywhere else you damn well please."

Discreetly, Luis Cervantes made no reply.

A week, ten days, a fortnight elapsed. The Federal troops seemed to have vanished. There was an abundance of corn and beans, too, in the neighboring ranches. The people hated the Government so bitterly that they were overjoyed to furnish assistance to the rebels. Demetrio's men, therefore, were peacefully waiting for the complete recovery of their chief.

Day after day, Luis Cervantes remained humble and silent.

"By God, I actually believe you're in love," Demetrio said jokingly one morning after the daily treatment. He had begun to like this tenderfoot. From then on, Demetrio began gradually to show an increasing interest in Cervantes' comfort. One day he asked him if

the soldiers gave him his daily ration of meat and milk; Luis Cervantes was forced to answer that his sole nourishment was whatever the old ranch women happened to give him and that everyone still considered him an intruder.

"Look here, Tenderfoot, they're all good boys, really," Demetrio answered. "You've got to know how to handle them, that's all. You mark my words; from tomorrow on, there won't be a thing you'll lack."

In effect, things began to change that very afternoon. Some of Demetrio's men lay in the quarry, glancing at the sunset that turned the clouds into huge clots of congealed blood and listening to Venancio's amusing stories culled from *The Wandering Jew*. Some of them, lulled by the narrator's mellifluous voice, began to snore. But Luis Cervantes listened avidly and as soon as Venancio topped off his talk with a storm of anticlerical denunciations he said emphatically: "Wonderful, wonderful! What intelligence! You're a most gifted man!"

"Well, I reckon it's not so bad," Venancio answered, warming to the flattery, "but my parents died and I didn't have a chance to study for a profession."

"That's easy to remedy, I'm sure. Once our cause is victorious, you can easily get a degree. A matter of two or three weeks' assistant's work at some hospital and a letter of recommendation from our chief and you'll be a full-fledged doctor, all right. The thing is child's play."

From that night onward Venancio, unlike the others, ceased calling him Tenderfoot. He addressed him as Louie.

It was Louie, this, and Louie, that, right and left, all the time.

Look here, Tenderfoot, I want to tell you something," Camilla called to Luis Cervantes, as he made his way to the hut to fetch some boiling water for his foot.

For days the girl had been restless. Her coy ways and her reticence had finally annoyed the man; stopping suddenly, he stood up and eyeing her squarely:

"All right. What do you want to tell me?"

Camilla's tongue clove to her mouth, heavy and damp as a rag; she could not utter a word. A blush suffused her cheeks, turning them red as apples; she shrugged her shoulders and bowed her head, pressing her chin against her naked breast. Then without moving, with the fixity of an idiot, she glanced at the wound, and said in a whisper:

"Look, how nicely it's healing now: it's like a red Castille rose."

Luis Cervantes frowned and with obvious disgust continued to care for his foot, completely ignoring her as he worked. When he had finished, Camilla had vanished.

For three days she was nowhere to be found. It was always her mother, Agapita, who answered Cervantes' call, and boiled the water for him and gave him rags. He was careful to avoid questioning her. Three days later, Camilla reappeared, more coy and eager than ever.

The more distraught and indifferent Luis Cervantes grew, the bolder Camilla. At last, she said: "Listen to me, you nice young fellow, I want to tell you something pleasant. Please go over the words of the revolutionary song 'Adelita' with me, will you? You can guess why, eh? I want to sing it and sing it, over again often and often, see? Then when you're off and away and when you've forgotten all about Camilla, it'll remind me of you."

To Luis Cervantes her words were like the noise of a sharp steel knife drawn over the side of a glass bottle. Blissfully unaware of the effect they had produced, she proceeded, candid as ever:

"Well, I want to tell you something. You don't know that your chief is a wicked man, do you? Shall I tell you what he did to me? You know Demetrio won't let a soul but Mamma cook for him and me take him his food. Well, the other day I take some food over to him and what do you think he did to me, the old fool. He grabs hold of my wrist and he presses it tight, tight as can be, and then he starts pinching my legs.

"Come on, let me go,' I said. 'Keep still, lay off, you shameless creature. You've got no manners, that's the trouble with you.' So I wrestled with him, and shook myself free, like this, and ran off as fast as I could. What do you think of that?"

Camilla had never seen Luis Cervantes laugh so heartily.

"But it is really true, all this you've told me?"

Utterly at a loss, Camilla could not answer. Then he burst into laughter again and repeated the question. A sense of confusion came upon her. Disturbed, troubled, she said brokenly:

"Yes, it's the truth. And I wanted to tell you about it. But you don't seem to feel at all angry."

Once more Camilla glanced adoringly at Luis Cervantes' radiant, clean face; at his glaucous, soft eyes, his cheeks pink and polished as a porcelain doll's; at his tender white skin that showed below the line of his collar and on his shoulders, protruding from under a rough woolen poncho; at his hair, ever so slightly curled.

"What the devil are you waiting for, fool? If the chief likes you, what more do you want?"

Camilla felt something rise within her breast, an empty ache that became a knot when it reached her throat; she closed her eyes fast to hold back the tears that welled up in them. Then, with the back of her hand, she wiped her wet cheeks, and just as she had done three days ago, fled with all the swiftness of a young deer.

XII

Demetrio's wound had already healed. They began to discuss various projects to go northward where, according to rumor, the rebels had beaten the Federal troops all along the line.

A certain incident came to precipitate their action. Seated on a crag of the sierra in the cool of the afternoon breeze, Luis Cervantes gazed away in the distance, dreaming and killing time. Below the narrow rock Pancraccio and Manteca, lying like lizards between the jarales along one of the river margins, were playing cards. Anastasio Montanez, looking on indifferently, turned his black hairy face toward Luis Cervantes and, leveling his kindly gaze upon him, asked:

"Why so sad, you from the city? What are you day-dreaming about? Come on over here and let's have a chat!"

Luis Cervantes did not move; Anastasio went over to him and sat down beside him like a friend.

"What you need is the excitement of the city. I wager you shine your shoes every day and wear a necktie. Now, I may look dirty and my clothes may be torn to shreds, but I'm not really what I seem to be. I'm not here because I've got to be and don't you think so. Why, I own twenty oxen. Certainly I do; ask my friend Demetrio. I cleared ten bushels last harvest time. You see, if there's one thing I love, that's riling these Government fellows and making them furious. The last scrape I had--it'll be eight months gone now, ever since I've joined these men--I stuck my knife into some captain. He was just a nobody, a little Government squirt. I pinked him here, see, right under the navel. And that's why I'm here: that and because I wanted to give my mate Demetrio a hand." "Christ! The bloody little darling of my life!" Manteca shouted, waxing enthusiastic over a winning hand. He placed a twenty-cent silver coin on the jack of spades.

"If you want my opinion, I'm not much on gambling. Do you want to bet? Well, come on then, I'm game. How do you like the sound of this leather snake jingling, eh?"

Anastasio shook his belt; the silver coins rang as he shook them together.

Meanwhile, Pancraccio dealt the cards, the jack of spades turned up out of the deck and a quarrel ensued. Altercation, noise, then shouts, and, at last, insults. Pancraccio brought his stony face close to Manteca, who looked at him with snake's eyes, convulsive, foaming at the mouth. Another moment and they would have been exchanging blows. Having completely exhausted their stock of direct insults, they now resorted to the most flowery and ornate insulting of each other's ancestors, male and female, paternal or maternal. Yet nothing untoward occurred.

After their supply of words was exhausted, they gave over gambling and, their arms about each other's shoulders, marched off in search of a drink of alcohol.

"I don't like to fight with my tongue either, it's not decent. I'm right, too, eh? I tell you no man living has ever breathed a word to me against my mother. I want to be respected, see? That's why you've never seen me fooling with anyone." There was a pause. Then, suddenly, "Look there, Tenderfoot," Anastasio said, changing his tone and standing up with one hand spread over his eyes. "What's that dust over there behind the hillock. By God, what if it's those damned Federals and we sitting here doing nothing. Come on, let's go and warn the rest of the boys."

The news met with cries of joy.

"Ah, we're going to meet them!" cried Pancraccio jubilantly, first among them to rejoice.

"Of course, we're going to meet them! We'll strip them clean of everything they brought with them."

A few moments later, amid cries of joy and a bustle of arms, they began saddling their horses. But the enemy turned out to be a few burros and two Indians, driving them forward.

"Stop them, anyhow. They must have come from somewhere and they've probably news for us," Demetrio said.

Indeed, their news proved sensational. The Federal troops had fortified the hills in Zacatecas; this was said to be Huerta's last stronghold, but everybody predicted the fall of the city. Many families had hastily fled southward. Trains were overloaded with people; there was a scarcity of trucks and coaches; hundreds of people, panic-stricken, walked along the highroad with their belongings in a pack slung over their shoulders. General Panfilo Natera was assembling his men at Fresnillo; the Federals already felt it was all up with them.

"The fall of Zacatecas will be Huerta's requiescat in pace," Luis Cervantes cried with unusual excitement. "We've got to be there before the fight starts so that we can join Natera's army."

Then, suddenly, he noted the surprise with which Demetrio and his men greeted his suggestion. Crestfallen, he realized they still considered him of no account.

On the morrow, as the men set off in search of good mounts before taking to the road again, Demetrio called Luis Cervantes:

"Do you really want to come with us? Of course you're cut from another timber, we all know that; God knows why you should like this sort of life. Do you imagine we're in this game because we like it? Now, I like the excitement all right, but that's not all. Sit down here; that's right. Do you want to know why I'm a rebel? Well, I'll tell you.

"Before the revolution, I had my land all plowed, see, and just right for sowing and if it hadn't been for a little quarrel with Don Monico, the boss of my town, Moyahua, I'd be there in a jiffy getting the oxen ready for the

sowing, see?

"Here, there, Pancracio, pull down two bottles of beer for me and this tenderfoot. . . . By the Holy Cross . . . drinking won't hurt me, now, will it?"

XIII

I was born in Limon, close by Moyahua, right in the heart of the Juchipila canyon. I had my house and my cows and a patch of land, see: I had everything I wanted. Well, I suppose you know how we farmers make a habit of going over to town every week to hear Mass and the sermon and then to market to buy our onions and tomatoes and in general everything they want us to buy at the ranch. Then you pick up some friends and go to Primitivo Lopez' saloon for a bit of a drink before dinner; well, you sit there drinking and you've got to be sociable, so you drink more than you should and the liquor goes to your head and you laugh and you're damned happy and if you feel like it, you sing and shout and kick up a bit of a row. That's quite all right, anyhow, for we're not doing anyone any harm. But soon they start bothering you and the policeman walks up and down and stops occasionally, with his ear to the door. To put it in a nutshell, the chief of police and his gang are a lot of joykillers who decide they want to put a stop to your fun, see? But by God! You've got guts, you've got red blood in your veins and you've got a soul, too, see? So you lose your temper, you stand up to them and tell them to go to the Devil.

"Now if they understand you, everything's all right; they leave you alone and that's all there is to it; but sometimes they try to talk you down and hit you and--well, you know how it is, a fellow's quick-tempered and he'll be damned if he'll stand for someone ordering him around and telling him what's what. So before you know it, you've got your knife out or your gun leveled, and then off you go for a wild run in the sierra, until they've forgotten the

corpse,see?

"All right: that's just about what happened to Monico. The fellow was a greater bluffer than the rest. He couldn't tell a rooster from a hen, not he. Well, I spit on his beard because he wouldn't mind his own business. That's all, there's nothing else to tell.

"Then, just because I did that, he had the whole God-damned Federal Government against me. You must have heard something about that story in Mexico City--about the killing of Madero and some other fellow, Felix or Felipe Diaz, or something--I don't know. Well, this man Monico goes in person to Zacatecas to get an army to capture me. They said that I was a Maderista and that I was going to rebel. But a man like me always has friends. Somebody came and warned me of what was coming to me, so when the soldiers reached Limon I was miles and miles away. Trust me! Then my compadre Anastasio who killed somebody came and joined me, and Pancraccio and Quail and a lot of friends and acquaintances came after him. Since then we've been sort of collecting, see? You know for yourself, we get along as best we can. . . ."

For a while, both men sat meditating in silence. Then:

"Look here, Chief," said Luis Cervantes. "You know that some of Natera's men are at Juchipila, quite near here. I think we should join them before they capture Zacatecas. All we need do is speak to the General."

"I'm no good at that sort of thing. And I don't like the idea of accepting orders from anybody very much."

"But you've only a handful of men down here; you'll only be an unimportant chieftain. There's no argument about it, the revolution is bound to win. After it's all over they'll talk to you just as Madero talked to all those who had helped him: 'Thank you very much, my friends, you can go home now. . . .'"

"Well that's all I want, to be let alone so I can go home."

"Wait a moment, I haven't finished. Madero said:
"You men have made me President of the Republic. You
have run the risk of losing your lives and leaving your
wives and children destitute; now I have what I wanted,
you can go back to your picks and shovels, you can
resume your hand-to-mouth existence, you can go half-
naked and hungry just as you did before, while we, your
superiors, will go about trying to pile up a few million
pesos. . . ."

Demetrio nodded and, smiling, scratched his head.

"You said a mouthful, Louie," Venancio the barber
put in enthusiastically. "A mouthful as big as a church!"

"As I was saying," Luis Cervantes resumed, "when
the revolution is over, everything is over. Too bad that so
many men have been killed, too bad there are so many
widows and orphans, too bad there was so much blood-
shed.

"Of course, you are not selfish; you say to yourself:
'All I want to do is go back home.' But I ask you, is it
fair to deprive your wife and kids of a fortune which God
himself places within reach of your hand? Is it fair to
abandon your motherland in this solemn moment when
she most needs the self-sacrifice of her sons, when she
most needs her humble sons to save her from falling
again in the clutches of her eternal oppressors, execu-
tioners, and caciques? You must not forget that the thing
a man holds most sacred on earth is his motherland."

Macias smiled, his eyes shining.

"Will it be all right if we go with Natera?"

"Not only all right," Venancio said insinuatingly, "but
I think it absolutely necessary."

"Now Chief," Cervantes pursued, "I took a fancy to
you the first time I laid eyes on you and I like you more
and more every day because I realize what you are
worth. Please let me be utterly frank. You do not yet
realize your lofty noble function. You are a modest man
without ambitions, you do not wish to realize the ex-
ceedingly important role you are destined to play in the

revolution. It is not true that you took up arms simply because of Senor Monico. You are under arms to protest against the evils of all the caciques who are overrunning the whole nation. We are the elements of a social movement which will not rest until it has enlarged the destinies of our motherland. We are the tools Destiny makes use of to reclaim the sacred rights of the people. We are not fighting to dethrone a miserable murderer, we are fighting against tyranny itself. What moves us is what men call ideals; our action is what men call fighting for a principle. A principle! That's why Villa and Natera and Carranza are fighting; that's why we, every man of us, are fighting."

"Yes ... yes ... exactly what I've been thinking myself," said Venancio in a climax of enthusiasm.

"Hey, there, Pancraccio," Macias called, "pull down two more beers."

XIV

You ought to see how clear that fellow can make things, Compadre," Demetrio said. All morning long he had been pondering as much of Luis Cervantes' speech as he had understood.

"I heard him too," Anastasio answered. "People who can read and write get things clear, all right; nothing was ever truer. But what I can't make out is how you're going to go and meet Natera with as few men as we have."

"That's nothing. We're going to do things different now. They tell me that as soon as Crispin Robles enters a town he gets hold of all the horses and guns in the place; then he goes to the jail and lets all the jailbirds out, and, before you know it, he's got plenty of men, all right. You'll see. You know I'm beginning to feel that we haven't done things right so far. It don't seem right somehow that this city guy should be able to tell us

what to do."

"Ain't it wonderful to be able to read and write!"

They both sighed, sadly. Luis Cervantes came in with several others to find out the day of their departure.

"We're leaving no later than tomorrow," said Demetrio without hesitation.

Quail suggested that musicians be summoned from the neighboring hamlet and that a farewell dance be given. His idea met with enthusiasm on all sides.

"We'll go, then," Pancraccio shouted, "but I'm certainly going in good company this time. My sweetheart's coming along with me!"

Demetrio replied that he too would willingly take along a girl he had set his eye on, but that he hoped none of his men would leave bitter memories behind them as the Federals did.

"You won't have long to wait. Everything will be arranged when you return," Luis Cervantes whispered to him.

"What do you mean?" Demetrio asked. "I thought that you and Camilla . . ."

"There's not a word of truth in it, Chief. She likes you but she's afraid of you, that's all."

"Really? Is that really true?"

"Yes. But I think you're quite right in not wanting to leave any bitter feelings behind you as you go. When you come back as a conqueror, everything will be different. They'll all thank you for it even."

"By God, you're certainly a shrewd one," Demetrio replied, patting him on the back.

At sundown, Camilla went to the river to fetch water as usual. Luis Cervantes, walking down the same trail, met her. Camilla felt her heart leap to her mouth. But,

without taking the slightest notice of her, Luis Cervantes hastily took one of the turns and disappeared among the rocks.

At this hour, as usual, the calcinated rocks, the sun-burnt branches, and the dry weeds faded into the semi-obscurity of the shadows. The wind blew softly, the green lances of the young corn leaves rustling in the twilight. Nothing was changed; all nature was as she had found it before, evening upon evening; but in the stones and the dry weeds, amid the fragrance of the air and the light whirl of falling leaves, Camilla sensed a new strangeness, a vast desolation in everything about her.

Rounding a huge eroded rock, suddenly Camilla found herself face to face with Luis, who was seated on a stone, hatless, his legs dangling.

"Listen, you might come down here to say good-bye."

Luis Cervantes was obliging enough; he jumped down and joined her.

"You're proud, ain't you? Have I been so mean that you don't even want to talk to me?"

"Why do you say that, Camilla? You've been extremely kind to me; why, you've been more than a friend, you've taken care of me as if you were my sister. Now I'm about to leave, I'm very grateful to you; I'll always remember you."

"Liar!" Camilla said, her face transfigured with joy. "Suppose I hadn't come after you?"

"I intended to say good-bye to you at the dance this evening."

"What dance? If there's a dance, I'll not go to it."

"Why not?"

"Because I can't stand that horrible man . . . Demetrio!"

"Don't be silly, child," said Luis. "He's really very fond of you. Don't go and throw away this opportunity. You'll never have one like it again in your life. Don't you know that Demetrio is on the point of becoming a general, you silly girl? He'll be a very wealthy man, with horses galore; and you'll have jewels and clothes and a fine house and a lot of money to spend. Just imagine what a life you would lead with him!"

Camilla stared up at the blue sky so he should not read the expression in her eyes. A dead leaf shook slowly loose from the crest of a tree swinging slowly on the wind, fell like a small dead butterfly at her feet. She bent down and took it in her fingers. Then, without looking at him, she murmured:

"It's horrible to hear you talk like that. . . . I like you . . . no one else. . . . Ah, well, go then, go: I feel ashamed now. Please leave me!"

She threw away the leaf she had crumpled in her hand and covered her face with a corner of her apron. When she opened her eyes, Luis Cervantes had disappeared.

She followed the river trail. The river seemed to have been sprinkled with a fine red dust. On its surface drifted now a sky of variegated colors, now the dark crags, half light, half shadow. Myriads of luminous insects twinkled in a hollow. Camilla, standing on the beach of washed, round stones, caught a reflection of herself in the waters; she saw herself in her yellow blouse with the green ribbons, her white skirt, her carefully combed hair, her wide eyebrows and broad forehead, exactly as she had dressed to please Luis. She burst into tears.

Among the reeds, the frogs chanted the implacable melancholy of the hour. Perched on a dry root, a dove wept also.

That evening, there was much merrymaking at the dance, and a great quantity of mezcal was drunk. "I miss Camilla," said Demetrio in a loud voice. Everybody looked about for Camilla.

"She's sick, she's got a headache," said Agapita harshly, uneasy as she caught sight of the malicious glances leveled at her.

When the dance was over, Demetrio, somewhat unsteady on his feet, thanked all the kind neighbors who had welcomed them and promised that when the revolution had triumphed he would remember them one and all, because "hospital or jail is a true test of friendship."

"May God's hand lead you all," said an old woman. "God bless you all and keep you well," others added. Utterly drunk, Maria Antonia said: "Come back soon, damn soon!"

On the morrow, Maria Antonia, who, though she was pockmarked and walleyed, nevertheless enjoyed a notorious reputation--indeed it was confidently proclaimed that no man had failed to go with her behind the river weeds at some time or other--shouted to Camilla:

"Hey there, you! What's the matter? What are you doing there skulking in the corner with a shawl tied round your head! You're crying, I wager. Look at her eyes; they look like a witch's. There's no sorrow lasts more than three days!"

Agapita knitted her eyebrows and muttered indistinctly to herself.

The old crones felt uneasy and lonesome since Demetrio's men had left. The men, too, in spite of their gossip and insults, lamented their departure since now they would have no one to bring them fresh meat every day. It is pleasant indeed to spend your time eating and drinking, and sleeping all day long in the cool shade of the rocks, while clouds ravel and unravel their fleecy threads on the blue shuttle of the sky.

"Look at them again. There they go!" Maria Antonia yelled. "Why, they look like toys."

Demetrio's men, riding their thin nags, could still be descried in the distance against the sapphire translucence of the sky, where the broken rocks and the chaparral melted into a single bluish smooth surface. Across the air a gust of hot wind bore the broken, faltering strains of "La Adelita," the revolutionary song, to the settlement. Camilla, who had come out when Maria Antonia shouted, could no longer control herself; she dived back into her hut, unable to restrain her tears and moaning. Maria Antonia burst into laughter and moved off.

"They've cast the evil eye on my daughter," Agapita said in perplexity. She pondered a while, then duly reached a decision. From a pole in the hut she took down a piece of strong leather which her husband used to hitch up the yoke. This pole stood between a picture of Christ and one of the Virgin. Agapita promptly twisted the leather and proceeded to administer a sound thrashing to Camilla in order to dispel the evil spirits.

Riding proudly on his horse, Demetrio felt like a new man. His eyes recovered their peculiar metallic brilliance, and the blood flowed, red and warm, through his coppery, pure-blooded Aztec cheeks.

The men threw out their chests as if to breathe the widening horizon, the immensity of the sky, the blue from the mountains and the fresh air, redolent with the various odors of the sierra. They spurred their horses to a gallop as if in that mad race they laid claims of possession to the earth. What man among them now remembered the stern chief of police, the growling policeman, or the conceited cacique? What man remembered his pitiful hut where he slaved away, always under the eyes of the owner or the ruthless and sullen foreman, always forced to rise before dawn, and to take up his shovel, basket, or goad, wearing himself out to earn a mere pitcher of atole and a handful of beans?

They laughed, they sang, they whistled, drunk with the sunlight, the air of the open spaces, the wine of life.

Meco, prancing forward on his horse, bared his white glistening teeth, joking and kicking up like a clown.

"Hey, Pancracio," he asked with utmost seriousness, "my wife writes me I've got another kid. How in hell is that? I ain't seen her since Madero was President."

"That's nothing," the other replied. "You just left her a lot of eggs to hatch for you!"

They all laughed uproariously. Only Meco, grave and aloof, sang in a voice horribly shrill:

"I gave her a penny
That wasn't enough.
I gave her a nickel
The wench wanted more.
We bargained. I asked
If a dime was enough
But she wanted a quarter.
By God! That was tough!
All wenches are fickle
And trumpery stuff!"

The sun, beating down upon them, dulled their minds and bodies and presently they were silent. All day long they rode through the canyon, up and down the steep, round hills, dirty and bald as a man's head, hill after hill in endless succession. At last, late in the afternoon, they descried several stone church towers in the heart of a bluish ridge, and, beyond, the white road with its curling spirals of dust and its gray telegraph poles.

They advanced toward the main road; in the distance they spied a figure of an Indian sitting on the embankment. They drew up to him. He proved to be an unfriendly looking old man, clad in rags; he was laboriously attempting to mend his leather sandals with the help of a dull knife. A burro loaded with fresh green grass stood by. Demetrio accosted him.

"What are you doing, Grandpa?"

"Gathering alfalfa for my cow."

"How many Federals are there around here?"

"Just a few: not more than a dozen, I reckon."

The old man grew communicative. He told them of many important rumors: Obregon was besieging Guadalajara, Torres was in complete control of the Potosi region, Natera ruled over Fresnillo.

"All right," said Demetrio, "you can go where you're headed for, see, but you be damn careful not to tell anyone you saw us, because if you do, I'll pump you full of lead. And I could track you down, even if you tried to hide in the pit of hell, see?"

"What do you say, boys?" Demetrio asked them as soon as the old man had disappeared.

"To hell with the mochos! We'll kill every blasted one of them!" they cried in unison.

Then they set to counting their cartridges and the hand grenades the Owl had made out of fragments of iron tubing and metal bed handles.

"Not much to brag about, but we'll soon trade them for rifles," Anastasio observed.

Anxiously they pressed forward, spurring the thin flanks of their nags to a gallop. Demetrio's brisk, imperious tones of order brought them abruptly to a halt.

They dismounted by the side of a hill, protected by thick huizache trees. Without unsaddling their horses, each began to search for stones to serve as pillows.

At midnight Demetrio Macias ordered the march to be resumed. The town was five or six miles away; the best plan was to take the soldiers by surprise, before reveille.

The sky was cloudy, with here and there a star shining. From time to time a flash of lightning crossed the sky with a red dart, illumining the far horizon.

Luis Cervantes asked Demetrio whether the success of the attack might not be better served by procuring a guide or leastways by ascertaining the topographic conditions of the town and the precise location of the soldiers' quarters.

"No," Demetrio answered, accompanying his smile with a disdainful gesture, "we'll simply fall on them when they least expect it; that's all there is to it, see? We've done it before all right, lots of times! Haven't you ever seen the squirrels stick their heads out of their holes when you poured in water? Well, that's how these lousy soldiers are going to feel. Do you see? They'll be frightened out of their wits the moment they hear our first shot. Then they'll slink out and stand as targets for us."

"Suppose the old man we met yesterday lied to us. Suppose there are fifty soldiers instead of twenty. Who knows but he's a spy sent out by the Federals!"

"Ha, Tenderfoot, frightened already, eh?" Anastasio Montanez mocked.

"Sure! Handling a rifle and messing about with bandages are two different things," Pancraccio observed.

"Well, that's enough talk, I guess," said Meco. "All we have to do is fight a dozen frightened rats."

"This fight won't convince our mothers that they gave birth to men or whatever the hell you like. . . ." Manteca added.

When they reached the outskirts of the town, Venancio walked ahead and knocked at the door of a hut.

"Where's the soldiers' barracks?" he inquired of a man

who came out barefoot, a ragged serape covering his body.

"Right there, just beyond the Plaza," he answered.

Since nobody knew where the city square was, Venancio made him walk ahead to show the way. Trembling with fear, the poor devil told them they were doing him a terrible wrong.

"I'm just a poor day laborer, sir; I've got a wife and a lot of kids."

"What the hell do you think I have, dogs?" Demetrio scowled. "I've got kids too, see?"

Then he commanded:

"You men keep quiet. Not a sound out of you! And walk down the middle of the street, single file."

The rectangular church cupola rose above the small houses.

"Here, gentlemen; there's the Plaza beyond the church. Just walk a bit further and there's the barracks."

He knelt down, then, imploring them to let him go, but Pancraccio, without pausing to reply, struck him across the chest with his rifle and ordered him to proceed.

"How many soldiers are there?" Luis Cervantes asked.

"I don't want to lie to you, boss, but to tell you the truth, yes, sir, to tell you God's truth, there's a lot of them, a whole lot of 'em."

Luis Cervantes turned around to stare at Demetrio, who feigned momentary deafness.

They were soon in the city square.

A loud volley of rifle shots rang out, deafening them. Demetrio's horse reared, staggered on its hind legs, bent its forelegs, and fell to the ground, kicking. The Owl

uttered a piercing cry and fell from his horse which rushed madly to the center of the square.

Another volley: the guide threw up his arms and fell on his back without a sound.

With all haste, Anastasio Montanez helped Demetrio up behind him on his horse; the others retreated, seeking shelter along the walls of the houses.

"Hey, men," said a workman sticking his head out of a large door, "go for 'em through the back of the chapel. They're all in there. Cut back through this street, then turn to the left; you'll reach an alley. Keep on going ahead until you hit the chapel."

As he spoke a fresh volley of pistol shots, directed from the neighboring roofs, fell like a rain about them.

"By God," the man said, "those ain't poisonous spiders; they're only townsmen scared of their own shadow. Come in here until they stop."

"How many of them are there?" asked Demetrio.

"There were only twelve of them. But last night they were scared out of their wits so they wired to the town beyond for help. I don't know how many of them there are now. Even if there are a hell of a lot of them, it doesn't cut any ice! Most of them aren't soldiers, you know, but drafted men; if just one of them starts mutinying, the rest will follow like sheep. My brother was drafted; they've got him there. I'll go along with you and signal to him; all of them will desert and follow you. Then we'll only have the officers to deal with! If you want to give me a gun or something. . . ."

"No more rifles left, brother. But I guess you can put these to some use," Anastasio Montanez said, passing him two hand grenades.

The officer in command of the Federals was a young coxcomb of a captain with a waxed mustache and blond hair. As long as he felt uncertain about the strength of the assailants, he had remained extremely quiet and prudent;

but now that they had driven the rebels back without allowing them a chance to fire a single shot, he waxed bold and brave. While the soldiers did not dare put out their heads beyond the pillars of the building, his own shadow stood against the pale clear dawn, exhibiting his well-built slender body and his officer's cape bellying in the breeze.

"Ha, I remember our coup d'etat!"

His military career had consisted of the single adventure when, together with other students of the Officers' School, he was involved in the treacherous revolt of Feliz Diaz and Huerta against President Madero. Whenever the slightest insubordination arose, he invariably recalled his feat at the Ciudadela.

"Lieutenant Campos," he ordered emphatically, "take a dozen men and wipe out the bandits hiding there! The curs! They're only brave when it comes to guzzling meat and robbing a hencoop!"

A workingman appeared at the small door of the spiral staircase, announcing that the assailants were hidden in a corral where they might easily be captured. This message came from the citizens keeping watch on housetops.

"I'll go myself and get it over with!" the officer declared impetuously.

But he soon changed his mind. Before he had reached the door, he retraced his steps.

"Very likely they are waiting for more men and, of course, it would be wrong for me to abandon my post. Lieutenant Campos, go there yourself and capture them dead or alive. We'll shoot them at noon when everybody's coming out of church. Those bandits will see the example I'll set around here. But if you can't capture them, Lieutenant, kill them all. Don't leave a man of them alive, do you understand?"

In high good humor, he began pacing up and down the room, formulating the official despatch he would send off no later than today.

To His Honor the Minister for War,
General A. Blanquet,
Mexico City.

Sir:

I have the honor to inform your Excellency that on the morning of . . . a rebel army, five hundred strong, commanded by . . . attacked this town, which I am charged to defend. With such speed as the gravity of the situation called for, I fortified my post in the town. The battle lasted two hours. Despite the superiority of the enemy in men and equipment, I was able to defeat and rout them. Their casualties were twenty killed and a far greater number of wounded, judging from the trails of blood they left behind them as they retreated. I am pleased to state there was no casualty on our side. I have the honor to congratulate Your Excellency upon this new triumph for the Federal arms. Viva Presidente Huerta! Viva Mexico!

"Well," the young captain mused, "I'll be promoted to major." He clasped his hands together, jubilant. At this precise moment, a detonation rang out. His ears buzzed, he--

XVII

If we get through the corral, we can make the alley, eh?" Demetrio asked.

"That's right," the workman answered. "Beyond the corral there's a house, then another corral, then there's a store."

Demetrio scratched his head, thoughtfully. This time his decision was immediate.

"Can you get hold of a crowbar or something like that to make a hole through the wall?"

"Yes, we'll get anything you want, but . . ."

"But what? Where can we get a crowbar?"

"Everything is right there. But it all belongs to the boss."

Without further ado, Demetrio strode into the shed which had been pointed out as the toolhouse.

It was all a matter of a few minutes. Once in the alley, hugging to the walls, they marched forward in single file until they reached the rear of the church. Now they had but a single fence and the rear wall of the chapel to scale.

"God's will be done!" Demetrio said to himself. He was the first to clamber over.

Like monkeys the others followed him, reaching the other side with bleeding, grimy hands. The rest was easy. The deep worn steps along the stonework made their ascent of the chapel wall swifter. The church vault hid them from the soldiers.

"Wait a moment, will you?" said the workman. "I'll go and see where my brother is; I'll let you know and then you'll get at the officers."

But no one paid the slightest attention to him.

For a second, Demetrio glanced at the soldiers' black coats hanging on the wall, then at his own men, thick on the church tower behind the iron rail. He smiled with satisfaction and turning to his men said:

"Come on, now, boys!"

Twenty bombs exploded simultaneously in the midst of the soldiers who, awaking terrified out of their sleep, started up, their eyes wide open. But before they had realized their plight, twenty more bombs burst like thunder upon them leaving a scattering of men killed or maimed.

"Don't do that yet, for God's sake! Don't do it till I find my brother," the workman implored in anguish.

In vain an old sergeant harangued the soldiers, insulting them in the hope of rallying them. For they were rats, caught in a trap, no more, no less. Some of the soldiers, attempting to reach the small door by the staircase, fell to the ground pierced by Demetrio's shots. Others fell at the feet of these twenty-odd specters, with faces and breasts dark as iron, clad in long torn trousers of white cloth which fell to their leather sandals, scattering death and destruction below them. In the belfry, a few men struggled to emerge from the pile of dead who had fallen upon them.

"It's awful, Chief!" Luis Cervantes cried in alarm. "We've no more bombs left and we left our guns in the corral."

Smiling, Demetrio drew out a large shining knife. In the twinkling of an eye, steel flashed in every hand. Some knives were large and pointed, others wide as the palm of a hand, others heavy as bayonets.

"The spy!" Luis Cervantes cried triumphantly. "Didn't I tell you?"

"Don't kill me, Chief, please don't kill me," the old sergeant implored squirming at the feet of Demetrio, who stood over him, knife in hand. The victim raised his wrinkled Indian face; there was not a single gray hair in his head today. Demetrio recognized the spy who had lied to him the day before. Terrified, Luis Cervantes quickly averted his face. The steel blade went crack, crack, on the old man's ribs. He toppled backward, his arms spread, his eyes ghastly.

"Don't kill my brother, don't kill him, he's my brother!" the workman shouted in terror to Pancraccio who was pursuing a soldier. But it was too late. With one thrust, Pancraccio had cut his neck in half, and two streams of scarlet spurted from the wound.

"Kill the soldiers, kill them all!"

Pancraccio and Manteca surpassed the others in the savagery of their slaughter, and finished up with the

wounded. Montanez, exhausted, let his arm fall; it hung limp to his side. A gentle expression still filled his glance; his eyes shone; he was naive as a child, unmoral as a hyena.

"Here's one who's not dead yet," Quail shouted.

Pancracio ran up. The little blond captain with curled mustache turned pale as wax. He stood against the door to the staircase unable to muster enough strength to take another step.

Pancracio pushed him brutally to the edge of the corridor. A jab with his knee against the captain's thigh-- then a sound not unlike a bag of stones falling from the top of the steeple on the porch of the church.

"My God, you've got no brains!" said Quail. "If I'd known what you were doing, I'd have kept him for myself. That was a fine pair of shoes you lost!"

Bending over them, the rebels stripped those among the soldiers who were best clad, laughing and joking as they despoiled them. Brushing back his long hair, that had fallen over his sweating forehead and covered his eyes, Demetrio said:

"Now let's get those city fellows!"

XVIII

On the day General Natera began his advance against the town of Zacatecas, Demetrio with a hundred men went to meet him at Fresnillo.

The leader received him cordially.

"I know who you are and the sort of men you bring. I heard about the beatings you gave the Federals from Tepic to Durango."

Natera shook hands with Demetrio effusively while Luis

Cervantes said:

"With men like General Natera and Colonel Demetrio Macias, we'll cover our country with glory."

Demetrio understood the purpose of those words, after Natera had repeatedly addressed him as "Colonel."

Wine and beer were served; Demetrio and Natera drank many a toast. Luis Cervantes proposed: "The triumph of our cause, which is the sublime triumph of Justice, because our ideal--to free the noble, long-suffering people of Mexico--is about to be realized and because those men who have watered the earth with their blood and tears will reap the harvest which is rightfully theirs."

Natera fixed his cruel gaze on the orator, then turned his back on him to talk to Demetrio. Presently, one of Natera's officers, a young man with a frank open face, drew up to the table and stared insistently at Cervantes.

"Are you Luis Cervantes?"

"Yes. You're Solis, eh?"

"The moment you entered I thought I recognized you. Well, well, even now I can hardly believe my eyes!"

"It's true enough!"

"Well, but . . . look here, let's have a drink, come along." Then:

"Hm," Solis went on, offering Cervantes a chair, "since when have you turned rebel?"

"I've been a rebel the last two months!"

"Oh, I see! That's why you speak with such faith and enthusiasm about things we all felt when we joined the revolution."

"Have you lost your faith or enthusiasm?"

"Look here, man, don't be surprised if I confide in you

right off. I am so anxious to find someone intelligent among this crowd, that as soon as I get hold of a man like you I clutch at him as eagerly as I would at a glass of water, after walking mile after mile through a parched desert. But frankly, I think you should do the explaining first. I can't understand how a man who was correspondent of a Government newspaper during the Madero regime, and later editorial writer on a Conservative journal, who denounced us as bandits in the most fiery articles, is now fighting on our side."

"I tell you honestly: I have been converted," Cervantes answered.

"Are you absolutely convinced?"

Solis sighed, filled the glasses; they drank.

"What about you? Are you tired of the revolution?" asked Cervantes sharply.

"Tired? My dear fellow, I'm twenty-five years old and I'm fit as a fiddle! But am I disappointed? Perhaps!"

"You must have sound reasons for feeling that way."

"I hoped to find a meadow at the end of the road. I found a swamp. Facts are bitter; so are men. That bitterness eats your heart out; it is poison, dry rot. Enthusiasm, hope, ideals, happiness-vain dreams, vain dreams. . . . When that's over, you have a choice. Either you turn bandit, like the rest, or the timeservers will swamp you. . . ."

Cervantes writhed at his friend's words; his argument was quite out of place . . . painful. . . . To avoid being forced to take issue, he invited Solis to cite the circumstances that had destroyed his illusions.

"Circumstances? No--it's far less important than that. It's a host of silly, insignificant things that no one notices except yourself . . . a change of expression, eyes shining-lips curled in a sneer-the deep import of a phrase that is lost! Yet take these things together and they compose the mask of our race . . . terrible . . . grotesque . . .

a race that awaits redemption!"

He drained another glass. After a long pause, he continued:

"You ask me why I am still a rebel? Well, the revolution is like a hurricane: if you're in it, you're not a man . . . you're a leaf, a dead leaf, blown by the wind."

Demetrio reappeared. Seeing him, Solis relapsed into silence.

"Come along," Demetrio said to Cervantes. "Come with me."

Unctuously, Solis congratulated Demetrio on the feats that had won him fame and the notice of Pancho Villa's northern division.

Demetrio warmed to his praise. Gratefully, he heard his prowess vaunted, though at times he found it difficult to believe he was the hero of the exploits the other narrated. But Solis' story proved so charming, so convincing, that before long he found himself repeating it as gospel truth.

"Natera is a genius!" Luis Cervantes said when they had returned to the hotel. "But Captain Solis is a nobody . . . a timeserver."

Demetrio Macias was too elated to listen to him.

"I'm a colonel, my lad! And you're my secretary!"

Demetrio's men made many acquaintances that evening; much liquor flowed to celebrate new friendships. Of course men are not necessarily even tempered, nor is alcohol a good counselor; quarrels naturally ensued. Yet many differences that occurred were smoothed out in a friendly spirit, outside the saloons, restaurants, or brothels.

On the morrow, casualties were reported. Always a few dead. An old prostitute was found with a bullet through her stomach; two of Colonel Macias' new men lay in the gutter, slit from ear to ear.

Anastasio Montanez carried an account of the events to his chief. Demetrio shrugged his shoulders. "Bury them!" he said.

XIX

"They're coming back!"

It was with amazement that the inhabitants of Fresnillo learned that the rebel attack on Zacatecas had failed completely.

"They're coming back!"

The rebels were a maddened mob, sunburnt, filthy, naked. Their high wide-brimmed straw hats hid their faces. The "high hats" came back as happily as they had marched forth a few days before, pillaging every hamlet along the road, every ranch, even the poorest hut.

"Who'll buy this thing?" one of them asked. He had carried his spoils long; he was tired. The sheen of the nickel on the typewriter, a new machine, attracted every glance. Five times that morning the Oliver had changed hands. The first sale netted the owner ten pesos; presently it had sold for eight; each time it changed hands, it was two pesos cheaper. To be sure, it was a heavy burden; nobody could carry it for more than a half-hour.

"I'll give you a quarter for it!" Quail said.

"Yours!" cried the owner, handing it over quickly, as though he feared Quail might change his mind. Thus for the sum of twenty-five cents, Quail was afforded the pleasure of taking it in his hands and throwing it with all his might against the wall.

It struck with a crash. This gave the signal to all who carried any cumbersome objects to get rid of them by smashing them against the rocks. Objects of all sorts, crystal, china, faience, porcelain, flew through the air.

Heavy, plated mirrors, brass candlesticks, fragile, delicate statues, Chinese vases, any object not readily convertible into cash fell by the wayside in fragments.

Demetrio did not share the untoward exaltation. After all, they were retreating defeated. He called Montanez and Pancraccio aside and said:

"These fellows have no guts. It's not so hard to take a town. It's like this. First, you open up, this way. . . ."
He sketched a vast gesture, spreading his powerful arms.
"Then you get close to them, like this. . . ." He brought his arms together, slowly. "Then slam! Bang! Whack! Crash!" He beat his hands against his chest.

Anastasio and Pancraccio, convinced by this simple, lucid explanation answered:

"That's God's truth! They've no guts! That's the trouble with them!"

Demetrio's men camped in a corral.

"Do you remember Camilla?" Demetrio asked with a sigh as he settled on his back on the manure pile where the rest were already stretched out.

"Camilla? What girl do you mean, Demetrio?"

"The girl that used to feed me up there at the ranch!"

Anastasio made a gesture implying: "I don't care a damn about the women ... Camilla or anyone else...."

"I've not forgotten," Demetrio went on, drawing on his cigarette. "Yes, I was feeling like hell! I'd just finished drinking a glass of water. God, but it was cool. . . . 'Don't you want any more?' she asked me. I was half dead with fever . . . and all the time I saw that glass of water, blue . . . so blue . . . and I heard her little voice, 'Don't you want any more?' That voice tinkled in my ears like a silver hurdy-gurdy! Well, Pancraccio, what about it? Shall we go back to the ranch?"

"Demetrio, we're friends, aren't we? Well then, listen. You may not believe it, but I've had a lot of experience with women. Women! Christ, they're all right for a while,

granted! Though even that's going pretty far. Demetrio, you should see the scars they've given me . . . all over my body, not to speak of my soul! To hell with women. They're the devil, that's what they are! You may have noticed I steer clear of them. You know why. And don't think I don't know what I'm talking about. I've had a hell of a lot of experience and that's no lie!"

"What do you say, Pancracio? When are we going back to the ranch?" Demetrio insisted, blowing gray clouds of tobacco smoke into the air.

"Say the day, I'm game. You know I left my woman there too!"

"Your woman, hell!" Quail said, disgruntled and sleepy.

"All right, then, our woman! It's a good thing you're kindhearted so we all can enjoy her when you bring her over," Manteca murmured.

"That's right, Pancracio, bring one-eyed Maria Antonia. We're all getting pretty cold around here," Meco shouted from a distance.

The crowd broke into peals of laughter. Pancracio and Manteca vied with each other in calling forth oaths and obscenity.

XX

Villa is coming!"

The news spread like lightning. Villa--the magic word! The Great Man, the salient profile, the unconquerable warrior who, even at a distance, exerts the fascination of a reptile, a boa constrictor.

"Our Mexican Napoleon!" exclaimed Luis Cervantes.

"Yes! The Aztec Eagle! He buried his beak of steel in the head of Huerta the serpent!" Solis, Natera's chief

of staff, remarked somewhat ironically, adding: "At least, that's how I expressed it in a speech I made at Ciudad Juarez!"

The two sat at the bar of the saloon, drinking beer. The "high hats," wearing mufflers around their necks and thick rough leather shoes on their feet, ate and drank endlessly. Their gnarled hands loomed across table, across bar. All their talk was of Villa and his men. The tales Natera's followers related won gasps of astonishment from Demetrio's men. Villa! Villa's battles! Ciudad Juarez . . . Tierra Blanca . . . Chihuahua . . . Torreon. . . .

The bare facts, the mere citing of observation and experience meant nothing. But the real story, with its extraordinary contrasts of high exploits and abysmal cruelties was quite different. Villa, indomitable lord of the sierra, the eternal victim of all governments . . . Villa tracked, hunted down like a wild beast . . . Villa the reincarnation of the old legend; Villa as Providence, the bandit, that passes through the world armed with the blazing torch of an ideal: to rob the rich and give to the poor. It was the poor who built up and imposed a legend about him which Time itself was to increase and embellish as a shining example from generation to generation.

"Look here, friend," one of Natera's men told Anastasio, "if General Villa takes a fancy to you, he'll give you a ranch on the spot. But if he doesn't, he'll shoot you down like a dog! God! You ought to see Villa's troops! They're all northerners and dressed like lords! You ought to see their wide-brimmed Texas hats and their brand-new outfits and their four-dollar shoes, imported from the U. S. A."

As they retailed the wonders of Villa and his men, Natera's men gazed at one another ruefully, aware that their own hats were rotten from sunlight and moisture, that their own shirts and trousers were tattered and barely fit to cover their grimy, lousy bodies.

"There's no such a thing as hunger up there. They carry boxcars full of oxen, sheep, cows! They've got cars full of clothing, trains full of guns, ammunition, food

enough to make a man burst!"

Then they spoke of Villa's airplanes.

"Christ, those planes! You know when they're close to you, be damned if you know what the hell they are! They look like small boats, you know, or tiny rafts . . . and then pretty soon they begin to rise, making a hell of a row. Something like an automobile going sixty miles an hour. Then they're like great big birds that don't even seem to move sometimes. But there's a joker! The God-damn things have got some American fellow inside with hand grenades by the thousand. Now you try and figure what that means! The fight is on, see? You know how a farmer feeds corn to his chickens, huh? Well, the American throws his lead bombs at the enemy just like that. Pretty soon the whole damn field is nothing but a graveyard . . . dead men all over the dump . . . dead men here . . . dead men there . . . dead men everywhere!"

Anastasio Montanez questioned the speaker more particularly. It was not long before he realized that all this high praise was hearsay and that not a single man in Natera's army had ever laid eyes on Villa.

"Well, when you get down to it, I guess it doesn't mean so much! No man's got much more guts than any other man, if you ask me. All you need to be a good fighter is pride, that's all. I'm not a professional soldier even though I'm dressed like hell, but let me tell you. I'm not forced to do this kind of bloody job, because I own . . ."

"Because I own over twenty oxen, whether you believe it or not!" Quail said, mocking Anastasio.

XXI

The firing lessened, then slowly died out. Luis Cervantes, who had been hiding amid a heap of ruins at the fortification on the crest of the hill, made bold to show his face. How he had managed to hang on, he did not

know. Nor did he know when Demetrio and his men had disappeared. Suddenly he had found himself alone; then, hurled back by an avalanche of infantry, he fell from his saddle; a host of men trampled over him until he rose from the ground and a man on horseback hoisted him up behind him. After a few moments, horse and riders fell. Left without rifle, revolver, or arms of any kind, Cervantes found himself lost in the midst of white smoke and whistling bullets. A hole amid a debris of crumbling stone offered a refuge of safety.

"Hello, partner!"

"Luis, how are you!"

"The horse threw me. They fell upon me. Then they took my gun away. You see, they thought I was dead. There was nothing I could do!" Luis Cervantes explained apologetically. Then:

"Nobody threw me down," Solis said. "I'm here because I like to play safe."

The irony in Solis' voice brought a blush to Cervantes' cheek.

"By God, that chief of yours is a man!" Solis said.

"What daring, what assurance! He left me gasping--and a hell of a lot of other men with more experience than me, too!"

Luis Cervantes vouchsafed no answer.

"What! Weren't you there? Oh, I see! You found a nice place for yourself at the right time. Come here, Luis, I'll explain; let's go behind that rock. From this meadow to the foot of the hill, there's no road save this path below. To the right, the incline is too sharp; you can't do anything there. And it's worse to the left; the ascent is so dangerous that a second's hesitation means a fall down those rocks and a broken neck at the end of it. All right! A number of men from Moya's brigade who went down to the meadow decided to attack the enemy's trenches the first chance they got. The bullets whizzed about us, the battle raged on all sides. For a time they stopped firing, so we thought they were being attacked from behind. We stormed their trenches--look, partner, look at that

meadow! It's thick with corpses! Their machine guns did that for us. They mowed us down like wheat; only a handful escaped. Those Goddamned officers went white as a sheet; even though we had reinforcements they were afraid to order a new charge. That was when Demetrio Macias plunged in. Did he wait for orders? Not he! He just shouted:

" 'Come on, boys! Let's go for them!'

"Damn fool!' I thought. 'What the hell does he think he's doing!'

"The officers, surprised, said nothing. Demetrio's horse seemed to wear eagle's claws instead of hoofs, it soared so swiftly over the rocks. 'Come on! Come on!' his men shouted, following him like wild deer, horses and men welded into a mad stampede. Only one young fellow stepped wild and fell headlong into the pit. In a few seconds the others appeared at the top of the hill, storming the trenches and killing the Federals by the thousand. With his rope, Demetrio lassoed the machine guns and carried them off, like a bull herd throwing a steer. Yet his success could not last much longer, for the Federals were far stronger in numbers and could easily have destroyed Demetrio and his men. But we took advantage of their confusion, we rushed upon them and they soon cleared out of their position. That chief of yours is a wonderful soldier!"

Standing on the crest of the hill, they could easily sight one side of the Bufa peak. Its highest crag spread out like the feathered head of a proud Aztec king. The three-hundred-foot slope was literally covered with dead, their hair matted, their clothes clotted with grime and blood. A host of ragged women, vultures of prey, ranged over the tepid bodies of the dead, stripping one man bare, despoiling another, robbing from a third his dearest possessions.

Amid clouds of white rifle smoke and the dense black vapors of flaming buildings, houses with wide doors and windows bolted shone in the sunlight. The streets seemed to be piled upon one another, or wound picturesquely about fantastic corners, or set to scale the hills nearby. Above the graceful cluster of houses, rose the lithe

columns of a warehouse and the towers and cupola of the church.

"How beautiful the revolution! Even in its most barbarous aspect it is beautiful," Solis said with deep feeling. Then a vague melancholy seized him, and speaking low:

"A pity what remains to do won't be as beautiful! We must wait a while, until there are no men left to fight on either side, until no sound of shot rings through the air save from the mob as carrion-like it falls upon the booty; we must wait until the psychology of our race, condensed into two words, shines clear and luminous as a drop of water: Robbery! Murder! What a colossal failure we would make of it, friend, if we, who offer our enthusiasm and lives to crush a wretched tyrant, became the builders of a monstrous edifice holding one hundred or two hundred thousand monsters of exactly the same sort. People without ideals! A tyrant folk! Vain bloodshed!"

Large groups of Federals pushed up the hill, fleeing from the "high hats." A bullet whistled past them, singing as it sped. After his speech, Alberto Solis stood lost in thought, his arms crossed. Suddenly, he took flight.

"I'll be damned if I like these plaguey mosquitoes!" he said. "Let's get away from here!"

So scornfully Luis Cervantes smiled that Solis sat down on a rock quite calm, bewildered. He smiled. His gaze roved as he watched the spirals of smoke from the rifles, the dust of roofs crumbling from houses as they fell before the artillery. He believed he discerned the symbol of the revolution in these clouds of dust and smoke that climbed upward together, met at the crest of the hill and, a moment after, were lost. . . .

"By heaven, now I see what it all means!"

He sketched a vast gesture, pointing to the station. Locomotives belched huge clouds of black dense smoke rising in columns; the trains were overloaded with fugitives who had barely managed to escape from the captured town.

Suddenly he felt a sharp blow in the stomach. As though his legs were putty, he rolled off the rock. His ears buzzed. . . Then darkness . . . silence . . .
.
eternity. . . .

PART TWO

Demetrio, nonplussed, scratched his head: "Look here, don't ask me any more questions. . . . You gave me the eagle I wear on my hat, didn't you? All right then; you just tell me: 'Demetrio, do this or do that,' and that's all there is to it."

To champagne, that sparkles and foams as the beaded bubbles burst at the brim of the glass, Demetrio preferred the native tequila, limpid and fiery.

The soldiers sat in groups about the tables in the restaurant, ragged men, filthy with sweat, dirt and smoke, their hair matted, wild, disheveled.

"I killed two colonels," one man clamored in a guttural harsh voice. He was a small fat fellow, with embroidered hat and chamois coat, wearing a light purple handkerchief about his neck.

"They were so Goddamned fat they couldn't even run. By God, I wish you could have seen them, tripping and stumbling at every step they took, climbing up the hill, red as tomatoes, their tongues hanging out like hounds. 'Don't run so fast, you lousy beggars!' I called after them. 'I'm not so fond of frightened geese--stop, You bald-headed bastards: I won't harm you! You needn't worry!' By God, they certainly fell for it. Pop, pop! One shot for each of them, and a well-earned rest for a pair of poor sinners, be damned to them!"

"I couldn't get a single one of their generals!" said a swarthy man who sat in one corner between the wall and the bar, holding his rifle between his outstretched legs. "I sighted one: a fellow with a hell of a lot of gold plastered all over him. His gold chevrons shone like a

Goddamned sunset. And I let him go by, fool that I was. He took off his handkerchief and waved it. I stood there with my mouth wide open like a fool! Then I ducked and he started shooting, bullet after bullet. I let him kill a poor cargador. Then I said: 'My turn, now! Holy Virgin, Mother of God! Don't let me miss this son of a bitch.' But, by Christ, he disappeared. He was riding a hell of a fine nag; he went by me like lightning! There was another poor fool coming up the road. He got it and turned the prettiest somersault you ever saw!"

Talk flew from lip to lip, each soldier vying with his fellow, snatching the words from the other's mouth. As they declaimed passionately, women with olive, swarthy skins, bright eyes, and teeth of ivory, with revolvers at their waists, cartridge-belts across their breasts, and broad Mexican hats on their heads, wove their way like stray street curs in and out among groups. A vulgar wench, with rouged cheeks and dark brown arms and neck, gave a great leap and landed on the bar near Demetrio's table.

He turned his head toward her and literally collided with a pair of lubric eyes under a narrow forehead and thick, straight hair, parted in the middle.

The door opened wide. Anastasio, Pancraccio, Quail, and Meco filed in, dazed.

Anastasio uttered a cry of surprise and stepped forward to shake hands with the little fat man wearing a charro suit and a lavender bandanna. A pair of old friends, met again. So warm was their embrace, so tightly they clutched each other that the blood rushed to their heads, they turned purple.

"Look here, Demetrio, I want the honor of introducing you to Blondie. He's a real friend, you know. I love him like a brother. You must get to know him, Chief, he's a man! Do you remember that damn jail at Escobedo, where we stayed together for over a year?"

Without removing his cigar from his lips, Demetrio, buried in a sullen silence amid the bustle and uproar, offered his hand and said:

"I'm delighted to meet you!"

"So your name is Demetrio Macias?" the girl asked suddenly. Seated on the bar, she swung her legs; at every swing, the toes of her shoes touched Demetrio's back.

"Yes: I'm Demetrio Macias!" he said, scarcely turning toward her.

Indifferently, she continued to swing her legs, displaying her blue stockings with ostentation.

"Hey, War Paint, what are you doing here? Step down and have a drink!" said the man called Blondie.

The girl accepted readily and boldly thrust her way through the crowd to a chair facing Demetrio.

"So you're the famous Demetrio Macias, the hero of Zacatecas?" the girl asked.

Demetrio bowed assent, while Blondie, laughing, said:

"You're a wise one, War Paint. You want to sport a general!"

Without understanding Blondie's words, Demetrio raised his eyes to hers; they gazed at each other like two dogs sniffing one another with distrust. Demetrio could not resist her furiously provocative glances; he was forced to lower his eyes.

From their seats, some of Natera's officers began to hurl obscenities at War Paint. Without paying the slightest attention, she said:

"General Natera is going to hand you out a little general's eagle. Put it here and shake on it, boy!"

She stuck out her hand at Demetrio and shook it with the strength of a man. Demetrio, melting to the congratulations raining down upon him, ordered champagne.

"I don't want no more to drink," Blondie said to the

waiter, "I'm feeling sick. Just bring me some ice water."

"I want something to eat," said Pancracio. "Bring me anything you've got but don't make it chili or beans!"

Officers kept coming in; presently the restaurant was crowded. Small stars, bars, eagles and insignia of every sort or description dotted their hats. They wore wide silk bandannas around their necks, large diamond rings on their fingers, large heavy gold watch chains across their breasts.

"Here, waiter," Blondie cried, "I ordered ice water. And I'm not begging for it either, see? Look at this bunch of bills. I'll buy you, your wife, and all you possess, see? Don't tell me there's none left--I don't care a damn about that! It's up to you to find some way to get it and Goddamned quick, too. I don't like to play about; I get mad when I'm crossed. . . . By God, didn't I tell you I wouldn't stand for any backchat? You won't bring it to me, eh? Well, take this. . . ."

A heavy blow sent the waiter reeling to the floor.

"That's the sort of man I am, General Macias! I'm clean-shaven, eh? Not a hair on my chin? Do you know why? Well, I'll tell you! You see I get mad easy as hell; and when there's nobody to pick on, I pull my hair until my temper passes. If I hadn't pulled my beard hair by hair, I'd have died a long time ago from sheer anger!"

"It does you no good to go to pieces when you're angry," a man affirmed earnestly from below a hat that covered his head as a roof does a house. "When I was up at Torreón I killed an old lady who refused to sell me some enchiladas. She was angry, I can tell you; I got no enchiladas but I felt satisfied anyhow!"

"I killed a storekeeper at Parral because he gave me some change and there were two Huerta bills in it," said a man with a star on his hat and precious stones on his black, calloused hands.

"Down in Chihuahua I killed a man because I always saw him sitting at the table whenever I went to eat. I hated the looks of him so I just killed him! What the hell

could I do!"

"Hmm! I killed. . . .

The theme is inexhaustible.

By dawn, when the restaurant was wild with joy and the floor dotted with spittle, young painted girls from the suburbs had mingled freely among the dark northern women. Demetrio pulled out his jeweled gold watch, asking Anastasio Montanez to tell him the time.

Anastasio glanced at the watch, then, poking his head out of a small window, gazed at the starry sky.

"The Pleiades are pretty low in the west. I guess it won't be long now before daybreak. . . ."

Outside the restaurant, the shouts, laughter and song of the drunkards rang through the air. Men galloped wildly down the streets, the hoofs of their horses hammering on the sidewalks. From every quarter of the town pistols spoke, guns belched. Demetrio and the girl called War Paint staggered tipsily hand in hand down the center of the street, bound for the hotel.

II

What damned fools," said War Paint convulsed with laughter! "Where the hell do you come from?..... Soldiers don't sleep in hotels and inns any more..... Where do you come from? You just go anywhere you like and pick a house that pleases you, see. When you go there, make yourself at home and don't ask anyone for anything. What the hell is the use of the revolution? Who's it for? For the folks who live in towns? We're the city folk now, see? Come on, Pancraccio, hand me your bayonet. Damn these rich people, they lock up everything they've got!"

She dug the steel point through the crack of a drawer and, pressing on the hilt, broke the lock, opened the splinted cover of a writing desk. Anastasio, Pancraccio

and War Paint plunged their hands into a mass of post cards, photographs, pictures and papers, scattering them all over the rug. Finding nothing he wanted, Pancraccio gave vent to his anger by kicking a framed photograph into the air with the toe of his shoe. It smashed on the candelabra in the center of the room.

They pulled their empty hands out of the heap of paper, cursing. But War Paint was of sterner stuff; tirelessly she continued to unlock drawer after drawer without failing to investigate a single spot. In their absorption, they did not notice a small gray velvet-covered box which rolled silently across the floor, coming to a stop at Luis Cervantes' feet.

Demetrio, lying on the rug, seemed to be asleep; Cervantes, who had watched everything with profound indifference, pulled the box closer to him with his foot, and stooping to scratch his ankle, swiftly picked it up. Something gleamed up at him, dazzling. It was two pure-water diamonds mounted in filigreed platinum. Hastily he thrust them inside his coat pocket.

When Demetrio awoke, Cervantes said:

"General, look at the mess these boys have made here. Don't you think it would be advisable to forbid this sort of thing?"

"No. It's about their only pleasure after putting their bellies up as targets for the enemy's bullets."

"Yes, of course, General, but they could do it somewhere else. You see, this sort of thing hurts our prestige, and worse, our cause!"

Demetrio leveled his eagle eyes at Cervantes. He drummed with his fingernails against his teeth, absent-mindedly. Then:

"Come along, now, don't blush," he said. "You can talk like that to someone else. We know what's mine is mine, what's yours is yours. You picked the box, all right; I picked my gold watch; all right too!"

His words dispelled any pretense. Both of them, in

perfect harmony, displayed their booty.

War Paint and her companions were ransacking the rest of the house. Quail entered the room with a twelve-year-old girl upon whose forehead and arms were already marked copper-colored spots. They stopped short, speechless with surprise as they saw the books lying in piles on the floor, chairs and tables, the large mirrors thrown to the ground, smashed, the huge albums and the photographs torn into shreds, the furniture, objets d'art and bric-a-brac broken. Quail held his breath, his avid eyes scouring the room for booty.

Outside, in one corner of the patio, lost in dense clouds of suffocating smoke, Manteca was boiling corn on the cob, feeding his fire with books and paper that made the flames leap wildly through the air.

"Hey!" Quail shouted. "Look what I found. A fine sweat-cover for my mare."

With a swift pull he wrenched down a hanging, which fell over a handsomely carved upright chair.

"Look, look at all these naked women!" Quail's little companion cried, enchanted at a de luxe edition of Dante's Divine Comedy. "I like this; I think I'll take it along."

She began to tear out the illustrations which pleased her most.

Demetrio crossed the room and sat down beside Luis Cervantes. He ordered some beer, handed one bottle up to his secretary, downed his own bottle at one gulp. Then, drowsily, he half closed his eyes, and soon fell sound asleep.

"Hey!" a man called to Pancraccio from the threshold. "When can I see your general?"

"You can't see him. He's got a hangover this morning. What the hell do you want?"
"I want to buy some of those books you're burning."
"I'll sell them to you myself."

"How much do you want for them?"
Pancracio frowned in bewilderment.

"Give me a nickel for those with pictures, see. I'll give you the rest for nothing if you buy all those with pictures."

The man returned with a large basket to carry away the books. . . .

"Come on, Demetrio, come on, you pig, get up! Look who's here! It's Blondie. You don't know what a fine man he is!"

"I like you very much, General Macias, and I like the way you do things. So if it's all right, I'd like very much to serve under you!"

"What's your rank?" Demetrio asked him.

"I'm a captain, General."

"All right, you can serve with me now. I'll make you major. How's that?"

Blondie was a round little fellow, with waxed mustache. When he laughed, his blue eyes disappeared mischievously between his forehead and his fat cheeks. He had been a waiter at "El Monico," in Chihuahua; now he proudly wore three small brass bars, the insignia of his rank in the Northern Division.

Blondie showered eulogy after eulogy on Demetrio and his men; this proved sufficient reason for bringing out a fresh case of beer, which was finished in short order.

Suddenly War Paint reappeared in the middle of the room, wearing a beautiful silk dress covered with exquisite lace.

"You forgot the stockings," Blondie shouted, shaking with laughter. Quail's girl also burst out laughing. But War Paint did not care. She shrugged her shoulders indifferently, sat down on the floor, kicked off her white satin slippers, and wiggled her toes happily, giving their muscles a freedom welcome after their tight confinement

in the slippers. She said:

"Hey, you, Pancracio, go and get me my blue stockings . . . they're with the rest of my plunder."

Soldiers and their friends, companions and veterans of other campaigns, began to enter in groups of twos and threes. Demetrio, growing excited, began to narrate in detail his most notable feats of arms.

"What the hell is that noise?" he asked in surprise as he heard string and brass instruments tuning up in the patio.

"General Demetrio Macias," Luis Cervantes said solemnly, "it's a banquet all of your old friends and followers are giving in your honor to celebrate your victory at Zacatecas and your well-merited promotion to the rank of general!"

III

General Macias, I want you to meet my future wife," Luis Cervantes said with great emphasis as he led a beautiful girl into the dining room.

They all turned to look at her. Her large blue eyes grew wide in wonder. She was barely fourteen. Her skin was like a rose, soft, pink, fresh; her hair was very fair; the expression in her eyes was partly impish curiosity, partly a vague childish fear. Perceiving that Demetrio eyed her like a beast of prey, Luis Cervantes congratulated himself.

They made room for her between Luis Cervantes and Blondie, opposite Demetrio.

Bottles of tequila, dishes of cut glass, bowls, porcelains and vases lay scattered over the table indiscriminately. Meco, carrying a box of beer upon his shoulders, came in cursing and sweating.

"You don't know this fellow Blondie yet," said War Paint, noticing the persistent glances he was casting at Luis Cervantes' bride. "He's a smart fellow, I can tell you, and he never misses a trick."

She gazed at him lecherously, adding:

"That's why I don't like to see him close, even on a photograph!"

The orchestra struck up a raucous march as though they were playing at a bullfight. The soldiers roared with joy.

"What fine tripe, General; I swear I haven't tasted the like of it in all my life," Blondie said, as he began to reminisce about "El Monico" at Chihuahua.

"You really like it, Blondie?" responded Demetrio.

"Go ahead, call for more, eat your bellyful."

"It's just the way I like it," Anastasio chimed in. "Yes, I like good food! But nothing really tastes good to you unless you belch!"

The noise of mouths being filled, of ravenous feeding followed. All drank copiously. At the end of the dinner, Luis Cervantes rose, holding a champagne glass in one hand, and said:

"General. . ."

"Ho!" War Paint interrupted. "This speech-making business isn't for me; I'm all against it. I'll go out to the corral since there's no more eating here."

Presenting Demetrio with a black velvet-covered box containing a small brass eagle, Luis Cervantes made a toast which no one understood but everyone applauded enthusiastically. Demetrio took the insignia in his hands; and with flushed face, and eyes shining, declared with great candor:

"What in hell am I going to do with this buzzard!"

"Compadre," Anastasio Montanez said in a tremulous voice. "I ain't got much to tell you. . . ."

Whole minutes elapsed between his words; the cursed words would not come to Anastasio. His face, coated with filth, unwashed for days, turned crimson, shining with perspiration. Finally he decided to finish his toast at all costs. "Well, I ain't got much to tell you, except that we are pals. . . ."

Then, since everyone had applauded at the end of Luis Cervantes' speech, Anastasio having finished, made a sign, and the company clapped their hands in great gravity.

But everything turned out for the best, since his awkwardness inspired others. Manteca and Quail stood up and made their toasts, too. When Meco's turn came, War Paint rushed in shouting jubilantly, attempting to drag a splendid black horse into the dining room.

"My booty! My booty!" she cried, patting the superb animal on the neck. It resisted every effort she made until a strong jerk of the rope and a sudden lash brought it in prancing smartly. The soldiers, half drunk, stared at the beast with ill-disguised envy.

"I don't know what the hell this she-devil's got, but she always beats everybody to it," cried Blondie. "She's been the same ever since she joined us at Tierra Blanca!"

"Hey, Pancraccio, bring me some alfalfa for my horse," War Paint commanded crisply, throwing the horse's rope to one of the soldiers.

Once more they filled their glasses. Many a head hung low with fatigue or drunkenness. Most of the company, however, shouted with glee, including Luis Cervantes' girl. She had spilled all her wine on a handkerchief and looked all about her with blue wondering eyes.

"Boys," Blondie suddenly screamed, his shrill, guttural voice dominating the mall, "I'm tired of living; I feel like killing myself right now. I'm sick and tired of War Paint and this other little angel from heaven won't even look at me !"

Luis Cervantes saw that the last remark was addressed to his bride; with great surprise he realized that it was not Demetrio's foot he had noticed close to the girl's, but Blondie's. He was boiling with indignation.

"Keep your eye on me, boys," Blondie went on, gun in hand. "I'm going to shoot myself right in the forehead!"

He aimed at the large mirror on the opposite wall which gave back his whole body in reflection. He took careful aim. . . .

"Don't move, War Paint."

The bullet whizzed by, grazing War Paint's hair. The mirror broke into large jagged fragments. She did not even so much as blink.

IV

Late in the afternoon Luis Cervantes rubbed his eyes and sat up. He had been sleeping on the hard pavement, close to the trunk of a fruit tree. Anastasio, Pancraccio and Quail slept nearby, breathing heavily.

His lips were swollen, his nose dry and cold. There were bloodstains on his hands and shirt. At once he recalled what had taken place. Soon he rose to his feet and made for one of the bedrooms. He pushed at the door several times without being able to force it open. For a few minutes he stood there, hesitating.

No--he had not dreamed it. Everything had really occurred just as he recalled it. He had left the table with his bride and taken her to the bedroom, but just as he was closing the door, Demetrio staggered after them and made one leap toward them. Then War Paint dashed in after Demetrio and began to struggle with him. Demetrio, his eyes white-hot, his lips covered with long blond hairs, looked for the bride, in despair. But War Paint

pushed him back vigorously.

"What the hell is the matter with you? What the hell are you trying to do?" he demanded, furious.

War Paint put her leg between his, twisted it suddenly, and Demetrio fell to the ground outside of the bedroom. He rose, raging.

"Help! Help! He's going to kill me!" she cried, seizing Demetrio's wrist and turning the gun aside. The bullet hit the floor. War Paint continued to shriek. Anastasio disarmed Demetrio from behind.

Demetrio, standing like a furious bull in the middle of the arena, cast fierce glances at all the bystanders, Luis Cervantes, Anastasio, Manteca, and the others.

"Goddamn you! You've taken my gun away! Christ! As if I needed any gun to beat the hell out of you."

Flinging out his arms, beating and pummeling, he felled everyone within reach. Down they rolled like tenpins. Then, after that, Luis Cervantes could remember nothing more. Perhaps his bride, terrified by all these brutes, had wisely vanished and hidden herself.

"Perhaps this bedroom communicates with the living room and I can go in through there," he thought, standing at the threshold. At the sound of his footsteps, War Paint woke up. She lay on the rug close to Demetrio at the foot of a couch filled with alfalfa and corn where the black horse had fed.

"What are you looking for? Oh, hell, I know what you want! Shame on you! Why, I had to lock up your sweetheart because I couldn't struggle any more against this damned Demetrio. Take the key, it's lying on that table, there!"

Luis Cervantes searched in vain all over the house.

"Come on, tell me all about your girl."

Nervously, Luis Cervantes continued to look for the key.

"Come on, don't be in such a hurry, I'll give it to you. Come along, tell me; I like to hear about these things,

you know. That girl is your kind, she's not a country person like us."

"I've nothing to say. She's my girl and we're going to get married, that's all."

"Ho! Ho! Ho! You're going to marry her, eh? Trying to teach your grandmother to suck eggs, eh? Why, you fool, any place you just manage to get to for the first time in your life, I've left a hundred miles behind me, see. I've cut my wisdom teeth. It was Meco and Manteca who took the girl from her home: I knew that all the time. You just gave them something so as to have her yourself, gave them a pair of cuff links . . . or a miraculous picture of some Virgin. . . . Am I right? Sure, I am! There aren't so many people in the world who know what's what, but I reckon you'll meet up with a few before you die!"

War Paint got up to give him the key but she could not find it either. She was much surprised. Quickly, she ran to the bedroom door and peered through the keyhole, standing motionless until her eye grew accustomed to the darkness within. Without drawing away, she said: "You damned Blondie. Son of a bitch! Come here a minute, look!"

She went away laughing.

"Didn't I tell them all I'd never seen a smarter fellow in all my life!"

The following morning, War Paint watched for the moment when Blondie left the bedroom to feed his horses. . . .

"Come on, Angel Face. Run home quick!"

The blue-eyed girl, with a face like a Madonna, stood naked save for her chemise and stockings. War Paint covered her with Manteca's lousy blanket, took her by the hand and led her to the street.

"God, I'm happy," War Paint cried. "I'm crazy . . . about Blondie . . . now."

Like neighing colts, playful when the rainy season begins, Demetrio's men galloped through the sierra.

"To Moyahua, boys. Let's go to Demetrio Macias' country!"

"To the country of Monico the cacique!"

The landscape grew clearer; the sun margined the diaphanous sky with a fringe of crimson. Like the bony shoulders of immense sleeping monsters, the chains of mountains rose in the distance. Craggs there were like heads of colossal native idols; others like giants' faces, their grimaces awe-inspiring or grotesque, calling forth a smile or a shudder at a presentment of mystery.

Demetrio Macias rode at the head of his men; behind him the members of his staff: Colonel Anastasio Montanez, Lieutenant-Colonel Pancraccio, Majors Luis Cervantes and Blondie. Still further behind came War Paint with Venancio, who paid her many compliments and recited the despairing verses of Antonio Plaza. As the sun's rays began to slip from the housetops, they made their entrance into Moyahua, four abreast, to the sound of the bugle. The roosters' chorus was deafening, dogs barked their alarm, but not a living soul stirred on the streets.

War Paint spurred her black horse and with one jump was abreast with Demetrio. They rode forward, elbow to elbow. She wore a silk dress and heavy gold earrings. Proudly her pale blue gown deepened her olive skin and the coppery spots on her face and arms. Riding astride, she had pulled her skirts up to her knees; her stockings showed, filthy and full of runs. She wore a gun at her side, a cartridge belt hung over the pommel of her saddle.

Demetrio was also dressed in his best clothes. His broad-brimmed hat was richly embroidered; his leather trousers were tight-fitting and adorned with silver buttons; his coat was embroidered with gold thread.

There was a sound of doors being beaten down and forced open. The soldiers had already scattered through the town, to gather together ammunition and saddles from everywhere.

"We're going to bid Monico good morning," Demetrio said gravely, dismounting and tossing his bridle to one of his men. "We're going to have breakfast with Don Monico, who's a particular friend of mine"

The general's staff smiled . . . a sinister, malign smile. . . .

Making their spurs ring against the pavement, they walked toward a large pretentious house, obviously that of a cacique.

"It's closed airtight," Anastasio Montanez said, pushing the door with all his might.

"That's all right. I'll open it," Pancracio answered, lowering his rifle and pointing it at the lock.

"No, no," Demetrio said, "knock first."

Three blows with the butt of the rifle. Three more. No answer. Pancracio disobeys orders. He fires, smashing the lock. The door opens. Behind, a confusion of skirts and children's bare legs rushing to and fro, pell-mell.

"I want wine. Hey, there: wine!" Demetrio cries in an imperious voice, pounding heavily on a table.

"Sit down, boys."

A lady peeps out, another, a third; from among black skirts, the heads of frightened children. One of the women, trembling, walks toward a cupboard and, taking out some glasses and a bottle, serves wine.

"What arms have you?" Demetrio demands harshly.

"Arms, arms . . . ?" the lady answers, a taste of ashes on her tongue. "What arms do you expect us to have! We are respectable, lonely old ladies!"

"Lonely, eh! Where's Senor Monico?"

"Oh, he's not here, gentlemen, I assure you! We merely rent the house from him, you see. We only know him by name!"

Demetrio orders his men to search the house.

"No, please don't. We'll bring you whatever we have ourselves, but please for God's sake, don't do anything cruel. We're spinsters, lone women . . . perfectly respectable. . . ."

"Spinsters, hell! What about these kids here?" Pancraccio interrupts brutally. "Did they spring from the earth?"

The women disappear hurriedly, to return with an old shotgun, covered with dust and cobwebs, and a pistol with rusty broken springs.

Demetrio smiles.

"All right, then, let's see the money.

"Money? Money? But what money do you think a couple of spinsters have? Spinsters alone in the world. . . .?"

They glance up in supplication at the nearest soldier; but they are seized with horror. For they have just seen the Roman soldier who crucified Our Lord in the Via Crucis of the parish! They have seen Pancraccio!

Demetrio repeats his order to search.

Once again the women disappear to return this time with a moth-eaten wallet containing a few Huerta bills.

Demetrio smiles and without further delay calls to his men to come in. Like hungry dogs who have sniffed their

meat, the mob bursts in, trampling down the women who sought to bar the entrance with their bodies. Several faint, fall to the ground; others flee in panic. The children scream.

Pancracio is about to break the lock of a huge wardrobe when suddenly the doors open and out comes a man with a rifle in his hands.

"Senor Don Monico!" they all exclaim in surprise.

"Demetrio, please, don't harm me! Please don't harm me! Please don't hurt me! You know, Senor Don Demetrio, I'm your friend!"

Demetrio Macias smiles slyly. "Are friends," he asked, "usually welcomed gun in hand?"
Don Monico, in consternation, throws himself at Demetrio's feet, clasps his knees, kisses his shoes: "My wife! . . . My children! . . . Please, Senor Don Demetrio, my friend!"

Demetrio with taut hand puts his gun back in the holster.

A painful silhouette crosses his mind. He sees a woman with a child in her arms walking over the rocks of the sierra in the moonlight. A house in flames. . . .

"Clear out. Everybody outside!" he orders darkly.

His staff obeys. Monico and the ladies kiss his hands, weeping with gratitude. The mob in the street, talking and laughing, stands waiting for the general's permission to ransack the cacique's house.

"I know where they've buried their money but I won't tell," says a youngster with a basket in his hands.

"Hm! I know the right place, mind you," says an old woman carrying a burlap sack to hold whatever the good Lord will provide. "It's on top of something . . . there's a lot of trinkets nearby and then there's a small bag with mother-of-pearl around it. That's the thing to look for!"

"You ain't talking sense, woman," puts in a man.

"They ain't such fools as to leave silver lying loose like that. I'm thinking they've got it buried in the well, in a leather bag."

The mob moves slowly; some carry ropes to tie about their bundles, others wooden trays. The women open out their aprons or shawls calculating their capacity. All give thanks to Divine Providence as they wait for their share of the booty.

When Demetrio announces that he will not allow looting and orders them to disband, the mob, disconsolate, obeys him, and soon scatters; but there is a dull rumor among the soldiers and no one moves from his place.

Annoyed, Demetrio repeats this order.

A young man, a recent recruit, his head turned by drink, laughs and walks boldly toward the door. But before he has reached the threshold, a shot lays him low. He falls like a bull pierced in the neck by the matador's sword. Motionless, his smoking gun in his hand, Demetrio waits for the soldiers to withdraw.

"Set fire to the house!" he orders Luis Cervantes when they reach their quarters.

With a curious eagerness Luis Cervantes does not transmit the order but undertakes the task in person.

Two hours later when the city square was black with smoke and enormous tongues of fire rose from Monico's house, no one could account for the strange behavior of the general.

VI

They established themselves in a large gloomy house, which likewise belonged to the cacique of Moyahua. The previous occupants had already left strong evidences in

the patio, which had been converted into a manure pile. The walls, once whitewashed, were now faded and cracked, revealing the bare unbaked adobe; the floor had been torn up by the hoofs of animals; the orchard was littered with rotted branches and dead leaves. From the entrance one stumbled over broken bits of chairs and other furniture covered with dirt.

By ten o'clock, Luis Cervantes yawned with boredom, said good night to Blondie and War Paint, who were downing endless drinks on a bench in the square, and made for the barracks. The drawing room was alone furnished. As he entered, Demetrio, lying on the floor with his eyes wide open, trying to count the beams, gazed at him.

"It's you, eh? What's new? Come on, sit down."

Luis Cervantes first went over to trim the candle, then drew up a chair without a back, a coarse rag doing the duty of a wicker bottom. The legs of the chair squeaked. War Paint's black horse snorted and whirled its crupper in wide circles. Luis Cervantes sank into his seat.

"General, I wish to make my report. Here you have . . ."

"Look here, man, I didn't really want this done, you know. Moyahua is almost like my native town. They'll say this is why we've been fighting!" Demetrio said, looking at the bulging sack of silver Cervantes was passing to him. Cervantes left his seat to squat down by Demetrio's side.

He stretched a blanket over the floor and into it poured the ten-peso pieces, shining, burning gold.

"First of all, General, only you and I know about this. . . . Secondly, you know well enough that if the sun shines, you should open the window. It's shining in our faces now but what about tomorrow? You should always look ahead. A bullet, a bolting horse, even a wretched cold in the head, and then there are a widow and orphans left in absolute want! . . . The Govern-

ment? Ha! Ha! . . . Just go see Carranza or Villa or any of the big chiefs and try and tell them about your family. . . . If they answer with a kick you know where, they'll say they're giving you a handful of jewels. And they're right; we did not rise up in arms to make some Carranza or Villa President of our Republic. No--we fought to defend the sacred rights of the people against the tyranny of some vile cacique. And so, just as Villa or Carranza aren't going to ask our consent to the payment they're getting for the services they're rendering the country, we for our part don't have to ask anybody's permission about anything either."

Demetrio half stood up, grasped a bottle that stood nearby, drained it, then spat out the liquor, swelling out his cheeks.

"By God, my boy, you've certainly got the gift of gab!"

Luis felt dizzy, faint. The spattered beer seemed to intensify the stench of the refuse on which they sat; a carpet of orange and banana peels, fleshlike slices of watermelon, moldy masses of mangoes and sugarcane, all mixed up with cornhusks from tamales and human offal.

Demetrio's calloused hands shuffled through the brilliant coins, counting and counting. Recovering from his nausea, Luis Cervantes pulled out a small box of Fallieres phosphate and poured forth rings, brooches, pendants, and countless valuable jewels.

"Look here, General, if this mess doesn't blow over (and it doesn't look as though it would), if the revolution keeps on, there's enough here already for us to live on abroad quite comfortably."

Demetrio shook his head.

"You wouldn't do that!"

"Why not? What are we staying on for? . . . What cause are we defending now?"

"That's something I can't explain, Tenderfoot. But I'm

thinking it wouldn't show much guts."

"Take your choice, General," said Luis Cervantes, pointing to the jewels which he had set in a row.

"Oh, you keep it all. . . . Certainly! . . . You know, I don't really care for money at all. I'll tell you the truth! I'm the happiest man in the world, so long as there's always something to drink and a nice little wench that catches my eye. . . ."

"Ha! Ha! You make the funniest jokes, General. Why do you stand for that snake of a War Paint, then?"

"I'll tell you, Tenderfoot, I'm fed up with her. But I'm like that: I just can't tell her so. I'm not brave enough to tell her to go plumb to hell. That's the way I am, see? When I like a woman, I get plain silly; and if she doesn't start something, I've not got the courage to do anything myself." He sighed. "There's Camilla at the ranch for instance. . . . Now, she's not much on looks, I know, but there's a woman I'd like to have....."

"Well, General, we'll go and get her any day you like."

Demetrio winked maliciously.

"I promise you I'll do it."

"Are you sure? Do you really mean it? Look here, if you pull that off for me, I'll give you the watch and chain you're hankering after."

Luis Cervantes' eyes shone. He took the phosphate box, heavy with its contents, and stood up smiling.

"I'll see you tomorrow," he said. "Good night, General! Sleep well."

I don't know any more about it than you do. The General told me, 'Quail, saddle your horse and my black mare and follow Cervantes; he's going on an errand for me.' Well, that's what happened. We left here at noon, and reached the ranch early that evening. One-eyed Maria Antonia took us in. . . . She asked after you, Pancraccio. Next morning Luis Cervantes wakes me up. 'Quail, Quail, saddle the horses. Leave me mine but take the General's mare back to Moyahua. I'll catch up after a bit.' The sun was high when he arrived with Camilla. She got off and we stuck her on the General's mare."

"Well, and her? What sort of a face did she make coming back?" one of the men inquired.

"Hum! She was so damned happy she was gabbing all the way."

"And the tenderfoot?"

"Just as quiet as he always is, you know him."

"I think," Venancio expressed his opinion with great seriousness, "that if Camilla woke up in the General's bed, it was just a mistake. We drank a lot, remember! That alcohol went to our heads; we must have lost our senses."

"What the hell do you mean: alcohol! It was all cooked up between Cervantes and the General."

"Certainly! That city dude's nothing but a . . ."

"I don't like to talk about friends behind their backs," said Blondie, "but I can tell you this: one of the two sweethearts he had, one was mine, and the other was for the General."

They burst into guffaws of laughter.

When War Paint realized what had happened, she sought out Camilla and spoke with great affection:

"Poor little child! Tell me how all this happened."

Camilla's eyes were red from weeping.

"He lied to me! He lied! He came to the ranch and he told me, 'Camilla, I came just to get you. Do you want to go away with me?' You can be sure I wanted to go with him; when it comes to loving, I adore him. Yes, I adore him. Look how thin I've grown just pining away for him. Mornings I used to loathe to grind corn, Mamma would call me to eat, and anything I put in my mouth had no taste at all."

Once more she burst into tears, stuffing the corner of her apron into her mouth to drown her sobs.

"Look here, I'll help you out of this mess. Don't be silly, child, don't cry. Don't think about the dude any more! Honest to God, he's not worth it. You surely know his game, dear? . . . That's the only reason why the General stands for him. What a goose! . . . All right, you want to go back home?"

"The Holy Virgin protect me. My mother would beat me to death!"

"She'll do nothing of the sort. You and I can fix things. Listen! The soldiers are leaving any moment now. When Demetrio tells you to get ready, you tell him you feel pains all over your body as though someone had hit you; then you lie down and start yawning and shivering. Then put your hand on your forehead and say, 'I'm burning up with fever.' I'll tell Demetrio to leave us both here, that I'll stay to take care of you, that as soon as you're feeling all right again, we'll catch up with them. But instead of that, I'll see that you get home safe and sound."

VIII

The sun had set, the town was lost in the drab melancholy of its ancient streets amid the frightened silence

of its inhabitants, who had retired very early, when Luis Cervantes reached Primitivo's general store, his arrival interrupting a party that promised great doings.

Demetrio was engaged in getting drunk with his old comrades. The entire space before the bar was occupied. War Paint and Blondie had tied up their horses outside; but the other officers had stormed in brutally, horses and all. Embroidered hats with enormous and concave brims bobbed up and down everywhere. The horses wheeled about, prancing; tossing their restive heads; their fine breed showing in their black eyes, their small ears and dilating nostrils. Over the infernal din of the drunkards, the heavy breathing of the horses, the stamp of their hoofs on the tiled floor, and occasionally a quick, nervous whinny rang out.

A trivial episode was being commented upon when Luis Cervantes came in. A man, dressed in civilian clothes, with a round, black, bloody hole in his forehead, lay stretched out in the middle of the street, his mouth gaping. Opinion was at first divided but finally all concurred with Blondie's sound reasoning. The poor dead devil lying out there was the church sexton. . . . But what an idiot! His own fault, of course! Who in the name of hell could be so foolish as to dress like a city dude, with trousers, coat, cap, and all? Pancraccio simply could not bear the sight of a city man in front of him! And that was that!

Eight musicians, playing wind instruments, interrupted their labors at Cervantes' command. Their faces were round and red as suns, their eyes popping, for they had been blowing on their brass instruments since dawn.

"General," Luis said pushing his way through the men on horseback, "a messenger has arrived with orders to proceed immediately to the pursuit and capture of Orozco and his men."

Faces that had been dark and gloomy were now illuminated with joy.

"To Jalisco, boys!" cried Blondie, pounding on the counter.

"Make ready, all you darling Jalisco girls of my heart, for I'm coming along too!" Quail shouted, twisting back the brim of his hat.

The enthusiasm and rejoicing were general. Demetrio's friends, in the excitement of drunkenness, offered their services. Demetrio was so happy that he could scarcely speak. They were going to fight Orozco and his men! At last, they would pit themselves against real men! At last they would stop shooting down the Federals like so many rabbits or wild turkeys.

"If I could get hold of Orozco alive," Blondie said, "I'd rip off the soles of his feet and make him walk twenty-four hours over the sierra!"

"Was that the guy who killed Madero?" asked Meco.

"No," Blondie replied solemnly, "but once when I was a waiter at 'El Monico,' up in Chihuahua, he hit me in the face!"

"Give Camilla the roan mare," Demetrio ordered Pancraccio, who was already saddling the horses.

"Camilla can't go!" said War Paint promptly.

"Who in hell asked for your opinion?" Demetrio retorted angrily.

"It's true, isn't it, Camilla? You were sore all over, weren't you? And you've got a fever right now?"

"Well--anything Demetrio says."

"Don't be a fool! say 'No,' come on, say 'No,'" War Paint whispered nervously into Camilla's ear.

"I'll tell you, War Paint. . . . It's funny, but I'm beginning to fall for him. . . . Would you believe it!" Camilla whispered back.

War Paint turned purple, her cheeks swelled. Without a word she went out to get her horse that Blondie was

saddling.

IX

A whirlwind of dust, scorching down the road, suddenly broke into violent diffuse masses; and Demetrio's army emerged, a chaos of horses, broad chests, tangled manes, dilated nostrils, oval, wide eyes, hoofs flying in the air, legs stiffened from endless galloping; and of men with bronze faces, ivory teeth, and flashing eyes, their rifles in their hands or slung across the saddles.

Demetrio and Camilla brought up the rear. She was still nervous, white-lipped and parched; he was angry at their futile maneuver. For there had been battles, no followers of Orozco's to be seen. A handful of Federals, routed. A poor devil of a priest left dangling from a mesquite; a few dead, scattered over the field, who had once been united under the archaic slogan, RIGHTS AND RELIGION, with, on their breasts, the red cloth insignia: Halt! The Sacred Heart of Jesus is with me!

"One good thing about it is that I've collected all my back pay," Quail said, exhibiting some gold watches and rings stolen from the priest's house.

"It's fun fighting this way," Manteca cried, spicing every other word with an oath. "You know why the hell you're risking your hide."

In the same hand with which he held the reins, he clutched a shining ornament that he had torn from one of the holy statues.

After Quail, an expert in such matters, had examined Manteca's treasure covetously, he uttered a solemn guffaw.

"Hell, Your ornament is nothing but tin!"

"Why in hell are you hanging on to that poison?" Pancracio asked Blondie who appeared dragging a pris-

oner.

"Do you want to know why? Because it's a long time since I've had a good look at a man's face when a rope tightens around his neck!"

The fat prisoner breathed with difficulty as he followed Blondie on foot; his face was sunburnt, his eyes red; his forehead beaded with sweat, his wrists tightly bound together.

"Here, Anastasio, lend me your lasso. Mine's not strong enough; this bird will bust it. No, by God, I've changed my mind, friend Federal: think I'll kill you on the spot, because you are pulling too hard. Look, all the mesquites are still a long way off and there are no telegraph poles to hang you to!"

Blondie pulled his gun out, pressed the muzzle against the prisoner's chest and brought his finger against the trigger slowly . . . slowly. . . . The prisoner turned pale as a corpse; his face lengthened; his eyelids were fixed in a glassy stare. He breathed in agony, his whole body shook as with ague. Blondie kept his gun in the same position for a moment long as all eternity. His eyes shone queerly. An expression of supreme pleasure lit up his fat puffy face.

"No, friend Federal," he drawled, putting back his gun into the holster; "I'm not going to kill you just yet. . . . I'll make you my orderly. You'll see that I'm not so hardhearted!"

Slyly he winked at his companions. The prisoner had turned into an animal; he gulped, panting, dry-mouthed. Camilla, who had witnessed the scene, spurred her horse and caught up with Demetrio.

"What a brute that Blondie is: you ought to see what he did to a wretched prisoner," she said. Then she told Demetrio what had occurred. The latter wrinkled his brow but made no answer.

War Paint called Camilla aside.

"Hey you . . . what are you gobbling about? Blondie's my man, understand? From now on, you know how things are: whatever you've got against him you've got against me too! I'm warning you."

Camilla, frightened, hurried back to Demetrio's side.

X

The men camped in a meadow, near three small lone houses standing in a row, their white walls cutting the purple fringe of the horizon. Demetrio and Camilla rode toward them. Inside the corral a man, clad in shirt and trousers of cheap white cloth, sat greedily puffing at a cornhusk cigarette. Another man sitting beside him on a flat cut stone was shelling corn. Kicking the air with one dry, withered leg, the extremity of which was like a goat's hoof, he frightened the chickens away.

"Hurry up, 'Pifanio," said the man who was smoking, "the sun has gone down already and you haven't taken the animals to water."

A horse neighed outside the corral; both men glanced up in amazement. Demetrio and Camilla were looking over the corral wall at them.

"I just want a place to sleep for my woman and me," Demetrio said reassuringly.

As he explained that he was the chief of a small army which was to camp nearby that night, the man smoking, who owned the place, bid them enter with great deference. He ran to fetch a broom and a pail of water to dust and wash the best corner of the hut as decent lodging for his distinguished guests.

"Here, 'Pifanio, go out there and unsaddle the horses."

The man who was shelling corn stood up with an effort. He was clad in a tattered shirt and vest. His

torn trousers, split at the seam, looked like the wings of a cold, stricken bird; two strings of cloth dangled from his waist. As he walked, he described grotesque circles.

"Surely you're not fit to do any work!" Demetrio said, refusing to allow him to touch the saddles.

"Poor man," the owner cried from within the hut, "he's lost all his strength. . . . But he surely works for his pay. . . . He starts working the minute God Almighty himself gets up, and it's after sundown now but he's working still!"

Demetrio went out with Camilla for a stroll about the encampment. The meadow, golden, furrowed, stripped even of the smallest bushes, extended limitless in its immense desolation. The three tall ash trees which stood in front of the small house, with dark green crests, round and waving, with rich foliage and branches drooping to the very ground, seemed a veritable miracle.

"I don't know why but I feel there's a lot of sadness around here," said Demetrio.

"Yes," Camilla answered, "I feel that way too."

On the bank of a small stream, Pifanio was strenuously tugging at a rope with a large can tied to the end of it. He poured a stream of water over a heap of fresh, cool grass; in the twilight, the water glimmered like crystal. A thin cow, a scrawny nag, and a burro drank noisily together.

Demetrio recognized the limping servant and asked him: "How much do you get a day?"

"Eight cents a day, boss."

He was an insignificant, scrofulous wraith of a man with green eyes and straight, fair hair. He whined complaint of his boss, the ranch, his bad luck, his dog's life.

"You certainly earn your pay all right, my lad," Demetrio interrupted kindly. "You complain and complain, but you aren't no loafer, you work and work." Then,

aside to Camilla: "There's always more damned fools in the valley than among us folk in the sierra, don't you think?"

"Of course!" she replied.

They went on. The valley was lost in darkness; stars came out. Demetrio put his arm around Camilla's waist amorously and whispered in her ear.

"Yes," she answered in a faint voice.

She was indeed beginning to "fall for him" as she had expressed it.

Demetrio slept badly. He flung out of the house very early.

"Something is going to happen to me," he thought.

It was a silent dawn, with faint murmurs of joy. A thrush sang timidly in one of the ash trees. The animals in the corral trampled on the refuse. The pig grunted its somnolence. The orange tints of the sun streaked the sky; the last star flickered out.

Demetrio walked slowly to the encampment.

He was thinking of his plow, his two black oxen--young beasts they were, who had worked in the fields only two years--of his two acres of well-fertilized corn. The face of his young wife came to his mind, clear and true as life: he saw her strong, soft features, so gracious when she smiled on her husband, so proudly fierce toward strangers. But when he tried to conjure up the image of his son, his efforts were vain; he had forgotten. . . .

He reached the camp. Lying among the farrows, the soldiers slept with the horses, heads bowed, eyes closed.

"Our horses are pretty tired, Anastasio. I think we ought to stay here at least another day."

"Well, Compadre Demetrio, I'm hankering for the

sierra. . . . If you only knew. . . . You may not believe me but nothing strikes me right here. I don't know what I miss but I know I miss something. I feel sad . . . lost. . . ."

"How many hours' ride from here to Limon?"

"It's no matter of hours; it's three days' hard riding, Demetrio."

"You know," Demetrio said softly, "I feel as though I'd like to see my wife again!"

Shortly after, War Paint sought out Camilla.

"That's one on you, my dear. . . . Demetrio's going to leave you flat! He told me so himself; 'I'm going to get my real woman,' he says, and he says, 'Her skin is white and tender . . . and her rosy cheeks. . . . How beautiful she is!' But you don't have to leave him, you know; if you're set on staying, well--they've got a child, you know, and I suppose you could drag it around. . . ."

When Demetrio returned, Camilla, weeping, told him everything.

"Don't pay no attention to that crazy baggage. It's all lies, lies!"

Since Demetrio did not go to Limon or remember his wife again, Camilla grew very happy. War Paint had merely stung herself, like a scorpion.

XI

Before dawn, they left for Tepatitlan. Their silhouettes wavered indistinctly over the road and the fields that bordered it, rising and falling with the monotonous, rhythmical gait of their horses, then faded away in the nacreous light of the swooning moon that bathed the valley.

Dogs barked in the distance.

"By noon we'll reach Tepatitlan, Cuquio tomorrow, and then . . . on to the sierra!" Demetrio said.

"Don't you think it advisable to go to Aguascalientes first, General?" Luis Cervantes asked.

"What for?"

"Our funds are melting slowly."

"Nonsense . . . forty thousand pesos in eight days!"

"Well, you see, just this week we recruited over five hundred new men; all the money's gone in advance loans and gratuities," Luis Cervantes answered in a low voice.

"No! We'll go straight to the sierra. We'll see later on."

"Yes, to the sierra!" many of the men shouted.

"To the sierra! To the sierra! Hurrah for the mountains!"

The plains seemed to torture them; they spoke with enthusiasm, almost with delirium, of the sierra. They thought of the mountains as of a most desirable mistress long since unvisited.

Dawn broke behind a cloud of fine reddish dust; the sun rose an immense curtain of fiery purple. Luis Cervantes pulled his reins and waited for Quail.

"What's the last word on our deal, Quail?"

"I told you, Tenderfoot: two hundred for the watch alone."

"No! I'll buy the lot: watches, rings, everything else. How much?"

Quail hesitated, turned slightly pale; then he cried spiritedly:

"Two thousand in bills, for the whole business!"

Luis Cervantes gave himself away. His eyes shone with such an obvious greed that Quail recanted and said:

"Oh, I was just fooling you. I won't sell nothing! Just the watch, see? And that's only because I owe Pancracio two hundred. He beat me at cards last night!"

Luis Cervantes pulled out four crisp "double-face" bills of Villa's issue and placed them in Quail's hands.

"I'd like to buy the lot. . . . Besides, nobody will offer you more than that!"

As the sun began to beat down upon them, Manteca suddenly shouted:

"Ho, Blondie, your orderly says he doesn't care to go on living. He says he's too damned tired to walk."

The prisoner had fallen in the middle of the road, utterly exhausted.

"Well, well!" Blondie shouted, retracing his steps. "So little mama's boy is tired, eh? Poor little fellow. I'll buy a glass case and keep you in a corner of my house just as if you were the Virgin Mary's own little son. You've got to reach home first, see? So I'll help you a little, sonny!"

He drew his sword out and struck the prisoner several times.

"Let's have a look at your rope, Pancracio," he said. There was a strange gleam in his eyes. Quail observed that the prisoner no longer moved arm or leg. Blondie burst into a loud guffaw: "The Goddamned fool. Just as I was learning him to do without food, too!"

"Well, mate, we're almost to Guadalajara," Venancio said, glancing over the smiling row of houses in Tepatitlan nestling against the hillside.

They entered joyously. From every window rosy cheeks, dark luminous eyes observed them. The schools were quickly converted into barracks; Demetrio found lodging in the chapel of an abandoned church.

The soldiers scattered about as usual pretending to seek arms and horses, but in reality for the sole purpose of looting.

In the afternoon some of Demetrio's men lay stretched out on the church steps, scratching their bellies. Venancio, his chest and shoulders bare, was gravely occupied in killing the fleas in his shirt. A man drew near the wall and sought permission to speak to the commander. The soldiers raised their heads; but no one answered.

"I'm a widower, gentlemen. I've got nine children and I barely make a living with the sweat of my brow. Don't be hard on a poor widower!"

"Don't you worry about women, Uncle," said Meco, who was rubbing his feet with tallow, "we've got War Paint here with us; you can have her for nothing."

The man smiled bitterly.

"She's only got one fault," Pancraccio observed, stretched out on the ground, staring at the blue sky, "she goes mad over any man she sees."

They laughed loudly; but Venancio with utmost gravity pointed to the chapel door. The stranger entered timidly and confided his troubles to Demetrio. The soldiers had cleaned him out; they had not left a single grain of corn.

"Why did you let them?" Demetrio asked indolently.

The man persisted, lamenting and weeping. Luis Cervantes was about to throw him out with an insult. But Camilla intervened.

"Come on, Demetrio, don't be harsh, give him an order to get his corn back."

Luis Cervantes was obliged to obey; he scrawled a few

lines to which Demetrio appended an illegible scratch.

"May God repay you, my child! God will lead you to heaven that you may enjoy his glory. Ten bushels of corn are barely enough for this year's food!" the man cried, weeping for gratitude. Then he took the paper, kissed everybody's hand, and withdrew.

XII

They had almost reached Cuquio, when Anastasio Montanez rode up to Demetrio: "Listen, Compadre, I almost forgot to tell you. . . . You ought to have seen the wonderful joke that man Blondie played. You know what he did with the old man who came to complain about the corn we'd taken away for horses? Well, the old man took the paper and went to the barracks. 'Right you are, brother, come in,' said Blondie, 'come in, come in here; to give you back what's yours is only the right thing to do. How many bushels did we steal? Ten? Sure it wasn't more than ten? . . . That's right, about fifteen, eh? Or was it twenty, perhaps? . . . Try and remember, friend. . . . Of course you're a poor man, aren't you, and you've a lot of kids to raise. . . . Yes, twenty it was. All right, now! It's not ten or fifteen or twenty I'm going to give you. You're going to count for yourself. . . . One, two, three . . . and when you've had enough you just tell me and I'll stop.' And Blondie pulled out his sword and beat him till he cried for mercy."

War Paint rocked in her saddle, convulsed with mirth. Camilla, unable to control herself, blurted out:

"The beast! His heart's rotten to the core! No wonder I loathe him!"

At once War Paint's expression changed.

"What the hell is it to you!" she scowled. Camilla, frightened, spurred her horse forward. War Paint did likewise and, as she trotted past Camilla, suddenly she reached out, seized the other's hair and pulled with all

her might. Camilla's horse shied; Camilla, trying to brush her hair back from over her eyes, abandoned the reins. She hesitated, lost her balance and fell in the road, striking her forehead against the stones.

War Paint, weeping with laughter, pressed on with utmost skill and caught Camilla's horse.

"Come on, Tenderfoot; here's a job for you," Pancraccio said as he saw Camilla on Demetrio's saddle, her face covered with blood.

Luis Cervantes hurried toward her with some cotton; but Camilla, choking down her sobs and wiping her eyes, said hoarsely:

"Not from you! If I was dying, I wouldn't accept anything from you . . . not even water."

In Cuquio Demetrio received a message.

"We've got to go back to Tepatitlan, General," said Luis Cervantes, scanning the dispatch rapidly. "You've got to leave the men there while you go to Lagos and take the train over to Aguascalientes."

There was much heated protest, the men muttering to themselves or even groaning out loud. Some of them, mountaineers, swore that they would not continue with the troop.

Camilla wept all night. On the morrow at dawn, she begged Demetrio to let her return home.

"If you don't like me, all right," he answered sullenly.

"That's not the reason. I care for you a lot, really. But you know how it is. That woman . . ."

"Never mind about her. It's all right! I'll send her off to hell today. I had already decided that."

Camilla dried her tears. . . .

Every horse was saddled; the men were waiting only

for orders from the Chief. Demetrio went up to War Paint and said under his breath:

"You're not coming with us."

"What!" she gasped.

"You're going to stay here or go wherever you damn well please, but you're not coming along with us."

"What? What's that you're saying?" Still she could not catch Demetrio's meaning. Then the truth dawned upon her. "You want to send me away? By God, I suppose you believe all the filth that bitch . . ."

And War Paint proceeded to insult Camilla, Luis Cervantes, Demetrio, and anyone she happened to remember at the moment, with such power and originality that the soldiers listened in wonder to vituperation that transcended their wildest dream of profanity and filth. Demetrio waited a long time patiently. Then, as she showed no sign of stopping, he said to a soldier quite calmly:

"Throw this drunken woman out."

"Blondie, Blondie, love of my life! Help! Come and show them you're a real man! Show them they're nothing but sons of bitches! . . ."

She gesticulated, kicked, and shouted.

Blondie appeared; he had just got up. His blue eyes blinked under heavy lids; his voice rang hoarse. He asked what had occurred; someone explained. Then he went up to War Paint, and with great seriousness, said:

"Yes? Really? Well, if you want my opinion, I think this is just what ought to happen. So far as I'm concerned, you can go straight to hell. We're all fed up with you, see?"

War Paint's face turned to granite; she tried to speak but her muscles were rigid.

The soldiers laughed. Camilla, terrified, held her breath.

War Paint stared slowly at everyone about her. It all took no more than a few seconds. In a trice she bent down, drew a sharp, gleaming dagger from her stocking and leapt at Camilla.

A shrill cry. A body fell, the blood spurting from it.

"Kill her, Goddamn it," cried Demetrio, beyond himself. "Kill her!"

Two soldiers fell upon War Paint, but she brandished her dagger, defying them to touch her:

"Not the likes of you, Goddamn you! Kill me yourself, Demetrio!"

War Paint stepped forward, surrendered her dagger and, thrusting her breast forward, let her arms fall to her side.

Demetrio picked up the dagger, red with blood, but his eyes clouded; he hesitated, took a step backward. Then, with a heavy hoarse voice he growled, enraged:

"Get out of here! Quick!"

No one dared stop her. She moved off slowly, mute, somber.

Blondie's shrill, guttural voice broke the silent stupor:

"Thank God! At last I'm rid of that damned louse!"

XIII

Someone plunged a knife
Deep in my side.
Did he know why?
I don't know why.

Maybe he knew,
I never knew.
The blood flowed out
Of that mortal wound.
Did he know why?
I don't know why.
Maybe he knew,
I never knew.

His head lowered, his hands crossed over the pommel of his saddle, Demetrio in melancholy accents sang the strains of the intriguing song. Then he fell silent; for quite a while he continued to feel oppressed and sad.

"You'll see, as soon as we reach Lagos you'll come out of it, General. There's plenty of pretty girls to give us a good time," Blondie said.

"Right now I feel like getting damn drunk," Demetrio answered, spurring his horse forward and leaving them as if he wished to abandon himself entirely to his sadness.

After many hours of riding he called Cervantes.

"Listen, Tenderfoot, why in hell do we have to go to Aguascalientes?"

"You have to vote for the Provisional President of the Republic, General!"

"President, what? Who in the devil, then, is this man Carranza? I'll be damned if I know what it's all about."

At last they reached Lagos. Blondie bet that he would make Demetrio laugh that evening.

Trailing his spurs noisily over the pavement, Demetrio entered "El Cosmopolita" with Luis Cervantes, Blondie, and his assistants.

The civilians, surprised in their attempt to escape, remained where they were. Some feigned to return to their tables to continue drinking and talking; others hesitantly

stepped up to present their respects to the commander.

"General, so pleased! . . . Major! Delighted to meet you!"

"That's right! I love refined and educated friends," Blondie said. "Come on, boys," he added, jovially drawing his gun, "I'm going to play a tune that'll make you all dance."

A bullet ricocheted on the cement floor passing between the legs of the tables, and the smartly dressed young men-about-town began to jump much as a woman jumps when frightened by a mouse under her skirt. Pale as ghosts, they conjured up wan smiles of obsequious approval. Demetrio barely parted his lips, but his followers doubled over with laughter.

"Look, Blondie," Quail shouted, "look at that man going out there. Look, he's limping."

"I guess the bee stung him all right."

Blondie, without turning to look at the wounded man, announced with enthusiasm that he could shoot off the top of a tequila bottle at thirty paces without aiming.

"Come on, friend, stand up," he said to the waiter. He dragged him out by the hand to the patio of the hotel and set a tequila bottle on his head. The poor devil refused. Insane with fright, he sought to escape, but Blondie pulled his gun and took aim.

"Come on, you son of a sea cook! If you keep on I'll give you a nice warm one!"

Blondie went to the opposite wall, raised his gun and fired. The bottle broke into bits, the alcohol poured over the lad's ghastly face.

"Now it's a go," cried Blondie, running to the bar to get another bottle, which he placed on the lad's head.

He returned to his former position, he whirled about, and shot without aiming. But he hit the waiter's ear instead of the bottle. Holding his sides with laughter, he

said to the young waiter:

"Here, kid, take these bills. It ain't much. But you'll be all right with some alcohol and arnica."

After drinking a great deal of alcohol and beer, Demetrio spoke:

"Pay the bill, Blondie, I'm going to leave you."

"I ain't got a penny, General, but that's all right. I'll fix it. How much do we owe you, friend?"

"One hundred and eighty pesos, Chief," the bartender answered amiably.

Quickly, Blondie jumped behind the bar and with a sweep of both arms, knocked down all the glasses and bottles.

"Send the bill to General Villa, understand?"

He left, laughing loudly at his prank.

"Say there, you, where do the girls hang out?" Blondie asked, reeling up drunkenly toward a small well-dressed man, standing at the door of a tailor shop.

The man stepped down to the sidewalk politely to let Blondie pass.

Blondie stopped and looked at him curiously, impertinently.

"Little boy, you're very small and dainty, ain't you? . . . No? . . . Then I'm a liar! . . . That's right! . . . You know the puppet dance. . . . You don't? The hell you don't! . . . I met you in a circus! I know you can even dance on a tightrope! . . . You watch!"

Blondie drew his gun out and began to shoot, aiming at the tailor's feet; the tailor gave a little jump at every pull of the trigger.

"See! You do know how to dance on the tightrope,

don't you?"

Taking his friends by the arm, he ordered them to lead him to the red-light district, punctuating every step by a shot which smashed a street light, or struck some wall, a door, or a distant house.

Demetrio left him and returned to the hotel, singing to himself:

"Someone plunged a knife
Deep in my side.
Did he know why?
I don't know why.
Maybe he knew,
I never knew."

XIV

Stale cigarette smoke, the acrid odors of sweaty clothing, the vapors of alcohol, the breathing of a crowded multitude, worse by far than a trainful of pigs.

Texas hats, adorned with gold braid, and khaki predominate. "Gentlemen, a well-dressed man stole my suitcase in the station. My life's savings! I haven't enough to feed my little boy now!"

The shrill voice, rising to a shriek or trailing off into a sob, is drowned out by the tumult within the train.

"What the hell is the old woman talking about?"
Blondie asks, entering in search of a seat.

"Something about a suitcase . . . and a well-dressed man," Pancracio replies. He has already the laps of two civilians to sit on.

Demetrio and the others elbow their way in. Since those on whom Pancracio had sat preferred to stand up, Demetrio and Luis Cervantes quickly seize the vacant

seats.

Suddenly a woman who has stood up holding a child all the way from Irapuato, faints. A civilian takes the child in his arms. The others pretend to have seen nothing. Some women, traveling with the soldiers, occupy two or three seats with baggage, dogs, cats, parrots. Some of the men wearing Texan hats laugh at the plump arms and pendulous breasts of the woman who fainted.

"Gentlemen, a well-dressed man stole my suitcase at the station in Silao! All my life's savings . . . I haven't got enough to feed my little boy now! . . ."

The old woman speaks rapidly, parrotlike, sighing and sobbing. Her sharp eyes peer about on all sides. Here she gets a bill, and further on, another. They shower money upon her. She finishes the collection, and goes a few seats ahead.

"Gentlemen, a well-dressed man stole my suitcase in the station at Silao." Her words produce an immediate and certain effect.

A well-dressed man, a dude, a tenderfoot, stealing a suitcase! Amazing, phenomenal! It awakens a feeling of universal indignation. It's a pity: if this well-dressed man were here every one of the generals would shoot him one after the other!

"There's nothing as vile as a city dude who steals!" a man says, exploding with indignation.

"To rob a poor old lady!"

"To steal from a poor defenseless woman!"

They prove their compassion by word and deed: a harsh verdict against the culprit; a five-peso bill for the victim.

"And I'm telling you the truth," Blondie declares.
"Don't think it's wrong to kill, because when you kill, it's always out of anger. But stealing--Bah!"

This profound piece of reasoning meets with unanimous assent. After a short silence while he meditates, a colonel ventures his opinion:

"Everything is all right according to something, see? That is, everything has its circumstances, see? God's own truth is this: I have stolen, and if I say that everyone here has done the trick, I'm not telling a lie, I reckon! "

"Hell, I stole a lot of them sewing machines in Mexico," exclaims a major. "I made more'n five hundred pesos even though I sold them at fifty cents apiece!"

A toothless captain, with hair prematurely white, announces:

"I stole some horses in Zacatecas, all damn fine horses they was, and then I says to myself, 'This is your own little lottery, Pascual Mata,' I says. 'You won't have a worry in all your life after this.' And the damned thing about it was that General Limon took a fancy to the horses too, and he stole them from me!"

"Of course--there's no use denying it, I've stolen too," Blondie confesses. "But ask any one of my partners how much profit I've got. I'm a big spender and my Purse is my friends' to have a good time on! I have a better time if I drink myself senseless than I would have sending money back home to the old woman!"

The subject of "I stole," though apparently inexhaustible, ceases to hold the men's attention. Decks of cards gradually appear on the seats, drawing generals and officers as the light draws mosquitoes.

The excitement of gambling soon absorbs every interest, the heat grows more and more intense. To breathe is to inhale the air of barracks, prison, brothel, and pigsty all in one.

And rising above the babble, from the car ahead ever the shrill voice, "Gentlemen, a well-dressed young man stole . . ."

The streets in Aguascalientes were so many refuse piles. Men in khaki moved to and fro like bees before their hive, overrunning the restaurants, the crapulous lunch houses, the parlous hotels, and the stands of the street vendors on which rotten pork lay alongside grimy cheese.

The smell of these viands whetted the appetites of Demetrio and his men. They forced their way into a small inn, where a disheveled old hag served, on earthenware plates, some pork with bones swimming in a clear chili stew and three tough burnt tortillas. They paid two pesos apiece; as they left Pancracio assured his comrades he was hungrier than when he entered.

"Now," said Demetrio, "we'll go and consult with General Natera!"

They made for the northern leader's billet.

A noisy, excited crowd stopped them at a street crossing. A man, lost in the multitude, was mouthing words in the monotonous, unctuous tones of a prayer. They came up close enough to see him distinctly; he wore a shirt and trousers of cheap white cloth and was repeating:

"All good Catholics should read this prayer to Christ Our Lord upon the Cross with due devotion. Thus they will be immune from storms and pestilence, famine, and war."

"This man's no fool," said Demetrio smiling.

The man waved a sheaf of printed handbills in his hand and cried:

"A quarter of a peso is all you have to pay for this prayer to Christ Our Lord upon the Cross. A quarter . . ."

Then he would duck for a moment, to reappear with a snake's tooth, a sea star, or the skeleton of a fish. In the same predicant tone, he lauded the medical virtues and the mystical powers of every article he sold.

Quail, who had no faith in Venancio, requested the man to pull a tooth out. Blondie purchased a black seed from a certain fruit which protected the possessor from lightning or any other catastrophe. Anastasio Montanez purchased a prayer to Christ Our Lord upon the Cross, and, folding it carefully, stuck it into his shirt with a pious gesture.

"As sure as there's a God in heaven," Natera said, "this mess hasn't blown over yet. Now it's Villa fighting Carranza."

Without answering him, his eyes fixed in a stare, Demetrio demanded a further explanation.

"It means," Natera said, "that the Convention won't recognize Carranza as First Chief of the Constitutionalist Army. It's going to elect a Provisional President of the Republic. Do you understand me, General?"

Demetrio nodded assent.

"What's your opinion, General?" asked Natera.

Demetrio shrugged his shoulders:

"It seems to me that the meat of the matter is that we've got to go on fighting, eh? All right! Let's go to it! I'm game to the end, you know."

"Good, but on what side?"

Demetrio, nonplussed, scratched his head:

"Look here, don't ask me any more questions. I never went to school, you know. . . . You gave me the eagle I wear on my hat, didn't you? All right then; you just tell me: 'Demetrio, do this or do that,' and that's all there's to it!"

PART THREE

"Villa? Obregon? Carranza? What's the difference? I love the revolution like a volcano in eruption; I love the volcano, because it's a volcano, the revolution, because it's the revolution!"

I

El Paso, Texas, May 16, 1915

My Dear Venancio:

Due to the pressure of professional duties I have been unable to answer your letter of January 4 before now. As you already know, I was graduated last December. I was sorry to hear of Pancraccio's and Manteca's fate, though I am not surprised that they stabbed each other over the gambling table. It is a pity; they were both brave men. I am deeply grieved not to be able to tell Blondie how sincerely and heartily I congratulate him for the only noble and beautiful thing he ever did in his whole life: to have shot himself!

Dear Venancio, although you may have enough money to purchase a degree, I am afraid you won't find it very easy to become a doctor in this country. You know I like you very much, Venancio; and I think you deserve a better fate. But I have an idea which may prove profitable to both of us and which may improve your social position, as you desire. We could do a fine business here if we were to go in as partners and set up a typical Mexican restaurant in this town. I have no reserve funds at the moment since I've spent all I had in getting my college degree, but I have something much more valuable than money; my perfect knowledge of this town and its needs. You can appear as the owner; we will make a monthly division of profits. Besides, concerning a question that interests us both very much, namely, your social improvement, it occurs to me that you play the guitar quite well. In view of the recommendations I could give you and in view of your train-

ing as well, you might easily be admitted as a member of some fraternal order; there are several here which would bring you no inconsiderable social prestige.

Don't hesitate, Venancio, come at once and bring your funds. I promise you we'll get rich in no time. My best wishes to the General, to Anastasio, and the rest of the boys.

Your affectionate friend,
Luis Cervantes

Venancio finished reading the letter for the hundredth time and, sighing, repeated:

"Tenderfoot certainly knows how to pull the strings all right!"

"What I can't get into my head," observed Anastasio Montanez, "is why we keep on fighting. Didn't we finish off this man Huerta and his Federation?"

Neither the General nor Venancio answered; but the same thought kept beating down on their dull brains like a hammer on an anvil.

They ascended the steep hill, their heads bowed, pensive, their horses walking at a slow gait. Stubbornly restless, Anastasio made the same observation to other groups; the soldiers laughed at his candor. If a man has a rifle in his hands and a beltful of cartridges, surely he should use them. That means fighting. Against whom? For whom? That is scarcely a matter of importance.

The endless wavering column of dust moved up the trail, a swirling ant heap of broad straw sombreros, dirty khaki, faded blankets, and black horses. . . .

Not a man but was dying of thirst; no pool or stream or well anywhere along the road. A wave of dust rose from the white, wild sides of a small canyon, swayed mistily on the hoary crest of huizache trees and the greenish stumps of cactus. Like a jest, the flowers in the cac-

tus opened out, fresh, solid, aflame, some thorny, others diaphanous.

At noon they reached a hut, clinging to the precipitous sierra, then three more huts strewn over the margin of a river of burnt sand. Everything was silent, desolate. As soon as they saw men on horseback, the people in the huts scurried into the hills to hide. Demetrio grew indignant.

"Bring me anyone you find hiding or running away," he commanded in a loud voice.

"What? What did you say?" Valderrama cried in surprise. "The men of the sierra? Those brave men who've not yet done what those chickens down in Aguascalientes and Zacatecas have done all the time? Our own brothers, who weather storms, who cling to the rocks like moss itself? I protest, sir; I protest!"

He spurred his miserable horse forward and caught up with the General.

"The mountaineers," he said solemnly and emphatically, "are flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone. *Os ex osibus meis et caro de carne mea*. Mountaineers are made from the same timber we're made of! Of the same sound timber from which heroes . . ."

With a confidence as sudden as it was courageous, he hit the General across the chest. The General smiled benevolently.

Valderrama, the tramp, the crazy maker of verses, did he ever know what he said?

When the soldiers reached a small ranch, despairingly, they searched the empty huts and small houses without finding a single stale tortilla, a solitary rotten pepper, or one pinch of salt with which to flavor the horrible taste of dry meat. The owners of the huts, their peaceful brethren, were impassive with the stonelike impassivity of Aztec idols; others, more human, with a slow smile on their colorless lips and beardless faces, watched these fierce men who less than a month ago had made the miserable huts of others tremble with fear, now in their

turn fleeing their own huts where the ovens were cold and the water tanks dry, fleeing with their tails between their legs, cringing, like curs kicked out of their own houses.

But the General did not countermand his order. Some soldiers brought back four fugitives, captive and bound.

II

WHY do you hide?" Demetrio asked the prisoners.

"We're not hiding, Chief, we're hitting the trail."

"Where to?"

"To our own homes, in God's name, to Durango."

"Is this the road to Durango?"

"Peaceful people can't travel over the main road nowadays, you know that, Chief."

"You're not peaceful people, you're deserters. Where do you come from?" Demetrio said, eyeing them with keen scrutiny.

The prisoners grew confused; they looked at each other hesitatingly, unable to give a prompt answer.

"They're Carranzistas," one of the soldiers said.

"Carranzistas hell!" one of them said proudly. "I'd rather be a pig."

"The truth is we're deserters," another said. "After the defeat we deserted from General Villa's troops this side of Celaya."

"General Villa defeated? Ha! Ha! That's a good joke."

The soldiers laughed. But Demetrio's brow was

wrinkled as though a black shadow had passed over his eyes.

"There ain't a son of a bitch on earth who can beat General Villa!" said a bronzed veteran with a scar clear across the face.

Without a change of expression, one of the deserters stared persistently at him and said:

"I know who you are. When we took Torreon you were with General Urbina. In Zacatecas you were with General Natera and then you shifted to the Jalisco troops. Am I lying?"

These words met with a sudden and definite effect. The prisoners gave a detailed account of the tremendous defeat of Villa at Celaya. Demetrio's men listened in silence, stupefied.

Before resuming their march, they built a fire on which to roast some bull meat. Anastasio Montanez, searching for food among the huizache trees, descried the close-cropped neck of Valderrama's horse in the distance among the rocks.

"Hey! Come here, you fool, after all there ain't been no gravy!" he shouted.

Whenever anything was said about shooting someone, Valderrama, the romantic poet, would disappear for a whole day.

Hearing Anastasio's voice, Valderrama was convinced that the prisoners had been set at liberty. A few moments later, he was joined by Venancio and Demetrio.

"Heard the news?" Venancio asked gravely.

"No."

"It's very serious. A terrible mess! Villa was beaten at Celaya by Obregon and Carranza is winning all along the line! We're done for!"

Valderrama's gesture was disdainful and solemn as

an emperor's. "Villa? Obregon? Carranza? What's the difference? I love the revolution like a volcano in eruption; I love the volcano because it's a volcano, the revolution because it's the revolution! What do I care about the stones left above or below after the cataclysm? What are they to me?"

In the glare of the midday sun the reflection of a white tequila bottle glittered on his forehead; and, jubilant, he ran toward the bearer of such a marvelous gift.

"I like this crazy fool," Demetrio said with a smile. "He says things sometimes that make you think."

They resumed their march; their uncertainty translated into a lugubrious silence. Slowly, inevitably, the catastrophe must come; it was even now being realized. Villa defeated was a fallen god; when gods cease to be omnipotent, they are nothing.

Quail spoke. His words faithfully interpreted the general opinion:

"What the hell, boys! Every spider's got to spin his own web now!"

III

In Zacatecas and Aguascalientes, in the little country towns and the neighboring communities, haciendas and ranches were deserted. When one of the officers found a barrel of tequila, the event assumed miraculous proportions. Everything was conducted with secrecy and care; deep mystery was preserved to oblige the soldiers to leave on the morrow before sunrise under Anastasio and Venancio.

When Demetrio awoke to the strains of music, his general staff, now composed chiefly of young ex-government officers, told him of the discovery, and Quail, interpreting the thoughts of his colleagues, said senten-

tiously:

"These are bad times and you've got to take advantage of everythin'. If there are some days when a duck can swim, there's others when he can't take a drink."

The string musicians played all day; the most solemn honors were paid to the barrel: but Demetrio was very sad.

"Did he know why?
I don't know why."

He kept repeating the same refrain.

In the afternoon there were cockfights. Demetrio sat down with the chief officers under the roof of the municipal portals in front of a city square covered with weeds, a tumbled kiosk, and some abandoned adobe houses.

"Valderrama," Demetrio called, looking away from the ring with tired eyes, "come and sing me a song--sing 'The Undertaker.'"

But Valderrama did not hear him; he had no eyes for the fight; he was reciting an impassioned soliloquy as he watched the sunset over the hills.

With solemn gestures and emphatic tones, he said:

"O Lord, Lord, pleasurable it is this thy land! I shall build me three tents: one for Thee, one for Moses, one for Elijah!"

"Valderrama," Demetrio shouted again. "Come and sing 'The Undertaker' song for me."

"Hey, crazy, the General is calling you," an officer shouted.

Valderrama with his eternally complacent smile went over to Demetrio's seat and asked the musicians for a

guitar.

"Silence," the gamesters cried. Valderrama finished tuning his instrument.

Quail and Meco let loose on the sand a pair of cocks armed with long sharp blades attached to their legs. One was light red; his feathers shone with beautiful obsidian glints. The other was sand-colored with feathers like scales burned slowly to a fiery copper color.

The fight was swift and fierce as a duel between men. As though moved by springs, the roosters flew at each other. Their feathers stood up on their arched necks; their combs were erect, their legs taut. For an instant they swung in the air without even touching the ground, their feathers, beaks, and claws lost in a dizzy whirlwind. The red rooster suddenly broke, tossed with his legs to heaven outside the chalk lines. His vermilion eyes closed slowly, revealing eyelids of pink coral; his tangled feathers quivered and shook convulsively amid a pool of blood.

Valderrama, who could not repress a gesture of violent indignation, began to play. With the first melancholy strains of the tune, his anger disappeared. His eyes gleamed with the light of madness. His glance strayed over the square, the tumbled kiosk, the old adobe houses, over the mountains in the background, and over the sky, burning like a roof afire. He began to sing. He put such feeling into his voice and such expression into the strings that, as he finished, Demetrio turned his head aside to hide his tears.

But Valderrama fell upon him, embraced him warmly, and with a familiarity he showed everyone at the appropriate moment, he whispered:

"Drink them! . . . Those are beautiful tears."

Demetrio asked for the bottle, passed it to Valderrama. Greedily the poet drank half its contents in one gulp; then, showing only the whites of his eyes, he faced the spectators dramatically and, in a highly theatrical voice, cried:

"Here you may witness the blessings of the revolution

caught in a single tear."

Then he continued to talk like a madman, but like a madman whose vast prophetic madness encompassed all about him, the dusty weeds, the tumbled kiosk, the gray houses, the lovely hills, and the immeasurable sky.

IV

Juchipila rose in the distance, white, bathed in sunlight, shining in the midst of a thick forest at the foot of a proud, lofty mountain, pleated like a turban.

Some of the soldiers, gazing at the spire of the church, sighed sadly. They marched forward through the canyon, uncertain, unsteady, as blind men walking without a hand to guide them. The bitterness of the exodus pervaded them.

"Is that town Juchipila?" Valderrama asked.

In the first stage of his drunkenness, Valderrama had been counting the crosses scattered along the road, along the trails, in the hollows near the rocks, in the tortuous paths, and along the riverbanks. Crosses of black timber newly varnished, makeshift crosses built out of two logs, crosses of stones piled up and plastered together, crosses whitewashed on crumbling walls, humble crosses drawn with charcoal on the surface of whitish rocks. The traces of the first blood shed by the revolutionists of 1910, murdered by the Government.

Before Juchipila was lost from sight, Valderrama got off his horse, bent down, kneeled, and gravely kissed the ground.

The soldiers passed by without stopping. Some laughed at the crazy man, others jested. Valderrama, deaf to all about him, breathed his unctuous prayer:

"O Juchipila, cradle of the Revolution of 1910, O blessed land, land steeped in the blood of martyrs, blood of dreamers, the only true men . . ."

"Because they had no time to be bad!" an ex-Federal officer interjected as he rode.

Interrupting his prayer, Valderrama frowned, burst into stentorian laughter, reechoed by the rocks, and ran toward the officer begging for a swallow of tequila.

Soldiers minus an arm or leg, cripples, rheumatics, and consumptives spoke bitterly of Demetrio. Young whippersnappers were given officers' commissions and wore stripes on their hats without a day's service, even before they knew how to handle a rifle, while the veterans, exhausted in a hundred battles, now incapacitated for work, the veterans who had set out as simple privates, were still simple privates. The few remaining officers among Demetrio's friends also grumbled, because his staff was made up of wealthy, dapper young men who oiled their hair and used perfume.

"The worst part of it," Venancio said, "is that we're gettin' overcrowded with Federals!"

Anastasio himself, who invariably found only praise for Demetrio's conduct, now seemed to share the general discontent.

"See here, brothers," he said, "I spits out the truth when I sees something. I always tell the boss that if these people stick to us very long we'll be in a hell of a fix. Certainly! How can anyone think otherwise? I've no hair on my tongue; and by the mother that bore me, I'm going to tell Demetrio so myself."

Demetrio listened benevolently, and, when Anastasio had finished, he replied:

"You're right, there's no gettin' around it, we're in a bad way. The soldiers grumble about the officers, the officers grumble about us, see? And we're damn well ready now to send both Villa and Carranza to hell to have a good time all by themselves. . . . I guess we're in the same fix as that peon from Tepatitlan who complained about his boss all day long but worked on just the same. That's us. We kick and kick, but we keep on

killing and killing. But there's no use in saying anything to them!"

"Why, Demetrio?"

"Hm, I don't know. . . . Because . . . because . . . do you see? . . . What we've got to do is to make the men toe the mark. I've got orders to stop a band of men coming through Cuquio, see? In a few days we'll have to fight the Carranzistas. It will be great to beat the hell out of them."

Valderrama, the tramp, who had enlisted in Demetrio's army one day without anyone remembering the time or the place, overheard some of Demetrio's words. Fools do not eat fire. That very day Valderrama disappeared mysteriously as he had come.

V

They entered the streets of Juchipila as the church bells rang, loud and joyfully, with that peculiar tone that thrills every mountaineer.

"It makes me think we are back in the days when the revolution was just beginning, when the bells rang like mad in every town we entered and everybody came out with music, flags, cheers, and fireworks to welcome us," said Anastasio Montanez.

"They don't like us no more," Demetrio returned.

"Of course. We're crawling back like a dog with its tail between its legs," Quail remarked.

"It ain't that, I guess. They don't give a whoop for the other side either."

"But why should they like us?"

They spoke no more.

Presently they reached the city square and stopped in front of an octagonal, rough, massive church, reminiscent of the colonial period. At one time the square must

have been a garden, judging from the bare stunted orange trees planted between iron and wooden benches. The sonorous, joyful bells rang again. From within the church, the honeyed voices of a female chorus rose melancholy and grave. To the strains of a guitar, the young girls of the town sang the "Mysteries."

"What's the fiesta, lady?" Venancio asked of an old woman who was running toward the church.

"The Sacred Heart of Jesus!" answered the pious woman, panting.

They remembered that one year ago they had captured Zacatecas. They grew sadder still.

Juchipila, like the other towns they had passed through on their way from Tepic, by way of Jalisco, Aguascalientes and Zacatecas, was in ruins. The black trail of the incendiaries showed in the roofless houses, in the burnt arcades. Almost all the houses were closed, yet, here and there, those still open offered, in ironic contrast, portals gaunt and bare as the white skeletons of horses scattered over the roads. The terrible pangs of hunger seemed to speak from every face; hunger on every dusty cheek, in their dusty countenances; in the hectic flame of their eyes, which, when they met a soldier, blazed with hatred. In vain the soldiers scoured the streets in search of food, biting their lips in anger. A single lunch-room was open; at once they filled it. No beans, no tortillas, only chili and tomato sauce. In vain the officers showed their pocketbooks stuffed with bills or used threats:

"Yea, you've got papers all right! That's all you've brought! Try and eat them, will you?" said the owner, an insolent old shrew with an enormous scar on her cheek, who told them she had already lain with a dead man, "to cure her from ever feeling frightened again."

Despite the melancholy and desolation of the town, while the women sang in the church, birds sang in the foliage, and the thrushes piped their lyrical strain on the withered branches of the orange trees.

VI

Demetrio Macias' wife, mad with joy, rushed along the trail to meet him, leading a child by the hand. An absence of almost two years!

They embraced each other and stood speechless. She wept, sobbed. Demetrio stared in astonishment at his wife who seemed to have aged ten or twenty years. Then he looked at the child who gazed up at him in surprise. His heart leaped to his mouth as he saw in the child's features his own steel features and fiery eyes exactly reproduced. He wanted to hold him in his arms, but the frightened child took refuge in his mother's skirts.

"It's your own father, baby! It's your daddy!"

The child hid his face within the folds of his mother's skirt, still hostile.

Demetrio handed the reins of his horse to his orderly and walked slowly along the steep trail with his wife and son.

"Blessed be the Virgin Mary, Praise be to God! Now you'll never leave us any more, will you? Never . . . never. . . . You'll stay with us always?"

Demetrio's face grew dark. Both remained silent, lost in anguish. Demetrio suppressed a sigh. Memories crowded and buzzed through his brain like bees about a hive.

A black cloud rose behind the sierra and a deafening roar of thunder resounded. The rain began to fall in heavy drops; they sought refuge in a rocky hut.

The rain came pelting down, shattering the white Saint John roses clustered like sheaves of stars clinging to tree, rock, bush, and pitaya over the entire mountainside.

Below in the depths of the canyon, through the gauze

of the rain they could see the tall, sheer palms shaking in the wind, opening out like fans before the tempest. Everywhere mountains, heaving hills, and beyond more hills, locked amid mountains, more mountains encircled in the wall of the sierra whose loftiest peaks vanished in the sapphire of the sky.

"Demetrio, please. For God's sake, don't go away! My heart tells me something will happen to you this time."

Again she was wracked with sobs. The child, frightened, cried and screamed. To calm him, she controlled her own great grief.

Gradually the rain stopped, a swallow, with silver breast and wings describing luminous charming curves, fluttered obliquely across the silver threads of the rain, gleaming suddenly in the afternoon sunshine.

"Why do you keep on fighting, Demetrio?"

Demetrio frowned deeply. Picking up a stone absent-mindedly, he threw it to the bottom of the canyon. Then he stared pensively into the abyss, watching the arch of its flight.

"Look at that stone; how it keeps on going. . . ."

VII

It was a heavenly morning. It had rained all night, the sky awakened covered with white clouds. Young wild colts trotted on the summit of the sierra, with tense manes and waving hair, proud as the peaks lifting their heads to the clouds.

The soldiers stepped among the huge rocks, buoyed up by the happiness of the morning. None for a moment dreamed of the treacherous bullet that might be awaiting him ahead; the unforeseen provides man with his greatest joy. The soldiers sang, laughed, and chattered away.

The spirit of nomadic tribes stirred their souls. What matters it whether you go and whence you come? All that matters is to walk, to walk endlessly, without ever stopping; to possess the valley, the heights of the sierra, far as the eye can read.

Trees, brush, and cactus shone fresh after rain. Heavy drops of limpid water fell from rocks, ocher in hue as rusty armor.

Demetrio Macias' men grew silent for a moment. They believed they heard the familiar rumor of firing in the distance. A few minutes elapsed but the sound was not repeated.

"In this same sierra," Demetrio said, "with but twenty men I killed five hundred Federals. Remember, Anastasio?"

As Demetrio began to tell that famous exploit, the men realized the danger they were facing. What if the enemy, instead of being two days away, was hiding somewhere among the underbrush on the terrible hill through whose gorge they now advanced? None dared show the slightest fear. Not one of Demetrio Macias' men dared say, "I shall not move another inch!"

So, when firing began in the distance where the vanguard was marching, no one felt surprised. The recruits turned back hurriedly, retreating in shameful flight, searching for a way out of the canyon. A curse broke from Demetrio's parched lips. "Fire at 'em. Shoot any man who runs away!" "Storm the hill!" he thundered like a wild beast. But the enemy, lying in ambush by the thousand, opened up its machine-gun fire. Demetrio's men fell like wheat under the sickle.

Tears of rage and pain rise to Demetrio's eyes as Anastasio slowly slides from his horse without a sound, and lies outstretched, motionless. Venancio falls close beside him, his chest riddled with bullets. Meco hurtles over the precipice, bounding from rock to rock.

Suddenly, Demetrio finds himself alone. Bullets whiz past his ears like hail. He dismounts and crawls over the rocks, until he finds a parapet: he lays down a stone to protect his head and, lying flat on the ground, begins to shoot.

The enemy scatter in all directions, pursuing the few fugitives hiding in the brush. Demetrio aims; he does not waste a single shot.

His famous marksmanship fills him with joy. Where he settles his glance, he settles a bullet. He loads his gun once more . . . takes aim. . . .

The smoke of the guns hangs thick in the air. Locusts chant their mysterious, imperturbable song. Doves coo lyrically in the crannies of the rocks. The cows graze placidly.

The sierra is clad in gala colors. Over its inaccessible peaks the opalescent fog settles like a snowy veil on the forehead of a bride.

At the foot of a hollow, sumptuous and huge as the portico of an old cathedral, Demetrio Macias, his eyes leveled in an eternal glance, continues to point the barrel of his gun.

LITERATURE:
DEATH OF AN ASSASSIN



Walking Stars

Stories of Magic and Power



VICTOR VILLASEÑOR



Piñata Books
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1994

wrong, too. One little kid even offered to break another window for me.

I said, "No more broken windows, and listen closely. He got the twenty not because he broke the window, but because he had the guts to speak up, and he didn't know if he was going to get punished or what. This boy is going to go far! He made the decision to come forward no matter what. And that takes guts."

You see, it's like my Dad always told me. Our decisions are who we are. Decisions and having the guts to stick to our decisions against all odds. And in this story, my Dad, who was younger and weaker becomes the hero, and his older, stronger brother becomes the nobody. And that's how it works in real life, too. Bullies eventually become nobodies, and the persons who were tormented become "somebodies," if—and this is a big if—they only have the guts to endure and not get bitter.

So, in my opinion, this is, indeed, the greatest gift we can give to ourselves and God: to keep the faith and stretch ourselves to the stars as we reach inside ourselves with all our God-given power and magic.

Death of an Assassin

"The colonel is coming! The colonel is coming!" shouted a young, barefooted boy, running up the cobblestone street of the little settlement.

It was almost dark, and quickly Juan ran into his home, yelling, "Hurry, Mamá! Here comes *el coronel!*"

Emilia started screaming with terror. The last time the colonel and his men had caught them, they'd raped and beaten Emilia in front of Doña Margarita's very own eyes so that they, the Villaseñors, could see what became of anyone who refused to bow down to authority. But the great woman, Doña Margarita, had not shied away from her responsibilities. No, she'd knelt down and began to pray, refusing to close her eyes to the horrors that these abusive, federal troops put her daughter through. And she had watched them with her eyes wide open and prayed with her rosary in hand, asking God to forgive them and to not blame their mothers whose loins they came from.

Hearing Doña Margarita's words, one soldier had lost his ability to rape Emilia, and he'd become

so enraged with the old woman's praying that he'd pulled up his pants and rushed across the room to beat Doña Margarita. But another soldier had knocked him down. Then, in a fit of rage, the federal troops had begun to fight amongst themselves until the colonel had come in and separated them, calling them a bunch of weak fools because they didn't know how to properly treat a woman. The colonel had then yanked Doña Margarita's rosary from her hand and slapped her, calling her "a stupid Indian." And then he tore the rosary to pieces, scattering the well-worn beads to the wind.

Now Luisa and Doña Margarita quickly tried to get Emilia to stop screaming and ushered her out the back door of their home so they could hide in the bushes underneath the wall of the *ramada*. It was almost dark; there was just a little pink and pale yellow in the western sky painted across the heavens in soft, long horizontal brush strokes. The colonel and his men could be heard entering the village, their horses' hooves echoing on the rock-smooth cobblestones. Emilia began to cry again, whimpering like a lost little child. She wanted her doll. Ever since her last beating, nothing could pacify her except her dirty, little, ragged doll. It was a doll that she'd gotten as a child, ordered all the way from Spain, and at one time had been a wondrous Flamenco dancing woman with fine clothes and real blond hair.

"I'll run back inside and get it for her," said Salvador, his heart pounding in deadly fear.

"Oh, no, you don't!" said his mother. "They so

much as see one little movement and they'll start shooting! You know how much they still fear us and hate us! No, you stay put!"

"But, Mamá," said Luisa, who was big with child, "if he doesn't go and get her dirty little doll, they'll find us all and maybe even kill us this time. Please, let him go quickly before they get any closer and hear her."

Emilia was crying and whimpering, and the colonel and his troops were halfway up the street now. They were walking slowly, confidently, each horse stepping deliberately—well-shod horses and well-armed men coming down the cobblestones, watching every house, every shadow, as they came. They'd killed almost every male human down to the age of twelve in all the area, and so they figured that they had no one left to fear, fully realizing that the old men and little boys who were left had seen so much bloodshed in the last few years that their hearts were gone out of them.

"Mamá, Luisa is right," said Juan. He was ten years old and he'd been running and hiding and dodging bullets for the last three years of his life. "I've got to do it, and now!"

Quickly, he jumped up and sped out of the bushes, up over the wall, and across the *ramada*. The colonel and his men were only three houses up the street. He had to find his sister's doll and get back into hiding instantly or all would be lost. My God, he was so scared that his little heart was pounding a million miles an hour.

Going inside the house, he glanced all around

the kitchen, but didn't see the doll. He rushed to the back, looking through the bed where Emilia and Luisa slept together. Ever since José-Luis' death, Luisa slept with Emilia. That way they could give each other comfort in the quiet of the night.

He found nothing. He rushed into the room where he and his mother slept on another straw mat on the floor. The last time the soldiers had come, they'd taken all their bedding and furniture and set it on fire in the street in front of their home. Oh, these soldiers were determined to show them what became of people who raised sons who dared feast their eyes on the Heavens and think of themselves as having value.

Searching desperately, Juan didn't find the doll there, either. Then he heard his sister's cries and the horses dancing, echoing, their well-shod hooves getting closer and closer. He just knew that they were going to be found. He rushed into the kitchen to get a pan or a knife to throw at the horseman, so that they'd give him chase and not find his mother and sisters. That's when he saw Emilia's doll. Why, it was sitting there on the ledge of the broken kitchen window with the last of the going sunlight reflecting off the doll's fine, smooth face.

Juan snatched up the doll and dashed out to the *ramada*, coming within a few feet of the well-shod horses' hooves. He dropped, crawling alongside the twisted vines of the *ramada*, his chest pounding against the good Earth. And he was just going to drop the doll over the rock wall to his mother and sisters

when a soldier heard him and reined in his mount.

"What's that?" shouted the soldier, drawing his pistol and shooting once, twice, three times into the vines of the dark twisting *ramada*.

Hearing the shots, Doña Margarita and her daughters glanced up and saw Juan's hand hanging over the top of the wall above them. His hand opened, letting go of the doll, and then went limp. The old ragged dancing Flamenco woman came tumbling down through the leaves and branches of the bushes into Emilia's starving hands. Immediately, Emilia calmed down as if she'd been given a gift from Heaven. It took every ounce of power for Doña Margarita to not scream out in HORROR! Juan was dead. His hand had gone limp. They could now hear the colonel's huge, bellying voice.

"Stop wasting your bullets, you fool!" snapped *el coronel*. "This village has nothing worth shooting anymore with our guns!"

The colonel's men laughed and continued down the cobblestone street, shooting now and then and laughing as they went. They'd won; the colonel figured that they'd killed each and every man, woman and child who'd seen him run down the road that night with his fat ass wiggling in awful fear. And anyone who might still be living, the colonel was sure that they wished that they were dead.

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Late that night, little Pelón, Mateo's youngest

brother, who'd given Juan his smooth, good-luck rock on the night of the witch, came to see Juan. The word was out that the federal troops had put three good bullet holes through Juan's body but that his mother, Doña Margarita, the great *curandera*, healer, had slipped the bullet holes from his body to his loose clothing and saved his life. Little Pelón found Juan and his family in the thick trees just down the hill from the town. They were going to sleep outside for a few nights in case the soldiers returned.

After inspecting the three bullet holes in Juan's clothing, just inches away from his neck and left side, Pelón informed Juan that the last of his brothers had been assassinated two days before. "They came late in the day as we were eating, but we didn't run," said Pelón, tears coming to his eyes, "because I'm ten and Alfonso was only twelve, and they'd already killed Mateo and all my older brothers. So, well, my mother said, 'Don't run! Just keep eating and they'll leave us alone.' But they didn't. They shot Alfonso as he sat there eating his *taco de frijoles*."

No one knew what to say. There'd been so much killing in the last couple of years that, my God, there seemed to be no end to it. As soon as a boy began to just show any little sign of manhood, he was executed on the spot. And the word was out that these killings would continue until every man, woman or child with any bad Indian blood was eradicated so that Mexico could then take its proper place among the modern nations of the world.

"Look," Pelón whispered to Juan once the women were asleep, "I've figured out a way to kill the colonel, but I need your help."

Juan glanced around, not wanting his mother and sisters to hear. He got up, and he and Pelón went out to the meadows beyond the trees. The moon was out and the sky was filled with thousands and thousands of stars. Facing each other, they sat down like two little dark stones, and Pelón explained the whole thing to Juan.

"You see, Juan, this is our only chance to do it," said Pelón, "now that *el coronel* figures that he's killed all of us and he's starting to use the same trails each time to come up here."

Juan nodded. He could see that it was a good plan and the right time to do it, now that the colonel was so confident that he was leisurely coming up each time on the easy main trails. But, still, there was the problem of a weapon. Every pistol and rifle had long ago been confiscated by the Federales. There wasn't a weapon to be had in all the mountains.

"No, that's not true," said Pelón. "I saw where my brothers buried a couple of good rifles before they were killed." He stood up. "Are you in?"

Juan sat there on the ground, looking up at his childhood friend whom he had known since they'd begun to walk. "Yes," said Juan, standing up and taking hold of his friend's hand. "I'm in *a lo macho!*"

"*A lo macho!*" repeated Pelón, and he took Juan into his arms, hugging him. Two little boys, each ten years old, and each so scared and torn and

worn that they didn't know what else to do.

"Look," added Pelón, wiping his eyes, "with you at my side, Juan, what can possibly go wrong? You're the one who faced La Bruja single-handedly and took three of the colonel's best bullets and didn't even lose a drop of blood! Nothing can go wrong, I tell you. It's done! Day after tomorrow, before the sun is chest high, *el coronel* will be dead, and this land will be free once again!"

And they held each other in a long *abrazo*, both knowing fully well that they really had not one chance in hell of pulling this off. But there was nothing else that they could do, for tomorrow they'd get a little hair on their upper lip or just a little bit taller, and then it would be their turn to be executed. Now, only while they were still children, did they have any chance whatsoever of succeeding.



Two days later, Juan met Pelón down in the deep gulleys north of town. It was late afternoon; they only had a couple more hours of good daylight.

"Did you tell anyone?" asked Pelón. Pelón, meaning "bald-headed," had such a big, thick mane of wild hair that everyone had teased him about his hair ever since he could remember, saying that all the forests of the world would be gone before Pelón went bald.

"No," said Juan. "I told no one."

"Not even your mother?" asked Pelón.

Juan resented this question. "Especially not my mother!" he snapped. "My God, she'd be out of her head with worry if I'd told her what we were about!"

"All right, calm down," said Pelón. "Calm down. I was just checking. We can't be too careful with what we're about to do."

"Did you get the rifle?" asked Juan.

"Sure. I got it over there in those rocks, wrapped in a serape and covered with leaves."

Juan glanced over to the pile of large boulders and could see nothing. He was glad that Pelón had hidden the weapon well. After all, they didn't want to be seen lugging a rifle around the countryside. He glanced back at Pelón. There was something different about this childhood friend of his; his eyes were not the eyes of a young boy anymore.

"Come," said Pelón, "we'll go over my plan once more. You have Don Pio's blood in your veins, just like your brother José, so you should have a head for strategy. Oh, my brothers would marvel at José's strategy of battle. Our brothers, they were great, weren't they?" he added.

"Yes," said Juan. And he almost added, "If only they had lived." But he didn't say this. He held.

They went over to the boulders and hunched down out of sight, warmed a couple of *taquitos*, and ate as they spoke. The sun was finally going down, and they could soon travel without being seen.

Pelón's plan was simple. He'd been watching the federal troops for days now, and he'd come to realize that the colonel and his men were coming

up from the lowlands on the same trail. And, every time, they'd rest their horses three-fourths of the way up the mountain in a little basin where there was water and grass. The colonel had also gotten in the habit of walking a little way away from his men to take a crap over a large, fallen log, from where he could keep watch on the trail above and below him.

"So, you see," Pelón had explained to Juan, "all we got to do is get there the night before and bury me in the dirt and cover me with leaves and broken branches. Then, in the morning, when he has his pants down and he's shitting, I'll just rise up and shoot him dead from a distance of about ten feet, so I'll be sure not to miss."

The plan could work, Juan was sure of it, if only he covered Pelón up correctly with the leaves and branches and the colonel came the same way and took his same crap and Pelón didn't lose his nerve.

"Look," said Juan, "I've been thinking your plan over very carefully, and I really do think that it can work. But, well, it's going to take a lot of nerve for you to stay there quietly all night and then to not panic or make a single move when the colonel and his men ride up, making so much noise and trampling all around you with their horses."

"I got the nerve," said Pelón. "Believe me, I got the nerve. After they killed Mateo and all my brothers, I've been thinking of nothing else but this!

"You know," he said, a strange calmness coming to his eyes, "*el coronel* is right. There isn't ever

going to be peace in Mexico until they kill every one of us, damn their wretched souls!"

Juan was taken aback. He hadn't expected this hate, this power, this conviction, to come from one of his own playmates who was so young. But he could now see that he'd been kidding himself. For he, too, was raging mad inside, wanting to kill, to destroy this damned colonel and all his men. Oh, the abuses, the absolute horrors that these men had committed in the name of law and order were monstrous!

"All right," said Juan, "I agree with you that there isn't going to be peace in Mexico until somebody is killed, but it's not going to be us. It's them who must die. They don't work the fields, they don't protect their homes and families, so it's them who must go. We have to live as my brother José said. We, the meek, who give heart and soul and the sweat off our backs to our sacred piece of Earth."

"You're right," said Pelón. "And that's why we must do this. Let's go."

"Just wait," said Juan. "I want to see the rifle. Also, after I bury you, how will you know when to raise up and start shooting, especially if I bury you so well that you can't see and you can't be seen, either?"

Pelón was stumped. But not for long. "I guess I'll know to come up shooting when I hear his first shits and farts."

Both boys started laughing.

"Then, let's hope he eats well tonight and drinks

a lot so he'll be shitting and farting big and loud tomorrow," added Juan, laughing all the more.

And so there they went, two little boys, lugging an old *retrocarga*, homemade shotgun, that hadn't been fired in years, to do in the most famous badmen of all the region. The sun was down now and the western sky was painted in long streaks of pink and rose and yellow and gold. The clouds were banked up against the distant mountain called El Serro Gordo, The Fat Mountain, and all the rolling little hills and valleys between that distant mountain and their own great mountain called El Serro Grande, The Big Mountain, were green and lush, looking so beautiful and peaceful.

The two little boys began to whistle as they went. They were absolutely stout-hearted in their belief that they would succeed, and so they were happy.

Overhead, the last of the great flocks of fork-tailed blackbirds came swooping by on their way to roost in the tall grasses by the shallow mountain lakes. It had been another good day on God's sacred Earth, and she, the Night, was now approaching in all her splendor and magic. The first few stars were beginning to make themselves known, shining brightly in the heavens. Oh, it was good to be alive, holding your head high and feasting your eyes upon the wondrous evening sky with your heart full of hope and glory.

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No one knew where Juan was, and Doña Margarita was becoming very anxious. She wondered if her little son's disappearance had anything to do with Pelón having come by the night before. She decided to call Luisa back from looking for Juan. She just had this little quiet feeling deep inside herself that the two boys were up to something, and so maybe it was best not to draw anymore attention to the fact that Juan was missing.

Doña Margarita took in hand what was left of her father's once-fine handmade rosary and went outside to pray. The sun was gone and the night was coming, and soon it would be dark. Doña Margarita began to pray, releasing her soul to God and knowing deep inside of herself that all would turn out for the Sacred Good, if only she kept faith and allowed God to do His work, and let herself bend with the turns and twists of life, and not take too seriously those fears that kept coming up inside her weak, human mind. For she well knew that the turns and twists of life could never be understood with the head, but had to be felt by the heart and allowed to blossom with the wisdom of one's God-given soul.

Oh, if it weren't for her complete faith in God, she was sure that she never could've survived that terrible day that the colonel and his men had abused Emilia. But, with her feet well-planted in the rich soil of the Mother Earth, she had endured and she'd been able to go on, just as she was going to go on now. This was the power of living; this was the power of bringing in God's light with every

breath one took. To fill one's being with so much light that no little, dark, sneaky thought of fear or doubt could reside in one's entire being.

Doña Margarita now continued praying, eyes focused on the Father Sky and feet planted in the Mother Earth, not really knowing where her little boy was, but fully realizing that her soul was gone from her body, having been released to God's infinite powers, and her soul would somehow find the means with which to help her son. She prayed and the Universe listened and the stars brightened.



Going down through the trees, the two boys dropped into the little basin. It was dark now, and they needed to move slowly, carefully, and not leave any signs of having passed through there. Grass was in the open places and leaves and broken branches were under the trees. Then, they heard a sound. They froze, not moving a muscle, and glanced around, but only with their eyes—barely moving their heads or bodies.

Two eyes were watching them from over there by two trees. They couldn't quite make out what the two eyes were until they saw the flicker of the ears. Then they knew that it was a deer. In fact, they could now make out that it was a doe and her fawn, which had stepped out from behind her.

"*Mira, mira,*" said Pelón, blowing out with relief. Both boys had been holding their breath in deadly fear. "I thought maybe it was a tiger, or

maybe even a soldier. You know, if the colonel was smart," continued Pelón, "he would leave a group of soldiers behind to keep track of their trails. That's what I'll do when I join Villa," he added with *gusto*.

"You're going to join Pancho Villa?" asked Juan, also feeling relieved that it had turned out to be only a deer.

"Sure, of course. It's either join the rebels or continue to stay up here all alone in these God-forsaken mountains until they hunt us all down. It's not going to stop with us killing the colonel, you know. They'll be sending others."

"Well, then, why are we doing this?" asked Juan. He'd assumed that once they'd gotten rid of *el coronel* it would all be over.

"Because the BAS..." Pelón began shouting in anger.

Just then, the doe leaped, looking behind her, and was off in large, graceful bounds. Her fawn went right after her in small, tight prancing leaps. Both boys crouched down, holding deadly still. They couldn't see what had startled the doe, but they were terrified once again. Pelón signaled Juan to follow him, and they moved quietly along the ground, their little hearts beating wildly.

Crawling into the brush, they lay down, chests against the good Earth. Juan drew close to Pelón's right ear and whispered, "Look, maybe we shouldn't bury you right now. I think maybe we should wait until daybreak, when we can see better. That doe was really frightened."

"Maybe it was just because I raised my voice,"

said Pelón.

"Maybe," said Juan, "but maybe not. I think we should wait."

"I don't know," whispered Pelón. "They've been coming by here pretty early."

"Yes, but what if the situation doesn't look right in the morning? Once you're buried, Pelón, that's it. We can't just uncover you. I think we better wait until daylight so we can see. Then I can bury you carefully and fix up the area so it looks like nobody has been here."

Pelón glanced around, thinking over the situation, then said, "Okay, I'll trust your judgment, Juan, but I just hope he doesn't come by too early and catch us sleeping."

"He won't," said Juan. "Remember, he's going to eat and drink a lot tonight, so he'll fart big and loud for us tomorrow!"

Both boys laughed quietly, trying hard to keep their voices down. They still didn't know what had startled the doe, and they wanted to be very careful.

"You know," said Juan, glancing up at the star-studded heavens, "I think we should maybe pray."

"You still pray," asked Pelón, "after all that's happened to our families?"

At first Juan was taken aback by Pelón's question, but then he recovered and said, "Yes, of course. In fact, at home we probably pray more now than ever before." And so Juan knelt there in the brush where they were hiding and began to pray, with Pelón only watching. Overhead the stars

continued blinking, winking, giving wonderment and beauty.

"Come on," said Juan to Pelón, "join me. In the morning, we'll have plenty of time to do everything."

"All right," said Pelón. "I hope you're right."

And so now, both boys were praying together. The doe came back down into the grassy meadow and began to graze once again. Whatever had frightened her was gone now. Upon seeing the doe and her fawn return, the boys felt better and finished up their prayers, feeling good and confident once again.

"And so, *buenas noches*, dear God," said Juan, finishing his prayer, "and let us sleep in peace and keep us well throughout the night."

"And help us tomorrow," added Pelón, "that we not fail, for we are pure of heart and only wish to protect our homes and families."

Making the sign of the cross over themselves, the two boys came out from the brush and stood up in the clearing by the doe and her little fawn. It was a magnificent night, filled with thousands of bright stars and not a single cloud. The doe and her fawn looked at the two small boys, but didn't bolt. The two animals seemed very much at peace once again.

"I wonder," said Juan, "if animals pray, too. Look how relaxed and happy they are now."

"Animals don't pray," said Pelón, laughing. "What are you, *loco*?"

"No," said Juan, "my mother has always told us that praying calms the heart, and look how peace-

ful those deer are now.”

Pelón glanced at the deer and then back at Juan. “Did your mother really move those bullet holes from your body to your clothes? You know, everyone is starting to say that your mother is the real *bruja* of our region, but that she’s a good witch because she goes to church every day.”

“My mother is no *bruja*!” snapped Juan.

“Look, I didn’t mean to offend you,” said Pelón. “It’s just that, well, did she move those bullets from your body to your clothes?”

Juan didn’t want to answer. He’d been out cold when they’d taken him inside. “I don’t know,” he said. “I was told that the one bullet hit so close to my head that I was knocked out. But, yes, that’s what they were saying when I came to. They said that they’d seen the other two bullets in my body, and I was dead until my mother lit the candles and put her hands on me and started praying.”

“Then your mother really is a witch,” said Pelón, making the sign of the cross over himself, eyes large with wonder.

“No, she isn’t!” said Juan. “Women just come from the moon—you know that. And, well, when they show their power, and the men see that they can’t move them, people start calling them witches. But they’re not. They’re just women, damn it! My mother is no witch! Not any more than yours!”

“Don’t call my mother a witch!” yelled Pelón.

“Well, then, don’t call mine one, either. Hell, your mother has done wonders, too. No one can figure out how she keeps your corn growing, even

after the soldiers trample and burn it.”

Pelón calmed down. “All right,” he said, “you’re right. My mother does wonders, too, so I won’t call your mother, well, a *bruja* anymore. But tell me, Juan, how come you know so much about all this?” asked the boy, his eyes still huge with fear. “You aren’t a *brujo*, are you?”

“Of course not,” said Juan, getting really tired of the whole subject. “It’s just that each night when my mother puts us to bed, she tells us stories.”

“What kind of stories?”

“Well, stories about the magic of life. Stories that give us hope and strength, wings of understanding, so no matter how awful the world gets all around us, we’ll always still feel the power of God’s breath...giving us light, just like those stars and moon give light to the darkness.”

“I see,” said Pelón. “I see. Just like those stars and moon, eh?”

“Yes,” said Juan. “Just like those stars and moon.”

The fawn had come closer to the two boys. It was obvious that Pelón still wasn’t too sure about Juan and had a thousand more questions, but Juan wanted no more of this. He was exhausted. Ever since that soldier had shot at him, everyone had been asking him what his mother had done to him and if it was true that she’d brought him back from the dead.

“I’m tired,” said Juan. “I think we better find a place to bed down for the night so we can go to sleep.

“Look, the little fawn wants to smell us,” added

Juan, smiling and putting his hand out to the little deer. The fawn stretched out his neck, sniffing Juan's fingertips. "You know, I bet animals really do pray in their own way," said Juan. "That's how they're able to live surrounded by lions and all these other dangers but still live in such peace and happiness."

"Maybe you're right," said Pelón, feeling that no deer would come this close to a real witch because wild animals—it was well-known—could see what lurked inside a human's heart. "Come on, I'm tired, too. Let's go over to that huge tree by the fallen log where the colonel does his *caca* and find a place to sleep."

"Okay," said Juan, getting to his feet slowly. He didn't want to startle the little deer.

Both boys now went over to the huge tree by the fallen log where the colonel had been relieving himself each time he came up the mountain. They got down between the thick, bare roots of the tree that some pigs had uprooted, creating a little hollow. They wanted to get out of the wind and cold so that they could get a good night's rest.

The fawn, who'd been watching them, saw them disappear into the hollow and came over to see what had happened to them. The doe followed her fawn and saw the two boys going to sleep. She took up ground, standing over the boys and her fawn like a sentry.

Juan remembered opening his eyes once and seeing the mother deer standing over them, and he just knew that his mother had come to protect

them in the form of a mother deer. But he didn't say anything about this to Pelón. He didn't want to confuse things any more than they already were. High overhead, the stars were blinking, winking by the thousands, and the moon gave her magic light, too. It had been another good day and now it was becoming a good night. There were no witches or other evils on the other side. No, there was just the fear and jealousy that people took with them in their souls.

"*Buenas noches,*" said Juan to the miracle of the heavens. "And thank you, Mamá," he said to the mother deer. He breathed more easily and went back to sleep, feeling safe, and dreamed of green meadows and happy deer praying to the Almighty.



The two boys were fast asleep when they first heard the snorts of the colonel's horses coming up the steep grade. Quickly, they opened their eyes, not knowing what to do. Oh, my God, they'd been caught with their pants down. And now they couldn't just jump up and take off running or they'd be spotted and shot down for sure. They glanced at each other, then raised up their heads as much as they dared and looked between the displaced tree roots. They saw that the soldiers were already in the basin. Some were already off their horses and putting them to graze. Others were taking their mounts down to the water to drink. Then, they heard the colonel's big, powerful voice and realized

that he was directly behind them. But they didn't dare turn around to look.

"Take my horse!" shouted *el coronel*, belching loudly. He sounded like a man with a bad stomach. "Over there, over there. Get the hell away from me!"

They could hear the soldier doing as he was told, grabbing the reins of the colonel's horse and quickly leading him off, coming so close to them that they could see the horse's hooves passing by as they looked from under the big roots of the huge tree. Then, here came the colonel himself, passing by them even closer, his tall, leather boots glistening in the early morning light. He was grabbing tree branches as he passed, causing leaves to fall, and belching with every step. Oh, he was in terrible shape. They could smell the sour odor coming off of him.

Juan and Pelón glanced at each other and, if they hadn't been so terrified, they would've burst out laughing. This was exactly what they'd wanted. They couldn't have asked for it any better. Then, there was the colonel, only fifteen feet away from them, unbuckling his gun belt and dropping his pants. He turned away from them and barely got his big white ass over the fallen log before he began to shit with enormous-sounding explosions.

Quickly, Pelón reached under himself, bringing up the rifle, which was still wrapped in the serape. He tried to unwrap the weapon as quickly and quietly as he could, but he was having trouble working within the small confines of the little hollow.

Juan kept glancing at the colonel, praying to

God, "Oh, please, dear God," he said to himself, "let him be so full of farts and caca that he doesn't stop shitting and can't hear us!"

Finally, Pelón had the weapon uncovered, but it was pointing in the wrong direction. Quickly, he tried turning it around, hitting Juan in the face with the barrel.

Seeing the huge barrel of the homemade retrocarga, Juan blurted out, "That's it? That's our weapon?"

"Quiet!" whispered Pelón under his breath as he shoved the huge weapon between the roots, pointing it at the colonel's back side.

"But it won't shoot!" said Juan. "I thought we had a real rifle!"

But Pelón wasn't paying attention to Juan anymore, and he now cocked back the two big hammers and spoke out loud. "*Coronel*," he said in a clear, good voice, "I'm Mateo's little brother!"

And, as the colonel turned to see who had the audacity to come up behind him and bother him while he relieved himself, Pelón pulled both triggers. But nothing happened; the hammers just didn't move.

Instantly, the colonel saw the situation: two little boys with an old retrocarga from the days of Benito Juárez, hunched down under a bunch of big tree roots, trying to kill him. Quick as a cat, he pulled up his pants and reached for his gun belt. But, at that very instant, Juan hit the two hammers with a stone, and the old weapon EXPLODED, pipe-barrel splitting in two and a fountain of

rock and used little pieces of iron shooting towards the colonel. The two boys were thrown back with the explosion of the weapon, smashing Pelón against the dirt across the hollow. The colonel was thrown over backwards across the log. Instantly, his men were shouting and taking cover, returning fire.

Crawling out of the hollow, Juan was up and trying to clear his head so they could take off running. But what he saw Pelón do next was something he'd never forget. Pelón didn't run. No, he cleared his head and ran over to the colonel, who was squirming about in terrible pain, took the colonel's gun from his gun belt and emptied the pistol into his naked, bloated belly. The soldiers' bullets sang all around Pelón's head, but he never gave them any importance. Only when he saw that the great bad man was dead did Pelón throw down the gun and come running towards Juan. Then they were off like deer, running down through the brush and trees as the soldiers continued shooting at them.

"I killed him!" yelled Pelón, as they ran. "I killed him and he looked me in the eyes and knew who I was before he died! Oh, it was wonderful!"

Some of the soldiers got on their horses and tried to give chase, but the two boys knew these mountains like the back of their hands and cut through the breaks, leaping from boulder to boulder, leaving the armed men far behind. Finally, they were down in the deep canyons where the wild orchids grew, and they were going to start back up

the mountainside when they came upon the doe and her little fawn once again. The deer had been bedded down.

"Wait," said Juan. "Maybe this is a good place for us to hole up for the day. We don't want to get up on top and run into the soldiers or someone who might turn us in to them."

"Who'd turn us in?" asked Pelón. He was so excited that he was ready to pop. "I killed him! I killed him! Oh, my God, it was wonderful! Seeing him squirm around, I put a bullet into his fat belly for every one of my brothers! We did it, Juan! We really did it!"

"Yes, we did. But now we got to keep calm so we don't get killed, too. Come, let's get up on that ridge and bed down like the deer do and keep very quiet 'til nighttime."

And they'd no more than hidden themselves when here came five mounted soldiers down into the bottom of the canyon with an old Indian leading them on foot. The two boys held their breath, watching them pass by down below in the trees. Once, the Indian stopped and glanced up in their direction, but then he just went on down the canyon bottom, leading the soldiers away.

"Did you see how *el indio* looked up towards us?" asked Pelón.

"Yes," said Juan. "He knows we're up here. We better go before they circle above us and come in from behind."

The two boys took off up the ridge as fast as they could go, startling the doe and her fawn,

who'd bedded down above them.

"You better run, too!" said Juan to the deer as they went racing by them.

But the deer didn't run with them. Instead, they ran downhill. Juan and Pelón were coming off the top of the ridge when they heard the shooting down below.

Juan stopped. "They shot the deer," he said.

"How do you know?" asked Pelón.

"I just know," said Juan, tears coming to his eyes.

And he took off racing for home as fast as he could go. He had to see if his beloved dear old mother was all right.

Two days later, Pelón disappeared. It was rumored that he'd joined Francisco Villa's army and had been given the rank of Captain, making him the youngest officer Villa had ever welcomed into his armed forces.



Author's Note

In real life, Rambo and John Wayne and Schwarzenegger and all these other big fake movie heroes have it all backwards. It doesn't take big muscles and all these modern guns to be a Superman or Superwoman. That's all superficial bull! It's not how big the dog is, but how big the fight in the dog is.

And each one of us, no matter how small or young, can defend ourselves once we set our mind to it. Conviction of heart is our power. Truly, conviction of heart, making that "decision" that this is it and we are going to do it, no matter what. Why, this colonel had killed well over five hundred people, and he'd bullied thousands of others, entire communities, and yet these two little boys did him in. No one, but no one, can push people too far. Even the most meek and good-of-heart will finally stand up and be accounted for.

Also, my father and his friend didn't do this for glory or medals or to prove anything to anyone. No, they did it for the love of their families, the love that they had for their mothers and sisters and little brothers and their sacred piece of Mother Earth.

Thank you. *Gracias*. We're all somebody, people of value. All we have to do make that "decision" to stand up and do it!

PRIMARY DOCUMENTS:

PLAN OF SAN LUIS OF POTOSÍ

PLAN OF AYALA

PLAN OF GUADALUPE

PLAN OF SAN LUIS OF POTOSÍ

**CREATED BY
FRANCISCO MADERO**

OCTOBER 5, 1910

Peoples, in their constant efforts for the triumph of the ideal of liberty and justice, are forced, at precise historical moments, to make their greatest sacrifices.

Our beloved country has reached one of those moments. A force of tyranny which we Mexicans were not accustomed to suffer after we won our independence oppresses us in such a manner that it has become intolerable. In exchange for that tyranny we are offered peace, but peace full of shame for the Mexican nation, because its basis is not law, but force; because its object is not the aggrandizement and prosperity of the country, but to enrich a small group who, abusing their influence, have converted the public charges into fountains of exclusively personal benefit, unscrupulously exploiting the manner of lucrative concessions and contracts.

The legislative and judicial powers are completely subordinated to the executive; the division of powers, the sovereignty of the States, the liberty of the common councils, and the rights of the citizens exist only in writing in our great charter; but, as a fact, it may almost be said that martial law constantly exists in Mexico; the administration of justice, instead of imparting protection to the weak, merely serves to legalize the plunderings committed by the strong; the judges instead of being the representatives of justice, are the agents of the executive, whose interests they faithfully serve; the chambers of the union have no other will than that of the dictator; the governors of the States are designated by him and they in their turn designate and impose in like manner the municipal authorities.

From this it results that the whole administrative, judicial, and legislative machinery obeys a single will, the caprice of General Porfirio Diaz, who during his long administration has shown that the principal motive that guides him is to maintain himself in power and at any cost.

For many years profound discontent has been felt throughout the Republic, due to such a system of government, but General Diaz with great cunning and perseverance, has succeeded in annihilating all independent elements, so that it was not possible to organize any sort of movement to take from him the power of which he made such bad use. The evil constantly became worse, and the decided eagerness of

General Diaz to impose a successor upon the nation in the person of Mr. Ramon Corral carried that evil to its limit and caused many of us Mexicans, although lacking recognized political standing, since it had been impossible to acquire it during the 36 years of dictatorship, to throw ourselves into the struggle to recover the sovereignty of the people and their rights on purely democratic grounds....

In Mexico, as a democratic Republic, the public power can have no other origin nor other basis than the will of the people, and the latter can not be subordinated to formulas to be executed in a fraudulent manner. . . ,

For this reason the Mexican people have protested against the illegality of the last election and, desiring to use successively all the recourses offered by the laws of the Republic, in due form asked for the nullification of the election by the Chamber of Deputies, notwithstanding they recognized no legal origin in said body and knew beforehand that, as its members were not the representatives of the people, they would carry out the will of General Diaz, to whom exclusively they owe their investiture.

In such a state of affairs the people, who are the only sovereign, also protested energetically against the election in imposing manifestations in different parts of the Republic; and if the latter were not general throughout the national territory, It was due to the terrible pressure exercised by the Government, which always quenches in blood any democratic manifestation, as happened in Puebla, Vera Cruz, Tlaxcala, and in other places.

But this violent and illegal system can no longer subsist.

I have very well realized that if the people have designated me as their candidate for the Presidency it is not because they have had an opportunity to discover in me the qualities of a statesman or of a ruler, but the virility of the patriot determined to sacrifice himself, if need be, to obtain liberty and to help the people free themselves from the odious tyranny that oppresses them.

From the moment I threw myself into the democratic struggle I very well knew that General Diaz would not bow to the will of the nation, and the noble Mexican people, in following me to the polls, also knew perfectly the outrage that awaited them; but in spite of it, the people gave the cause of liberty a numerous contingent of martyrs when they were necessary and with wonderful stoicism went to the polls and received every sort of molestation.

But such conduct was indispensable to show to the whole world that the Mexican people are fit for democracy, that they are thirsty for liberty, and that their present rulers do not measure up to their aspirations.

Besides, the attitude of the people before and during the election, as well as afterwards, shows clearly that they reject with energy the Government of General Diaz and that, if those electoral rights had been respected, I would have been elected for President of the Republic.

Therefore, and in echo of the national will, I declare the late election illegal and, the Republic being accordingly without rulers, provisionally assume the Presidency of the Republic until the people designate their rulers pursuant to the law. In order to attain this end, it is necessary to eject from power the audacious usurpers whose only title of legality involves a scandalous and immoral fraud.

With all honesty I declare that it would be a weakness on my part and treason to the people, who have placed their confidence in me, not to put myself at the front of my fellow citizens, who anxiously call me from all parts of the country, to compel General Diaz by force of arms, to respect the national will.

PLAN DE SAN LUIS DE POTOSÍ

**CREADOR OR
FRANCISCO MADERO**

5 DE OCTUBRE DE 1910

Los pueblos, en su esfuerzo constante porque triunfen los ideales de libertad y justicia, se ven precisados en determinados momentos históricos a realizar los mayores sacrificios.

Nuestra querida Patria ha llegado a uno de esos momentos: una tiranía que los mexicanos no estábamos acostumbrados a sufrir, desde que conquistamos nuestra independencia, nos oprime de tal manera, que ha llegado a hacerse intolerable.

En cambio de esta tiranía se nos ofrece la paz , pero es una paz vergonzosa para el pueblo mexicano, porque no tiene por base el derecho, sino la fuerza; porque no tiene por objeto el engrandecimiento y prosperidad de la Patria , sino enriquecer un pequeño grupo que, abusando de su influencia, ha convertido los puestos públicos en fuente de beneficios exclusivamente personales, explotando sin escrúpulos las concesiones y contratos lucrativos.

Tanto el poder Legislativo como el Judicial están completamente supeditados al Ejecutivo; la división de los poderes, la soberanía de los Estados, la libertad de los Ayuntamientos y los derechos del ciudadano sólo existen escritos en nuestra Carta Magna; pero, de hecho, en México casi puede decirse que reina constantemente la Ley Marcial ; la justicia, en vez de impartir su protección al débil, sólo sirve para legalizar los despojos que comete el fuerte; los jueces, en vez de ser los representantes de la Justicia , son agentes del Ejecutivo, cuyos intereses sirven fielmente; las cámaras de la Unión no tienen otra voluntad que la del Dictador; los gobernadores de los Estados son designados por él y ellos a su vez designan e imponen de igual manera las autoridades municipales.

De esto resulta que todo el engranaje administrativo, judicial y legislativo obedecen a una sola voluntad, al capricho del general Porfirio Díaz, quien en su larga administración ha demostrado que el principal móvil que lo guía es mantenerse en el poder y a toda costa.

Hace muchos años se siente en toda la República profundo malestar, debido a tal

régimen de Gobierno; pero el general Díaz, con gran astucia y perseverancia, había logrado aniquilar todos los elementos independientes, de manera que no era posible organizar ninguna clase de movimiento para quitarle el poder que tan mal uso hacía. El mal se agravaba constantemente, y el decidido empeño del general Díaz de imponer a la Nación un sucesor, y siendo éste el señor Ramón Corral, llevó ese mal a su colmo y determinó que muchos mexicanos, aunque carentes de reconocida personalidad política, puesto que había sido imposible labrársela durante 36 años de Dictadura, nos lanzáramos a la lucha, intentando reconquistar la soberanía del pueblo y sus derechos en el terreno netamente democrático.

Entre otros partidos que tendían al mismo fin, se organizó el Partido Nacional Antirreeleccionista proclamando los principios de SUFRAGIO EFECTIVO Y NO REELECCIÓN, como únicos capaces de salvar a la República del inminente peligro con que la amenazaba la prolongación de una dictadura cada día más onerosa, más despótica y más inmoral.

El pueblo mexicano secundó eficazmente a ese partido y, respondiendo al llamado que se le hizo, mandó a sus representantes a una Convención, en la que también estuvo representado el Partido Nacional Democrático, que asimismo interpretaba los anhelos populares. Dicha Convención designó sus candidatos para la Presidencia y Vicepresidencia de la República, recayendo esos nombramientos en el señor Dr. Francisco Vázquez Gómez y en mí para los cargos respectivos de Vicepresidente y Presidente de la República.

Aunque nuestra situación era sumamente desventajosa porque nuestros adversarios contaban con todo el elemento oficial, en el que se apoyaban sin escrúpulos, creímos de nuestro deber, para servir la causa del pueblo, aceptar tan honrosa designación. Imitando las sabias costumbres de los países republicanos, recorrí parte de la República haciendo un llamamiento a mis compatriotas. Mis giras fueron verdaderas marchas triunfales, pues por donde quiera el pueblo, electrizado por las palabras mágicas de SUFRAGIO EFECTIVO Y NO REELECCIÓN, daba pruebas evidentes de su inquebrantable resolución de obtener el triunfo de tan salvadores principios. Al fin, llegó un momento en que el general Díaz se dio cuenta de la verdadera situación de la República y comprendió que no podía luchar ventajosamente conmigo en el campo de la Democracia, y me mandó reducir a prisión antes de las elecciones, las que se llevaron a cabo excluyendo al pueblo de los comicios por medio de la violencia, llenando las prisiones de ciudadanos independientes y cometiendo los fraudes más desvergonzados.

En México, como República democrática, el poder público no puede tener otro ori-

gen ni otra base que la voluntad nacional, y ésta no puede ser supeditada a fórmulas llevadas a cabo de un modo fraudulento.

Por este motivo el pueblo mexicano ha protestado contra la ilegalidad de las últimas elecciones; y queriendo emplear sucesivamente todos los recursos que ofrecen las leyes de la República en la debida forma, pidió la nulidad de las elecciones ante la Cámara de Diputados, a pesar de que no reconocía al dicho cuerpo un origen legítimo y de que sabía de antemano que, no siendo sus miembros representantes del pueblo, sólo acatarían la voluntad del general Díaz, a quien exclusivamente deben su investidura.

En tal estado las cosas, el pueblo, que es el único soberano, también protestó de un modo enérgico contra las elecciones en imponentes manifestaciones llevadas a cabo en diversos puntos de la República, y si éstas no se generalizaron en todo el territorio nacional fue debido a terrible presión ejercida por el gobierno, que siempre ahoga en sangre cualquiera manifestación democrática, como pasó en Puebla, Veracruz, Tlaxcala, México y otras partes.

Pero esta situación violenta e ilegal no puede subsistir más.

Yo he comprendido muy bien que si el pueblo me ha designado como su candidato para la Presidencia, no es porque haya tenido la oportunidad de descubrir en mí las dotes del estadista o de gobernante, sino la virilidad del patriota resuelto a sacrificarse, si es preciso, con tal de conquistar la libertad y ayudar al pueblo a librarse de la odiosa tiranía que lo oprime.

Desde que me lancé a la lucha democrática sabía muy bien que el general Díaz no acataría la voluntad de la Nación, y el noble pueblo mexicano, al seguirme a los comicios, sabía también perfectamente el ultraje que le esperaba; pero a pesar de ello, el pueblo dio para la causa de la Libertad un numeroso contingente de mártires cuando éstos eran necesarios, y con admirable estoicismo concurrió a las casillas a recibir toda clase de vejaciones.

Perotal conducta era indispensable para demostrar al mundo entero que el pueblo mexicano está apto para la democracia, que está sediento de libertad, y que sus actuales gobernantes no responden a sus aspiraciones.

Además, la actitud del pueblo antes y durante las elecciones, así como después de ellas, demuestra claramente que rechaza con energía al Gobierno del general Díaz y que, si se hubieran respetado esos derechos electorales, hubiese sido yo electo para

la Presidencia de la República.

En tal virtud, y haciéndome eco de la voluntad nacional, declaro ilegales las pasadas elecciones, y quedando por tal motivo la República sin gobernantes legítimos, asumo provisionalmente la Presidencia de la República, mientras el pueblo designa conforme a la ley sus gobernantes. Para lograr este objeto es preciso arrojar del poder a los audaces usurpadores que por todo título de legalidad ostentan un fraude escandaloso e inmoral.

Con toda honradez declaro que consideraría una debilidad de mi parte y una traición al pueblo que en mí ha depositado su confianza no ponerme al frente de mis conciudadanos, quienes ansiosamente me llaman, de todas partes del país, para obligar al general Díaz, por medio de las armas, a que respete la voluntad nacional.

El Gobierno actual, aunque tiene por origen la violencia y el fraude, desde el momento que ha sido tolerado por el pueblo, puede tener para las naciones extranjeras ciertos títulos de legalidad hasta el 30 del mes entrante en que expiran sus poderes; pero como es necesario que el nuevo gobierno dimanado del último fraude no pueda recibirse ya del poder, o por lo menos se encuentre con la mayor parte de la Nación protestando con las armas en la mano, contra esa usurpación, he designado el DOMINGO 20 del entrante noviembre para que de las seis de la tarde en adelante, en todas las poblaciones de la República se levanten en armas bajo el siguiente

PLAN

- I. Se declaran nulas las elecciones para Presidente y Vicepresidente de la República, Magistrados a la Suprema Corte de la Nación y Diputados y Senadores, celebradas en junio y julio del corriente año.
- II. Se desconoce al actual Gobierno del general Díaz, así como a todas las autoridades cuyo poder debe dimanar del voto popular, porque además de no haber sido electas por el pueblo, han perdido los pocos títulos que podían tener de legalidad, cometiendo y apoyando, con los elementos que el pueblo puso a su disposición para la defensa de sus intereses, el fraude electoral más escandaloso que registra la historia de México.
- III. Para evitar hasta donde sea posible los trastornos inherentes a todo movimiento revolucionario, se declaran vigentes, a reserva de reformar oportunamente por los medios constitucionales aquellas que requieran reformas, todas las

leyes promulgadas por la actual administración y sus reglamentos respectivos, a excepción de aquellas que manifiestamente se hallen en pugna con los principios proclamados en este Plan. Igualmente se exceptúan las leyes, fallos de tribunales y decretos que hayan sancionado las cuentas y manejos de fondos de todos los funcionarios de la administración porfirista en todos los ramos; pues tan pronto como la revolución triunfe, se iniciará la formación de comisiones de investigación para dictaminar acerca de las responsabilidades en que hayan podido incurrir los funcionarios de la Federación, de los Estados y de los Municipios.

En todo caso serán respetados los compromisos contraídos por la administración porfirista con gobiernos y corporaciones extranjeras antes del 20 del entrante.

Abusando de la ley de terrenos baldíos, numerosos pequeños propietarios, en su mayoría indígenas, han sido despojados de sus terrenos, por acuerdo de la Secretaría de Fomento, o por fallos de los tribunales de la República. Siendo de toda justicia restituir a sus antiguos poseedores los terrenos de que se les despojó de un modo tan arbitrario, se declaran sujetas a revisión tales disposiciones y fallos y se les exigirá a los que los adquirieron de un modo tan inmoral, o a sus herederos, que los restituyan a sus primitivos propietarios, a quienes pagarán también una indemnización por los perjuicios sufridos. Sólo en caso de que esos terrenos hayan pasado a tercera persona antes de la promulgación de este Plan, los antiguos propietarios recibirán indemnización de aquellos en cuyo beneficio se verificó el despojo.

- IV. Además de la Constitución y leyes vigentes, se declara Ley Suprema de la República el principio de NO REELECCIÓN del Presidente y Vicepresidente de la República, de los Gobernadores de los Estados y de los Presidentes Municipales, mientras se hagan las reformas constitucionales respectivas.
- V. Asumo el carácter de Presidente Provisional de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos con las facultades necesarias para hacer la guerra al Gobierno usurpador del general Díaz.

Tan pronto como la capital de la República y más de la mitad de los Estados de la Federación estén en poder de las fuerzas del Pueblo, el Presidente Provisional convocará a elecciones generales extraordinarias para un mes después y entregará el poder al Presidente que resulte electo, tan luego como sea conocido el resultado de la elección.

- VI. El Presidente Provisional, antes de entregar el poder, dará cuenta al Congreso de la Unión del uso que haya hecho de las facultades que le confiere el presente Plan.
- VII. El día 20 de noviembre, desde las seis de la tarde en adelante, todos los ciudadanos de la República tomarán las armas para arrojar del poder a las autoridades que actualmente gobiernan. Los pueblos que estén retirados de las vías de comunicación lo harán desde la víspera.
- VIII. Cuando las autoridades presenten resistencia armada, se les obligará por la fuerza de las armas a respetar la voluntad popular, pero en este caso las leyes de la guerra serán rigurosamente observadas, llamándose especialmente la atención sobre las prohibiciones relativas a no usar balas explosivas ni fusilar a los prisioneros. También se llama la atención respecto al deber de todo mexicano de respetar a los extranjeros en sus personas e intereses.
- IX. Las autoridades que opongan resistencia a la realización de este Plan serán reducidas a prisión para que se les juzgue por los tribunales de la República cuando la revolución haya terminado. Tan pronto como cada ciudad o pueblo recobre su libertad, se reconocerá como autoridad legítima provisional al principal jefe de las armas, con facultad de delegar sus funciones en algún otro ciudadano caracterizado, quien será confirmado en su cargo o removido por el Gobierno Provisional.

Una de las principales medidas del Gobierno Provisional será poner en libertad a todos los presos políticos.

- X. El nombramiento de Gobernador Provisional de cada Estado que haya sido ocupado por las fuerzas de la revolución será hecho por el Presidente Provisional. Este Gobernador tendrá estricta obligación de convocar a elecciones para Gobernador Constitucional del Estado, tan pronto como sea posible, a juicio del Presidente Provisional. Se exceptúan de esta regla los Estados que de dos años a esta parte han sostenido campañas democráticas para cambiar de gobierno, pues en éstos se considerará como Gobernador provisional al que fue candidato del pueblo siempre que se adhiera activamente a este Plan.

En caso de que el Presidente Provisional no haya hecho el nombramiento de Gobernador, que este nombramiento no haya llegado a su destino o bien que

el agraciado no aceptara por cualquiera circunstancia, entonces el Gobernador será designado por votación de todos los Jefes de las armas que operen en el territorio del Estado respectivo, a reserva de que su nombramiento sea ratificado por el Presidente Provisional tan pronto como sea posible.

- XI. Las nuevas autoridades dispondrán de todos los fondos que se encuentren en todas las oficinas públicas para los gastos ordinarios de la administración; para los gastos de la guerra, contratarán empréstitos voluntarios o forzosos. Estos últimos sólo con ciudadanos o instituciones nacionales. De estos empréstitos se llevará una cuenta escrupulosa y se otorgarán recibos en debida forma a los interesados a fin de que al triunfar la revolución se les restituya lo prestado.

Transitorio.

- A. Los jefes de las fuerzas voluntarias tomarán el grado que corresponda al número de fuerzas a su mando. En caso de operar fuerzas voluntarias y militares unidas, tendrá el mando de ellas el mayor de graduación, pero en caso de que ambos jefes tengan el mismo grado, el mando será del jefe militar.

Los jefes civiles disfrutarán de dicho grado mientras dure la guerra, y una vez terminada, esos nombramientos, a solicitud de los interesados, se revisarán por la Secretaría de Guerra, que los ratificará en su grado o los rechazará, según sus méritos.

- B. Todos los jefes, tanto civiles como militares, harán guardar a sus tropas la más estricta disciplina, pues ellos serán responsables ante el Gobierno Provisional de los desmanes que cometan las fuerzas a su mando, salvo que justifiquen no haberles sido posible contener a sus soldados y haber impuesto a los culpables el castigo merecido.

Las penas más severas serán aplicadas a los soldados que saqueen alguna población o que maten a prisioneros indefensos.

- C. Si las fuerzas y autoridades que sostienen al general Díaz fusilan a los prisioneros de guerra, no por eso y como represalias se hará lo mismo con los de ellos que caigan en poder nuestro; pero en cambio serán fusilados, dentro de las veinticuatro horas y después de un juicio sumario, las autoridades civiles y militares al servicio del general Díaz que una vez estallada la revolución hayan ordenado, dispuesto en cualquier forma, transmitido la orden o fusilado a alguno de nuestros soldados.

De esa pena no se eximirán ni los más altos funcionarios, la única excepción será el general Díaz y sus ministros, a quienes en caso de ordenar dichos fusilamientos o permitirlos, se les aplicará la misma pena, pero después de haberlos juzgado por los tribunales de la República, cuando ya haya terminado la Revolución.

En caso de que el general Díaz disponga que sean respetadas las leyes de guerra, y que se trate con humanidad a los prisioneros que caigan en sus manos, tendrá la vida salva; pero de todos modos deberá responder ante los tribunales de cómo ha manejado los caudales de la Nación y de cómo ha cumplido con la ley.

- D. Como es requisito indispensable en las leyes de la guerra que las tropas beligerantes lleven algún uniforme o distintivo y como sería difícil uniformar a las numerosas fuerzas del pueblo que van a tomar parte en la contienda, se adoptará como distintivo de todas las fuerzas libertadoras, ya sean voluntarios o militares, un listón tricolor; en el tocado o en el brazo.

CONCIUDADANOS:

Si os convoco para que toméis las armas y derroquéis al Gobierno del general Díaz, no es solamente por el atentado que cometió durante las últimas elecciones, sino para salvar a la Patria del porvenir sombrío que le espera continuando bajo su dictadura y bajo el gobierno de la nefasta oligarquía científica, que sin escrúpulo y a gran prisa están absorbiendo y dilapidando los recursos nacionales, y si permitimos que continúe en el poder, en un plazo muy breve habrán completado su obra: habrá llevado al pueblo a la ignominia y lo habrá envilecido; le habrán chupado todas sus riquezas y dejado en la más absoluta miseria; habrán causado la bancarrota de nuestra Patria, que débil, empobrecida y maniatada se encontrará inerme para defender sus fronteras, su honor y sus instituciones.

Por lo que a mí respecta, tengo la conciencia tranquila y nadie podrá acusarme de promover la revolución por miras personales, pues está en la conciencia nacional que hice todo lo posible para llegar a un arreglo pacífico y estuve dispuesto hasta a renunciar mi candidatura siempre que el general Díaz hubiese permitido a la Nación designar aunque fuese al Vicepresidente de la República; pero, dominado por incomprensible orgullo y por inaudita soberbia, desoyó la voz de la Patria y prefirió precipitarla en una revolución antes de ceder un ápice, antes de devolver al pueblo un átomo de sus derechos, antes de cumplir, aunque fuese en las postrimerías de su

vida, parte de las promesas que hizo en la Noria y Tuxtepec.

Él mismo justificó la presente revolución cuando dijo: “Que ningún ciudadano se imponga y perpetúe en el ejercicio del poder y ésta será la última revolución.”

Si en el ánimo del general Díaz hubiesen pesado más los intereses de la Patria que los sórdidos intereses de él y de sus consejeros, hubiera evitado esta revolución, haciendo algunas concesiones al pueblo; pero ya que no lo hizo... ¡tanto mejor!, el cambio será más rápido y más radical, pues el pueblo mexicano, en vez de lamentarse como un cobarde, aceptará como un valiente el reto, ya que el general Díaz pretende apoyarse en la fuerza bruta para imponerle un yugo ignominioso, el pueblo recurrirá a esa misma fuerza para sacudirse ese yugo, para arrojar a ese hombre funesto del poder y para reconquistar su libertad.

Francisco I. Madero
San Luis Potosí, octubre 5 de 1910

PLAN OF AYALA

**CREATED BY
EMILIANO ZAPATA AND OTILIO MONTAÑO**

NOVEMBER 28, 1911

Liberating Plan of the sons of the State of Morelos, affiliated with the Insurgent Army which defends the fulfillment of the Plan of San Luis, with the reforms which it has believed proper to add in benefit of the Mexican Fatherland.

We who undersign, constituted in a revolutionary junta to sustain and carry out the promises which the revolution of November 20, 1910, just past, made to the country, declare solemnly before the face of the civilized world which judges us and before the nation to which we belong and which we call [sic, love], propositions which we have formulated to end the tyranny which oppresses us and redeem the fatherland from the dictatorships which are imposed on us, which [propositions] are determined in the following plan:

1. Taking into consideration that the Mexican people led by Don Francisco I. Madero went to shed their blood to reconquer liberties and recover their rights which had been trampled on, and for a man to take possession of power, violating the sacred principles which he took an oath to defend under the slogan "Effective Suffrage and No Reelection," outraging thus the faith, the cause, the justice, and the liberties of the people: taking into consideration that that man to whom we refer is Don Francisco I. Madero, the same who initiated the above-cited revolution, who imposed his will and influence as a governing norm on the Provisional Government of the ex-President of the Republic Attorney Francisco L. de Barra [sic], causing with this deed repeated sheddings of blood and multiplicate misfortunes for the fatherland in a manner deceitful and ridiculous, having no intentions other than satisfying his personal ambitions, his boundless instincts as a tyrant, and his profound disrespect for the fulfillment of the preexisting laws emanating from the immortal code of '57 [Constitution of 1857], written with the revolutionary blood of Ayutla;

Taking into account that the so-called Chief of the Liberating Revolution of Mexico, Don Francisco I. Madero, through lack of integrity and the highest weakness, did not carry to a happy end the revolution which gloriously he initiated with the help of God and the people, since he left standing most of

the governing powers and corrupted elements of oppression of the dictatorial government of Porfirio Díaz, which are not nor can in any way be the representation of National Sovereignty, and which, for being most bitter adversaries of ours and of the principles which even now we defend, are provoking the discomfort of the country and opening new wounds in the bosom of the fatherland, to give it its own blood to drink; taking also into account that the aforementioned Sr. Francisco I. Madero, present President of the Republic, tries to avoid the fulfillment of the promises which he made to the Nation in the Plan of San Luis Potosí, being [sic, restricting] the above-cited promises to the agreements of Ciudad Juárez, by means of false promises and numerous intrigues against the Nation nullifying, pursuing, jailing, or killing revolutionary elements who helped him to occupy the high post of President of the Republic;

Taking into consideration that the so-often-repeated Francisco I. Madero has tried with the brute force of bayonets to shut up and to drown in blood the pueblos who ask, solicit, or demand from him the fulfillment of the promises of the revolution, calling them bandits and rebels, condemning them to a war of extermination without conceding or granting a single one of the guarantees which reason, justice, and the law prescribe; taking equally into consideration that the President of the Republic Francisco I. Madero has made of Effective Suffrage a bloody trick on the people, already against the will of the same people imposing Attorney José M. Pino Suárez in the Vice-Presidency of the Republic, or [imposing as] Governors of the States [men] designated by him, like the so-called General Ambrosio Figueroa, scourge and tyrant of the people of Morelos, or entering into scandalous cooperation with the científico party, feudal landlords, and oppressive bosses, enemies of the revolution proclaimed by him, so as to forge new chains and follow the pattern of a new dictatorship more shameful and more terrible than that of Porfirio Díaz, for it has been clear and patent that he has outraged the sovereignty of the States, trampling on the laws without any respect for lives or interests, as has happened in the State of Morelos, and others, leading them to the most horrendous anarchy which contemporary history registers.

For these considerations we declare the aforementioned Francisco I. Madero inept at realizing the promises of the revolution of which he was the author, because he has betrayed the principles with which he tricked the will of the people and was able to get into power: incapable of governing, because he has no respect for the law and justice of the pueblos, and a traitor to the fatherland, because he is humiliating in blood and fire, Mexicans who want liberties, so as to please the científicos, landlords, and bosses who enslave us, and from

today on we begin to continue the revolution begun by him, until we achieve the overthrow of the dictatorial powers which exist.

2. Recognition is withdrawn from S. Francisco I. Madero as Chief of the Revolution and as President of the Republic, for the reasons which before were expressed, it being attempted to overthrow this official.
3. Recognized as Chief of the Liberating Revolution is the illustrious General Pascual Orozco, the second of the Leader Don Francisco I. Madero, and in case he does not accept this delicate post, recognition as Chief of the Revolution will go to General Don Emiliano Zapata.
4. The Revolutionary Junta of the State of Morelos manifests to the Nation under formal oath: that it makes its own the plan of San Luis Potosí, with the additions which are expressed below in benefit of the oppressed pueblos, and it will make itself the defender of the principles it defends until victory or death.
5. The Revolutionary Junta of the State of Morelos will admit no transactions or compromises until it achieves the overthrow of the dictatorial elements of Porfirio Díaz and Francisco I. Madero, for the nation is tired of false men and traitors who make promises like liberators and who on arriving in power forget them and constitute themselves tyrants.
6. As an additional part of the plan, we invoke, we give notice: that [regarding] the fields, timber, and water which the landlords, científicos, or bosses have usurped, the pueblos or citizens who have the titles corresponding to those properties will immediately enter into possession of that real estate of which they have been despoiled by the bad faith of our oppressors, maintain at any cost with arms in hand the mentioned possession; and the usurpers who consider themselves with a right to them [those properties] will deduce it before the special tribunals which will be established on the triumph of the revolution.
7. In virtue of the fact that the immense majority of Mexican pueblos and citizens are owners of no more than the land they walk on, suffering the horrors of poverty without being able to improve their social condition in any way or to dedicate themselves to Industry or Agriculture, because lands, timber, and water are monopolized in a few hands, for this cause there will be expropriated the third part of those monopolies from the powerful proprietors of them, with prior indemnization, in order that the pueblos and citizens of Mexico may

obtain ejidos, colonies, and foundations for pueblos, or fields for sowing or laboring, and the Mexicans' lack of prosperity and well-being may improve in all and for all.

8. [Regarding] The landlords, científicos, or bosses who oppose the present plan directly or indirectly, their goods will be nationalized and the two-third parts which [otherwise would] belong to them will go for indemnizations of war, pensions for widows and orphans of the victims who succumb in the struggle for the present plan.
9. In order to execute the procedures regarding the properties aforementioned, the laws of disamortization and nationalization will be applied as they fit, for serving us as norm and example can be those laws put in force by the immortal Juárez on ecclesiastical properties, which punished the despots and conservatives who in every time have tried to impose on us the ignominious yoke of oppression and backwardness.
10. The insurgent military chiefs of the Republic who rose up with arms in hand at the voice of Don Francisco I. Madero to defend the plan of San Luis Potosí, and who oppose with armed force the present plan, will be judged traitors to the cause which they defended and to the fatherland, since at present many of them, to humor the tyrants, for a fistful of coins, or for bribes or connivance, are shedding the blood of their brothers who claim the fulfillment of the promises which Don Francisco I. Madero made to the nation.
11. The expenses of war will be taken in conformity with Article 11 of the Plan of San Luis Potosí, and all procedures employed in the revolution we undertake will be in conformity with the same instructions which the said plan determines.
12. Once triumphant the revolution which we carry into the path of reality, a Junta of the principal revolutionary chiefs from the different States will name or designate an interim President of the Republic, who will convoke elections for the organization of the federal powers.
13. The principal revolutionary chiefs of each State will designate in Junta the Governor of the State to which they belong, and this appointed official will convoke elections for the due organization of the public powers, the object being to avoid compulsory appointments which work the misfortune of the pueb-

los, like the so-well-known appointment of Ambrosio Figueroa in the State of Morelos and others who drive us to the precipice of bloody conflicts sustained by the caprice of the dictator Madero and the circle of científicos and landlords who have influenced him.

14. If President Madero and other dictatorial elements of the present and former regime want to avoid the immense misfortunes which afflict the fatherland, and [if they] possess true sentiments of love for it, let them make immediate renunciation of the posts they occupy and with that they will with something staunch the grave wounds which they have opened in the bosom of the fatherland, since, if they do not do so, on their heads will fall the blood and the anathema of our brothers.
15. Mexicans: consider that the cunning and bad faith of one man is shedding blood in a scandalous manner, because he is incapable of governing; consider that his system of government is choking the fatherland and trampling with the brute force of bayonets on our institutions; and thus, as we raised up our weapons to elevate him to power, we again raise them up against him for defaulting on his promises to the Mexican people and for having betrayed the revolution initiated by him, we are not personalists, we are partisans of principles and not of men!

Mexican People, support this plan with arms in hand and you will make the prosperity and well-being of the fatherland.

Ayala, November 25, 1911

Liberty, Justice and Law

Signed,

General in Chief Emiliano Zapata; Generals Eufemio Zapata, Francisco Mendoza, Jesús Morales, Jesús Navarro, Otilio E. Montaña, José Trinidad Ruiz, Próculo Capistrán; Colonels...; Captains... [This] is a true copy taken from the original. Camp in the Mountains of Puebla, December 11, 1911. Signed General in Chief Emiliano Zapata.

PLAN DE AYALA

**CREADO POR
EMILIANO ZAPATA Y OTILIO MONTAÑO**

28 DE NOVIEMBRE DE 1911

http://es.wikisource.org/wiki/Plan_de_Ayala_%281911-11-28%29

Plan libertador de los hijos del Estado de Morelos, afiliados al Ejército Insurgente que defiende el cumplimiento del Plan de San Luis, con las reformas que ha creído conveniente aumentar en beneficio de la Patria Mexicana.

Los que subscribimos, constituidos en Junta Revolucionaria para sostener y llevar a cabo las promesas que hizo la Revolución de 20 de noviembre de 1910, próximo pasado, declaramos solemnemente ante la faz del mundo civilizado que nos juzga y ante la Nación a que pertenecemos y amamos, los propósitos que hemos formulado para acabar con la tiranía que nos oprime y redimir a la Patria de las dictaduras que se nos imponen las cuales quedan determinadas en el siguiente Plan:

- I. Teniendo en consideración que el pueblo mexicano, acaudillado por don Francisco I. Madero, fue a derramar su sangre para reconquistar libertades y reivindicar derechos conculcados, y no para que un hombre se adueñara del poder, violando los sagrados principios que juró defender bajo el lema de “Sufragio Efectivo y No Reelección,” ultrajando así la fe, la causa, la justicia y las libertades del pueblo; teniendo en consideración que ese hombre a que nos referimos es don Francisco I. Madero, el mismo que inició la precitada revolución, el que impuso por norma gubernativa su voluntad e influencia al Gobierno Provisional del ex Presidente de la República licenciado Francisco L. de la Barra, causando con este hecho reiterados derramamientos de sangre y multiplicadas desgracias a la Patria de una manera solapada y ridícula, no teniendo otras miras, que satisfacer sus ambiciones personales, sus desmedidos instintos de tirano y su profundo desacato al cumplimiento de las leyes preexistentes emanadas del inmortal Código de 57 escrito con la sangre de los revolucionarios de Ayutla.

Teniendo en cuenta: que el llamado Jefe de la Revolución Libertadora de México, don Francisco I. Madero, por falta de entereza y debilidad suma, no llevó a feliz término la Revolución que gloriosamente inició con el apoyo de Dios y del pueblo, puesto que dejó en pie la mayoría de los poderes gubernativos y

elementos corrompidos de opresión del Gobierno dictatorial de Porfirio Díaz, que no son, ni pueden ser en manera alguna la representación de la Soberanía Nacional, y que, por ser acérrimos adversarios nuestros y de los principios que hasta hoy defendemos, están provocando el malestar del país y abriendo nuevas heridas al seno de la Patria para darle a beber su propia sangre; teniendo también en cuenta que el supradicho señor don Francisco I. Madero, actual Presidente de la República, trata de eludirse del cumplimiento de las promesas que hizo a la Nación en el Plan de San Luis Potosí, siendo las precitadas promesas postergadas a los convenios de Ciudad Juárez; ya nulificando, persiguiendo, encarcelando o matando a los elementos revolucionarios que le ayudaron a que ocupara el alto puesto de Presidente de la República, por medio de las falsas promesas y numerosas intrigas a la Nación.

Teniendo en consideración que el tantas veces repetido Francisco I. Madero, ha tratado de ocultar con la fuerza bruta de las bayonetas y de ahogar en sangre a los pueblos que le piden, solicitan o exigen el cumplimiento de sus promesas en la Revolución, llamándoles bandidos y rebeldes, condenándolos a una guerra de exterminio, sin conceder ni otorgar ninguna de las garantías que prescriben la razón, la justicia y la ley; teniendo en consideración que el Presidente de la República Francisco I. Madero, ha hecho del Sufragio Efectivo una sangrienta burla al pueblo, ya imponiendo contra la voluntad del mismo pueblo, en la Vicepresidencia de la República, al licenciado José María Pino Suárez, o ya a los gobernadores de los Estados, designados por él, como el llamado general Ambrosio Figueroa, verdugo y tirano del pueblo de Morelos; ya entrando en contubernio escandaloso con el partido científico, hacendados-feudales y caciques opresores, enemigos de la Revolución proclamada por él, a fin de forjar nuevas cadenas y seguir el molde de una nueva dictadura más oprobiosa y más terrible que la de Porfirio Díaz; pues ha sido claro y patente que ha ultrajado la soberanía de los Estados, conculcando las leyes sin ningún respeto a vida ni intereses, como ha sucedido en el Estado de Morelos y otros conduciéndonos a la más horrorosa anarquía que registra la historia contemporánea. Por estas consideraciones declaramos al susodicho Francisco I. Madero, inepto para realizar las promesas de la revolución de que fue autor, por haber traicionado los principios con los cuales burló la voluntad del pueblo y pudo escalar el poder; incapaz para gobernar y por no tener ningún respeto a la ley y a la justicia de los pueblos, y traidor a la Patria por estar a sangre y fuego humillando a los mexicanos que desean libertades, a fin de complacer a los científicos, hacendados y caciques que nos esclavizan y desde hoy comenzamos a continuar la Revolución principiada por él, hasta conseguir el derrocamiento de los poderes dictatoriales que existen.

- II. Se desconoce como Jefe de la Revolución al señor Francisco I. Madero y como Presidente de la República por las razones que antes se expresan, procurándose el derrocamiento de este funcionario.
- III. Se reconoce como Jefe de la Revolución Libertadora al C. general Pascual Orozco, segundo del caudillo don Francisco I. Madero, y en caso de que no acepte este delicado puesto, se reconocerá como jefe de la Revolución al C. general don Emiliano Zapata.
- IV. La Junta Revolucionaria del Estado de Morelos manifiesta a la Nación, bajo formal protesta, que hace suyo el plan de San Luis Potosí, con las adiciones que a continuación se expresan en beneficio de los pueblos oprimidos, y se hará defensora de los principios que defienden hasta vencer o morir.
- V. La Junta Revolucionaria del Estado de Morelos no admitirá transacciones ni componendas hasta no conseguir el derrocamiento de los elementos dictatoriales de Porfirio Díaz y de Francisco I. Madero, pues la Nación está cansada de hombres falsos y traidores que hacen promesas como libertadores, y al llegar al poder, se olvidan de ellas y se constituyen en tiranos.
- VI. Que los terrenos, montes y aguas que hayan usurpado los hacendados, científicos o caciques a la sombra de la justicia venal, entrarán en posesión de esos bienes inmuebles desde luego, los pueblos o ciudadanos que tengan sus títulos, correspondientes a esas propiedades, de las cuales han sido despojados por mala fe de nuestros opresores, manteniendo a todo trance, con las armas en las manos, la mencionada posesión, y los usurpadores que se consideren con derechos a ellos, lo deducirán ante los tribunales especiales que se establezcan al triunfo de la Revolución.
- VII. En virtud de que la inmensa mayoría de los pueblos y ciudadanos mexicanos no son más dueños que del terreno que pisan sin poder mejorar en nada su condición social ni poder dedicarse a la industria o a la agricultura, por estar monopolizadas en unas cuantas manos, las tierras, montes y aguas; por esta causa, se expropiarán previa indemnización, de la tercera parte de esos monopolios, a los poderosos propietarios de ellos a fin de que los pueblos y ciudadanos de México obtengan ejidos, colonias, fundos legales para pueblos o campos de sembradura o de labor y se mejore en todo y para todo la falta de prosperidad y bienestar de los mexicanos.

- VIII. Los hacendados, científicos o caciques que se opongan directa o indirectamente al presente Plan, se nacionalizarán sus bienes y las dos terceras partes que a ellos correspondan, se destinarán para indemnizaciones de guerra, pensiones de viudas y huérfanos de las víctimas que sucumban en las luchas del presente Plan.
- IX. Para ejecutar los procedimientos respecto a los bienes antes mencionados, se aplicarán las leyes de desamortización y nacionalización, según convenga; pues de norma y ejemplo pueden servir las puestas en vigor por el inmortal Juárez a los bienes eclesiásticos, que escarmentaron a los déspotas y conservadores que en todo tiempo han querido imponernos el yugo ignominioso de la opresión y el retroceso.
- X. Los jefes militares insurgentes de la República que se levantaron con las armas en las manos a la voz de don Francisco I. Madero, para defender el Plan de San Luis Potosí y que se opongan con fuerza al presente Plan, se juzgarán traidores a la causa que defendieron y a la Patria, puesto que en la actualidad muchos de ellos por complacer a los tiranos, por un puñado de monedas o por cohechos o soborno, están derramando la sangre de sus hermanos que reclaman el cumplimiento de las promesas que hizo a la Nación don Francisco I. Madero.
- XI. Los gastos de guerra serán tomados conforme al artículo XI del Plan de San Luis Potosí, y todos los procedimientos empleados en la Revolución que emprendemos, serán conforme a las instrucciones mismas que determine el mencionado Plan.
- XII. Una vez triunfante la Revolución que llevamos a la vía de la realidad, una junta de los principales jefes revolucionarios de los diferentes Estados, nombrará o designará un Presidente interino de la República, que convocará a elecciones para la organización de los poderes federales.
- XIII. Los principales jefes revolucionarios de cada Estado, en junta, designarán al gobernador del Estado, y este elevado funcionario, convocará a elecciones para la debida organización de los poderes públicos, con el objeto de evitar consignas forzosas que labren la desdicha de los pueblos, como la conocida consigna de Ambrosio Figueroa en el Estado de Morelos y otros, que nos condenan al precipicio de conflictos sangrientos sostenidos por el dictador Madero y el círculo de científicos hacendados que lo han sugestionado.

XIV. Si el presidente Madero y demás elementos dictatoriales del actual y antiguo régimen, desean evitar las inmensas desgracias que afligen a la patria, y poseen verdadero sentimiento de amor hacia ella, que hagan inmediata renuncia de los puestos que ocupan y con eso, en algo restañarán las graves heridas que han abierto al seno de la Patria, pues que de no hacerlo así, sobre sus cabezas caerán la sangre y anatema de nuestros hermanos.

XV. Mexicanos: considerad que la astucia y la mala fe de un hombre está derramando sangre de una manera escandalosa, por ser incapaz para gobernar; considerad que su sistema de Gobierno está agarrotando a la patria y hollando con la fuerza bruta de las bayonetas nuestras instituciones; así como nuestras armas las levantamos para elevarlo al Poder, las volvemos contra él por faltar a sus compromisos con el pueblo mexicano y haber traicionado la Revolución iniciada por él; no somos personalistas, ¡somos partidarios de los principios y no de los hombres!

Pueblo mexicano, apoyad con las armas en las manos este Plan, y haréis la prosperidad y bienestar de la Patria.

Libertad, Justicia y Ley. Villa de Ayala, Estado de Morelos, 28 de noviembre de 1911.

General Emiliano Zapata, General Otilio E. Montaña, General José Trinidad Ruíz, General Eufemio Zapata, General Jesús Morales, General Próculo Capistrán, General Francisco Mendoza.

Coroneles: Amador Salazar, Agustín Cázares, Rafael Sánchez, Cristobal Domínguez, Fermín Omaña, Pedro Salazar, Emigdio E. Marmolejo, Pioquinto Galis, Manuel Vergara, Santiago Aguilar, Clotilde Sosa, Julio Tapia, Felipe Vaquero, Jesús Sánchez, José Ortega, Gonzalo Aldape, Alfonso Morales, Petronilo Campos. Capitanes: Manuel Hernández, Feliciano Domínguez, José Pineda, Ambrosio López, Apolinar Adorno, Porfirio Cázares, Antonio Gutiérrez, Odilón Neri, Arturo Pérez, Agustín Ortíz, Pedro Valbuena Herrero, Catarino Vergara, Margarito Camacho, Serafín Rivera, Teófilo Galindo, Felipe Torres, Simón Guevara, Avelino Cortés, José María Carrillo, Jesús Escamilla, Florentino Osorio, Camerino Menchaca, Juan Esteves, Francisco Mercado, Sotero Guzmán, Melesio Rodríguez, Gregorio García, José Villanueva, L. Franco, J. Estudillo, F. Galarza González, F. Caspeta, P. Campos. Teniente: Alberto Blumenkron.

PLAN OF GUADALUPE

**PROCLAIMED BY
VENUSTIANO CARRANZA
MARCH 26, 1913**

Manifiesto to the Nation:

Considering that General Victoriano Huerta, to whom the constitutional President Don Francisco I. Madero had trusted the defense of the institutions and legality of his Government, when siding with the enemies who rebelled against that same Government, to restore the latest dictatorship, committed the crime of treason to scale in power, arresting the President and Vice-president, as well as their Ministers, demanding of them by violent means to renounce their posts, which is verified by the messages that the same General Huerta sent to the Governors of the States communicating to them that he had taken prisoner the Supreme Magistrates of the Nation and their Cabinet. Considering that the Legislative and Judicial Powers in spite of the laws and constitutional rules have recognized and protected General Victoriano Huerta and his illegal and unpatriotic procedures, and considering, of having violated the sovereignty of those States, whose Governors should have been the first to not recognize him, the following subscribers, Chiefs and Officers commanding the constitutional forces, have agreed and will sustain with arms the following:

PLAN

1. General Victoriano Huerta is not recognized as President of the Republic.
2. The Legislative and Judicial Powers of the Federation are also not recognized.
3. The Governments of the States that still recognize the Federal Powers that form the present Administration, are also not recognized thirty days after the publication of this Plan.
4. For the organization of the army entrusted with fulfilling our intentions, we name as First Chief of the Army that will be denominated Constitutional-ist, the citizen Venustiano Carranza, Governor of the State of Coahuila.

5. When the Constitutionalist Army occupies Mexico City, the citizen Venustiano Carranza, First Chief of the Army, will be in interim charge of the Executive Power, or whoever would have substituted him in command.
6. The interim president of the republic will call for general elections as soon as the peace has been consolidated, handing over power to the citizen who is elected.
7. The citizen acting as First Chief of the Constitutionalist Army in the states whose governments have recognized that of Huerta, will assume command as provisional governor and will call for local elections, after having taken possession of their posts the citizens having been elected to carry out the powers of the federation, as called for by the previous rule.

PLAN DE GUADALUPE

**CREADO POR
VENUSTIANO CARRANZA
26 DE MARZO DE 1913**

MANIFIESTO A LA NACIÓN

Considerando que los Poderes Legislativo y Judicial han reconocido y amparado en contra de las leyes y preceptos constitucionales al general Victoriano Huerta y sus ilegales y antipatrióticos procedimientos, y considerando, por último, que algunos Gobiernos de los Estados de la Unión han reconocido al Gobierno ilegítimo impuesto por la parte del Ejército que consumó la traición, mandado por el mismo general Huerta, a pesar de haber violado la soberanía de esos Estados, cuyos Gobernadores debieron ser los primeros en desconocerlo, los suscritos, Jefes y Oficiales con mando de las fuerzas constitucionales, hemos acordado y sostendremos con las armas el siguiente:

PLAN

- I. Se desconoce al general Victoriano Huerta como Presidente de la República.
- II. Se desconoce también a los Poderes Legislativo y Judicial de la Federación.
- III. Se desconoce a los Gobiernos de los Estados que aún reconozcan a los Poderes Federales que forman la actual Administración, treinta días después de la publicación de este Plan.
- IV. Para la organización del ejército encargado de hacer cumplir nuestros propósitos, nombramos como Primer Jefe del Ejército que se denominará “Constitucionalista”, al ciudadano Venustiano Carranza, Gobernador del Estado de Coahuila.
- V. Al ocupar el Ejército Constitucionalista la Ciudad de México, se encargará interinamente del Poder Ejecutivo al ciudadano Venustiano Carranza, Primer Jefe del Ejército, o quien lo hubiere sustituido en el mando.
- VI. El Presidente Interino de la República convocará a elecciones generales tan luego como se haya consolidado la paz, entregando el Poder al ciudadano que

hubiere sido electo.

VII. El ciudadano que funja como Primer Jefe del Ejército Constitucionalista en los Estados cuyos Gobiernos hubieren reconocido al de Huerta, asumirá el cargo de Gobernador Provisional y convocará a elecciones locales, después de que hayan tomado posesión de su cargo los ciudadanos que hubieren sido electos para desempeñar los altos Poderes de la Federación, como lo previene la base anterior, al ciudadano que hubiese sido electo.

Hacienda de Guadalupe, Coahuila.