

# *THE RECORD*

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The sun rises in the east, and time, contemplating paradise, takes possession of life.

Peeking out of the window into space, Man felt frightened. Observing him, the gods saw that he was vulnerable and they thought: “Man is the substance of our hearts.”

## **One**

MAN PUT GUARDS on the walls that he had built around cities and now called them nations. He placed flags atop the highest mountains, and would kill and die for these flags.

And Authority tore down the walls and abolished the flags.

He saw how men spoke in different languages that divided them.

And so Authority taught one single language to all the people of the Earth.

And he saw that religions made men confront one another and said, "Leave the matters of the soul to the soul, and let governments handle the social and material haughtiness among the citizens of the world."

And he realized that all men were not created equal.

And Authority abolished all inheritance of properties and titles, so that each individual would enjoy only self-earned achievements.

And he saw that in living so quickly and selfishly Man did not have time to notice how he was destroying nature, and, as such, his descendants would not survive.

And Authority prohibited all those things that killed the trees, the rivers and the sea, for without them, life on the planet would disappear.

A child's textbook on the Revolution had been carelessly forgotten on the bus seat now occupied by Julia on her way to the Stadium. She flipped its pages distractedly and then pushed it aside.

Pulled back and cascading lightly down her back, her long, black hair enhanced her beautiful Mediterranean looks, while her big, expressive, dark eyes were framed by her bronze cheeks.

As she glanced out of the window, she saw how they continued to move along quietly and swiftly down the road, which was adorned by the shadows cast by the tall and ancient Siberian Elms.

Happy to exchange a school day for a field trip, some children were playing and laughing in the back of the crowded bus. They were all from different schools in Shandu, the city next to the Stadium. Going to the site where an attempt would be made to break the world record for the hundred meters was their reward for doing well in school.

After making sure that all was well with the children, Julia moved to the front of the bus and sat near the driver. She thought about how incredibly fortunate she was to be here in Shandu, and so close to the historical moment of the Race. Her good fortune was a result of the important position held by her father as Chief Engineer of the Information and Communications Systems that were to control and broadcast the much-awaited event. In recent months, his professional duties had brought him to Shandu where he set up his base of operations.

Since childhood, her father had taken her halfway across the world in fulfillment of his responsibilities as an IT Consultant for Authority, a position he had held for many years.

Now, at the age of twenty-two, as she began the mandatory citizen's five-year civil service, fate had brought her to this beautiful Mediterranean city that would go down in history, due to the events that would be taking place in the coming weeks.

Undoubtedly, she would be one of the few lucky people that might be near the Stadium at the time of the final act, but it was very unlikely that she would get to meet the athletes. All she knew about them was the same thing everyone else knew: their names were Aristos First and Aristos Fifth. They had trained since birth, and just like the previous twelve generations before them, they lived in the enigmatic Residence, which had been built for the training and preparation of their ancestors, as well as their own. Julia had seen photographs of the building a thousand times since it was rare for a tourist to come to Shandu and not take photos of the famous façade as a backdrop; she had not been an exception. But no one, not even her father who was so close to Authority, had met the brothers Aristos. Apparently, they lived with their tutors and trainers, and no one knew if they even occasionally left the Residence. The secrecy that surrounded the lives of the brothers fired-up everyone's imagination.

Again she looked at the trees passing by her window at a very high speed and, in the background, the shining sea. She loved the scenery.

Her thoughts changed course:

In reality, she thought, the biggest drawback of such frequent traveling is that I've never had the opportunity to really know the various people who have passed through my life. No sooner than I begin settling my roots in a place, I have to go to another. Undoubtedly, this situation allowed her to encounter the most unusual customs and traditions, so that, at twenty-two, she had learned more about the world than most people learn throughout their lives. Well, I think it's been worth it. She told herself, finding comfort in this thought.

In Shandu, she had managed to adapt quite well. Her best friend Tessa was fun and friendly, as were Tessa's group of friends with whom she shared her time of leisure. Not a bad place to live and settle down, she thought, once I finish serving my civil duties, I could settle down here permanently, and, if I can someday finish school, I can practice medicine here. She reflected with a hint of pessimism.

She combined work with medical school, where she attended classes in the

afternoon. Within two years she would be ready to begin her internship at some local hospital. These prospects were very appealing to her.

The approaching sight of the Stadium's dome broke her train of thoughts.

However many times she had seen it, the magnitude of the building always took her breath away. An enormous and seemingly cold hemisphere of translucent material, with shiny metal radial ribs, it must have been about one hundred and fifty meters in diameter and fifty in height at its central point.

Two straight, white marble columns adorn the main entrance after which transparent doors gave entry to the complex. An inscription above the doors read: IN THE MEASURE ONE DESIRES, ONE ACHIEVES. The bus came to a stop at a large esplanade directly in front of the entrance, which was so barren and stripped of any ornamentation that upon arriving, visitors perceived a sense of loneliness.

The place came alive for a few moments as the children exited the bus under the watchful eye of the driver and Julia. When the Stadium doors opened, the excited children grouped around their young tutor as she pointed out the inscription on the entrance, explained its meaning, and led them inside. Interestingly, the Stadium dimensions impressed the children to the extent that they refrained from their laughter and commotion as if they had just entered a place of worship.

A homogeneous and natural light bathed the interior space and penetrated through the entire hemispherical surface, diminishing the rays of sunlight and thus eliminating any glare. In the center, splitting the interior surface in two, a racetrack with a single lane, discreetly surrounded by several TV cameras that seemed ready to spring into action at a moments notice.

Two giant screens, now dormant, were each placed about ten meters above ground level at the start and at the end of the track.

Close to the screen where the track ended, as if offering a warm welcome, a giant statue of a middle-aged man in ancient garb stood with arms slightly open. The inscription at the bottom read: "Doctor Jacson".

Several designated areas occupied the circular bottom: dressing rooms, massage parlor, and so on; yet there were no bleachers to indicate accommodation for spectators.

"As you know," Julia explained, "the Stadium was built ... When? Who can tell me?" her infectious smile invited the children to answer.

At first, they hesitated, but eventually, one of the more daring ones, decided to respond:

“Three hundred and eighteen years ago, Miss.”

“Very good! And who designed it?”

“Dr. Jacson.” Several voices responded in unison.

“Well, now, I want all of you to answer. This one is a little more difficult. Ready? What is Professor Jacson’s theory?”

This time the children were ready to show off their knowledge, especially to a question with such an obvious answer. A strong chorus of children's voices was heard as almost all of them answered simultaneously.

“I can’t understand a thing!” Julia said still smiling. “Let's see, you answer me.” She pointed at the same freckled-faced boy who had begun to speak before.

After a moment's hesitation, he found his nerve and recited the thesis they had all learned and repeated a thousand times in school:

“The genetic imprint fixed in consecutive generations via a high degree of interbreeding, perfects the superspecialization of the individual and, through him, the community, which in turn may evolve without limits.”

“Perfect!” Julia approved.

“Miss, we knew the answer too!” Protested the other children who had not had a chance to show their skills.

“I know, and I’ll ask other questions later. Now, make sure you stay close to me and without touching anything, follow me to see the rest of the complex.”

Having already recovered from the almost reverential shock that the Stadium produced on visitors, the children began walking noisily behind their guide. They saw the special pedals that served to help impulse the athletes at the start of the race. Julia pointed out that some very complicated instruments controlled the temperature and humidity and maintained them constant. She explained that the conditions were identical to those in the Residence where the athletes were being trained.

In one of the side rooms, they saw a large photograph of Larsa, the athlete who, one thousand, four hundred and forty-three years earlier had set the record of 7.984 seconds for the hundred-meter dash.

After a couple of hours during which they witnessed what they already knew through the many published photographs, they re-boarded the bus with the same inexhaustible clamor with which they had arrived.

The sun was at its highest point as they drove away on the road that had brought them to the Stadium.

## Two

“Hello there! How are you doing?”

The tall, thin man with the relaxed voice appeared to be in his sixties, with the first signs of graying at his temples. He sat behind the desk he had occupied for the past seven years, when Authority had appointed him as Prime Secretary. His career in political honors had been meteoric. At the age of twenty-five, after a contested vote, he became the mayor of his hometown in northern Europe. Upon reaching the legal age, he managed to enter the Senate representing his region. His work in this capacity, always honest and efficient, caught the eye of Authority, who chose him for the position he now holds and that made him the chief executive. His name was Dalmas.

Before him stood the gentleman he had just greeted: Sheffair, the engineer that was Authority’s adviser in Informatics and Communications. He was of a similar age to the Prime Secretary, but he was slightly thicker, and had not yet lost the good looks that he certainly must have had in his youth. He had specialized in computer engineering at the School of Cassar under the tutelage of the prestigious Professor Butler, recently deceased. As Presidential Advisor, he had been commissioned to design the computer complex of which he was now in charge, and which was essential for the realization of the great test and the transmission that would broadcast the images of the Race to every corner of the Earth.

They were in the spacious office of the Prime Secretary, located in the government building of Urbitad, the capital of the World State. The office was well lit by the light coming in through a large set of side windows from which the Presidential House could be seen; the same place that had been occupied for centuries by successive Authorities. The furniture was functional and elegant, but without ostentatious pretensions.

“How are you doing?” the Prime Secretary asked again.

“Almost everything is done,” Sheffair, replied, “I finished the inspections of the broadcasting stations and everything is ready.”

“You must be tired.” Said Dalmas.

“Not really. We are still quite young, you know!” The engineer joked,

knowing how the Prime Secretary secretly liked to tease him about his age. “But I do want to go back to Shandu to see Julia.”

“Ah, yes, your daughter!” Dalmas smiled remembering her. “The last time I saw her she was a child. By now she must have bloomed into a beautiful woman. How old is she?”

“She’s twenty-two, and yes, she is a beauty. Each day she looks more and more like her mother.”

“You still miss her, don’t you?”

“Yes, very much,” said the engineer as he stood up and approached the windows. “Anyway ... staying active helps me make her absence more bearable.” Dalmas stood and joined Sheffair by the window.

“Do you think Julia will settle down in Shandu?” Dalmas asked, attempting to change the subject that caused the engineer so much sadness. “It is a beautiful city to live in.”

“I don’t know. She hasn’t decided yet and she needs to start giving it some serious thought. She has already moved too many times because of my work; it’s time she settles into a steady place.” He was silent for a moment and then continued reflectively “I can’t help thinking that perhaps I have been too selfish with her. I’ve continuously taken her from one place to another, especially since her mother passed away... I could not bear to live without the warmth of her company.”

“You can’t blame yourself! Think about what a great experience it must have been for her to have the opportunity to meet so many people and so many cities. What is she doing now?”

“She works as a guide for the Stadium in Shandu.”

“Is she happy?”

“I think so, but she aspires other things...” They were interrupted by a discreet knock on the office door, followed by the appearance of a middle-aged woman.

“Sir, your meeting with Senator Zenón is in five minutes. He’s already in the boardroom.”

“Thank you, Flavia.” Dalmas said to his secretary. “I’ll be there shortly.”

The engineer noticed how Dalmas's face had darkened slightly at the mention of the senator’s name. When the secretary left, he asked:

“What’s wrong?”

“I fear this man is going to cause problems ... But don’t worry, you already have enough problems of your own.” He smiled and paused briefly, “When do you return to Shandu, my friend?”

“Tomorrow, I have to finalize the arrangements in the Stadium.”

"Okay. Give me a call before you leave in case Authority needs anything from you."

Later, when they parted, he said:

“Say hello to your daughter for me and have a good trip.”

"I will. Thank you."

## Three

The classroom was bursting with about a hundred young people, mostly students. They were listening intently to the forty-something year old man on the podium, as he delivered a fiery speech.

“Senator Zenón’s reasons are solid: after fifteen centuries of peace, it is necessary for the Constitution to evolve and with it society. The proposed amendments to Article 8 will allow a gradual decentralization of the State Administration. It will also allow each region to develop its own personality and its own distinguishing characteristics. We cannot continue to use ancient warfare as a pretext to continue managing everything from Urbitad! You, our youth, are the ones called upon to lead this movement.” He continued, “Senator Zenón will defend the movement in the plenary session of the Senate. He will guide us. But those of you in this room, and many more like you, will have to defend it in the streets.”

There was a strong round of applause from most of the audience, but the speaker detained them with a gesture.

“Listen to me carefully!” He continued. “Very soon, there will be many demonstrations in hundreds of cities, and the attendees will hold up what will be our hallmark: a flag of the size and color of each individual’s preference. As you well know, they are prohibited, but no matter. It will be the means of establishing our differential note against conservatives who intent to obliterate any type of change. Behind those flags we will fight together as one.”

This time the applause was deafening. Among the young attendees, Tessa was, perhaps, one of the most enthusiastic. Not being very tall, she was forced



to stand on tiptoe to see the speaker. Her short, red hair, and oval, freckled face gave her a mischievous air.

“Antonio, lift me up a little.” She said to the friend that had accompanied her to the meeting.

“But it’s over!” He replied laughing. “Come on, let’s get out of here!” He took her hand and tried to make his way out between the people who, swirling around the speaker, were asking him a thousand questions. When they finally got out, Antonio asked:

“Do you want to grab a drink?”

“I’d love to, but I have to get up early tomorrow, besides, I’m exhausted.”

“Okay. And how about this weekend, want to go somewhere?”

“What do you have in mind?”

“Well, I figure we can go out to dinner on Friday, then we can take the night train to the mountains and spend a couple of days hiking and fishing. What do you think?”

“I would really love to – even though I have no idea how to fish – but the problem is my parents. I don’t think...”

“Just tell them you’re going to a friend’s house.” “

Of course!” Her face lit up, pleased with the idea. “I’ll tell them I’m with Julia! I’ll have to let her know our plans in case my parents call her.”

“What? Don’t your parents trust you?”

“Well, let’s just say they have caught me off-guard a few times...” Moments later they parted, still laughing.

## Four

“The start has to be explosive!” The coach repeated over and over. “That’s the key! The milliseconds lost in that instant are lost forever, so focus to the max. Understood?”

After a pause, and a hard look at the athlete, he ordered:

“Let’s start over!”

And once again, Aristos Fifth went to the starting line. Bending down, he

rested his feet on the blocks and his hands on the starting line. He catapulted forward like a bullet as he received a micro discharge of electrical energy through the pedals. Simultaneously, the electronic chronometer turned on. The fast moving digits along with the enlarged image of the young runner could be seen on a screen at the end of the track. The start time was not good.

“Listen to me, Fifth!” Reproached the head coach while the others watched silently and motionless. “You have to leap in the same instant the signal comes through the block to your feet! It’s the only way to get into immediate acceleration. Your timing is not good. You lack concentration. Start again and this time keep your damn mind only on running!”

The tall, long-legged young man with the dark eyes and skin obediently returned to the starting point.

Meanwhile, as his brother Aristos First was getting a massage from the physiotherapist, the assistant coaches looked at the athlete in action on the screen. First, lying on his back on the table, enjoyed the massage that ended his training day and commented the incidents of the moment with the masseur:

“He’s tired,” he whispered softly, gesturing towards his brother. “Coach should let him relax a bit.”

“He knows what he’s doing. Your brother needs to make the same time as you. Coach is in charge, so stay out of it.”

“It’s not going to happen today,” he insisted, “he’s very stiff.”

“Well, that’s why they are still working with him.”

In silence, they both continued watching the screen that was now indicating the time between the start signal and the moment that Fifth actually started. This system also allowed the coaches to check the degree of acceleration of the athletes, from the moment they got in motion until they reached maximum speed. Each athlete ran alone, just as the chosen one would do in the Stadium to try and beat the world record.

The naked Aristos First, while still receiving his relaxing massage, closed his eyes and let his thoughts drift toward issues that had long worried him. Isolated from his surroundings, while the expert hands of the masseuse went from one muscle to another in his body, his mind conjured the images of his four brothers who had been rejected for running.

They were all the result of a complicated selection program. Over twelve generations of geneticists experimenting with interbreeding in order to "fabricate" a man capable of breaking the world record that had been established more than 1,400 years ago. Dr. Jacson had designed the program.

According to his genetic laws, through overspecialization of some individuals, regardless of the field, humanity could continue to make progress almost indefinitely. It was the only way to escape that natural law which dictates that inexorably, all things that are born must die.

So far, all of Jacson's theories had proved to be true in all their premises. And they, the Aristos, were living proof. Indeed, the athletic performance of each generation was superior to the previous one, generation after generation. Now, the two of them, being the most recent results, represented perfection in this specialty: their legs were longer, more flexible and more agile than the legs of their predecessors. Aristos First had started walking ninety-eight days after birth, eight days before his brother Fifth, and twenty before anyone of the previous generation. Electrocardiograms showed that his physical ability to withstand sudden acceleration was perfect, and his breathing rate was appropriate to meet the goals they anticipated.

He knew that every generation had produced various individuals, men and women who, for one reason or another, had been rejected, in most cases at the very moment of their birth. That's what had happened to his other siblings. However, those who met the requirements of the geneticists were prepared like he and his brother were being prepared and as soon as they reached adulthood, their semen would be deposited in the females to start the next generation.

According to Jacson's laws, as generations of interbreeding advanced, the percentages of success would increase. First and Fifth were the twelfth, and would be the last, because the following would yield a useless product in excess of 92%. "Interbreeding enhances both virtues and defects", geneticists maintain, "and once you reach this point, you cannot continue working. You have to start again from the very beginning."

They were the only ones that met the requirements of the experts. Of the six members of their generation, four had been rejected. Three had been rejected at the very moment of their birth, but Aristos Second, whom he vividly remembered, was an exceptional case. He grew up with them and, at puberty, he began developing deformities. His legs started curving like a bow and his feet began to shrink. With horror, First remembered how, one day they were playmates and the next his brother was being taken away to a hospital from which he would never return.

Today, no one disputed Professor Jacson's theories. However, there was a time when he was forced to defend his thesis against the moral customs of the era, which considered interbreeding to be a crime against nature, even at an experimental level. But his thesis won, thanks to the support he received from the Authority of the time, who saw how, for centuries, man had lost hope of

being able to continue to evolve. The mere thought depressed him and sank him into such a state of apathy that he forced a decrease in birth rates and these became dangerously low.

If Jacson's theories proved to be correct, the system would be applied to all possible fields of human activity. This would result in men that would represent, both physically and intellectually, the banner of progress for everyone else. The best thinkers, engineers, mathematicians, physicians, etc., would breed with the brightest women of the same specialty and their children, would breed with their siblings. This would carry on until the twelfth generation, which would put forth the most perfect human being in each field. Then it would have to start all over again. However, these super specialists would have contributed their knowledge and skills to the rest of humanity.

As the date of the Race approached, his anxiety increased. He thought of the millions of people - people he didn't even know - that would be waiting for him and his brother to fulfill Jacson's "prophecy". At times, especially in moments of solitude, he trembled at the thought that when the time came, either his brother or he would not be able to break the record.

He preferred not to imagine the consequences, but, undoubtedly, they would be fatal to all the citizens of the world. The hopes that had taken so many years to build could tumble down in a matter of seconds. He had only shared these fears with his brother Fifth.

The psychologist that prepared them on how to use the mental void technique, claimed that during the Race, it would clear their head of any other thought that was not running. At that crucial moment, they would be guided by an instinct that had been genetically fixed for centuries.

His train of thought was abruptly interrupted as his brother's training session ended.

"Let's go shower." Fifth said as he reached his brother. "Today we won't even have time to eat. Our Tutor is waiting for us."

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The evening was peaceful as both young men and the old man strolled through the shaded walkways of the Residence. Walking between the two athletes, the old man seemed even smaller than he actually was. Just like all the other boys their age, they got lessons in history, art, geography, and other subjects, from their Tutor. But above all, the Tutor tried to teach them how to think. On multiple occasions he had told them that the job of a good teacher is to teach the reason why things are the way they are, in order to make them understand the world better and thus give them more freedom. "The

‘how’,” he said, “is what you learn with specializations in higher education. This will teach you how to build a bridge, but not what motivates men to cross it.”

The First Authority and Father of the Revolution had taught that a revolution was only possible if it first took place in the minds of men. The simple change of state or government systems is not a revolution; it is only a relay in power.

According to history, it was changing minds that made the transformation of the economic system possible: small workshops, farmers and artisans replaced the major financial and business groups. With the disappearance of the great corporations, it also substituted contaminating energy products with other more natural and safe ones, such as energy derived from hydrogen, solar and wind. The education systems also underwent profound transformations over the centuries of evolution. The model chosen focused on logic rather than memory and the humanities rather than specialties.

The Aristos were a very special case within this Universalist civilization that had resulted from the Revolution. On that particular evening, as in so many others, the young brothers were engaged in a heated discussion.

“The destruction of Rome,” said First, “was not the work of barbarians. They simply buried a corpse that had been decomposing for a very long time.”

“Why?” retorted Fifth. “That does not make much sense. The world had gone through the longest period of peace that humanity had enjoyed in many centuries.”

“Because that same peace, and the prosperity that came with it, were corrupting and accommodating - first the ruling classes, and then the people.”

“So, according to your theory, peace is just as deadly as war.”

“Not exactly,” said First passionately. “But when you look at our history, it appears that men tend to self-destruct.”

Up until then, the Tutor had remained silent listening to the young men. Now he interrupted suddenly:

“Always remember that big and pompous words like truth, beauty, goodness, happiness and peace are all in the perspective of the beholder.

“Peace, for example, is not a subjective concept!” Fifth protested.

“It’s not?” Replied the old man. “Define it.”

“Well, I would say,” he hesitated for an instant and glanced over at his

brother before answering, "it is the absence of war."

"And how would you define happiness?"

"Well, as having no problems..."

"Do you agree, First?"

"I think it's the consistency between behavior and beliefs."

The old man looked at the two for a moment, smiled and concluded:

"Both definitions could be correct, so we have two truths."

So which one is the valid one?" Fifth asked.

"Either one of them and many others. The best answer is the one you find within yourself. Outside of yourself, you will only find questions that are impossible to answer."

"Perhaps," First said without much conviction, "truth is what the majority say it is."

"Do not believe it, son. The truth is more easily found in the individual than in the masses." He paused thoughtfully. "Man is an island of which the sum only forms a herd of sheep that moves to the beat of primary emotions and, due to its gregarious nature, is easily manipulated by its pastor."

"Are we to conclude from this that emotions are also a negative element?"

"Not if they respond to individual and deep feelings that words alone cannot express and perhaps only silence is capable of conveying them."

They continued talking until the sun went down.

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As was their custom, that night after dinner they got together in Fifth's comfortable bedroom. They would listen to some music, chat and hang out, perhaps play a board game, but they never stayed up too late because they got up very early. First was sitting on the floor with his back against the wall and Fifth was lying on his bed.

"I was horrible today!" He said with resignation.

"Nah! Don't worry about it. It was just one of those days." First tried to downplay the situation.

"You know, you should be the chosen one..."

"Why?" First interrupted his brother rejecting the idea with a gesture.

“Simply because you are faster than me. And although they never tell us our actual times, you must be close to the record.”

“That's nonsense. They just give us the times of departure and acceleration.”

“That's enough.”

“Not if we want to see if we are on the right track to beat the record!”

“You know, we're not.” Said Fifth. “We don't need to be told. Our departure and acceleration times have not yet reached Larsa's, although I am convinced that, on the day of the Race, we will both reach that record.”

“I hope you're right!” answered First.

Both men were silent for a moment. Then Fifth went on:

“We have very little time, and the logical thing would be for you to be chosen. I really have no idea what I could do with my life after this,” there was sadness in his voice, “Ever since we were born, we have been doing the same thing over and over: prepare for a race that will last a few seconds. Whichever one of us runs – and logically breaks the record – will spend the rest of his life surrounded by the utmost popularity and prestige. The other one will have nothing! Just as they planted the quality to run in our genes, they should have removed the ability to think; at least the ability to doubt.”

As long as that crucial moment of the decision was still far off, they had been able to keep their minds occupied with the day-to-day affairs. But, for the past few months, as the key date approached, they touched the subject openly with each other. The Tutors, who were perfectly aware of the young men's concerns, tried to prevent these preoccupations from affecting the brothers throughout the intensive preparation to which they were subjected in the weeks before the Race. In an effort to avoid last minute problems, they were still hesitant to confirm which one of them would be chosen for the Race. They wanted to maintain the tension in the Aristos, but they were conscious of the risks this involved and so the sessions with the psychologist were intensified to the same degree as the physical overhaul. This situation would last until shortly before the televised world presentation, at which time the name of the chosen one would be revealed.

“Look, Fifth,” First said, trying to reassure his brother, “the one that's not selected will just live a normal life, just like any other person. There's nothing to be afraid of!”

“We both know that it will not be easy to adapt to a vulgar and ordinary life. And surely I'll be the one stuck in that role, simply because you're better.

I won't lie to myself about it but believe me, I'll be happy for you. The problem is mine and I will have to learn how to handle it."

"Nothing has been decided yet!" protested First.

"It doesn't matter, that's the way it's going to be." There was another moment of silence. The conversation was making First feel uncomfortable.

"You and I look so much alike," Fifth continued, "that even if the rejected one is not shown by the media, everyone will guess who it is... he'll get nothing but pity and will always be seen as the loser."

"Dear God!" First interrupted again. "Why are you so pessimistic today?"

"Maybe it's because, while the coach made me repeat the race over and over, I realized I could not continue deceiving myself. I'll never be the chosen one!"

"There are still a few weeks left and a lot of things can happen in that amount of time. Forget about it! Besides, if I were the selected one, I would do it because I have no choice! I don't know if I could handle the pressure. This is a one-shot deal and the whole Earth will be watching the Race. It can be maddening..."

"That doesn't scare me."

"I know. That's why I'm telling you to let the time go by and devote yourself to prepare thoroughly. You want this Race more than I do and believe me; it is very possible that it turns out that way." Fifth looked at his brother and tried to guess what he meant by his words and asked:

"You're not thinking of doing something stupid, are you?"

"Who, me?" First laughed. "Not at all! It's just that I feel – in fact I'm sure – that there is much more to life, and whichever one of us is discarded from the Race will have the opportunity to explore these things just like any other normal citizen. I am not cut out to be a public figure." He said as he laughed. "And much less some sort of prophet. Okay, that's enough! Either we play some game or I am going to bed. Today you are unbearable!"

## Five

It was already dark when Julia got home. She crossed the small front garden and entered the house. Sitting in a comfortable armchair in the living



room, her father read the newspaper by the light of a foot lamp. Upon hearing the door open, he looked up and saw his daughter. A loving smile instantly appeared on his lips. Julia approached him and greeted him with a sweet hug and kiss.

“Hi, Dad!”

“How are you, beautiful? How have you been these past weeks?”

“Bah! As usual.” she said while putting her books down on the table and flopping on the couch opposite her father. She took off her shoes, pushed them aside and curled her legs up under her.

“And you? How was your trip?”

“It was good. I traveled more than fifty thousand kilometers in the last few weeks.” He smiled. “I guess I can still handle it!”

“Have you finished your work?”

“For now, yes. Besides, I can’t go too long without your awesome cooking!” Sheffair said jokingly, knowing how little his daughter liked cooking. “I think I’ll stay a few days just to enjoy your meals.”

“You are crazy!”

“Yep, I missed your cooking ... By the way!” said her father suddenly remembering something. “Before I forget, Tessa called. She said she needs for you to get in touch with her urgently.” With a dismissive gesture, the girl reached out to grab the phone on the table next to her, and dialed her friend’s number.

“Is that you, Julia?” Said Tessa's unmistakable voice on the other side of the line.

“Yes. My father told me you called.”

“Right. You see...” she sounded more excited than usual. “I need you to do me a big favor!”

“Of course! What is it?”

“Today I was informed that next Sunday we will have some special visitors at the Stadium, and I have been ordered to take charge of this matter.”

Absentmindedly, Julia ran a hand through her wavy black hair and threw it back over her right shoulder.

“On Sunday?” Julia asked bewildered. “But there are never visitors on Sunday...”

“Well, there will be this next one.”

“Tessa, this is not one of yours pranks, is it?” Julia interrupted, making faces as if the friend could see her.

“I wish! Listen, I got a call from the Director telling me that several gentlemen will be visiting the Stadium on Sunday. He said that even he doesn’t know who they are, and that the order came from ‘higher up’. I have no choice but to go!” Tessa stressed. “

My goodness, what a mystery!” Julia said to her friend, intrigued.

“Well, you’ll have the opportunity to uncover it,” Tessa said with confidence, “because I’m counting on you to take my place. You’ll cover me, won’t you?”

“Sure, but why? What’s going on?”

“I have a great plan for that day...dinner and travel included!”

“Do I know who this ‘plan’ is?” Julia asked smiling. “

No, but I promise to introduce you to him if you cover for me. Are we on, girlfriend?”

“Okay, but you don’t need to butter me up. Tell me exactly what it is that I need to do.”

“Thanks you, thank you, thank you!” The voice on the other end of the phone exploded with joy. “I owe you big time!”

Julia could not help but smile at the exaggerated tone of her friend. Tessa continued:

“Look, all you have to do is drive to the Stadium and open the doors at ten o'clock. When the jerks arrive, just smile and tell them you're in a hurry and as soon as they leave, you leave too. So, we have a deal?”

“Yeah! Just go and don’t worry about a thing; have fun for us both!”

“Wait, don’t hang up yet. I told my parents that I'm staying with you. So you know...”

“I get it, you big liar!” Julia laughed. “Relax. I got everything under control!”

After cutting off Tessa’s endless expressions of gratitude, Julia hung up.

Having unwillingly listened to Julia's part of the conversation, her father asked:

“You have visitors at the Stadium on Sunday? I thought it was prohibited.”

“Apparently, some people are above the laws and prohibitions don’t affect them. I was going to ask you if you knew anything about it, but I guess you don’t.”

“No, this is the first I hear of it. Very strange...” he whispered, and after a moment's reflection, shook his head slightly as if to ward off a particular thought. “Well, it’s a shame,” he continued, “that you’ll have to work on your day off.”

As customary, after dinner, they sat on the porch that was dimly lit by the light coming through the living room window. They both missed these intimate moments when their professional obligations separated them. As if announcing the arrival of spring, the sweet smell of orange blossoms reached them. Quietly sitting on the large swing, they contemplated the hundreds of lights that made up Shandu. It was a typical post-revolutionary city.

The Revolution had taken place more than fifteen hundred years ago and over the centuries that followed, the ideas that motivated it began taking shape. The World State took advantage of the immense economic resources that became available with the disappearance of hundreds of governments, along with their inefficient and bureaucratic war machines, and, among other things, created a new kind of city that gradually eliminated the old concept of a mammoth city. New cities should not have more than three hundred fifty thousand inhabitants. The idea was that people could work in their shops or their farms and live in them, without sacrificing space. It was a matter of the city adapting to man, and not vice versa, as had happened in remote historical times.

As time went by, the great old cities were eventually abandoned and had now become ruins that tourists visit. The State has since been building new cities and providing homes for citizens, as is its constitutional duty. Citizens can enjoy them until their death in exchange for a modest sum of money that is used to fund its maintenance.

All citizens can apply for housing in any city on Earth, but obviously, not everyone can get their preferences; an issue that causes the administration a few headaches. Traditionally, when a citizen reaches adulthood, he will put in a request for the place where he expects to carry out his professional activity. However, some people choose to continue living and working in the family shop or on the family farm. Naturally, when their parents die, they have preference to use the facilities, including the house. Nevertheless, it is quite common for people to change housing and even change city more than once throughout their lives. When any property is vacated, it is returned to the State,

which puts it into circulation to meet new requests.

Architectural models depend on the region of the world where the city stands, but they all share a common feature: they are all large and low, where, as an old saying from the time of the Revolution says: “The sky and horizon can always be seen, unless they are obstructed by the trees in their parks.”

For the past few months, the Sheffairs had been occupying a house located on a small hill that allowed them to see the artisans’ neighborhood in the east, as well as the area of workshops and small factories that was near it. The gardeners’ houses and lands were to the west and not far from them, small farms could be seen. Large radial roads interconnected all areas and lead downtown. It was the only place where you could see some tall buildings designated for commercial and administrative activities. Past these, on clear days, you could see the ocean.

While enjoying the beautiful scenery, father and daughter seemed lost in their individual thoughts.

“Do you know where we're going once the Race is over?” Julia's voice was like a whisper in the night.

After thinking a moment, her father responded with the same intimate tone:

“I'm only sure of what I should do on the day of the test. As you know, I'll be at the computer center in Urbitad to head the operation. I know that Authority will be there as well as some of my technicians. After that ... we'll see.”

He turned to look at her for a moment and smiled tenderly.

“The important thing is for you to think about what you want to do. My fate is sealed.” Sheffair paused briefly. “My sweet daughter, since your mother died, I have only been interested in two things: you and my work. And now the two have matured.”

Another moment of silence while both gazed at some distant point.

“You have bloomed into a beautiful, intelligent, sensitive woman and you have your whole life ahead of you, along with the obligation to live it. But as of now, you must do it on your own.”

Julia was about to protest, but he cut her off with a gentle gesture.

“That's the way life is, sweetheart.”

She felt a slight chill. Maybe it was the cool breeze coming from the sea.

She moved closer to her father and leaned her head on his shoulder, the way she did as a child. It made her feel safe.

"Someday, probably somewhere near the sea," he smiled as he spoke because he knew his daughter well, "you will settle down and find someone to share your life with. You'll tell your kids about your mother and me, and perpetuate us in their hearts. As you see," he joked, "my work with you is done."

She looked at him and, in a laughing tone, replied:

"Oh, no! Don't think you'll get rid of me that easily. When and if I ever marry, I will live where you do. Who if not you, will babysit your grandchildren when I go out?"

It was definitely getting chillier. Julia snuggled even closer against her father.

"You are, without a doubt, my pride and joy! I can only hope that everything goes well on the day of the Race. This is what I have prepared for and dedicated my whole life to. If I succeed, I can rest easy."

"But, Dad!" She protested. "You'll have to keep working. You don't expect to retire now, do you? You're not that old!"

"Time will tell!" He interrupted, holding her against him.

The scent of orange blossoms reached them with increasingly subtle softness.

## Six

"What you propose is a deadly shot straight to the lifeline of our society!" Dalmas said to Senator Zenón. They were seated facing each other at the large table in the conference room.

The senator was probably in his early fifties with rather long hair that covered his ears. He was dressed very casually, which was inappropriate when considering the rank of the person he was meeting with.

"I never expected your approval." The absence of courtesy in the response was not lost on the Prime Secretary, although the soft tone of the senator's voice slightly disguised his intensions.

"Do you have the hundred votes needed to submit the proposed

constitutional change to the General Assembly?”

“I’m not sure.” Zenón replied cautiously.

Dalmas knew via his informants, that although he didn’t have them yet, he might reach them.

“Surely, you will admit that I have the constitutional right to attempt an amendment...”

“Certainly. No one will deny you your rights, and I least of all.”

Dalmas was trying not to show the animosity his visitor provoked in him:

“The only thing I ask is that you defer the issue so it does not coincide with the Race. Your proposal will inevitably result in public debate, which would be a distraction during such a crucial time for humanity.”

“I promise to give some thought to your suggestion.” Zenón replied softly, although Dalmas suspected that the only way the senator would change any plans he might have, would be not getting the required 100 votes.

“But, in principle,” continued the senator, “I have to confess that it would be a difficult postponement. I am sure that by now you have heard rumors that the word regarding possible constitutional amendment is on the street. Quite frankly, I believe it has aroused much enthusiasm, especially among young people.”

“Is it possible,” asked the Prime Secretary, knowing full well what the answer was, “that those rumors were started from within your own followers? It is my understanding that some universities are being visited by some of your most heated partisans.”

“Absolutely not!” Zenón protested energetically. “We are not interested in producing any type of disorder. That is not our style. Also, allow me to share my personal thoughts with you regarding what you consider bad timing for this important matter.” The senator was attempting to divert the thorny issue. “If the amendment is rejected, it will be an effective way to nip these rumors at their root. And if it is approved, it will be a perfect time to make it happen: it will coincide with the year of the Great Race and ratify the theories of Professor Jacson.”

Dalmas decided not to press the issue further, as it seemed clear that Zenón had made his decisions before going there. He was intrigued, however, about the senator’s motives for requesting this interview with him if he had nothing to discuss.

“Many years ago, before the Revolution,” the Prime Secretary made a last

effort to reason with the senator “the world had hundreds of countries and States, and two forms of government: dictatorships, that produced men who were more obtuse than brilliant, and the so-called democracies, which put the mediocre in charge, and whose only virtue was to know how to sell itself via the corrupted and partisan media. The first were exterminated by their own corruption. The latter, self-destroyed through the demagogic system that was based on the thesis that every man had the right to vote as corresponded with the theoretical exercise of freedom. In the first case, it was a matter of being the stronger of the wolf pack, in the second, the weight of the passive classes, corrupted by subsidies, led government positions to be held by politicians, who in turn, and in order to satisfy said masses, didn’t hesitate to gouge productive citizens to buy votes from the subsidized. Both systems were alternating for years and eventually self-destroyed, dragging nations down with them. When the first Authority created Universalism as the only possible solution, millions of people around the world joined the movement, understanding that it was the only way for mankind to survive its own stupidity. The Constitution Article that you wish to amend would bring back local authorities which could be the beginning of the creation of individual nations...”

“You exaggerate!” Zenón interrupted rather abruptly. “The consequences need not be such. I appreciate you giving me a refresher course, but I know my history, although, it is ridiculous to compare the circumstances of that time with the present. The past is best forgotten.”

The senator’s lack of courtesy upset Dalmas, who mentally noted not to make any further attempts to convince him. Moments later, he was pleased to find out the real reason for the visit.

“My supporters and I are aware that if we take this proposition to the Senate, it could be vetoed by Authority.” Zenón returned to his more persuasive tone. “But, as you well know, this could be a problem facing the future.”

Dalmas laughed to himself. So this is what you want. He thought. You wonder if Authority will use his right to veto because if so, many senators who promised you their vote will now withdraw their support so as not to be attached to a lost cause. That’s your problem, and you want me to give you a clue about the intentions of Authority. This is the real reason for your visit!

“Although, logically,” the Prime Secretary said aloud, trying not to let his face betray his previous reflections, “Authority is aware of the proposal, he has not seen fit to communicate his intentions to me. As you know, he is extraordinarily reserved.”

Take a risk and play your cards! He thought to himself again. But from this meeting, you will walk away with doubts.

“Mr. Prime Secretary,” said Zenón interrupting his thoughts, “Please convey to Authority my desire to meet with him to expose this issue.”

“I will do so. However,” he continued after a brief pause, “again I ask you to consider postponing the filing of the amendment until the next council year. Maybe then we will be more receptive to this proposal.”

“I greatly appreciate it, and I reiterate my promise to consider it, although I've already explained why I feel that this year's plenary meeting is the right time.”

“Very well.” Dalmas said standing up and thus terminating the meeting, convinced his words had been wasted on the senator.

After the polite farewells, Zenón left.

## Seven

As soon as Julia laid eyes on them, she sensed who they were. Following Tessa's instructions, she had opened the Stadium at ten in the morning and, after disconnecting all security systems, prepared to wait for the visitors.

A small bus arrived from which several people stepped out. Amongst them, two very tall young men, accompanied by four middle-aged men, and an elderly, gray-haired man with a very distinguished air about him. The physical resemblance between the two young men was remarkable, and their athletic physique was impressive. Their features were sharp but pleasant, with medium dark skin and hair cut shorter than the current style.

Julia would have wagered a month's salary that these were none other than the Aristos.

The distinguished older man approached Julia and after greeting her amicably, indicated that she need not worry about them as they were going to tour the facilities briefly and would let her know when they were ready to leave.

Still stunned by the suspected identity of the visitors, she was only able to mutter a timid "My pleasure". Moments later, the group entered the Stadium.

From where she stood, Julia could see them talking to each other, but she



could not hear what they were saying. The group walked slowly through all the areas of the Stadium, carefully observing all the details. At one point, one of the two young men turned towards Julia's direction and their eyes met briefly. Embarrassed, they each smiled and looked away. Julia cursed herself, feeling stupid about the situation and was relieved when they disappeared behind the door of the control room.

Left alone, she gave some thought to the situation and understood the mystery surrounding the visit. It had to be on a Sunday! The day of the Race was getting closer and the Aristos wanted to inspect the facilities, to make sure all was in order. It was obvious that they were not just some "regular" guys. My God, she thought, if Tessa had known. . She had never understood why the identity of the athletes was such a guarded secret. This had ignited the imagination of millions of young teenagers, and she, like so many others, had fantasized more than once about having the opportunity to meet the athletes as they trained in the mysterious Residence. Each girl imagined the brothers in the likeness of their ideal man. Now, seeing them for the first time, Julia could not decide if she felt disappointed or not, but she was very certain that they were nothing like she had imagined.

"Hello!" A voice said from behind her. Caught completely off-guard, she jumped at the sound. She had been so completely lost in her own thoughts, she had not realized that one of the young men had approached and was now standing next to her. Noticing her reaction, he couldn't help but smile as he apologized.

"Sorry," he said. "I didn't mean to startle you."

Julia made an effort to conceal her bewilderment, but with little success.

"You know," He continued as he absently looked in another direction in order to give her time to regain her composure. "I get the impression that we've ruined your day off."

"Oh, not at all!" She managed to say; grateful for the seconds he was giving her to calm down. "I had no big plans for today," an automatic smile appearing on her face, "so it's really not a problem."

"So, you work here?"

"Yes. I give tours to the visitors of the Stadium." They hit it off immediately and for a while they engaged in small talk. When they saw that the rest of the group was walking towards them, the young man asked:

"What's your name?"

"Julia." She was going to ask him the same thing but given the special

circumstances, she hesitated, not sure if it would be appropriate. In the end, she decided to ask.

“And yours?”

He replied simply and without the slightest hesitation:

“Aristos First.”

There was a short silence. Upon confirming her suspicions, Julia could not help feeling a bit embarrassed, but this time she recovered quickly.

“Believe it or not,” First said hastily as the group was moving closer, “I was born in Shandu and yet I don’t know the city at all. You would be doing me a big favor if you accompany me as a guide one of these days...” he smiled with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes, “If you accept, I will be eternally grateful.”

“I would love to” she replied in the same mischievous tone, “but aren’t you supposed to do nothing but train?”

“How horrible! You are more demanding than my tutors! Quick! Give me your phone number before they reach us.” he urged softly.

‘Local CB-410.’

“Great! It’s easy to remember!”

These last words were a mere whisper, as the others had reached them already.

Shortly afterwards, following the formal farewells, she watched them leave.

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She did not sleep well that night. In the privacy of her cozy room, lying in bed, barefoot but fully dressed, she crossed her arms behind her head and stared at the night as she listened to the pitter-patter of the rain against the windows, driven by the wind coming from the sea.

She could not get the events of the day out of her mind. She had not even told her father that she had met the athletes and did not know what to do. Her first impulse had been to call Tessa and tell her all about the amazing events of the day, but something told her that Aristos First had committed an indiscretion by telling her his name, and that it could cause him some problems. On the other hand, she knew that Tessa was not precisely a model of discretion, so she decided not to say anything, at least for now.

She replayed the short conversation she had had with First over and over in her head, and although she could recall the exact figure of the athlete, she had trouble finding his face in her memory. Of one thing she was sure: the image of the young man provoked in her a disturbing pleasure.

As the fine spring rain stopped tapping the glass, with her thoughts still enjoying the pleasant feeling left by that brief encounter, she began to drift off and finally surrendered to sleep: barefoot, fully dressed and wondering if he would really call.

## Eight

Dalmas was telling Authority about the conversation he had with Zenón. They were sitting in the simple private office that the maximum leader used for informal meetings, on the upper floor of the Presidential Palace. The only distinguishing ornamentations were the one hundred forty-one small-framed photographs of all the previous Authorities, hanging on the wall.

Authority was seventy-eight years old and he looked it. Of medium height and built with white hair, he looked like so many other older men, except for his eyes. When he fixed his gaze on someone, his deep black eyes seemed to penetrate into the deepest corners of their soul, where the best-guarded secrets were kept. He was one of those men who had no need to raise his voice in order to be heard and obeyed. According to those that were close to him, despite his appearance, he still retained the vitality that made him famous during his time as a senator. His dark tunic was of such simplicity that, at first glance, it was hard to believe that this was the man that had governed the destiny of the world for the past nine years, after his predecessor died, his election by the Senate had been unanimous.

“Do you think Zenón will get the hundred votes?” His voice was calm and deep. Depending on the circumstances, he could easily change his tone to be soft and persuasive, or cold and sharp. His voice was a weapon he knew how to use well.

“I think so, sir,” replied Dalmas. “At least he is convinced that he can get them. If he weren’t, he would not have been so adamant about our meeting.” The Prime Secretary continued, “I get the impression that Zenón wants to succeed you and feels that this is a quick way to gain popularity.”

“What do you think is the best course of actions to neutralize this?”

“First, we should find out if he really has the votes needed to file the

amendment. If, as I fear, he does have the votes, we will have to persuade enough senators to defeat him in full. However, his main concern is to know if you will use your right to veto. In any case, Zenón is aware that this is our last option.”

“Don’t count on it.” said Authority. You know that under the Constitution, any member of the Senate with the support of a hundred votes can submit two amendments to the Constitution every century. If I were to use my right to veto now, both my successor and I would be powerless to cope with any other changes attempted in the future that could pose a serious threat to the stability of the system.”

There was a thoughtful silence. Dalmas thought about how complicated things could get, if Authority was not willing to use the power that came with his post. He knew that Zenón had come to the same conclusion and this allowed him to play his tricks fearlessly.

“For over fifteen-hundred years, the Constitution drafted by our forefathers has demonstrated that its principles are the best rules that man has ever had in order to be able to live together in peace. Throughout the centuries,” Authority continued, “it has undergone only minor tweaks, and any changes made have always been previously agreed upon between the executive and legislative powers. That particular Article, the eighth, is one of the keys to prevent the emergence of nationalist passions and interests and to avoid the damages that these feelings, almost always misused, have caused to humanity throughout history. Therefore, we cannot allow this amendment.”

Concern was clearly reflected on Dalmas’ face and Authority tried to reassure him with a gesture.

“Stay calm and don’t worry. Everything will turn out fine. Initiate the plan we discussed and make sure that every senator who shares our views campaigns to attract the undecided without delay.”

“They will all ask where you stand regarding this issue.”

“Do not hesitate to inform them. Tell them I am frontally opposed to change and I trust their wisdom and responsibility to address the issue through their votes.”

“What do I tell them regarding the use of the veto?”

“Look, our laws are extremely wise. For centuries, the power to veto has been handed down from one Authority to another and none of them has had to use it. I do not want to be the first to leave my successor deprived of that right. This rule, by virtue of its unique characteristics, is a guarantee to citizens

against an Authority that might be faced with absolutist temptations or from an ambitious populist, that having reached the Senate, will try to pass laws on behalf of the people, and paradoxically these just wind up turning against him. In short, it is a guarantee to be used as an element of persuasion.”

He paused to see if Dalmas had understood the full extent of the idea.

“However,” he continued, “when talking to the senators, you should hint that I am determined to use it if necessary. This should discourage those who always vote for the proposals that are sure to win.”

“Very well, sir.” The Prime Secretary answered respectfully.

They now moved on to other government business. Dalmas took mental note of each and every one of the suggestions and orders he received from his superior, who was aware, that Dalmas was completely loyal and that he would make use of all his resources to carry out his orders. Authority was interested in the grain shipments from the southern cone of South America, where there were surpluses, going to central and northern Africa, where drought had been wreaking havoc for the past few years. Dalmas informed him that it was already taking place and that there would be no shortage of supplies in needy areas.

“How is Sheffair? Did he not meet with you?”

“Yes, sir. He has almost finished all the preparations for the Race and has left for Shandu to finalize the details for the Stadium. If you recall, he is due back a few days before the test to head the operation at the computer central.

“Very good.” Authority approved. Then, thinking aloud, he continued. “He’s a great man. We must take care of him...”

Dalmas thought he detected a subtle note of sadness from the President of the World State.

“How are the athletes?” Asked the older man. “I suppose their Tutors must soon decide which of the two brothers should run. Correct?”

“In recent confidential reports, I was informed that the choice would probably be Aristos First. He is a few thousandths of a second faster than his brother, but neither one of them has reached record time.” Dalmas said unable to hide the anxiety it caused him.

“Don’t worry. They’ll make it!” Authority replied fixing his eyes on Dalmas with that self-assurance he seemed to have on all-important issues. “Have no doubt! But everything will be on the day and time scheduled by professor Jacson.”

So be it, thought the Prime Secretary. Failure would be terrible for everyone. I'd rather not think about it!

As they so often did, they continued discussing affairs late into the night.

## Nine

The previous day, while watering the two orange and lemon trees in the garden, her father said to her: "A young man called asking if you could go to the market tomorrow. He said he would be there." She absently asked who he was, convinced that it was probably one of Tessa's friends. "He didn't tell me his name," her father continued. "He insisted that I ask you if he could visit the Stadium on Sunday." When she realized who it was, she did her best to evade her father's questions, as she had not yet told him she had met one of the Aristos. However, Sheffair noticed her contained expression of joy upon receiving the news.

That morning she put on a curve-hugging, light cotton dress, with a deep neckline and shoulder straps, which contrasted beautifully with her dark skin. Looking in the mirror, she liked what she saw. After giving herself a nod of approval, she hesitated as she realized her bare arms and shoulders might get chilly in the evening. But vanity won the battle and she decided to leave the dress on. After a last check-up look in the mirror, she headed out in the direction of downtown Shandu. When she reached the market, she found that, as usual, a colorful and noisy crowd of buyers, sellers and onlookers invaded it. It was the same in every city in the world where she had lived. The market was not only a place to trade, but also a place of fun and development of the social life of the inhabitants of the region.

Shandu's market is made up of a group of buildings linked by manicured gardens and dirt roads. The buildings are divided and organized by specialty pavilions: food, technology, clothing, state affairs, culture, and so on. In each of them, thousands of artisans and small industrialists presented their products for sale every Thursday. Representing not only numerically, but also qualitatively, the most active sector of the community in every city in the world.

The northern part of the complex is reserved for parking. Not far from there, is the child-care center where parents can leave their children in the care of competent officials, while shopping and selling. The southern part is intended for leisure. There are theaters, cinemas, restaurants, and all of those who, after the hustle-bustle of the day, still feel like having fun, can enjoy

places to dance and listen to music until late into the morning.

Lost in the crowd, Julia walked unhurriedly wondering how she would find Aristos among such a multitude of people. Determined to take it easy, she browsed through various exhibitions and eventually approached the State pavilion. The officer on duty was attending to a large number of people who were putting in their requests for things that were essential to them but were hard to find in the region. Convinced that Aristos was not there, she left the hall and went to Technology.

Upon entering, they saw each other almost simultaneously. Their eyes met in the distance and he pushed his way through the crowd, walking quickly towards her. Although it was hard to admit it, Julia realized that she had been tense while she waited. Now, seeing him show up, she began to relax.

She could now get a better look at him than when they met briefly in the Stadium. He seemed taller, thin but strong and though his clothes were wide and somewhat juvenile, they could not entirely conceal his athletic built. She loved the way he looked at her with his black eyes. She also noticed how he drew the attention of the young ladies and the not so young. The young ones looked at him openly and the others more discreetly.

“I see you got my message.” This was his greeting to Julia.

“Yes, I got your coded message.” She replied while smiling back at him.

“Great! So you're ready to be my private guide today?”

“Of course! But ... where you pulling my leg when you said you've never been here before?”

“No, really.” confirmed Aristos as they began to walk among the people approaching the nearby exhibitors. “The only places we have been allowed to visit are old ruins of cities like Paris, Rome or Madrid, and always for the purpose of study.” The noise prevented them from hearing each other well. He got close to her and continued:

“I suppose we’ve never come to Shandu, or any other city, for security reasons.”

“And how were you allowed today?” Julia asked.

“Well...” He hesitated a moment. “This has to be a secret between you and me. Can I count on your discretion?”

“Have you escaped?” She laughed feeling intimately flattered.

He took her arm and squeezed it gently as he turned and looked at her with

laughing eyes.

“You got it!” With all the noise, she guessed, rather than understood the answer.

“Really?”

“Yes!”

An uncomfortable silence grew between them. Julia did not know how to react. No doubt she was flattered, but this feeling lasted only a moment and was soon replaced by alarm. What kind of consequences could this bring on them? He was too important for something like this to go unnoticed. It would take one single journalist to discover the presence of Aristos, and the scandal would be out of proportion. In her wildest dream she could not have imagined being in a situation of such magnitude.

Aristos, who seemed distracted with the various articles of the exhibitors, suddenly turned towards her.

“Would you please stop worrying?” He said, apparently reading her thoughts and disrupting their progress.

He’s right, she told herself, and then continued aloud:

“I just think you're crazy.”

“What?”

“I said you’re crazy!” Several people turned around to look at them.

“Yes, I am crazy...about you!” He replied laughing.

Damn it, she thought, infected by his laughter. The important thing is to enjoy this moment.

Meanwhile, They had arrived at the car exhibitions. There were all types and sizes. Some were displaying the most modern features: open hydrogen engines. In recent times, the industrialists who were engaged in this type of vehicle manufacture, seemed to pay particular attention to the originality of the designs of the body of the vehicles and the sound level of their engines. In their advertising, many claimed that the sound level was zero on the universal Loar tables that controlled the noise level of engines before they were released. Anyone looking in the parking area outside the compound could see almost as many models as shown here in the pavilion.

Next they came to the agriculture and food pavilion, where they were able to attend the auctions, which were quite a spectacle. Each craftsman, farmer or livestock breeder attempted to sell their products to retailers and individuals at



the highest price possible, but always within the maximum and minimum set by the State. If prices drop too low, the State becomes the buyer and acquires the surplus until the market balances. The surpluses are then sent to regions where there is shortage of them. This measure enables producers to maintain their purchasing power. Logically, when prices soar, those benefits increase, but only up to the maximum allowed by the State, which at this point becomes a seller thus balancing prices and markets.

Producers and traders loudly yell out their prices within the established margins, and surprising, they are able to understand one another above the deafening noise. Undoubtedly, the continuous practice makes it possible. At the end of the day, the items that have not been sold; especially when it comes to perishable foods, are exchanged for others that may be needed. In reality, at the market almost everyone is a buyer and seller at the same time and, if nothing else, they all play an important role.

As they walked along, Julia did her best to explain all this to Aristos but it was quite difficult to be understood above all the noise. Leaving the pavilion, they were tired and hungry. Led by Julia, they headed to the outdoor gardens, where you could walk around and taste various dishes cooked with local produce. They ate meat pies, vegetables fried in the most varied forms, and of course they could not miss the opportunity to taste the typical fish delicacies of Shandu.

Later, they decided to seek out the resting area in search of a little relaxation. As expected, it was not easy finding an empty table among the hundreds that were available with their multicolored awnings. By the time they managed to find a table where they could sit at, the noontime sun was fierce and so they could really appreciate the awnings and the nearby trees that surrounded them.

“A single day at the market requires more effort than your training does.” Julia joked after ordering two coffees and pastries from the waiter that approached them.

“Maybe, but this is much more fun!” he replied in the same tone. “I have no objection to changing my training routine; especially if you're willing to be my coach.” After they were served, Aristos asked:

“Do you come here often?”

“Yes, like most people.”

“And you serve as guide to someone in particular?” Aristos gave her an intentional look.

“Oh, sure!” Julia laughed. “To anyone who asks me and...”

"I'm serious! What do you do for fun?"

“Well, I usually go out with a group of friends.”

“Where do you usually go?”

“On Thursday, we normally come here. On our days off, if we don't have requests from intruders to visit the Stadium, we go to the beach or countryside, although most of the time we meet at someone's house to listen to music, dance ... in the end, just to hang out.” Julia looked at him mischievously and continued: “Well, now it's my turn to ask. Okay?” She paused as if reflecting: “Oh, would that be uncovering some state secret?”

He laughed.

“Ask me anything you want. The problem is not the questions, but rather the answers ... and not because they may reveal some state secret, but because my brother's life and mine are so boring and monotonous.” He made a pause. “I can tell you that all our waking hours are entirely dedicated to training and taking classes with different tutors. Only occasionally, as I had mentioned, we take short trips to some city that's been dead for many years. The only thing out of the ordinary that we are allowed do is to go sailing.

“How is your relationship with your brother and tutors?”

He thought for a moment before replying:

“For two people who have lived together since birth, I would say our relationship is good. I guess,” he continued, “that in our own way we love each other. We never had the warmth of a parent, so the love we are able to give each other is all we have. Our relationship with the teachers and especially with the Tutor is quite endearing, but always mediated by the knowledge that they only have one goal in life: to prepare us to break the record for the hundred meter dash and thereby fulfill the prophesy of professor Jacson.

“Are you two alike?”

"Who?"

“Fifth and you. And I don't mean physically, because I already saw that.”

“Yes, we're a lot alike physically. Our characters, however, are quite different.” There was a short silence as they finished their drinks.

“Perhaps,” continued Aristos, “he accepts our role in life better than I do. Or, perhaps, he has more ambition than me. I often find it unbearable when I

contemplate our lives and feel like we are like two islands in an unknown world.”

Julia listened attentively and began to regret that the conversation had taken that course, but he went on: “The fact is they have made us different, even in our name! No one uses numbers to identify people; not even Authority! We seem to have been pulled out of a history book, from a time when people inherited their parents' names and used numbers to indicate their ancestors, the first, the second... You'd think we are above the Constitution, which expressly prohibits the inheritance not only of goods, but also of titles. And yet, we inherited the Aristos from previous generations followed by our name...” He was talking to her and yet he seemed to be talking to himself. “Actually ... I don't know, sometimes I think that we are slaves of History and a strange product of genetics. I never asked to be a prophet of anything or anyone.”

Both were silent with their gaze lost in the crowd. Then she reached over the table and took his hands.

“Forgive me.” Julia's voice seemed like a whisper brought in with the light wind coming from the sea. “I'm sorry I broke your harmony... I'm sorry.”

Aristos squeezed her hand and made an effort to trivialize the conversation.

“Not at all! I'm the one that needs to apologize!” He suddenly got to his feet. “I suppose I should be proud of the role I have to play.” he smiled looking into those eyes that he liked so much. “Well, let's forget everything I said and concentrate on the only thing that matters: today. Are you willing to continue being my guide?”

She smiled back at him. Both of them were fully aware of the intimate current that had sparked between them. T

hey spent the rest of the afternoon visiting other pavilions. They paid special attention to the art section, where they could appreciate good examples of current works, in addition to some of the classics. They also found books of the most diverse subjects; some were over two thousand years old and very well preserved.

In the Historical Technology Pavilion, they saw the remains of old vehicles dating from the time before the Revolution, and that were still able to run with polluting energies. They got goosebumps when they saw the mural of photographs showing how ancient cities used to look: gigantic, tall buildings, dirty and with very little greenery. It looked as if the huge concrete buildings dominated the inhabitants, who looked like small insects moving through them

nervously. Julia thought she would have gone crazy if I had had to live in a place where your feet hardly ever felt the earth and buildings did not allow you to see the sky.

In the projection room, the archaic films showing the world the way it had been more than fifteen centuries ago could be seen. Some showed how, in those archaic times, while in the desert areas of Earth thousands of human beings starved, in other parts of the world men destroyed surplus food. Most visitors thought this was surely an exaggeration. It seemed too outrageous to have been true. Perhaps, some said, it was a way to exalt the Revolution brought on by the first Authority, which resulted in the current world and civilization. In fact, for some time now, some intellectuals from various corners of the Earth cautiously spread these ideas, and it was even rumored that some of the senators were in favor. "Such behavior is not possible from mankind", some would respond. It was said that the famous progressive senator Zenón was one of the supporters of this theory.

It was already dark by the time they left the culture pavilion. They had a few drinks while listening to some youths singing folk songs from the region. Farther off, a string sextet played a waltz. In a circular track, lit by colored lanterns, people of various ages were dancing.

"Come on!" Julia said smiling.

"Where to?"

"Dancing!" she took his hand and pulled him in the direction of the track where they were still playing the waltz.

"I can't!" he protested, "I have no idea how to dance!"

"Don't worry about it. I'll lead and you just follow!"

With the awkwardness of someone who's not used to doing something, Aristos began to waltz, led by Julia. A little overwhelmed by the night, the lights and the turning round and round, he gradually got the hang of it and, felt a joy he had never felt before, driven by the gyrations of the dance and the physical contact with Julia. For a while, they both completely lost track of time and let themselves get carried away by the sensuality of the moment.

As the darkness of the western sky was blending with the light of dawn, they parted in the small garden in front of Julia's house.

“We got him trapped!”

“Who, Dalmas?”

“Of course not! Dalmas is of no importance! I’m referring to Authority!”

Everyone looked at him expectantly. The meeting convened by Zenón was being held at the University of Klibona, along the coast of the Baltic Sea. Attending were teachers, some student leaders and budding politicians from various Asian and European regions that had been specifically invited by the Senator. Each one of them had different motives for being there; some were sincere in their belief that it was time that the Constitution evolved, others saw in this movement an opportunity to relaunch their personal careers, and the rest, the majority, were those who always follow anything or any type of movement.

“What exactly do you mean when you say we ‘got him trapped’?” Asked one of the Asian attendees.

“He cannot use the veto.”

“Why?”

“I have been studying the behavior of the various Authorities throughout history and discovered that none of them has ever made use of the veto when there has been a constitutional crisis. After carefully pondering upon the possible reason for this behavior, I managed to figure out the answer: as all of you know, according to the law, the veto can be used only twice in a century. Using it would mean taking away the power to act before any other amendment initiative that could occur during the same period. So they guard it as something sacred from one Authority to another, in anticipation of difficult parliamentary times. Based on this, I am confident that our current Authority will not use that right.”

Zenón saw the doubtful looks on the faces of everyone around him.

“It's true!” He insisted emphatically. “He will never use it because if he did, he would leave his successor disarmed. Don’t you understand? For centuries, the senators who tried to change something in the Constitution were forced to compromise, convinced that, otherwise, their current Authority would use the veto. They did not even consider confronting Authority on the issue! But we will! And we will succeed, because we know that he will not use that privilege. That is our advantage!”

“Zenón,” said a Northern-European attending the meeting, “even though what you say makes perfect sense, it is still an assumption on your part.”

“That may very well be!” the Senator said firmly. “But I have studied this in depth and I am quite sure that I am right! It is our trump and we must play our cards counting on that possibility. I will venture to present the issue to the Senate, but it is necessary that each one of you assist our cause by getting the maximum demonstrations of support to our thesis in the cities where you may have influence. Above all, and preferably, you should seek out the help of younger people and try to persuade some intellectuals,” he intentionally stressed the word, “to publically support us. It will all depend on how you present our message. It is necessary for you to coordinate the times for the presentation of your manifestations. Do you think you can do this?”

There were a few moments of silence. One of the youngest attendees, a college professor in South Asia, said:

“Our role is not difficult to accomplish and you can count on our commitment. The question is, do you have the hundred necessary votes to submit the amendment?”

“Yes,” Zenón answered. “We actually have more votes than we need in the Senate, so it should not be a problem. With you lobbying on the street and my team working on the Senators, we are sure to succeed.”

“How do you think the government will react against the riots in the streets?”

“By sending out the Security Forces.”

“There will be arrests and there might even be some injuries...”

“It’s a price we’ll have to pay. But don’t forget that those accidents will become the government’s responsibility, and that will turn into more votes for us.”

“When should we start to promote the demonstrations?”

“Ten days from now; In other words, a week before the full Senate convenes,” Zenón continued, while all those present listened intently. “We’re fighting, and we are committed to this fight, to ensure that the regions acquire greater autonomy, so that they create or recover their own identity: a language, customs and greater administrative independence. After so many years of peace, this should be possible today. Look, shortly after the Senate plenary session, the most important event of the last century will take place: the Race to try and beat the record. This is something we are all looking forward to and hope it is achieved, as we are burdened with the illusion that Jacson’s prophecies must be fulfilled in order to achieve complete human evolution. This will help create a new environment that promotes changes and new

courses to take, and these should also reach into the political arena. So, we find ourselves in the most important dates for humanity since the Revolution. Our project fits perfectly within this new ambiance, which is why it is the perfect time to present it.”

A murmur of approval could be heard among the attendees. Having recently organized so many similar meetings in so many places around the world, Zenón knew that they were willing to join forces and this was necessary in order to win the battle on the streets, and essential to his overall strategy.

## Eleven

Near Shandu, the State-owned, ten-meter sailboat reserved for the private use of the Aristos, had been anchored all winter. Sailing was one of the few activities they could enjoy outside the control and watching-eye of their tutors and thus provided the best moments of privacy. Just as they did every spring, the two brothers again rigged the sailboat.

The brothers checked for rust on the centerboard, the hull and the rudder blade and were relieved to find none. They also examined the keel bolts and found them to be in good condition. First was filling some areas where the caulking had come out of the seams, while Fifth sanded some of the ship’s surface before varnishing.

“We should be able to take her to sea within a week.” Said First.

“We’ll need help to launch it.”

“The people from the Residence can lend a hand. I hope they don’t give us a hard time due to the proximity of the Race.”

“I don’t think so. It would not make sense for them to take away the few distractions that we are allowed. It relaxes us and helps us to smooth out some of the tension caused by the test. They continued for a while, each one focused on their task.

Later, during a break, Fifth asked:

“How did it go with the girl in the Stadium?”

"It went great!"

“Will you see her again?”

“I will if you cover me again.”

“You're risking a lot. Sooner or later they will find out.” Fifth warned.

“Better for you. I will be eliminated and you'll run.”

“That's a stupid thing to say, don't you think?” The reproach came from the soul.

“You're right, sorry,” First thought for a moment before continuing. “But I'll tell you something, the logical thing would be that you run. The only thing I would regret is never knowing if I was capable of breaking the record, but quite frankly, each day I have less and less interest in the Race and what's to follow it. I guess this could not be foreseen by the geneticists, eh?”

“As I've said so many times: there is nothing I want more in the world. The problem is that you are faster and therefore you must be elected.” Fifth nodded in resignation and continued, “What can we do!”

“Please stop feeling sorry for yourself!” First said firmly. “The chosen one will become a triumphant god or a losing clown – trust me, I have no desire to be chosen!”

“Are you serious? You honestly believe that?”

“Word, brother!” First replied smiling. “So cheer up and let's finish rigging the boat so we can get out to sea.”

## Twelve

The law enforcers had overtaken downtown Shandu and their presence was obviously intended as a prevention measure. Agents were grouped into squads of five or six men and were perfectly equipped to deal with any potential disturbance. They controlled the streets that converged central downtown after the early morning discovery of thousands of small paper-drawn rectangular flags literally covering the ground. Although the cleaning services had acted quickly, they had been unable to remove all of them. The early risers had received quite a surprise as they headed out for their daily routine.

The first protesters began gathering at noon in downtown Shandu and by 1:00 PM the crowd had grown to about a thousand people. As they finally got organized and before the impassive gaze of the police, they took out small flags and in unison started waving them in the wind forming a colorful and



noisy backdrop.

In the front line, arm in arm with her companions who led the demonstration, was Tessa. Her short reddish hair gently framed her oval face and made her look even younger than she actually was. Along with the other protesters, she began slowly walking around and around the town square.

Songs about the reason for the demonstration accompanied the flag-waving, supporting the ideas set forth by Senator Zenón, whose name was chanted with strong hoorays. It seemed more like a celebration than a protest. The Police stood by expectantly, but did not intervene. Pedestrians who happened to be passing nearby would chance a curious look, but quickly accelerated their pace to get away from there, and thus avoid potential problems. Out of all the office buildings surrounding the town square, curious heads popped out to watch the unusual sight.

For a while, the situation remained unchanged. Feeling that they had met their objective of attracting attention, the participants of the demonstration, mostly young people, were about to dissipate. Suddenly, from within the crowd, above the chanting and singing, a man's voice was heard shouting:

“Now! Now!”

Without further warning, a series of objects flew out from the center of the group of protesters and hit a squad of police who was stationed in a corner. The officers, who were surprised by the attack, were slow to react and the projectiles wounded two of them. After the first moments of confusion, the other officers realized what had happened and adjusting their helmets, they pulled out their batons, raised their shields and charged into the group of protesters. The confusion was tremendous. People screaming, running, being struck... In a matter of seconds, many of the young protesters disappeared down the streets that were now free of the police who were assisting their fallen peers. Others fought the police and some were beaten with rubber batons even after they had fallen to the ground.

Tessa was surprised by the speed of the events that were taking place. She heard the screams, felt two police officers run past her, and, soon after, while trying to flee, she tripped over a body. It was a young man she did not know who was bleeding profusely from his head. Impressed by the image, she tried to stop the bleeding with the same flag which, moments before, she had been waving.

“You have to get up!” she shouted, trying to be heard over so much confusion.

The young man fixed his panic-stricken eyes on her and moments later, he

lost consciousness. Tessa felt someone forcefully taking her by the arms and pulling her with the intention of getting her out of there. When she looked up, she saw it was Antonio.

“We can’t just leave him here!” she shouted, as she felt him dragging her away.

“Come on, we have to go! There’s nothing you can do for him and if you stay you’ll get arrested!”

“But this man is going to bleed to death!”

“They will rescue him! Come on, we have to run!”

Once more, Antonio pulled her with force, and took her away. In the distance they heard the sirens announcing the arrival of more armed forces.

Finally, Tessa and Antonio reached one of the square’s exit streets. They had seen some ambulances headed towards the scene of the riots. Once they felt they were at a safe distance, they stopped at the shelter of a doorway.

“What happened?” Tessa asked gasping for air. “It was all going so well!”

“What happened was that some jerks led us into a trap!” He replied while wiping sweat and trying to catch his breath. “Is there somewhere you can go?”

“Sure there is: home!”

“It's not convenient to go home. You could have been identified and they will be searching for you. Your house would be the first place they would look for you.”

“Do you really think they’ll do that?” Tessa asked frightened as she finished wiping her sweat with a handkerchief.

“I don’t know for sure since this is my first time participating in a demonstration. But, just in case, I'm going to stay with a few trusted friends. You can stay with me if you want and we can wait it out a few days and see what happens.”

She thought about it for a moment, still struggling to recover her breath, and then decided:

“Thanks, but no. I think I’ll go to a friend's house. I’m sure I’ll be safe there.”

They parted quickly, wishing each other luck and Tessa went in search of the place where she had left the car.

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Julia was shocked by her friend's appearance when she showed up at the door.

"What in the world happened to you? Are you ok?"

"Can I come in?"

"Of course! Come on in!"

"Is your father home?" Tessa asked softly as her friend moved aside to let her inside the house.

"No, he won't be back until late. But, are you going to tell me what happened to you?"

"Yes, but first let me use the bathroom to wash up."

"Hey, you have blood on your arm! Are you hurt?"

"No, it's not my blood. I will explain, but please, let me wash up first."

Shortly after, as they both sat on Julia's bed, Tessa explained everything that had happened.

"You are crazy!" Julia said when Tessa finished her story. "You could have been injured or arrested! You are definitely crazy! But of course, you can stay here as long as you need to. Although," she reflected, "you should call your parents before they start worrying."

"And what do I say? How can I justify staying here to your father and my parents?"

"Girl! You are the expert on finding alibis. So start thinking of one before we talk to them."

"If the cops show up at my house looking for me, my family will freak out!" Tessa thought aloud.

"Why not tell the truth for a change? What can they say?"

"Yikes! You have no idea what would be in store for me..."

"It's worse if they find out from the police."

"Can't argue that! Okay, so how about," said Tessa partially recovering her usual coolness, "you get me something to eat while I think? I haven't had anything since last night, when we began preparing for the demonstration. Meanwhile, we should catch the news on TV to see what's going on. I hope that at least we managed to get the attention we were seeking."

While Julia was preparing something to eat, Tessa went to the living room, turned on the TV and tuned into one of the local channels. She did not have to wait long, because suddenly the regular programming was interrupted and a news anchor appeared onscreen. With a solemn demeanor, he prepared to read some breaking news.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” the news anchor said, “we continue reporting the events from this morning where there have been demonstrations in cities around the world in support of the amendment to article eight of the constitution that Senator Zenón will be presenting in the coming days. The Senator has made statements regretting the two deaths that have occurred, and blames it on the Government. One of the deaths occurred in Calpoy, in the south of Australia, and the other, in our own city. Both were young protesters,” Julia came in the room just then and sat down to follow the news report. The two friends looked silently at the screen. “It is also regrettable, that in what is now being known as the tragic Flags Day, many police officers and protesters have been injured. We have also received a statement from our region’s senator asking everyone to remain calm. The following is a picture of the young man who has lost his life this morning in downtown Shandu, during the incidents.”

Seeing the picture on the screen, Tessa froze. She immediately recognized the young man with the head-wound that she had stumbled over and had tried to help. There was no doubt.

“What’s wrong?” Julia was alarmed to see the look on her friend’s face.

“That's him!”

"Who?" "Him!"

"Who? The one you tried to help?"

“Yes, it's him...! My God, I will never forget the look on his face...! It's definitely him!”

Julia didn’t know what to say. Seeing the tears that began to slide down the cheeks of her friend, she pulled her gently towards her as she stroked her auburn hair. After a while, when Julia saw that she was beginning to calm down, she went to the medicine cabinet in the kitchen and pulled out a jar of algae extracts known for their soothing properties, and had Tessa take them with a little water. Knowing they would take effect in few minutes, she escorted her friend to her bedroom and helped her lie on the bed.

“Get some rest and you'll feel better. Stop worrying, my dear friend, it was not your fault. Rest...”

As soon as she saw that the drug had taken effect, Julia carefully closed the door to the room and decided to call Tessa's parents to inform them of the situation. As she dialed her friend's number, she thought that she should also tell her own father what had happened, sure that he would definitely see things more calmly. We will need his help, thought Julia feeling much better after making the decision.

## Thirteen

The beach was completely deserted. Nearly full, the moon cast its light on the sea, whose waves broke gently before reaching the shore, occasionally wrapping seaweed bracelets on the bare ankles of the two young people. Tired of walking, they sat on the wet sand. At first, he seemed more reflective than usual. He had been rather quiet since they met at sunset.

"A diamond for your thoughts." Said Julia breaking the long silence.

"Look," said Aristos pointing to the Shandu bay, "look at the thousands of lights. From here it's hard to believe that behind them, there are people like you and me who love, or hate, or simply live a normal life with their problems and ambitions. Nighttime and distance make it seem like the perfect world that it is not. Even the harshest feelings can become soft in a beautiful landscape. It looks like the drawings of the stories we read as children: it was impossible to imagine that something in them was not beautiful and perfect. And yet..."

"What's wrong?" Julia interrupted. She was sitting beside him, her arms wrapped around her legs and her chin resting on her knees. Slowly, her bare feet were drawing figures in the sand.

"Why do you ask?"

"Look, if you don't feel like talking about it, then don't, but..."

"I'm fine, really!"

She nodded silently, and again they both drifted into their own thoughts. Julia sensed that his concerns were related to the Race. Even though First hadn't said anything, she was under the impression that he had problems. Had he been informed that he was not the chosen one? If this were so, she had no idea how he would deal with it; a lifetime dedicated to pursuing a goal that suddenly vanished. But the opposite could also happen, he could have been selected and was feeling the pressure of the responsibility that this implied. She picked up some sand with her hand and threw it towards the sea, while her

thoughts took another direction. Tessa's image crept into her mind. She was concerned about Tessa's involvement in the whole issue with the flags. The newspaper commented that the Security Forces were on alert in several parts of the world. They said that there had been some arrests made in relation to the riots on the day of the demonstrations. Fortunately, however, the police had not shown any interest in her friend. She could not help thinking that many people, including Tessa, were being manipulated by outside interests and ambitions. She intuitively decided not to intervene in the matter. For some reason, she didn't trust Senator Zenón, even though she didn't completely understand his political thesis. She ran her hand through her hair, as she often did when distracted, and mentally scolded herself for not being able to banish these concerns while spending such a beautiful night with someone she was so attracted to. Turning to look at him, she saw that he was watching her and smiling slyly.

"Now I'm offering you that diamond for your thoughts!"

Julia explained what had happened, omitting the part about the dead young man. When she finished the story, he said:

"There are ruthless people that have no concern for the life of others and unfortunately, there are always those that naively follow them; sometimes even willing to give their lives, fooled into thinking they are going to change the world. In the end, they become puppets, manipulated by the powerful, whose only real goal is personal ambition. Such people have existed in all ages, and will continue to exist. They are a danger to everyone, and these well-meaning idealists are nothing more than cannon fodder to throw into the fray. They will always be the losers; if their cause does not succeed, those that command them will simply withdraw, and if they win, those that command will get the credit. In any case, they feel happy by deceiving themselves into thinking they are doing something important with their lives."

"That's not always the case," she countered. "You yourself are a perfect example of the opposite."

"Not quite. I play my role like everyone else, with the drawback that I have very few choices. Look," continued Aristos, "you are the result of genetic chance - and a beautiful result, I might add - " he said smiling. "But we were designed to be as we are, without the option of being different. Therefore, our freedom is conditional. Our genes have been mixed by design and not by chance. This not only affects our physical body, but also our minds. So as you can see, we are actually perfect examples of the manipulation of some men over others."

He paused thoughtfully and, after throwing a flat stone that bounced

several times on the water, he continued:

“You know, there have been many times when I have felt the need to get on a sailboat, and sail off into the high seas, just to disappear for a while. Fortunately, we were taught the art of navigation at a very young age, because when I'm alone at sea, I feel free. Today is one of those days when I'm just fed up with everything, because I feel I understand it all... I would like to take that sailboat ...”

“Would you take on a first mate?” She said with a smile interrupting his negative thoughts.

“Are you serious? You would go?” He asked with interest.

“Of course I would! But where would we go?”

“That's not important. In principle, we would set bow to the horizon and let the wind take us where no one, not even myself, anticipates my failure. I guess that's why I could never make up my mind to do it; because it's useless to run from oneself and, perhaps, because I lacked the courage to leave everything behind.”

Again, they were silent for a few minutes. Suddenly, without knowing why, the waltz they had danced the night at the market and brought them so close together, came to Julia's mind. She decided it was time to set aside all concerns and began humming that catchy melody as she remembered that night.

“We should continue with your dance classes. You never finished learning the waltz.” She suddenly said playfully.

“What do you mean I didn't finish?” He protested laughing. “At the end I was dancing better than you. In fact, even though I have a very poor ear for music, I still remember the melody. Listen ...” He began to hum in unison with Julia. They stood up almost simultaneously and started dancing in the moonlight. Every time a wave reached them, their feet would splash in the water and soon enough they were both soaking wet. When they stopped dancing they looked at each other and burst out laughing.

“I think we should get out of these wet clothes.” Aristos said. “Shall we go for a swim?” He asked suddenly.

“Now?” She complained. “The water must be freezing!”

“Some sailor you turned out to be! And you say you want to go sailing?”

“I'll admit I am a little afraid ...”

“Come on, you chicken!”

Aristos undressed, threw his clothes carelessly on the sand and ran into the water.

“You’re crazy! You’re going to freeze!”

Julia hesitated, but only for an instant. She undressed quickly and plunged into the waves. The water was not as cold as she expected, but she swam vigorously in order to warm up and catch up with First who was quite far away. Once she reached him, they swam together for a while fully enjoying the feeling. After a while they raced back to the shore. When they arrived at the beach they fell to the sand and lay there, still panting from exercise.

The most perfect harmony flooded their hearts as their bodies became one, with the moon and stars as their only witnesses.

## Fourteen

The rays of sunlight filtered through the trees, as the Tutor and Aristos First strolled through the park at the Residence. The spring rain from the previous night had left several pools of mud, and drops of water still fell from the leaves as they were swayed by the sea breeze.

“Are you saying that you are afraid to take responsibility for the Race?”  
Said the old man with his usual serenity.

“I honestly don’t know. I just wish everything was over already.”

First’s restlessness in the recent weeks had not gone unnoticed by the Tutor, who knew him from the moment of his birth, so he was not at all surprised when First requested to speak to him that morning. In fact, he had been expecting it for days, and had First not requested the meeting, he would have made the suggestion himself.

“When I was a child,” continued the young man, “all this seemed like a game. We grew up with the security of knowing what our fate was: to train and prepare to break the world record for the hundred-meter dash, which had not been possible for over fourteen hundred years. But my concern increases as the time approaches, for I am not convinced I can break the record.”

“Those concerns will be erased the day of the Race. You have been prepared to do so through mental vacuum techniques.”



“Even if I succeeded, the life promised after breaking the record is not what I want. You have to choose between Fifth and me. You should choose him...”

The last words were almost a whisper. The Tutor suddenly stopped and taking Aristos by the arm he snapped angrily:

“Is it possible that these concerns have something to do with your relationships with a certain girl?”

The young man froze. It baffled him that the Tutor could have information regarding his relationship with Julia. I know, First thought, that he saw me talking to her at the Stadium, but there is no way he could know anything else. On the other hand, he was sure that his brother had not said anything about it. He was desperately trying to think, but only managed to say:

“How did you know?”

“What difference does it make?” They began to walk slowly through the trees. “What I hope is that you understand the reasons why you were asked to make the sacrifice of not having contact with outsiders. Human relations are always complex and, in your case, even more. Whomever results to be the chosen one to run will need every ounce of mental strength to beat the mark, as has been desired and expected by all of mankind for centuries.”

Aristos listened in silence as they continued walking. He felt a pang of guilt in his heart.

“For the first time,” said the old man, “you're facing a desire that differs from the one that up to now, has been the only one. Your mind is sharing concerns: it is fighting between that for which you were born and your feelings for that girl. That makes you suffer. You know your mission is all-consuming and should not be shared with any other concern. That is why we have tried to keep you from anything that might interfere with your concentration. Later, there will be time for all else.”

He was silent for a few moments as they passed one of the checkpoints of the Residence and greeted the guard with a nod.

“Have my times increased?” Aristos asked when they were out of earshot from the guard.

“Possibly, but that is not the most important thing right now. Your level of determination is lower, and that's fundamental. Look, son,” the Tutor said tenderly, “we know that we are demanding a lot from you, but the reward is infinitely greater, in fact, it is above all of us and therefore any effort is small.” The old man made a gesture of weariness.

Noticing the old man was fatigued, Aristos took his arm and led him to a nearby bench where they sat.

“For centuries,” he continued, while the athlete listened in respectful silence, “hundreds of men and women dedicated their lives to making you what you are today: the most perfect human running machine ever seen by mankind. Like you, your ancestors also trained every day since birth. They did this in order to pass on to you the most specialized genetics. They did so knowing that they would not be able to witness their dream come true, yet sure that it would, and that, gave them the strength to carry out their sacrifice. You, however, as the product of all those sacrifices, will have the opportunity to live the realization of those dreams. My son,” the Tutor seemed extremely fatigued, “that great collective illusion is above you or any other man.”

In the quiet moments that followed, they were able to hear the familiar voices of the groundskeepers of the Residence, carrying out their daily tasks.

“What if we can’t do it?”

As if propelled by a spring, the old man jumped and turned violently towards Aristos.

“Never doubt it! Never!” He said it with such force that he surprised the athlete. “Doubt is a luxury we cannot afford! It is doubt itself that can lead us to disaster. So banish those negative thoughts from your head. It will get done!” He said firmly.

His words were followed by a moment of silence in which both were lost in their own thoughts. Aristos cursed himself for being so stupid. That old man was the father and the mother he never knew, and even though he always said that he did nothing but fulfill his duty, everyone knew that their relationship was more than an obligation.

“We have tried to prepare you not only as athletes, but as men, for the days after the Race.” The Tutor continued, his voice calm again. “As far as the girl is concerned, you should have waited until the end of this journey. We would have helped resolve all your concerns, but this...”

The wind continued to swing the branches of the trees overhead, projecting over them, alternately, light and shadow. The Tutor picked up a small branch and began to draw concentric circles on the wet ground: the first, as large as the radius of his arms allowed, and more circles within, each smaller than the previous. Aristos watched him with curiosity.

“Look,” said the old man when he finished the drawing, “when we meet someone for the first time we usually only show the first layer,” he pointed to

the outer circle with the branch, “where our social behavior is embedded and which initially makes most people seem charming, thus helping social coexistence.” Aristos did not take his eyes off the circles as the Tutor pointed to the next one. “As relations intensify, the various layers that cover the inner self begin to fall. Family and friends cross all these concentric circles, and the more circles they cross the greater our exposure. These represent our most intimate being,” He pointed to the very smallest ones, “they are the layers representing our fears, our frustrations, and our innermost insecurities, they even contain our unspoken dreams and shameful desires. If anyone tried to penetrate those layers, it would leave us so completely naked and vulnerable that we would wind up hating them. Finally,” he said, pointing to the center, “this would be the authentic Self: the area within that remains unknown to us and yet it makes us who we are. If it contradicts the other layers, it will destroy us, but if it is in balance with the other circles, it will bring us closer to absolute harmony. You met this girl,” he continued, “and this has led you to discover aspects of yourself that you ignored up until now. So much so that this relationship has unconsciously made you question what until now was your primary mission.” The young man was about to protest, but the Tutor interrupted him. “I have no doubt that the rest of your concerns are important, but these concerns have increased and reached a higher level because someone has penetrated several layers and now you are too vulnerable. Look, son, when there is a conflict between destiny and the information contained in a person’s innermost self, people become schizophrenic. For the first time in your life, you have to choose between the feelings represented by this girl, and your mission, for which you were chosen before your birth.”

“I have no doubts about my mission,” Aristos protested, “and the fact that I love this woman does not mean...”

“I know. And both need not be incompatible. But the impatience of youth has made you believe they are, and has nailed doubts in your spirit.”

Once again they were silent. Aristos was glad he had requested this meeting with the Tutor. His words always produced a soothing sensation. Undoubtedly, he was the person who knew him best. For a few minutes they each sank into their own thoughts. Then the old man spoke again, but this time there was a deep sadness in his voice.

“Do you love her that much?”

“Yes.” Aristos said with gentle firmness “From the first moment, when I saw her at the Stadium. I struggled not to think about her, because I knew that given the proximity of the Race, the time was inopportune, but I could not help it. I guess none of this should have happened ... I’m sorry! I am truly sorry. But had I been convinced that my life should focus solely on the Race,

nothing would have made me stray from that path. I feel as if I've never been able to live in the present. Since I was born, the Record was the future, the present would last only a few seconds, and from that moment on, I was always doomed to live from the past. It seems that the only thing they could not steal from me is the experience of death. I want to live in the present, and that means in every moment, every instant ... I fear that the Record would not let me."

For a moment, the movement of air parted the leaves of the trees. A ray of sunshine filtered through and lit up the old man's face as he said, almost in a whisper:

"That's the way things are. You're throwing away the glory ... you know this, right?"

Aristos nodded.

"Yes ... But in exchange for living..."

The old man took his strong arm. The young athlete thought he saw that his eyes were moist when he said:

"Let's go, son. I'm cold."

## **Fifteen**

Authority explained the situation concisely, omitting any personal opinion on the matter. Everyone looked at him and then looked at each other in disbelief. Not only because the meeting had been unexpected, but also because it had been extended to the full cabinet on an issue that was beyond the specialized area of each ministry. The slanting light coming through the half-open blinds lit the large room and their chairs were arranged in a semicircle around the State President, with no table between them.

"I need your advice." Authority said. "This issue is as important as it is urgent. What do you think is going to happen, and what should we do?"

In addition to the secretaries, Albu, the Senate President was in the meeting, still as overweight as he had been in the days when he had shared chambers with Authority, to whom he had always shown a deep loyalty. In fact, he was one of the leading proponents when the Senate appointed him President of the State. He was aware that he had been called due to the severity of the situation, which had become even more complicated after the death of two people during the recent demonstrations. He also knew that the

atmosphere among the senators was very agitated. Definitely, the situation was very delicate and the worse problem was that all the possible solutions seemed unsafe.

“First of all, sir, a question.” Albu was the first to speak. “Would you use your right to veto?”

“No.” Authority said flatly. “The solution will have to come some other way, and the search for said solution will have to be a top priority for all members of the Government. Being able to count on your help will take some of the load off our back.” He directed these last words especially at Albu.

“We'll have to put pressure on the senators one by one.” said the Secretary of Justice, concerned about what some might consider interference in the work of the Senate.

“Yes, that is what I expect of you.”

“Sir, it is very risky. Some will take the opportunity to shout that the government is interfering with that institution.”

Several of those present nodded their heads affirmatively and began to speak, but it was Albu who made himself heard:

“Sir, according to my reports, it seem that many of the representatives, from both Europe and Asia, support the amendment proposed by Zenón. This fact is more important than any criticism you might get for speaking to the senators, especially when he has enough votes to win.”

“And what do you suggest we do?”

Before deciding to answer, Albu looked around at those in the room hoping to find support. Not finding it, he continued:

“Our only chance lies in persuading the undecided and conveying our trust to those who share our views, for they are all being pressured by Zenón and his maneuvers. We must choose between doubt and certainty: if we do, we will have a chance to win, even if we receive criticism for what they will more than likely call government pressure to the Senate. But if we don't do it, we will lose.”

“Sir, with all due respect, I think it is my duty to insist that the only true solution is the use of the veto.”

No sooner had he spoken, the Secretary of Public Security regretted his words. Their situation was extremely delicate after the events of the Day of the Flags. The press was watching him closely and he had become the target of all forms of criticism, even from those close to the government.

“Do you think that would convince people of our reasons?” Authority spoke as he gave him a cold stare. “Do you think that the veto would solve the street riots?”

The Secretary of Public Security deemed it wiser not to insist. Authority then addressed Dalmás.

“What do you think?”

“Sir, I beg you to excuse me from giving my opinion. The cabinet and I will do what the rest of you decide.”

“Normally I would be pleased to grant whatever you asked, but not today.” Authority cut him off emphatic.

“Then I will speak in favor of the veto despite the risks such an action involves, because in light of the latest information, Zenón seems to have the votes needed for his proposed amendment. I see no other way to stop it.”

Authority listened attentively and then addressed the Secretaries of Justice and Public Security:

“What are our chances of controlling the riots before the start of the Senate meets?”

“It depends largely on the amount of force needed and the cooperation of the mayors of the towns involved.”

The words of the Secretary of Public Security got a quick reaction from the Secretary of Justice:

“Force must be used with extreme caution. The two deaths from Zenón’s manifestations have given him more votes than all his demagogic speeches together. We cannot create new martyrs! That is precisely what Zenón wants.”

They continued discussing the different options for over an hour. They also tried to figure out how to go about putting pressure on the member of the Senate without being too obvious.

When the meeting was over, Dalmás, couldn’t help but notice the pessimistic mood of the cabinet members while saying goodbye.

When they were alone, Authority, addressed him:

“Please sit down,” he said, “and now tell me what you really think.”

The Prime Secretary leaned back in his chair and began to speak respectfully but with the trust built by hundreds of shared confidences.

“First of all, we need to control disorderly conducts using only the

necessary and minimum violence. Second, I think your presence, on the last day of session, may prevent the undecided from massively tilting towards Zenón if they sense defeat. And finally, the use of the veto should be left on the table to be used in case of extreme necessity.”

“I’ve made my position regarding the veto very clear.” Authority cut him off tonelessly.

“Forgive me for being so bold, but you asked for my opinion and I am giving it to you. Also,” continued Dalmas, “I think, that if you address the senators, your speech should be televised around the world. Your arguments should be disseminated as efficiently as possible. Only this can prevent today’s unease from eventually becoming extended and violent actions manipulated by some populist.”

After a few minutes of silence, Authority, who had stood up, said:

“Zenón has laid a good ambush, eh? He must be convinced that he has us by the neck and he may well be right...” He gave Dalmas an intense look. “Well, that’s life for you! All eras have had their Zenón. There have always been politicians who merely throw focal messages that people like to hear, regardless of short and/or long-term consequences. Interestingly enough, many naive citizens call them progressives, when, in reality, all they are is demagogues who take dangerous shortcuts in order to satisfy their immeasurable hunger for power and vanity.”

“Will you receive the Senator?”

“Yes. Have him come in tomorrow, but after twelve. Before I see him I want to meet with Albu alone. Ask him to come see me in my private office at nine.”

“For Zenón the official office, right?” asked Dalmas.

“Spending so much time together is a problem, it seems we guess our mutual thoughts.” Authority smiled.

Dalmas was flattered. Those words from the mouth of the old man were a very desired speech of acceptance.

## **Sixteen**

“What are your vacation plans?”

Tessa and Julia sat on the porch enjoying some refreshments. It had been a while since they had seen each other as the public tours of the Stadium had ceased due to the proximity of the Race. The morning was clear and behind the buildings downtown the sea could be seen.

“I’m going to the mountains with Antonio.”

“You’re going to miss your friend Zenón's debate?” Julia asked her friend smiling wickedly.

“No way!” Tessa exclaimed. “He’s fooled us enough! Damn politicians! Everything was planned to provoke exactly what happened afterwards. We fell for it like idiots! We were the fools they used as bait... anyway, quite frankly, I don’t believe any cause is worth dying for.”

The two friends were silent.

“Hey, by the way...” Julia suddenly remembered. “You didn’t tell me if I'm supposed to be your alibi of your trip.”

“No need as I’ve been making progress! I told my parents the truth and they gave me permission to go!”

“Did you tell them everything? Including about Antonio?”

“Yep! I know it’s hard to believe, but I did!” After a pause, she continued: “How about you? What are you going to do?”

“I do not know yet. I have no concrete plan.”

“What a silly question!” Tessa said impishly. “You’ll be following you dear Aristos, right?”

Julia smiled. A few days before, she had told both her father and her friend (who could not hide her envy) about First, without going into excessive detail.

“It will all depend on who is elected to run.” Julia mused.

“If he runs, you’ll lose him. You know that, right?” Tessa said with unusual severity. “I pray to the gods that Fifth is chosen.”

“This is true. But everything has its share of problems.”

“And to think that I could have been the one in the stadium that day!” Tessa was once more using her usual tone.

“I’ll make sure to tell Antonio,” Julia laughed, “I promise I’ll tell you as soon as I see him.”

“Don’t bother, I’ll tell myself. Hey, you know what? If your Aristos



doesn't run you could come to the mountain with us. Maybe we could even swap."

"You are crazier by the day!" In a more serious tone she said: "Let's see what happens."

"Okay!" said Tessa, "but don't forget about me. If you feel like it, I would love for you to come with us."

"We'll see how things go." after a short silence Julia asked: "Have you thought about what you'll do once vacation is over?"

"Yes, Antonio and I have requested a farm in a city in the region of the Seine."

"But that's so far away!" Julia said regretfully. "Besides, I can't picture you growing tomatoes and milking cows."

"Why not? Right now we have no idea, but we'll learn. Before you know it we'll know how to cultivate the garden, take care of our animals, and auction products on the market on Thursdays."

The two friends continued to enjoy the beautiful day while chatting. They sensed they would not see each other again for a while.

## Seventeen

The spring morning was rather cool and Albu was all bundled up when he arrived at Authority's office. Not having had to wait, he now sat face to face with Authority.

"I need your help." The State President shot directly at the Senate President.

"Here I am. What do I need to do?"

Although they saw each other very little, they maintained the friendship that had united them during their joint years in the Senate and they had not forgotten how to speak to each other without beating around the bush.

"Will you help me because you're convinced that I am right or to honor our old friendship?"

"For those two reasons and a third: it is the best for everyone."

"Very well, Albu. How many votes do you think Zenón has?"

“Right now things are pretty much even. The final decision will be made by a dozen at most. If you decide to speak in the Senate, the undecided will likely choose to say no to the amendment.”

“Do you know of specific names of Senators who are determined to vote for Zenón?”

“Yes, I do. Why?”

“Because we will have to find a way of persuading fifteen or twenty of them and attract them to our cause. In such important matters, we cannot and should not leave anything to chance.” He smiled gently and then went on to say: “Our world may not be perfect,” Albu listened intently, “but it is the best world that man has had since the dawn of time. The Universalist Revolution ended the wars when it managed to abolish the borders that divided nations. This also eradicated hunger and illiteracy in the world, as the resources were now of a single state, as opposed to hundreds of them, and could thus be used to resolve these matters with the utmost priority. More than fifteen centuries ago, The Revolution also ended the inheritance of goods and, in this way, allowed the achievement of true social justice. Each citizen has a single name as a symbol that he or she will have to achieve success with self-effort and it will not depend or rely on the status of the family they were born into. We therefore embrace individual differences and don’t promote the collective uniqueness that spilled so much blood and caused so much suffering. These are the fundamental principles we stand for. It was these same principles that saved humanity when it was rushing toward self-destruction. Man had achieved the highest technology but had not made the intellectual progress necessary for survival.” Authority stood up and Albu respectfully did the same. “Now we are forced to use whatever methods are necessary so that no one can threaten our future, or take us back to the old tribal wars. That is our responsibility, friend, and what we get paid to do.”

“What do you suggest we do?”

“We need to study these names one by one and find their weaknesses. Some have ambitions to be met and others something to hide. Let’s not rely solely on the power of my speech!” He smiled as he said it. “Do you agree?”

“Totally.”

“Well then, let's get to work!”

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The meeting with Zenón a few hours later took place in a different office and with a different attitude. Authority was much more solemn as he sat across

from the Senator, separated by a long dark wood table.

“Thank you for seeing me.” Said the senator.

“No need to thank me,” replied the President of the State with an icy tone. “What I can do for you?”

Zenón ignored the tone used by Authority and began to explain the reasons for presenting the amendment. The old man listened without interrupting him, and when he had finished, he said:

“Could you not have waited for next year’s plenary session so as not to interfere with the Race?”

“I think it's the right time, as I explained to your Prime Secretary.”

“The right time ... for whom?”

“For history. In the same year that the record is broken thus advancing individuals, we begin to change the Constitution so that society progresses.”

“Society consists of individuals and only through their improvement can communities advance. Moreover, society per se, does not exist: it is a reflection of man's gregariousness, powered by political and social scientists in order to more easily manipulate.”

“I do not see it that way, sir. I think...”

“I think you did not come here to try to convince me with your thesis, just as I renounce trying to convince you with mine.” interrupted Authority. “Therefore, I would appreciate it if you just tell me the real reason for your visit. I think we're both smart enough not to waste our time in useless speculations.”

Zenón continued without blinking an eye after the abrupt challenge from the President.

“I agree with you. It's the best thing to do.” He paused reflectively, then continued: “I am sure that you know that I will win,” Authority made a slight but visible gesture of doubt, “unless you use the veto. Will you use it?”

“I will be as honest with you as you have been with me. You sense that I will not use it and you may be right. But tell me: what is it that you’re really looking to accomplish? Because, regardless of the reasons you give in your fiery speeches when defending your thesis, you are too intelligent not to be aware of the long-term damage that would occur if the amendment passes. Knowledge of history is only useful if it serves to correct the mistakes of our ancestors, and I know you know this. So: what is it that you really want?”

Zenón smiled. He shifted uneasily in his seat and moments later, without hesitation, replied:

“Your post.”

Authority seemed to think for a few seconds, but never showed surprise by the senator's response. Then, staring at his opponent, said:

“You’re going about it the wrong way. When I’m done with you in the plenary session, you’ll be lucky if you can keep a dozen supporters.”

## **Eighteen**

They spent all afternoon rapidly sailing windward. The coast of Shandu could no longer be seen and the wind was cooling as the sun went down. The tide was not high, but a strong current kept the boat in balance.

Assisted by Julia, First put a reef in the mainsail, but decided instead on keeping the jib up, thus the yacht had better movement. He took the tiller and prepared to steer the boat until reaching open sea, where he would use the auto-navigator. From where he stood, he watched Julia standing on the bow pulpit, with the wind caressing her face and playing with her hair.

The events of the day drifted into his mind. Very early in the morning, he had put his things in a suitcase. It was hard to believe that a whole lifetime fit into such a small space. The night before, he had bid farewell to Fifth, who was on his way to Urbitad. There was to be a televised presentation to be held in a few days after the senate plenary. They had embraced wishing each other luck. "You're going to do it!" First said. His brother only replied, "I'll never forget you." Both felt a strong sense of emptiness in the pit of their stomach.

A few days prior, the Tutor had officially told them that Fifth had been chosen. He spoke to First alone: "From now on you will become a normal citizen. You can do what you want with your life, although you will need an adjustment period with which we will help you." Although the news had not really been a surprise for him, in principle, he did not know how to react. "You should take a few months off to give yourself time to think and to decide your future. What would you like to do?" The old man asked him tenderly. A single answer had come to mind: "Sail."

Everything happened very quickly. After a few hours of hesitation, he decided to call Julia and ask her to accompany him.

She told him she had to think about it, but shortly afterwards, as she recovered from the surprise, she phoned to say he could count on her.

"You want something to eat or drink?" Julia had approached him, interrupting his thoughts.

"Something hot would do us both good." He suggested.

"Alright."

Julia went down to the cabin of the boat and began to prepare some soup on the stove. Night had fallen and it was cool, so hot soup was just what their young bodies needed. While she was cooking, she was recalling her own surprise at her father's approval when she told him she would be going on a boat trip with Aristos. "Do you love each other?" He had asked. She did not hesitate to answer yes and he continued:

"Then do what you think best, but have you thought that if you are at sea you will not receive any news of the Race?" She explained that this was precisely what First wanted. He needed to forget and to be forgotten, in order to reflect on his future. He wanted to be isolated from everyone and everything for a while, with no media to remind him of his past. Her father reflected on this for a few minutes, but again insisted: "So for a few weeks you will not receive any news at all?" She confirmed that indeed that's how it would be. She seemed to remember a gesture of relief in her father's face, but the illusion of the moment made her forget to ask why. She made a mental note to ask him upon her return.

They said their goodbyes that morning. He held her tightly, as never before, and after saying goodbye to First, who had come to pick her up, he took his daughter's face in his hands and looking into her eyes said, "Strive to be happy, sweetheart." As they drove away in the car, he stood in the driveway, waving goodbye.

The memory was interrupted by First as he entered the cabin. He wrapped his arms around Julia and, embracing her, said:

"It smells so good!"

"What? Wait! Who's steering the boat?" She was alarmed.

"The other crew." He teased.

"Stop being silly..."

"The auto navigator, you chicken sailor!"

After the soup, their bodies warmed up. Shortly after, they lay on the berth

and cuddled for a while, while listening in silence to the sound of the wind against the sails and the bow of the boat cutting through the water. For the first time after the emotions and anxieties experienced in recent days, in the middle of the ocean, they found peace.

“I love you.” Julia said moments before they made passionate love.

## **Nineteen**

During events of this magnitude, the reason why Urbitad was capital of the world became evident. It was built on the ruins of Hong Kong, the Asian city of ancient times. Back in the twenty first century, it had become the synthesis of Eastern and Western cultures, after the decline of the Euro-American civilization, when the economic and political power of the world passed on to the Asian nations.

Urbitad is situated on the island of the same name. It would seem that its three hundred fifty thousand inhabitants had taken to the streets. People were running to and fro, creating a sense of feverish activity as the annual plenary session of the senate was taking place.

Politicians and journalists from all corners of the Earth occupied the city. Even nearby cities had benefited by the event, its hotels were full and only the privileged got accommodation in the capital.

In the nine years since his election, Authority had never attended the Senate sessions. He believed that senators should legislate completely independently. This time however, was a special occasion. The media anticipated that given the importance of what was to be decided, Authority would intervene and make use of his constitutional right, vetoing Zenón's proposal. The wagers on the street were ten to one that he would use that right.

This extraordinary session had broken another custom: television cameras would be broadcasting around the world. They would, however, broadcast with a two hours delay time in anticipation of any problems that might occur. It was believed that this had been an initiative of Zenón's followers who saw it as a personal historic achievement.

The three preceding days of sessions were dedicated to several senators defending the amendment while the opposing senators rebuffed it. As expected, Zenón's final speech was brilliant and fiery. The pros and cons arguments occupied the second and third days. Each one was entitled to argue the reasons for their vote, but with a limited time, lest they would need to

extend to one more day. At the conclusion of the third day, the Presidential Palace officially informed that Authority, using his right, would address the full Senate before the votes were cast. By now, this was a surprise to no one.

The Senators barely had enough time to wash and eat something before returning to the Senate. Authority was to arrive in Chambers by seven, and at that time everyone should be assembled.

The President of the State arrived at the doors of the Senate at seven o'clock sharp. A formation of Security Officers in their gala uniforms lined the sidewalk from the outside of the building to its entry. The police kept hundreds of photographers at bay while the audience stood behind rails, a few meters behind. Authority got out of the official vehicle and made his way between the line of officers. Once he reached the doors, the three regulatory knocks announced the arrival of the president. The chief ushers, after opening the heavy doors, solemnly announced:

“Mr. President Authority requesting permission from the senators to enter the Senate.”

All the senators stood up. The Chairman of the Board went to the door and respectfully greeted Authority, who replied courteously. As they both walked down the aisle towards the presidential podium, the welcome cheers from those present accompanied them.

“Here we are together again, eh, old friend?” Authority said to Albu in a voice that only they could hear.

“Yes, sir, just like old times,” said the Senate President. He could not help a certain emotional inflection in his voice.

The Chamber was very bright, illuminated by television lights. Authority headed straight to the simple podium with a microphone on the speaker's platform from where one could devise the entire room. Meanwhile, the President of the Senate, had moved to his usual seat at the head of the presidential table from where he addressed the audience:

“Ladies and gentlemen of the Senate,” the senators remained respectfully standing, “today, this institution is honored to receive Authority. Making use of the rights conferred by the Constitution, he has requested to address Parliament before the vote to be taking place at the end of his speech, just as the law prescribes. And thus, this President grants the floor to Authority.”

The applause was long and hard. The State President bowed his head gently as a gesture of appreciation to his audience and waited for the Senators to sit. When all became silent, the one hundred and forty second President of

the World began to speak.

“With your permission, Mr. President,” he said to the President of the Senate in the required parliamentary courtesy, who in turn nodded slightly. “Senators,” the television cameras captured each and every gesture, “great men are only truly great when their achievements are parallel to their dreams. The first Authority was the greatest of all, because he dared to dream of what most considered impossible: a different humanity, and he succeeded. Many years ago the world was very different from what it is now. There were wars in which, in the name of all that separated men, people were killing each other by the millions. Their leaders convinced them that it was their duty as citizens, to defend their borders, their religion, language or race, in other words, everything that distinguished some citizens from others. But these deaths never fixed anything. The end of each war meant the prelude to the next. History has shown that wars were just a cover-up for the power struggle between specific individuals; be it political or economic – assuming there is a difference between them – using their people to obtain their ambitions. And the symbol they always used to highlight their differences: flags. Each flag represented what separated every human group from the other, serving each side in litigation to differentiate, never to join. This is why they were banned by our Constitution, because they were never symbols of coexistence, but rather of death and misery. Hiding behind them, people were dying and killing without knowing why. Is this what we want to go back to?”

The question hung in the air. The silence in the chamber was absolute. The television cameras continued picking up Authority’s every word and gesture. Everyone was aware that he was addressing all the citizens of the world.

“Today, Senator Zenón is asking you to amend the eighth article of our Constitution; that same article that for the past fifteen centuries has kept us safe from these atrocities. I am sure that this senator is a good man, but he has forgotten to explain how he intends to prevent this amendment, if it should pass, from being used by multiple regional politicians to accumulate more personal power. How some may even attempt to destroy the basic principle that sustains our peaceful coexistence: humans in solidarity, sharing the same home called Earth. I know that Senator Zenón is not an ambitious citizen and naively thinks that everyone is like him. More than likely, this is why he has not explained to us how he would prevent a governor from any given region on the planet, feeling more powerful than others, to use that power against a neighboring region, bringing us back to the times of tribes and nations that were the cause of endless conflicts of hundreds of millions of human beings leading to uncountable murders. The lack of solidarity can also bring us back to the time in which a fifth of humanity enjoyed ninety percent of the planet's resources, while the remaining four-fifths suffered a monopoly of hunger.



Zenón thinks everyone is like him,” the senator was increasingly uncomfortable in his seat, “worried about the two unnecessary deaths already produced by this amendment. But we all know that unlike Mr. Zenón, there are those that justify the deaths of others if it serves their purposes.” He paused and, shortly after, continued in a firm voice: “Senators, you are not attending a match between progressives and conservatives. Often, being progressive strives in maintaining standards that have been effective for so long, rather than initiating adventures that put the security of our people at risk, just to satisfy the personal ambitions of some groups of demagogues. Obviously I am not referring to our dear senator.” The ironic references to Zenón sank the senator deeper and deeper into his seat. “The event that mankind has been waiting three hundred years for, will take place within three days. To rob this event of the starring role is highly unfair. If the athlete sets the record, we will have demonstrated to mankind the correct path to follow: the path that leads to the improvement of the individual. The pursuit of happiness is an individual option. The State cannot provide happiness, but it must create the framework for it to be possible. We live on a small planet, with limited natural resources and we cannot divide it again. In the past, this has only brought unhappiness and misery to most. The Earth is the only real heritage we have, and no tribe or so-called nation, can appropriate pieces of it. That's what, in large part, is at risk with this amendment,” he made a pause during which he seemed to look at the senators one by one. “In conclusion, ladies and gentlemen, let me just say that I had no intention, at any time, to use my veto. And the reason is very simple: I know that each of you will cast your vote thinking that a change to the eighth article of the Constitution such as the one proposed by Mr. Zenón, could bring painful consequences to future generations. It would surely be a high price to pay for a fleeting moment of glory on a cover story by the media, or worse yet, to satisfy immeasurable personal ambitions.” Each person in attendance felt as if they were being personally addressed. “The citizens of the world expect all of you to fulfill your obligation. Vote, only according to your consciences. Thank you.”

Authority had not read a single word to deliver his speech. For a few eternal seconds after he finished addressing the senate, there was nothing but absolute silence. As he was about to step down from the podium, there was an eruption of applause in unison. Zenón looked around and knew he had lost.

## Twenty

The Stadium was empty. Everything was ready for the big Race. The light

coming through the enormous hemisphere lit the track below, where a solitary man was exercising and stretching. His breathing was steady but tense. From the sidelines, the television cameras that followed the figure of the athlete were emitting a soft, hardly audible sound.

Aristos Fifth tried to concentrate. He knew that he would have only one chance to break the record. He agitated his arms hanging loosely along the side of his body, while taking short, energetic strides, to warm up his muscles. His mind could not help randomly conjuring familiar images.

He thought of his Tutor. Interestingly, he was unable to accurately recall his facial features; he guessed who it was by the feeling that the memory imprinted in his soul. Beside him, dancing in his head were the figure of his brother First, and that of the little child, also his brother, who had been removed from their lives due to his deformities. He tried to imagine what they would be thinking while watching him on TV, all alone. He struggled to keep his mind from continuing to wander. He focused his gaze and thoughts on the numbers moving on the screen in front of him, and that indicated that the start of the test was approaching.

He tried to use the mental void method to escape the images that assaulted his mind. He tried to focus on the current record of seven thousandths of a second that he was expected to break today. Despite having spent his whole life training in a place like this, preparing for the arrival of this moment, he realized that to get the precise concentration he needed was going to be difficult. He shuddered at the thought of millions of people watching him. The purpose of the psychological work with the Tutors had been to enable him to put aside these concerns that would naturally assail him at that very moment. For a moment he froze in horror at the thought of failure.

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He sat on a large armchair in the middle of the room, from where he could see everything happening there. His head, covered with gray and resting on the high back and the white robe covering his body set him apart from the rest of those presents. His face, furrowed by a thousand wrinkles, reflected serenity despite the sharp tension that lingered in the air.

Authority looked inquiringly at the man sitting to his right who rose and approached the technicians that were attending the monitors. He revised their work, with the expertise that only many years of practice can provide. Once satisfied that all was going well, and with the thick carpet muffling the sound of his footsteps, he returned to his seat.

“Everything is ready, sir.”

His words were acknowledged by a slight nod of the head, followed by a glance to see the time remaining for the start and then a gaze lost in the thousand lights of the control systems.

The room, where every detail of the Race was being controlled, had ten television monitors showing the images sent from cameras at the Stadium thousands of miles away. In front of each monitor, a technician wearing a blue robe remained alert to any incident that might occur.

Authority and Sheffair, occupied the central part of the room, and behind them sat twenty men, wearing the distinctive green robes indicating they were government secretaries. The tension of the wait was more visible in them than on the others.

Everyone was silently focused on the screens that showed the images of what was happening at the Stadium. Some of them thought about how fortunate they were to be able to watch this historical event from a place as privileged as the Communications Center. All eyes were fixed on the three digits that would soon begin to dance frantically and eventually indicate the time set by the athlete. If Jacson's predictions were correct, the three zeros, would turn into 207.

This would mean that they had won. Any other possibility was unthinkable.

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Just like every other city in the world, Shandu seemed deserted. People were home and all activity had stopped. Everyone wanted to witness the good news. They shared Aristos's loneliness as they contemplated his image on the TV screens. Everyone would have liked to help him run faster, but it was impossible. It all had to be just as Jacson had foreseen. It had to be a solo act by the athlete. In any case, it did not matter because in every town and every city everyone was content to celebrate this success for all humanity.

If the result of the Race confirmed Jacson's theories, a new, virtually infinite path would open up to the evolution of man. Past generations had dreamed of this moment, and the future would remember it forever; but they had the privilege of being the generation that witnessed it. Ultimately, everyone had known for centuries, that the Race was to take place now, this very minute. Only a few naysayers wondered what would happen if it failed. It was said that humanity would never recover from the loss of hope that had been held for centuries, and frustrated in just seconds. If the test failed, mankind could lose faith in its own ability to evolve and, thereafter, slowly begin to die, as individuals and as a genre.

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Once again, Authority gave Sheffair an inquisitive look. Sheffair answered with a very soft whisper that was inaudible to the rest of those present. Meanwhile, the cameras did not lose a single movement of the athlete, not even a drop of his sweat. Undoubtedly, the engineer knew his job. Under his direction, these precise images were not just being broadcasted, but they were also being recorded, and for the future generations, would constitute full proof of EVERYTHING that had happened.

From his seat, Sheffair turned his face to watch Authority and saw that his gaze was seemingly lost. Once again, he admired the serenity of the elderly man whose wrinkled hands rested on the arms of the chair.

Both were aware that although every minimum detail had been taken care of, if something went wrong – it did not matter what the cause was – the consequences would be unpredictable. Sheffair tried to think positively and banish any thoughts that may lead him elsewhere.

Authority felt extremely tired, but at peace with himself. The events about to take place were his ultimate lifetime goal. Fate had wanted him, and no other, to bear the responsibility of the next few moments, but he was strangely relaxed. He looked up at the monitors and saw the athlete preparing for the supreme moment.

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Finally, Aristos Fifth had managed to assert the mental vacuum techniques and the autosuggestion took effect. A solitary command began to pound in his mind, in the very depths of his whole being, a command that had been printed a thousand times in his genes: run!

He could feel the muscles stretch, with a flexibility that he had never felt before. Like a lightning bolt, the thought of success flashed through his mind and he knew that victory would be his.

Vigorously but quietly, he inhaled through his nose and exhaled through his mouth. With conviction in his eyes and absolute emptiness in his mind, he was the perfect specialist.

Slightly frowning, he looked straight ahead and felt, rather than saw, how time was running out. He stood behind the starting line, and leaning carefully, put his hands on the edge of the line that marked the start. He fixed his gaze on the ground as his legs flexed repeatedly on the support blocks. His whole body felt like it was made of elastic. A mild electrical current would indicate the exact time of the start, and at that precise moment the three zeros that had

remained fixed until now, would also start to run. There was no before or after, only now. The genetic information of hundreds of years concentrated on his muscles and his will. He looked up and fixed his gaze on the beam pointing to the finish line.

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All those looking at the screens saw the metamorphosis of the athlete. Through the sophisticated devices of ambient sound, his breathing and heart rate acceleration were perfectly audible. His eyes were a cry of his will. The last second of centuries of waiting, was now shattered by a time clock.

Sheffair realized he'd been holding his breath. A technician wiped the sweat from his face. Everyone lived that moment in the deepest silence, and suddenly, it happened: the three zeros on the top right of the screen began to move rapidly. The last two figures moved at such a high speed that they were totally invisible to the human eye. The athlete catapulted forward.

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Aristos Fifth felt the electrical contact coming from the foot support block. Without even realizing it, his body shot forward, and he began running regardless of his mind control. He could hear himself. He could feel the rapid beating of his heart in his ears. He saw the image of the track moving backwards under his feet. Directly ahead, the beam of light seemed very far away.

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The technical perfection of his movements could be clearly seen on the screens. The back and forth rhythm of his arms, the lifting of the elbows so as to pull the shoulders, and these in turn pulling the rest of his body. It appeared as if his feet did not make contact with the ground as he glided through the air trying to maintain his posture in perfect balance.

All eyes in the room moved rapidly from the athlete to the time clock that seemed to accelerate more and more.

The end was near.

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Although it seemed impossible, Aristos Fifth could have sworn that he had felt the light beam on his body as he crossed the finish line. In any case, once he cut through it, he could no longer hear his own breathing, and while his legs were trying to stop the momentum of the race, all of his senses concentrated on his eyes that were focused on the giant screen looking for the

three numbers.

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They watched as he approached the finish line. Without even realizing it, all but Authority and the engineer, had stood up as the end of the Race was coming to an end. They approached the monitors as if they wanted to be closer to the athlete.

Suddenly, for a brief moment, time stood still. Full of anxiety, they all observed Aristos cross the finish line and how he kept on running due to the effects of inertia. Once they managed to absorb all this information, their eyes wandered to the upper right hand corner of the screen, where three new numbers appeared and were very still: 207.

They remained silent for the few seconds that their minds required to process this new information and what it meant. Suddenly, there was an explosion of joy. A cry of long contained anxiety burst from their souls. Evolution was possible!

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Had anyone been able to observe the planet from a distance, they would have seen millions of people shouting and dancing in the streets. People cried, laughed and hugged. Some sat in silence, absorbing the Good News within themselves. Others chanted, with reverence, the names of Jacson the god, and Aristos, his son.

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Everyone in the Communications Center respectfully took turns to embrace Authority. He could not hide the moisture in his eyes. Everything was accomplished.

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An airlift was scheduled to pick him up. Exhausted by the effort and stress, the athlete slowly let himself fall to the ground as he felt his heart rate returning to normal. The three numbers meant that the goal had been reached, proving that Jacson had been right all along. Without even thinking about it, he flexed his legs vigorously to relax his muscles. He knew there would be no one for miles around the stadium as roadblocks prevented curious onlookers from approaching. However, he would be taken out of the Stadium in a few minutes and a new life would begin for him. Everyone would want to see and touch him. He was Jacson's son, and would spend the rest of his days touring the world telling his experiences and sharing the Good News. His popularity would have no limits and history would always remember him. What he could

not understand was why none of this was making him feel happy. He thought about how his semen would give life to new specialists that in turn would begin a new genetic cycle. It was even quite possible that after his death, he would be hibernated. But there was no satisfaction in this either.

Everything had been perfect, but in the vast emptiness of the Stadium he felt all alone, helpless...

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Filled with the deepest admiration, the Government members and technicians said goodbye to Authority and Sheffair as they were leaving the Communications Center. Their plans were to immediately return to their respective cities to participate in the celebrations of the Good News. Once alone, the old man and the engineer exchanged a look filled with profound fatigue.

"The time has arrived, my friend." Authority said to Sheffair. "Do you have any doubts?"

"No, sir. Everything is perfect as it is."

"I have to bear witness. You understand, right?"

"Yes, sir. I understand."

The engineer removed a capsule out of a small box that he had taken out of his pocket.

"Sit down." Authority whispered softly as he led him to the same chair that he himself had previously occupied. Once he was seated, and just as he had practiced in his mind a thousand times, he introduced the capsule into his mouth and, without further thought, swallowed. Authority sat beside him.

"You will feel no pain," he said, his voice low and calm. "But you and I both know that everything must be fulfilled. This is how it was planned."

Sheffair nodded silently. He felt his strength beginning to desert him as the sun set gently in the West. Images of his wife and Julia began to flood his mind as he heard the old man's words from very far away.

"For a very long time, mankind was constantly on the path of self-destruction. My ancestors gave them what they needed to make the survival of our species possible: faith in evolution and the endless progress of the human race. This was to be the new religion. But you and me, my friend, we have given future generations something to live for. For years, we both knew what your mission was and prepared accordingly. Today everything is fulfilled, and men celebrate jubilantly. A new era begins for humanity. As you know so well,

for centuries it seemed that human evolution had come to an end. Man's development as a species was no different than it was as an individual: birth, maturity, old age and death. But now, with your dedication and sacrifice, you have helped to revive the old dream of eternal youth, and the secret, dear friend, is none other than HOPE.

The old man stood up and walked slowly to the large windows, where he saw a large, agitated crowd surrounding the building.

"I too have done my duty." He continued. "That secret mission that was assigned to me by my predecessors has been fulfilled... and yet, I do not feel happy. Together, we have provided the light of hope to all others, but the information will die with us. No other will know the truth, not even my successor. Thus you must die, and the computer will delete the information you have, thanks to which this result was possible. Only we will know the truth, that is our unique advantage over our fellow man, the truth: that the times for the Race would always be 7 seconds and 207 thousandths. It has always been the plan. The amount of time it took the athlete to get to the finish line is irrelevant; that preset number would always appear on screen. You programmed the computer to accomplish this mission and to then delete it. We are the only two that know this and we must die with the secret. I wanted to be the first, my friend. I would love to be in your place. I lived with the bitterness of always having to have the answers to every question, and right now I am tired ... so tired ... Where do we find our hope?

The engineer never heard the last words. He had passed just a few moments before. Aseptically. Silently.

When Authority left the building he did not see the crowd, which was barely contained by the security forces. Neither did he hear their songs, or their cries of overwhelming joy. He looked up and watched the sun set behind the mountains. And he thought: "How beautiful...!"

THE END

## **Additional Contents**

To the reader:

When you purchase a movie in any format, it usually includes a "making-of" . Well, at the editor's suggestion, we decided to do a "making-of" of The



Record. But rather than focusing on how it was made we're going to talk about why it was made. What was the logic behind it? Are its proposals utopian or a necessity?

Actually, hidden among the intrigue and suspense, there are various ideas that are, in short, what motivated me to write this novel. Let's talk about it, shall we?

Let me begin with a fastidious request. When I originally wrote this book, I titled it *The Record*, so for sentimental reasons, please don't mind when I refer to it as such.

As you may have noticed, despite the story's futuristic setting, it steers away from the inhumane and robotic societies often created by science-fiction authors. I do not believe in that robotic man in a cold and technological society; which is why I do not reflect this in my writings. For a long time I have had a passion for studying and understanding mankind's journey on Earth over thousands of years and it has taught me that, in essence, man has not changed since the beginning of time. We make the same mistakes over and over again, and hardly learn anything from them. We tend to think that our current technical skills make us better than previous generations, and that is a deeply flawed assessment.

Indeed, history shows us that the men who walked the streets of Athens 2,500 years ago were not much different than those of today. They worried about their welfare, economics, children, politics and sports, which they were so fond of, that even wars stopped during the Olympics. They liked to have drinks with friends to chat about their city's latest political gossip, the next much talked about divorce or the latest sports scores. They wanted to love and be loved. They wondered who they were and where they were going. Does that seem very different from people today?

Consequently, there are no grounds to believe that citizens of the future will be different from citizens of today. Contemporary technology will provide the ability to develop easier and more massive ways of killing each other over the ages, but man, in essence, is and will remain the same.

I thought it would be interesting to develop these ideas, which embedded in the plot, would support the novel. On this occasion, however, we will leave the future. We will travel to the past and present for the purpose of displaying the world of universalism and the reasons for the need to convert planet Earth into a single country for all of its inhabitants.

And so, let us take another peek through the window of time that allowed us to observe our civilization fifteen centuries into the future, and together we will undertake a journey into the past and present.

# **I. The Crossroads**

At a glance, the first pages of *The Record*, take us to a society achieved via a Universalist revolution that has made planet Earth home to all of its inhabitants, and through this achievement, a society that is much better than the one we live in today.

The story takes place in the future, around the year 3500. It was evident – actually, not so evident, as we shall later see – that in the 21st century, mankind had reached a dead end, finding that Universalism would be the only solution for survival.

After envisioning the grave consequences that the latest applications of science and technology to the art of war would have on humanity, Albert Einstein wrote a letter to President Roosevelt in 1939, in which he defended the establishment of a world government as the only possible guarantor of global peace.

When Truman gave the order to drop the first atomic bomb on Japan in 1945, it was the beginning of a new and disturbing stage in our history. For the first time, mankind had the technology to wipe itself off the face of the Earth, but was not smart enough to control this enormously destructive power.

Among others, this great technological change, made it necessary to introduce major reforms in the organization of man on the planet, to ensure their survival.

Time and again, the brightest scientific minds of the twentieth century have indicated the need to form a world government as the only way to address the problems and dangers that loom over us. Isaac Asimov insisted on it when he wrote, “All the Troubles of the World”, indicating that the truly dire ones, are of global proportions. Overpopulation, pollution, and nuclear war are unsolvable for any nation or group of nations. In other words, we are in dire need of a world government.

One thing was very clear to Einstein, Asimov and other great prophets of the twentieth century that were advocates of science and technology: our technology has advanced significantly more than our level of competence, this being the reason why we can no longer control it. If no appropriate action is taken, this dangerous instrument, placed in the hands of the inevitably unconscious and irresponsible, will destroy humanity. This conviction was the base for the First Authority to lead the Universalist Revolution. Aware that the existing, outdated, and comfortably situated economic and political structures,

will snatch any possibility of a future for man as an individual and as a whole if we do not fight for change. The solutions will never come from those that are already in power, because they feel satisfied and often think like that great cynic who was once asked, "When do you think the world will end?" He replied without blinking, "When I die." There is no doubt that the necessary solutions should come from new people with different ideas. That is what the ruling classes symbolize in The Record.

The need for this profound change is evident, as weapons of mass destruction have placed humanity at a dangerous crossroads: destroy them or be destroyed by them. It is disturbing to see how man's behavior does not change when the circumstances are identical - even if there are thousands of years of history between them. Governments and the powers that be, whatever their political views, have never refrained from sacrificing human lives in the name of their country. They will always justify by claiming it is for the greater good, adding, of course, the prospect of economic benefits or of a potential loss of power. The dominant classes always find an excuse, whether religious or territorial, for justifying the intervention of nations in conflict behind any flag. As long as there are tribes or countries on Earth, war will exist. This conviction is what motivates the revolution that sets the stage for The Record.

Everyone knows that the United States used atomic bombs against Japan in 1945, but there have been other times in recent history that we have been on the brink of a nuclear confrontation. During the Cold War, the late President Kennedy did not hesitate, even for a moment, to put humanity on the verge of a new world war when he demanded the Soviet Union to dismantle their nuclear warheads that were installed in Cuba, an independent country that had accepted them, just as Turkey had allowed the U.S. to deploy missiles near the Soviet border. Fortunately, the world was spared the imminent disaster when the Soviet Prime Minister Khrushchev decided to withdraw the missiles when he realized war seemed inevitable. Meanwhile, Kennedy lived the last days of the crisis locked in his nuclear bunker, while we, the ingenuous people who inhabit this beautiful and troubled Earth, moved across its surface without any protection and without the slightest possibility of influencing the grave decisions being made from remote locations.

If this has been done by countries that, theoretically, have control mechanisms in place over their leaders, just imagine what can be expected from countries that offer less guarantees to their citizens and also have full capacity for destruction; countries such as Pakistan, India, China, Israel, Korea and a long list of European countries? Surely new countries will be added to the "nuclear club" in the future, not to mention the possibility of uncontrollable international terrorist groups being added to this category.

Einstein, Asimov and other wise men posed: there can be no local solutions to universal problems, and it is absolutely impossible for the governments of the more than two hundred nations that make up the current political map, to reach agreement that would be sufficient to resolve such serious and urgent matters.

But the current risks are much broader. Can anyone with the slightest sense of reality really believe that an accident occurring in a nuclear center of any country will not affect the rest of us? That the existence of borders can prevent disaster from affecting them, the way it already occurred with Chernobyl?

Can anyone really think that the multiple and expensive state structures on our planet can provide reasonable safeguards to prevent the existing hunger in the world from resulting in a destructive confrontation between rich nations and people who have nothing to lose except their misery?

Can anyone guarantee that countries that possess weapons of mass destruction would not use them if circumstances called for it? Does anyone believe that existing borders and governments will provide some sort of protection against the consequences of radioactivity, which would claim the lives of humans on the planet?

Can anyone expect a country to jeopardize its economic growth by giving up its industrial development in order to prevent the polluting gases from destroying the forests that generate the oxygen needed for the maintenance of life on our planet, without a superior political power forcing them to do so?

To make this more relevant to our current reality, let's reflect on the key issues that sustain our troubled society. In the novel we look at these issues from a balcony in the future. It is a journey from a bird's-eye view about a society where Universalism is a reality enjoyed by all of Earth's inhabitants. A civilization where there are no wars because there are no countries, where the global economy allows for one region to cover for another's deficiencies through the bartering of goods. A civilization where man travels the world freely, where the only borders are his own ambitions and he is not driven by hunger. A world where national interests affecting the environment have disappeared with the abolition of all nations, and where the legal framework and the language is the same for everyone. In a nutshell, a society that is nearly perfect.

## **II. The World We Live In**

It would make sense that we begin by analyzing ourselves, the men and women who make up the raw materials of society, as we are the essence of our greatest concerns given that nothing is dearer than oneself and the gender to which one belongs. Both sexes are united by an overwhelming majority of common characteristics, making up what we call the human race.

Like any other animal species, we are guided by the instinct of survival, which is the engine that moves everything; it is why we love, eat, have sex, strive to improve ourselves, form organized groups, seek shelter and fear death.

Biology further clarifies these common characteristics. Over hundreds of thousands of years, each sex has developed distinctive behaviors that distinguish one from the other. The prehistoric period more or less made us what we are today. It was hundreds of centuries, which is a long period of time compared to the barely thirty centuries that we know as “history”, and it had the most influence in our small daily behaviors; we are still mesmerized by the figures made by fire in a fireplace, which make us feel secure and at home. This is because for thousands of years fire accounted for the only way for humans to break the darkness of night and protect themselves against predators and the cold, leaving those sensations imprinted in our subconscious minds, even though we no longer have the same needs. In addition, for thousands of years, the male human was responsible for hunting and gathering food. During this time, they developed the ability to work in teams, establish strategies and carry out physical labor. Meanwhile, their female counterparts would remain in caves procreating and taking care of children at what today would be considered a very early age. For the females it was essential that the males return with food for them and their children. This led them to develop the art of seduction as a means to ensure that men would tend to their basic needs, including reproduction. These behaviors are still seen today, although in highly advanced countries it is more out of tradition than real need, given that women are now more autonomous. Nevertheless, there are several industries founded on these behaviors (fashion, cosmetics, etc.) Companies whose clients are generally women.

Historically, it is also common that when a society achieves high levels of stability and security, these nuances in behavior become diluted, exposing more similarities between men and woman, due to the fact that women no longer need men for support. However, when these concepts of stability and security disappear (e.g., in the Middle Ages, at the end of the Roman Empire) we tend to return to our roots.

Also, for the same historical reasons, men developed an adventurous spirit, given the need to go out in search of food, while women generally have more

homey and sedentary characteristics.

Since the dawn of time, facing suffering or the awareness of death itself, our species has found it necessary to create religions that provide the hope of a life after death.

In short, the things that sustain our way of being are biology, the survival instinct and history, in that order; and different conditions that arise when there are varying socioeconomic circumstances.

The sense of ownership is another manifestation of our instincts. The prehistoric man - much like today's man - guarded his cave in order to protect himself and his family from the elements and wild animals. He marked and tended to his hunting grounds, and later the cultivation of crops, to ensure their subsistence. This organization to defend their territories is the foundation for what is known today as countries. This is the main reason for the failure of any political system - such as communism - that seeks to abolish private property, which is an attack on one of the manifestations of man's survival instinct. Any political philosophy that ignores man's natural way of being is simply an aberration.

Currently we are living in an interesting stage in the history of mankind on Earth, with the coexistence of societies that have existed throughout the centuries and are at different stages of evolution: the tribe, the medieval, the industrial, and technological societies.

The first two have coincided in time for thousands of years, usually ignoring each other. The birth and evolution of the others came about with the industrial revolution, and currently lead the contemporary world. Men and women living in organized tribes, as our ancestors did thousands of years ago still exist in some parts of Africa and South America, as if time in these regions has stood still. These are weak social organizations that are inevitably condemned to disappear when they come in contact with others. Their survival depends on nature and a reduced number of members. This is the only way their social structures can continue to operate with such a low level of skills and a chief or king, who usually holds political power, based on divine principles and controls the warriors that support it, and a sorcerer or witch doctor who has a monopoly on religion and education. When these communities grow, rather than staying together and becoming stronger societies, they divide and give rise to new tribes, which usually end up being rivals. As the number of people on the planet continues to rise, habitable space for these tribes is on the decline, and as sad as it may be, there's little we can do about it. Evolution is a strong force and, just like animals that are unable to adapt have a tendency to disappear, human groups who do not adjust with the times will have difficulty surviving.

On the other hand, multiple countries, mainly in Africa and Asia, are still deeply immersed in practices from the Middle Ages. One example of this is today's Arab countries, which embody all the characteristics that define the Middle Ages: the atomization of kingdoms, the immense social and economic inequalities, the isolation of their cities (where the authorities try to keep them from external influences), the divine and patrimonial origin of power that mixes politics and religion, and the bigotry with which the latter factor is enhanced.

It seems as though through these countries we are witnessing the Middle Ages first hand. Beyond the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, this comparative anachronism constitutes one of the root causes why Islamic leaders perceive the information and images that come to their cities from the West as an attack on their interests. They are manifestations of a world other than their own and threaten the stability of political and religious power in their states. As a result of globalization, this information exposes its people to a society where the rights of women and men are equal, where rulers are elected and judged by their people, where citizens are not just subordinates, where torture and slavery have been banished, and where religions remain in the private sphere. This collection of differentiating factors, which directly attacks the principles keeping the leaders in power, makes them react defensively, brainwashing their citizens with religion and ignorance, in order to protect their world from the influences of the West, which is viewed as an enemy. Many of these leaders - as rich as if straight out of *A Thousand and One Nights* - are to blame for not modernizing their societies, by making proper use of the immense economic opportunities that oil provides for them (similar to what takes place in Mexico, Brazil and Venezuela). Its citizens should claim this right urgently, before the wells run dry and all they have left is the desert sand to sustain them.

The fact is that not all Arab countries have oil, but the ones that do, have it in mass quantities. The leaders of these countries should be directing the development in those regions of the planet, instead of flaunting their wealth in the most exclusive places. These are the same political and religious parties that are responsible for keeping their citizens in the Middle Ages, knowing that as long as they reign and keep their people ignorant, said people will never claim their right to a more useful and fair distribution of wealth. In several Asian countries, including China, with an ancient culture that until recently was stuck in the Middle Ages, the progression toward an industrial society has developed with varying degrees of success.

As for Latin American countries, here we have societies with roots in Western culture, taking continuous steps to advance and then going backwards with strong jolts from right to left, always torn between attempts at

sociopolitical progress and the endemic despotism that corrodes them. This particular erratic behavior arises from these countries' origins: they are a product of Spain and Portugal in the Middle Ages and the aristocratic world that dominated during the time of discovery and that established societies that were primarily agricultural in those lands. The Industrial and French Revolutions developed far from its borders, so their influence only reached them sparingly. For this reason, they still swing between certain medieval habits and irregular attempts to establish themselves as modern states. Much like the Arab countries, they are not taking advantage of their natural resources, including oil, which is abundant in some regions, to modernize.

This phenomenon was not reproduced in North America because their first European settlers were from more advanced societies, where there was already a strong industrial and commercial bourgeoisie. This circumstance allowed practiced colonization to be different from what was developed some centuries earlier by the conquistadores from the Iberian Peninsula.

The nations that emerged from the remnants of the former Soviet Union find themselves in a situation similar to that of Latin America, where there still remains a long and hard path to reconstructing obsolete structures before replacing them with those more consistent with the new times.

Finally, there are the so-called Western democracies, which have passed the earlier evolutionary stages, and lead global socioeconomic progress today. To follow that evolutionary path, they had to overcome great difficulties; there were moments of deep setbacks and other significant social advances. Overall it can be said that the democratic states are the children of Greco-Roman thought and organization, recovered in Europe during the Renaissance, and the Industrial and French revolutions.

Geographically these countries are distributed between Europe, North America, Australia and Japan. Although there are slight differences, their people enjoy a standard of living that has never before been achieved, but at the same time, they have a certain sense of guilt for the misery existing in other parts of the world, which is enhanced by lack of understanding and not necessarily due to a cause-effect relationship between their own wealth and the deficiencies of others. The United States is the leader of all of them.

This is not the first time in history where one single nation exercises superpowers. In another era, Rome was not only a superpower but was expected to watch over the rest of the world. For the most part, it exercised this role with prudence and not a little wisdom. Its prestige was such that, when a neighboring king invaded Egypt, (both were allies of Rome), the Senate sent an ambassador to the court of the invading king to make him desist. The invading king, after hearing Rome's arguments, said he would



think about it. The Roman ambassador drew a circle on the floor around the king and told him that he would need an answer before stepping out of the circle. Immediately, the invading king withdrew his troops. The fact is that conflicts were not always resolved without the use of weapons, but it is true that the world enjoyed the longest period of peace that man has ever known.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, Winston Churchill defined the United States as the "new Rome". This being the case, its government should use maximum restraint and wisdom in the exercise of its sole superpower status. It is true, however, that the variable which implies the existence of nuclear, chemical or biological weapons, like so many other universal problems, makes this role not just difficult, but almost impossible. Today, weapons of mass destruction are available with relatively few resources and are not just in the hands of many countries, but also in the hands of groups of extremists willing to do just about anything. Consequently, it is impossible to perform the role of sentinel of the world without, at the same time, subjecting humanity to a risk it cannot assume, even if the best of intentions are utilized in that capacity.

In order to better understand the general approach of the ideas proposed by The Record, and with no claim to be exhaustive as it could become boring, let's explore with a bird's eye view, the world around us and the obsolete power mechanisms that move it: governments, economy, culture, science, information, religion and many other elements that are so common in our everyday lives that many times they go by virtually unnoticed.

### **III. The Government**

Unlike many other species, the ability to establish communities along with the technological skills that mankind has been able to develop throughout his existence has allowed humans to spread throughout the Earth and stand the test of time.

Government is the instrument that keeps the people organized. Without Government, there would be anarchy, leading humans to a primitive disorder, where individuals would establish their own rules of conduct, resulting in their inability to grow as a species. It would be an overwhelming combination of individual insecurities that would lead to chaos, and, by the same token, force people to live by the law of the jungle where "only the strongest survive", putting humans just a step away from extinction. Iraq is a perfect example of what happens when a government collapses without being replaced immediately by another: passions, ambitions and selfishness of individuals

translate into killings, lootings and other calamities. These acts make any attempt at collective life impossible, which is essential for citizens to be at peace. Anarchism is a beautiful poetic alternative that would be possible to implement if we were angels. However, unfortunately, this is not the case, which is why we must learn to love, be familiar with and respect each other as we are.

Governments are born of the instinctive human need to structure their lives collectively in order to survive, and are built around a set of institutions needed to achieve that goal. Since the beginning of time, societies that have achieved the highest levels of stability and civilization have been those that knew how to better consolidate their social organization. Government plays a key role in achieving that goal.

Small villages or tribes were accustomed to choosing a chief or king, an equal amongst them, whom they trusted with the priestly duties in order to maintain a good relationship with their particular god, be it the Sun, Water or Mother Earth. However, when it came to major decisions, they were made with everyone's participation. It was the perfect democracy, without social classes. This worked well amid the primitive peoples until their population grew and their community organization became more complex and they began specializing their functions. The king no longer had time to assume all of his responsibilities and so he began to appoint "officials" to act as delegates. This was the birth of bureaucracy. It then became necessary for someone to take care of the roads, sanitation, trade, etc., and he appointed competent people to perform each function and thus the birth of departments or ministries.

At some point, as the number of citizens grew, not all of them could participate in decisions-making meetings, and so delegates were appointed to represent them and assume the role of advisor to the king, as well as intervene in more fundamental decisions such as: creation of taxes, regulation, declare war ... and thus the birth of parliaments.

Finally, when, due to their growth, the tribe or the village came too close to another neighbor, they established defensive criteria on the territory that they occupied, in anticipation of conflict. Thus the birth of nations with borders and armies to defend them.

Throughout history (with some variables), these have been the roots from which existing governments and the institutions that compose them have germinated. It was Rome that led the concept of "state" or "government" to its highest form; one might even say Rome invented the concept. This occurred as a result of its expansion into Italy, when it stopped thinking in terms of village and tribe, to do so as a nation equipped with the same language and the same laws regulating coexistence.

This structure has had its ups and downs throughout history. At times, the executive branch has usurped the power of parliament, giving rise to what we call a dictatorship. In contrast, when the parliamentary, judicial and executive branches have remained separate from each other and the citizens that carry out these functions have been elected by popular vote, we call it a democracy.

The history of mankind is a continuous relay of nations and forms of government associated with them, where there are no truths more ephemeral than politics.

If we look around us with a little cunning, we conclude that, in some ways, we are still in the tribal era. We have not outgrown that stage. As explained before, a tribe, with their civilization in tow, inexorably grew at the expense of another, which, being weaker or poorly organized, was absorbed by the first. Do you see, dear reader, any differences with what is happening today?

The world we live in has more than two hundred tribes or nations, with their corresponding governments, which, as has always happened, continue to be relentlessly at war with each other. In fact, the past century has had the dubious honor of being the most prolific in wars throughout the history of mankind.

As we were saying, modern governments are deeply rooted in the Roman organization, and have become obsolete to meet the new challenges posed in today's world. The basic function of each of them is to provide their citizens safety, welfare and perspectives of a good future. However, as already pointed out by the great scientists of the twentieth century, the current technology has made them anachronistic. Among other things, due to this modern technology, those nations and the governments who run them are no longer able to fulfill the basic functions that justify their existence, and consequently, it is necessary to evolve into a new form of government that considers the Earth as a single unit and man as a universal citizen. It is the authentic revolution still pending.

Even if it is from a selfish perspective, we all want to solve the pressing problems of hunger in the Third World. If not, its inhabitants will peacefully or violently try to immigrate to Western countries. They have nothing to lose at this point, as all they have is the monopoly of hunger, and against this, there are no effective borders.

If Pakistan and India, as countries with a significant nuclear arsenal and in constant conflict over possession of Kashmir, decided to use their power of destruction (which they would not hesitate to consider, if, at some point, they were placed in a position where they felt threatened), our borders and governments could do nothing to prevent radioactivity from eradicating life in

large areas of the planet.

Using globalization for their purposes, terrorism has been internationalized and is harshly punishing many nations. It is not likely to disappear from the world as long as there are countries that provide refuge and encouragement. Governments are powerless to act effectively in this area, as they would need global agreements to eradicate it. These agreements are not just difficult to achieve, but almost impossible, due to the confluence of different criteria and interests.

Every year, the polluting factories of developed countries and of those in the process of developing, destroy thousands of hectares of forest that provide the oxygen we breathe. If we continue down this path, our descendants will have no Earth to inherit, as the novel says. Even with the best of intentions, each individual government alone cannot do anything to avoid the consequences of this phenomenon, a product of industrialization.

The planet has become smaller. The globalization of communications has also provided universal availability of part of the economy, mainly the movement of capital and information, which, in itself, is not a positive thing without the production and purchasing power of citizens. So much so that a fall in the Tokyo stock market affects the investor in London and the bankruptcy of an English bank may result in the suspension of payments, leading to the subsequent generation of unemployment in many companies in other parts of the world. In response, there is nothing national governments can do, as they are unable to confront decisions made thousands of miles away. Shouldn't this be enough reason for us to change them?

We, the citizens of this planet will have to revolt someday, and the sooner the better. We need to revolt against the ill-intentioned message from the powers that be, in the sense that the creation of a world government is utopian. It is not true, as we will explain later in this book. But, even if it were, is there anything more beautiful than the fight for a dream?

## **IV. The Economy**

The concept of "economy" is very broad and has much influence in the past and present of mankind. It also bears weight on political decisions made by governments, which, while not intending to make an exhaustive study, we find it necessary to get acquainted with its general principles, in order to best describe the world we inhabit.

In the novel we see an economy where large corporations have disappeared because their power nucleus is hard to control and thus they manage to impose criteria regardless of its usefulness. We propose a free economy, recovering the artisan and small farmer, but making them co-exist with larger, specialized companies in those fields where it is necessary due to productive complexity. Trade should be fully globalized, so that each region produces that which their natural conditions facilitate, or that the very talent and imagination of its people make possible - all this within a universal framework.

To make all this a bit easier to understand, we will try to reflect on some basic aspects of the economy.

## 1. Production

In order to cover his basic needs, man needs access to food, shelter, clothing, and so on. In the beginning of time he tended to be self-sufficient: hunting for food, building a house or seeking a cave for shelter, and used animal skins as clothing. As the population grew, individuals began to specialize in different types of production; thus the birth of the farmer, the agriculturist, the artisan ... Later on, and in order to meet the vital needs, man started exchanging goods, and this became the forerunner of trade as we know it today.

Subsequently, as societies progressed, it became unnecessary for its members to invest all of their available time in the search for food or clothing. Now, for the first time, man became familiar with free time, and so he began to create things that go beyond the bare necessities: culture, entertainment and a host of second tier goods.

The increase in demand resulted in an increase in production and of course, its organization became more complex. This brought about the need for two additional specializations: entrepreneurs and workers. The first contributed the idea and the funding required to develop it, and either directly or via a delegate, managed and directed the structure of production. The latter, in return for a wage, contributed the labor required for the manufacture of the goods that society demanded. Later, as a result of the evolution of technology, mechanization was introduced to the production processes.

On the other hand, the entrepreneur operated as an individual or via partnerships or corporations. Some centuries later, these partnerships or corporations decided to increase their production in several countries, and so the so-called multinationals were born. These companies, as we know them today, originated in the industrial revolution, when larger companies gradually replaced artisans who produced copious amounts of goods. In order to thrive,

these mass producers needed a broader market than that offered by their own cities or countries.

Also a product of the industrial revolution is the enduring mistrust between management and the workforce. This confrontation is absurd, as both are essential to one another, and the first would do well to share the profits that without their workers they would not have obtained. It would be wise to involve the laborers in the common shared adventure: the enterprise from which they all live.

Currently, multinationals have become such a strong influence on the economy, that they have limited the decision-making capacity of the governments of the countries where they are settled. The great majority of these companies have developed from what we know as the capitalist world.

In socialized economies of recent and spectacular collapse, the government became the entrepreneur, and all its citizens became the workers. It was based on a principle that is as beautiful as it is demagogic: create a government of workers in a world of workers. First of all, let us point out the inconsistency of this premise. In reality, an entrepreneur is simply a worker, who takes risks by investing his money and employs other men in pursuit of an idea. When this philosophy of socialized economy was put into practice, what really happened was that it created a world of men working for a single employer: the government. This same government wanted a monopoly of all power, both economic and political, and this made it impossible to maintain a healthy balance between employer and employee, whose production criteria was tilted towards the interests of the ruling party and its members, and not necessarily in the good of the community. Once the people became aware of all this, they stopped producing, deeply discouraged by the lack of individual initiative. Such was the case in the Soviet Union.

The failure of this production system is explained by the very nature of man. It not only stunts man's growth capacity, it also fails to satisfy man's constant need of possessions, which is something inherent to all human beings as we discussed in another chapter. This is well illustrated in the reply given by a high Soviet leader, in the final stage of communism, when a reporter asked how it was possible that a country so rich in natural resources had such a shortage of primary goods. Quite calmly, the leader said: "They (in reference to the people), pretend to work, and we, the government, pretend to pay them." Indeed, the lack of individual freedom and work incentives, among other things, was the downfall of the communist production system.

China has learned the lesson. Little by little, it is getting rid of communism, through a slow evolution towards a liberalized economy. The fact is that the industriousness of its people and the vastness of its own market

can easily lead this country to become the world's leading power in a few years. If it stays on this path, its political system will eventually evolve into a democracy - something that will be possible when the middle class is sufficiently large. Let's not forget however, to credit communism for helping China advance from medieval misery to its current poverty, an indispensable precursor to the new social and economic progress they can achieve in the future.

At the other end of the spectrum, we find capitalism, which, left to its logical consequences, it tends to create huge inequalities between men. This should be corrected without sacrificing the creativity of the person, by any government that is inspired by social justice.

Almost all European nations, faced with the choice between socialism and capitalism, have opted for a mixed economic system in which the government intervenes for strategic reasons in certain areas of the economy, making them somehow coexist.

In reality what is happening is that the part of the liberalized economy that is in the hands of civil society, is hiding losses while financing - in conditions of unequal competition-, the large deficits of the companies controlled by the government. In order to pay, the government uses the citizen's tax dollars through national budgets. This system is designed to fail. In the next fifty years we can expect to see the collapse of what we know as the European welfare state, driven by competition that will be coming from Asia. This old continent will lose its weight in the world.

In conclusion, the role of government should be to set the right framework where free men can develop, on equal terms, their ideas, ambitions and professional and personal goals, while protecting the disadvantaged, which should not be swallowed by the ambition and power of the strongest. This is the premise of The Record.

## 2. Money

We use it every day, but very seldom have we wondered what it really is.

First, it should be clarified that money is nothing more than a simple agreement. Its strength is based on its holder trusting that he can change that piece of metal, or paper, for goods from the country that issues the particular currency.

Money was created due to man's need to possess an effective tool with which to conduct trade in goods. In ancient times, in societies that were much simpler than the current ones, that transaction was limited to the mere exchange of goods between people, so, for example, a person with a wheat

surplus and in need of leather for clothing, would try to exchange with someone possessing a surplus of leather and in need of wheat. This probably gave birth to the art of bargaining, which still persists in many parts of the world. It would have been quite difficult to determine how much wheat to exchange for a sheepskin. Presumably, these transactions would be carried out after long nights of discussions, which no doubt were fascinating.

Things began to get complicated when, as a result of population growth and the specialization of production, it became difficult to conduct large commercial operations and equate prices and values, which clearly held back large-scale trade. This issue was resolved with the ingenious invention of what we now know as money. Now, trade expanded rapidly since it facilitated the exchange of goods, both among individuals and between communities.

Initially, as there was no monetary system, trading was done using chickens, cows or pigs as payment. In fact, the first coins that were minted by the Roman had images of these animals and were called pecunia, a term derived from pecus, which in Latin means "cattle". Before the start of the Punic Wars, Carthage had the most advanced economic system of the time. When Rome had barely started to mint rough metal coins, the Carthaginians already had banknotes: leather strips that showed different stamps based on their value. These 'notes' were guaranteed by the gold stored by the government.

But what is money in reality? As stated earlier, it is an agreement, an unwritten agreement. Physically, it is usually a piece of metal or paper with little value in itself. Without detailing an analysis of its evolution throughout history, let us point out some important points that may shed some light on what money really is.

Until recently, all money put into circulation by each country, corresponded to the total value of the gold reserves existing in the state bank. This system was extended from antiquity until almost the present day. Money was a sort of cashier's check, immediately due, issued by the government and the holder expected to convert its concrete value into gold or equivalent goods. For example, if the Bank of France had in its coffers a hundred tons of gold, it manufactured coins and bills with a total equivalent value and put it into circulation, its division into smaller units led to what was known as currency or national currency, which each country gave a different name. This meant that any currency in circulation was warranted in its value, by the percentage equivalent of gold deposited in the state bank. At other times, coins were made directly in gold or silver, so they had their own value.

This system of gold as the standard, ceased to be used in the early 1930s, as a result of the deflationary crisis of 1929. It was replaced by a complex



system, usually directed by the central banks of each country, with more or less independence from their governments, in which multiple factors are taken into account when deciding how much money is to be put into circulation: working capital needs of businesses and individuals as well as governments, payment balances, inflation, gross domestic product, and so on. The effectiveness of this approach has varied, depending on the use of that power made by rulers in their respective economies.

There have been cases in which the authorities of a country, beset by their government debt, put large amounts of money into circulation. In these cases, the value of the currency decreases in that it represents a smaller percentage of the total current circulating needs. Consequently, with the same currency fewer goods can be bought, resulting in more expensive products and often leading to a rampant inflation.

Sometimes governments make decisions that are as populist as they are irresponsible. The spending commitments they make to their citizens often exceeds the amount of taxes they will be able to collect, meaning that they are spending more than they are collecting. When this is the case, they will often turn first to the market for credit. After exhausting these possibilities (usually for breach of its payment obligations), they tend to resolve the situation with the circulation of large amounts of the country's currency, which generates high inflation rates. This is a trick often used by governments to cover up their poor administration, with the most immediate consequence being the impoverishment of the citizens, who suddenly find that they can buy less today than they did yesterday with the same amount they receive for their work. By the same token, their savings will automatically lose value as their ability to be exchanged for goods or services is reduced.

Nevertheless, although it is the most severe, this is not the only cause for the growth of inflation. Other causes are the increased demand regarding the available supply, which is the case when society requires more goods than it produces, thus increasing the expense. Another cause is the upward movement of imported goods, resulting in an increase in domestic prices.

On the other hand, if the amount of currency put into circulation is much lower than the gross domestic product or capital needs, its value increases and so does the purchasing power of the citizens. This may occur as a result of large excess in the production of consumer goods that wind up accumulating in warehouses, making the supply exceed the demand. It can also happen due to the withdrawal of money from the market. For the economy, the consequences of this situation are even worse than those of inflation. Companies experience great losses because the money used to buy raw materials has a lower purchasing power than the money received through the

sale of the final product. In other words, the manufacturing cost exceeds the profit of sales. In short, they lose money and end up going bankrupt, resulting in business closures and a rampant raise of unemployment. When entering a dynamic of this sort, in which the prices of goods are higher today than they will be tomorrow, we face the phenomenon known as deflation.

In any case, markets tend to regulate themselves and produce the goods that citizens request and in the quantities that they demand. Therefore, a reasonable, controlled inflation is healthy for the economy because it indicates that we are immersed in a dynamic society. Deflation, however, is a symptom of an economy in a true recession.

The natural law of the market is to produce what sells, because that's what people want to buy. Governments that have attempted to replace this logic with a planned economy, where the government determines what goods are to be produced and consumed have failed miserably. As previously explained, the closest and best examples are the former Soviet Union countries, which practiced this system and it led them to the economic collapse, which in turn led to a political shutdown.

Currency also reflects this unwritten market law: if there is too much of it in circulation, its value drops and generates inflation. On the other hand, if there is very little, its value rises but it leads to a recession. It would therefore be very interesting if monetary decisions were made by independent technical entities, which would remain on the sidelines of the whims of whatever political party is currently in power. In any case, responsible governments must maintain a monetary discipline that will avoid the negative consequences of both inflation and deflation, by trying to circulate only the amount of money necessary so that the purchasing power of citizens is not affected.

Universalism, as referred to in the novel, takes the gross domestic product as the standard for the manufacture and circulation of money. Thus, the money circulating corresponds to the total production of consumer goods, and stays away from decisions or interests that may be more or less arbitrary. In other words, if the production of goods and services is valued at a hundred billion (expressed in world currency), the Government should make and circulate its equivalent in fractioned monetary units; thus citizens can exchange them anywhere in the world for products they wish to own, without any political interference.

### 3. Taxes

Governments must provide a range of services to their citizens: health, education, housing, justice, security, transportation, and so on. To handle all that, what is needed are people willing to devote themselves to these tasks –

officials, as well as the means and facilities to carry them out. To finance these services and resources, financial contributions are required from their citizens who, in turn, must also be the beneficiaries. These contributions are known as taxes.

In democracies, governments submit their annual accounts for approval by their respective parliaments, explaining how much income they expect to raise through taxes and how they are going to spend it: these are national budgets.

There are two types of taxes: direct and indirect. The first are those paid based on the profits made by companies, the range of salaries earned by workers and professionals, and so on. Indirect taxes, on the other hand, are those levied directly on products or services purchased, such as gasoline, clothing, housing, etc.

Governments sometimes use taxes for their own political purposes. When they want to penalize an economic activity, they heap taxes on it; in contrast, when they want to promote it, they lighten its tax burden. They even play "educational" politics: governments who do not want their citizens to be too demanding, try to arrange it so that most people, particularly the working class, do not realize that they are paying. By using the simple trick of forcing companies to retain these taxes directly from the worker's payroll, and it is the companies who, acting as tax collectors, pay into the government's coffers. This way, the worker loses sight of the fact that it is the government that is charging him a tax for working, and he is more tolerant of the errors and corruption on the part of his leaders, because he does not feel that his money is being misappropriated.

The most progressive governments make each citizen or business entity responsible for the direct payment of their tax obligations. The worker who is obliged to pay to the public Treasury's account a large percentage of his salary every month, is usually more demanding with regard to the way politicians and officials use his money.

Reflecting on this point, we can state the obvious: governments do not have more money than what their citizens contribute. Consequently, if taxes get too high, they can choke the economy and make it less competitive as a result of the cost increase of products. On the other hand, if taxes are too low, the government can find itself in deficit (spending more than it has), so it will be forced to go into debt, and then pay the relevant amounts for interest on the debt, or it will print money, which will result in a devaluation of the currency, which will in turn impoverish the citizens.

Therefore, it is extremely important to demand that governments do not make financial commitments that endanger the economic stability of their

respective countries. This is what is happening in Europe today, and future generations will probably pay the price, with a dramatic decline in their standard of living.

Unfortunately, there are many examples of such irresponsible behavior. When some governments, such as Argentina in recent decades, promote subsidies for civil servant pensions, usually attached to expansive phrases like progress and solidarity, what they are really trying to hide is nothing more than vulgar vote buying. They do not care if they ruin the working classes, who are responsible for creating the wealth necessary for there to be something to divide, and they end up discouraging them, burdening them with taxes, and stupefying taxpayers, making them selfish, eternal consumers of the resources vital for those who are really in need. True social progress is maximizing the imagination to create wealth, jobs, and helping those in real need with the resources resulting from the efforts of businessmen and workers, but without them sinking under the weight of the others, as this would create only misery, and misery is not divisible.

In short, government budgets, like those of any individual, consist of income and expenses. If it is important to hold those in charge accountable for the taxes that they want to create, it is no less important to hold them accountable for the way they want to spend it.

In the final instance, people must hold their governments accountable for the way they use the taxes and understand that government accounts, like those of any family, must maintain a satisfactory balance between income and expenditure.

#### 4. Trade and Prices

Trade is as old as the presence of man on Earth, and is closely linked to man's own nature, to the satisfying of his most urgent needs and his desire for possessions. It is, in short, the art of exchanging goods or services. In other sections, we describe its main features, but here, we will only deal with its fundamental relationship to pricing.

First, we must accept that all movement of buying and selling is a commercial activity. When we receive, as well as when we deliver goods of any kind, products, services, etc., in exchange for money, or any other way of payment in kind. This leads us to make a fundamental observation: How are the prices of what we buy fixed?

The first principle is that every demand gives rise to an offer, and if demand for a particular good exceeds the existing supply, the price will go up. In the opposite situation, it will fall. However, every product has an objective and a subjective price: one is the cost of manufacturing it, and the other is

what the market is willing to pay for it. Combining these two factors, you arrive at a final price. This principle is of universal application. When you buy a house, there is an objective price, which is what it cost the builder to build it, in addition to the workers' wages, taxes, materials used and the profit to the business. There is also a subjective price, which is the value of the land, and it has a great influence on the final purchase price, which will be more or less, depending on the law of supply and demand. This means that if your municipality has abundant land for development, the house will be cheaper than if land were scarce; in the latter case, the price will tend to rise.

As we were saying, prices are governed by the unwritten law of supply and demand. However, sometimes voluntary and undesirable distortions are introduced into the system. Sometimes, for example, the shortage is fictitiously created, not just for the purpose of preventing a particular product from being priced excessively low, but to keep it steady, and if possible, make it rise. We've all read or heard at times that a country has thrown their surplus agricultural production into the sea, because the year has been magnificent and the abundance of the crops has given rise to such a large demand that the prices sank to below what it cost the farmers to produce them, so the excess itself could ruin them. To avoid this overabundance, they destroy part of the crop and sell the rest at the desired price.

The question everyone asks is: why not take those surpluses to other areas of the world where they are needed to feed the people? Indeed, that is what should be done, but unfortunately, experience shows that when this has been attempted, the government of the country receiving the aid has re-sold it to other parts of the world, usually in exchange for weapons to ensure their stay in power, and nothing has reached the people in need. It is not done just by corrupt governments, but also by groups of unscrupulous individuals who trade in the humanitarian contributions that other citizens of the world, with the best of intentions, have donated.

On one occasion, I discussed with a senior European official, the need to send the surplus milk from our continent to Africa, as he was complaining of the high cost of storage. He replied that he had tried several times, but with frustrating results, because these surpluses, after a time, had reappeared in Europe, sold at low prices, thereby affecting local producers. He explained that the only way to ensure that aid reached those who really needed it would be by controlling the distribution in the host country. However, their own governments prevent it and make a great fuss when it is suggested, citing interference by colonialists who deliver aid.

Once again, we face a difficult problem in the current global context.

## 5. The Stock Exchange

Given the importance and popularity it has achieved in recent years, we will try to explain below what the Stock Exchange is.

The Exchange began as a financial instrument for companies, as a complement or a substitute for traditional credit. In turn, it has become a mechanism for ownership in the companies, as it allows any citizen to buy in at a relatively low cost. Companies that need an injection of capital to take on new projects or to stabilize those which are in the developmental stage, have the opportunity to obtain funds through those persons or entities that have entrusted their savings to them, and thus have become shareholders.

The main advantage for publicly traded companies is that, in addition to obtaining funding, they do not pay interest on money received, unlike what happens with credits. The shareholder or investor, meanwhile, becomes a co-owner of the company and therefore is subject to its financial development. In other words, if the company in which he has purchased shares obtains benefits, a portion of it will be for him, depending on his percentage of ownership. However, if the company generates losses, the shareholder may lose all the capital he invested in it.

As mentioned, this financial tool has played a key role in the growth of companies in recent decades, and has increased public ownership in them, because, worldwide, there are millions of small investors who spend their savings to purchase shares in the stock market. These investments are known as risk capital, because if the company generates losses, stocks go down in value and some of the savings are lost, but if it makes a profit, the shareholder may participate in them and revalue his shares. Nonetheless, there is a subjective value to the shares, which carry greater weight each day, resulting from the law of supply and demand. If some securities have many more applications where the purchaser is making more than the seller, the price tends to rise. For the most part, this is due to capricious purchasing movements rather than the results of the operating accounts of the companies concerned. By contrast, stocks go down when the number of buyers – the amount of purchasing money – is less than the offer of securities offered at a determined price.

Currently, this behavior has caused speculative movements on such a scale, that there can be overvaluing of shares in a company facing a delicate economic situation and undervaluing of others with a healthy economy. Consequently, over time, the stock has lost its usefulness as a barometer of the health of the economy of a country.

The problem is that they have confused the means with the ends. The initial objective of the Exchange as a recipient of funding for business projects has been blurred, to benefit the speculating game that looks for immediate

results. Hardly anyone trusts their savings to them on a long-term basis to receive the income shares of company profits when their projects succeed. In the current situation, stock market investors buy and sell stocks compulsively, seeking an immediate benefit in raising or lowering the speculative trading securities. In other words, the stock market has become, basically, something like a virtual business which, most of the time, does not generate any collective wealth.

It would be interesting to consider the stock market returning to its origins, especially after the globalization of the financial world, as this causes speculation in New York, for example, to pull in the savings of thousands of investors from multiple countries, who have neither the information nor, much less, sufficient training to exercise minimal control over the investment.

## 6. Credit

Another way to access funding, both by companies and individuals, is via credit. Credit is money that is received, with a commitment to return it within a given period and with a previously agreed interest. That interest is usually a few points above the inflation rate in the country where it is requested.

In ancient times, the temples were in charge of this credit mechanism but in today's world, it is the banks, where people place their money in exchange for a small interest, in the best-case scenario. Banks, in turn, lend your money to other persons or entities in need of funding, and this is the basis of their business. In short, they take one's savings to loan them to others, and they keep a gross profit margin that we call interest. This means that they never have in their coffers, at any time, all the money they have received from the savers, since a significant part has been loaned to others requesting funding. Therefore, if a high percentage of the bank depositors were to simultaneously reclaim their deposits, it would be physically impossible to return them. Recently, we have had an example in Argentina, with the famous "Corralito".

As can be seen, one of the keys to the economy is trust. We invest in the stock market hoping to get benefits, but if for any reason there is a panic chain reaction, everyone would want to sell and, therefore, shares would collapse, as there would not be sufficient purchasers. If that same panic reaction were to be produced because of doubts regarding the stability of a financial institution where we deposit our savings, they would suspend payments, because they would be unable to repay the funds we had deposited, and which everyone, in their fright, would be trying to withdraw. To prevent the situation from reaching these proportions, most Western countries have introduced mechanisms to prevent the failure of the financial system: support from other banks, and from the central bank itself, and even the government, as a last resort, through the taxes paid by its citizens.

## V. Culture and Nationalism

As you have seen, there is no doubt that The Record outlines a decidedly anti-nationalist philosophy. However, this conviction does not simply arise from an educated guess or a hunch, but rather from the careful study of history, man's trajectory within that history, evolution, and above all, from reason. In light of the problems that the world faces today, the existence of nations is not only an obstacle for the true development of man, but a breeding ground for continuing and unsolvable conflicts, and the pyre that can end our civilization as we know it. In short, the existence of countries as a way of organizing our life on planet Earth has not only lost its usefulness, but it has also become extremely dangerous.

The current defense of nationalism is the product of individual interests, and quite similar to the feudal lords in the Middle Ages. These interests hide the more concrete ambitions of a group of people, who usually dress-up arguments that are as empty as they are demagogic and then present them. Let's think about this.

Culture, for example, is one of the key points wielded by the defenders of nations and nationalism, to justify its existence. They often resort to the "differentiating factor" as the main argument to support their ideas. It is, therefore, advisable to continue this discussion using these terms, as they lead to considerable confusion.

It is logical to suppose that man originated from a common root, but we will leave this discussion to the anthropologists. In any case, it is undeniable that, for centuries, various tribes were formed, each founded by members who separated from other tribes. These separated members settled in a different place and populated, subsequently forming cities as they expanded their territorial domains. Over the centuries, this led to what we now know as countries.

In each of these primitive and isolated settlements, man evolved differently from others with whom he had no contact. He developed his own language, customs, religion, nutritional habits and craft characteristics, according to what the nature of the place provided and conditioned him to. The sum of all these characteristics forged the particular behaviors that resulted in the evolution of a unique human group. It is what we call a people's culture.

This is obviously a very broad concept, with mixed components that are closely related to the natural conditions of the environment where the different



groups decided to settle. Each natural environment creates specific habits and customs according to its characteristics. Thus, it makes sense that the character of the people who inhabited the valley of the Guadalquivir, endowed with a generous nature, should be different from the character of those that crossed the African deserts. While one was encouraged by nature itself, to lead a sedentary life, the other was forced by his harsh surroundings to develop a nomadic lifestyle, as the arid soil offered no incentive to settle there. Thus the birth of different foods and their preparation, as well as different values and habits. They also adopted gods that were suited to their different needs and therefore different religions with different rites were born. All of this, in turn, gave way to different customs and cultures.

As a result of population growth and the need to find new sources of food in order to survive, tribes began to spread and settle on lands that surrounded them. Inevitably, they came up against other human settlements, which hindered their expansive movement. When two groups came in contact, they discovered they had different languages, worshiped different gods, ate different foods, and had developed different techniques and handicraft goods, although they descended from a common root.

These contacts were not always friendly. However, for a time, they used to coexist, giving each other sideways glances, marking their territory for hunting and farming, and placing sentinels at their limits to safeguard them, and thus, countries were born.

Sooner rather than later, be it from ambition or by an increase of their needs, these groups of people wound up confronting each other. The strongest and best organized defeated and absorbed the other and from this traumatic merging a new culture took shape with traces of both. With the passage of time, the consolidation put forth a new language, different gods, customs, cuisine, crafts, etc. As soon as they came into contact with another tribe, the process started all over again.

Throughout history, these fusions of cultures have occurred continuously, even to this day. They will continue to happen, and we will continue to be enriched by it in the future, if we do not self-destruct before.

Greek culture, which provokes so much well deserved admiration, was born from the fusion of the Minoan, Achaeans and Dorian civilizations. The Romans took over and absorbed it, and this has continued to occur until today. Consequently, what we understand by "culture" is not set in stone: it is in a perpetual state of evolution, resulting from man's contact with his fellow man.

Let us ponder upon one of these cultural components: language. Usually, language is seen as a cultural element of the first order and a "differential

factor", justifying nationalism. Perhaps the first thing we should ask ourselves is: What is its purpose? The answer is obvious: Communication between people. It therefore seems reasonable to conclude that if we all spoke the same language, the ability to communicate would increase significantly. Thus it can be considered a demagogic aberration for governments to use language as a value in itself, to justify the existence of their countries. It's not a matter of making them suddenly disappear. It is simply a matter of public authorities not artificially enhancing those that, due to the passage of time and the small number of current speakers, are being relegated to oblivion. An obvious example of this practice is what is happening in the Spanish Basque Country. Let us, therefore, allow history and evolution to walk their natural path, because from a world like today's world, with globalized communications, a universal language will undoubtedly be born as a synthesis of several existing ones, and that will facilitate communication between the people who inhabit the Earth.

As the best field of sociological experimentation available to man, History offers multiple choices in this regard, so let's have a look at it to see what our behaviors have been throughout time on these issues. Roman culture, the mother of the current Western culture, was formed with the contribution of Sabine, Etruscan and Latin cultures, to which later Greek and even Asian influences were added. And thus it is repeated because all countries leave their mark on the culture of the conqueror, through which a new one is born, with renewed vigor, and takes over the previous one. In other words, cultures do not disappear but are transformed. Attempting to stay anchored in one of them would go against evolution and against History itself, an attempt that is always doomed to fail.

The Roman era is very enlightening, since, for centuries, Rome was consolidated in the known world with enormous force. They shared the laws, language, architecture, crafts, trade, and they were even responsible for the most prolonged period of peace and prosperity ever known to mankind. It was so rich and varied in its coherence that we still continue to feed off of it. Its concept of government, its laws, its language and its philosophy, still illuminate modern man. Even the Greek culture, which Rome declared to admire, has come down to us through them, because otherwise, it would have been diluted with the passage of time. No other culture has had such an impact on history, and it's a shame that most of the time we only learn about it through bad movies, Asterix comic books, political propaganda or biased legends, which, interestingly enough, have been enhanced by the Christian Church itself. What makes this even more interesting is the fact that it had to become Roman to universalize itself, and is, in some ways, the heiress of the institutions and the prestige that Rome left in memory of the people.

With the fall of the Roman Empire, that world was shattered, and of those fragments, many kingdoms were born. As a result, hundreds of human groups, which until then had maintained a fluid means of communication, were once again isolated. Thus was born the era we call the Middle Ages.

Centuries later, the isolation of the dozens of kingdoms which arose from the fall of the Roman Empire resulted in new languages, different customs, conflicting religions and territorial claims. Once more, the people were dragged into a string of endless wars that continue, even to this day, and have given shape, among other things, to the current European map.

In short, we must be aware that the differential cultural events that are frequently used as a justification of nationalist movements have their origin in the isolation of groups and are especially encouraged by those who use them to satisfy their lust for power. But we must not lose sight of the fact that just like in the Middle Ages, this isolation has numbed the thinking capacity of the people even more so than the stages of History in which communications and relationships between men have been fluid.

The term "culture", however, is not merely limited to language or customs, but also refers to the artistic or recreational activities that occur in a given region. Some nationalist politicians will use the uniqueness of the art produced in their country or region as one of the distinguishing features that justify its existence. We are again faced with a monumental aberration, as nothing is more universal than art. Every masterpiece created by mankind, individually or collectively, raises man above his own essence, and becomes heritage and comfort of all. There is no doubt that this is the ultimate reward that an artist may receive.

We must understand that culture is a universal phenomenon in a perpetual state of evolution. Mixing cultures is very enriching and it is deeply reprehensible when it becomes an element of separation between men. It is even worse when used as an excuse to encourage and justify terrorist movements from nationalisms.

In conclusion, cultures that have been shaped over the centuries in each of the countries or nations of our world are the result of prolonged periods of isolation. When cultural forms make contact with others, they evolve. This has happened and will continue to happen as long as man inhabits Earth. Therefore, for politicians to use culture as an instrument to justify nationalisms is not only a perverse anachronism, but also, above all, it is an attack against evolution and human history.

Educating man in understanding that Earth is a commonplace for all, should be an essential objective of every human being, and more so of those

who hold political power.

## **VI Religion**

The novel enters deeply within this topic. It describes a society that, much like today's, in what we call advanced countries, and what happened in Rome centuries ago, has reached a high peak in social and economic progress, which has led to the apathy that always emerges when man finds no new convictions that are worth fighting and living for. We are unable to combine the ideas that feed our spirits, with a materialism that provides safety and welfare. Materialism always comes out on top, but man needs other things to survive. The consequences are often palpable: low birthrate, an aging population, and a younger generation unable to make new contributions, as they are trapped by consumerism. That is, what Authority expressed in his speech: "Man's development as a species was no different than it was as an individual: birth, maturity, old age and death." This is a serious, real, and curious problem of our species - as long as we have a conviction for which to struggle, we develop a creative and dynamic society, even in difficult material situations. When there is nothing to fight for, usually as the result of a high level of comfort and security, man gentrifies and slowly begins to die. Our Western world presents all of these symptoms.

As previously mentioned, Rome also found itself in this situation. The emperor Constantine saw this problem and embraced the Christian religion, not necessarily from religious conviction, but as a political solution as he observed that its members lived a more laborious and orderly life. With the Christians as an example, he sought to recover the ethical values that give meaning to the much-satiated existence of his people. This measure sought to curb the decline of the Roman citizen, who no longer believed in anything, not even in itself.

In *The Record*, the rulers do something similar. They create a new religion based on the limitless evolution of man, symbolized and highlighted by *The Race*, which results from applying the theories of Professor Jacson. This is necessary because after years of peace and prosperity, man is showing obvious signs of decay. In short, the story leads you to the conclusion that man needs faith and values to survive his own limitations.

Religions represent a set of beliefs, beyond material things, and are based on the conviction of the existence of a superior being or beings (god or gods) along with the promise of a life after death, thus resulting in the ethical and

moral behavior of men.

Following the Marxist views, political leftists defined religion as the opium of the people. It is likely that this assertion better fit those who sustained it, considering the damage they have caused to the very people they claimed to defend and represent. Such a definition cannot be applied to religions, as these have put hope in the hearts of millions of men and women throughout the troubled history of mankind. This is most certainly not the case for political ideologists; much less in a durable manner.

Religion has played and continues to play, a key role in the evolution of humanity. It has given man a set of ethical and moral behavioral guidelines and has facilitated coexistence as well as individual enrichment.

But if History has taught us anything, it is that the contributions of religions have been extremely positive only when they have adjusted to a personal scale. When religion and power have mixed, directly or indirectly it has been thrown completely out of balance. A good example of this is the Inquisition, sponsored by the Christian Church for centuries; it is no coincidence that during that time, it is closely linked to the stale and patrimonial European monarchies. These behaviors of the Church were deeply distanced from the source of their ideology, which was unifying and humanistic, but which, in contact with earthly power, became perverted in its procedures and purposes.

Today, the confusion between government and religion can be seen clearly in many Arab countries, where this very mix has sunk their people back into the Dark Ages.

These are the behaviors that confuse the people because, logically, they are unable to distinguish between the philosophies of the religion and how monks or friars misuse it. Followers see them as representatives and strongly believe what they preach, but in the end they become frustrated by the conflict and end up losing their religious convictions, which become empty rituals that are kept more out of habit and superstition than conviction. In fact, decreasing faith increases the pomp and folklore that surround it. The religious apathy that currently exists in the West goes hand-in-hand with the unedifying behavior of some members of the Church.

Just like in the civilization described in *The Record*, religion belongs, and must stay, within the individual and the subjective. The duty of government is to take care of man's material and concrete needs. Christ said: "Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." With this, he clearly embodied the idea of separation of church and state. The government should be secular, yet at the same time show the greatest respect for all religions and

forms of worshipping, so that they can develop in complete freedom and become a key element to facilitate coexistence between men.

Naturally, the government should intervene in compliance with the law, to control excessive fanaticism that may arise from any religious movement that seeks to make intolerance its strengthening instrument in society. All citizens of the world and all institutions, including religious ones, must be subordinated to a universal constitution and, through it, to human rights, which must be defended as a higher value.

The idea of separation of religion and state is not new and was adopted by man a long time ago. While there are previous codes, the principle of law, as we understand it today, was set by scholars in the publication of The Law of the Twelve Tables written by the Decimvir. This happened in the Third Century B.C., when, over the protests of the people, the Roman Senate found it necessary to separate the civil from the divine, thus separating the will of the citizens from the will of the fickle gods, or rather, of those who claimed to represent them. To do this, Appius Claudius and ten other legislators were commissioned to draw up a new legal regulation, which culminated in the Twelve Tables and, since then, despite delays that persist in many countries in our world, enshrined the separation between state and religion.

So it has been around for a while, and once again, we can see how many answers to what we believe are current problems are given to us by History

## **VII Emigration**

In the Second Century AD, the Emperor Antoninus, successor of the great Hadrian, was literally besieged by ambassadors from many countries and kingdoms requesting to be annexed to the Roman Empire, which enjoyed prosperity and welfare.

Once he took over the Government, he deposited his enormous personal fortune into the State Treasury and from that moment on, he established a judicious administration of budgets. He requested the consent of the Senate for his government actions, and he made himself accountable for governmental budgets, dollar by dollar. He equalized the rights and duties of spouses, and completely abolished torture, which he declared to be a crime, even if it were performed on slaves, who at that moment became similar to what today is known as domestic service. He wanted peace at any cost, even if it encouraged

the boldness of the Germans, who interpreted any pacifist gesture as a weakness — does this remind anyone of what would happen eighteen centuries later, right before the Second World War? The day he died, as always, he gave the password to his guard: "Equanimity". He could not have come up with a word of more significance. He later called his nephew, Marcus Aurelius, and said to him, "Son, it is now your turn." The State coffers were healthier than they had ever been, but his personal fortune had been reduced to zero.

This is not a fable. It is a historical reality that immerses us into a melancholic envy; it would not hurt us to find leaders of this caliber in today's world. However, despite being such a great leader, neither he nor his successors managed to avoid, and effectively resolve, the arrival of the foreign barbarians from the outlying regions of the Empire, who were fleeing from the misery of their own countries. Centuries later, when Rome came to an end, some emigrants were already officials or craftsmen and were part of the legions, including the rank of officers. However, the number was such that Antoninus and his successors would not, or could not integrate them all into the Empire. Despite the border police efforts, they managed to settle within Roman territory in large numbers, and many were taking jobs that the citizens would not take. This was so prevalent that when Rome defeated Attila at the Catalonian Fields, the general that commanded the legions was Aetius, a German. As Montanelli noted, "The so called invasion, that which is said to have ended the Empire, was nothing more than a change of the guard among barbarians". These were already there, and in such large numbers that they ended up pushing aside the old citizens and their society, since they could not generate enough jobs for those who were arriving in uncontrolled waves.

Currently, we face difficulties that are similar to those that Rome had for centuries, and failed to solve. They even tried to install doors to the Empire and guard them, but were unsuccessful. We are now applying the same solutions, and without a doubt, will obtain the same results.

It is clear that the solution to the problem is not achieved by opening the doors to let in all of those fleeing from the wars and hunger to which their governments have lead them, because this ends up destroying the world that welcomes them. First, many people cannot become integrated with the new country, and second, the host society feels assaulted by the ghettos they form. That is what happened to Rome; although it had a very solid political and social structure that has remained to this day, many of those who came in were refractory to the civilization that was giving them shelter, just like it is happening now. Let us not make the same mistakes.

Another solution that does not work is when countries of the so called

"First World" transfer to other countries part of their economic resources derived from taxes imposed to their citizens. If those resources are not controlled or distributed by the donors themselves — something that can only be achieved by the use of force, which is something that cannot be proposed —, not only do they not reach the people in need, but actually serve to finance corruption and keep the same rulers who are condemning their people to poverty, in power.

It is a widespread "fad" among western nations to blame each other for the ills of the Third World. Maybe it's a sense of guilt due to their own welfare, when confronted with the devastating images from other countries that are seen every day by way of the media. However, it is likely that the feelings of guilt would vanish by travelling to those countries and seeing how little a human life is worth to their leaders, and how their governments spend almost all of their resources in the purchase of weapons to fight their neighbors and hold on to power. For example, they would be amazed at how racist the Mauritians are and how they enslave everyone who comes to their country fleeing from the tribal wars prevalent in the neighboring countries. They would be amazed by how, at best, the governments that direct them, do so with medieval criteria, including the "droit de seigneur" (a putative legal right allowing the lord of a medieval estate to take the virginity of his serfs' maiden daughters). They would probably be shocked to see how, in many countries in Africa, Asia and America, the ruling classes, without batting an eye, accumulate vast personal fortunes at the expense, in large part, of the dollars that come to them through the International Monetary Fund, with the intention of contributing to the development of their country. These funds, however, are not used to that end, but rather for the personal accumulation of wealth and for subsidies whose only purpose is to hide the corruption of vote purchases. However, when the time comes to repay the loans — something that, they normally don't do —, they find ways to mobilize well intentioned people from around the world, calling for the cancellation of the debt, blaming it on the misery of these countries, and not the fraudulent misuse of the money received by their governments.

The philosophy of The Record is clear on this point. As long as there are nations and governments with these characteristics, there will be no solutions for these countries. Consequently, it must be the citizens of those countries who must rebel against their leaders. The solution cannot be reached by means of some type of liberation war led by foreigners, or by way of the impoverishment of the West, which, given the size of the problem, it would be impossible to resolve the plight of those without sinking in the attempt — as it happened to Rome — or without severely affecting the welfare of its citizens, which, on the other hand, is something they are not willing to accept. The



people themselves have to walk the path, led by the most restless minorities, who, from within, should start the Revolution to get their societies out of the Middle Ages, as Europe did centuries ago.

Such minorities should have all our sympathy and support, and must be able to replace the corrupt governments and systems that run them, and resolutely take the path of progress and social justice.

Human migration has always existed and will continue to exist, as long as the Earth is our common living place. People search individually for a way to survive in lands that provide the means to do it. When it is one person or several thousands that are looking for an opportunity, we find ourselves with a tolerable migration, as they usually end up being integrated within the nation that receive them. However, when millions come in, in a disorderly way, we face an invasion, which is unacceptable by the host society and one that will generate all kinds of adverse reactions.

If universalism ever becomes a reality, such as in the story presented by The Record, it would help to permanently solve this serious problem, as the system would gradually integrate all countries. For this to happen, leadership training cadres and commanders must be set up to lead the new society that the Third World nations need in order to get out of their long prostration. They would also need to replace the current leaders, as they would never be willing to promote any changes from which they cannot expect to receive any personal gain. It will have to be new men who lead their people down the path of progress and dignity.

## **VIII. Science**

While abandoning the search for the great questions of life, which is the basis of philosophy, man tries to study the how, which is the role of science and its main consequence: technology.

Bones, and the carved stones cut by primitive man, as tools for hunting and cutting, are the earliest known evidence of technology. From those primitive times and the coming of the computer age along with the development of spacecraft, man has come a long way.

Science and technology have largely fulfilled their ultimate goal, which is to make man's life on Earth easier and more comfortable. Had we been capable of perfectly adapting to our environment, the development of these skills might not have been necessary. However, since we are not that type of

animal, like say, a dolphin, the technological discoveries have become one of the main causes of our survival as a race. Without them, we probably would not have gone past the prehistoric stage and we might be one of the many species that have disappeared from the face of the planet.

But, man displayed a wide range of resources and technical skills to overcome hunger, cold, disease and distances. Every scientific discovery, with its inevitable advances and retreats, became the starting point for a new discovery, and in many of them effective ways were found to facilitate man's life on this planet.

It is possible that in the future we continue to be amazed by, and derive benefits from, the new discoveries and scientific advances such as anti-gravity, that will allow us to fly like birds and bring us closer to the rest of the universe, effective vaccines and drugs to fight the major plagues and diseases that continue to haunt us. This will extend our lives and allow us to develop crops that have greater production capacity, which will provide food for the ever-growing population, inexhaustible and clean energy such as hydrogen, which will replace the current contaminating fossil fuels, etc. But science must also urgently correct its dark side. We must not forget that many inventions are derived from research done for military purposes, or, more specifically, for the extermination of man. Occupying an obvious prominent place in this category are the atomic bomb and its derivatives, the hydrogen and cobalt bombs.

One has to wonder then, if science and technology have made survival possible for man, an animal incapable of adapting to the environment, will they also end up becoming his executioner. It would be a cruel irony for History! Nature has endowed us with skills that can lead us to the stars, but has also led us to the Holocaust.

Biotechnology, which is still in its infant stage, is another area that we need to control, if we do not want our society to turn into the setting outlined by "Brave New World".

Ultimately, the way such knowledge is used is man's responsibility. However, in principle, we don't have many reasons to be optimistic. In any case, it seems logical to conclude that nuclear weapons, and the science that makes them possible, will only be useless when wars disappear, and for this to happen, countries must be eliminated. Let's start doing this. Technology has also created a collateral effect that should not be overlooked. Although it has managed to strengthen the presence of man on Earth, it has also made the individual more vulnerable, less independent. Think about how helpless we feel when there is a simple blackout and everything stops working. This occurs because electricity (like so many things) comes of shared specialized knowledge and expertise, which no one, individually, dominates in its totality.

We have definitely created a much more complex world which appears to be the price of what we call progress. I do not know if you feel the same, but now more than ever, I miss the simplicity of freshly made bread, the conversations around the fire in the winter evenings, ample spaces and the quiet life. But this return would surely be a true utopia ... or would it?

## **IX Anti-Globalization**

Following the subject of the book, it seems logical that we stop to analyze the recent movement that we know as anti-globalization.

This movement, which takes advantage of the universalization of communications, is born chronologically after the failure of communism in the former Soviet Union and its subsequent fall, which left millions of people all over the world without a political reference point. Due to the way they had been educated, these people could not just jump into capitalism, its traditional enemy. Some did, however, and were catalogued as wild converts. The rest sought another flag that would funnel their social frustrations and concerns for the injustice and inequality that exists all over the world. They found it in anti-globalization.

This has merged different human groups, in addition to those already mentioned, that have a variety of concerns: radical nationalists, religious extremists, anti-system groups, dissatisfied farmers, pacifists, some environmentalists, and many well-meaning individuals. The result is a colorful and diverse set whose elements only have common notes in their marked activity level and the fact that they blame a currently non-existent globalization, for all earthly problems.

A brief analysis of these groups will give us some insight as to the motivations that move them to join the anti-globalization movement. The old communists see globalization as the failure of the philosophy they believe in, and the success of capitalism, which they consider an insult. This awakens in them a revanchist spirit that is manifested, among others, in an anti-Americanism that is both visceral and irrational.

Radical nationalists perceive it as the end of their dream of becoming the masters of their respective tribes.

Religious extremists are concerned about the possible loss of the power they have over the spirit and mind of their followers, if they come in contact with other values.

The anti-system groups integrate as a result of a mixture of residual movements, ranging from anarchism to fascism, with multi-faceted arguments that are contradictory within themselves.

European farmers join this current for fear of losing their privileges and welfare because of any eventual economic concessions that their politicians could give to their counterparts of the Third World.

Finally, the pacifist and environmental groups blame hunger, war and environmental degradation on globalization.

Now, do their approaches and concerns have some profound reasoning? Let's think about that. The arguments of the old communist are based primarily on emotional and visceral concepts. They grew up within a regime that educated them with the idea that their world was the best, and that capitalism was its decaying rival, and, according to the official propaganda of the time, it was about to collapse. Reality however, showed them that everything around them faded, and that paradoxically, the old enemy was still standing. Melancholy moves them to blame the failure of the system on the men who directed them, rather than analyzing the root causes leading a failure which is really the result of a political philosophy that shuts down the liberty and creativity of man as an individual.

Radical nationalists, especially the violent ones, have cause to worry about the universalistic tendency, since it represents the antithesis of the exclusivist, conservative, racist and tribal concepts that they embody. On the other hand, those who see nationalism as respect and maintenance for the culture of a nation should not see an enemy in universalization, because if they are not capable of respecting the peculiarities of each individual, their revolution is probably condemned to failure. The diversity and mixture of cultures enrich humanity as a whole.

Many religious extremists are convinced that, in a globalized world, their "truths" will be windswept by union, and they will lose their earthly power and the control over the people they subjugate. An example of this can be seen in Islamic countries, where religious leaders maximize their positions under any excuse, promoting terrorist actions whenever one of their countries starts a slight movement wanting to modernize and wanting to get out of the Middle Ages. Universalization should never involve the disappearance of religion, only its excesses. Governments must respect religions and maintain a secular nation that constitutionally guarantees freedom of religion to all its citizens.

Without losing sight of their value as the alarm voices of our consciences, the anti-system groups show such a variety of principles and colors that they are difficult to categorize. However, we want to separate the fascist

movements that blend in with them, because, in fact, they often bring together false and fanatical nationalists, far removed from the large numbers acting in good faith, that are truly sensitized by human suffering.

All in all, the positions that deserve more attention and in-depth analysis, within the anti-globalization movement are those represented by farmer associations of rich countries, pacifists and environmental groups.

The first, manifest an unfounded fear that globalization might bring negative consequences to the economies of richer countries. This is not how it should be. The countries of the world should unite gradually, and this must involve a matching of the legal framework, particularly in reference to the social and fiscal rights and obligations of the workers and employers. A legal system that will balance the production costs under equality conditions for all the regions on Earth. This way, it prevents those that, for lack of labor rights, attempt to gain economic advantages via the laws of some nations, which will go so far as to tolerate slavery. For this reason, protective import tariffs should not be lifted until the legal equality is a reality among those countries that want to be a part of universalism. In a way similar to those that want to join the European Union, every nation that wants to become a part of this must meet certain requirements, designed to prevent a negative impact to the other members. Evidently, every case must be provided a transitional period for adaptation. This is the key to avoiding unnecessary losses during the merging of nations, in the end, everyone will benefit from the implementation.

Rich nations will take advantage of opportunities provided by a borderless market, and with billions of free consumers with a rising purchasing power; this will mean a marketing field for their products beyond the imagination. Presently, just a billion citizens have a certain amount of purchasing power and a dignified living standard. In turn, universalization will create a potential market of more than six billion people, meaning that wealth would multiply six times, to satisfy the required needs. In order to meet this enormous demand, it would be essential to have the active participation of all the citizens of the current underdeveloped nations, and also the availability of their raw materials, which would be revalued due to the dramatic increase in their demand. In turn, this would result in the creation of hundreds of millions of new jobs throughout the globe, and at the same time, an increase of the standard of living of their countries.

This is not a dream. It is the inevitable consequence of legal, financial and labor harmonization, within a universal Constitution, which would emerge after the disappearance of nations and the integration of these into a single world country. That was the Revolution of the first Authority.

The mistake made by the anti-globalization movement as well as the left-

wing parties, was to ask for the distribution of existing wealth, instead of promoting the creation of more. If we do not help wealth grow, many people in the "First World" might come to feel that the poorer countries are being helped at their expense and they would feel attacked. This is the situation with farmers, who are feeling that the level of welfare and social rights that they have reached after years of struggle is being threatened. They would understand that funding of the Third World would be made through the import of raw material and agricultural commodities from the poorest countries, which can produce them at a lower cost, not having the same level of wage demands, taxes and labor. Seeing its future threatened, they engage in this war.

Given its importance, it would be interesting to dig a little deeper into this idea. The problems of the Third World nations are not due to the fact that some regions of the world are rich and others poor. The concept that wealth is a whole is dangerously wrong, as it means that if one has more, the other has less. Reality, however, is very different. The creation of wealth is only limited by the industriousness, organization, ingenuity and production capacity of the people that generate it. Just a century ago, the number of people on Earth who enjoyed a reasonable standard of living represented about 40% of the current number. The increased level of wellbeing of millions of citizens has been achieved through the generation of new wealth (GDP have multiplied in many countries) and this new wealth has not been subtracted from those who had previously achieved high levels of prosperity. We must stay on this road if we want to solve the serious poverty problems that plague the planet. This must be done without impoverishing those that are more developed; who should not be discouraged, so as to have their cooperation, which is required to carry out this Revolution.

The governments of many underdeveloped countries blame the poverty of their people on the lack of solidarity of Western countries and on the historical pillage of colonial times. Naturally, shifting the blame is easier than self-evaluating its own deficient and corrupt administration, which is the true cause of their misery. Helping the Third World countries can only be done by gradually incorporating it into ours, as conditions of equal rights and obligations slowly set in for one and the other. It is a path that must be walked with determination. If we are capable of convincing ourselves that with alms, which is what we currently give, all we do is throw a few drops of water onto the seas of human needs, which, ironically, don't even reach those people for which they are intended. In reality, all this merely serves to ease our consciences, which have been made to feel guilty by demagoguery and propaganda. Only equal rights and the disappearance of nations will allow putting an end to this sad and tragic reality of existing inequalities once and for all.

In conclusion, the path to globalization must be gradually travelled by those nations that freely choose to do so. However, before joining and to begin receiving aid from countries that are already incorporated, they have the obligation to harmonize their legal frameworks with the most productive nations on Earth and with social demands that have been established by them to protect their citizens. In short, for countries to be equal, they must rise to meet the higher standards, not the opposite. This is what is actually meant when speaking of the distribution of wealth. Therefore, let us not fight globalization, as it is not the enemy. Let us fight, instead, to make the Earth a permanent home of free and organized people in one equalitarian Country.

More than likely, pacifists and environmentalists will agree that the only way to end wars and the deterioration of nature is through the termination of the current system of Nations, given the inability of countries to enter into global agreements regarding issues that concern them. As long as there is a piece of land that is separated from the others and a flag representing it, there will be wars, and as long as multiple governments exist, we will not be able to reach a global environmental agreement.

Universalism means no more wars, and no more armies, because once nations disappear as a political concept, territorial enemies will cease to exist, and there will be no one to fight against. The history of man during tens of thousands of years has taught us that dialogue and goodwill have never been enough to prevent wars. Universalism on the other hand, does not have to negotiate with governments the basic principles, such as environmentalism. It would be able to confer constitutional status and avoid erratic or permissive behaviors.

"For once, let us learn from history and do away with the root cause of these serious problems, which is the existence of countries as exclusive territories. To achieve this, we need the active participation of all men and women of goodwill, with the necessary determination to struggle for the dream of a better world."

This is what First Authority would say.

## **X The World Proposed by “The Record”**

The universalism we see in The Record does not aspire a perfect world for the simple fact that man himself is not perfect. Even so, this utopia of perfection should always remain alive in the dreams of people, but we must also maintain the necessary sense of reality to prevent non-attainment from

leading to frustrations.

In the constitution approved by the Cortes of Cadiz in 1812 it said: "Everyone has the right to happiness." This beautiful principle turned out to be nothing more than a sterile statement of good intentions. However, if we rescue its ultimate intention, we could propose this to the new world: "The Government cannot provide happiness, as it is a personal and individual thing, but, it must create the framework for it to be possible, by eliminating wars and ensuring the satisfaction of man's basic needs, such as food, shelter, education, health, employment and equal justice."

The proposals for the new humanity as presented on The Record are based on that principle. To fully understand it, we must learn from History and not from propaganda. We must never lose sight of History because it is our best source of knowledge about how we are, and not how we think we are.

As a result of misinformation, we tend to think that present societies are more advanced than those of the past. This is totally false as the path of human evolution on Earth is dotted with continuous forward and backward steps. Just think back to the Middle Ages and the disappearance of the entire social, technical, political and even the school of thought, that had been accomplished by Greeks and Romans. You can also compare the degree of progress achieved by Islam centuries ago and the sorry state in which they find themselves today. Many societies reached a high degree of development and, later, for one reason or another, fell into the deepest decline. Perhaps the behavior of these societies is identical to that of man as an individual; you are born, you grow up, you mature and then you die.

But let's not allow this thought to plunge us into a melancholic state. History has also left us enough clues to deduce that, when man is organized in accordance with sound and coherent structures, and feeds good values with which to grow, societies are able to transcend with time. For example, for the European society of the XV century, the Renaissance meant a big blow to the age of conformity, as they recovered the values of the classical world, which was the beginning of the end of the Dark Ages. We are still following that path of evolution, with varying degrees of success at different times. In fact, universalism should be the natural goal of this development and the beginning of a new humanity. If this were to be implanted, the effects would be deep and immediate. Wars, in particular, would disappear. In the absence of nations, there would be no flags to fly against others. This would also eliminate the risk of man disappearing from the face of the Earth due to the possible use of weapons of mass destruction. These would be entirely eliminated; including the knowledge that makes them possible.

With the elimination of wars, the hundreds of armies in the world



disappear as well, as they would be completely unnecessary.

The huge amount of funds no longer used to sustain warfare will allow the world government to feed and build decent housing for all inhabitants of the planet, and help the most underdeveloped countries reach the same level as those with the most progress, without the citizens feeling that their economies are negatively affected.

As a result of this, the current migration, born by the need to survive, will disappear, and with it, any conflicts produced by the inability of the migrants to adapt to the host society. People would be free to settle in whichever place on Earth they choose and is best suited for the pursuit of their dreams, not pressured by the shortcomings of their region.

It is a beautiful dream! Don't you agree, dear reader? Well, actually, it is a simple consequence of the disappearance of borders, to be followed by the forced retirement of hundreds of governments, wars and armies. More than likely, you agree that the idea is worth fighting for.

Let's continue visualizing the new world to be born of the Revolution as proposed by The Record. Since people would be free to move around the planet without being hampered by the existence of borders, with the passage of time and as a result of natural evolution, a common language would be born. This new language, a merging of many existing ones, will facilitate understanding among all citizens.

Trade would have a true global profile and, by the effect of communicating vessels, and not being subjected to border barriers, the economic levels of all people will tend to balance out. Let's see what History teaches us about this. In fact, let's look at History as it is being made in our current time. With the great effort and reluctance of many "patriots", Europe is walking the path of unity, and we can see that it is producing a steady balance between income levels in different countries. Finding no obstacles to sell their products, underdeveloped nations increase their wealth, but without negative consequences predicted by opponents of all unitary movement, who insist that it would be at the expense of the wealthiest nations. In fact, the wealthiest nations are also benefiting by participating in a much bigger free market, with increasing purchasing power and without protective barriers. But Europe must also move forward towards a political merger, overcoming their fears and historic rivalries. Despite what is heard from certain official circles, the resistance to unite does not stem from the people but rather from politicians whose greater interest is maintaining their share of power. For the most part, when, without nationalistic propaganda, the people understand the benefits of uniting, they have a high predisposition to quickly walk the path of unification. They are not quite able to understand why, if the European territory becomes one single market,

should there not also be a single government which cohesions and represents different regions, as long as they respect the idiosyncrasies of the people.

In any case, it's obvious that the path is opening in this old continent, which has historically been the birthplace of almost all the ideas that move the world.

Another consequence of the Revolution would be the creation of a global currency, which would further facilitate trade between peoples, as this would do away with the cumbersome and expensive exchange rates. The European experience is also being positive in this regard, just as the U.S. has been doing for so long.

One of the great fears of the affluent and even the working class in Western countries is losing their labor rights regarding developing countries and especially, the Third World. But this does not necessarily have to be so. The current reality of the economic and legal aspects of a non-globalized world is leading many multinationals to set up their factories in countries where those rights have so little consistency that the labor paid is comparable in conditions to those of slave societies. Their goal is simple: reduce the cost of production in order to compete with products made by these same countries in the Third World.

Let's see an example: As a result of a series of agreements with the countries of the European Union, Morocco currently sells large quantities of fruit and vegetables to Europe. The rights of the European workers are unthinkable in today's Alawite State, such as social security, unemployment benefits, health insurance, retirement funds, and so on. These rights have an impact on business costs and make the end product more expensive than if produced in Morocco. Consequently, if a European businessman who is doomed to disappear as a result of such unfair (yet legal) competition, wishes to survive, he will be forced to move production to North Africa and from there, continue to sell his products in the old continent taking advantage of existing treaties. Many criticize this position claiming patriotic reasons, while others support it, naively arguing that this is generating wealth in the Third World. What they fail to see is that, in return, they are creating unemployment in their own country. It's like the old adage, "Robbing Peter to pay Paul". Ultimately, like it or not, these individual behaviors find their logic in the very existence of the countries, which have totally different legal regulations, making these inequalities possible.

The existence of a single government in the world would require the harmonization, theoretical and practical, of the fundamental rules of coexistence, and equal rights and duties for all the citizens of the Earth. This would come forth from a single Constitution, allowing each region certain

rules and regulatory capacity, as long as these are not in conflict with higher laws, as contained in the Constitution or laws passed by the World Senate.

This equality, whose effective implementation would be the responsibility of the judges, would suppress undesirable economic or personal practices. Offshore tax and labor havens would cease to exist, including slavery, which is still present in many parts of the world. Logically, companies would disperse around the globe for strategic reasons, in order to bring their processing centers to those that consume or produce raw materials, in order to save on transportation costs, rather than seeking cheap labor.

If the Southern Cone of Latin America is rich in cereals or copper, manufacturing companies would find it profitable to finalize these products in that region. If North Africa has a great capacity to produce fruit and vegetables, the interest to establish local facilities would be logical. In each case, wealth would be created in the areas of origin of the products. This would also reasonably increase the work in various impoverished regions of the world, and thus create hundreds of millions of new consumers with purchasing power. In turn, the regions that are more technologically advanced would increase the market for their products, allowing them to maintain their standard of living.

Unequivocally, History has shown that when markets and production of goods unite, wealth increases for all, and in the medium term, the living standards of the poorest, approach that of the wealthy without major trauma. Just the opposite happens when the economy is socialized: it equals, but on the low side.

Another consequence that comes with universalism is the specialization of the old countries in the production of goods. Each one of them would base its main livelihood on a certain type of industry (agriculture, livestock, technology, tourism, etc.). This is not a perverse byproduct of globalization, but quite the contrary, as it will increase and improve the means of production at lower costs, making them affordable for a greater number of consumers, thereby encouraging trade between all. In short, if we raise the income of all the inhabitants of the planet, we will face a market of over six billion consumers without money restrictions, which will benefit both the poor and rich countries of today.

The world government would develop the legal framework that would make free enterprise and trade possible, with equal working conditions for all the workers on the planet, and would be responsible for monitoring and controlling its effective compliance. The benefit would be immeasurable because it would equate the rights of men and eradicate hunger, brutal inequalities, migration trauma and the injustice that the market can generate.

It is important to emphasize that the world government must act as judge and arbitrator, and not as a business, an activity that must rely on the freedom of citizens and the good sense of the markets as they themselves demand and regulate the goods they want to produce. However, the government and judges must strive to control all the agents involved in the economic exchange, to avoid creating groups that are so powerful that they may eventually become an anti-establishment movement without social control. This must be guaranteed with the approval a hard, clear legislation that limits the growth of the financial groups that control companies, and equally tough rules against any monopolistic situation.

Another key role of the state must be to correct, through taxes, the inequities that this globalized and liberalized economy might create, in order to protect the lower classes. However, this must be done carefully, while avoiding that they become a class of passive, selfish and endless consumers of resources from the productive classes. They must be encouraged and allowed access to dignified work.

The transition to the incorporation of all nations to universalism is quite possible, at a level that at present, we can barely imagine. With the immense economic resources that would be gradually released as hundreds of governments around the world disappeared, along with their armies. Moreover, in all likelihood, taxes would tend to decrease, so that there would be more wealth in the hands of citizens and this would increase the standard of living in all areas of the Earth. As a result, the demand for goods would grow, which would increase the number of new workers and entrepreneurs by hundreds of millions, in order to meet this demand. This would make all state expenditures more bearable for all by increasing the number of taxpayers.

Another major problem that afflicts humanity is related to the environment and so far it has been unsolvable due to the apparent inability of governments to reach agreements. If neighboring industries are destroying a country's forests, what can the current rulers do other than protest? The government of the polluting country will not stop their production companies, for the obvious consequences of unemployment and poverty this would have on its citizens. This behavior, on the other hand, is independent of whether it is a dictatorial state or a democratic one, because in today's world we have more than enough examples of both, with identical behaviors. However, it is only logical: no ruler wants to make unpopular decisions that would surely mean his political ruin.

Unfortunately, on the other hand, pollution moves faster than the decision to use existing technology to minimize it, as it makes manufacturing processes more expensive. What does this mean in today's world? It means that if a

government forces its industries to apply the technology to prevent contamination in their factories and others do not, the second will monopolize the market as they will produce goods at a lower cost, so that we will be penalizing the one that expresses concern about the environment and rewarding those that are taking no action to control pollution. Again we are faced with the need for a single legislation to address a universal problem. If the rule was the same for everyone, no one could exploit the existence of ecological "havens" for their benefit, and it would avoid the unfair competition that rewards the transgressor.

This common legal framework would have the same utility to eliminate tax havens, terrorist strongholds - which are usually rooted in religious or nationalist movements - and many other injustices and suffering that are due to the existence of countries with different laws, created for the convenience of a particular country, without the slightest concern for how it may affect the rest of humanity. These myopic and selfish behaviors that jeopardize man as a species, can only be eradicated by a broad understanding of the Earth as a unique and common place for all of us to coexist. However, the world of universalism, organized around a strictly secular State, must be exquisitely respectful of religions and the customs of all people, provided these do not conflict with the dignity and/or life of others. Ablation, for example, cannot be practiced under any cultural pretext. Women should have the same rights and obligations as men, even if the rules or customs of a region say otherwise. No religion can advocate war as an element of imposing "their truth". All those that exhibited or promote these behaviors, by violating the human rights that the Universalist Constitution has established for all men, should be prosecuted as mere criminals.

However, it is expected that, as the implementation of Universalist thought makes progress, these cultural aberrations would disappear. Obviously, the education of the people has a lot to say and do in this regard.

The science and technology that have so greatly helped to improve the quality of life for mankind should be at our service and not become an end to serve themselves. Their objective should be to combat disease and pain, improve living conditions, and not to alienate human beings from nature by creating artificial worlds that undoubtedly contribute to their unhappiness. When man recovers his intimate relationship with nature, he will slow down and will therefore be better able to savor life. It amazes me to see how we are fascinated by speed – whether it's a car, a projectile or a computer -, and we mystify it as an indisputable value. I not only wonder why we are going so fast, I also wonder where are we going?

In conclusion, this is the world proposed by The Record, which is more

than just a dream. It is a necessity if we are to have a future as a species and as individuals. So each and every one of us should go back to being the protagonists of our own lives, and thus continue being the protagonists of our hopes.

THE END

***Freeditorial*** 

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