"What's new with Segundo?" asked Antonio de la Maza. Leaning against the steering wheel, Antonio Imbert replied, not turning around:

"I saw him yesterday. They let me visit him every week now. A short visit, half an hour. Sometimes the fucking warden of La Victoria decides to cut the visits to fifteen minutes. Just to be a son of a bitch."

"How is he?"

How could someone be who, trusting in a promise of amnesty, left Puerto Rico, where he had a good job working for the Ferré family in Ponce, and returned to his country only to discover that they were waiting to try him for the alleged crime of a unionist that had been committed in Puerto Plata years earlier, and sentence him to thirty years in prison? How could a man feel who, if he had killed, did it for the regime, and was repaid by Trujillo's leaving him to rot in a dungeon for the past five years?

But this was not his answer, because Imbert knew that Antonio de la Maza had not asked the question out of interest in his brother Segundo but only to break the interminable waiting. He shrugged:

"Segundo has balls. If he's having a tough time he doesn't show it. Sometimes he even gets a kick out of cheering me up."

"You didn't tell him anything about this."

"Of course not. To be on the safe side, and not to give him false hopes. Suppose it fails?"

"It won't fail," Lieutenant García Guerrero interjected from the back seat. "The Goat is coming."

Was he? Tony Imbert looked at his watch. He still might come, no reason to lose hope. He never lost patience, and hadn't

for many years. When he was young he did, unfortunately, and that led him to do things he regretted with every cell in his body. Like the telegram he sent in 1949, crazed with anger at the landing of anti-Trujillistas, led by Horacio Julio Ornes, on the beach at Luperón in the province of Puerto Plata, when he was governor. "Give the order and I'll burn Puerto Plata, Chief." The words he regretted most in his life. He saw them printed in every newspaper, for the Generalissimo wanted all Dominicans to know how much of a dedicated, fanatical Trujillista the young governor was.

Why did Horacio Julio Ornes, Félix Córdoba Boniche, Tulio Hostilio Arvelo, Gugú Henríquez, Miguelucho Feliú, Salvador Reyes Valdéz, Federico Horacio, and the rest choose Puerto Plata on that long-ago June 19 in 1949? The expedition was a resounding failure. One of the two invading airplanes could not even fly the distance and returned to the island of Cozumel. The Catalina, carrying Horacio Julio Ornes and his companions, landed on the water near the muddy coast of Luperón, but before the expeditionary force could climb out, a Coast Guard cutter fired on the plane and destroyed it. In a few hours Army patrols captured the invaders. That permitted the kind of farcical show Trujillo liked so much. He granted amnesty to the prisoners, including Horacio Julio Ornes, and in a show of power and magnanimity allowed them to go into exile again. But as he was making this gesture of generosity for the outside world, the governor of Puerto Plata, Antonio Imbert, and his brother, Major Segundo Imbert, military commander of the province, were stripped of their rank, imprisoned, and beaten, and a merciless reprisal was carried out against supposed accomplices, who were arrested, tortured, and often shot in secret. "Accomplices who weren't accomplices," he thinks. "They thought everybody would rise up when they saw them land. In fact, nobody was with them." Too many innocents had to pay for their fantasy.

How many innocents would have to pay if tonight's plan failed? Antonio Imbert was not as optimistic as Amadito or

Salvador Estrella Sadhalá; when they learned from Antonio de la Maza that General José René (Pupo) Román, head of the Armed Forces, was involved in the plot, they became convinced that once Trujillo was dead, everything would go like clockwork: the military, obeying Román's orders, would detain the Goat's brothers, kill Johnny Abbes and the die-hard Trujillistas, and install a civilian-military junta. The people would take to the streets and, overjoyed at gaining their freedom, exterminate the *caliés*. Would things turn out that way? Disillusionment, ever since the stupid ambush to which Segundo fell victim, had made Antonio Imbert allergic to premature enthusiasm. He wanted to see Trujillo's corpse lying at his feet; the rest of it mattered less to him. Ridding the country of that man was the main thing. When that obstacle was out of the way, even if things didn't go so well at first, at least a door would be opened. And that justified what they were doing tonight, even if none of them survived.

No, Tony had not said a word about the conspiracy to his brother Segundo on his weekly visits to him at La Victoria. They talked about the family, about baseball and boxing, and Segundo told him stories about the prison routine, but they avoided the only important topic. On his last visit, as he was saying goodbye, Antonio whispered: "Things are going to change, Segundo." A word to the wise. Had he guessed? After a series of crushing blows, Segundo, like Tony, had gone from enthusiastic Trujillista to a man disaffected with the regime to conspirator, and long ago had concluded that the only way to put an end to the tyranny was by killing the tyrant; everything else was useless. You had to eradicate the person in whom all the strands of the dread spiderweb converged.

"What would have happened if the bomb had exploded on Máximo Gómez when the Goat was taking his walk?" Amadito fantasized.

"Trujillista fireworks in the sky," replied Imbert.

"I could have been one of the firecrackers if I had been on duty," the lieutenant said with a laugh.

"I would have sent a huge wreath of roses to your funeral," said Tony.

"What a plan," Estrella Sadhalá remarked. "Blowing up the Goat and all his cronies. Heartless!"

"Well, I knew you wouldn't be part of his escort," said Imbert. "Besides, when that happened I hardly knew you, Amadito. Now I would have to give it a little more thought."

"That's a relief," said the lieutenant, thanking him.

They had been waiting on the road to San Cristóbal for more than an hour, and had tried several times to have a conversation, or to joke, as they were doing now, but those efforts had petered out and each man enclosed himself again in his own torments, hopes, or memories. At one point Antonio de la Maza turned on the radio, but as soon as he heard the honeyed voice on the Voice of the Tropics announcing a program on spiritualism, he turned it off.

Yes, in the failed plan to kill the Goat two and a half years earlier, Antonio Imbert had been prepared to blow up, along with Trujillo, many of the toadies who escorted him every afternoon on his walk from the house of Doña Julia, the Sublime Matriarch, along Máximo Gómez and the Avenida, to the obelisk. Weren't the men who accompanied him the dirtiest and most bloodstained? It would be a service to the country to eradicate so many of his henchmen at the same time as the tyrant.

He prepared the assault alone, not even telling his best friend, Salvador Estrella Sadhalá, because even though Turk was an anti-Trujillista, Tony was afraid he would disapprove because of his Catholicism. He planned it and thought it out in his own mind, bringing to it all the resources at his disposal, convinced that the fewer the people involved, the greater its chances for success. Not until the final stage did he include in his project two boys from what would later be called the June 14 Movement; at that time, it was a clandestine group of young professionals and students trying to organize in order to take action, though they didn't know what kind, against tyranny.

His plan was simple and practical. It took advantage of the maniacal discipline that Trujillo brought to his routine activities, in this case his evening walk along Máximo Gómez and the Avenida. He studied the terrain carefully, going back and forth along the avenue lined with the residences of the regime's top men, past and present. The ostentatious house of Héctor (Blacky) Trujillo, his brother's puppet president for two terms. The pink mansion of Mama Julia, the Sublime Matriarch, whom the Chief visited every afternoon before setting out on his walk. The house of Luis Rafael Trujillo Molina, nicknamed Kid, who was mad for cockfights. And the houses of General Arturo (Razor) Espaillat, and of Joaquín Balaguer, the current puppet president, which stood next to the nuncio's residence. The elegant dwelling that once belonged to Anselmo Paulino was now one of Ramfis Trujillo's houses. The mansion of the Goat's daughter, the beautiful Angelita, and her husband, Colonel Luis José (Pechito) León Estévez. The residence of the Cáceres Troncoso family, and the palatial home of the Vicini tycoons. Adjoining Máximo Gómez was a ball field that Trujillo built for his sons across from Radhamés Manor and the lot once occupied by the house of General Ludovino Fernández, whom the Goat had ordered killed. Separating the mansions were large open spaces filled with weeds and protected by green-painted wire fences erected along the edge of the sidewalk. On the right side of the street, where the entourage always walked, there were vacant lots surrounded by the same wire fencing, which Antonio Imbert had spent many hours studying.

He chose the piece of fence that started at Kid Trujillo's house. On the pretext of replacing part of the fencing around Ready-Mix, the cement factory where he was manager (it belonged to Paco Martínez, the Bountiful First Lady's brother), he bought several dozen meters of wire fencing and the metal poles that were placed every fifteen meters to hold the fence taut. He verified personally that the poles were hollow and could be filled with sticks of dynamite. Since Ready-Mix

owned two quarries on the outskirts of Ciudad Trujillo, from which raw materials were extracted, it was easy for him, on his periodic visits, to take away sticks of dynamite and hide them in his own office: he always came in before anyone else and left after the last employee had gone home.

When everything was ready, he told his plan to Luis Gómez Pérez and Iván Tavares Castellanos. Younger than he, they were at the university, studying law and engineering, respectively. They belonged to his cell of the clandestine anti-Trujillista groups; after observing them for many weeks, he decided they were serious, trustworthy, and eager to take action. Both accepted enthusiastically. They agreed not to say a word to their comrades, with whom they met in groups of eight or ten, always in a different location, to discuss the best way to mobilize the people against the dictatorship.

With Luis and Iván, who turned out to be even better than he had hoped, Tony filled the poles with sticks of dynamite, and placed the caps after testing them with a remote control. To be certain of their timing, they practiced in the empty lot of the factory after the workers and clerical staff had left, to see how long they needed to take down a piece of existing fence and put up a new one, replacing the old posts with ones full of dynamite. Less than five hours. Everything was ready on June 12. They planned to act on June 15, when Trujillo returned from a trip to Cibao. They had at their disposal a dump truck that would knock down the piece of fence at dawn, so they would have a pretext—wearing the blue overalls of Municipal Services—to replace it with the armed one. They marked two points, each less than fifty paces from the explosion, where, with Imbert to the right and Luis and Iván to the left, they would activate the remote controls in quick succession, the first blast to kill Trujillo at the moment he passed in front of the poles, and the second to make sure he was dead.

And then, on June 14, 1959, the eve of the day they had decided on, in the mountains of Constanza, it happened—the unexpected landing of an airplane from Cuba, painted with the

colors and insignia of the Dominican Air Force and carrying anti-Trujillista guerrillas, followed a week later by landings on the beaches of Maimón and Estero Hondo. The arrival of that small detachment, which included the bearded Cuban comandante Delio Gómez Ochoa, sent a chill down the spine of the regime. It was a rash, uncoordinated attempt. The clandestine groups had absolutely no information regarding what was being prepared in Cuba. The support of Fidel Castro for the uprising against Trujillo had been, since the fall of Batista six months earlier, an obsessive topic at their meetings. They counted on that help in every plan they put together and then took apart, and for which they were amassing hunting rifles, revolvers, old shotguns. But no one Imbert knew was in touch with Cuba or had any idea that June 14 would see the arrival of dozens of revolutionaries; after putting the handful of guards at the Constanza airport out of commission, they fled to the nearby mountains, only to be hunted down like rabbits in the days that followed, and killed on the spot or taken to Ciudad Trujillo, where, on Ramfis's orders, almost all of them were murdered (but not the Cuban Gómez Ochoa and his adopted son, Pedrito Mirabal, whom the regime, in another of its theatrical gestures, returned some time later to Fidel Castro).

And no one could have suspected the magnitude of the repression the government would unleash after the landing. In the ensuing weeks and months, it intensified rather than subsided. The *caliés* seized all suspects and took them to the SIM, where they were subjected to torture—castration, bursting their eardrums, gouging out their eyes, sitting them on the Throne—to force them to name names. La Victoria, La Cuarenta, and El Nueve were overflowing with young people of both sexes—students, professionals, and office workers—many of them the children or relatives of men in the government. Trujillo was dumbfounded: was it possible that the children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews of the people who had benefited most from the regime were plotting against him? They were shown no consideration despite their family names,

white faces, and middle-class trappings.

Luis Gómez Pérez and Iván Tavares Castellanos fell into the hands of the *caliés* of the SIM on the morning of the day scheduled for the attack. With his customary realism, Antonio Imbert knew he had no possibility of seeking asylum: all the embassies were surrounded by lines of uniformed police, soldiers, and *caliés*. He calculated that, under torture, Luis, Iván, or anyone else from the clandestine groups would mention his name and the *caliés* would come for him. Then, just as he did tonight, he knew exactly what to do: welcome them with lead. He would try to send a few of them into the next world before he was cut to ribbons. He was not going to let them pull out his nails with pliers, cut out his tongue, or sit him in the electric chair. Kill him, yes; abuse him, never.

On some pretext or other he sent his wife, Guarina, and his daughter, Leslie, who knew nothing of his activities, to the farm of some relatives in La Romana, and with a glass of rum in his hand, he sat down to wait. He had a loaded revolver, with the safety off, in his pocket. But the *caliés* did not come that day, or the next, or the one after that, to his house, or to his office at Ready-Mix, where he continued to show up punctually with all the sangfroid he could muster. Luis and Iván had not betrayed him, and neither had the people he knew in the clandestine groups. Miraculously, he escaped a repression that struck at the guilty and the innocent, filled the prisons, and for the first time in the twenty-nine years of the regime, terrorized the families of the middle class, Trujillo's traditional mainstays and the source of most of the prisoners, members of what was called, in response to the frustrated invasion, the June 14 Movement. Tony's cousin Ramón (Moncho) Imbert Rainieri was one of its leaders.

Why did he escape? Because of the courage of Luis and Iván, no doubt—two years later they were still in the dungeons of La Victoria—and the courage, no doubt, of other girls and boys in June 14 who forgot to name him. Perhaps they considered him merely an onlooker, not an activist. Tony Imbert was

so shy that he rarely opened his mouth at the meetings Moncho took him to for the first time; he would only listen, or offer a monosyllabic opinion. And it was unlikely he was in the files of the SIM except as the brother of Major Segundo Imbert. His service record was clean. He had spent his life working for the regime—as an inspector general on the railroad, governor of Puerto Plata, general supervisor of the National Lottery, director of the office that issued identity papers—and as manager at Ready-Mix, a factory that belonged to Trujillo's son-in-law. Why would they suspect him?

Very cautiously, in the days following June 14, he stayed at the factory at night, dismantled the sticks of dynamite and returned them to the quarries, while he pondered how and with whom he would carry out the next plan to do away with Trujillo. He confessed everything that had happened (and failed to happen) to his dearest friend, Salvador (Turk) Estrella Sadhalá, who berated Tony for not including him in the Máximo Gómez plot. Salvador had reached the same conclusion on his own: nothing would change as long as Trujillo was alive. They began to propose and discard possible methods of attack, but said nothing in front of Amadito, the third man in their trio: it was hard to believe that a military adjutant would want to kill the Benefactor.

Not long afterward, the traumatic episode in Amadito's career occurred—in order to obtain his promotion, he had to kill a prisoner (his ex-fiancée's brother, he believed)—that brought him into the game. It would soon be two years since the landings at Constanza, Maimón, and Estero Hondo. One year, eleven months, and fourteen days, to be exact. Antonio Imbert looked at his watch. He probably wasn't coming.

So many things had happened in the Dominican Republic, in the world, and in his personal life. So many. The massive dragnets of January 1960, into which so many boys and girls of the June 14 Movement fell, among them the Mirabal sisters and their husbands. Trujillo's break with his old accomplice, the Catholic Church, after the Pastoral Letter of January 1960,

in which the bishops denounced the dictatorship. The attempt against President Betancourt of Venezuela, in June 1960, that mobilized so many countries against Trujillo, including his great ally the United States, which voted in favor of sanctions on August 6, 1960, at the conference in Costa Rica. And, on November 25, 1960—Imbert felt the inevitable piercing in his chest every time he recalled that dismal day—the murder of the three sisters, Minerva, Patria, and María Teresa Mirabal, and their driver, in La Cumbre, in the northern mountain range, on their way home from visiting Minerva's and Maria Teresa's husbands, imprisoned in the Fortress of Puerto Plata.

The entire Dominican Republic learned about the killing in the rapid, mysterious way that news circulated from mouth to mouth and house to house and in a few hours reached the most remote corners of the country, though not a line appeared in the press, and often, as it circulated, the news transmitted by human tom-tom was colored, diminished, exaggerated until it turned into myth, legend, fiction, with almost no connection to real events. He recalled that night on the Malecón, not very far from where he was now, six months later, waiting for the Goat—to avenge the Mirabal sisters too. They were sitting on the stone railing, as they did every night—he, Salvador, Amadito, and, on this occasion, Antonio de la Maza—to enjoy the cool breeze and to talk, away from prying ears. What had happened to the Mirabal sisters set their teeth on edge, it turned their stomachs as they discussed the deaths of the three incredible women, high in the mountains, in an alleged car accident.

"They kill our fathers, our brothers, our friends. And now they're killing our women. And here we sit, resigned, waiting our turn," he heard himself say.

"Not resigned, Tony," Antonio de la Maza objected. He had come from Restauración, and had brought the news of the death of the Mirabal sisters, which he had heard along the way. "Trujillo will pay. A plan's in motion. But it has to be done right."

At that time, an attempt was being planned in Moca, during a visit by Trujillo to the land of the De la Maza family, on one of the trips through the country that he had been making since the condemnation by the OAS and the imposition of economic sanctions. A bomb would go off in the main church, consecrated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and a rain of rifle fire would fall on Trujillo from the balconies, terraces, and clock tower as he spoke on the platform erected in the atrium to a crowd gathered around the statue of St. John Bosco, partially covered by heartsease. Imbert himself inspected the church and volunteered to hide in the clock tower, the most dangerous place in the church.

"Tony knew the Mirabals," Turk explained to Antonio. "That's why he's so upset."

He knew them, though he couldn't say they were friends. He had occasionally met the three sisters, and Minerva's and Patria's husbands, Manolo Tavares Justo and Leandro Guzmán, at the meetings at which the June 14 Movement was organized, taking the historic Trinitaria de Duarte as their model. The three women were leaders of the small, enthusiastic, but disorganized and inefficient organization that the repression was destroying. They had made an impression on him because of the conviction and boldness they brought to an unequal and uncertain struggle, Minerva Mirabal in particular. It happened to everyone who met her and heard her give opinions, hold discussions, offer proposals, or make decisions. Though he hadn't thought about it earlier, after the killing Tony Imbert told himself that until he knew Minerva Mirabal, it had never occurred to him that a woman could dedicate herself to things as manly as planning a revolution, obtaining and hiding weapons, dynamite, Molotov cocktails, knives, bayonets, talking about assassination attempts, strategy, and tactics, and dispassionately discussing whether, in the event they fell into the hands of the SIM, activists ought to swallow poison to avoid the risk of betraying their comrades under torture.

Minerva spoke about these things, and about the best way

to engage in clandestine propaganda or recruit university students, and everyone listened to her. Because of her intelligence and the clarity with which she spoke. Her firm convictions and eloquence gave her words a strength that was contagious. And she was beautiful as well, with black hair and eyes, delicate features, finely drawn nose and mouth, and dazzling white teeth that contrasted with the bluish cast of her skin. Very beautiful, yes. There was something powerfully feminine in her, a delicacy, a natural flirtatiousness in her movements and smiles, despite the somber clothing she wore to meetings. Tony did not recall ever seeing her in makeup. Yes, very beautiful, but—he thought—none of the men would ever have dared to pay her one of those compliments, say one of those playful, witty things that were normal, natural—obligatory—for Dominican men, especially if they were young, and united by the intense brotherhood created by shared ideals, illusions, and dangers. Something in Minerva Mirabal's self-assured presence kept men from taking the informal liberties they allowed themselves with other women.

By then, she was already a legend in the small world of the clandestine struggle against Trujillo. Which of the things they said about her were true, which were exaggerated, which invented? No one would have presumed to ask her, no one wanted to receive that deep, scornful look or one of those cutting replies with which she sometimes silenced an opponent. They said that as a teenager she dared to rebuff Trujillo himself by refusing to dance with him, and for that reason her father was deposed as mayor of Ojo de Agua and sent to prison. Others suggested that it was more than a rebuff, that she had slapped him because while they were dancing he fondled her and said something obscene, a possibility that many rejected ("She wouldn't be alive, he would have killed her or had her killed on the spot"), but not Antonio Imbert. From the first time he saw and heard her, he did not doubt for a second that if the slap wasn't the truth, it could have been. It was enough to see and hear Minerva Mirabal for only a few minutes (talking,

for example, with icy naturalness about the need to prepare activists psychologically to resist torture) to know she was capable of slapping even Trujillo if he showed a lack of respect. She had been arrested several times, and stories were told about her fearlessness, first in La Cuarenta, and then in La Victoria, where she went on a hunger strike, withstood solitary confinement on bread and worm-infested water, and where, they said, she was savagely mistreated. She never spoke of her time in prison, or about the torture, or about the calvary her family had lived since it was known she was an anti-Trujillista: they had been hounded, had their few goods confiscated, and been placed under house arrest. The dictatorship allowed Minerva to study the law so that when she finished—a well-planned vengeance—it could deny her a professional license—that is, condemn her to not working, to not earning a living, to feeling frustrated in the prime of her youth, having studied five years for nothing. But none of that made her bitter; she went on tirelessly, encouraging everyone, an engine that would not stop, a prelude—Imbert often told himself—to the young, beautiful, enthusiastic, idealistic country the Dominican Republic would be one day.

He was embarrassed as he felt his eyes filling with tears. He lit a cigarette and took several drags, blowing the smoke toward the ocean, where moonlight glimmered and played. There was no breeze now. Occasionally, the headlights of a car appeared in the distance, coming from Ciudad Trujillo. The four would sit up straight, crane their necks, tensely scrutinize the darkness, but each time, when the car was twenty or thirty meters away, they discovered it wasn't the Chevrolet and slumped back in their seats, disappointed.

The one who controlled his emotions best was Imbert. He had always been quiet, but in recent years, since the idea of killing Trujillo had taken possession of him and, like a hermit crab, fed on all his energy, his silence had intensified. He had never had many friends; in the last few months, his life had been bounded by his office at Ready-Mix, his home, and his daily meetings with Estrella Sadhalá and Lieutenant García

Guerrero. Following the death of the Mirabal sisters, clandestine meetings had practically ceased. The repression crushed the June 14 Movement. Those who escaped withdrew into family life, trying to go unnoticed. From time to time a question would torment him: "Why wasn't I arrested?" Uncertainty made him feel ill, as if he were guilty of something, as if he were responsible for how much others had suffered at the hands of Johnny Abbes while he continued to enjoy his freedom.

A very relative freedom, it's true. When he understood the kind of regime he was living under, the kind of government he had served since he was a young man, and was still serving—what else was he doing as manager at one of the clan's factories?—he felt like a prisoner. Perhaps it was to rid himself of the feeling that all his steps were controlled, every path he took and all his movements tracked, that the idea of eliminating Trujillo took hold so firmly in his consciousness. His disenchantment with the regime was gradual, long, and secret, beginning much earlier than the political difficulties of his brother Segundo, who had been even more of a Trujillista than he. Who around him had not been a Trujillista for the past twenty, twenty-five years? They all thought the Goat was the savior of the Nation, the man who ended the caudillo wars, did away with the threat of a new invasion from Haiti, called a halt to a humiliating dependency on the United States—which controlled customs, prohibited a Dominican currency, and approved the budget—and, whether they were willing or not, brought the country's best minds into the government. Compared to that, what did it matter if Trujillo fucked any woman he wanted? Or swallowed up factories, farms, and livestock? Wasn't he increasing Dominican prosperity? Hadn't he given this country the most powerful Armed Forces in the Caribbean? For twenty years Tony Imbert had said and defended these things. That was what turned his stomach now.

He couldn't remember how it began, the first doubts, conjectures, discrepancies that led him to wonder if everything really was going so well, or if, behind the facade of a country that

under the severe but inspired leadership of an extraordinary statesman was moving ahead at a quickstep, lay a grim spectacle of people destroyed, mistreated, and deceived, the enthronement, through propaganda and violence, of a monstrous lie. Drops falling tirelessly, one after the other, boring a hole in his Trujillism. When he was no longer governor of Puerto Plata, deep in his heart he stopped being a Trujillista; he had become convinced the regime was dictatorial and corrupt. He told no one, not even Guarina. The face he showed the world was still Trujillista, and even though his brother Segundo had gone into exile in Puerto Rico, the regime, as a demonstration of its magnanimity, continued to give positions to Antonio, even—what greater proof of confidence?—in the Trujillo family enterprises.

It had been this malaise of so many years' duration—thinking one thing and doing something that contradicted it every day—that led him, in the secret recesses of his mind, to condemn Trujillo to death, to convince himself that as long as Trujillo lived, he and many other Dominicans would be condemned to this awful queasy sickness of constantly having to lie to themselves and deceive everyone else, of having to be two people in one, a public lie and a private truth that could not be expressed.

The decision did him good; it raised his morale. His life stopped being a mortifying duplicity when he could share his true feelings with someone else. His friendship with Salvador Estrella Sadhalá was like a gift from heaven. With Turk he could talk freely against everything around him; his moral integrity, the sincerity with which he tried to accommodate his behavior to the religion he professed with a devotion Tony had never seen in anyone else, made Salvador his model as well as his best friend.

Shortly after they became close friends, Imbert began to frequent clandestine groups, thanks to his cousin Moncho. Although he left the meetings with the feeling that these girls and boys were risking their freedom, their futures, their lives

but would not find an effective way to fight Trujillo, the hour or two he spent with them after arriving at a strange house—a different one each time, taking a thousand detours, following messengers identified with different code names—gave him a reason for living, cleared his conscience, and centered his life.

Guarina was dumbstruck when finally, so that some calamity would not take her completely by surprise, Tony began revealing to her that, contrary to all appearances, he was no longer a Trujillista and was even working in secret against the government. She did not try to dissuade him. She did not ask what would happen to their daughter, Leslie, if he was arrested and sentenced to thirty years in prison, like Segundo, or, even worse, if they killed him.

His wife and daughter did not know about tonight; they thought he was playing cards at Turk's house. What would happen to them if this failed?

"Do you trust General Román?" he said hurriedly, to force himself to think about something else. "Are you sure he's one of us?" Pupo Román, married to Trujillo's niece, was the brother-in-law of Generals José and Virgilio García Trujillo, the Chief's favorite nephews.

"If he weren't with us, we'd all be in La Cuarenta by now," said Antonio de la Maza. "He's with us as long as we meet his conditions: he has to see the body."

"It's hard to believe," Tony murmured. "What does the Minister of the Armed Forces stand to gain from this? He has everything to lose."

"He hates Trujillo more than you and I do," replied De la Maza. "And so do many of the men at the top. Trujillism is a house of cards. It'll collapse, you'll see. Pupo has commitments from a lot of men in the military; they're only waiting for his orders. He'll give them, and tomorrow this will be a different country."

"If the Goat comes," Estrella Sadhalá grumbled in the back seat.

"He'll come, Turk, he'll come," the lieutenant repeated one more time.

Antonio Imbert sank again into his thoughts. Would his country wake tomorrow to find itself liberated? He wanted that with all his strength, but even now, minutes before they would act, it was hard for him to believe. How many people were in the conspiracy besides General Román? He never wanted to find out. He knew about four or five, but there were many more. Better not to know. He always thought it crucial that the conspirators know as little as possible so as not to put the operation at risk. He had listened with interest to everything Antonio de la Maza told them about the commitment the head of the Armed Forces had made to assume power if they executed the tyrant. In this way the Goat's close relatives and the leading Trujillistas would be captured or killed before they could unleash a series of reprisals. Just as well that his two boys, Ramfis and Radhamés, were in Paris. How many people had Antonio de la Maza talked to? At times, in the endless meetings of the past few months to revise the plan, Antonio had let slip allusions, references, half-spoken words that suggested there were many people involved. Tony had taken caution to the extreme of cutting Salvador off one day when he began to say in indignation that he and Antonio de la Maza, at a meeting in the house of General Juan Tomás Díaz, had argued with a group of conspirators who objected to bringing Imbert into the plot. They didn't think he was safe because of his Trujillista past; somebody recalled the famous telegram to Trujillo, offering to burn Puerto Plata. ("It will follow me to my death and beyond," he thought.) Turk and Antonio had protested, saying they would put their hands to the fire for Tony, but he would not allow Salvador to continue:

"I don't want to know, Turk. After all, why would people who don't know me ever trust me? They're right, I've worked my whole life for Trujillo, directly or indirectly."

"And what do I do?" replied Turk. "What do thirty or forty percent of Dominicans do? Aren't we all working for the

government or its businesses? Only the very rich can allow themselves the luxury of not working for Trujillo."

"Not them either," he thought. The rich too, if they wanted to go on being rich, had to ally themselves with the Chief, sell him part of their businesses or buy part of his, and contribute in this way to his greatness and power. With half-closed eyes, lulled by the gentle sound of the sea, he thought of what a perverse system Trujillo created, one in which all Dominicans sooner or later took part as accomplices, a system which only exiles (not always) and the dead could escape. In this country, in one way or another, everyone had been, was, or would be part of the regime. "The worst thing that can happen to a Dominican is to be intelligent or competent," he had once heard Agustín Cabral say ("A very intelligent and competent Dominican," he told himself) and the words had been etched in his mind: "Because sooner or later Trujillo will call upon him to serve the regime, or his person, and when he calls, one is not permitted to say no." He was proof of this truth. It never occurred to him to put up the slightest resistance to his appointments. As Estrella Sadhalá always said, the Goat had taken from people the sacred attribute given to them by God: their free will.

In contrast to Turk, religion had never occupied a central place in the life of Antonio Imbert. He was Catholic in the Dominican way, he had gone through all the religious ceremonies that marked people's lives—baptism, confirmation, first communion, Catholic school, marriage in the Church—and he undoubtedly would be buried with the sermon and blessing of a priest. But he had never been a particularly conscientious believer, never been concerned with the implications of his faith in everyday life, never bothered to verify if his behavior complied with the commandments, as Salvador did in a way that he found debilitating.

But what he said about free will affected him. Perhaps this was why he decided that Trujillo had to die. So that he and other Dominicans could recover their ability to at least accept

or reject the work they did to earn a living. Tony did not know what that was like. Perhaps as a child he knew, but he had forgotten. It must be nice. Your cup of coffee or glass of rum must taste better, the smoke of your cigar, a swim in the ocean on a hot day, the movie you see on Saturday, the merengue on the radio, everything must leave a more pleasurable sensation in your body and spirit when you had what Trujillo had taken away from Dominicans thirty-one years ago: free will.