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When he heard the telephone ring, President Joaquín Balaguer, still not fully awake, had a presentiment of something very serious. He picked up the receiver at the same time that he rubbed his eyes with his free hand. He heard General José René Román summon him to a high-level meeting at the Army General Staff. "They've killed him," he thought. The conspiracy had been successful. He was completely awake now. He could not waste time indulging in pity or anger; for the moment, the problem was the head of the Armed Forces. He cleared his throat and said, slowly: "If something so serious has occurred, as President of the Republic my place is not in a barracks but at the National Palace. I am going there now. I suggest that the meeting be held in my office. Goodbye." He hung up before the Minister of the Armed Forces had time to answer.

He got up and dressed, not making any noise so as not to awaken his sisters. They had killed Trujillo, no doubt about it. And a coup was under way, led by Román. Why would he call him to the December 18 Fortress? To force him to resign, or arrest him, or demand that he support the uprising. It seemed crude, badly planned. Instead of telephoning, he should have sent a patrol for him. Román, though he might command the Armed Forces, lacked the prestige to impose his will on the garrisons. It was going to fail.

He went out, and at the sentry box he asked the guard to wake his driver. As the chauffeur drove him to the National Palace along a dark, deserted Avenida Máximo Gómez, he foresaw the next few hours: confrontations between rebellious and loyal garrisons, and possible military intervention by the United States. Washington would require some constitutional

pretense to take that action, and at this moment, the President of the Republic represented legality. True, his post was purely decorative. But with Trujillo dead, it was taking on reality. The transformation from mere figurehead to the authentic Head of State of the Dominican Republic depended on his conduct. Perhaps without knowing it, he had been waiting for this moment since his birth in 1906. Once again he repeated to himself the motto of his life: never, for any reason, lose your composure.

This determination was reinforced as soon as he entered the National Palace and saw the reigning confusion. The guards had been doubled, and armed soldiers wandered corridors and stairways, looking for someone to shoot. Some officials saw him walking calmly toward his office, and seemed relieved; perhaps he would know what to do. He never reached his office. In the reception room adjoining the Generalissimo's office, he saw the Trujillo family: wife, daughter, brothers and sisters, nephews and nieces. He went to them, wearing the grave expression the moment demanded. Angelita's eyes were filled with tears, and she was pale; but on the heavy, avaricious face of Doña María there was rage, immeasurable rage.

"What's going to happen to us, Dr. Balaguer?" Angelita stammered, seizing his arm.

"Nothing, nothing is going to happen to you," he consoled her. He also embraced the Bountiful First Lady: "The important thing is to remain calm. To arm ourselves with courage. God will not permit His Excellency's death."

A simple glance was enough to let him know that this tribe of poor devils had lost its compass. Petán, waving a submachine gun, walked in circles like a dog trying to bite its own tail, sweating and shouting nonsense about the mountain fire beetles, his own private army, while Héctor Bienvenido (Blacky), the former President, seemed the victim of catatonic idiocy: he stared at nothing, his mouth full of saliva, as if trying to remember who and where he was. And even the most unfortunate of the Chief's brothers, Amable Romeo (Peepee),

was there, dressed like a beggar, cowering in a chair, his mouth hanging open. Sitting in armchairs, Trujillo's sisters—Nieves Luisa, Marina, Julieta, Ofelia Japonesa—wiped their eyes or looked at him, pleading for help. He murmured words of encouragement to all of them. There was a vacuum, and it had to be filled as soon as possible.

He went to his office and called General Santos Mélido Marte, the Inspector General of the Armed Forces, the officer in the top military hierarchy with whom he had the longest relationship. He had heard nothing and was so stunned by the news that for half a minute the only thing he could say was "My God, oh my God." Balaguer asked him to call all the commanding generals and heads of garrisons in the Republic, assure them that the probable assassination had not altered the constitutional order and that they had the confidence of the Head of State, who was reconfirming their appointments. "I'll get on it right away, Mr. President," the general said, and hung up.

He was told that the apostolic nuncio, the American consul, and the chargé d'affaires of the United Kingdom were at the entrance to the Palace, held there by guards. He had them come in. What had brought them was not the assassination but the violent capture of Monsignor Reilly by armed men, who had broken down the doors of the Santo Domingo Academy and forced their way in. They fired their guns into the air, beat the nuns and the Redemptorist priests from San Juan de la Maguana who accompanied the bishop, killed a watchdog, and dragged the prelate away.

"Mr. President, I am holding you responsible for the life of Monsignor Reilly," the nuncio warned.

"My government will not tolerate any attempt against his life," threatened the representative of the United States. "I don't need to remind you of Washington's interest in Reilly, who is an American citizen."

"Have a seat, please," he said, indicating the chairs that surrounded his desk. He picked up the telephone and asked to speak to General Virgilio García Trujillo, head of San Isidro

Air Base. He turned to the diplomats: "Believe me, I regret this more than you do. I will spare no effort to remedy this act of barbarism."

A short while later, he heard the voice of the Generalissimo's nephew. Without moving his eyes away from the trio of visitors, he said, slowly and deliberately:

"I am speaking to you as President of the Republic, General. I am addressing you as the head of San Isidro and also His Excellency's favorite nephew. I will spare you the preliminaries in view of the gravity of the situation. In an act of enormous irresponsibility, some subordinate, perhaps Colonel Abbes García, has arrested Bishop Reilly after taking him by force from the Santo Domingo Academy. Sitting here now are representatives of the United States, Great Britain, and the Vatican. If anything happens to Monsignor Reilly, who is an American citizen, it can be catastrophic for the country. There may even be a landing of Marines. I do not need to tell you what that would mean for our nation. In the name of the Generalissimo, your uncle, I urge you to avoid a historical calamity."

He waited for General Virgilio García Trujillo's reaction. That nervous panting betrayed his indecision.

"It wasn't my idea, Dr. Balaguer," he heard him murmur at last. "I wasn't even informed about this."

"I know that very well, General Trujillo," Balaguer helped him along. "You are a sensible, responsible officer. You would never commit such an outrage. Is Monsignor Reilly at San Isidro? Or have they taken him to La Cuarenta?"

There was a long, barbed silence. He feared the worst.

"Is Monsignor Reilly alive?" Balaguer persisted.

"He's being held at an outpost of the base about two kilometers from here, Dr. Balaguer. The commander of the detention center, Rodríguez Méndez, did not allow him to be killed. I was just told."

The President sweetened his voice:

"I implore you to go there in person, as my emissary, to rescue the monsignor. And to ask his forgiveness, in the name

of the government, for the error. And then bring the bishop to my office. Safe and sound. This is a request to a friend, and also an order from the President of the Republic. I have full confidence in you."

The three visitors looked at him in confusion. He stood and walked over to them. He accompanied them to the door. As he shook their hands, he murmured:

"I am not certain of being obeyed, gentlemen. But, as you can see, I am doing everything in my power to restore rationality."

"What's going to happen, Mr. President?" the consul asked. "Will the Trujillistas accept your authority?"

"A good deal will depend on the United States, my friend. Frankly, I do not know. And now, if you will excuse me, gentlemen."

He returned to the room where the Trujillo family waited. More people had arrived. Colonel Abbes García was explaining that one of the assassins, held prisoner at the International Clinic, had given the names of three accomplices: the retired general Juan Tomás Díaz, Antonio Imbert, and Luis Amiama. No doubt there were many others. Among those assembled, he saw General Román; his khaki shirt was soaked, his face covered in perspiration, and he held his submachine gun in both hands. His eyes boiled with the frenzy of an animal that knows it is lost. Clearly, things had not gone well for him. In his thin, tuneless voice, the corpulent head of the SIM asserted that according to the former soldier, Pedro Livio Cedeño, the conspiracy had no ramifications inside the Armed Forces. As he listened, he told himself that the moment had arrived to confront Abbes García, who detested him. He merely had contempt for the head of the SIM. At times like this, unfortunately, pistols, not ideas, tended to prevail. He asked God, in whom he sometimes believed, to be on his side.

Colonel Abbes García launched the first attack. Given the vacuum left by the assassination, Balaguer ought to resign so that someone in the family could occupy the Presidency. With

his intemperate vulgarity, Petán supported him: "Yes, let him resign." He listened, silently, his hands folded across his stomach, like a mild-mannered parish priest. When their eyes all turned to him, he nodded timidly, as if apologizing for finding himself obliged to intervene. Modestly, he reminded them that he held the Presidency by a decision of the Generalissimo. He would resign immediately if that would serve the nation, of course. But he would permit himself to suggest that before disrupting constitutional order, they wait for the arrival of General Ramfis. Could the Chief's firstborn be excluded from so serious a matter? The Bountiful First Lady immediately agreed: she would accept no decision without her oldest son being present. According to Colonel Luis José (Pechito) León Estévez, Ramfis and Radhamés were already making preparations in Paris to charter an Air France plane. The question was tabled.

As he returned to his office, he told himself that the real battle should be waged not against Trujillo's brothers, that pack of idiotic thugs, but against Abbes García. He might be a demented sadist, but he had the intelligence of Lucifer. Abbes had just made a mistake, forgetting about Ramfis. María Martínez had become Balaguer's ally. He knew how to seal the alliance: the Bountiful First Lady's avarice would be useful in the present circumstance. But the most urgent matter was to prevent an uprising. When it was the usual time for him to be at his desk, the call came from General Mélido Marte. He had spoken with all the military regions, and the commanders had assured him of their loyalty to the constituted government. Still, General César A. Oliva in Santiago de los Caballeros, General García Urbáez in Dajabón, and General Guarionex Estrella in La Vega were disturbed by contradictory communications from the Minister of the Armed Forces. Did the President know anything about that?

"Nothing concrete, but I imagine the same thing you do, my friend," Balaguer said to General Mélido Marte. "I will telephone those commanders and attempt to reassure them.

Ramfis Trujillo is on his way home to guarantee leadership of the country's military."

Without wasting any time, he called the three generals and reiterated that they enjoyed his full confidence. He asked them to assume all administrative and political powers and guarantee order in their regions, and, until General Ramfis arrived, to speak only to him. As he was saying goodbye to General Guarionex Estrella Sadhalá, his aides informed him that General Virgilio García Trujillo was in the anteroom with Bishop Reilly. He had Trujillo's nephew come in alone.

"You have saved the Republic," he said, embracing him, something he never did. "If Abbes García's orders had been carried out and the irreparable had happened, the Marines would be landing in Ciudad Trujillo."

"They weren't only Abbes García's orders," the head of San Isidro Air Base replied. He seemed confused. "The one who ordered Commander Rodríguez Méndez, at the Air Force detention center, to shoot the bishop was Pechito León Estévez. He said it was my brother-in-law's decision. Yes, Pupo. I don't understand. Nobody even consulted me. It was a miracle that Rodríguez Méndez refused to act until he talked to me."

General García Trujillo cared for his appearance and dress—a thin Mexican-style mustache, brilliantined hair, a well-cut, pressed uniform, as if he were about to go on parade, and the inevitable Ray-Ban sunglasses in his pocket—as coquettishly as his cousin Ramfis, whose intimate friend he was. But now his shirt was not tucked all the way in, and his hair was disheveled; suspicion and doubt were in his eyes.

"I don't understand why Pupo and Pechito made a decision like that without talking to me first. They wanted to compromise the Air Force, Dr. Balaguer."

"General Román must be so affected by what happened to the Generalissimo that he has lost control of his nerves." The President made excuses for him. "Fortunately, Ramfis is already on the way. His presence is absolutely necessary. It falls to him, as a four-star general and the son of the Chief, to assure

the continuity of the Benefactor's policies."

"But Ramfis isn't a politician, he hates politics; you know that, Dr. Balaguer."

"Ramfis is a very intelligent man, and he adored his father. He cannot refuse to assume the role that the Nation expects of him. We will persuade him."

General García Trujillo looked at him warmly.

"You can count on me to do what is needed, Mr. President."

"Dominicans will know that you saved the Republic tonight," Balaguer repeated as he accompanied him to the door. "You have a great responsibility, General. San Isidro is the most important base in the country, and for that reason, maintaining order depends on you. If anything happens, call me; I have ordered priority status for your calls."

Bishop Reilly must have spent terrifying hours in the hands of the *caliés*. His habit was torn and muddied, and deep furrows lined his pale, thin face that still bore the imprint of a grimace of horror. He was erect and silent. He listened with dignity to the excuses and explanations of the President of the Republic, and even made an effort to smile as he thanked him for the steps he had taken to free him: "Forgive them, Mr. President, for they know not what they do." At that point, the door opened, and, submachine gun in hand, drenched in sweat, eyes brutalized by fear and rage, General Román burst into the office. A moment was all the President needed to know that if he did not take the initiative, this ape would start to fire. "Ah, Monsignor, look who is here." Effusively, he thanked the Minister of the Armed Forces for coming to apologize, in the name of the military, to His Grace the Bishop of San Juan de la Maguana for the misunderstanding of which he had been the victim. General Román, turned to stone in the middle of the office, blinked with a stupid expression on his face. He had crusts in his eyes, as if he had just awakened. Without saying a word, after hesitating for a few seconds, he extended his hand to the bishop, who was as disconcerted as the general by what was happening. The President said good-

bye to Monsignor Reilly at the door.

When he returned to his desk, Pupo Román shouted: "You owe me an explanation. Who the hell do you think you are, Balaguer?" and waved his submachine gun in his face. The President remained imperturbable, looking him in the eye. He felt invisible rain on his face, the general's spittle. This lunatic would not dare to fire now. After a stream of insults and curses and incoherent phrases, Román fell silent. He was still in the same spot, panting. In a soft, deferential voice, the President advised him to make an effort to control himself. At a time like this, the head of the Armed Forces should set an example of equilibrium. Despite his insults and threats, he was prepared to help him, if he needed him. General Román exploded once again into a semidelirious monologue during which he let him know, for no good reason, that he had given the order to execute Major Segundo Imbert and Papito Sánchez, imprisoned in La Victoria, for complicity in the assassination of the Chief. He did not want to go on listening to such dangerous confidences. Without saying a word, he left the office. There could be no doubt: Román was involved in the death of the Generalissimo. His irrational behavior could not be explained in any other way.

He returned to the reception room. They had discovered the body of Trujillo in the trunk of a car, in the garage of General Juan Tomás Díaz. In all the long years of his life, Dr. Balaguer would never forget the contorted faces, the weeping eyes, the expressions of abandonment, loss, despair, among civilians and military men, when the bloody, bullet-ridden corpse, its face destroyed by the bullet that had shattered the chin, was laid out on the bare table in the dining room of the Palace (where, a few hours earlier, Simon and Dorothy Gittleman had been regaled at a luncheon) and stripped and washed so that a team of doctors could examine the remains and prepare the body for the wake. The reaction of the widow made more of an impression on him than anyone else's response. Doña María Martínez stared at the victim as if she were hypnotized, standing

very straight in the high-platform shoes on which she always seemed to be perched. Her eyes were dilated and red, but she was not crying. She gesticulated suddenly and roared: "Vengeance! Vengeance! They all have to be killed!" Dr. Balaguer hurried to her and placed an arm around her shoulders. She did not move away. He could hear her deep, heavy breathing. She was trembling convulsively. "They will have to pay, they will have to pay," she repeated. "We will move heaven and earth to make it so, Doña María," he whispered in her ear. At that instant he had a presentiment: now, at this moment, he had to drive home what he had achieved with the Bountiful First Lady; afterward it would be too late.

Pressing her arm tenderly, as if to move her away from the sight that caused her suffering, he led Doña María Martínez to one of the small rooms adjoining the dining room. As soon as he was certain that they were alone, he closed the door.

"Doña María, you are an exceptionally strong woman," he said fondly. "That is why I presume, at such a sorrowful time, to disturb your grief with a matter that may seem inopportune. But it is not. My actions are guided by admiration and affection. Please, sit down."

The round face of the Bountiful First Lady looked at him with distrust. He smiled at her sadly. It was undoubtedly impertinent to pester her with practical matters when her spirit had to absorb a terrible blow. But what about the future? Doña María had a long life ahead of her, did she not? Who could tell what might happen after this cataclysm? It was imperative that she take certain precautions, thinking always of the future. The ingratitude of nations was a proven fact, ever since Judas' betrayal of Christ. The country might cry for Trujillo today, and raise its voice against the assassins. But would it remain loyal tomorrow to the memory of the Chief? Suppose resentment, that national disease, triumphed? He did not want to waste her time. And therefore he would come straight to the point. Doña María had to protect herself, had to secure against all eventualities the legitimate property acquired through the

efforts of the Trujillo family, which had, moreover, provided so many benefits to the Dominican people. And do it before subsequent political readjustments became an obstacle. Dr. Balaguer suggested she discuss this with Senator Henry Chirinos, who was entrusted with the management of the family businesses, and determine what portion of the patrimony could be transferred overseas immediately, without incurring too much of a loss. It was something that still could be done with absolute discretion. The President of the Republic had the power to authorize operations of this kind—the conversion of Dominican pesos into foreign currency by the Central Bank, for example—but there was no way to know if it would still be possible later on. The Generalissimo was always reluctant to make these transfers because of his high moral scruples. Maintaining this policy under current circumstances would be, if she would forgive the expression, sheer stupidity. It was a piece of friendly advice, inspired by devotion and friendship.

The Bountiful First Lady listened in silence, looking into his eyes. Finally she nodded appreciatively:

"I knew you were a loyal friend, Dr. Balaguer," she said, very sure of herself.

"I hope to prove it to you, Doña María. I trust you have not been offended by my counsel."

"It's good advice. In this country you never know what can happen," she grumbled. "I'll talk to Dr. Chirinos tomorrow. Everything will be done with the greatest discretion?"

"On my honor, Doña María," the President declared, touching his chest.

He saw a doubt altering the expression of the Generalissimo's widow. And he guessed what she was going to say to him:

"I ask that you don't even speak to my children about this little matter," she said, very quietly, as if she were afraid they might hear her. "For reasons it would take too long to explain."

"Not to anyone, not even to them, Doña María," the Pres-

ident reassured her. "Of course. Allow me to reiterate how much I admire your character, Doña María. Without you, the Benefactor could never have accomplished all that he did."

He had won another point in his strategic war with Johnny Abbes García. Doña María's response had been predictable: her greed was stronger than any other passion. And, in fact, the Bountiful First Lady inspired a certain respect in Dr. Balaguer. In order to keep herself at Trujillo's side for so many years, first as mistress, then as wife, La Españolita had been obliged to strip away all sensitivity, all sentiment—especially pity—and take refuge in calculation, cold calculation, and, perhaps, hatred as well.

The reaction of Ramfis, on the other hand, disconcerted him. Within two hours of his arrival with Radhamés, Porfirio Rubirosa, and a group of friends at San Isidro Air Base, on a chartered Air France plane—Balaguer was the first to embrace him at the bottom of the steps—and freshly shaved and dressed in his uniform of a four-star general, he came to the National Palace to pay his respects to his father. He did not cry, he did not say a word. His grief-stricken, handsome face was ashen and wore a strange expression of surprise, befuddlement, denial, as if that recumbent figure in evening clothes, the chest covered with medals, lying in the sumptuous casket surrounded by candelabra, in a room filled with funeral wreaths, could not and should not be there, as if the fact that it was there revealed a failure in the order of the universe. He spent a long time looking at his father's corpse, his face twisting into grimaces he could not control; it seemed as if his facial muscles were trying to shake off a spiderweb sticking to his skin. "I won't be as generous as you were with your enemies," he heard him say at last. Then Dr. Balaguer, who was at his side, dressed in strict mourning, whispered in his ear: "It is indispensable that we speak for a few minutes, General. I know this is a very difficult moment for you. But there are matters that cannot be put off." Ramfis nodded, regaining his self-control. They went, alone, to the President's office. On the way, they could

see through the windows the huge, growing crowd, swelling with the arrival of groups of men and women from the outskirts of Ciudad Trujillo and nearby towns. The line, in rows of four or five, was several kilometers long, and the armed guards could scarcely control it. They had been waiting for hours. There were heartrending scenes, outbursts of weeping, hysterical displays among those who had already reached the steps of the Palace and felt themselves close to the Generalissimo's funeral chamber.

Dr. Joaquín Balaguer always knew that his future, and the future of the Dominican Republic, depended on this conversation. As a consequence, he decided on something that he did only in extreme cases, since it went against his cautious nature: he would gamble everything on a single play. Holding off until Trujillo's oldest son was sitting on a chair that faced his desk—through the windows, moving like a turbulent sea, the immense, eddying crowd waited to reach the body of the Benefactor—and not wavering from his tranquil manner, not betraying the slightest uneasiness, he said the words he had carefully prepared:

"It depends on you, and only on you, whether some, a good deal, or nothing at all of Trujillo's work endures. If his legacy disappears, the Dominican Republic will sink back into barbarism. We will compete again with Haiti, as we did before 1930, for the privilege of being the poorest, most violent nation in the Western Hemisphere."

He spoke at length, but Ramfis did not interrupt once. Was he listening? He did not nod or shake his head; his eyes, fixed on him for part of the time, wandered periodically, and Dr. Balaguer told himself that this kind of look probably indicated the onset of the crises of withdrawal and acute depression for which he had been committed to psychiatric hospitals in France and Belgium. But, if he was listening, Ramfis would weigh what he was saying. For although he was a drinker, a womanizer with no political vocation or civic concerns, a man whose sensibilities seemed limited to the feelings aroused in him by women, horses, planes, and liquor, and one who could

be as cruel as his father, he clearly was intelligent. Probably the only one in the family with the brains to see past his nose, his belly, his phallus. He had a quick, sharp mind that, if cultivated, might have borne excellent fruit. He directed his recklessly frank exposition to that intelligence. He was convinced this was his last card if he did not want to be swept away like wastepaper by the gentlemen with guns.

When he stopped speaking, General Ramfis was even paler than when he had been looking at his father's body.

"You could lose your life for half of the things you've said to me, Dr. Balaguer."

"I know, General. The situation left me no choice but to speak to you frankly. I have laid out for you the only policy I believe possible. If you see any other, so much the better. I have my resignation here in this drawer. Shall I submit it to Congress?"

Ramfis shook his head no. He took a breath, and after a moment, in his melodious, radio actor's voice, he said:

"A long time ago I reached a similar conclusion, by a different route." He moved his shoulders in resignation. "It's true, I don't believe there is another policy. To save ourselves from the Marines and the Communists, and to have the OAS and Washington lift the sanctions. I accept your plan. You'll have to consult with me and wait for my okay before each step, each measure, each agreement. I insist on that. Command of the military, questions of security, are my affair. I will tolerate no interference, not from you or civilian bureaucrats, and not from the Yankees. No one who has been involved, directly or indirectly, in Papa's assassination will go unpunished."

Dr. Balaguer rose to his feet.

"I know you adored him," he said solemnly. "It speaks well of your filial sentiments that you want to avenge this horrendous crime. No one, least of all me, will stand in the way of your determination to see justice done. That, too, is my most fervent desire."

When he had said goodbye to Trujillo's son, he sipped a glass of water. His heart was recovering its natural rhythm. He

had staked his life and won the bet. Now, to put into effect what they had agreed on. He began at the Benefactor's funeral in the church in San Cristóbal. His eulogy, filled with moving tributes to the Generalissimo yet attenuated by sibylline critical allusions, made some uninformed courtiers shed tears, disconcerted others, raised the eyebrows of still others, and left many confused, but it earned the congratulations of the diplomatic corps. "Things are beginning to change, Mr. President," the new American consul, recently arrived on the island, said approvingly. The next day, Dr. Balaguer urgently summoned Colonel Abbes García. The moment he saw him, his bloated face consumed with annoyance—he was wiping away perspiration with his inevitable red handkerchief—he told himself that the head of the SIM knew perfectly well why he was here.

"Did you call me to let me know I've been dismissed?" he asked, without greeting him. He was in uniform, his trousers slipping down and his cap comically to one side; in addition to the pistol at his waist, a submachine gun hung from his shoulder. Behind him Balaguer saw the thuggish faces of four or five bodyguards, who did not come into the office.

"To ask you to accept a diplomatic post," the President said amiably. His tiny hand indicated a chair. "A patriot with talent can serve the nation in many different areas."

"Where is this golden exile?" Abbes García did not attempt to hide his frustration or his anger.

"In Japan," said the President. "I have just signed your appointment as consul. Your salary and expenses will be those of an ambassador."

"Couldn't you send me any farther away?"

"There is no other place," Dr. Balaguer apologized, without irony. "The only country more distant is New Zealand, but we do not have diplomatic relations with them."

The rotund figure shifted in his seat, snorting. A yellow line of infinite dislike surrounded the irises of his bulging eyes. He held the red handkerchief to his lips for a moment, as if he were going to spit in it.

"You believe you've won, Dr. Balaguer," he said in an abusive tone. "You're wrong. You are as closely identified with this regime as I am. As dirty as I am. Nobody will swallow the Machiavellian ploy of you leading the transition to democracy."

"It is possible I will fail," Balaguer admitted, with no hostility. "But I must try. And to that end, some people have to be sacrificed. I am sorry you are the first, but it cannot be avoided: you represent the worst face of the regime. A necessary, heroic, tragic face, I know. The Generalissimo himself, sitting in the same chair you occupy now, pointed that out to me. But for that very reason, it is impossible to save you at a time like this. You are an intelligent man, I do not need to explain it to you. Do not create needless complications for the government. Go abroad and be discreet. It is to your benefit to leave, to make yourself invisible until people forget you. You have many enemies. And any number of countries that would like to get their hands on you. The United States, Venezuela, Interpol, the FBI, Mexico, all of Central America. You know this better than I. Japan is a safe haven, even more so with diplomatic immunity. I understand you have always been interested in spiritualism. The Rosicrucian doctrine, I believe? Use the opportunity to deepen your studies. Finally, if you wish to settle someplace else, please do not tell me where; you will continue to receive your salary. I have signed a special order for your traveling and moving expenses. Two hundred thousand pesos, which you can draw on the Treasury. Good luck."

He did not extend his hand, because he supposed the former soldier (the night before, he had signed the decree separating him from the Army) would not shake it. For a long time Abbes García sat motionless, observing him with bloodshot eyes. But the President knew he was a pragmatic man, who, instead of reacting with some stupid piece of bravado, would accept the lesser evil. He saw him stand and leave, without saying goodbye. He personally dictated to a secretary the communiqué stating that *former* Colonel Abbes García had resigned from the Intelligence Service to accept a diplomatic post overseas. Two days

later, among five columns announcing the deaths and arrests of the Generalissimo's killers, *El Caribe* published a photograph in which Dr. Balaguer could see Abbes García, wearing a braid-trimmed coat and the bowler hat of a character out of Dickens, walking up the steps to an airplane.

By this time, the President had decided that the new parliamentary leader, whose mission would be to discreetly turn the Congress toward positions more acceptable to the United States and the West, would be not Agustín Cabral but Senator Henry Chirinos. He would have preferred Egghead, whose sober habits coincided with his own way of life, while he found the alcoholism of the Constitutional Sot repugnant. But he chose him because the sudden rehabilitation of a man who had fallen into disgrace through a recent decision of His Excellency could anger the hard-core Trujillistas, whom he still needed. He must not provoke them too much, not yet. Chirinos was physically and morally repulsive, but his talent for intrigue and legalistic scheming was infinite. Nobody knew parliamentary tricks better than he. They had never been friends—because of alcohol, which disgusted Balaguer—but as soon as he was called to the Palace and the President let him know what he expected of him, the senator exulted, just as he did when Balaguer asked him to facilitate, in the speediest and most invisible way possible, the transfer of the Bountiful First Lady's funds overseas. ("A noble concern of yours, Mr. President: to assure the future of an illustrious matron in her misfortune.") On that occasion, Senator Chirinos, still in the dark regarding what was being planned, admitted that he had been honored to inform the SIM that Antonio de la Maza and General Juan Tomás Díaz were wandering around the old colonial city (he had spotted them in a car parked in front of the house of a friend, on Calle Espaillat) and requested the President's good offices in claiming the reward Ramfis was offering for any information leading to the capture of his father's assassins. Dr. Balaguer advised him to forgo the money and not publicize his patriotic denunciation: it could prejudice his political future in an irre-

mediable way. The man whom Trujillo called the Walking Turd to his intimates, understood immediately:

"Allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President," he exclaimed, gesturing as if he were on a speaker's platform. "I have always believed that the regime ought to open up to modern times. With the Chief gone, no one better than you to weather the storm and steer the Dominican ship of state into the port of democracy. You can count on me as your most loyal and dedicated collaborator."

And, in fact, he was. In the Congress he introduced the motion granting General Ramfis Trujillo supreme power in the military hierarchy and maximum authority in all military and police matters in the Republic, and he instructed the deputies and senators regarding the new policy proposed by the President, intended not to negate the past or reject the Trujillo Era but to go beyond it dialectically, adapting it to different times so that as the Republic—with no steps backward—was perfecting her democracy, she would be welcomed again by her sister nations of the Americas into the OAS and, once sanctions were lifted, reintegrated into the international community. In one of his frequent working meetings with President Balaguer, Senator Chirinos asked, not without a certain uneasiness, about His Excellency's plans with respect to former senator Agustín Cabral.

"I have ordered his bank accounts unfrozen and his services to the State acknowledged so that he can receive a pension," Balaguer informed him. "For the moment, his return to political life does not seem opportune."

"We are in full agreement," the senator said approvingly. "Egghead, with whom I have a long-standing relationship, is a conflictive man who creates enemies."

"The State can make use of his talent as long as he is not too prominent," the chief executive added. "I have proposed to him that he serve as a legal adviser in the administration."

"A wise decision." Again Chirinos approved. "Agustín always had an excellent juridical mind."

Barely five weeks had passed since the death of the Generalissimo, and the changes were considerable. Joaquín Balaguer could not complain: in that brief time, he had transformed himself from a puppet president, a nonentity, into an authentic Head of State, an office recognized by all factions, and, in particular, by the United States. They had been hesitant at first, but after he explained his plans to the new consul, they now took more seriously his promise to move the country gradually toward full democracy while maintaining order and not allowing any advantage to the Communists. Every two or three days he had meetings with the efficient John Calvin Hill—a diplomat with the body of a cowboy, who spoke plainly and to the point—whom he had just convinced that, at this stage, it was necessary to have Ramfis as an ally. The general had accepted his plan of gradual opening. He had control of the military, and consequently those thuggish brutes Petán and Héctor, as well as the more primitive adherents of Trujillo in the Armed Forces, were kept in check. Otherwise, they would already have deposed the President. Perhaps Ramfis believed that with the concessions he granted Balaguer—the return of certain exiles, the appearance of timid criticism of the Trujillo regime on the radio and in the papers (the most belligerent, *La Unión Cívica*, was published for the first time in August), increasingly visible public meetings of opposition forces, the rightist National Civic Union of Viriato Fiallo and Ángel Severo Cabral, and the leftist June 14 Revolutionary Movement—he could have a political future. As if anyone named Trujillo could ever figure again in the public life of this nation! For the moment, best not to disabuse him of his error. Ramfis controlled the weapons and had the support of the military; shaking up the Armed Forces until Trujillism had been eradicated would take time. Relations between the government and the Church were excellent again; he sometimes had tea with the apostolic nuncio and Archbishop Pittini.

The problem that could not be resolved in a manner acceptable to international opinion was the question of "human

rights." There were daily protests on behalf of political prisoners, victims of torture, the disappeared, the murdered, at La Victoria, El Nueve, La Cuarenta, and prisons and garrisons in the interior. His office was inundated with manifestos, letters, telegrams, reports, diplomatic communications. He could not do much. Or, rather, anything, except make vague promises and look away. He kept his part of the bargain to give Ramfis a free hand. Even if he had wanted to, he could not have broken his word. The Generalissimo's son had sent Doña María and Angelita to Europe, and tirelessly continued the search for accomplices, as if multitudes had taken part in the conspiracy to kill Trujillo. One day, the young general asked him point-blank:

"Do you know that Pedro Livio Cedeño tried to implicate you in the plot to kill Papa?"

"I am not surprised," the impassive President said with a smile. "The best defense the assassins have is to compromise everyone. Especially those who were close to the Benefactor. The French call it 'intoxication.' "

"If only one other assassin had corroborated it, you'd have suffered the same fate as Pupo Román." Ramfis seemed sober despite the smell of alcohol on his breath. "Right now he's cursing the day he was born."

"I do not want to know about it, General," Balaguer interrupted, holding up a tiny hand. "You have the moral right to avenge the crime. But do not give me any details, I beg you. It is easier to deal with the criticisms I receive from all around the world if I am not aware that the excesses they denounce are true."

"All right. I'll only inform you of the capture of Antonio Imbert and Luis Amiama, if we do capture them." Balaguer saw his handsome actor's face contort, as it always did whenever he mentioned the only two participants in the plot who were not imprisoned or dead. "Do you think they're still in the country?"

"In my judgment, yes," Balaguer declared. "If they had

gone abroad, they would have held press conferences, received prizes, appeared on television. They would be enjoying their status as so-called heroes. They are in hiding here, no doubt about it."

"Then sooner or later we'll get them," Ramfis murmured. "I have thousands of men searching, house by house, hideout by hideout. If they're still in the Dominican Republic, we'll get them. And if not, there's no place in the world where they can escape paying for Papa's death. Even if I spend my last cent finding them."

"I hope your wish comes true, General," said an understanding Balaguer. "Allow me one request. Be sure to follow correct form. The delicate operation of proving to the world that the country is opening to democracy will be frustrated if there is a scandal. Another Galíndez, let us say, or another Betancourt."

Only with regard to the conspirators was the Generalissimo's son intractable. Balaguer did not waste time interceding for their freedom; the fate of those arrested was sealed, as Imbert's and Amiama's would be if they were captured, and, moreover, he was not sure doing so would further his plans. True, times were changing, but the sentiments of the masses were fickle. The Dominican people, Trujillista to the death until May 30, 1961, would have torn out the eyes and hearts of Juan Tomás Díaz, Antonio de la Maza, Salvador Estrella Sadhalá, Luis Amiama, Huáscar Tejeda, Pedro Livio Cedeño, Fifí Pastoriza, Antonio Imbert, and their associates, if they had laid hands on them. But the mystical consubstantiation with the Chief, in which Dominicans had lived for thirty-one years, was disappearing. Street meetings called by students, the Civic Union, or June 14, sparsely attended at first by a few fearful people, had grown after a month, two months, three months. Not only in Santo Domingo (President Balaguer had prepared the motion to change back its name from Ciudad Trujillo, which Senator Chirinos would have the Congress approve by acclamation at the proper moment), where they sometimes filled Independencia Park, but also in Santiago, La Romana,

San Francisco de Macorís, and other cities. Fear was dissipating and the rejection of Trujillo was increasing. His fine historical nose told Dr. Balaguer that the new feeling would grow, irresistibly. And in a climate of popular anti-Trujillism, the assassins would become powerful political figures. That was to no one's advantage. Which is why he struck down a timid attempt by the Walking Turd when, as parliamentary leader of the new Balaguerista movement, he came to ask him if he believed that an agreement by Congress to grant amnesty to the May 30 conspirators would persuade the OAS and the United States to lift the sanctions.

"The intention is good, Senator. But what about the consequences? Amnesty would wound the sensibilities of Ramfis, who would immediately order the murder of everyone who had been pardoned. Our efforts could crumble away."

"The astuteness of your perceptions will never fail to amaze me," exclaimed Senator Chirinos, practically applauding.

Except in this area, Ramfis Trujillo—whose life was devoted to daily bouts of drunkenness at the San Isidro Air Base and in his house on the beach at Boca Chica, where he had installed, along with her mother, his latest girlfriend, a dancer at the Lido in Paris, leaving his pregnant wife, the young actress Lita Milán, in the French capital—had displayed a more willing disposition than Balaguer could have hoped. He had resigned himself to changing Ciudad Trujillo back to Santo Domingo and renaming all the cities, localities, streets, squares, accidents of geography, and bridges called Generalissimo, Ramfis, Angelita, Radhamés, Doña Julia, or Doña María, and he was not insisting on harsh punishments for the students, subversives, and idlers who destroyed the statues, plaques, busts, photos, and posters of Trujillo and family on streets and avenues, in parks, and along highways. He accepted without argument Dr. Balaguer's suggestion that "in an act of patriotic altruism" he cede to the State—that is, the people—the lands, farms, and agricultural enterprises that had belonged to the Generalissimo and his children. Ramfis did so in a public letter. In this way, the State

became owner of forty percent of all arable land, making it the government which controlled more enterprises than any other in the hemisphere, except Cuba. And General Ramfis pacified the souls of those degenerate brutes, the Chief's brothers, who were perplexed by the systematic disappearance of the trappings and symbols of Trujillism.

One night, after eating his usual austere supper, with his sisters, of chicken broth, white rice, salad, and milk pudding, the President fainted when he stood to go up to bed. He lost consciousness for only a few seconds, but Dr. Félix Goico warned him: if he continued working at this pace, before the end of the year his heart or his brain would explode like a grenade. He had to rest more—since the death of Trujillo he had slept no more than three or four hours a night—exercise, and relax on weekends. He forced himself to spend five hours a night in bed, and after lunch he would walk, though far from Avenida George Washington, to avoid compromising associations; he would go to the former Ramfis Park, renamed for Eugenio María de Hostos. And to ease his spirit, for several hours on Sundays following Mass he would read romantic or Modernist poems, or the Castilian classics of the Golden Age. On occasion some irate citizen would insult him on the street—"Balaguer, the paper doll!"—but most of the time people offered a greeting: "Good afternoon, Mr. President." He would thank them ceremoniously, tipping his hat, which he was in the habit of wearing pulled down all the way to his ears so the wind would not blow it off.

On October 2, 1961, when he announced in the General Assembly of the United Nations, in New York, that "in the Dominican Republic an authentic democracy and a new set of circumstances are being born," he acknowledged, before approximately one hundred delegates, that the Trujillo dictatorship had been an anachronism that had savagely infringed rights and freedoms. And he asked the free nations to help him restore law and liberty to the Dominicans. A few days later, he received a bitter letter from Doña María Martínez, in Paris. The Bountiful First

Lady complained that the President had drawn an "unjust" picture of the Trujillo Era, omitting "all the good things my husband also did, and that you yourself praised so highly over the course of thirty-one years." But it wasn't María Martínez who troubled the President; it was Trujillo's brothers. He learned that Petán and Blacky had held a stormy meeting with Ramfis, demanding to know whether he was going to allow that little weakling to go to the UN and insult his father. The time had come to get him out of the National Palace and put the Trujillo family back in power, which is what the people were demanding! Ramfis replied that if he led a coup, an invasion by the Marines would be inevitable: John Calvin Hill had told him so personally. The only chance for holding on to anything was to close ranks behind the fragile legality of the President. Balaguer was skillfully maneuvering to get the OAS and the State Department to lift sanctions. And to achieve this he was obliged to give speeches like the one at the UN, which were contrary to his convictions.

But at the meeting he had with the chief executive shortly after Balaguer returned from New York, Trujillo's son displayed much less tolerance. His animosity was so intense that a rupture seemed inevitable.

"Are you going to keep attacking Papa the way you did in the General Assembly?" Sitting on the chair that the Chief had occupied during their last interview, only hours before he was killed, Ramfis spoke without looking at him, his eyes fixed on the sea.

"I have no alternative, General," the President said mournfully. "If I want them to believe that everything is changing, that the country is opening to democracy, I must make a self-critical examination of the past. It is painful for you, I know. It is no less painful for me. At times politics demands this kind of anguish."

For a long time, Ramfis did not reply. Was he drunk? On drugs? Was it one of those mental crises that brought him to the brink of madness? With large bluish shadows around his blazing, restless eyes, he was grimacing in a strange way.

"I explained to you what I would do," Balaguer added. "I have strictly abided by our agreement. You approved my project. But, of course, what I told you then still stands. If you prefer to take the reins, you do not need to bring in tanks from San Isidro. I will give you my resignation right now."

Ramfis gave him a long look filled with ennui.

"Everybody's asking me to do it," he murmured without enthusiasm. "My uncles, the regional commanders, the military, my cousins, Papa's friends. But I don't want to sit where you're sitting. I don't want the job, Dr. Balaguer. Why would I? So they can repay me the way they did him?"

He fell silent, profoundly dejected.

"So then, General, if you do not want power, help me to exercise it."

"More than I already have?" Ramfis asked mockingly. "If it weren't for me, my uncles would have taken you out and shot you a long time ago."

"It is not enough," Balaguer said. "You see the turmoil in the streets. The meetings of the Civic Union and June 14 grow more violent every day. This will get worse if we do not gain the upper hand."

The color returned to the face of the Generalissimo's son. He waited, his head craned forward, as if wondering whether the President would dare to request the thing he suspected he wanted.

"Your uncles have to leave," Dr. Balaguer said softly. "As long as they are here, neither the international community nor public opinion will have faith in the change. Only you can convince them."

Was he going to insult him? Ramfis looked at him in astonishment, as if he could not believe what he had heard. There was another long pause.

"Are you going to ask me to leave too, leave this country that Papa made, so that people will swallow all the bullshit about a new era?"

Balaguer waited several seconds.

"Yes, you too," he murmured, his heart in his mouth. "You too. Not yet. After you arrange for your uncles to leave. After you help me consolidate the government and make the Armed Forces understand that Trujillo is no longer here. This is not news to you, General. You always knew. Knew that the best thing for you, your family, and your friends, is for this project to move forward. With the Civic Union or June 14 in power, it would be worse."

He did not pull out his revolver, he did not spit at him. He turned pale again and made that lunatic face. He lit a cigarette and exhaled several times, watching the smoke disappear.

"I would have left a long time ago, left this country of assholes and ingrates," he muttered. "If I had found Amiama and Imbert, I wouldn't be here. They're the only ones missing. Once I keep the promise I made to Papa, I'll go."

The President informed him that he had authorized the return from exile of Juan Bosch and his colleagues from the Dominican Revolutionary Party, the PRD. It seemed to him that the general did not listen to his argument that Bosch and the PRD would become involved in a fierce struggle with the Civic Union and June 14 for leadership of the anti-Trujillista movement. And would, in this way, perform a service for the government. Because the real danger lay in the gentlemen of the Civic Union, people of wealth, conservatives with influence in the United States, such as Severo Cabral; Juan Bosch knew this, and would do everything reasonable—and perhaps some unreasonable things too—to block access to the government of so powerful a rival.

There were some two hundred real or supposed accomplices to the conspiracy remaining in La Victoria, and once the Trujillos had gone, it would be a good idea to grant them amnesty. But Balaguer knew that Trujillo's son would never allow the executioners who were still alive to go free. He would vent his rage on them, as he had with General Román, whom he tortured for four months before announcing that the prisoner had killed himself out of remorse for his betrayal (the

body was never found), and with Modesto Díaz (if he was still alive, Ramfis must still be abusing him). The problem was that the prisoners—the opposition called them executioners—were a blemish on the new face he wanted to give to the regime. Missions, delegations, politicians, and journalists were constantly arriving to express their interest in them, and the President had to do some deft juggling to explain why they had not yet been sentenced, and swear that their lives would be respected and their absolutely scrupulous trial would be attended by international observers. Why hadn't Ramfis finished them off, as he had with almost all of Antonio de la Maza's brothers—Mario, Bolívar, Ernesto, Pirolo—and many cousins, nephews, and uncles, who were shot or beaten to death on the very day of his arrest, instead of keeping them in jail as a fermenting agent for the opposition? Balaguer knew that the blood of the executioners would spatter onto him: this was the charging bull he still had to face.

A few days after this conversation, a telephone call from Ramfis brought him excellent news: he had persuaded his uncles, Petán and Blacky, to go on long vacations. On October 25, Héctor Bienvenido flew with his American wife to Jamaica. And Petán sailed on the frigate *Presidente Trujillo* for a supposed cruise around the Caribbean. Consul John Calvin Hill confessed to Balaguer that now the possibility of sanctions being lifted was growing stronger.

"I hope it does not take too long, Consul Hill," urged the President. "Every day the stranglehold on our country grows tighter."

Industrial enterprises were almost paralyzed because of political uncertainty and limitations on imports; shops were empty because of the drop in income. Ramfis was selling firms not registered in the name of the Trujillos, and bearer shares, at a loss, and the Central Bank had to transfer those sums, converted into foreign currency at the unrealistic official exchange rate of one peso to a dollar, to banks in Canada and Europe. The family had not transferred as much foreign currency over-

seas as the President feared: Doña María, twelve million dollars; Angelita, thirteen; Radhamés, seventeen; and Ramfis, about twenty-two so far, which added up to sixty-four million dollars. It could have been worse. But the reserves would soon be wiped out, and soldiers, teachers, and public employees would not be paid.

On November 15, he received a call from a terrified Minister of the Interior: Generals Petán and Héctor Trujillo had unexpectedly returned. He implored the President to seek asylum; at any moment there would be a military coup. The bulk of the Army supported them. Balaguer had an urgent meeting with Consul John Calvin Hill. He explained the situation to him. Unless Ramfis stopped it, many garrisons would back Petán and Blacky in their attempt at insurrection. There would be a civil war whose outcome was uncertain, and a widespread massacre of anti-Trujillistas. The consul knew everything. In turn, he informed him that President Kennedy himself had just ordered a war fleet sent in. The aircraft carrier *Valley Forge*, the cruiser *Little Rock*, flagship of the Second Fleet, and the destroyers *Hyman*, *Bristol*, and *Beatty* had left Puerto Rico and were sailing toward the Dominican coast. Some two thousand Marines would land if there was a coup.

In a brief telephone conversation with Ramfis—he spent four hours trying to reach him—he heard ominous news. He'd had a violent argument with his uncles. They wouldn't leave the country. Ramfis had warned them he would go if they didn't.

"What will happen now, General?"

"It means that from this moment on, you're alone in the cage with the wild animals, Mr. President." Ramfis laughed. "Good luck."

Dr. Balaguer closed his eyes. The next few hours and days would be crucial. What did Trujillo's son plan to do? Leave the country? Shoot himself? He would go to Paris to rejoin his wife, his mother, and his brothers and sisters, console himself with parties, polo games, and women in the beautiful house he had bought in Neuilly. He had already taken out all the money

he could, leaving some real estate that sooner or later would be confiscated. In short, that was not a problem. But the wild animals were. The Generalissimo's brothers would begin shooting soon, the only thing they did with any skill. Balaguer's name was first on all the lists of enemies to be liquidated, which, according to rumor, had been drawn up by Petán. And so, as one of his favorite proverbs said, he would have to "ford this river nice and slow, and keep to the rocks." He was not afraid, he was only saddened that the exquisite piece of work he had undertaken would be ruined by a hoodlum's bullet.

At dawn the next day he was awakened by his Minister of the Interior, who informed him that a group of military men had removed Trujillo's body from its crypt in the church in San Cristóbal and taken it to Boca Chica, where the yacht *Angelita* was anchored at General Ramfis's private dock.

"I have not heard anything, Minister," Balaguer cut him off. "And you have told me nothing. I advise you to rest for a few hours. We have a long day ahead of us."

Contrary to the advice he gave the minister, he did not go back to sleep. Ramfis would not leave without wiping out his father's assassins, a killing that could demolish his laborious efforts of the past few months to convince the world that with him as President the Republic was becoming a democracy without the civil war or chaos feared by the United States and the Dominican ruling classes. But what could he do? Any order of his regarding the prisoners that contradicted those issued by Ramfis would be disobeyed, testifying to his absolute lack of authority with the Armed Forces.

And yet, mysteriously, except for the proliferation of rumors regarding imminent armed uprisings and massacres of civilians, nothing happened on November 16 or 17. He continued to take care of ordinary matters, as if the country were enjoying complete tranquillity. At dusk on November 17 he was informed that Ramfis had abandoned his beach house. A short while later, he was seen getting out of a car, inebriated, and hurling curses and a grenade—which did not explode—at

the facade of the Hotel El Embajador. After that, no one knew his whereabouts. The following morning, a delegation from the National Civic Union, led by Ángel Severo Cabral, asked to meet immediately with the President: it was a matter of life and death. He received them. Severo Cabral was beside himself. He brandished a sheet of paper scrawled by Huáscar Tejeda to his wife, Lindín, and smuggled out of La Victoria, which revealed that the six men accused of killing Trujillo (including Modesto Díaz and Tunti Cáceres) had been separated from the rest of the political prisoners and were to be transferred to another prison. "They're going to kill us, my love," the letter ended. The leader of the Civic Union demanded that the prisoners be placed in the hands of the Judicial Branch, or freed by presidential decree. The wives of the prisoners were demonstrating, with their lawyers, at the doors of the Palace. The international press had been alerted, as well as the State Department and the Western embassies.

An alarmed Dr. Balaguer assured them that he would intervene personally in the matter. He would not allow a crime to be committed. According to reports he had received, the transfer of the six conspirators had as its object an acceleration of the investigation. It was merely a step in the reconstruction of the crime, after which the trial would begin without delay. And, of course, with observers from the World Court at The Hague, whom he would personally invite to the country.

As soon as the leaders of the Civic Union had gone, he called the Solicitor General of the Republic, Dr. José Manuel Machado. Did he know why the head of the National Police, Marcos A. Jorge Moreno, had ordered the transfer of Salvador Estrella Sadhalá, Huáscar Tejeda, Fifí Pastoriza, Pedro Livio Cedeño, Tunti Cáceres, and Modesto Díaz to the cells of the Palace of Justice? The Solicitor General of the Republic knew nothing. He reacted with indignation: someone was misusing the name of the Judicial Branch, no judge had ordered a new reconstruction of the crime. Appearing to be very troubled, the President declared that it was intolerable. He would immediately order the Minister of Justice

to carry out a thorough investigation, determine those responsible, and bring charges against them. In order to leave written proof that he had done so, he dictated a memorandum to his secretary and told him it was urgent that it be delivered right away to the Ministry of Justice. Then he called the minister on the phone. He found him in a state of agitation:

"I don't know what to do, Mr. President. I have the prisoners' wives at the door. I'm being pressured on all sides to make a statement, and I don't know anything. Do you know why they've been transferred to the cells of the Judicial Branch? Nobody can explain it to me. They're taking them to the highway for a new reconstruction of the crime, which no one has ordered. And no one can get near them because soldiers from the San Isidro Air Base have cordoned off the area. What should I do?"

"Go there personally and demand an explanation," the President told him. "It is absolutely imperative that there be witnesses to the fact that the government has done all it can to stop the breaking of the law. Go there with the representatives of the United States and Great Britain."

Dr. Balaguer personally called John Calvin Hill and begged him to support this step by the Minister of Justice. At the same time, he informed him that if, as it seemed, General Ramfis was preparing to leave the country, Trujillo's brothers would move into action.

He continued attending to affairs, apparently absorbed by the critical financial situation. He did not move from his office at lunchtime, and, working with the Minister of Finance and the director of the Central Bank, refused to receive calls or visits. At dusk, his secretary handed him a note from the Minister of Justice, informing him that he and the American consul had been prevented from approaching the scene of the reconstruction of the crime by armed members of the Air Force. He confirmed that no one in the ministry, the prosecutor's office, or the courts had requested or been informed of such an inquiry; it was an exclusively military decision. When he arrived home, at eight-thirty in

the evening, he received a call from Colonel Marcos A. Jorge Moreno. The van with three armed guards that was to return the prisoners to La Victoria after completion of the judicial inquiry had disappeared.

"Spare no effort to find them, Colonel. Mobilize all the forces you need," ordered the President. "Call me no matter the time."

He told his sisters, disturbed by rumors that the Trujillos had killed the men who assassinated the Generalissimo, that he knew nothing. The stories were probably inventions of extremists intended to worsen the climate of agitation and uncertainty. As he reassured them with lies, he speculated: Ramfis would leave tonight, if he had not done so already. That meant the confrontation with the Trujillo brothers would take place at dawn. Would he order them arrested? Would he have them killed? Their minuscule brains were capable of believing that if they eliminated him, they could halt a historical process that would soon erase them from Dominican politics. He did not feel apprehensive, only curious.

As he was putting on his pajamas, Colonel Jorge Moreno called again. The van had been found: the six prisoners had fled after murdering the three guards.

"Move heaven and earth until you find the fugitives," he intoned, with no change in his voice. "You will answer to me for the lives of those prisoners, Colonel. They must appear in court to be tried according to law for this new crime."

Before he fell asleep, he felt a sudden surge of pity. Not for the prisoners, undoubtedly slaughtered this afternoon by Ramfis in person, but for the three young soldiers whom Trujillo's son also had murdered in order to give an appearance of truth to the farce of the flight. Three poor guards killed in cold blood, to give the veneer of reality to a ridiculous sham no one would ever believe. What useless bloodshed!

The next day, on his way to the Palace, he read on the inside pages of *El Caribe* about the flight of "Trujillo's assassins, after treacherously taking the lives of the three guards who

were escorting them back to La Victoria." Still, the scandal he feared did not occur; it was dimmed by other events. At ten in the morning, the door of his office was kicked open. Submachine gun in hand, and with clusters of grenades and revolvers at his waist, General Petán Trujillo burst into the room, followed by his brother Héctor, also dressed as a general, and twenty-seven armed men from his personal guard, whose faces looked not only thuggish but drunk. The revulsion this ill-mannered mob produced in him was stronger than his fear.

"I cannot offer you seats, I do not have that many chairs, forgive me," the small President apologized, sitting very straight. He seemed composed, and there was an urbane smile on his round little face.

"The moment of truth has arrived, Balaguer," roared the savage Petán, spraying saliva. He flourished his submachine gun in a menacing way, and waved it in the President's face. He did not draw back. "Enough bullshit and hypocrisy. Just like Ramfis finished off those sons of bitches yesterday, we're going to finish off the ones still walking around free. Beginning with the Judases, you treacherous dwarf!"

This vulgar imbecile was also drunk. Balaguer hid his indignation and apprehension with complete self-control. Calmly, he indicated the window:

"I ask you to accompany me, General Petán." Then he spoke to Héctor. "You too, please."

He walked to the window and pointed at the ocean. It was a brilliant morning. Facing the coastline one could see very clearly, gleaming in the sun, the silhouettes of three American warships. Their names were not visible, but one certainly could admire the long cannons on the *Little Rock*, a cruiser equipped with missiles, and on the aircraft carriers *Valley Forge* and *Franklin D. Roosevelt*, all aimed at the city.

"They are waiting for you to take power to begin firing," said the President, very slowly. "They are waiting for you to give them an excuse to invade us again. Do you want to go down in history as the Dominicans who allowed a second Yan-

kee occupation of the Republic? If that is what you want, shoot and make me a hero. My successor will not sit in this chair for even an hour."

Since they had permitted him to say what he had said, he told himself, it was unlikely they would kill him. Petán and Blacky were whispering, talking at the same time and not understanding a word. The thugs and bodyguards looked at one another in confusion. Finally, Petán ordered his men to leave. When he found himself alone in the office with the two brothers, he concluded he had won the game. They sat down in front of him. Poor devils! How uncomfortable they looked! They did not know where to begin. He had to make the task easier for them.

"The country is waiting for a gesture from you," he said amiably. "Hoping you will act with the generosity and patriotism of General Ramfis. Your nephew has left the country in the interest of peace."

Petán, ill-humored and direct, interrupted him:

"It's very easy to be a patriot when you have millions overseas and the properties Ramfis owns. But me and Blacky don't have houses outside the country, or stocks, or bank accounts. All we own is here, in this country. We were the only assholes who obeyed the Chief when he prohibited taking money overseas. Is that fair? We're not idiots, Mr. Balaguer. All the lands and goods we have here they're going to confiscate."

He felt relieved.

"That can be remedied, gentlemen," he reassured them. "Of course it can. A magnanimous gesture such as the one the Nation asks of you must be compensated."

From this moment on, it was nothing but a tedious financial negotiation, which confirmed for the President the contempt he felt toward those who were greedy for money. It was something he had never coveted. He finally settled on amounts he considered reasonable, given the peace and security the Republic would gain in return. He ordered the Central Bank to pay two million dollars to each of the brothers, and to convert into

foreign currency the eleven million pesos they already had, some of it in shoeboxes and the rest on deposit in banks in the capital. To be certain the agreement would be respected, Petán and Héctor demanded that it be countersigned by the American consul. John Calvin Hill agreed immediately, delighted that matters would be settled with goodwill and no bloodshed. He congratulated the President and declared: "It is in a crisis that you know a true statesman." Lowering his eyes modestly, Dr. Balaguer told himself that, with the departure of the Trujillos, there would be such an explosion of exultation and joy—and some chaos too—that few people would remember the murder of the six prisoners, whose bodies—how could there be any doubt?—would never be found. The episode would not do him too much damage.

In the Council of Ministers he asked for unanimous agreement from the cabinet for a general political amnesty, which would empty the prisons and nullify all judicial proceedings against subversion, and he ordered the Dominican Party dissolved. The ministers rose to their feet and applauded. Then, with somewhat flushed cheeks, his Minister of Health, Dr. Tabaré Álvarez Pereyra, informed him that for the past six months he had hidden in his house—most of the time confined in a narrow closet with robes and pajamas—the fugitive Luis Amiama Tió.

Dr. Balaguer praised his humanitarian spirit and asked him to accompany Dr. Amiama to the National Palace, when both he and Don Antonio Imbert, who would undoubtedly reappear at any moment, would be received in person by the President of the Republic with the respect and gratitude they deserved for the great services they had rendered the Nation.