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When Dr. Marcelino Vélez Santana, who had gone out for news, came back to the airless attic of Dr. Robert Reid Cabral's little Moorish-style house, where they had already spent two days, to place a sympathetic hand on Turk's shoulder and tell him that the *caliés* had stormed his house on Mahatma Gandhi and taken away his wife and children, Salvador Estrella Sadhalá decided to turn himself in. He was sweating, gasping for breath. What else could he do? Let those savages kill his wife and children? They were certainly being tortured. He felt too much anguish to pray for his family. That was when he told his companions in the hideout what he was going to do.

"You know what that means, Turk," Antonio de la Maza argued with him. "They'll abuse and torture you in the most barbaric way before they kill you."

"And they'll go on hurting your family in front of you, to make you betray everybody," insisted General Juan Tomás Díaz.

"Nobody will make me open my mouth, even if they burn me alive," he swore with tears in his eyes. "The only one I'll name is that stinking Pupo Román."

They asked him not to leave the hiding place before they did, and Salvador agreed to stay one more night. The thought of his wife and children—fourteen-year-old Luis and Carmen Elly, who had just turned four—in the dungeons of the SIM, surrounded by sadistic thugs, kept him awake all night, gasping for breath, not praying, not thinking about anything else. Remorse gnawed at his heart: how could he have exposed his family like this? And the guilt he felt for shooting Pedro Livio Cedeño moved to the middle distance. Poor Pedro Livio!

Where was he now? What horrors had been done to him?

On the afternoon of June 4, he was the first to leave Reid Cabral's house. He hailed a cab at the corner and gave the address, on Calle Santiago, of the engineer Feliciano Sosa Mieses, his wife's cousin, with whom he had always been good friends. All he wanted was to find out if he had any news of her and the children, and the rest of the family, but that was impossible. Feliciano himself opened the door, and when he saw him, he made a gesture—*Vade retro!*—as if the devil were standing in front of him.

"What are you doing here, Turk?" he exclaimed, furious. "Don't you know I have a family? Do you want them to kill us? Get away! For the sake of everything you hold dear, get out of here!"

He closed the door with an expression of fear and revulsion that left Salvador not knowing what to do. He went back to the cab, feeling a depression that turned his bones to water. Despite the heat, he was dying of cold.

"You've recognized me, haven't you?" he asked the driver, when he was already in his seat.

The man, who wore a baseball cap pulled down to his eyebrows, did not turn around to look at him.

"I recognized you when you got in," he said very calmly. "Don't worry, you're safe with me. I'm anti-Trujillista too. If we have to run, we'll run together. Where do you want to go?"

"To a church," said Salvador. "It doesn't matter which one."

He would put himself in the hands of God and, if possible, make confession. After he had unburdened his conscience, he would ask the priest to call the guards. But after driving toward the center of town for a short time, along streets where the shadows were deepening, the driver warned him:

"That guy turned you in, señor. There are the *caliés*."

"Stop," Salvador ordered. "Before they kill you too."

He crossed himself and got out of the cab, holding up his hands to indicate to the men with submachine guns and pistols

in the Volkswagens that he would offer no resistance. They put him in handcuffs that bit into his wrists and pushed him into the back seat of one of the Beetles; the two *caliés* who were half sitting on him gave off a stink of sweat and feet. The car pulled away. Since they were on the road to San Pedro de Macorís, he assumed they were taking him to El Nueve. He made the trip in silence, trying to pray, saddened because he could not. His head was a seething, noisy, chaotic place where nothing was still, not a thought, not an image: everything was popping, like soap bubbles.

There was the famous house, at kilometer nine, encircled by a high concrete wall. They crossed a garden and he saw a comfortable country estate, with an old chalet surrounded by trees and flanked by rustic buildings. They shoved him out of the Beetle. He walked down a darkened hall lined with cells that held clusters of naked men, and they made him go down a long staircase. An acrid, sharp odor of excrement, vomit, and burned flesh made him feel faint. He thought of hell. There was hardly any light at the bottom of the stairs, but in the semi-darkness he could see a line of cells with iron doors and little barred windows, crowded with heads struggling to see out. At the end of the cellar they tore off his trousers, shirt, underwear, shoes, and socks. He was naked, and still wearing handcuffs. The soles of his feet felt wet with a sticky substance that covered the rough flagstone floor. They kept shoving him and forced him into another room that was almost completely dark. They sat him down and fastened him into a shapeless chair lined with metal plates—he shuddered—that had straps and metal rings for his hands and feet.

For a long time nothing happened. He tried to pray. One of the men in shorts who had tied him down—his eyes were becoming used to the darkness—began to spray the air, and he recognized the cheap perfume called Nice that was advertised on the radio. He felt the cold of the metal plates against his thighs, buttocks, back, and at the same time he was sweating, almost suffocating in the sultry atmosphere. By now he could

make out the faces of the people crowded around him; their silhouettes, their odors, some facial features. He recognized the flabby face with the double chin, the deformed body with its prominent belly. He was sitting very close to him, on a bench between two other people.

"It's shameful, damn it! A son of General Piro Estrella involved in this shit," said Johnny Abbes. "There's no gratitude in your fucking blood."

He was about to say that his family had nothing to do with what he had done, that his father, his brothers, his wife, certainly not Luisito and little Carmen Elly, none of them knew anything about this, when the electrical current picked him up and flattened him against the straps and rings that held him down. He felt needles in his pores, his head exploded into little fireballs, and he pissed, shat, and vomited everything he had inside. A bucket of water revived him. He immediately recognized the other figure to the right of Abbes García: Ramfis Trujillo. He wanted to insult him and at the same time plead with him to release his wife and Luisito and Carmen, but his throat produced no sound.

"Is it true that Pupo Román is part of the plot?" asked Ramfis's discordant voice.

Another bucket of water returned his powers of speech.

"Yes, yes," he said, not recognizing his own voice. "That coward, that traitor, yes. He lied to us. Kill me, General Trujillo, but let my wife and children go. They're innocent."

"It won't be that easy, asshole," Ramfis replied. "Before you go to hell, you have to pass through purgatory. You son of a bitch!"

A second electrical discharge catapulted him against his bonds—he felt his eyes popping out of their sockets, like a frog's—and he lost consciousness. When he came to, he was on the floor of a cell, naked and handcuffed, in the middle of a slimy puddle. His bones and muscles ached, and he felt an unbearable burning in his testicles and anus, as if they had been flayed. But the thirst was even more agonizing: his throat,

tongue, and palate were like fiery sandpaper. He closed his eyes and prayed. He could, with intervals when his mind went blank; then, for a few seconds, he was able to concentrate again on the words. He prayed to Our Lady of Mercy, reminding her of the devotion with which he had made the pilgrimage, as a young man, to Jarabacoa, and climbed to Santo Cerro to kneel at her feet in the Sanctuary devoted to her memory. Humbly he implored her to protect his wife, and Luisito, and Carmen Elly from the cruelty of the Beast. In the midst of the horror, he felt grateful. He could pray again.

When he opened his eyes, he recognized his brother Guarionex lying beside him, his body naked and battered, covered with wounds and bruises. My God, they had left poor Guaro in a terrible state! The general's eyes were open, looking at him in the dim light that a bulb in the hallway allowed to filter through the little barred window. Did he recognize him?

"I'm Turk, your brother, I'm Salvador," he said, dragging himself over to him. "Can you hear me? Can you see me, Guaro?"

He spent an infinite time trying to communicate with his brother but did not succeed. Guaro was alive; he moved, moaned, opened and closed his eyes. At times he made bizarre remarks and gave orders to his subordinates: "Move that mule, Sergeant!" And they had kept the Plan secret from General Guarionex Estrella Sadhalá because they considered him too much of a Trujillista. What a surprise for poor Guaro: to be arrested, tortured, and interrogated because of something he knew nothing about. He tried to explain this to Ramfis and Johnny Abbes the next time he was taken to the torture chamber and seated on the Throne, and he repeated it and swore it over and over again, between fainting spells brought on by the electrical currents, and while they flogged him with those whips, the "bull's balls," that tore off pieces of skin. They did not seem interested in knowing the truth. He swore in God's name that Guarionex, his other brothers, certainly not his father, none of them had been part of the conspiracy, and he

shouted that what they had done to General Estrella Sadhalá was a monstrous injustice that they would have to answer for in the next life. They did not listen, they were more interested in torturing him than in interrogating him. Only after an interminable period of time—had hours, days, weeks passed since his capture?—did he realize that with a certain regularity they were giving him a bowl of soup with pieces of yuca, a slice of bread, and jugs of water into which the jailers spat as they passed them to him. By now nothing mattered. He could pray. He prayed in all his free and lucid moments, and sometimes even when he was asleep or unconscious. But not when they were torturing him. On the Throne, pain and fear paralyzed him. From time to time a SIM doctor would come to listen to his heart and give him an injection that revived him.

One day, or night, for in the jail it was impossible to know the time, they took him out of the cell, naked and handcuffed, made him climb the stairs, and pushed him into a small, sunlit room. The white light blinded him. At last he recognized the pale, elegant face of Ramfis Trujillo, and at his side, erect as always despite his years, his father, General Piro Estrella. When he recognized the old man, Salvador's eyes filled with tears.

But instead of being moved at seeing the desolate creature his son had become, the general roared in indignation:

"I don't know you! You're not my son! Assassin! Traitor!" He gesticulated, choking with rage. "Don't you know what I, you, all of us owe to Trujillo? He's the man you murdered? Repent, you miserable wretch!"

He had to lean against a table because he began to reel. He lowered his eyes. Was the old man pretending? Was he hoping to win over Ramfis and then beg him to spare his life? Or was his father's Trujillista fervor stronger than his feelings for his son? That doubt tore at him constantly, except during the torture sessions. These came every day, every two days, and now they were accompanied by long, maddening interrogations in which they repeated, a thousand and one times, the same questions, demanded the same details, and tried to make him de-

nounce other conspirators. They never believed he did not know anyone other than those they already knew about, or that no one in his family had been involved, least of all Guarionex. Johnny Abbes and Ramfis did not appear at those sessions; they were conducted by subordinates who became familiar to him: Lieutenant Clodoveo Ortiz, the lawyer Eladio Ramírez Suero, Colonel Rafael Trujillo Reynoso, First Lieutenant Pérez Mercado of the police. Some seemed to enjoy passing electric prods along his body, or beating him on the head and back with blackjacks covered in rubber, or burning him with cigarettes; others seemed disgusted or bored. Always, at the beginning of each session, one of the half-naked bailiffs responsible for administering the electric shocks would spray the air with Nice to hide the stink of his defecations and charred flesh.

One day—what day could it be?—they put in his cell Fifí Pastoriza, Huáscar Tejeda, Modesto Díaz, Pedro Livio Cedeño, and Tunti Cáceres, Antonio de la Maza's young nephew, who, in the original Plan, was going to drive the car that Antonio Imbert eventually drove. They were naked and handcuffed, like him. They had been in El Nueve the whole time, in other cells, and received the same treatment of electric shocks, whippings, burnings, and needles in the ears and under the nails. And they had been subjected to endless interrogations.

From them he learned that Imbert and Luis Amiama had disappeared, and that in his desperation to find them, Ramfis was now offering half a million pesos to anyone facilitating their capture. From them he also learned that Antonio de la Maza, General Juan Tomás Díaz, and Amadito had died fighting. He had been kept in isolation, but they had been able to talk with their jailers and learn what was happening on the outside. Huáscar Tejeda had heard from one of his torturers, with whom he had become friendly, about the conversation between Ramfis Trujillo and Antonio de la Maza's father. The son of the Generalissimo came to inform Don Vicente de la Maza, in prison, that his son had died. The old caudillo of

Moca asked, without a tremor in his voice: "Did he die fighting?" Ramfis nodded. Don Vicente de la Maza crossed himself: "Thank you, Lord!"

It did him good to see that Pedro Livio Cedeño had recovered from his wounds. Nigger felt absolutely no rancor toward Turk for shooting him in the confusion of that night. "What I can't forgive any of you for is not killing me," he joked. "What did you save my life for? For this? Assholes!" The resentment all of them felt toward Pupo Román was very deep, but nobody was happy when Modesto Díaz said that from his cell on a higher floor, he had seen Pupo naked, handcuffed, his eyelids sewn shut, being dragged by four bailiffs to the torture chamber. Modesto Díaz was not even the shadow of the elegant, intelligent politician he had been all his life; he had lost many kilos, had wounds over his entire body, and wore an expression of infinite despair. "That's what I must look like," thought Salvador. He had not looked in a mirror since his arrest.

He often asked his interrogators to allow him a confessor. At last, the jailer who brought their meals asked who wanted a priest. They all raised their hands. He had them put on trousers and brought them up the steep staircase to the room where Turk had been insulted by his father. To see the sun and feel its warm touch on his skin renewed his spirit. Even more so when he confessed and took communion, something he thought he would never do again. When the military chaplain, Father Rodríguez Canela, asked them to join him in a prayer in memory of Trujillo, only Salvador kneeled down and prayed with him. His companions, disconcerted, remained standing.

From Father Rodríguez Canela he learned the date: August 30, 1961. Only three months had gone by! To him it seemed as if this nightmare had lasted for centuries. Depressed, debilitated, demoralized, they spoke little among themselves, and conversations always revolved around what they had seen, heard, and experienced in El Nueve. Of all the statements his cellmates made, the one indelibly etched into Salvador's brain was the story told by a sobbing Modesto Díaz. For the first

few weeks he had been in a cell with Miguel Ángel Báez Díaz. Turk remembered his surprise on May 30 when this individual appeared in his Volkswagen on the San Cristóbal highway to assure them that Trujillo, with whom he had walked along the Avenida, would come, which was how Salvador learned that this powerful man among the Trujillista faithful was also part of the conspiracy. Abbes García and Ramfis, infuriated with him because he had been so close to Trujillo, were present for all the sessions of electric shocks, beatings, and burnings inflicted on him, and ordered the SIM doctors to revive him so the torture could continue. After two or three weeks, instead of the usual plate of foul-smelling corn mush, a pot with pieces of meat was brought to them in their cell. Miguel Ángel Báez and Modesto gulped it down, choking, eating with both hands until they were full. A short time later the jailer came in. He confronted Báez Díaz: General Ramfis Trujillo wanted to know if eating his own son didn't make him sick. From the floor, Miguel Ángel insulted him: "You can tell that filthy son of a bitch for me that I hope he swallows his tongue and poisons himself." The jailer started to laugh. He left and came back, and from the door he showed them the head of a boy, holding it up by the hair. Miguel Ángel Báez Díaz died a few hours later, in Modesto's arms, of a heart attack.

The image of Miguel Ángel recognizing the head of Miguelito, his oldest son, obsessed Salvador; he had nightmares in which he saw Luisito and Carmen Elly decapitated. He would scream in his sleep, annoying his cellmates.

Unlike his friends, several of whom had tried to end their lives, Salvador was determined to resist until the end. He had reconciled himself with God—he prayed day and night—and the Church forbade suicide. Besides, it wasn't easy to kill oneself. Huáscar Tejeda made the attempt with a tie he stole from one of the jailers (who kept it folded in his back pocket). He tried to hang himself but failed, and because he tried, his punishment intensified. Pedro Livio Cedeño tried to get himself killed by provoking Ramfis in the torture chamber: "son of a

bitch," "bastard," "motherfucker," "your slut of a mother La Española worked in a whorehouse before she was Trujillo's girlfriend," and he even spat on him. Ramfis did not fire the shots he longed for: "Not yet, not so fast. That'll come at the end. You have to keep paying first."

The second time Salvador Estrella Sadhalá learned the date, it was October 9, 1961. They had him put on trousers, and again he climbed the stairs to the room where the sunlight hurt his eyes and brought joy to his skin. Ramfis was there, pale and impeccable in his uniform of a four-star general, with that day's *El Caribe* in his hand: October 9, 1961. Salvador read the large headline: "Letter from General Pedro A. Estrella to General Ramfis, son of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo."

"Read this letter your father sent me." Ramfis handed him the paper. "He talks about you."

Salvador, his wrists cut by handcuffs, grasped *El Caribe*. He felt vertigo and an indefinable mixture of revulsion and sadness, but he read the entire letter. General Piro Estrella called the Goat "the greatest of all Dominicans," boasted of having been his friend, bodyguard, and protégé, and alluded to Salvador with vile epithets; he spoke of "the felony of a son gone astray" and of "my son's treason when he betrayed his protector" and his own family. Worse than the insults was the final paragraph: his father thanked Ramfis, with bombastic servility, for giving him money to help him survive the confiscation of the family's property because of his son's participation in the assassination.

He returned to his cell sick with disgust and shame. He did not hold up his head again, although he attempted to hide his demoralization from his companions. "It isn't Ramfis, it's my father who has killed me," he thought. And he envied Antonio de la Maza. What luck to be the son of a man like Don Vicente!

A few days after that cruel October 9, when he and his five cellmates were moved to La Victoria—they were hosed down and the clothes they were wearing when they were arrested

were returned to them—Turk was a walking corpse. Not even the possibility of having visitors—half an hour, on Thursdays—and hugging and kissing his wife, Luisito, and Carmen Elly, could melt the ice that had formed around his heart after he read General Piro Estrella's public letter to Ramfis Trujillo.

In La Victoria the torture and interrogations stopped. They still slept on the floor but were no longer naked: they wore clothes sent to them from home. The handcuffs were removed. Their families could send food, soft drinks, and some money, with which they bribed their jailers to sell them newspapers, give them information about other prisoners, or carry messages to the outside. President Balaguer's speech at the United Nations, condemning the Trujillo dictatorship and promising democratization "while maintaining order," brought a rebirth of hope in the prison. It seemed incredible, but there was a burgeoning political opposition, with the Civic Union and June 14 operating in the light of day. Above all, his friends were encouraged to learn that in the United States, Venezuela, and elsewhere, committees had been formed to demand that they be tried in a civil court, with international observers. Salvador made an effort to share the optimism of the others. In his prayers, he asked God to give him back his hope. Because he had none. He had seen the implacable expression on Ramfis's face. Would he let them go free? Never. He would carry his revenge through to the end.

There was an explosion of rejoicing in La Victoria when it was learned that Petán and Blacky Trujillo had left the country. Now Ramfis would go too. Balaguer would have no recourse but to declare an amnesty. Modesto Díaz, however, with his powerful logic and cold analytical method, convinced them that their families and attorneys had to mobilize in their defense, now more than ever. Ramfis would not leave before he had exterminated his papa's executioners. As he listened, Salvador observed the ruin that Modesto had become: he was still losing weight and he had the face of a wrinkled old man. How many kilos had he shed? The trousers and shirts his wife

brought swam on him, and every week he had to make new holes in his belt.

Salvador was always sad but spoke to no one about his father's public letter, which he carried with him like a knife in the back. Even though their plans did not work out as they had hoped, and there had been so much death and so much suffering, their action had helped to change things. The news filtering into the cells of La Victoria told of meetings, of young people decapitating statues of Trujillo and tearing down plaques with his name and the names of his family, of some exiles returning. Wasn't this the beginning of the end of the Trujillo Era? None of it could have happened if they hadn't killed the Beast.

The return of the Trujillo brothers was an ice-cold shower for the prisoners in La Victoria. Making no effort to hide his joy, on November 17 Major Américo Dante Minervino, the prison warden, told Salvador, Modesto Díaz, Huáscar Tejeda, Pedro Livio, Fifí Pastoriza, and the young Tunti Cáceres that at nightfall they would be transferred to the cells in the Palace of Justice because the next day there would be another reconstruction of the crime on the Avenida. They pooled all their money and, through one of the jailers, sent urgent messages to their families, telling them that something suspicious was going on; there was no doubt the reconstruction was a farce and Ramfis had decided to kill them.

At dusk the six men were handcuffed and taken away, with an escort of three armed guards, in the kind of black van with tinted windows that people in Santo Domingo called the Dogcatcher. Salvador closed his eyes and begged God to take care of his wife and children. Contrary to their worst fears, they were not taken to the cliffs, the regime's favorite spot for secret executions, but to the center of town and the Palace of Justice at the Fairgrounds. They spent most of the night standing, since the cell was so narrow they could not all sit down at the same time. They took turns sitting, two by two. Pedro Livio and Fifí Pastoriza were in good spirits; if they had been brought here, the story about the reconstruction was true.

Their optimism infected Tunti Cáceres and Huáscar Tejeda. Yes, yes, why not? They'd be turned over to the Judicial Branch to be tried by civilian judges. Salvador and Modesto Díaz remained silent, concealing their skepticism.

In a very quiet voice, Turk whispered in his friend's ear: "This is the end, isn't it, Modesto?" The lawyer nodded, not saying anything, squeezing his arm.

Before the sun came up they were taken out of the prison and put into the Dogcatcher again. There was an impressive military deployment around the Palace of Justice, and Salvador, in the uncertain light, saw that all the soldiers wore Air Force insignia. They were from San Isidro Air Base, the fiefdom of Ramfis and Virgilio García Trujillo. He said nothing, not wanting to alarm his companions. In the cramped van he tried to talk to God, as he had for part of the night, asking that He help him die with dignity, that he not dishonor himself with any show of cowardice, but he could not concentrate now. His failure caused him great anguish.

After a short drive, the van came to a stop. They were on the San Cristóbal highway. This had to be the site of the assassination. The sun gilded the sky, the coconut palms along the road, the ocean that murmured as it broke against the rocks. There were a great many guards. They had cordoned off the highway and blocked traffic in both directions.

"As far as this circus is concerned, the boy turned out to be as much of a clown as his papa," he heard Modesto Díaz say.

"Why should it be a circus?" Fifí Pastoriza protested. "Don't be such a pessimist. It's a reconstruction. Even the judges are here. Don't you see?"

"The same kind of joke his papa liked," Modesto insisted, shaking his head in disgust.

Farce or not, it went on for many hours, until the sun was in the middle of the sky and began to drill into their skulls. One by one, they were made to pass in front of a campaign table set up outdoors, where two men in civilian clothing asked the same questions that had been asked in El Nueve and

La Victoria. Typists recorded their answers. Only low-ranking officers were present. None of the top brass—Ramfis, Abbes García, Pechito León Estévez, Pirulo Sánchez Rubirosa—were visible during the tedious ceremony. They were not given anything to eat, only some glasses of soda at noon. It was early afternoon when the rotund warden of La Victoria, Major Américo Dante Minervino, put in an appearance. He was chewing nervously on his mustache and his face looked more sinister than usual. He was accompanied by a corpulent black with the flattened nose of a boxer, a submachine gun on his shoulder and a pistol tucked into his belt. They were returned to the Dogcatcher.

"Where are we going?" Pedro Livio asked Minervino.

"Back to La Victoria," he said. "I came to take you back myself so you won't get lost."

"What an honor," replied Pedro Livio.

The major was behind the wheel and the black with the boxer's face sat beside him. The three guards escorting them in the rear of the Dogcatcher were so young they looked like new recruits. They seemed tense, overwhelmed by the responsibility of guarding such important prisoners. In addition to handcuffs, their ankles were tied rather loosely, allowing them to take short steps.

"What the hell do these ropes mean?" Tunti Cáceres protested.

One of the guards pointed at the major and lifted a finger to his mouth: "Quiet."

During the long ride, Salvador realized they were not going back to La Victoria, and judging by the faces of his companions, they had guessed the same thing. They were silent, some with their eyes closed and others with their eyes opened wide, and blazing, as if trying to see through the metal sides of the vehicle to find out where they were. He did not try to pray. His anxiety was so great, it would have been useless. God would understand.

When the van stopped, they heard the ocean crashing at

the foot of a high cliff. The guards opened the door. They were at a deserted spot with reddish earth and sparse trees, on what seemed to be a promontory. The sun was still shining, but it had already begun its descending arc. Salvador told himself that dying would be a way to rest. What he felt now was immense weariness.

Dante Minervino and the powerful black with the face of a boxer had the three adolescent guards climb out of the van, but when the six prisoners tried to follow, they stopped them: "Stay where you are." Immediately after that, they began to fire. Not at them, at the young soldiers. The three boys fell, riddled with bullets, without time to be surprised, to understand, to scream.

"What are you doing, what are you doing, you criminals!" Salvador bellowed. "Why kill those poor guards? Murderers!"

"We're not killing them, you are," Major Dante Minervino replied, very seriously, as he reloaded his submachine gun; the black with the flattened face rewarded him with a giggle. "And now you can get out."

Stunned, stupid with surprise, the six men were taken down, and, stumbling—the ropes obliged them to move in ridiculous little jumps—over the corpses of the three guards, they were taken to another, identical van parked a few meters away. One man in civilian clothes was guarding it. After locking them into the back of the van, the three men squeezed into the front seat. Once again, Dante Minervino was at the wheel.

And now Salvador could pray. He heard one of his companions sobbing, but this did not distract him. He prayed with no difficulty, as he had in better times, for himself, his family, the three guards who had just been murdered, his five companions in the van, one of whom, in an attack of nerves, was cursing and banging his head against the metal plate that separated them from the driver.

He did not know how long this trip lasted, because he did not stop praying for an instant. He felt peace and an immense tenderness thinking of his wife and children. When they pulled

to a stop and opened the door, he saw the sea, the dusk, the sun sinking in an inky blue sky.

The men pulled them out. They were in the courtyard-garden of a large house, next to a pool. There were a handful of silver palms with lofty crowns, and, about twenty meters away, a terrace with figures of men holding glasses. He recognized Ramfis, Pechito León Estévez, Pechito's brother Alfonso, Pirulo Sánchez Rubirosa, and two or three others he did not know. Alfonso León Estévez ran over to them, still holding his glass of whiskey. He helped Américo Dante Minervino and the black boxer shove them toward the coconut palms.

"One at a time, Alfonso!" Ramfis ordered. "He's drunk," Salvador thought. The son of the Goat had to get drunk to give his last party.

The first one they shot was Pedro Livio, who collapsed instantly under the barrage of revolver and submachine-gun fire that cut him down. Next, they pulled Tunti Cáceres over to the palms, and before he fell he insulted Ramfis: "Degenerate, coward, faggot!" And then, Modesto Díaz, who shouted: "Long live the Republic!" and lay writhing on the ground before he died.

Then it was his turn. They did not have to shove or drag him. Taking the short little steps allowed by the ropes around his ankles, he walked by himself to the palm trees where his friends were lying, thanking God that he had been permitted to be with Him in his final moments, and telling himself, with a certain melancholy, that he would never see Basquinta, the Lebanese village left behind by the Sadhalás to preserve their faith and seek their fortune in this land of our Lord.