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When the Chief's limousine pulled away and left him in the stinking mudhole, General José René Román was trembling from head to toe, like the soldiers he had seen dying of malaria in Dajabón, a garrison on the Haitian-Dominican border, at the start of his military career. For many years Trujillo had been brutal with him before family and strangers, making him feel how little respect he had for him, using any excuse to call him an idiot. But he had never carried his contempt and insults to the extremes he had shown tonight.

He waited for the trembling to pass before walking to San Isidro Air Base. The guard on duty was shocked to see the head of the Armed Forces appear on foot and covered in mud, in the middle of the night. General Virgilio García Trujillo, commander of San Isidro and Román's brother-in-law—he was Mireya's twin brother—was not there, but the Minister of the Armed Forces called all the other officers together and reprimanded them: the broken pipe that had enraged His Excellency had to be repaired immediately or the punishments would be severe. The Chief would come back to check, and they all knew he was implacable with regard to cleanliness. He ordered a jeep and driver to take him home; he didn't change or clean up before he left.

In the jeep, on the way to Ciudad Trujillo, he told himself that his trembling was not really due to the Chief's insults but to the tension he had felt since the phone call letting him know the Benefactor was angry with him. Throughout the day, he told himself a thousand times over that it was impossible, absolutely impossible, that he had found out about the conspiracy plotted by his compadre Luis Amiama and his close friend

General Juan Tomás Díaz. He wouldn't have phoned; he would have had him arrested and he'd be in La Cuarenta now, or El Nueve. And yet the little worm of doubt did not allow him to eat a mouthful at supper. Well, in spite of the terrible time he had been put through, it was a relief that the Chief's insults were caused by a broken sewage pipe and not a conspiracy. The mere thought of Trujillo finding out that he was one of the conspirators made his blood run cold.

He could be accused of many things, but not cowardice. From the time he was a cadet, and in all his postings, he had shown physical daring and displayed a courage in the face of danger that earned him a reputation for machismo among officers and subordinates. He was always good at boxing, with gloves or bare fists. He never allowed anyone to treat him with disrespect. But, like so many officers, so many Dominicans, before Trujillo his valor and sense of honor disappeared, and he was overcome by a paralysis of his reason and his muscles, by servile obedience and reverence. He often had asked himself why the mere presence of the Chief—his high-pitched voice and the fixity of his gaze—annihilated him morally.

Because he knew the power Trujillo had over his character, General Román's immediate response to Luis Amiama when he first spoke to him, five and a half months earlier, about a conspiracy to put an end to the regime, had been:

"Abduct him? That's bullshit! As long as he's alive nothing will change. You have to kill him."

They were on Luis Amiama's banana plantation in Guayubín, Montecristi, sitting on a sunny terrace and watching the muddy water of the Yaque River as it flowed past. His compadre explained that he and Juan Tomás were organizing this operation to keep the regime from ruining the country completely and precipitating another Cuban-style Communist revolution. It was a serious plan that had the support of the United States. Henry Dearborn, John Banfield, and Bob Owen, at the legation, had given their formal backing and made the head of the CIA in Ciudad Trujillo, Lorenzo D.

Berry ("The owner of Wimpy's Supermarket?" "That's right"), responsible for supplying them with money, weapons, and explosives. The United States, uneasy about Trujillo's excesses ever since the attempt on the life of the Venezuelan President, Rómulo Betancourt, wanted to get rid of him; at the same time, they wanted to be sure he would not be replaced by a second Fidel Castro. This was why they were backing a serious, clearly anti-Communist group that would establish a civilian-military junta and hold elections within six months. Amiama, Juan Tomás Díaz, and the gringos were in agreement: Pupo Román should preside over the junta. There was no one better to secure the cooperation of the military and an orderly transition to democracy.

"Abduct him, ask him to resign?" Pupo was appalled. "You've got the wrong country and the wrong man, compadre. Don't you know him? He'll never let you take him alive. And you'll never get him to resign. You have to kill him."

The driver of the jeep, a sergeant, was silent, and Román took deep drags from a Lucky Strike, his favorite brand of cigarettes. Why had he agreed to join the conspiracy? Unlike Juan Tomás, in disgrace and cashiered from the Army, he had everything to lose. He had reached the highest position a military man could aspire to, and though things weren't going well for him in business, his farms still belonged to him. The danger that they would be seized had disappeared with the payment of four hundred thousand pesos to the Agrarian Bank. The Chief didn't cover the debt out of respect for his person, but because of his arrogant feeling that the family must never look bad, that the image of the Trujillos and their relations must always be spotless. And it wasn't an appetite for power, the prospect of being named Provisional President of the Dominican Republic—and the possibility, which was very real, of then becoming the elected President—that led him to give his support to the conspiracy. It was rancor, the accumulated effect of the infinite offenses to which Trujillo had subjected him since his marriage to Mireya, which had made him a member of the privileged,

untouchable clan. That was why the Chief had promoted him over other men, appointed him to important positions, and occasionally presented him with gifts of cash or sinecures that allowed him to enjoy a high standard of living. But he had to pay for the favors and distinctions by accepting arrogance and abuse. "And that matters more," he thought.

During these five and a half months, each time the Chief humiliated him, General Román, as he did now while the jeep was crossing Radhamés Bridge, told himself that he soon would feel like a whole man, with his own life, even though Trujillo went out of his way to make him feel absolutely worthless. Luis Amiama and Juan Tomás might not suspect it, but he was in the conspiracy to prove to the Chief that he wasn't the incompetent fool Trujillo believed him to be.

His conditions were very concrete. He would not lift a finger until he saw with his own eyes that the Chief had been executed. Only then would he proceed to mobilize troops and capture the Trujillo brothers and the officers and civilians most involved with the regime, starting with Johnny Abbes García. Luis Amiama and General Díaz must not mention to anyone—not even the head of the action group, Antonio de la Maza—that he was part of the conspiracy. There would be no written messages or telephone calls, only direct conversations. He would cautiously begin to place officers he trusted in key posts, so that when the day arrived all the installations would obey his orders.

This is what he had done, naming his classmate and close friend General César A. Oliva as the head of the Fortress of Santiago de los Caballeros, the second largest in the country. He also arranged to appoint General García Urbáez, a loyal ally, as commander of the Fourth Brigade, stationed in Dajabón. And he was counting on General Guarionex Estrella, commander of the Second Brigade, in La Vega. He wasn't very friendly with Guaro, an avid Trujillista, but he was the brother of Turk Estrella Sadhalá, who was in the action group, and it was logical to suppose he would side with his brother. He hadn't confided his secret to any

of those generals; he was too clever to risk a denunciation. But he was sure that as events unfolded, they would all come over without hesitation

When would it happen? Very soon, most likely. On his birthday, May 24, just six days earlier, Luis Amiama and Juan Tomás Díaz, whom he had invited to his country house, assured him that everything was ready. Juan Tomás was categorical: "Any day now, Pupo." They told him that President Joaquín Balaguer had probably agreed to be part of the civilian-military junta over which he would preside. He asked for details, but they couldn't give him any; the approach had been made by Dr. Rafael Batlle Viñas, married to Indiana, Antonio de la Maza's cousin, and Balaguer's principal physician. He had sounded out the puppet president, asking if, in the event Trujillo disappeared suddenly, "he would collaborate with the patriots." His reply was cryptic: "According to the Constitution, if Trujillo were to disappear, I would have to be taken into account." Was this a good piece of news? That suave, astute little man had always inspired in Pupo Román the instinctive distrust he felt for bureaucrats and intellectuals. It was impossible to know what he was thinking; behind his affable manners and eloquence lay an enigma. But, in any case, what his friends said was true: Balaguer's involvement would reassure the Yankees.

By the time he reached his house in Gazcue, it was nine-thirty. He sent the jeep back to San Isidro. Mireya and his son Álvaro, a young lieutenant in the Army who had come to visit them on his day off, were alarmed at seeing him in that condition. He explained what had happened as he removed his dirty clothes. He had Mireya telephone her brother and told General Virgilio García about the Chief's outburst:"I'm sorry, Virgilio, but I'm obliged to reprimand you. Come to my office tomorrow, before ten o'clock."

"Shit, and all for a broken pipe," Virgilio exclaimed in amusement. "The man can't control his temper!"

He took a shower and soaped his entire body. When he came out of the tub, Mireya handed him clean pajamas and a

silk bathrobe. She stayed with him while he dried himself, splashed on cologne, and dressed. Contrary to what many people believed, beginning with the Chief, he hadn't married Mireya out of self-interest. He had fallen in love with the dark, timid girl, and risked his life by courting her despite Trujillo's opposition. They were a happy couple, and in twenty years together they'd had no fights or separations. As he talked to Mireya and Álvaro at the table—he wasn't hungry, all he wanted was rum on the rocks—he wondered what his wife's reaction would be. Would she side with her husband or with the clan? His doubts mortified him. He had often seen Mireya indignant at the Chief's insulting manner; perhaps that would tip the balance in his favor. Besides, what Dominican woman wouldn't like to be the First Lady?

When supper was over, Álvaro went out to have a beer with some friends. Mireya and he went up to their bedroom and turned on the Dominican Voice. There was a program of dance music with popular singers and orchestras. Before the sanctions, the station would bring in the best Latin American performers, but due to the crisis of the past year, almost all the programs on Petán Trujillo's television station featured local artists. As they listened to the merengues and danzones of the Generalissimo Orchestra, conducted by Maestro Luis Alberti, Mireya remarked sadly that she hoped the problems with the Church would end soon. There was a bad atmosphere, and her friends, when they played canasta, talked about rumors of a revolution and Kennedy sending in the Marines. Pupo reassured her: the Chief would get his way this time too, and the country would be peaceful and prosperous again. His voice sounded so false that he stopped talking, pretending he had to cough.

A short time later, there was the screech of brakes and the frantic sound of a car's horn. The general jumped out of bed and went to the window. He made out the sharp-edged silhouette of General Arturo (Razor) Espaillat coming out of the automobile that had just pulled up. As soon as he saw his face, looking yellow in the light of the streetlamp, his heart skipped

a beat: it's happened.

"What's going on, Arturo?" he asked, leaning his head out the window.

"Something very serious," said General Espaillat, coming closer. "I was at the Pony with my wife, and the Chief's Chevrolet drove past. A little while later I heard shooting. I went to see what was happening and ran into a gunfight, right in the middle of the highway."

"I'm coming down, I'm coming down," shouted Pupo Román. Mireya was putting on her robe as she crossed herself: "My God, my uncle, don't let it be true, sweet Jesus."

From that moment on, and in all the minutes and hours that followed, when his fate was decided, and the fate of his family, the conspirators, and, in the long run, the Dominican Republic, General José René Román always knew with absolute lucidity what he should do. Why did he do exactly the opposite? He would ask himself the question many times in the next few months, without finding an answer. He knew, as he went down the stairs, that under these circumstances the only sensible thing to do, if he cared anything about his life and did not want the conspiracy to fail, was to open the door for the former head of the SIM, the military man most involved in the regime's criminal operations, the one responsible for countless abductions, acts of extortion, tortures, and murders ordered by Trujillo, and empty his revolver into him. In order to avoid going to prison or being murdered, Razor's record left him no alternative but to maintain a doglike loyalty to Trujillo and the regime.

Although he knew this all too well, he opened the door and let in General Espaillat and his wife, whom he kissed on the cheek and tried to reassure, for Ligia Fernández de Espaillat had lost her self-control and was stammering incoherently. Razor gave him precise details: as his car approached, he heard deafening gunfire from revolvers, carbines, and submachine guns, and in the powder flashes he recognized the Chief's Bel Air and could see a figure on the highway, shooting, maybe it

was Trujillo. He couldn't help him: he was in civilian clothes, he wasn't armed, and fearing that Ligia might be hit by a stray bullet, he had come here. It happened fifteen minutes ago, twenty at the most.

"Wait for me, I'll get dressed." Román ran up the stairs, followed by Mireya, who was waving her hands and shaking her head as if she were deranged.

"We have to let Uncle Blacky know," she exclaimed, while he was putting on his everyday uniform. He saw her run to the telephone and dial, not giving him time to open his mouth. And though he knew he ought to stop that call, he didn't. He took the receiver and, as he buttoned his shirt, he told General Héctor Bienvenido Trujillo:

"I've just been informed of a possible attempt on His Excellency's life, on the San Cristóbal highway. I'm going there now. I'll keep you apprised."

He finished dressing and went downstairs, carrying a loaded M-1 carbine. Instead of firing and finishing off Razor, he spared his life again, and nodded when Espaillat, his little rat's eyes devoured by worry, advised him to alert the General Staff and order a nationwide curfew. General Román called the December 18 Fortress and directed all the garrisons to impose a rigorous quartering of troops and to close all exits from the capital, and he told the commanders in the interior that he would shortly be in telephone or radio contact with them regarding a matter of utmost urgency. He was wasting precious time, but he had to act in this way, which, he thought, would clear away any doubts about him in Razor's mind.

"Let's go," he said to Espaillat.

"I'm going to take Ligia home," he replied. "I'll meet you on the highway. At about kilometer seven."

When General Román drove away, at the wheel of his own car, he knew he ought to go immediately to the house of General Juan Tomás Díaz, just a few meters from his own, to confirm if the assassination had been successful—he was sure it had—and start the process of the coup. There was no escape; he was an

accomplice regardless of whether Trujillo was dead or wounded. But instead of going to see Juan Tomás or Amiama, he drove his car to Avenida George Washington. Near the Fairground he saw someone signaling to him from a car: it was Colonel Marcos Antonio Jorge Moreno, head of Trujillo's personal bodyguards, accompanied by General Pou.

"We're worried," Moreno shouted, leaning his head out the window. "His Excellency hasn't arrived in San Cristóbal."

"There was an attempt on his life," Román informed them. "Follow me!"

At kilometer seven, when, in the beams from Moreno's and Pou's flashlights, he recognized the bullet-riddled Chevrolet, saw the smashed glass and bloodstains and debris on the asphalt, he knew the attempt had been successful. He had to be dead after that kind of gunfire. And therefore he ought to subdue, recruit, or kill Moreno and Pou, two self-proclaimed Trujillistas, and, before Espaillat and other military men arrived, race to the December 18 Fortress, where he would be safe. But he didn't do that either; instead, displaying the same consternation as Moreno and Pou, he searched the area with them and was glad when the colonel found a revolver in the underbrush. Moments later Razor was there, patrols and guards arrived, and he ordered them to continue the search. He would be at the headquarters of the General Staff.

While he sat in his official car and was taken by his driver, First Sergeant Morones, to the December 18 Fortress, he smoked several Lucky Strikes. Luis Amiama and Juan Tomás must be desperately looking for him, dragging the Chief's body around with them. It was his duty to send them some kind of signal. But instead of doing that, when he reached the headquarters of the General Staff he instructed the guards not to allow in any civilians, no matter who they were.

He found the Fortress in a state of bustling activity inconceivable at this hour under normal circumstances. As he hurried up the stairs to his command post and responded in kind to the officers who saluted him, he heard questions—"An attempted

landing across from the Fairground, General?"—which he did not stop to answer.

He went into his office in a state of agitation, feeling his heart pound, and a simple glance at the twenty or so high-ranking officers gathered there was enough to let him know that despite the lost opportunities, he still had a chance to put the Plan into effect. The officers who, when they saw him, clicked their heels and saluted were a group representing the high command, friends, for the most part, and they were waiting for his orders. They knew or intuited that a terrifying vacuum had just been created, and, educated in the tradition of discipline and total dependence on the Chief, they expected him to assume command, with clarity of purpose. Fear and hope were on the faces of Generals Fernando A. Sánchez, Radhamés Hungría, Fausto Caamaño, and Félix Hermida, Colonels Rivera Cuesta and Cruzado Piña, Majors Wessin y Wessin, Pagán Montás, Saldaña, Sánchez Pérez, Fernández Domínguez, and Hernando Ramírez. They wanted him to rescue them from an uncertainty against which they had no defense. A speech delivered in the voice of a leader who has his balls in the right place and knows what he is doing, explaining that in this dire circumstance the disappearance or death of Trujillo, for reasons yet to be determined, provided the Republic with a providential opportunity for change. Above all, they must avoid chaos, anarchy, a Communist revolution and its corollary, occupation by the Americans. They, who were patriots by vocation and profession, had the duty to act. The country had touched bottom, placed under quarantine because of the excesses of a regime which, although in the past it had performed services that could never be repaid, had degenerated into a tyranny that provoked universal revulsion. It was necessary to move events forward, with an eye to the future. If they followed him, together they would close the abyss that had begun to open before them. As head of the Armed Forces he would preside over a civilian-military junta, composed of prominent figures and responsible for guaranteeing a transition

to democracy, which would allow the lifting of sanctions imposed by the United States and elections under the supervision of the OAS. The junta had the approval of Washington, and from them, the leaders of the most prestigious institution in the country, he expected cooperation. He knew his words would have been greeted with applause, and whoever had doubts would have been won over by the conviction of the others. It would be easy then to order executive officers like Fausto Caamaño and Félix Hermida to arrest the Trujillo brothers and round up Abbes García, Colonel Figueroa Carrión, Captain Candito Torres, Clodoveo Ortiz, Américo Dante Minervino, César Rodríguez Villeta, and Alicinio Peña Rivera, thereby immobilizing the machinery of the SIM.

But, though he knew with certainty what he ought to do and say at that moment, he didn't do that either. After a few seconds of hesitant silence, he limited himself to informing the officers, in vague, broken, stammering terms, that in view of the attempt on the person of the Generalissimo, the Armed Forces must be like a fist, ready to strike. He could feel, touch the disappointment of his subordinates, whom he was infecting with his own uncertainty instead of infusing them with confidence. This was not what they were hoping for. To hide his confusion, he communicated with the garrisons in the interior. He repeated to General César A. Oliva, in Santiago, General García Urbáez, in Dajabón, and General Guarionex Estrella, in La Vega, in the same hesitant way—his tongue barely obeyed him, as if he were drunk—that due to the presumed assassination, they should confine their troops to barracks and take no action without his authorization.

After the round of phone calls, he broke out of the secret straitjacket that bound him and took a step in the right direction:

"Don't leave," he announced, getting to his feet. "I'm calling an immediate high-level meeting."

He ordered calls placed to the President of the Republic, the head of the SIM, and the former President, General Héctor

Bienvenido Trujillo. He would have the three of them come here, and arrest them. If Balaguer was part of the conspiracy, he could help in the steps that followed. He saw bewilderment in the officers, glances exchanged, whispering. They passed him the telephone. They had gotten Dr. Joaquín Balaguer out of bed:

"I'm sorry to wake you, Mr. President. There has been an attempt on His Excellency, while he was driving to San Cristóbal. As Minister of the Armed Forces, I am calling an urgent meeting at the December 18 Fortress. I ask you to come here without delay."

President Balaguer did not respond for a long time, so long that Román thought they had been cut off. Was it surprise that caused his silence? Satisfaction at knowing the Plan was being put into effect? Or mistrust of this phone call in the middle of the night? At last he heard his answer, spoken without a trace of emotion:

"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."

Without giving him time to reply, he hung up.

Johnny Abbes García listened to him attentively. All right, he would go to the meeting, but only after he heard the statement of Captain Zacarías de la Cruz, who was badly wounded and had just been admitted to Hospital Marión. Only Blacky Trujillo appeared to agree to his call for a meeting. "I'll be right there." He seemed unhinged by what was happening. But when he didn't show up after half an hour, General José René Román knew that his last-minute plan had no chance of being realized. Not one of the three men would fall into the trap. And he, because of his actions, had begun to sink into quicksands that it would soon be too late to escape. Unless he commandeered a military plane and had it fly to Haiti, Trinidad, Puerto Rico, the French Antilles, or Venezuela, where he would be welcomed with open arms.

From that moment on, he was in a somnambulistic state. Time was eclipsed, or, rather, instead of moving forward it spun around in a monomaniacal repetition that depressed and infuriated him. He would not leave that state again in the four and a half months of life he had remaining, if what he had, deserved to be called life and not hell, a nightmare. Until October 12, 1961, he did not have a clear notion of chronology but did have an idea of mysterious eternity, which had never interested him. In the sudden attacks of lucidity that reminded him he was alive, that it hadn't ended, he tortured himself with the same question: why, knowing that *this* was waiting for you, why didn't you act as you should have? The question hurt him more than the tortures he faced with great courage, perhaps to prove to himself that cowardice was not the reason he had acted so indecisively on that endless night of May 31, 1961.

Incapable of making sense of his actions, he fell into contradictions and erratic initiatives. He ordered his brother-in-law, General Virgilio García Trujillo, to dispatch four tanks and three infantry companies from San Isidro, where the armored divisions were stationed, to reinforce the December 18 Fortress. But immediately after that he decided to leave the Fortress and go to the Palace. He instructed the head of the Army General Staff, the young General Tuntin Sánchez, to keep him informed regarding the search. Before he left he called Américo Dante Minervino, at La Victoria. He categorically ordered him to immediately liquidate, with absolute secrecy, the prisoners Major Segundo Imbert Barreras and Rafael Augusto Sánchez Saulley, and to make the bodies disappear, for he feared that Antonio Imbert, a member of the action group, might have told his brother about his involvement in the conspiracy. Américo Dante Minervino, accustomed to these kinds of missions, asked no questions: "Understood, General." He bewildered General Tuntin Sánchez by telling him to inform the SIM, Army, and Air Force patrols participating in the search that persons on the lists of "enemies" and "the disaffected," which had been distributed to them, ought to be terminated at

the first sign of resisting arrest. ("We don't want prisoners who'll be used to unleash international campaigns against our country.") His subordinate made no comment. He would transmit your instructions exactly, General.

As he left the Fortress to go to the Palace, the lieutenant of the guard informed him that two civilians in a car, one of whom claimed to be his brother Ramón (Bibín), had come to the entrance demanding to see him. Following his orders, he had obliged them to leave. He nodded, not saying a word. That meant his brother was in on the plot, that Bibín too would have to pay for his doubts and evasions. Sunk in a kind of hypnosis, he thought his inaction could be due to the fact that although the body of the Chief might be dead, his soul, spirit, whatever you called it, still enslaved him.

At the National Palace he found confusion and desolation. Almost the entire Trujillo family had gathered there. Petán, in riding boots and with a submachine gun slung over his shoulder, had just arrived from his fiefdom in Bonao and was pacing back and forth like a cartoon cowboy. Héctor (Blacky), sitting on a sofa, rubbed his arms as if he were cold. Mireya, and his mother-in-law Marina, were consoling Doña María, the Chief's wife, who was as pale as a corpse and whose eyes flashed fire. The beautiful Angelita cried and wrung her hands, but her husband, Colonel José (Pechito) León Estévez, in uniform and looking glum, failed to calm her. He felt all their eyes fixed on him: any news? He embraced them, one by one: they were combing the city, house by house, street by street, and soon . . . Then he discovered that they knew more than the head of the Armed Forces. One of the conspirators, the former soldier Pedro Livio Cedeño, had been wounded and was being interrogated by Abbes García at the International Clinic. And Colonel José León Estévez had already informed Ramfis and Radhamés, who were trying to charter an Air France plane to fly them in from Paris. This was when he also learned that the power attached to his position, which he had squandered over the past few hours, was beginning to slip away; decisions no

longer came from his office but from the heads of the SIM, Johnny Abbes García and Colonel Figueroa Carrión, or from Trujillo's family and relatives, like Pechito or his brother-in-law Virgilio. An invisible force was distancing him from power. It did not surprise him that Blacky Trujillo gave him no explanation for not coming to the meeting he had asked him to attend.

He left the group, hurried to a phone booth, and called the Fortress. He ordered the head of the General Staff to send troops to surround the International Clinic, place the former officer Pedro Livio Cedeño under guard, and stop the SIM from taking him out of there, using force if necessary. The prisoner had to be transferred to the December 18 Fortress. He would come and interrogate him personally. Tuntin Sánchez, after an ominous pause, said only: "Good night, General." He told himself, in torment, that this was perhaps his worst mistake of the entire evening.

There were more people now in the reception room where the Trujillos had gathered. All of them listened, in grief-stricken silence, to Colonel Johnny Abbes García, who was standing and speaking mournfully:

"The dental plate found on the highway belongs to His Excellency. Dr. Fernando Camino has confirmed this. We must assume that if he isn't dead, his condition is grave."

"What about the assassins?" Román interrupted, in a defiant attitude. "Did the subject talk? Did he name his accomplices?"

The fat-cheeked face of the head of the SIM turned toward him. His amphibian eyes washed over him with a gaze that, in his state of extreme susceptibility, seemed mocking.

"He's given up three," Johnny Abbes said, looking at him without blinking. "Antonio Imbert, Luis Amiama, and General Juan Tomás Díaz. He's the leader, he says."

"Have they been captured?"

"My people are looking for them all over Ciudad Trujillo," Johnny Abbes García declared. "There's something else. The United States might be behind this."

He mumbled a few words of congratulation to Colonel Abbes and returned to the phone booth. He called General Tuntin Sánchez again. The patrols should immediately arrest General Juan Tomás Díaz, Luis Amiama, and Antonio Imbert, as well as their families, "alive or dead, it didn't matter, maybe dead would be better because the CIA might try to get them out of the country." When he hung up, he was certain: the way things were going, not even exile would be possible. He'd have to shoot himself.

In the salon, Abbes García was still speaking. Not about the assassins; about the situation faced by the country.

"At a time like this, it is absolutely necessary that a member of the Trujillo family assume the Presidency of the Republic," he declared. "Dr. Balaguer should resign and hand over his office to General Héctor Bienvenido or General José Arismendi. This will let the people know that the Chief's spirit, philosophy, and policies will not be undermined and will continue to guide Dominican life."

There was an uncomfortable silence. Those present exchanged glances. The vulgar, bullying voice of Petán Trujillo dominated the room:

"Johnny's right. Balaguer should resign. Blacky or I will take over the Presidency. The people will know that Trujillo hasn't died."

Then, following the eyes of everyone in the room, General Román discovered that the puppet president, as small and discreet as ever, was listening from a chair in the corner, trying, one would say, not to be in the way. He was dressed impeccably, as usual, and displayed absolute serenity, as if this were no more than a minor formality. He gave a fleeting little smile and spoke with a tranquillity that softened the atmosphere:

"As you all know, I am President of the Republic by a decision of the Generalissimo, who always accommodated himself to constitutional procedures. I occupy this post in order to facilitate matters, not to complicate them. If my resignation will alleviate the situation, you have it. But allow me to make a

suggestion. Before reaching a transcendental decision that signifies a break with legality, would it not be prudent to wait for the arrival of General Ramfis Trujillo? As the Chief's oldest son, his spiritual, military, and political heir, should he not be consulted?"

He looked at the woman who, according to the requirements of strict Trujillista protocol, was always called the Bountiful First Lady by social chroniclers. An imperious María Martínez de Trujillo reacted:

"Dr. Balaguer is right. Until Ramfis arrives, nothing should change." Her round face had regained its color.

Watching the President of the Republic shyly lower his eyes, General Román escaped for a few seconds from his gelatinous mental wandering to tell himself that, unlike him, this unarmed little man, who wrote poetry and seemed so inconsequential in a world of machos with pistols and submachine guns, knew exactly what he wanted and what he was doing, and did not lose his composure for an instant. In the course of that night, the longest in his half century of life, General Román discovered that in the vacuum and chaos created by what had happened to the Chief, this insignificant man whom everyone had always considered a mere clerk, a purely decorative figure in the regime, began to acquire surprising authority.

As if in a dream, in the hours that followed he saw this assemblage of Trujillo's family, relatives, and top leaders form cliques, dissolve them, and form them again as events began to connect like pieces filling in the gaps of a puzzle until a solid figure took shape. Before midnight they were told that the pistol discovered at the site of the attack belonged to General Juan Tomás Díaz. When Román ordered his house searched, along with the houses of all his brothers and sisters, he was informed that it was already being taken care of by patrols of the SIM under the direction of Colonel Figueroa Carrión, and that Juan Tomás's brother, Modesto Díaz, turned over to the SIM by his friend the gamecock breeder Chucho Malapunta, in whose house he had been hiding, was already in a cell at La

Cuarenta. Fifteen minutes later, Pupo telephoned his son Álvaro. He asked him to bring extra ammunition for his M-1 carbine (he had not removed it from his shoulder), for he was convinced that at any moment he would have to defend his life or end it by his own hand. After conferring in his office with Abbes García and Colonel Luis José (Pechito) León Estévez regarding Bishop Reilly, he took the initiative of saying that on his authority he should be removed by force from the Santo Domingo Academy, and he supported the proposal of the head of the SIM that the bishop should be executed, for there was no doubt about the Church's complicity in the criminal plot. Angelita Trujillo's husband, touching his revolver, said it would be an honor to carry out the order. He returned in less than an hour, enraged. The operation had gone off without serious incident, except for a few punches aimed at some nuns and two Redemptorist priests, also gringos, who tried to protect the bishop. The only fatality was a German shepherd, the watchdog at the Academy, who bit a *calié* before being shot. The prelate was now in the Air Force detention center at kilometer nine on the San Isidro highway. Commander Rodríguez Méndez, head of the center, refused to execute Reilly and prevented Pechito León Estévez from doing so, claiming he had orders from the President of the Republic.

Stupefied, Román asked if he was referring to Balaguer. Angelita Trujillo's husband, no less disconcerted, nodded:

"Apparently, he seems to think he exists. What's so incredible isn't that the insolent little jerk is sticking his nose into our business, but that his orders are being obeyed. Ramfis has to put him in his place."

Pupo Román exploded in anger: "We don't have to wait for Ramfis. I'll straighten him out right now."

He strode toward the President's office but had a dizzy spell in the corridor. He managed to stagger to a chair, where he collapsed and fell asleep immediately. When he awoke a couple of hours later, he remembered a polar nightmare: trembling with cold on a snowy steppe, he watched a pack of

wolves loping toward him. He jumped up and almost ran to President Balaguer's office. He found the doors wide open. He walked in, determined to make this meddling pygmy feel the weight of his authority, but, another surprise, in the office he came face to face with none other than Bishop Reilly. His eyes wide with fear, his tunic torn, his face bearing the marks of abuse, the bishop's tall figure still maintained a majestic dignity. The President of the Republic was saying goodbye to him.

"Ah, Monsignor, look who is here, the Minister of the Armed Forces, General José René Román Fernández." He introduced them. "He has come to reiterate to you the regrets of the military authorities for this lamentable misunderstanding. You have my word, and that of the head of the Army—is that not so, General Román?—that neither you, nor any prelate, nor the sisters of Santo Domingo, will be troubled again. I will personally give my apologies to Sister Wilhelmina and Sister Helen Claire. We are living through very difficult times, and you, as a man of experience, can understand that. There are subordinates who lose control and go too far, as they did tonight. It will not happen again. If you have the slightest problem, I beg you to get in touch with me personally."

Bishop Reilly, who looked at them as if he were surrounded by Martians, nodded vaguely and took his leave. Román confronted Dr. Balaguer angrily, touching his submachine gun:

"You owe me an explanation, Mr. Balaguer. Who are you to countermand an order of mine, calling a military center, a subordinate officer, passing over the chain of command? Who the hell do you think you are?"

The little man looked at him as if he were listening to the rain. After observing him for a moment, he smiled amiably. And indicating the chair in front of the desk, invited him to sit down. Pupo Román did not move. The blood was boiling in his veins, like a volcano about to erupt.

"Answer my question, damn it!" he shouted.

Dr. Balaguer did not falter this time either. With the same mildness he used when reciting or giving a speech, he counseled him paternally:

"You are confused, General, and with reason. But make an effort. We may be living through the most critical moment in the history of the Republic, and you more than anyone should set an example of calm for the country."

He withstood the general's enraged look—Pupo wanted to hit him, and, at the same time, curiosity restrained him—and after he sat down at his desk, he added, using the same intonation:

"You should thank me for having stopped you from committing a serious error, General. Killing a bishop would not have resolved your problems. It would have made them worse. For what it is worth, you should know that the President you came here to insult is prepared to help you. Although, I fear, I will not be able to do much for you."

Román detected no irony in his words. Did they hide a threat? No, judging by the benevolent manner in which Balaguer looked at him. His fury evaporated. Now, he was afraid. He envied the serenity of this honey-voiced midget.

"You should know that I've ordered the execution of Segundo Imbert and Papito Sánchez, in La Victoria," he roared at the top of his voice, not thinking about what he was saying. "They were in this conspiracy too. I'll do the same to everybody who's implicated in the assassination of the Chief."

Dr. Balaguer nodded gently, his expression not changing in the slightest.

"For great ills, great remedies," he murmured cryptically. And, standing up, he walked to the door of his office and went out without saying goodbye.

Román remained there, not knowing what to do. He chose to go to his own office. At two-thirty in the morning he drove Mireya, who had taken a tranquilizer, to the house in Gazcue. There he found his brother Bibín forcing the soldiers on guard to drink from a bottle of Carta Dorada that he brandished like a flag. Bibín, the idler, the drinker, the rake, the

wastrel, good-natured Bibín could barely stand. He practically had to carry him to the upstairs bathroom on the pretext that he would help him vomit and wash his face. As soon as they were alone, Bibín burst into tears. He contemplated his brother with infinite sadness in his tear-filled eyes. A thread of spittle hung from his lips like a spiderweb. Lowering his voice, choking up, he said that he, Luis Amiama, and Juan Tomás had spent the night looking for him all over the city and became so desperate they even cursed him. What happened, Pupo? Why didn't he do anything? Why did he hide? Wasn't there a Plan? The action group did their part. They brought him the body as he had asked.

"Why didn't you do your part, Pupo?" Sighs shook his chest. "What's going to happen to us now?"

"There was a problem, Bibín. Razor Espaillat showed up, he saw everything. There was nothing I could do. Now . . ."

"Now we're fucked," Bibín said hoarsely, swallowing mucus. "Luis Amiama, Juan Tomás, Antonio de la Maza, Tony Imbert, all of us. But especially you. You, and then me, because I'm your brother. If you love me at all, shoot me right now, Pupo. Fire that submachine gun, make the most of my being drunk. Before they do it. For the sake of what you love best, Pupo."

At that moment, Álvaro knocked at the bathroom door: they had just discovered the Generalissimo's body in the trunk of a car at the house of General Juan Tomás Díaz.

He did not close his eyes that night, or the next one, or the one after that, and, probably, in four and a half months did not experience again what sleep had once been for him—resting, forgetting about himself and others, dissolving into a nonexistence from which he returned restored, his energy renewed—although he did lose consciousness often, and spent long hours, days, nights in a mindless stupor without images or ideas, with a firm desire for death to come and free him. Everything mixed up and scrambled, as if time had turned into a stew, a jumble in which before, now, and afterward had no

logical sequence but were recurrent. He clearly remembered the sight, when he reached the National Palace, of Doña María Martínez de Trujillo bellowing before the corpse of the Chief: "Let the blood of his assassins run until the last drop!" And, as if it came next, but it could have happened only a day later, the svelte, uniformed, impeccable figure of Ramfis, pale and rigid, leaning without bending over the carved coffin, contemplating the painted face of the Chief, and murmuring: "I won't be as generous as you were with our enemies, Papa." It seemed to him that Ramfis was talking not to his father but to him. He gave him a hard embrace and groaned in his ear: "What an irreparable loss, Ramfis. It's good we have you."

He saw himself immediately after that, in his parade uniform, the inseparable M-1 submachine gun in his hand, in the crowded church in San Cristóbal, attending the funeral rites for the Chief. Some lines from the address by a much larger President Balaguer—"Here, ladies and gentlemen, split by a flash of treacherous lightning, lies the powerful oak that for more than thirty years defied all thunderbolts and emerged victorious from every storm"—brought tears to his eyes. He listened, sitting next to a stony Ramfis, who was surrounded by bodyguards carrying submachine guns. And he saw himself, at the same time, contemplating (one, two, three days earlier?) the line of countless thousands of Dominicans of all ages, professions, races, and social classes, waiting hours on end, under a merciless sun, to climb the stairs of the Palace and, with hysterical exclamations of grief, with fainting and screaming and offerings to the *loas* of Voodoo, to pay their final homage to the Chief, the Man, the Benefactor, the Generalissimo, the Father. And in the midst of all that, he was listening to reports from his aides regarding the capture of the engineer Huáscar Tejeda and Salvador Estrella Sadhalá, the end of Antonio de la Maza and General Juan Tomás Díaz in Independencia Park at the corner of Bolívar as they defended themselves with guns, and the almost simultaneous death, a short distance away, of Lieutenant Amador García, who also killed before he could be

killed, and the mob's looting and destruction of the house where his aunt had given him refuge. And he remembered the rumors regarding the mysterious disappearance of his compadre Amiama Tió and Antonio Imbert—Ramfis was offering half a million pesos to anyone with information leading to their capture—and the fall of some two hundred Dominicans, both civilian and military, in Ciudad Trujillo, Santiago, La Vega, San Pedro de Macorís, and half a dozen other places, who had been implicated in the assassination of Trujillo.

All of that was mixed up, but at least it was intelligible. As was the final coherent memory his mind would preserve: how, when the Mass for the Generalissimo lying in state in the San Cristóbal church was over, Petán Trujillo took his arm: "Come with me in my car, Pupo." In Petán's Cadillac he knew—it was the last thing he knew with total certainty—that this was his last chance to save himself from what was coming by emptying his submachine gun into the Chief's brother and into himself, because that ride was not going to end at his house in Gazcue. It ended at San Isidro Air Base, where, Petán lied to him, not bothering to pretend, "there would be a family meeting." At the entrance to the base, two generals, his brother-in-law Virgilio García Trujillo and the head of the Army General Staff, Tuntin Sánchez, informed him that he was under arrest, accused of complicity with the assassins of the Benefactor and Father of the New Nation. Very pale, avoiding his eyes, they asked for his weapon. Obediently, he handed them the M-1 submachine gun that had not left his side for four days.

They took him to a room with a table, an old typewriter, a pile of blank sheets, and a chair. They asked him to remove his belt and shoes and hand them to a sergeant. He did so, asking no questions. They left him alone, and minutes later Ramfis's two closest friends, Colonel Luis José (Pechito) León Estévez and Pirulo Sánchez Rubirosa, came in, did not greet him, and told him to write down everything he knew about the conspiracy, giving the full names of the conspirators. General Ramfis—by supreme decree, which the Congress would confirm

tonight, President Balaguer had just named him Commander-in-Chief of the Air, Sea, and Land Forces of the Republic—had full knowledge of the plot, thanks to the detainees, all of whom had denounced him.

He sat down at the typewriter and for several hours did what they had ordered. He was a terrible typist; he used only two fingers and made a good number of mistakes that he did not take the time to correct. He told everything, beginning with his first conversation with his compadre Luis Amiama six months earlier, and he named the twenty or so people he knew were implicated, but not Bibín. He explained that for him the decisive factor was the support of the United States for the conspiracy, and that he agreed to preside over the civilian-military junta only when he learned from Juan Tomás that both Consul Henry Dearborn and Consul Jack Bennett, as well as the head of the CIA in Ciudad Trujillo, Lorenzo D. Berry (Wimpy), wanted him to head it. He told only one small lie: that in exchange for his participation, he had demanded that Generalissimo Trujillo be abducted and forced to resign, but under no circumstances was he to be killed. The other conspirators had betrayed him by not keeping this promise. He reread the pages and signed them.

He was alone for a long time, waiting, with a serenity of spirit he had not felt since the night of May 30. When they came for him, it was growing dark. It was a group of officers he did not know. They put him in handcuffs and took him out, not wearing his shoes, to the courtyard of the base, and put him in a van with tinted windows; on it he read the words "Pan-American Institute of Education." He thought they were taking him to La Cuarenta. He knew that gloomy house on Calle 40, near the Dominican Cement Factory, very well. It had belonged to General Juan Tomás Díaz, who sold it to the State so that Johnny Abbes could convert it into the setting for his elaborate methods of extracting confessions from prisoners. He had even been present, following the Castroite invasion on June 14, when one of those being interrogated, Dr. Tejeda

Florentino, sitting on the grotesque Throne—a seat from a jeep, pipes, electric prods, bullwhips, a garrote with wooden ends for strangling the prisoner as he received electric shocks—was mistakenly electrocuted by a SIM technician, who released the maximum voltage. But no, instead of La Cuarenta they took him to El Nueve on the Mella Highway, a former residence of Pirulo Sánchez Rubirosa. It also housed a Throne, one that was smaller but more modern.

He was not afraid. Not now. The immense fear that since the night of Trujillo's assassination had kept him "mounted"—the term used for those who were drained of themselves and occupied by spirits in Voodoo ceremonies—had disappeared completely. In El Nueve, they stripped him and sat him on the black seat in the middle of a windowless, dimly lit room. The strong smell of excrement and urine nauseated him. The seat, misshapen and absurd with all its appendages, was bolted to the floor and had straps and rings for the ankles, wrists, chest, and head. Its arms were faced with copper sheets to facilitate the passage of the current. A bundle of wires came out of the Throne and led to a desk or counter, where the voltage was controlled. In the sickly light, as he was strapped into the chair, he recognized the bloodless face of Ramfis between Pechito León Estévez and Sánchez Rubirosa. He had shaved his mustache and was not wearing his eternal Ray-Ban sunglasses. He looked at Pupo with the lost gaze he had seen in Ramfis when he directed the torture and killing of the survivors of Constanza, Maimón, and Estero Hondo in June 1959. Ramfis continued to look at him without saying anything, while a *calié* shaved him, and another, kneeling, bound his ankles, and a third sprayed perfume around the room. General Román Fernández withstood those eyes.

"You're the worst of all, Pupo," he heard Ramfis say suddenly, his voice breaking with sorrow. "Everything you are and everything you have you owe to Papa. Why did you do it?"

"For love of my country," he heard himself saying.

There was a pause. Ramfis spoke again:

"Is Balaguer involved?"

"I don't know. Luis Amiama told me they had sounded him out, through his doctor. He didn't seem very sure. I tend to think he wasn't."

Ramfis moved his head and Pupo felt himself thrown forward with the force of a cyclone. The jolt seemed to pound all his nerves, from his head to his feet. Straps and rings cut into his muscles, he saw balls of fire, sharp needles jabbed into his pores. He endured it without screaming, he only bellowed. Although with each discharge—they came one after the other, with intervals when they threw buckets of water at him to revive him—he passed out and could not see, he then returned to consciousness. And his nostrils filled with that perfume housemaids wore. He tried to maintain a certain composure, not humiliate himself by begging for mercy. In the nightmare he would never come out of, he was sure of two things: Johnny Abbes García never appeared among his torturers, and at one point somebody—it might have been Pechito León Estévez or General Tuntin Sánchez—let him know that Bibín's reflexes were better than his because he had managed to fire a bullet into his mouth when the SIM came for him at his house on Arzobispo Nouel, corner of José Reyes. Pupo often wondered if his children, Álvaro and José René, whom he had never told about the conspiracy, had managed to kill themselves.

Between sessions in the electric chair, they dragged him, naked, to a damp cell, where buckets of pestilential water made him respond. To keep him from sleeping they taped his lids to his eyebrows with adhesive tape. When, in spite of having his eyes open, he fell into semiconsciousness, they woke him by beating him with baseball bats. At various times they stuffed inedible substances into his mouth; at times he detected excrement, and vomited. Then, in a rapid descent into subhumanity, he could keep down what they gave him. In the early sessions with electricity, Ramfis interrogated him. He repeated the same question over and over again, to see if he would contradict himself. ("Is President Balaguer implicated?") He responded,

making superhuman efforts to have his tongue obey him. Until he heard laughter, and then the colorless, rather feminine voice of Ramfis: "Shut up, Pupo. You have nothing to tell me. I know everything. Now you're only paying for your betrayal of Papa." It was the same voice, with its discordant changes in pitch, that Ramfis had at the orgy of blood following June 14, when he lost his mind and the Chief had to send him to a psychiatric hospital in Belgium.

At the time of this last conversation with Ramfis, he could no longer see him. They had removed the tape, ripping off his eyebrows in the process, and a drunken, joyful voice announced: "Now you'll have some dark, so you'll sleep real good." He felt the needle piercing his eyelids. He did not move while they sewed them shut. It surprised him that sealing his eyes with thread caused him less suffering than the shocks on the Throne. By then, he had failed in his two attempts to kill himself. The first time, he banged his head with all the strength he had left against the wall in his cell. He passed out, and barely bloodied his hair. The second time, he almost succeeded. Climbing up the bars—they had removed his handcuffs in preparation for another session on the Throne—he broke the bulb that lit the cell. On all fours, he swallowed every bit of glass, hoping that an internal hemorrhage would end his life. But the SIM had two doctors on permanent call and a small first-aid station supplied with what was necessary to prevent tortured prisoners from dying by their own hand. They took him to the infirmary, made him swallow a liquid that induced vomiting, and flushed out his intestines. They saved him, so that Ramfis and his friends could go on killing him in stages.

When they castrated him, the end was near. They did not cut off his testicles with a knife but used a scissors, while he was on the Throne. He heard excited snickers and obscene remarks from individuals who were only voices and sharp odors of armpits and cheap tobacco. He did not give them the satisfaction of screaming. They stuffed his testicles into his mouth, and he swallowed them, hoping with all his might that this

would hasten his death, something he never dreamed he could desire so much.

At one point he recognized the voice of Modesto Díaz, the brother of General Juan Tomás Díaz, who, people said, was as intelligent as Egghead Cabral or the Constitutional Sot. Had they put him in the same cell? Were they torturing him too? Modesto's voice was bitter and accusatory:

"We're here because of you, Pupo. Why did you betray us? Didn't you know this would happen to you? Repent for having betrayed your friends and your country."

He did not have the strength to articulate a sound or even open his mouth. Some time later—it could have been hours, days, or weeks—he heard a conversation between a SIM doctor and Ramfis Trujillo:

"Impossible to keep him alive any longer, General."

"How much time does he have?" It was Ramfis, no doubt about it.

"A few hours, perhaps a day if I double the serum. But in his condition, he won't survive another shock. It's incredible that he's lasted four months, General."

"Move away, then. I won't let him die a natural death. Stand behind me, you don't want any cartridges to hit you."

With great joy, General José René Román felt the final burst of gunfire.