

17 When Dr. Vélez Santana and Bienvenido García, General Juan Tomás Díaz's son-in-law, drove Pedro Livio Cedeño to the International Clinic, the inseparable trio—Amadito, Antonio Imbert, and Turk Estrella Sadhalá—reached a decision: it made no sense to go on waiting there until General Díaz, Luis Amiama, and Antonio de la Maza found General José René Román. What they should do is find a doctor to treat their wounds, then change their soiled clothes and look for a place to hide until things were settled. Was there a trustworthy doctor they could go to at this hour? It was close to midnight.

"My cousin Manuel," said Imbert. "Manuel Durán Barreras. He lives nearby and his office is next to his house. He can be trusted."

Tony's expression was somber, which surprised Amadito. When Salvador was driving them to Dr. Durán Barreras's house—the city was quiet and the streets were empty of traffic, the news hadn't broken yet—he asked:

"Why the long face?"

"This is all fucked up," Imbert replied quietly.

Turk and the lieutenant looked at him.

"Do you think it's normal for Pupo Román not to show up?" he added between clenched teeth. "There are only two explanations. Either they found him out and arrested him or he got scared. In either case, we're fucked."

"But we killed Trujillo, Tony!" Amadito tried to cheer him up. "Nobody's going to bring him back to life."

"Don't think I'm sorry about that," said Imbert. "The truth is, I never had much faith in the coup, the civilian-military junta, all those dreams of Antonio de la Maza. I always saw us

as being on a suicide mission."

"You should have said so earlier, brother," Amadito joked. "I would have written my will."

Turk dropped them off at Dr. Durán Barreras's place and went to his own house; since the *caliés* would soon find his abandoned car on the highway, he wanted to alert his wife and children and get some clothes and money. Dr. Durán Barreras was in bed. He came out in a robe, yawning. His jaw dropped when Imbert explained why they were covered with mud and blood, and what they wanted from him. For long seconds he looked at them, astounded, his large bony face, with its full beard, contorted in bewilderment. Amadito could see the doctor's Adam's apple moving up and down. From time to time he rubbed his eyes as if he were seeing ghosts. At last he reacted:

"The first thing is to treat you. Let's go to my office."

Amadito was the most seriously hurt. A bullet had hit his ankle; you could see the entrance and exit wounds, and splinters of bone protruding from them. His foot and part of his ankle were deformed by swelling.

"I don't know how you can stand with that shattered ankle," the doctor remarked as he disinfected the wound.

"I didn't realize until now that it hurt," replied the lieutenant.

In the euphoria of what had happened, he had hardly paid attention to his foot. But now, the pain was there, along with a fiery tingling that went up to his knee. The doctor bandaged the wound, gave him an injection, and handed him a vial of pills to take every four hours.

"Do you have somewhere to go?" Imbert asked while he was being treated.

Amadito thought immediately of his Aunt Meca. She was one of his eleven great-aunts, the one who had pampered him most since he had been a little boy. The old woman lived alone, in a wooden house filled with flowerpots, on Avenida San Martín, not far from Independencia Park.

"The first place they'll look for us will be with our relatives," Tony warned. "A close friend would be better."

"All my friends are in the military, brother. Staunch Trujilistas."

He could not understand why Imbert looked so worried and pessimistic. Pupo Román would show up and they would put the Plan in effect, he was sure about that. And anyway, with the death of Trujillo, the regime would collapse like a house of cards.

"I think I can help you, son," Dr. Durán Barreras intervened. "The mechanic who fixes my station wagon has a little farm he wants to rent. Near the Ozama extension. Shall I talk to him?"

He did, and it turned out to be surprisingly easy. The mechanic was named Antonio (Toño) Sánchez, and in spite of the hour he came to the house as soon as the doctor called. They told him the truth. "Damn, tonight I'll get drunk!" he exclaimed. It was an honor to let them have his place. The lieutenant would be safe, there were no close neighbors. He would take him in his jeep and make sure he had food.

"How can I ever repay you, Doc?" Amadito asked Durán Barreras.

"By taking care of yourself, son," and the doctor shook his hand, looking at him with compassion. "I wouldn't want to be in your skin if they catch you."

"That won't happen, Doc."

He had used up his ammunition, but Imbert had a good supply and gave him a handful of bullets. The lieutenant loaded his .45 and made his farewells by stating:

"Now I feel safer."

"See you soon, Amadito." Tony embraced him. "Your friendship is one of the good things that's happened to me."

When they left for the Ozama extension in Toño Sánchez's jeep, the city had changed. They passed a couple of Beetles filled with *caliés*, and as they were crossing Radhamés Bridge they saw a truck pull up, carrying guards, who jumped out and set up a roadblock.

"They know the Goat is dead," said Amadito. "I wish I

could have seen their faces when they found out they had lost their Chief."

"Nobody's going to believe it until they see and smell the body," the mechanic remarked. "Shit, this'll be a different country without Trujillo!"

The farm was a crude building in the middle of ten hectares of uncultivated land. The house was practically unfurnished: a cot with a mattress, a few broken chairs, and a demijohn of distilled water. "Tomorrow I'll bring you something to eat," Toño Sánchez promised. "Don't worry. Nobody will come here."

The house had no electricity. Amadito took off his shoes and lay down, fully dressed, on the cot. The sound of Toño Sánchez's jeep grew fainter until it disappeared. He was tired, and his heel and ankle hurt, but he felt a great serenity. With Trujillo dead, a great burden had been lifted from him. The guilt that had been gnawing at his soul ever since he was forced to kill that poor man—Luisa Gil's brother, my God!—would start to fade away now, he was sure. He would become the person he used to be, a man who could look in the mirror and not feel disgust with the face he saw reflected there. Ah, shit, if he could finish off Abbes García and Colonel Roberto Figueroa Carrión too, nothing else would matter. He would die in peace. He curled up, changed position several times, trying to get comfortable, but couldn't fall asleep. He heard noises in the dark, scurrying sounds. At dawn the excitement and pain eased, and he managed to sleep a few hours. He woke with a start. He'd had a nightmare but couldn't remember his dream.

He spent the hours of the new day peering out the windows, watching for the jeep. There was nothing to eat in the house, but he wasn't hungry. His occasional drinks of distilled water seemed to fill his stomach. But he was tormented by solitude, boredom, lack of news. If there were only a radio at least! He resisted the temptation to go out and walk to some inhabited place and find a newspaper. Control your impatience, boy, Toño Sánchez would come soon.

He didn't come until the third day. He appeared at noon on June 2, the day that Amadito, faint with hunger and desperate for news, turned thirty-two. Toño was no longer the easygoing, effusive, self-confident man who had brought him here. He was pale, devoured by anxiety, unshaven, and stammering. He handed him a thermos of hot coffee and some sausage and cheese sandwiches, which Amadito wolfed down as he heard the bad news. His picture was in all the papers and was shown frequently on television, along with those of General Juan Tomás Díaz, Antonio de la Maza, Estrella Sadhalá, Fifi Pastoriza, Pedro Livio Cedeño, Antonio Imbert, Huáscar Tejeda, and Luis Amiana. Pedro Livio Cedeño had been taken prisoner, and he had given them up. They were offering huge amounts of pesos to anyone with information about them. There was a fierce persecution of everyone suspected of being anti-Trujillista. Dr. Durán Barreras had been arrested the night before; Toño thought that if he was tortured, he'd betray them all in the end. It was extremely dangerous for Amadito to stay here.

"I wouldn't stay even if it was safe, Toño," the lieutenant said. "I'd rather be killed than have to spend another three days alone like this."

"Where will you go?"

He thought of his cousin Máximo Mieses, who had a place along the Duarte highway. But Toño discouraged him: the highways were full of patrols and they were searching every vehicle. He'd never get to his cousin's farm without being recognized.

"You have no idea what's going on." Toño Sánchez was in a rage. "Hundreds of people have been arrested. They've gone crazy, looking for all of you."

"They can go to hell," said Amadito. "Let them kill me. The Goat's gone and they can't bring him back. Don't worry, brother. You've done a lot for me. Can you get me to the highway? I'll go back to the capital on foot."

"I'm scared, but not so scared that I'd leave you out in the

cold, I'm not that much of a bastard," said Toño, who had calmed down. He patted him on the shoulder. "Let's go, I'll take you. If they catch us, you put a gun to my head, okay?"

He settled Amadito in the back of the jeep, under a piece of canvas, on top of which he placed some coils of rope and gasoline cans that slammed against the hunched-over lieutenant. The position gave him cramps and made the pain in his foot worse; every pothole in the road battered his shoulders, back, and head. But he never let go of his .45; he held it in his right hand, with the safety off. Whatever happened, they wouldn't take him alive. He wasn't afraid. In fact, he didn't have much hope of getting out of this. But it didn't matter. He hadn't felt this kind of serenity since that disastrous night with Johnny Abbes.

"We're coming up on the Radhamés Bridge," he heard a terrified Toño Sánchez say. "Don't move, don't make a sound, there's a patrol."

The jeep stopped. He heard voices, footsteps, and after a pause, friendly exclamations: "Hey, it's you, Toñito." "What's up, compadre?" They authorized him to continue without searching the car. They must have been in the middle of the bridge when he heard Toño Sánchez again:

"The captain was my friend Skinny Rasputín. Shit, what a piece of luck! My balls are still up around my ears, Amadito. Where should I drop you?"

"On Avenida San Martín."

A short while later, the jeep braked to a stop.

"I don't see *caliés* anywhere, now's a good time," Toño said. "God be with you, boy."

The lieutenant lifted off the canvas and the cans and jumped to the sidewalk. A few cars were passing, but he saw no pedestrians except for a man with a stick who was walking away, his back to him.

"God bless you, Toño."

"And be with you," Toño Sánchez repeated, pulling away.

Aunt Meca's little one-story house—made of wood, with a

fence, no garden, but surrounded by pots of geraniums in the windows—was about twenty meters away, which Amadito strode across, limping, not concealing his revolver. As soon as he knocked the door opened. Aunt Meca didn't have time to be astonished, because the lieutenant rushed in, moving her aside and closing the door behind him.

"I don't know what to do, where to hide, Aunt Meca. It'll be for one or two days, until I can find a safe place."

His aunt kissed and embraced him, affectionate as always. She didn't seem as frightened as Amadito had feared.

"They must have seen you, honey. How could you come in broad daylight? My neighbors are raging Trujillistas. You're covered with blood. And those bandages? Are you wounded?"

Amadito peered at the street through the curtains. There were no people on the sidewalks. Doors and windows across the street were closed.

"Ever since the news broke I've been praying to St. Peter Claver for you, Amadito, he's such a miraculous saint," his Aunt Meca said, cradling his face in her hands. "When they showed you on television and in *El Caribe*, some of my neighbors came to ask me questions, to see what they could find out. I hope they haven't seen you. You look awful, honey. Do you want anything?"

"Yes, Aunt Meca," he said with a laugh, caressing her white hair. "A shower and something to eat. I'm starving."

"And it's your birthday!" Aunt Meca recalled, and hugged him again.

She was a small, energetic old woman, with a resolute expression and deep, kind eyes. She had him take off his pants and shirt, so she could wash them, and while Amadito showered—it was a pleasure fit for the gods—she heated up all the leftovers in the kitchen. Wearing his shorts and undershirt, the lieutenant found a banquet spread on the table: fried green plantains, fried sausage, rice, deep-fried pieces of chicken. He ate with good appetite, listening to his Aunt Meca's stories. How it upset the family when they learned he was one of Trujillo's assassins. The

caliés had come to the houses of three of her sisters in the middle of the night, asking about him. They hadn't come here yet.

"If you don't mind, I'd like to sleep for a while, Aunt Meca. I've barely closed my eyes for days. I was too bored. I'm happy to be here with you."

She led him to her bedroom and had him lie down on her bed, under an image of St. Peter Claver, her favorite saint. She closed the shutters to darken the room, and said that while he was napping, she would wash and iron his uniform. "And we'll think of a place where you can hide, Amadito." She kissed him repeatedly on his brow and head: "And I thought you were such a good Trujillista, honey." He fell asleep immediately. He dreamed that Turk Sadhalá and Antonio Imbert were calling him repeatedly: "Amadito, Amadito!" They were trying to tell him something important, but he couldn't understand their gestures or words. It seemed to him he had just closed his eyes when he felt someone shaking him. There was Aunt Meca, so pale and frightened he felt sorry for her, and guilt-ridden for having involved her in this.

"They're here, they're here," she said in a strangled voice, crossing herself. "Ten or twelve Beetles, honey, and lots of *caliés*."

He was lucid now and knew perfectly well what to do. He made the old woman lie down on the floor, behind the bed, against the wall, at the feet of St. Peter Claver.

"Don't move, don't get up no matter what," he told her. "I love you very much, Aunt Meca."

He had the .45 in his hand. Barefoot, dressed only in his regulation khaki undershirt and shorts, he hugged the wall and crept to the front door. He peered through the curtains, staying out of sight. It was an overcast afternoon, and in the distance he could hear a bolero. Black SIM Volkswagens filled the street. At least twenty *caliés* armed with submachine guns and revolvers were surrounding the house. Three men were at the door. One of them pounded it with his fist, making the wood quiver, and shouted at the top of his voice:

"We know you're in there, García Guerrero! Come out with your hands up or you'll die like a dog!"

"Not like a dog, no," he murmured. As he opened the door with his left hand, he fired with his right. He managed to empty the clip of his pistol and saw the man who had urged him to surrender fall, bellowing, shot in the middle of the chest. But, annihilated by an untold number of bullets from submachine guns and revolvers, he did not see that in addition to killing one *calié*, he had wounded two others before dying himself. He did not see how his body was tied—the way hunters tie down deer killed in the Cordillera Central—to the roof of a Volkswagen, and how Johnny Abbes's men, who were inside the Beetle, held on to his ankles and wrists and displayed him to bystanders in Independencia Park, through which his killers drove in triumph, while other *caliés* entered the house, found Aunt Meca where he had left her, more dead than alive, and shoving and spitting at her, took her to SIM headquarters, at the same time that a greedy mob, under the mocking or impassive eyes of the police, began to loot the house, making off with everything the *caliés* hadn't stolen first, and after looting the house they destroyed it, tore down the walls, demolished the roof, and finally burned it until, at nightfall, there was nothing left but ashes and charred rubble.