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After Amadito left, Antonio Imbert remained a while longer in the house of his cousin, Dr. Manuel Durán Barreras. He had no hope that Juan Tomás Díaz and Antonio de la Maza would find General Román. Perhaps the political-military Plan had been discovered and Pupo was dead or in prison; perhaps he had lost his courage and stepped back. He had no alternative but to go into hiding. He and his cousin Manuel reviewed his options before deciding on a distant relative, Dr. Gladys de los Santos, Durán's sister-in-law. She lived nearby.

In the small hours of the morning, when it was still dark, Manuel Durán and Imbert walked the six blocks at a rapid pace without seeing any vehicles or pedestrians. Dr. De los Santos took some time to open the door. She was in her bathrobe, and rubbed her eyes vigorously as they explained the situation. She was not particularly frightened. She reacted with a strange equanimity. A stout but agile woman in her forties, she displayed enormous self-assurance and regarded the world with dispassion.

"I'll put you up the best I can," she told Imbert. "But this isn't a safe hiding place. I was arrested once, and the SIM has me in its files."

To keep the maid from finding him, she put him in a windowless storeroom next to the garage, and placed a folding mattress on the floor. It was a tiny, unventilated space. Antonio could not close his eyes for the rest of the night. He kept the Colt .45 beside him, on a shelf filled with canned goods; he was tense, his ears alert to any suspicious sound. He thought about his brother Segundo, and his skin crawled: they must be torturing him in La Victoria, or had already killed him.

Dr. De los Santos, who had locked the storeroom with a key, came to let him out at nine in the morning.

"I gave the maid the day off so she could visit her family in Jarabacoa." She tried to cheer him. "You can move anywhere you want in the house. But don't let the neighbors see you. What a night you must have spent in that cave."

While they ate breakfast in the kitchen—mangú, fried cheese, and coffee—they listened to the news. There was no mention of the assassination on the radio. Dr. De los Santos left for work a short while later. Imbert took a shower and went down to the living room, where, sprawled in an armchair, he fell asleep, the Colt .45 on his lap. He gave a great start and groaned when somebody shook him awake.

"The *caliés* took away Manuel this morning, not long after you left his house," said an extremely agitated Gladys de los Santos. "Sooner or later they'll get it out of him that you're here. You have to go, right away."

Yes, but where? Gladys had passed by the Imberts' house, and the street was crawling with guards and *caliés*; no doubt about it, they had arrested his wife and daughter. It seemed as if invisible hands were beginning to tighten around his throat. He hid his anguish so as not to increase the terror of Dr. De los Santos, who was a changed woman, so perturbed she could not stop blinking her eyes.

"There are *caliés* in Beetles and trucks full of guards everywhere," she said. "They're searching cars, asking everybody for papers, going into houses."

Nothing had been reported yet on television or radio, or in the papers, but rumors were flying. The human tom-tom was sending the news all over the city that Trujillo had been killed. People were frightened and confused about what might happen. For close to an hour he racked his brain: where could he go? He had to leave now. He thanked Dr. De los Santos for her help and went out, his hand on the pistol in his right trouser pocket. He walked for some time, in no particular direction, until he thought of his dentist, Dr. Camilo Suero, who lived

near the Military Hospital. Camilo and his wife, Alfonsina, let him in. They could not hide him, but did help him go over other possibilities. And then the image came into his mind of Francisco Rainieri, an old friend, the son of an Italian, and an ambassador of the Order of Malta; Francisco's wife, Venecia, and his wife, Guarina, had tea together and played canasta. Perhaps the diplomat could help him seek asylum in one of the legations. Taking every precaution, he called the Rainieris' residence and passed the receiver to Alfonsina, who pretended to be Guarina Tessón, the maiden name of Imbert's wife. She asked to speak to Queco. He came to the phone immediately, and she was startled by his extremely cordial greeting:

"How are you, my dear Guarina? I'm delighted to hear from you. You're calling about tonight, aren't you? Don't worry. I'll send the car for you. At seven sharp, if that's all right. Just give me your address again, all right?"

"Either he's a mind reader or he's gone crazy or I don't know what," said Alfonsina when she hung up the receiver.

"And now, what do we do until seven o'clock, Alfonsina?"

"Pray to Our Lady of Altagracia," she said, and crossed herself. "If the *caliés* come, just use your gun."

At exactly seven a shiny blue Buick, with diplomatic plates, stopped at the door. Francisco Rainieri was at the wheel. He pulled away as soon as Antonio Imbert sat down beside him.

"I knew the message was from you because Guarina and your daughter are at my house," said Rainieri by way of greeting. "There aren't two women named Guarina Tessón in Ciudad Trujillo, it could only have been you."

He was very calm, even cheerful, wearing a freshly ironed guayabera and smelling of lavender water. He drove Imbert to a distant house, along remote streets, taking a huge detour because there were roadblocks along the main streets where vehicles were stopped and searched. Less than an hour had passed since the official announcement of Trujillo's death. The atmosphere was heavy with apprehension, as if everyone were expecting an explosion. Elegant as always, the ambassador did not ask a single

question regarding Trujillo's assassination or the other conspirators. Very casually, as if he were talking about the next tennis championship at the Country Club, he remarked:

"With things the way they are, it's unthinkable that any embassy would give you asylum. And it wouldn't do much good. The government, if there is still a government, wouldn't respect it. They'd drag you out no matter where you were. The only thing you can do, for the moment, is hide. At the Italian consulate, where I have friends, there are too many employees and visitors going back and forth. But I found someone, and he's totally reliable. He did this once before, when they were hunting down Yuyo d'Alessandro. He has only one condition. Nobody can know, not even Guarina. For her own safety, more than anything else."

"Of course," Tony Imbert murmured, astounded that on his own initiative this man who was no more than a casual friend would risk so much to save his life. He was so disconcerted by Queco's daring generosity that he did not even manage to thank him.

At Rainieri's house he embraced his wife and daughter. Considering the circumstances, they were remarkably calm. But when he held her in his arms, he could feel Leslie's body trembling. He stayed with them and the Rainieris for approximately two hours. His wife had brought an overnight bag for him, with clean clothes and his shaving kit. They did not mention Trujillo. Guarina told him what she had learned from neighbors. Their house had been stormed at dawn by uniformed and plainclothes police; they had emptied it, breaking and smashing what they did not take away in two vans.

When it was time, the diplomat made a small gesture, pointing at his watch. Antonio Imbert embraced and kissed Guarina and Leslie, and followed Francisco Rainieri through the service entrance onto the street. Seconds later, a small vehicle with headlights dimmed pulled to a stop in front of them.

"Goodbye, and good luck," said Rainieri, shaking his hand. "Don't worry about your family. They won't want for anything."

Imbert got into the car and sat down next to the driver. He was a young man, wearing a shirt and tie, but no jacket. In impeccable Spanish, though with an Italian lilt, he introduced himself:

"My name is Cavaglieri and I'm an official at the Italian embassy. My wife and I will do everything possible to make your stay at our apartment pleasant. Don't worry, in my house there are no prying eyes. We live alone. We don't have a cook or servants. My wife loves keeping house. And we both like to cook."

He laughed, and Antonio Imbert imagined that courtesy required him to attempt a laugh as well. The couple lived on the top floor of a new building, not far from Calle Mahatma Gandhi and Salvador Estrella Sadhalá's house. Señora Cavaglieri was even younger than her husband—a slender girl with almond-shaped eyes and black hair—and she welcomed him with lively, smiling courtesy, as if he were an old family friend coming to spend the weekend. She did not display the slightest misgiving at having a stranger in her house, the assassin of the country's supreme ruler, the man whom thousands of hate-filled guards and police were avidly hunting down. During the six months and three days he lived with them, never, not once, did either one make him feel—despite his extreme sensitivity and a situation that predisposed him to seeing phantoms—that his presence was in any way an inconvenience. Did they know they were risking their lives? Of course. They heard and saw detailed reports on television of the panic those nefarious assassins had provoked in Dominicans, many of whom, not satisfied with denying them refuge, rushed to inform on them. The first one they saw fall was the engineer Huáscar Tejeda, shamefully forced out of the church of Santo Cura de Ars by the terrified priest, and into the arms of the SIM. They followed every detail of the odyssey of General Juan Tomás Díaz and Antonio de la Maza as they drove through the streets of Ciudad Trujillo in a taxi and were denounced by the people they turned to for help. And they saw

how the *caliés* killed Amadito García Guerrero and then dragged away the poor old woman who had given him shelter, and how the mob dismantled and destroyed her house. But these scenes and reports did not intimidate the Cavaglieris or lessen their cordial treatment of him.

After Ramfis's return, Imbert and his hosts knew that his confinement would be a long one. The public embraces of Trujillo's son and General José René Román were eloquent: Pupo had betrayed them, and there would be no military uprising. From his small universe in the Cavaglieris' penthouse, he saw the crowds standing in line, hour after hour, to pay homage to Trujillo, and he saw himself on the television screen, pictured beside Luis Amiama (whom he did not know), under captions that offered first a hundred thousand, then two hundred thousand, and finally half a million pesos to anyone reporting his whereabouts.

"Hmm, with the devaluation of the Dominican peso, it's not an interesting deal anymore," Cavaglieri remarked.

His life quickly fell into a strict routine. He had a small room to himself, with a bed, a night table, and a lamp. He got up early and did push-ups and sit-ups, and ran in place, for about an hour. He had breakfast with the Cavaglieris. After long discussions, he convinced them to let him help with the cleaning. Sweeping, running the vacuum, passing the feather duster over objects and articles of furniture, became both a diversion and an obligation, something he did conscientiously, with total concentration and a certain joy. But Señora Cavaglieri never allowed him into the kitchen. She cooked very well, especially pasta, which she served twice a day. He had liked pasta since he was a boy. But after six months of confinement, he would never again eat tagliarini, tagliatelle, ravioli, or any other variant of that popular Italian specialty.

When his domestic chores were concluded, he read for many hours. He had never been a great reader, but in those six months he discovered the pleasure of books and magazines, which were his best defense against the periodic depression

brought on by confinement, routine, and uncertainty.

When it was announced on television that a commission from the OAS had come to interview political prisoners, he learned that Guarina, along with the wives of all his friends in the conspiracy, had been in prison for several weeks. The Cavaglieris had kept Guarina's arrest from him. But a few weeks later, they were overjoyed to give him the good news that she had been released.

Never, not even when he was mopping, sweeping, or running the vacuum, did he fail to keep the loaded Colt .45 with him. His decision was unshakable. He would do the same as Amadito, Juan Tomás Díaz, and Antonio de la Maza. He would not be taken alive, he would die shooting. It was more honorable to die that way than to be subjected to abuses and tortures devised by the twisted minds of Ramfis and his cronies.

In the afternoon and at night he read the papers his hosts brought him and watched television newscasts with them. Without believing much of what he saw and read, he followed the confused dualism of the path the regime had embarked upon: a civilian government led by Balaguer, who made reassuring gestures and statements asserting that the country was democratizing, and a military and police power, headed by Ramfis, that continued to kill, torture, and disappear people with the same impunity as when the Chief was alive. Yet he could not help feeling encouraged by the return of the exiles, the appearance of small opposition papers—published by the Civic Union and June 14—and student demonstrations against the government, which were sometimes reported in the official media, though only to accuse the protesters of being Communists.

Joaquín Balaguer's speech at the United Nations, criticizing the Trujillo dictatorship and pledging to democratize the country, left him dumbfounded. Was this the same little man who for thirty-one years had been the most faithful and constant servant of the Father of the New Nation? In their long conversations at the table, when the Cavaglieris had sup-

per at home—on many evenings they went out to eat, but then Señora Cavaglieri would prepare the inevitable pasta for him—they filled in the gaps in his information with the gossip that was churning through the city, soon rebaptized with its old name, Santo Domingo de Guzmán. Though everyone worried about a coup by the Trujillo brothers that would restore the cruel, harsh dictatorship, people clearly were losing their fear, or, rather, breaking the spell that had kept so many Dominicans devoted, body and soul, to Trujillo. A growing number of anti-Trujillista voices, declarations, and attitudes gradually appeared, as well as more support for the Civic Union, June 14, or the Dominican Revolutionary Party, whose leaders had just returned to the country and opened an office in the center of the city.

The saddest day of his odyssey was also the happiest. On November 18, as the departure of Ramfis was being announced, it was reported on television that the six assassins of the Chief (four killers and two accomplices) had fled after murdering the three soldiers escorting them back to La Victoria prison following a reconstruction of the crime. Sitting in front of the television screen, he lost control and burst into tears. So, then, his friends—Turk, his dearest friend—had been killed, along with three poor guards who provided the alibi for the farce. Of course, the bodies would never be found. Señor Cavaglieri handed him a glass of cognac:

"Take heart, Señor Imbert. Just think, soon you'll see your wife and daughter. This is coming to an end."

A short while later, there was an announcement of the imminent departure of the Trujillo brothers and their families. This really was the end of his confinement. For the moment at least, he had survived the hunt in which, with the exception of Luis Amiama—he soon learned that he had spent six months hiding in a closet for many hours a day—practically all of the principal conspirators, along with hundreds of innocents, among them his brother Segundo, had been killed or tortured, or still languished in prison.

The day after the Trujillo brothers left the country, a political amnesty was declared. The jails began to open. Balaguer announced a commission to investigate what had happened to the "executioners of the tyrant." From that day on, radio, television, and the newspapers stopped calling them assassins; executioners, their new designation, would soon become heroes, and not long after that, streets, squares, and avenues all over the country would begin to be renamed for them.

On the third day, very discreetly—the Cavaglieris would not even allow him to take the time to thank them for what they had done, and all they asked was that he not reveal their identity to anyone, so as not to compromise their diplomatic status—he left his confinement at dusk and appeared, alone, at his house. For a long time he, Guarina, and Leslie embraced, unable to speak. They examined one another and found that while Guarina and Leslie had lost weight, he had gained five kilos. He explained that in the house where he had been hiding—he could not tell them where—they ate a lot of spaghetti.

They could not speak for too long. The ruined house of the Imberts began to fill up with bouquets of flowers and relatives, friends, and strangers, who came to embrace him, congratulate him, and—sometimes, trembling with emotion, their eyes brimming with tears—to call him a hero and thank him for what he had done. Suddenly, a military man appeared among the visitors. He was an aide-de-camp to the President of the Republic. After the obligatory greetings, Major Teofronio Cáceda told him that he and Don Luis Amiama—who had also just emerged from his hiding place, incredibly enough, the house of the current Minister of Health—were invited to the National Palace at noon tomorrow to be received by the Head of State. And, with a complicitous little laugh, he informed him that Senator Henry Chirinos had just introduced in Congress ("Yes, sir, the same Trujillo Congress") a law naming Antonio Imbert and Luis Amiama three-star generals in the Dominican Army for extraordinary services to the Nation.

The next morning, accompanied by Guarina and Leslie—

the three of them in their best clothes, though Antonio's were too tight—he kept his appointment at the Palace. A swarm of photographers greeted them, and a military guard in dress uniforms presented arms. In the waiting room he met Luis Amiama, a very slim, somber man with an almost lipless mouth who would be his inseparable friend from that time on. They shook hands and agreed to meet, after their audience with the President, to visit the wives (the widows) of all the conspirators who had died or disappeared, and to tell each other their own adventures. At that point, the door to the office of the Head of State opened.

Smiling, wearing an expression of deep joy, as the photographers' cameras flashed, Dr. Joaquín Balaguer walked toward them, arms opened wide.