

took was a glass bulb on a Christmas tree in the house of a rich man. One bulb, another bulb . . . until every bulb on the tree was smashed.

In those first years, out of curiosity, we always observed the life of the campesinos. To see if their shacks had a festive air about them. To see if we could smell the fragrance of Christmas in the mountains. In the city it's completely different. The lights, the billboards, the streams of presents, cards, parties—Christmas has a very unique fragrance. The last days of December are special. Around Christmas and New Year's people are more cheerful, nicer. The houses . . . even your own house is different, though it's the same old house. We wanted to see if in the mountains, moving out of the brush toward a little shack, we could breathe the fragrance of December, if we would feel that emotion that blossoms in December. In the city, people always buy something, even if it's just a little thing. And if not that, they create something, but it's the children who celebrate Christmas; they have their toys. It's got to be a very desperate poverty for Christmas not to come, the way it is in the mountains.

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A few days after Christmas a great thing happened. Because I was sick they put me in charge of the radio, responsible for listening to all the news programs and at the end of the day reporting back on the most important developments to the whole troop in formation. To keep them informed. And I gave a brief analysis of what seemed to me the most important things in the news. I was happy to be doing something.

Suddenly I heard that something unusual was happening on the highway to Masaya, that you couldn't get through to Masaya, that the Guard had been called out. I realized it was something serious and went to Modesto. I remember he was in the cooking area. "Brother, brother, something awful's going on in Managua. They say the road to Masaya is blocked and the Guard's been called out!" Of course they knew in advance that the Frente was going to strike in the city, but we didn't know shit. They knew exactly what was going on—it was an attack on a house party to capture hostages. I'm talking about the big action of December 27, 1974.

What houses, what embassies were on the road to Masaya? I don't know, I'm not from Managua. It was the attack on

Chema Castillo's house. In the mountains we always looked forward to listening to the news. A bit later when we were listening to the communiqué from the Guard the radios went dead; they had cut them off. Here it was, the big hit, but what was happening, what? A tremendous anxiety set in. Good God in heaven, let those sons-of-bitch boys come out of this alive. What could be going on? We knew it was an action. In a little while: "General Headquarters: The General Headquarters of the National Guard informs you that the house of Chema Castillo has been taken. . . . The Archbishop is mediating. . . . One of the assailants inside has been identified as Carlos Agüero. . . ." So that's it! I suddenly realized it couldn't have been Carlos Agüero, because I saw that Rodrigo had burst out laughing maliciously with René Vivas, and I knew right away who he was. I already knew that Carlos was tall and had light skin and blue eyes. Aha! So this joker is Carlos Agüero! It's him all right. I started putting together a whole bunch of things he had told me before. I hadn't placed him, but it hit me then—Rodrigo and Carlos Agüero were one and the same guy.

All day long we speculated about what was happening in Managua. And since I was in charge of the news, I stayed glued to the radio. "Is there any news . . . any news?" "Negotiations are continuing . . . they're going to broadcast some communiqués from the Frente . . ." And our communiqués came on! Son of a bitch! we said. We stuck that to 'em, those bastards, now we've got them where we want them. An incredible gaiety filled the camp. The poor sentries, when you came with their food: "What is it, brother, tell me." And you started blurting it all out, but that was against the rules so you went back. "But tell me more, more." "No, I'll tell you tonight."

Finally the compañeros came out of the house. I don't remember if we did any shooting, if there was rifle or machine-gun fire. The fact is that December 27 was an extraordinary boost for our morale. Shit, we were ecstatic, because the whole country heard our denunciation of the murder of cam-

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pesinos in the mountains, and the names of the places we had marched—Zinica, Waslala. **We felt that we weren't alone anymore, that the places where the guerrillas had been active were becoming famous, that the repression in the mountains was being denounced.**

About four days later we noticed a commotion in the bullpen—under Modesto and Rodrigo's rain cover—meetings with Arcadio and others. The upshot of this was that Rodrigo took off with five men. About six days later a campesino arrived in camp: "They're saying they've attacked the Waslala barracks, there was a gun battle, a lot of Guardsmen have been killed!" Rodrigo had gone out to attack the Waslala barracks. That was the plan. They say the Guard lost eleven men. The Guard never imagined that such a fortress of a headquarters would be attacked. **They'd never been attacked in the mountains;** now all of a sudden the bullets were flying. It was chaos inside; they were killing each other in the confusion, and the compas beat an orderly retreat, victorious. They executed several local judges. It was a fantastic moment for the guerrillas, which was **clouded only by the death of Tello.**

About three days after Rodrigo's return to camp the Guard broadcast a communiqué announcing that in the zone of Zinica or of Cusulí a Guard patrol in pursuit of the attacking band had encountered the resistance of an armed man; the man, who had died in the clash, had been identified as René Tejada Peralta. The Guard had captured one of our collaborators who had confessed that in such and such a house a guerrilla was hiding. Tello was with another compañero who had managed to get out alive, barefoot. About six in the evening, thinking it was the collaborator bringing him food, because they gave the signal and everything, he opened the door. The Guard opened fire, and since it was dusk and the light was dim, they got him with the first bullet, a man like Tello, who was always on his guard, they got him with a bullet from a Garand rifle right in the forehead.

I'll tell you what I felt when I heard of Tello's death: I felt

fear when Tello died. I felt fear, since in a way I had modeled myself on Tello. He had taught me how to fall and the various positions for lying on the ground. He had taught me what to do if the Guard came, what to do if they were getting near. Tello taught me what to do in battle, or in a retreat, and how to give orders in combat. And just like that it's Tello who's killed, the guy who taught me everything. I thought sometimes, everything he taught me is useless, because if he didn't apply it, if he didn't use it, it was all pure theory and not worth shit.

Nothing was sure anymore. What kind of guerrilla force is it anyhow when the best man of all, your teacher, is the first to die? By the time of Tello's death I was beginning to feel as if I had some balls; I was a bit tougher, more capable, superior to the student, the politico, I'd been before, the student leader in the university; I was beyond that. I was a guerrilla now and could manage the weight, I could march, I could handle a rifle, I could handle heavy weapons—and suddenly Tello was dead. So what the fuck was the point of all he had taught us? What good were his lessons if they could kill him first, before any of us? If they had killed a compañero we had trained with, at least we could have said he hadn't absorbed Tello's lessons. But no, it's Tello who dies, Tello first, and you felt superfragile, as if the Guard was invincible, and what we had was nothing but a caricature of a guerrilla army, nothing but good intentions, a pathetic dream, a joke of a guerrilla effort. That was how you felt.

I remember a helicopter flew over our camp that afternoon. The helicopter that was going to take Tello's body to be identified in Waslala. And we didn't even know he had been killed. We rushed to put out our fire, thinking they had spotted our position. We were ready for a fight. We doubled the watch, got our packs together . . . and nothing happened. "If those sons of bitches had shown up here, we would've wiped them out," we said. And later we found out that Tello was dead. I never forgave Tello for being killed by one bullet, just one

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bullet. That afternoon when the news came I went to my hammock, to my rain cover, to think about everything. And I thought of León and of the barrios and the university, and I also thought that the whole guerrilla war was one big piece of shit. I could not come to grips with Tello's death. The students threw stones, but what did students know about real combat, about the Guard? I had been one of the main student leaders and now I was a trained soldier, and I felt it, deep in my gut, that the guy who had trained me had been the first to die, somebody who knew more than me and by extension more than Subtiava about military matters, and more than the university, and more than all the compañeros underground and aboveground in the Frente Sandinista.

It was as if the mountain, too, felt fear. The wind dropped and the trees stopped swaying. There was a quiet, an overwhelming calm. Maybe it was just my own enormous fear, but I remember the trees drew apart, not a leaf stirred, and the tall trees, the towering trees were still, and the trampled brush; not a leaf stirred, as if the shell of the mountain had fallen away. All was quiet, unlike before when you felt a violence in the sway of the trees, as if they were defending themselves against the wind or hurling who knows what with their branches, as if warding off death or danger with their flailing branches. And the birds stopped singing as if frightened into flight. All froze in terror, awaiting that moment when the Guard would come and slaughter us all. I don't know, I can't explain what happened there. The compañeros were all talking about it. I wonder if the compañeros who had trained along with me were afraid, too. I know some of them didn't feel Tello's death very much. Or maybe it wasn't so much that they didn't feel it, but that he'd been so hard on us, and they were wondering why he hadn't shown more balls when the moment came. As he always had with us. It was like a reproach—where were all the things he had taught us? Even the constant murmur of the stream had stopped, as if its time had come and something was going to happen to that rippling

sound—it had joined with the trees that had stopped swaying and the animals that had fled and the songless birds; all was silent, even the movements of the compañeros; there was no laughter drifting from the cooking area where they were grinding corn or preparing food.

I couldn't believe that Tello was really dead. What I mean is, it wasn't certain anymore that the position of your knee on the ground should be as he said it was; it wasn't certain you should move this or that way in battle. It was all pure theory and the Guard with its strength, with its power, canceled it all out. Were the lessons he had given us correct or not? They didn't matter shit to the Guard. Although the Guard didn't know half what Tello knew, they pumped that bullet into him right at the start. So the Guard was a thousand times superior; the Guard was just laughing at all this shit, or not even noticing it. You may know plenty but they kill you just the same. So was it all worthless, all we knew? It was no good against the Guard. But if that was so, how could we hope to defeat them, how could we hope to wipe them out? How were we going to put an end to the dictatorship if it was neither here nor there to the Guard whether we knew how to shoot in a certain way, or to fight in a certain way?

I felt impotent. Not because of the weight of the pack—I could deal with that now, I could march, I could climb, I could stand the hunger, I could stand the loneliness. But the bottom had dropped out, out of my confidence about taking on and destroying the enemy, the most important thing of all. And I had felt I was representative of so many people, of the barrios, of the university, I had thought I was prepared.

Tello's death was incomprehensible to me, even though from the beginning I'd had his words ringing in my ears: if he should die he would be leaving behind people who could carry on the guerrilla war. I thought: if that joker has prepared us the way he prepared himself, if we're going to be like him and fight as he fought, if the lessons we've learned aren't worth a chickpea to the Guard, have no power to neutralize the

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Guard, if they're not good for anything, well, they're going to slaughter us all. And Tello admired Carlos Fonseca, too. Probably the only reason Carlos Fonseca is still alive, I thought, is that he hasn't come up here. It's hopeless, a half-assed guerrilla army against an enemy so incredibly powerful.

And what chance did Che have if the Rangers who killed him were trained by the same people who trained Tello's killers? Maybe if Che had not been a Quixote like Tello, or like us—the whole Frente Sandinista was probably a Quixote—maybe then he would have survived. And the student movement, the movement in the barrios, were these nothing but a couple of movements more, like so many others that have sprung up in different countries in Latin America, especially in the southern cone, that blaze for a moment and then are snuffed out? Cuba must have been an exception, because they had Fidel, Raúl, Camilo; they were able to bring it off because the enemy was inexperienced, because imperialism still had its gloves on.

It seemed as if all the songs, all the revolutionary literature coming out of Latin America was nothing but window dressing, an intellectual veneer on a shaky theory of revolution that would never, in practice, succeed. And that Latin America had no prospects, that we were going to fail, to be defeated, as the Colombians had been defeated, and the Venezuelans, and the Guatemalans.

And what saves you then? Because eventually your head stops spinning. Those feelings subside and you start to reflect maturely, calmly. You are saved by the fact that the FSLN inculcated in us a historical will, an infinite, boundless stubbornness. And all at once your brain starts to function. Okay, thousands of people may die, but you have to keep on fighting to bring down the enemy. Because to be against the Guard, even though you may die—to be a guerrilla fighter—is an absolutely honorable stance. If you die, you die with honor. Your death is in itself a protest. So Tello's death was a protest. And we were going to die protesting. Even if the Frente San-

dinista was just another guerrilla movement that imperialism would crush, that Somoza's dictatorship would crush, as they had crushed so many movements all over the continent. The important thing was not whether Tello applied what he knew, or whether or not what he taught was correct; what mattered was we had to die for an ideal. We had to put aside our dreams, hopes, and ambitions and break through the mountains, break through all that was unknown, break through everything, but finally and above all, break through!

The important thing was to fight, even though to do that we would have to give up making jokes about our military training or casting doubt on our own capacity as an army. We would have to die, and we would have to store up and keep tightly shrouded within us all our doubts and frustrations about our capacity; we would have to pool all these things and hurl them against the enemy and against the mountain and force the trees to sway again and bring sound back to the river.

A sense of pride emerged. From deep within rose the spirit of struggle, of never giving in, even though you might die. Your destiny had to be to rise to your death, to raise it up, to transform it into a standard and to thrust it on ahead, to forge ahead together with your own death and with your compañeros, and with the animals, to force the mountain to take our side, to force the trees to sway again.

From thinking so much, and since it was night, I fell asleep in a rage. And the next day I woke up in a rage, longing to fight, longing to test myself against the enemy, to test all of us, and longing to die, so that our deaths might stand as an affront to the enemy.

What I mean is, I woke up with an intense desire to live so that I could die and to die so that I could live. I wanted to die in order to live, to struggle in order to live for Latin America, to live and die for the Indians, to live and die for the blacks, to live and die for the animals, to live and die for my dad, who was a son of a bitch but a very nice guy. For the students, for

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Subtiava, for everything. These were the ideals I cherished and kept with me, in a private way, from the time I came up from the city to the mountains, and that I never talked about to anyone.

I tramped through the mud, I was glutted with mud, spattered with mud; I shit in mud, cried in mud, sloshed through mud, sunk my head in mud; there was mud in every crevice of my body, my cock was caked with mud; but I had something with me in the mountains that I never talked about, that nobody knew about. I think I only confessed it once to a compañero over some drinks, but that was later, in 1978. I kept that secret and held it tight for four years. You see, I wanted to live, because I went into the mountains with a fistful of ideals tight in my hand; I never let go of them or got them dirty; and if I fell flat in the mud, when I pulled out my hand, there, tight in my fist, were those ideals.

I remember about three days after Tello's death we thought the Guard was going to come after our camp. So we retreated upstream. We were right in the middle of eating a cow—superdelicious—when all of a sudden a compañero named Evelio rushed in. "Compañeros!" he said, "the Guard's coming, over there, somebody's guiding them!" It was a campesino from nearby that the Guard had got hold of and taken along by force. The order went out: vanguard, center, rearguard, and me with that shitty mess of mountain leprosy on my legs, and we had to retreat. They instructed Flavio to layer me up with more bandages. I could barely get on my boot. I was raging to fight and to die fighting the Guard. We started upstream, which means against the current. It was a stream about 15 yards wide, full of stones, and winding through a rugged mountain wilderness, on top of which now the mountain was an ally of the Guard. It had fallen silent, it no longer swayed; for three days it had stood stock still awaiting the moment when the Guard would come and the horrendous battle would begin.

We fell into formation—vanguard, center, rearguard—and

started marching. It was as though the mountain realized that what was happening was no joke and began to sway. You see, the mountain had been holding back because Tello had been killed. She wouldn't sway; it was as though she had gone over to the side of the Guard. She was unbending, watchful, waiting to see what would happen, and when we started to march in full battle readiness, retreating upstream but expecting to clash with the Guard, she came to herself, she shook herself to life. It was as if we had shaken the mountain as you would shake a woman, taking hold of her and saying, "Okay, bitch, what's going on," but with affection.

We started to march, with Rodrigo heading up the vanguard, Modesto in the center, and Aurelio Carrasco in the rearguard. A campesino marched in the center, and Modesto, since he was the leader, and me, since I was sick, since if you're fucked up physically you go in the center. The river was loaded with stones; the water was crystal-clear; as you went along you could see the stones, and you stepped between them. You kept falling down, and right at the outset all my bandages got wet; water seeped into the open sores, and with water in leprosy sores, you're wide open, as if the water was in league with the Guard.

The sores started stinging, to hurt me as if on purpose, for no good reason, as if purely to harass me, and my flesh fought back as if it, too, was fighting the water. But as I warmed up, the sores warmed up and didn't hurt so bad; I was stumbling against stones but it hurt less.

By that time I didn't give a damn whether I lived or died, because Tello was dead and we were going to find out right there who knew more—those bastard sons of bitches—we would see who would die. My rifle was loaded, and the longer I marched the more furious I was to fight, to have done with the Guard and everything else—to have done with the leprosy and the hunger and with everything they had forced us to give up, meat, everything. And Tello's death—dammit—we would see who knew how to fight, we would see who had reason on

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his side. It was a challenge flung down to history. I felt a rage that was like a million tiny atomic explosions through my pores. My brain was tight with rage. And my water-creased hands were fingering the trigger, wanting the Guard to appear and knowing I was going to die because I would never be able to get across that river. But I was going to let loose a storm of bullets . . .

At one point in the climb we had to scale about 30 yards of steep stone, a waterfall in that stream, which wound through the heart of the mountain. I said to Modesto, who was climbing up ahead of me, "Hey, Modesto, you forgot to tell me to bring along my mountain-climbing manual!" since it was 30 yards up and I could see that Modesto was having a hard time climbing. But we came out of it and continued to march.

The sun on the water burned us, even in the shade; through the foliage. I said to Modesto, "Look, Modesto, if I die, tell my son"—I knew then I had a baby—"that his father was a revolutionary, that he did what he had to do, and that all his life he should be proud of his father." Do you know what Modesto did when I said that, right on the march? He said, "I'll tell him, I'll tell him." And he touched me, brushing my wet face with his hand, which was so out of context because each of us had always to be covering our flank, because even though the mountain had started moving, she might still hold back—the mountain that had been our protectress, that had helped us, hidden us, kept us in her womb. But she had been still for so long when Tello died, I didn't trust her anymore; she might have gone over to the Guard. But when she started swaying, when she saw us in combat gear, "She's coming alive," I said, "she's returning to normal." But I thought: watch out for that mountain, that she doesn't go over to the Guard. I told Modesto that. We continued on, and the Guard didn't come.

When we emerged from the stream the mountain became composed, as if her confidence in us had been restored, as if she had been waiting to see who could do more, or who was

right, or had the strength. But I ended up suspecting that the mountain was not wondering about who had the strength or the power to destroy. I ended up thinking that the mountain leaned toward whoever kept a hundred years of life in his pack, or in his hands. Sometimes I wanted to say, Look, mountain, if you are stone or inanimate vegetable you have nothing to do with this, you have no power to judge anything, okay? I had the impression that the mountain was starting to discern, starting to think, as if an inner force was leading her to think and take sides and judge. Who the hell does this bitch think she is? I wanted to say to her, Look, you have no business here. You are vegetable, you are rock, you protect whoever seeks your protection. Because I had started to think she was protecting the Guard, that she had something to do with changes in the weather, and that the changes in the weather were all in favor of the Guard, in favor of the status quo. Probably since she was scared they would clear her forests, for the mountain's own survival. Okay, here you are, an inanimate being, but we are humans, rational creatures with soul and consciousness. We command you, rule and govern you, since you are nature. You give no orders.

I knew that as for discernment, reason, and intelligence we were more intelligent, more educated, more discerning than the Guard. So she had no right to strike those attitudes. As if she were swayed by what I said, or by what I thought, or by our readiness to fight after Tello's death. Because Tello was probably a symbol not just for me but for the mountain, too. He must have been a symbol since he had lived with her; I'm sure that he lived with her, that he had relations with her; **she bore him sons.**

So the mountain held fast to Tello as to the measure of all things. And when Tello died she felt that all was over, that her commitment was gone, that what was left was foolishness. But when she saw the readiness to fight of the group of men there marching over her, through her heart, she realized that Tello was not the beginning and end of the world, but had been her

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son. That Tello had been her son, though he may have been her life, her secret lover, her brother, her creature, her stone, though Tello may have been her river; she had to realize that Tello was not the end of the world. **She had to realize that Tello was the beginning of the world**, because after him came all of us with our teeth clenched and our feet bound up with mountain leprosy, with our wet fingers on the trigger, with our heavy packs—we had the power to light a fire in her heart.

As if she knew she had in fact screwed up, that she ought never to have fallen silent that afternoon when Tello died; she ought to have continued rocking, if only as a show of neutrality. But we bent her over; **we shattered the neutrality of the rivers and gigantic trees**; we brought her back to herself; the sound of the river changed as we passed, for we possessed the river, had impressed our own sound upon it, which was different from the sound it had taken upon itself when I was listening in my hammock and when it seemed the river sound was dropping down on purpose to meet the silence of the leaves on the silent trees. So, when she saw she had screwed up, there was nothing else to do—we brought her around by force. When the Guard came she realized her mistake.

At last we emerged from the stream. My legs were screwed, all cut up by the stones, and dammit was I sorry that the Guard had not appeared; we were almost sure we were going to clash with the Guard, that we'd be ambushed, and we had marched with the highest spirits, almost wanting to clash with the Guard. Because of Tello's death, and all the other deaths. So when we emerged from the stream we were happy, especially me because of my legs—we were going to rest. At the same time we were sad in a way, since that had been our chance once and for all to avenge Tello, to humble the mountain, the river, the stones—our chance to show who was who or to die protesting in the river, protesting with bullets over the river, as so many guerrillas all over Latin America had died in streams, in battles.

But the Guard was not there; it was off somewhere else searching for us. Or it had followed us but lost our trail, since we had gone through the stream. The point is that we came out of the stream without having fought. It was wonderful, because we were going to rest. I remember that the compañero who shared my rain cover helped me put up the hammock. In the mountains when the column was very long we usually slept in pairs so as to leave fewer tracks. So the compañero who was with me helped me put up the hammock. I remember that no order to change our clothes was given; we were on alert.

Reunion and Departure

The next day we moved into another region; we came to a ridge, a mountain crest, toward the top; but instead of climbing all the way up, since it's easier to march along the top, we marched "sloping," as we called it. Because the Guard usually patrolled the crests looking for our tracks; they assumed the guerrillas always marched on the higher ground. But that time we all marched on the slopes of the range, which of course was the hardest possible place to march, since you have to put one foot lower and the other higher up on the slope. And you come across drop-offs, ravines, ditches, hanging vines, and huge fallen trees that are very tricky to get around, since you can't climb over them. You have to find the edge of the downed branches and cross over there, over all the leaves and a whole mess of branches. Your pack gets caught and your rifle gets snagged; it's a battle every inch of the way. And since you're tired and walking on a slant, you slip and fall, and you leave tracks. You have to pick yourself up and erase the signs of your fall.

It was freezing cold along that ridge. We set up camp in a cachimbero, which is a dense jungle full of hundreds of varieties of brush and grasses and vegetation of all kinds—shrubs,

Return to the Past—

I started down with Juan de Dios Muñoz and Valdivia, José Dolores Valdivia, who went by the name of Faustino (or Silvestre). Faustino came along up to a point, then I continued on down alone. Faustino was going on to Cuá, to open up a new zone, or a new route, I'm not sure exactly what. We marched for several days until we came one night to a little shack. That was where I met Francisco Rivera. I already knew Juan de Dios, who had been with El Gato in that camp; I knew him since he had taken me into the mountains in '74. So we came to a shack, gave the signal, they signaled back, and we went in.

It was a tiny shack about 5 square yards with a kitchen area, some three-legged stools, a little rough-hewn table, a hammock, a cot, the cookstove, and another three-legged stool by the fire where a man was sitting, waiting for the black coffee to be ready. A handsome man, light-skinned, with blue eyes, wearing a hat. He didn't blink when we came in. When Juan de Dios said, "Rómulo, this is Eugenio," he answered, "You're Eugenio? Glad to meet you, compañero," and he held out his hand. That was it, nothing more; he remained seated. "And how was your trip?" he asked. "Fine, compañero."

"Compita," he turned to his wife, "it looks like it's about to boil." He busied himself with the black coffee, putting it in, stoking the fire, and smoking a cigarette. "How are the boys?" he asked. "Fine, compa." He had the campesino way of talking, but he looked just like a city man. With his blue eyes, light skin, and fine features, in the glow of the stove he looked just like a cowboy out of the Wild West. A Texas-style hat. Shit, I thought, this guy looks like a Texan and talks like a campesino. We chatted awhile, he with his campesino manner, asking us things and talking. Then we all went off to sleep outside the shack, in some hammocks about 500 yards away.

We talked a little more the next day, then took off, continuing on down and down. And all the way, as I realized it was no joke, that really I was going back to the city, my head was spinning as I tried to make some sense of it. On the one hand I was leaving behind what I loved more than anything else at the time, my brothers in the mountains, but at the same time I was approaching what I also loved, the city and my brothers in the city. And that tremendous uncertainty—where were they going to send me? And the city with its electric lights and colors again, and the cars and the blare of radios and watching TV and sugar—there would always be sugar, three times a day—and ice cream and sodas and chips and now and then a movie. And all the cars.

I never did figure out if I loved the mountains or not. Because it hurt me to leave them. But I also hated them; I came to hate the mountains. But I loved them too—who knows what the fuck was going on inside of me. The thing is I was thinking about the city again. First, there was my operation. And after that? Would they send me to another city or back to the mountains? I would either go to the country or stay in town, and there would be girls. I would see Claudia. And yes, I was going to make love, and the idea of making love with Claudia, or with any other woman, thrilled me, the sensation of kissing a woman again, of caressing a woman, of running my hand all over a woman's body, of being on top of

a woman, of coming on top of a woman. And I thought of the women who were in the underground at that time, I went over them all; which one did I want most to see, if Claudia wasn't there, or if Claudia didn't want me anymore, which one would it be? What women were there, what were they like, these women I didn't know? It had been exactly a year since I had touched a woman's face or brushed back a woman's hair. A year with nobody to give me even a little kiss on the cheek, nobody to be naked with, no skin to feel next to mine. My head was spinning.

The university again, would I go by the university? What people would be there? And if they put me back in the student movement? What people were in it now, what new girls had come in? Would one of them be the girl I'd be with? Or maybe they would send me to another city where there wouldn't be any girls. I hoped to God there would be a compañera, but who knows? That was how I daydreamed along the way. And the minute I quit thinking of that, I would think of the mountains. And if they kill me in the city, I thought, what if they recognize me and kill me, or take me alive? But they'd take me dead. Until it was finally time to put on different clothes. We took off our guerrilla outfits and I shaved; I only left my mustache, that was all. Before, aboveground, I never had a beard or a mustache.

And we continued going down until we got to a place that I think was Cuá, in the area around Cuá, and we caught a group-transport truck. It had been so long since I'd heard that sound, the distant rumble of a truck. I know that sound, I said, it's a truck. I said this with absolute confidence: it's a truck; I know that sound. I was so curious to see if I'd remember the sound of cars. And how would I eat, could I manage, would I be able to use a spoon, or a knife and fork, after eating for so long with my fingers—shoving in food like a savage, looking at things like a savage. Anyway, we caught the truck and climbed into the open back, which was packed solid with people, passengers going to a little town in the area. I was looking

around at everyone, trying to act natural but drinking it all in—the city men dressed in every possible color. The people in the truck were a combination of city and country.

We were not yet in the city, but somewhere between the mountains and the open fields. And all the while I was thinking about these things I've been telling you. Remembering how we used to demonstrate with pitch-pine torches and with candles. And how, in Chile I'd heard a slogan that went like this, "If you don't jump you're a mummy!" (a "mummy" in Chile during Allende's time was a member of the reaction, of the bourgeoisie). Anyway that slogan popped into my mind in the middle of a demonstration back home, and I yelled out, "If you don't jump you're a toad!" Because in Nicaragua the Somocistas were called toads, and everybody, about three-quarters of the people in the demo, started jumping up and down: "If you don't jump you're a toad, if you don't jump you're a toad! *El que no brinque es sapo, el que no brinque es sapo!*" Everybody jumping up and down, and that same night the Guard came looking for me at my house.

I remembered that and wondered if I was still the same guy who had organized those demonstrations and jumped up and down like that, who had been in the mountains and was now returning, with no idea what was going to happen next. That great uncertainty—what would they decide down there?

And the truck drove on; it was one long lurch and bump, stirring up those typical clouds of dust that go with cars on dirt roads in the summer. We were far from León, but León was in the air. The dust got in my nostrils and ears and throat; my hair was turning a chalky brown; the hair on my arms was turning blond; my mustache was almost white—which reminded me of León. It was hundreds of miles away, but I was breathing León. This feeling grew stronger as the sun beat down harder and it got hotter and the terrain opened out, and there were fewer and fewer trees. I could smell León when people in the truck started putting kerchiefs over their heads and faces to keep out the dust. We did that in León when the

Cerro Negro volcano blew its stack in 1971, and whirlwinds of ash whipped through the city.

Like everything else in those days we made use of it against Somoza. In the darkness brought on by the clouds of ash that were sifting down over León, El Gato and I took advantage of everybody going around with kerchiefs over their faces to go out to the Central Market with our faces covered. As we made our way among the baskets of crabs and clams and green vegetables, we'd moan: "It's terrible, terrible, it's the wrath of God, the wrath of God, God is punishing us for not kicking Somoza out! And He'll keep right on punishing us because Somoza is still in power!" We walked by the meatsellers and soft-drink vendors: "Wrath of God, wrath of God!" And past booths of clothing: "Wrath of God!" Past shoemakers and itinerant repairmen and people selling rice and beans: "If we don't kick Somoza out this will go on forever!" And people were pissed off because the dust was ruining everything and sales had fallen off. Naturally they were looking for somebody to vent their anger on. They listened to us because we gave them somebody to blame. And people started saying: "That son of a bitch is bringing down curses on us. That mistress of his, Dinora, is bad luck." So we made use of the circumstance to make propaganda against Somoza and the Guard.

Riding on that truck was like being on a time machine that was racing backward through time. As you rode along, the topography you had been used to seeing in recent months gave way to the topography you grew up with. The same madroño trees, the gnarled jinocuago, the same stones, the lizards, the iguanas, the hot dirt. As you went back over the road, this time going down, things came back to you from the past. Not just from the recent past, when you went up to the mountains, but from the past of your childhood. When I saw the madroño trees, or the calabash for example, I remembered the calabashes in the backyard of our house and how my dad used to cut switches from them to whip us with when we got out of

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hand. So when you saw the calabash you flew backward at an incredible speed toward your childhood.

In the late afternoon, after traveling for about eight hours, we came into El Sauce, where we were going to take the train. I remembered the railroad in León, when I took the train for the first time, and the thought of the train also brought back my childhood; coming down from the mountains in the truck was a continual coming and going over my own past, with the velocity, the agility, of a monkey, the way they swing through the branches at a breakneck speed. That was how you went from your childhood to the mountains, from the mountains to the city, and so on—in a rapid-fire juggling, a sort of mental trapeze act over little bits of your life—going farther and farther back in time.

There weren't many people in the streets in El Sauce, and we started walking toward the station. It wasn't long before we turned the corner and saw the huge train standing in the station, with lots of cars—long, black, and old, the very same train, of my childhood. It was as if the dialectic had come to a halt, because it was the same train, with the same railings, the same people, the same voices. "Ice water . . . ice water, pork and yucca . . . pork and yucca." The same women selling things with their big tin bowls, the porters hoisting up bags to be weighed on the scale, then throwing them on carts to take to the train. Men sloshing down rum, and here and there drunks scattered about the station, and innocent young girls begging, with whores on one corner and a pool hall on the other. It was all the uproar of the station I had known in the past: people clutching hens, loaded down with bags, fruit, all sorts of stuff; and campesinas in from the hills with their cheeks rouged for coming to town, with fresh lipstick on, that bright, bright red they always wear; and swarms of fat old ladies in aprons shooing away dogs and a drunk falling down off his horse and pigs in the street eating the little kids' shit; and pigsellers herding pigs onto the train, and women with food to sell shooing away pigs—squat pigs, snubtails, black

pigs, barrow pigs, pigs fattened up for market. And some damn fool of a gypsy telling fortunes with parrots, and campesinos milling around looking amazed, while a loudspeaker on a parked car was hawking a salve that was good for all that ailed you, including your griefs. And the same old Guardsman on the corner, minding his own business. . . .

We went in to buy our tickets: the heavy stench of piss in the corridor with the ticket window, and the ticket seller the same dog-faced guy you could tell from a mile off was a spy for the Guard, pushing the same old tickets toward us, with that little puncher that poked out a tiny hole. Then, in a while, that familiar whistle *whiiiiii* that meant the train was leaving, and everybody rushing to wind up their purchases, and the conductor chasing the little tykes off the train and "Just a minute!" from a woman still buying something, and "Quick, ice water!" or "Tortilla with pork and yucca!" And a guy racing along the platform because somebody had forgotten his change, and the guy on the train with his hand stuck out yelling, "Brother, my change, my change!" And the guy with the change still not catching up, and the other guy yelling, "Son of a bitch, my change!" Until he finally got it to him, a little scene that's played out a million times. And the train began to pull out of the station.

At last we were on our way to León, and the time machine raced even faster. Now the dust was behind us; we were starting to see something I hadn't seen in a long time: fields of white cotton. Cotton and again a flood of memories: the trailer trucks rolling out at dawn before the light, full of cotton pickers with the women in men's shirts. Everybody went to pick cotton, which always used to piss off my dad, because the workers in his business always took off to pick cotton, where the pay was better. The whirling cotton gins of León—I could almost feel the cotton fluff in my nostrils. And the train sped on with that same sound and pulled into a station, and the whistle blew and again the ice water and lottery tickets and dogs and the people climbing aboard and the conductor

scrambling. Then the bell in the new station, and the train pulling out.

As it hurtled on, I'm not sure why, but I began to feel more distressed. When the train neared Malpaisillo I was really beginning to feel uncomfortable, more and more uneasy. You see, it was gradually hitting me that I was going to have to face León again, to deal with a past I felt uncertain of. I became more and more nervous, skittish, restless—the pressure intensified. I didn't understand what was happening to me. I felt I was going to be hurled out of the train. So when the train started whistling, coming into Malpaisillo, I don't know why but I clung to the window with my hands, with my arms. I was sitting on the outside, by the window. I held on for dear life; I grabbed hold of the seat, feeling I might be catapulted forward. It wasn't that I wanted to go back—absolutely not. But I felt that something beyond my control was rocketing me toward León.

When the train came to a stop in the Malpaisillo station we didn't get off right away but waited for a bottleneck of people. We wanted to sort of blend into the uproar of all the people selling ice water and vegetables and clothes and every possible thing. A feeling of nakedness came over me in that station. We'd been in the mountains for so long with no contact with people, keeping out of sight, seeing only each other, not even going up to the shacks—because not all of us were authorized to approach the little shacks—we weren't used to being seen by people. Deep in the brush, we didn't let ourselves be seen. It hit me then that you get used not only to never seeing anybody, but also to nobody seeing you. You get used to being alone, right? I felt naked in Malpaisillo, in the sense that everybody was looking at you, in the sense that when you walked along you didn't stumble against any obstacle. You felt naked, with no protective shell. It was like being in an open field, on a beach—I don't know, but completely exposed. You don't have to keep picking up your feet to avoid the obstacles of the terrain. You walk normally, without pushing aside

branches all the time. That's how you discover that the trees in the mountains and the topography of the mountains have come in a way to be your clothing, a protective dress.

Walking through the streets I was filled with fear, because being from León I had taken a number of trips to Malpaisillo. So there were people who knew me, school friends, people from Malpaisillo who used to live in León. The fact of being known made me feel naked; anybody at all might see and recognize me. This feeling of nakedness was all the stronger since in the mountains you always carry a pistol or a heavy weapon like a rifle, a submachine gun, or a carbine. And your rifle was always loaded, and your clips full, too. And sometimes you had reserves of food in your pack—so you were self-sufficient in the environment. You felt the protection of that heavy weapon, which in the mountains is like a part of your flesh. Your rifle is part of you in the mountains. You slept with your gun, marched with it, bathed with it right beside you, did exercises with it. Icy gun, greasy gun, gun on your shoulder, in your hand, rusted gun, stalwart gun, whistle-clean or rain-wet gun—you always had that gun at your neck, on your shoulder, or in your hand. In the mountains your weapon is like a part of you, like one more member, one of the most important. When you fall down you try harder to protect your gun than you do your own hand. And you start to feel affection for that gun. You always nickname your guns. For example, Aurelio Carrasco called his Garand "El Garañon" (The Stud). Another compañero had a black-stocked carbine that he called "Black Lady." I had an M-1 carbine, and since I always slept with it beside me, sometimes right in the hammock with me, I called it my "Teddy Bear." In Malpaisillo I felt unprotected without my Teddy Bear, because it guaranteed me the opportunity to die fighting, a chance to defend myself.

I was tense, but I did my best to look like a normal run-of-the-mill guy; I wore a little hat, low boots, blue jeans, and an ordinary shirt. I had kept my mustache, but my great fear was

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that somebody would recognize me. I acted normal, but I was watching people's reactions as they went by. Not letting on, but I was observing people to see if anybody recognized me, and unfortunately, somebody did.

At that instant of recognition an electric current ran through my body, like a jolt in my stomach—I almost bolted. I wanted like hell to run. Was he going to say hello? Or call out my name? I decided I had better just walk faster and try to reach the highway to León. I remember we hid for about an hour, waiting for him to go for the Guard, but nothing happened. In a little while we decided to start walking along the highway toward León. Nobody had recognized me, nor Juan de Dios Muñoz either, who was with me. Or if they did they didn't dare turn us in.

As we went on foot down the highway I was filled with a tremendous curiosity that was like joy, because I was going to see my compañeros. Though really I wasn't that enthusiastic; too many things had happened for me to be carried away with enthusiasm. But it made me happy to think I was about to see my compañeros in the city, especially Iván Montenegro. But the magic was gone; it wasn't that thrill I felt when I left for the mountains. It was different now. People had died. We had learned that some die and others live; we had learned about suffering, that there was sadness as well as happiness.

I guess what thrilled me the most was the chance to see my daughters, or my sons. I remember now, before we started down, that son-of-a-bitch Rodrigo had said to me, "By the way, congratulations on those twins." Claudia's belly had been huge, and it seems that a courier or somebody somewhere along the line had mentioned that she was huge and probably was going to have twins. So by word of mouth it had traveled all the way up to the mountains, and somebody had told Modesto and Rodrigo that I had twins. And the joking started in. "Hot stuff, eh Eugenio, you must really be something!" All that ribbing you get when you have twins.

It was only when we got in on foot to a place near Telica, a

little shack, that I ran into a compañero named Francisco Lacyo who put me straight. "Eugenio, do you know you have a little girl?" "No, hombre," I answered, "not twins?" "No, hombre, it's a little girl and she looks like you." What a fantastic feeling! When they told me it wasn't twin boys but a little girl, well, an incredible tenderness filled me. It had never occurred to me I would have a girl, a little woman. When they told me that, I don't know, a very special tenderness came over me, I felt so delicate, so gentle. And naturally I'd been thinking for a long time of requesting a meeting with Claudia and the little girl, to see the baby.

Well, they came to get us; we sent a courier to León, and they came for us. They told us that the Regional would be coming in person to take us as far as the highway. The head of the Regional was Iván Montenegro. One night Iván Montenegro turned up in a taxi that belonged to a compañero. I guess you can imagine my joy at seeing Fat Man, who said to me a little nervously, "Get in, get in, get in." And we got in and started driving toward León.

Coming into León I felt—you know what I felt?—it was like one of those nightmares of being in León; it was like dreaming I was suddenly in León and that everybody was staring at me. And I was unarmed and the Guard was chasing me, or I was shooting but my gun wasn't working, I was firing but the bullets weren't hitting, or they were hitting but the Guardsmen weren't falling, they weren't dying. Or the barrel of my rifle would drop off; that was the nightmare when I thought of León. So entering León in a car at night, about eight at night . . . Blood of Christ! the same boulevard, the same Debayle Avenue from before, the hospital, the same drive-in, the train station. We turned at the station and ran into San Juan Park. They gave me some of those dark glasses, can you imagine, so nobody would recognize me. I looked out at the people—it was awful. It wasn't just that I felt naked; it was more than that, do you know how I felt? I felt, I'm in the underground entering León. What I mean is, the unthinkable,

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the unimaginable was happening, the thing I had feared the most. It meant the greatest possible physical danger, the most real possibility of being killed or captured. Really, it meant being totally exposed, totally in the open.

It was crazy in a way, but it had to be done—I entered León. We tried to keep to the barrios, skirting the main part of the city until we came to the safe house. It was in Subtiava, the house of a tailor, a compañero whose name I've forgotten. I don't remember the address very well, but it was in Subtiava, about a block or so from the Calle Real. Then—the fantastic joy—I got out of the car and there were "El Chiricuto," Luis Guzmán, Quincho Ibarro, Jorge Sinforeso Bravo, whom I knew from before. "Soup's on," somebody said. I took a bath; they gave me civilian clothes. I wanted everything—chocolate, an ice pop; I wanted a "burro's milk" candy from Prío's. What didn't I want? I wanted everything. It didn't seem possible that I was there, once again in the heart of León, and neither the Guard, nor Somoza's Security, nor my friends, nor my family knew anything about it.

Jorge Matus was there, who later died in the war; Marcelino Guido, who is now a captain and second in command in the Domestic Order Unit of the Second Military Region of the Ministry of the Interior; and other compañeros whose names I've forgotten, but whose faces I can still see. Some were killed; others survived; all sorts of people were there—students, workers, campesinos.

As the first day of the school progressed and I noted the limitations of the compañeros, I realized that what I had gone through in the mountains was not a unique experience—all the compañeros went through the same thing. Of course, the conditions in the school were somewhat different; it wasn't jungle, but pine forest, brakes of pine trees, which had already been fairly devastated by the North American lumber companies. The vegetation was not thick and overgrown, but very low and sparse. It was almost like holding classes in a park or an open field. It was so bare of trees that we had to camouflage our rain covers and camp utensils, so they couldn't be seen from the air.

There was a hill called "El Copetudo," which was quite deep in, and on top of that hill we made our camp. It was there that I started seeing the compañeros fall down, get frustrated, then push on ahead. I saw their problems and weaknesses emerge and start to be corrected. I saw the uneven development of the men, the different levels of ability. You can bet I busted my ass to teach them the very best I knew, and in that sense René Tejada was always present in me. He had died, but I was imparting Tello's spirit to the school. The course ended July 14, 1975. It began around June 14.

About ten days into the training, bits of news started coming in about strange people in the area. It seems officials of the Guard's military intelligence had detected traffic, comings and goings in the area at night, signs and more signs of our presence. The Guard didn't come for a long time, and we were able to finish our course. But one day we got word that the Guard had finally arrived. And there we were with thirty boys who had never fired a shot in their lives and had no experience

While I was still at the teacher's house, about twenty or thirty days after my operation, the National Leadership decided to set up two big guerrilla schools; the idea was to beef up our military training and strengthen the various sectors of the work with both more and better men, including those in the mountains. So one of these schools was set up in Macuelizo, just beyond the little farm where they took me after the operation. It was called Julio Buitrago and had thirty students. This was in June 1975. They notified me that I was now part of the Regional, and that we were going to operate a school for guys who would also be going into the mountains. I was to be assigned to the school, to help with the training and to teach the basics of the guerrilla struggle, in light of my own experience and the training I had received.

They named me military director of the school; Manuel Morales and Bayardo Arce were first and second in command, and Augusto Salinas Pinell was director of logistics, since he'd been working in that zone as underground organizer of the compañeros in the sector. That school was a tremendous experience for me, because I began to see my own experience reflected on a mass level, a collective level, in thirty compañeros.

marching. Just marching up to the camp had made their feet a swollen mess, and that was only eight hours. A march of eight hours, no more. But for them it was a big deal; they felt like hot-shot guerrillas when they managed that. So with guys who had never seen battle, who weren't used to marching or lugging packs, with hardly any weapons, just hunting rifles, with only two or three heavy weapons in the whole camp, a meager supply of ammunition, on a treeless, well-populated terrain—one thing was clear, if the Guard came, we were screwed.

We had set up the school there because we didn't have anyplace better to do it. And now the Guard was coming! It was decided that Manuel and Bayardo should go down to the city. We couldn't take on the Guard, not with just one contingent, and we had to get those guys back to the city. So later on they could be sent to the mountains. Pelota and Bayardo were supposed to arrange some way to get them out of there fast, in order to avoid a confrontation. We needed cars sent up to us, and houses where they could stay in the city, or be leapfrogged into other provinces; they were supposed to check out the highways, to see what roadblocks had been set up in town, what kind of surveillance was in force, so the operation could be carried out.

But dammit, the only thing we managed to do was get Bayardo and Manuel out. After they left, nobody else could get through. The Guard had encircled us. I was military head of the school, and Augusto Salinas Pinell was responsible overall, and now school was over. It ended the day the Guard came in.

We started down. When we had gone some distance we stopped near the shack of a collaborator to wait for our contact from the city to take people back, first through the brush, then along the highway.

This was where I put Tello's lessons to use. Tello lost his life because he was hiding about 500 yards from a collaborator's house; the Guard came, arrested the collaborator, and the

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collaborator led the Guard right to him. So I posted a sentry to watch the collaborator's house. If the Guard arrived, we'd retreat before the collaborator had a chance to turn us in. Even if he didn't turn us in, we had to take security measures.

In a little while the guy on watch informed us that about forty or fifty Guardsmen were in the collaborator's shack and had taken him prisoner. Immediately I gave the order for retreat, but by that time the whole area was crawling with patrols. The zone was completely surrounded; they were coming in after us. The Guard had helicopters, planes . . . the usual shitload of equipment. They had intelligence on the school, and they were going to bust it up. I decided to send Heriberto Rodriguez, a compañero who was a veteran of Raiti and Bocay, to head up the retreat into a different sector where we had another collaborator, where Augusto Salinas Pinell had just gone. He had left me in camp while he went to try to make contact with other collaborators who could help get us out of there. While the guys prepared to retreat, I stayed behind with some other compañeros; we had decided to hold off the Guard with an ambush, because if the Guard got to where we were, in a ravine, a dry stream bed, like a little canyon, we could gain time with an ambush.

But we managed to retreat with no problems; and once we got to another spot I went looking for contacts to help in getting out, since it was obvious no help was coming from the city. There we were—a whole bunch of armed men, and our only way out was to fight our way out. We would have to bust our balls against the Guard in an unequal battle. The truth is, we didn't know what to do; we were in a tight spot. We had to figure out how to make it to the city; we needed cars, even if just to go a short way; we needed houses in the city to put up all those guys.

I started out with Manuel Mairena, in civilian clothes, carrying just a pistol. We were going to Fidel's to try to make contact, where I'd been before, after my operation. I left instructions for Heriberto Rodriguez to take the compañeros

and head for another spot where we would link up with them later. We marched the whole day. When we were getting near Fidel's, we started marching in a dry stream bed with a sandy bottom. At about four in the afternoon we emerged from the stream bed. I said to Manuel, "You go on ahead and try to make contact, since you're from this area. I'll be right behind you. If anything goes wrong, we'll hightail it out back the way we came." I'm not sure how it came about, but we were marching along when all of a sudden we heard a voice: "There goes one of those sons of bitches!" "Brother," Manuel whispered, "let's get out of here. We've been spotted." We backed off, firing two shots, and started running like hell.

The Guard was in the shack now, lying in wait for us. Those sons of bitches, they had some guys standing around outside dressed like campesinos but who were Guardsmen; there was also a traitor, a spy from the area who knew Manuel Mairena, who knew he was in the underground with us. They let loose a hail of bullets in our direction, and we just had pistols, and one extra magazine. We were running as fast as we could in tactical zigzags through the stream bed until we came to a spot where we saw we could come out. We did, but other groups of Guardsmen had come running up from the other side—the hunt was on.

There was no brush, hardly any trees, just low plants and shrubs, little bushes, some charralitos. The Guard split up into groups of five, eight, or ten men, with machine guns and Garands and more rifles, with all their modern weaponry, and for sure they had grenades. We came out of the bushes, they saw us, and we shot off running again. It was one big rabbit hunt. As if you had turned loose a couple of rabbits and started tracking them down. We were scared shitless, but I was also in a rage. It wasn't so much that I minded dying, but I was furious that they might wipe us out like that.

Finally they had us cornered, but they didn't know it. I whispered to Manuel, "Cock your gun with the safety off, but don't shoot unless I do." The whole sector was crawling with

Guardsmen. We were crouching down between four little trees, those low ones, tiny trees, crouching on our haunches, because on our haunches at least we'd have a chance to jump up. In that precarious position we watched the Guardsmen, who were right on top of us but didn't see us. We decided that each of us should pick a Guardsman out of the group, get the drop on him down the barrel of our gun and follow his movements from the underbrush. If they spotted us, we would open fire from the bushes and run for our lives—I mean if they hadn't already pumped us full of bullets.

"Those fuckers are in here!" they were saying. "Where are those sons of bitches? They can't have gone far." They referred in their talk to other patrols in the area, in the stream bed or alongside of it. "They're in here," they said. "They've got to be right under our noses! Let's go straight ahead." And they came up and passed right in front of us, right near the bushes where we were hiding.

By that time it was getting to be six o'clock; dusk was settling in; it was almost dark. My God, did I want it to get dark! And finally it did. But they didn't go; they knew we were there, but they didn't know where. About seven or eight I whispered to Manuel, "Let's make a move. But listen, first put your hand on the ground and very quietly in slow motion push back the leaves until you've got bare dirt. Get rid of all the little twigs. Then, when you've got rid of the little leaves and twigs, take a step. Then with your other hand, a bit farther on, do the same thing, and take another step. That way you'll be sure not to make any noise—but watch out for the twigs, because in this quiet a cruuuunch could kill us. They'll start shooting indiscriminately in the dark and with machine guns. It'll be all over."

That was the plan. We had just started clearing away the twigs and the leaves when we heard a cough. I whispered to Manuel, "Let's hang on a bit longer. The later it gets the more likely they will go, and even if they don't go, they'll get so tired, they'll fall asleep."

We were still crouching on our haunches; our legs were numb; we shifted our weight from one leg to the other; then both legs were asleep, then just one—it was awful, can you imagine? We didn't dare move and were almost embracing.

At 3:00 A.M. we made our move, but we didn't go by way of the stream bed—we knew we'd be ambushed there—but through the brush, and we made it. We finally came out near the city. I arrived in a town under siege, but managed to get to the house of a guy who bet on cockfights. When I came in about 5:00 A.M. he jumped in surprise. "Child!" he said. "What are you doing out in the street?" "Looking for help, that's all," I answered. "Because, listen, we're stuck up there in the hills. The Guard has got us surrounded. The compañeros are waiting for us to come and get them out." "Ah, my boy, you'd better get going. Everybody in Ocotal's in jail," he said. "They've captured all the collaborators."

The situation in Ocotal was really bad; the Guard had occupied the city and made mass arrests. The old compañero who drove that car—whom we affectionately called Fitipaldi—they had hung him by his toes and beat the shit out of him in the barracks. All our structures, our safe houses, the whole network of collaborators had been destroyed, the people terrorized. That stunned me. It made me feel like shit, because these poor people were just getting going and now it was all ruined. But we also knew we had to forge ahead.

We went to another house and managed to make contact with Bayardo and Pelota. "Our hands are tied," they told me. "We're screwed, totally fucked. The Regional here has hit rock bottom; we can't make a move. Get one person out of this town and you've accomplished something major, really major! You go back up there, and you, Omar, you and Salinas take charge of those guys," they said. "Find a way to get them out, by the highway or whatever—just get them out. Here's some money and some cans of food." The guys up there were dying of hunger.

We started out again at night, skirting the town, scared of

running into the patrols that were combing the area, and lugging big sacks full of canned food. No car. All we need now is not to be able to find them, I thought, since there was a possibility the Guard might have arrested our remaining collaborators and we wouldn't be able to reestablish contact with the compañeros. We managed to reach Don Bonifacio Montoya's little shack; he was one of the first guides for the FSLN; he told us he'd been a guide for Carlos Fonseca. He was a wonderful old man—tall, fine-boned, light-skinned, with blue eyes, sort of brownish-blond hair, very good-looking. He was eighty-two and as pure as a child. He lived in a miserable little shack with his old wife, whose name I've forgotten. She was light-skinned, too, with blue eyes; they were campesinos from the north country, Sandinistas from Sandino's day, both of them.

We met them as they were coming from the stream, hauling water in a pail. We ran to them. "Don Bacho, Don Bacho!" "Boys! Over there. Get in the house!" he said. He could barely hear us calling out to him. "Careful they don't see you outside. The Guard is everywhere." "Have you seen the boys?" I asked him. "Of course. I've got them up on a hill," he said. It was a bare peak that only goats could climb, billygoats. He gave us black coffee. "The Guard hasn't been to your house?" we asked. "No," the old woman said, "and if they come, even if I've only got hot water I'll throw it in their faces."

That little old man, Don Bacho, was a page out of history. Salinas Pinell told me that the first time he came to Don Bacho's on behalf of the Frente the old guy was overjoyed to see him. "You see," he said, "you see, I knew you would come again! The fact is I have some things of yours buried here, that you left a long time ago." "But what?" Augusto asked him. "It's something the gringos had, that's what, something you left the last time you were through here." And he started digging under a tree trunk and brought up a little military pouch that dated back to the Yankee occupation. It

fell apart when you took it in your hand. Inside was a pile of Enfield bullets, can you believe it? The old man had kept them, can you imagine that? —the old man had kept them, and every day he had brought them out to air in the sun. Because he knew that someday the Sandinistas would come again.

"If you help me along, I'll take you to where I've got the boys," said Don Bacho. And we took hold of him—he was so old he could barely walk. We started climbing, almost carrying him between Mairena and myself. We found only some of our compañeros, and they were nearly dying of hunger. On one of the marches, since there were so many people and with only Heriberto Rodríguez to head the column, the line had broken along the way. And with only one guide—or no guide, I'm not sure—some of the boys fell behind and got separated. Because if you lose sight of the compañero in front of you, and you don't know the terrain, you can lose your bearings and wander off. From then on you're on your own to find your way out.

They killed three or four compañeros like that; the others managed to reach the highway. Of the ones who managed to get to the highway, they captured one or two in Estelí. One was an extraordinary boy, one of the best students in the school. Salinas, Mairena, and I were responsible for getting the rest down.

Once we reached the hill, we parceled out the food to the compañeros. The canned stuff plus some mangoes we had picked at Don Bacho's; for eight days Don Bacho had had nothing to eat but mangoes. The compañeros were at their posts all along the steep cliffs, fifteen or eighteen compañeros in all. As you climbed, you found them staked out one after another with their shotguns, their .22's, their Enfields, or whatever else—posted on the hill, on the steep pass. To have gotten them out of there the Guard would have needed planes. And it was no joke getting them down. We were inside the Guard's encirclement; we could move inside that circle. The

problem was to break out of it. The Guard was starting to send out patrols, up and down the area, trying to engage us in combat, and then tighten the circle. Salinas told me that they were able to get to the hill because Don Bacho had led them along a stretch where there weren't any Guardsmen. There were gaps between one patrol and the other, and Don Bacho knew all about how to move very close to one patrol and not be seen by the other.

We finally arrived, and I saw those hopeful, impatient faces, all thinking we had the magic key to getting them out. We ate a little something, then started to mull over the problem. Okay, we said, we have two choices: we either try to break through the ring or we wait for the Guard to find us and all die on that hill. That was the dilemma. But if we decided to leave, which way would we go? The farther out you went, the fewer the trees. There were pastures, completely open areas, corn-fields, a few bushes, with here and there a scraggly stand of little pines. Getting through that area wouldn't be easy. We finally decided to head for the Pan-American Highway, and from there each of us would try to get some civilian clothes from our collaborators along the highway, then catch a group-transport truck and get on out. There was no other way. The mission was to rescue the guys and get them back to the cities. Some of them were destined for the fronts in the mountains; others would be part of the networks in the city; others would go home and continue working aboveground.

So we planned with Don Bacho and his son—since Don Bacho also had his sons involved as collaborators—the best way to get out of there at night. With no flashlight, can you imagine, with all those cliffs. Luckily there was a good moon, which was both an advantage and a disadvantage. An advantage because you could see where you were going, and it helped the guides; it helped Don Bacho to get oriented. But a disadvantage because the Guard might see you. We started down. I put myself in the vanguard and Augusto moved me to the center. I remember that in the afternoon, before we

started to march, we changed our aliases. I was called Eugenio, but I took the name Juan José because the enemy knew some of our aliases. It was important to deny the enemy that sort of operational information.

We put our marching rules in force and headed out, no flashlights, each of us with a nylon cord attached in back. I was afraid that we might get separated along the way and they would murder the boys as they did the other guys that had gotten lost. So we tied a little nylon cord to each guy, right on the belt loop in back, so the guy behind could hang on to the little cord and not get lost. We had already practiced night marching in the school. They more or less knew the rules for marching at night. We made them even stricter, because this was a night march with real and immediate possibilities of a confrontation. I proposed that I should cover the retreat if a fight broke out, so that Augusto, who knew the area, could retreat with the guys. That's when we had an argument over who would go in the vanguard and who would cover the retreat. Augusto insisted that he, not I, should go in the vanguard, since in any case he had to cover the retreat because he knew the terrain, and besides we had another guide, Manuel Mairena. So I should go in the body of march.

In the end I think he was trying to keep me from getting killed—he was to die himself—because of the affection we had come to feel for each other in the course of running the school.

Augusto was an extraordinary fellow; he was a teacher in Somoto, a rural schoolteacher who had gone to the Esteli normal school. And his teaching experience had left a deep mark on his personality. He was a calm compañero, very brotherly and sweet. He had leadership ability, but in the style of a teacher to his students. He used to teach the campesinos how to read, using the underside of platanillo leaves; you could scratch letters onto the back of those leaves. He never lost his enthusiasm for teaching. I always put him in charge of teaching the campesinos to read wherever we were, because I knew

he was most fulfilled as a teacher. That was Mauricio, incapable of hurting you, always selfless in everything and constantly teaching one thing or another. Very brave. He didn't smoke and had a terrible sweet tooth. Sometimes he was inspired to write; he wrote little poems that he showed me. He was always talking about his little girl—he had a daughter; he didn't say much about his wife; mainly he spoke of his daughter. I even remember what size pants he wore—size 32.

We started down the cliffs in the dark, not carrying much weight, but very weak physically. For ten or fifteen days we had eaten nothing but brown sugar bars, some canned food, and mangoes. There was no water on that hill. You had to bring it in at night; a half-cup a day and a slice of mango or something like that was the daily ration. So the compañeros were weak; we were all weak, but I was more used to it than the others who had just come from the city to the school. And the guys started falling, tumbling down the steep pass. It was a very tense descent, because if you slipped you could kill yourself, and if the Guard was anywhere near they might hear us; you might even set off an avalanche or a rock slide.

Finally we managed to get down from the hill and start marching through a treeless area. I could hardly believe we had marched for three hours tied together like that. The guys rose to the occasion there; we couldn't fault our progress; the compañeros had grown tremendously. Of course, at the same time our lives were at stake. Augusto said that the idea was to get out of there and live to fight another day under better conditions. So on and on we trudged, through one place after another, marching all night. Don Bacho went with us up to a certain point, then we continued on with his son Pastor. Never have I seen men who were that hungry march that fast at night, or, as I was saying, who had grown so much. I remember that about twice we crossed a dirt road that went from Ocotal to Macuelizo; we went in a spearhead formation that we had recently practiced, with our weapons ready to fire. You see, we had morale; our morale was tremendous, in spite

of the difficult situation. We never let up on the process of political education. It was a constant, double-barreled thing, and you better believe it made a difference.

At five in the morning, exhausted, we came at last to a hill with the peculiar name of "La Señorita," a stony hill but covered with a dense vegetation. A tiny peak, some 200 yards from the Pan-American Highway near the town of Totogalpa, to the south of Ocotal, toward Esteli.

Another dilemma: whether or not to push the guys onto the highway in twos to try to hitchhike or catch a bus or just start walking. We had gotten through the worst of it; we were outside the encirclement. How awful it would be, we thought, to push those boys and ourselves, too, onto the highway and end up getting killed. With the experience we had accumulated in aboveground work and in that incredibly rich year in the mountains in my case, it was my feeling that to toss them overboard like that was too big a risk. Boys so newly trained would end up getting killed. We went over and over it and finally decided that they should hang on there a little longer while Manuel Mairena and I slipped back into Ocotal to try to get hold of a car to take them to Esteli. Once they were in Esteli, each of them could find his own way down to Managua.

Our collaborators in Totogalpa were bringing the boys a little food, mangoes and stuff like that, one hen for fifteen men, a hen per day, ten tortillas for fifteen men for a whole day. But they couldn't keep running up to that hill—the repression throughout the zone was too great.

We left them on "La Señorita" and once again slipped into Ocotal at dawn. I remembered a man I'd met before; he wasn't a compañero yet, but I went to him, since there was nowhere else to turn. He was a carpenter with a tiny shop, and Manuel Mairena and I hid under a table; he piled up some boxes at the end of the table so nobody could see us; customers came and went, but nobody knew we were there. We didn't dare fart, we couldn't do anything, least of all smoke. And on top of everything I wasn't sure that the carpenter

wasn't going to turn us in, he was so scared. I sent him out to make a contact for us; the guy, to get rid of us, went and found Señora Antúnez, the teacher, who got busy and came up with something.

The trouble was that our networks were so fragile that all the houses had been evacuated; the collaborators were all being arrested. There was only one house left that we hadn't used before. Mónica Baltodano had arranged for it; she was already in the Regional at that time. The collaborator was a very nervous guy, but there was nothing to be done. We had to make the risky decision for all of us to stay in the only place we had, which was his house. Can you imagine the guy's fright when in the middle of the night Bayardo Arce, Manuel Morales, Mónica Baltodano, Manuel Mairena, and I—the entire Northern Regional—turned up at his door? He wanted to chuck us out on the spot, but we had no intention of leaving.

I don't remember exactly, but I guess it was proposed that Bayardo go to Esteli. I don't know if the idea was to try to get hold of a car, or because it was necessary to clear out Ocotal, which had become one gigantic rat trap. Anyway, Bayardo took off with a guy in a truck—God knows how he got hold of a truck; he talked the owner into it, I guess—and Bayardo took off for Esteli. This was the plan: if they were stopped at the roadblock on the bridge the driver was going to crash through the Guardsmen in the truck, and they would shoot their way out. But the guy—who knows why, maybe he lost his nerve, I don't know—when they ordered them to halt and get out of the truck, obeyed. So Bayardo had to get out, and they started searching him. When they found his pistol, Bayardo grabbed the Guardsman's Garand, leaving the Guardsmen with the pistol and Bayardo with the rifle. The other guy opened fire on the Guard, jumped off the bridge, and Bayardo took off running toward Ocotal in a hail of bullets. As soon as he had a chance he dove off the highway into the brush.

The Guard started looking for him; they rounded up all the

jeeps they had—one or two, I'm not sure, but all they had—and surrounded the place where Bayardo went in. They started to hunt for him, but they were such cowards, seeing how Bayardo had acted, that they moved very cautiously, reminding each other, "Remember, he's got a Garand, that fucker has a Garand." It terrified them to go into the brush with Bayardo in there. The first guy who went in came right back out. Bayardo sat tight, he hung on, and at dawn we heard a knock at the door, *bam, bam, bam, bam*. It's the Guard! we thought, since patrols of the Guard had just gone by in jeeps on the street and on foot along the sidewalk, banging on doors and harassing. So when a knock came three or four minutes after the last patrol had passed, we were on the alert. We sprang to our positions, but it was Bayardo who entered. I can still see the horrified face of the poor man who owned the house, shitting green at the sight of Bayardo's swollen face. He was all beaten up, his whole face and mouth, his lips were all swollen, from the fall he took in that run-in with the Guard.

Sanctuary

Manuel Mairena and I went back to "La Señorita," with money for the compañeros to buy food. Now we could plan how to get them out of there. They had managed, they told us, through a collaborator in Totogalpa to send word to Salinas Pinell to get us a car, and he had succeeded. He'd been a student there and had some contacts, and he turned up with a truck. He made about three trips down and back, leaving some of the guys on the highway in civilian clothes. I remember that two compañeros, two of our best people, were caught right off the bat. It seems they were captured on a bus in Esteli. The authorities saw their military boots, hauled them off the bus, and murdered them. One of them was a strong, dark-skinned fellow, a high school student whose name I don't remember.

Augusto was to set things up for us to stay in Esteli. Mairena and I were the last to leave the hill, in the truck of a collaborator from Palacagüinca. They dropped us at Tobías Gadea's house in Esteli—but can you imagine our surprise when we ran smack into a huge party? I was dressed like a cowboy, in leather boots and blue jeans, carrying a bag and lariat, that leather cord they use to tie up cattle, plus my gre-

Reasons for Living

When I left for the mountains I was in love with Claudia. Loving her for me was something sublime, something beyond measure and magnitudes, as Che once said. I had put into that relationship the very purest of man's constructive and artistic powers. Out of that relationship I had built a great city, a very beautiful city. Let's say that our relationship was the beginning and the end, the alpha and omega of everything man has ever known about love. What I mean is, Claudia, or my relationship with Claudia, had become for me a standard in the mountains, a flag that I held aloft and that never got caught in the vines, that never fell, that never got wet or splattered with mud. What I'm saying is, after Claudia, after my love for her, after that came the jungle and everything that my mind had never counted on. Before entering the mountains I had no assessment of either the jungle or the forest, no conception of what the mountain really meant. So I went to bed with that standard beside me; I kept it always with me; I folded it neatly and put it under my head like a pillow, and went to sleep. That helped to keep me going; it helped me to live; it helped me to be better. I felt the pride of being an example for her. I felt the need to be an example—for her and for our baby

girl. Claudia was my motivating force, my security, my confidence; she meant bullets and being able to see in the dark, and more air in my lungs, more strength in my legs; she was my sense of direction and my fire; our love was warm, dry clothing; it was rain cover, victory, tranquility; it was everything—the future, children—everything my brain could calculate.

So, there I was in the little granary, and since it was winter and raining, it was horribly infested with fleas and mosquitos. And Gilberto arrived from Bayardo with a letter for me. I saw the letter was marked "Personal for Eugenio." I started reading: "Skinny, how are you?" it went, or something like that, I don't remember exactly. "Skinny, I admire you very much. Skinny, I want you to know I have a deep respect for you, that so many of the things I know I have learned from you. You've been one of the people that has most influenced my life. And because of this affection and the respect that I feel for you, I want to be honest—I want you to know that I've fallen in love with another compañero. I don't love you anymore, I now love him. I hope you'll understand. I want you to know I will always love you, or will always respect and admire you. Affectionately," and her alias.

I remember when the letter came I was very hungry, because I hadn't had lunch, or supper either, and the campesinos were afraid, and the Guard was snooping around everywhere, and some damn fleas were biting at my balls, hideous fleas. I had a fungus that made my feet burn. I couldn't remember the last time I'd brushed my teeth; when I ran my tongue over them I could feel a fuzz of built-up and accumulated food; my tongue was like sandpaper on my teeth. I felt really shitty that day. I had missed some contacts I was trying to make in the afternoon, and to top it all off I had lost a couple of bullets on the march. I never lost bullets. And there I was that night, resting, when that letter came. I also got a letter from Bayardo Arce that I didn't read until about two hours later. Because when I started reading Claudia's letter it upset me a lot. It seemed so unfair. This just couldn't be happening. It was not

in the cards; it was illogical; it didn't follow. How could she do that to me? I understood that she wasn't going to wait for me forever, like in the Middle Ages when the knight goes off to the Crusades, and after a thousand victorious battles comes galloping back and stops in front of the castle, and the lady appears, smiling, on the balcony, like in a fairy tale. I knew I couldn't demand that. But neither had I imagined that she would abandon me when I was keeping her standard spotless, unmuddied; when I was carrying that flag up all those hills, and every time I came to the top, without saying a word, I drove it into the ground. And at night I folded it and went to sleep with it. I saw it in the leaping flames of our bonfires, and in our victories, our triumphs. I saw it on all our marches. And I could not believe this was happening. Do you understand what I'm saying? I felt my world coming apart.

Have you ever noticed how in an airplane, when the plane turns, when the plane tilts, the surface of the earth is on a huge slant, and the hills are slanted, and when you fly over the sea the water seems about to pour out? And the houses are all askew and the people and the dogs? That was how I felt, as if the ground had shifted. I had lost my sense of space, my equilibrium, all sense of gravity and of inertia, any number of senses. Every physical sense that man has on the earth I had lost, and not only the physical. I had lost my sense of self, my sense of man and of woman, so many, many things.

I remember once, before leaving to go underground, I had said, "Look, Claudia, if they kill me someday—I'm going to tell you something I don't want you to tell anyone—if they kill me someday, it'll only be if I'm in too much pain or if they spray my face with bullets—that's the only way they'll keep me from dying with a smile on my lips, with a smile on my face. So, when you see the paper *Novedades* or *La Prensa* with this caption: 'Unidentified criminal dead,' and you see me and recognize my face and my smile in the newspaper, you'll know, I want you to know, that this smile is for you, that it belongs to you. And when the students march in the streets,

when they hold assemblies in the university to protest about my death, I want you to sit in one of those seats in the middle of the auditorium, or in the back. And when they say fine things about me, about how I was a man who did his duty, a man who fought the dictatorship, a brave man, and all that, I want you to sit quietly with that paper in your hand and look down at my face and think how that smile belongs to you, to you alone, and that nobody can ever take it away from you. And when you march in the demonstrations, and are walking or running, with the Guard chasing after you, my smile will be with you, walking or running, and don't let anybody ever take it away. It belongs to you. And nobody will be able to take that smile from me, because I give it to you. But don't tell this to anybody; don't talk about it. And if you have to die, you'll die, too, and before dying, you'll have that smile, but never tell anybody that smile is yours, that I gave it to you."

I thought of all that when I read the letter. Meanwhile, those fucking ticks were biting me like crazy; they were working overtime to really let me have it, biting me not just on my testicles, but all over my chest and my legs. And the fungus wasn't just on my feet anymore—my whole body was on fire. And now the pollen of the corn husks was starting to bother me when I was lying down. I got up. I couldn't sleep, and spent a dog's night tossing and turning. I got up to go pee. I cried that night. And I couldn't get to sleep. Finally, I don't know how, but an evil, Machiavellian thought occurred to me: now I know what I'm going to do. That woman will pay for her injustice. My mind is made up. I'll send her a letter and my revenge will be this—I'm going to tell her in this letter that the day I die, if the Guard doesn't spray my face with bullets, I won't be able to stop laughing, and that the laugh she'll see in the papers will not belong to her. She should know and be absolutely clear that this smile, which is the smile of a protesting man, the smile of a moral man, a consequential man, a man of love, a man of the mountains—that this smile

of a dying Sandinista no longer belongs to her. That was my secret revenge, and the great lesson was that this smile was for others, or even if it wasn't for others, it didn't matter. What mattered was that it wouldn't be for her.

Naturally, with everything that happened between the time I opened the letter and when I answered back, it was a very sad period. The tiniest thing made me sad. I was intensely depressed. But nobody realized it. Outwardly I tried to set an example of morale, of enthusiasm, and I managed. But at the same time I felt lonely. For the first time, I felt really alone, deeply alone. Let me tell you, that was loneliness.

When you go into the mountains as we did, it's a violent, even traumatic change. Because just like that, after being in the university leading an organized, disciplined life (after six years in the FSLN), you begin to climb and in twenty-four hours you're on the outskirts of Matagalpa heading into the mountains. In preparation you've bought a dozen Bufferins, a dozen Alka-Seltzers, aspirin tablets, who knows how many Tetracycline capsules, your little bottle of alcohol, your cotton, your sewing needles, thread, buttons, a couple of batteries, a pair of shoes. Besides that you have your driver's license, your wallet, your papers, your notebook, who knows what all. The nail clippers you've had in your room for ages, the pocket knife your brother gave you, the Western belt that was a gift from Luz Marina, your photographs, your old kerchief, the same one she used to wash with, or dry her hands. You take your usual underwear, the same clothes you've put on so many times, worn over and over on so many different occasions, in so many places, always with the same people. You start out with your same hands, your same face, your same eyes and teeth and hair, with the usual expression on your face, with your same old sweater. What I'm saying is, you are leaving the city; you are leaving your world. You are leaving your present, which the moment you start marching is transformed into the past. You take that present with you when you leave for the mountains. But the closer you get, the farther behind that present is; it is becoming past.

Reasons for Living

In fact, what is really happening is that your head is full of the life you've been living all those years, and everything about that life, all incredibly fresh. Everything you used to do—how you stayed up late, made love, fought, slept, ate, what you did for fun—all this is fresh in your mind, in your brain. Your happiest memories, the compañeros, her, your plans, all very fresh. As you approach the mountains, all of this is objectively transformed into the past. As you take all these things, including yourself, into the mountains, including your body, and all the ideas in your brain, these things in large part reaffirm that present in you. That present which is now the past. Am I making myself clear? Why? Because it's all behind you.

When you left for the mountains, you began the process of the forced shedding of your present. Against your will you were hurling that present back into the past, as if bits of your flesh were being left behind. And that hurts. But you have no choice but to go forward in that process of deincarnation, of slowly dying. And each day you are deeper into the mountains. First you stop seeing the type of people you saw before. From then on you won't see the type of people you saw in the city; you won't see the things you used to see every day: the houses, the walls, the glass windows, the pavement. It's all gone; objectively it's behind you, though you have it stored in your brain.

Before long you quit listening for the noise of cars, or of bicycles, or television or radios, or for the shouts of kids hawking newspapers or Chiclets. You quit listening for that typical city tone in the cries of the kids. You no longer see movie houses, or billboards for films. And you keep on going: no electric light. And on. Then no more colors, nothing but green; no colors but what people are wearing, and even those colors are starting to fade. You end up color blind. You won't be experiencing the taste of chocolate anymore, the sensation of rum, or wine, the flavor of Chiclets. Farther in you can forget about hearing music. The popular songs of the day—Camilo Sesto, Julio Iglesias, Leonardo Favio, Nicola Di

Bari—the radios don't come in with you, so the songs must be recorded on your brain.

Deeper in you begin to detach yourself; as you penetrate deeper, you are more and more isolated. Finally the moment comes when nothing is left of your past, in terms of your experience, your senses—I'm not sure how to say it—your immediate, recent past, it no longer exists. You have to resign yourself to never seeing it again, unless someday you come out of there alive, if the revolution triumphs.

About fifteen or twenty compañeros, no more, were up there in the guerrilla movement. How were fifteen or twenty of us in the mountains going to bring down Somoza's powerful armed Guard? Sometimes it seemed it would take years and years for us to triumph. And all those years push your present even farther back into the past, though your mind doesn't want to accept it. The only continuation of your present—your city present, your usual life in the city before leaving for the mountains—all that remains of that present in the mountains are things, the objects you are carrying, which are sensory stimuli to the ideas and memories in your brain. The concrete things that you have in your pack, plus your memories and ideas—there's nothing else to reaffirm your present, which is now the past. So what happens? One day you lose your kerchief, you forget it somewhere . . . son of a bitch, my kerchief! Where did I leave my kerchief? And the kerchief is gone; you'll never see it again. Son of a bitch, you say, she gave me that kerchief . . . the kerchief . . . the kerchief . . . son of a bitch! It's lost. Shit! A little piece of your present is torn out of you, which is how a bit of your identity is torn away, a bit of your flesh, of all you want to hang on to.

Eventually your clothes wear out. Your pants fall apart. You can't wear them, they're in rags, or you need to use them to patch your new pants, which are already full of rips. Then: son of a bitch, my nail clippers! Your nails need clipping and *zing!* that's the end of your clippers. Another piece of your flesh has fallen away.

As things continue to get lost or ruined, the objects that reaffirm your present are disappearing, the objects that confirm your identity, your consciousness of your own existence, your sense that you are not just living on the surface, but have a history. In the end your very sense of time is shot to hell, because as things keep getting lost, time is passing, is drawing on. Okay, would you ever be going back? Maybe you really were going to lose everything—your present, which is the past. And meanwhile the revolution is not triumphing, and the Guard is on top of you, and hunger, and everything else. You can be hungry, but really, if you can hang on to your convictions and an outlook for the future, you can better endure and stand up to the difficulties.

So, when you lose all your things, it's as if that many pieces of your present have broken off from you. It's so extreme that for a moment you don't know if you'll ever go back, if you'll ever return, and each thing that you lose is like a paring away, a whittling down, a falling off of piece after piece of your persona. And in time—unforgiving, unrelenting time that flows on, unchanging—you lose everything, even your mind. You are losing your self; your expression is being transformed, from always wearing long sleeves and never seeing the sun, since the tops of the trees block the sun, and never seeing the sky that could remind you of the sky back there, the sky of León, the sky of the past. And you can't connect the moon on the beaches at Poneloya, the moon you grew up with, with the moon in the mountains, and so associate your old present with your new, and be able to dream and remember and associate ideas, to maintain your sense of historical continuity. Since in the mountains there is no moon, no stars—everything is green. Your body turns a pallid white; your hands no longer look like hands, all covered with sores and scratches from vines and brambles, and filthy from never washing, never taking a bath. And the palms of your hands are thickened from swinging the machete and the ax, from hoisting the straps of your pack, putting up your hammock, and snatching hot

things out of the fire. Your fingers grow calloused, your hands; the very body you are master of, which you command, has begun very slowly to change right before your eyes, and you are powerless to prevent it.

And so your very body abandons your present while you look on helplessly; your very body is transformed into a new and different present. And the worst of it is, you never see yourself in a mirror. The first time I saw my face in the mountains was after about five months. Once I didn't see my face for almost a year. And when I finally saw myself again, brother, it wasn't me! I had a mustache, and never in my life had I had a mustache; I'd never let one grow. I was sprouting a beard that I was constantly stroking, but that I'd never seen. The expression in my eyes had changed; my brow was creased from frowning so much because of all the thorns, all the spills you take. The mountains always end up lining your brow, and your jaw widens out a bit. Have you ever noticed in the photographs taken right after the victory? Our brows were all lined, and our jaws set, because you clench your teeth when you march. Your eyebrows are always frowning. And the look in your eyes changes; the expression in your eyes grows sharper, from the effort to see in the dark, the strain of watching for the olive green enemy in the midst of all the green of the jungle—to avoid being ambushed—the strain of trying to see and not being able to see all the things and thoughts that are dissolving before you. All of this changes the look in your eyes, which becomes an aggressive look, but which never stops being clear. So when you see yourself in the mirror, you realize you are not the same. You realize you are someplace else; you are another person.

It's an anguish consciously accepted; you feel you are one more element, one more being in that environment which you have come to grips with and dominate, because you have reason. Because you have intelligence and dominate the environment for a purpose—to use it, in this case for the guerrilla struggle, the revolutionary war. So when you lose all the

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things you've brought with you, and when your own body, your own substance, has decayed and fallen away from you, your identity has one last refuge: in the ideas and in the memories that are lodged in your brain, which you have guarded and cherished and preserved in the innermost recesses of your brain as the fuel of all your forces, as the core, the pith of your life, the marrow of existence.

Ideas and memories are the most intimate part of man, where nobody can scrutinize, where not even the harshness of the mountain can penetrate—the only thing that nature cannot easily transform. You nourish your memories, and when you lie down in your hammock at night you hold your memories close to you; you bring them out a bit into the world, you turn them over in your head, you parade them a bit, timidly, in front of your eyes, though you never really see them. So you air these memories, and before going to sleep you return them very slowly to your brain, as if back into a spiral shell that is very gradually closing. You wind in your ideas once again, and probably your body curls up, too, I don't know—you start to gather in your ideas, to reel in your memories until they are all covered over and perfectly quiet, in the shelter of your brain, as if resting—and you sleep. You might say that the only umbilical cord, the only thread that still binds you to that past, or to that present which has become the past, is idea, memory.

So when you receive a letter like that, and your memories explode into fragments, it's as if the only thread left to you has been snapped, the invisible thread, the vital link that has bound you to your present, which is now the past, however you might rage against that fact and not want it to be so. When that letter came, it sent shock waves through me, tearing out from the most hidden recesses of my brain, from the most intimate part, a thing I had kept there to fall back on. When that happens, yes, you start to feel the loneliness, the isolation. And that's when, if you don't have a political-ideological mental framework, you desert or go crazy.

I remember once I wrote a poem which I also sent to Claudia after that letter, as a final touch, to let her know that what she had done was not going to kill me.

*Now that I've lost you,
I realize that
Had I not been lead,
I would have been shit.*

I have to explain to you that the word for "lead," in Spanish "*plomo*," is made up of the initials of *Patria Libre O Morir* (Free Homeland or Death). If I hadn't had a reason for living, another reason for living, namely the struggle to liberate Nicaragua, I would have fallen completely apart—into pure shit.

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But fortunately that did not happen. Early in the morning the next day I left the little granary and went to the coffee field to wash my face in a stream. I think I combed my hair. Then I sat down under an orange tree to suck the juice from some oranges. I started peeling an orange with my pocket knife, and as I separated the rind from the pulp of the orange, as I saw the bits of peeling falling away, separating, giving way to the knife, I felt I was like that orange, and the orange peelings were the things I ought not to think about. When I had finished peeling the orange I felt lighter, not quite so heavy. The orange was now naked, and it was smaller, reduced. I was letting go of my memories in the same way; I let them go as I peeled the rind from the orange. Or more or less, since as the days passed I began to feel lighter; my head did not feel so heavy. And finally, looking back on it, it was as if I had been lugger around a weight that little by little I had let go of. Until the only weight left was the weight of the struggle.

I took a deep breath; I filled my lungs with air; I felt the cool of the morning on my freshly washed face. I set my feet solidly on the ground, and sitting up, I burst out laughing. I

knew that a new phase of my life was beginning, there, under that orange tree. I had a sudden intuition that the future was right there, barely visible, like something slippery at the tips of my fingers, and I had only to close my fist to take hold of it. This was October 1975. Now it's all ahead of me, I thought; I'm going to create a life, and I'm going to paint that life; I'm going to paint the story of my life in the color I like the best; let every person paint his life, in whatever colors—and I'll paint mine, and in the finest colors.

So I sent Andrés to Gilberto to tell him to go to Los Planes to tell Moisés Córdoba we would be dropping in at his house that same night. Don Gilberto explained to Moisés that we had stayed with him and had been to La Montañita. It seemed that everybody was getting used to our presence, as if they felt it was no longer so dangerous. Or that it was dangerous, but that they wouldn't be murdered for it that day. Tomorrow maybe, but probably they wouldn't be murdered at all. They were opening up and beginning to become our friends; I was starting to joke around with them, to be accepted, to win their affection. We arrived that night at the crag we had decided earlier would be our campsite. The next day there they were, with hot beans and a tortilla from the town. They came back later with one of their last hens. And of course we had plenty to talk about with Moisés. That was when I suggested to Moisés that he take me to his father, the old Sandinista who was about eighty years old.

So, while he was working on that, I went on to something else, and through him I made contact with some other compañeros. Moisés, because of his dad, wasn't as scared as the others, or was more conscious of who we were, clearer about what it was we were doing. Because his dad had talked to him, before we came, about Sandino's struggle.

I was able to visit three little houses or so in those valleys, and the more people I met the more I was able to advance our political work. You could say the Córdoba family was the most prestigious in the valley; the fact that they were introducing

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me encouraged the others to be less afraid. If the Córdobas, if Don Leandro's sons, were involved in "that," well, it was okay for them to be in it, too. I spent the day on the rock, by a stream, and when it got dark I went down to their houses. In the little shacks at night, over one black coffee after another, in conversation after conversation, we discussed their financial troubles, and these conversations deepened our friendship. When I became friends with someone I always wanted that relationship to develop into something that had political content, and vice versa—I always tried to build a political connection into a solid personal friendship.

The first thing we would ask was if they owned the land they lived on, and the answer was always no, it belonged to the "rich folk." Or they would laugh, as if making a joke, or they would hang their heads. Because, for the campesinos, the land was a dream. A dream of their fathers, a dream of their fathers' grandfathers. So if you came and asked them if they owned the land, they just laughed. Because the land had never belonged to them, nor to their fathers, nor to their grandfathers. Naturally we steered our political discussions toward the reason the land was not theirs.

The landowners, or the fathers or grandfathers of the landowners, had over a period of years gradually been stripping the campesinos of their land. So the generation of campesinos we knew would tell us about how their great-grandfathers had owned land. And the story of what happened was passed down from great-grandfather to grandfather to father to son. They were now a generation without land. The landowners had appropriated the land through a process of violent evictions, or through legal means.

In the Condega plains, Los Planes, where Moisés lived, there were about one hundred acres and some twenty-five little shacks. They had a good name for that process. "They corralled us," they would say. They had been corralled, cut back, surrounded with barbed wire. And they ended up working the landowner's land and tending his cattle. And the cam-

pesinos who had been "corralled" had to grow their crops on land lent them by the local landowners. In the time they had left, they would cultivate a bit of ground they would rent from the landowner. And when the harvest came, they had to sell it to the same owners. And naturally you had to buy your salt, your filing tools, your machetes, your aspirin and other pills from the commissary the landowner operated right there.

We took hold of the campesinos' hands, broad, powerful, roughened hands. "These callouses," we asked, "how did you get them?" And they would tell us how they came from the machetes, from working the land. If they got those callouses from working the land, we asked, why did that land belong to the boss and not to them? We were trying to awaken the campesino to his own dream. We wanted to make him see that though the dream was dangerous—since it implied struggle—the land was their right. And we began to cultivate that dream. Through our political work, many campesinos began partaking of that dream.

Other compañeros did not live right there but were rancheros; people who worked land that was part of the acreage of an estate. A campesino was given a piece of ground on which he would build a shack, which was called a rancho. It went up in two days, just sticks and straw. So this compañero was doubly exploited. It was bad enough to have been "corralled." But the ranchero was worse off still, because he lived right on the landowner's grounds. That is why the land for the campesino was a permanent dream. We kept raising the question of the struggle for the land.

It would break our hearts sometimes, because you came to see how the campesino loves the land and has a richer, deeper sense of the land as an element. Just as a sailor cannot live without the sea, or as a pilot dreams of flying—the campesino has developed a kind of identification with the land, which you aren't likely to find in a man from the city. He has developed a kind of unity with the land, a whole series of special, very

characteristic emotions, with respect to the land. And something else—sometimes the campesino will speak of the land as of something sacred, like a mother. Or as if the land were a woman. "I'll make her produce, I tell you, I'll take her in hand, I'll clear her off." Or: "Now I've got her." And of course he begins to feel affection for the tiny piece of land the landowner has given him to work—clearing the brush, removing the trees, planting, harvesting. The campesino clears the brush with a machete to get the ground ready to plant. But you feel that even if it's a violent operation, in the end this clearing of the land is a very tender thing between him and the land, a very special sort of affection. So quite apart from needing the land to produce in order to live from the land, the campesino loves the land, and this is important, as a material element of his existence.

We never promised an agrarian reform to the campesinos, never! We invited them to struggle and to fight for agrarian reform. We invited them to fight for the land. Which was too great a temptation for a campesino to resist! How could they stand by and not fight for what was for them a mother, a wife, a way of living, affection, feeling, secret rapport? It would be very hard for the campesino to refuse to fight, particularly when we were awakening in him the feeling and the idea of class struggle.

The campesino has not only developed, as we said, affective sentiments, but his very sense perceptions have evolved in connection with the land, do you see? He has a greater sense of touch, a finer feel for the land; his sense of smell has evolved in relation to the land. He'll say to you, "Stubble land, sown land, cleared land, wet land," all sorts of land. The greatest crime of the dictatorship was to deny land to the campesino. Because denying the campesino land was like forcing him to wander in a living death. A campesino without land is like a zombie—he is out of his element. Apart from his element he is a broken man. That is why, in the country, animals, wife, children, and land are all one element; to the campesino

it is all a whole, his indivisible universe. I'm telling you the campesino without land is an incomplete man, a man without a soul. The soul of the campesino is the land; it is the element that gives him life, that propels him forward. Because he wants land for the harvest, and to be able to live from the land as men of the land must live from the land; apart from all this he is in love with the land and has intimate relations with her. And his wife and children are part of that same bond.

About nine that night after a good long talk, I crept back to my crag to go to bed. Of course, you never fall asleep right away; you are always thinking, hearing the night sounds, dogs barking down by the shack, listening to a little music. You tune in Radio Havana—that little chime that lets you know it's on the air. You hear the "Night Moment" at ten, or tune in a Managua station for a bit of music. I thought of my family in León. I remember that one night on that crag I was remembering my return from the mountains to León. That night in the safe house a flood of sensations overwhelmed me; one of the things I felt most intensely was a sense of the absurd. Distances in the mountains are measured in time: eight days, let's say, or seven days, or a month. It was a minimum of three hours to get from one place to the next, right? To get firewood was an hour, or a half-hour—it wasn't easy! Not just the distance but the terrain. To get anywhere you had to climb, or march for half a day, or a couple of hours. It meant cold, it meant God knows how many scratches on your hands, or how many falls, or how much physical pain. It meant that same awful fatigue in your legs and in your chest and in your lungs. What I'm saying is, going from one place to another meant sacrifice, time; it meant pain.

So, in León, I was filled with curiosity about my family. I asked the compañeros for news of my mother. What did they know about her? Could they tell me anything? How was she? How had she reacted? What was she doing to make ends meet? Because my brothers and I together had supported her, especially my older brother. How did she manage to live? How did she eat? She had no job. Before, she used to take in stu-

dents from out of town who came to study in León. But with three sons in the guerrilla war, nobody was going to stay there, to eat there; they would be afraid. Besides which, as it turned out, every so often the house was broken into and searched. And there was rent to pay every month, and sometimes we didn't have any money. How were my little brothers? And the compañeros started telling me how she had been.

I thought of going to visit her. Our hideout was only fifteen blocks from the house; fifteen blocks in a car would be five minutes or thereabouts, three minutes, ten minutes, and you wouldn't get wet or be worn out getting there, or scratched to bits—nothing. You would just sit back comfortably and listen to the radio. I felt nostalgic for my house; I longed to see my mom, and the neighbors and Doña Lillian's daughter. I had fallen in love with her, platonically, but had never told her how I felt—it was too painful. I felt nostalgic for my room, my tiny little room, for my bed, for the kitchen, the dining room, the living room, the wooden chairs, the bathroom, the yard, the dog. It was all so completely mine, I had preserved it; it was all so fresh that I couldn't believe I was that close, that I could actually go. If I asked to go I was sure they wouldn't say no—they would set it up somehow, to either take me there at night or to bring my mom to me.

But I also knew that I shouldn't go. Before leaving León I spent a number of nights like this: as soon as I was lying in bed I would start going over the blocks in my mind, the number of blocks, who lived on those blocks. I remembered the street so well! And it would be so simple to get there! It seemed absurd not to go! You have a house but you don't have a house; you have a family, a home, but you don't have a home. Until finally one night when I had gone out on a mission with Iván Montenegro and Jorge Sinforoso Bravo, I said to Iván, "Fat Man, Fat Man, let's go by my house." "Okay," he said, "but in the car you mean . . . right? without stopping." God in heaven! I started shaking like a leaf, can you imagine, it was too violent. Because the house was so fresh in my memory,

and in the mountains I had lost all hope of ever seeing it again. The mountain was the end of the world—we were like damned men—and then suddenly to be faced with the real and undeniable possibility of going by your house. And probably your mom would be standing in the doorway, or in the living room, or your brothers would be playing in the street with the dog.

A sort of anxiety, a nervousness came over me as we turned into the street. I saw the house with the same peeling yellow walls and the doors, right? My God, I thought, the dialectic has stopped! As if the whole year I had been away was just one second, see? I didn't know if I had really lived it, if I had really been in the mountains, if I had really lived all those days, one after another, until finally I had come back here. Or if, in fact, I had never been anywhere at all. There I was in the underground car, with my two compañeros, armed to the teeth, and we were driving right by the house. I could see the furniture—it was incredible! I had the impression that nothing was real. Sometimes it seems as if the world is turning with you, that you are making it go round; you have the feeling it would all stop if you weren't there.

But one thing was certain—León and my house had continued on quite independently of whether I was there or not. My mother and my brothers had gone on living, eating, sleeping, working, without me—how good that was to see! How alive they were, right? It's not that you think you're the center of the universe, but, well, it's a shock to the mind. Time had passed, a year had passed, and many things had happened, but the house was still the same house!

That confused me. I had lost my bearings in space and time. I looked at myself; I felt the limited and finite space of my body. I was there, materially, in all my finite, bodily dimension. Yet this finite dimension, this material presence, driving by the house—it was as if I could not connect with my own time, could not link up with it, did not fit into my own time and space. I didn't know whether time had passed or not.

There was the house with the same peeling paint, the same furniture, the same people of the barrio. But I could not fit together in my mind the magnitude of time, the year in the mountains, with the finiteness of my physical self. I don't know why, but suddenly I was overwhelmed with the sense that the very inhabitants of my house, or the house itself, were angelic—do you see? As if innocent . . . in another dimension. What did they know of all the things that had happened, of all the suffering, of so much that had been experienced? You think, what do they know?

The yellow walls were pure candidness; the furniture, pure silence. As if my house were a child existing beyond time, or a kind of rarity, a little bird; as if time counted for nothing there. My house had no idea of the war, nor of what was going on in Nicaragua at that time—am I making myself clear? The present and the past were clashing inside me. I wasn't sure where I was; what I mean is, if in my finite world I was in possession of my past or of my present. Or if both were inside me. Or did I inhabit only one, because I couldn't be in the past and present at the same time? If this was the past, I was in front of my house; but if this was the present and I was there—it was impossible. Because I didn't live there. I came from somewhere else, from living something else. Something snapped—my head was a whirl of space and time that I couldn't get straightened out. What I did feel was my own absurdity. Because I couldn't make sense of the two dimensions of time.

The car drove on and on. But I was staying behind, flowing out of myself, letting myself flow back, be pulled backward as if by my hair, until it hit me: no, this wasn't right. That present, though it existed here, did not belong to me. It was the past. I would not be returning there for a long time; it was no longer my world, no longer my life. That hurt it, hurt very much!

And the final, crowning blow, the brutal, harsh slap in the face was this: my whole sense of certainty had shattered back there, the organic unity of my past and present; the measure

of my own contradiction had shattered. And it was too late to recover it, since I wasn't going back. I wasn't going to be able to see my mother or my brothers. I would have to see them on down the line, in the future. You accept this emotionally; it's the only rational thing. It's as if someone had hit the little button of history, the little button that sets in motion the film of your life. I never suspected it would be so painful, that violent confrontation between present and past, that rupture through which I became conscious of the new quality of my life.

I remember when we got back to the safe house I was very quiet; I didn't say anything. I felt numb. It was like when a high fever has wrung you out and you're left in a stupor, thoughtful but not sad, more than anything frustrated and annoyed, trying to come to grips with the contradiction, the ridiculousness—I'll say it again—the absurdity of a situation like that. Why you could not go back, could not enter your own house.

As I lay thinking about all this on the crag that night, I felt a great hatred for the bourgeoisie, for North American imperialism, for Somoza's Guard—for they were the cause of this absurdity. We were living in a society of the absurd, and our life was the life of the absurd. We had to do things which in a normal society there would be no reason to do, and we could not do things which in a normal society could easily be done. That's what I mean when I say it was a society of the absurd; it forced us to do or not do absurd things. And I lay thinking so late that night that I fell asleep in the granary with my radio on.

In the morning Moisés appeared with my breakfast. He always came alone, but that day I could hear someone was with him. I knew Moisés's footsteps, the weight of his step, the rhythm of his stride. I recognized Moisés's step but he was walking more slowly than usual; somebody was coming behind him. That alarmed us. We dropped to our knees, Andrés and I, and took cover with our pistols and the grenade. But when I finally got a good look down the little trail that led to the crag, I could see it was a little old man coming behind Moisés. I said

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to Andrés, "Could that be Moisés's dad?" And sure enough, Moisés himself called out to me, "Juan José, this is my papito," which is a way of saying my papacito, my papa. The little old man started laughing and offered me his hand very shyly in the campesino manner. I could see he was a very thin man, of medium height, with curly black hair and a tanned, wrinkled face. He was like something very old that had been preserved for many years and that suddenly was brought out into the light, a thing that once was new, that once was young, but that had been in storage for so long it had started to deteriorate.

Don Leandro had been young, but so many years had passed—who knows where he had kept himself—and suddenly, *bam!* When I met him he was already an old man, toothless. He was wearing his best clothes; it was very humble, but he came that day dressed in his best. I said to him, "Aha! compañero, sir, how are you?" "Ah, not so good. You see, sir, I'm old," he said, "and you can't imagine how my stomach hurts me. And my eyes are bad. I'm so old I can't see, I'm a miserable man, I can't take a step without this cane; if I start out for the cornfield, in a few minutes I'm so tired I have to turn around and go home. My body is a wreck." And then he asked me, "That gun, what kind is it?" "This is a .45," I answered. "And what did you do with the other weapons?" he asked. When he asked about other weapons I assumed he knew we were guerrillas of the FSLN, that we moved in columns, that he suspected we had been in Macuelizo. I answered that we had to be careful, that we didn't carry heavy weapons since we didn't want people to see them and know that we were in the area. Sometimes we could only carry pistols. "But these are good pistols," I told him.

I did not realize he was connecting me with the old Sandinistas, from his own day, from the time of General Sandino. He was asking me about the other weapons, as somebody might say, you know, the weapons we had in the past, what did they do with those? For him, that moment he had preserved and which had grown old was an instant that lasted forty years. It

was like saying, Where did they leave the Enfield or the Mauser or the 30 caliber that we had? Then he confided with an air of wisdom and great confidence, "Those are fine animals, rapid-fire guns, very good. General Sandino once sent me to get tortillas for them at Yalí." And it all came out. I said to myself, What a beautiful thing, do you realize you are touching Sandino, you are touching history! And that very moment I understood what the Sandinista tradition meant; it was reaffirmed for me; I saw it in flesh and blood, in practice, in reality.

And the old man went on talking, and the anecdotes! He had been Sandino's courier. And he talked about Pablo Umanzor, with whom he had fought, and General Estrada, and Pedro Altamirano, José León Díaz, Juan Gregorio Collindres—he fought with all these famous men! He told me he could see it all; he was in another world; he remembered details. How I wished I had a tape recorder, he was saying such wonderful things. "Look, Juan José," he said, "I'm going to tell you something. I can't go with you on this campaign, because look at me, I'm old and what good would I be? I have the will but I wouldn't last a day, I could never survive another campaign. But I have many, many sons, plus all my grandsons; here are all these boys." And he motioned toward his son. "I am giving them to you, to go along with you because we all have to make an effort, we can't let them put an end to it all." He was saying we can't let them put an end to it as if it had never been interrupted, as if all this were a continuation of what he had lived through with Sandino.

It made me feel very good, but at the same time, I felt bad. I was happy, but troubled as well. Because I knew that sometimes things did not work out, that the Guard was repressing and murdering people. These were hard times. But dammit, I said to myself, either these people are very brave or very ignorant; either they don't know what they're getting into or they're irresponsible. That's what I felt. How is it possible, I thought, that when hundreds of people are being murdered right now around Ocotal, when the radios are blaring with

news about compañeros being killed, while the Guard is patrolling with helicopters and planes and thousands of soldiers, how is it possible that this man, with nobody here but Andrés and me, is committing himself to a course of action that appears at this moment to be nothing but a very dangerous adventure? Just, but foolhardy. How is it possible that after so much repression and so many deaths, so many defeats, and not just these but the ones they as Sandinistas had suffered with General Sandino, how was it possible that this man, after the death of Don Bacho, could be suggesting that if he weren't so old he would go with me? And since he was too old to survive another campaign he was giving me all his sons?

According to what Augusto Salinas Pinell had told me, Don Bacho Montoya had been murdered, thanks to a guy who had deserted from us and then been captured by the Guard. He had betrayed Don Bacho, and early in the morning the Guard had stormed his shack and started shouting insults. Don Bacho's wife was making black coffee, boiling the water for black coffee, when a lieutenant of the Guard yelled out to her, "Get your ass out here, you filthy old bitch!" The old woman answered back, "Get out yourself, you wretch!" And she took a pan of hot water and threw it at the lieutenant, scalding his chest and whole body. Then all hell broke loose—they started beating and torturing the two old people. They tore the shack apart, dragged them both outside, kicked in the little cooking stove, yanked down the odds and ends they had hanging from the roof—little cups, cheeses, curds; they ripped the sheets off the bed, dumped out all their clothes, hacked apart the cot, and smashed the table and the gourds and the clay pots. They shoved the two old folks out of the shack and tied them to a tree. And once they were tied up, they beat them both to death. Then they took a three-month-old baby out of the ruins of the shack and tossed him up in the air and caught him on the tips of their rifle bayonets as he was falling back to the ground. Then they pulled out the bayonet and tossed him up again. It was a feast of vultures.

And Don Bacho, beaten to death . . . How happy he was, I