A Central American Odyssey, 1861-1937

Alejandro Miranda

translated, edited and annotated by Stuart Witt
with a historical essay by Jordana Dym
illustrated by John Ashton Golden

Table of Contents

(**Page numbers** are originals which appear in brackets **[#]** within the text.)
(**Boldface** type indicates the change of countries in Alejandro's travels.)

REFLECTIONS OF MY LIFE*

(Rough Sketch of an Autobiography)

Alejandro Miranda Moreno
(1861-1937)
Leon, Nicaragua (1921-1937)

"ALEJANDRO MIRANDA
Espíritu aventurero, carácter recto,
acerado y sin dobleces.
Demócrata ciento por ciento;
honesto y honrado."
F. G. Miranda Morales=

-- I --

First Years: Chontales, Nicaragua (1861-1868)

Perhaps it is vanity (not literary vanity, to be precise, since I am not a lettered man nor have I ever pretended to be) that impels me to write these memories of my life; but the truth is that today, April 24, 1921, on my sixtieth birthday, I got out of bed cheerful and spry, my spirit brimming with desire to reminisce about the past. [1]

I was born in an indigenous pueblo of Chontales, Nicaragua, called Lovillisca, which long ago was destroyed by the inhabitants, as they told me when I was a boy. They burned it because of local feuds. Afterwards, some went to found the pueblo of San Pedro de Lóvago and others Santo Thomás, both of which exist today.

My parents were Don Canuto Miranda and Andrea Moreno. The shadow of a social stigma has surrounded me since birth: I am a bastard son. I do not believe I have any responsibility for that.

The memories that I have of my youth are very vague. For example, when I was two years old, they took me from my mother and brought me to my paternal grandmother who lived on her hacienda El Despoblado, which was relocated a little after my arrival to a place called La Unión, situated in a valley coursed by a rushing river. There I spent the first years of my [2] life tending calves, milking cows, and killing birds in the fields.

My aunts Raimunda and Gregoria taught me to stutter the first letters of the alphabet.

= Alejandro's nephew, son of Alejandro's brother Francisco, who typed the manuscript in the 1930's.

Three other boys, cousins more or less my age, lived on the hacienda, and I played and made mischief with them.

In that time, 1864-1868, my father was employed in one of the ministries in the capital of the Republic, and about 1868 he was named Tax Collector for Chontales with his residence in Juigalpa, the departmental capital.

I only remember two or three episodes from my time on my grandmother's hacienda. Because of the impression they made on me, I still retain the memory of them. One day after a torrential rainstorm I went with the other boys to see the river rising. We came to the bank, and the river course was so completely full, it seemed to threaten to disgorge its water onto the valley flats. With childish joy we began to throw stones at the wooden planks which were channeling the current. A little upstream from us there was a very deep hole, where we often used to swim; we were good swimmers. Some large *guabo* trees spread their branches over the hole. As the river rose, the current there was not very strong; we saw the rapids only in the middle, looking like a crest. We were cocky and having fun in our play: "Here comes an alligator," I said. "No," said [3] another, "It's not an alligator; it's a plank of wood." I said to them, "Let's go and look a little closer. Let's hurry and take our clothes off, climb one of the *guabos*, and from a branch we can see what's going on below. And if you're up to it, we'll be riding on its back!" No sooner spoken than done: a monkey couldn't climb the tree any better. I hung from the end of a branch far out over the water and tried to grab the "alligator" without making a sound. When the reptile passed near my feet, I let myself fall alongside it into the gush. Without a doubt, the animal was terribly frightened, since it immediately plunged. I let go of it and began to swim back to shore. I got out some twenty yards downstream, and when I went to put on my clothes, I felt a painful heat on my buttocks. The spines on the back of the crocodile caused a chafing that bothered me for some time. The animal was some four or five yards long.

On another occasion I had a dispute with a rooster, in which I was defeated. This is what happened: They had given me the workers' lunch, which was served in a *satvilla*, a wooden dish in the form of a tray which contained a groove in the center for the *jícara* cup with *tiste* or *pinol*, a mixture of ground toasted corn and sugar. With the lunch in the tray, I went to the ranch to take it to the hacienda workers. I put it on a large rickety bed and returned to the kitchen for the *jícara de pinol*. When I returned, I found a rooster very smugly gobbling my lunch. What rage that filled me with! I put the *jícara* into the groove and as quickly as I could, I looked for a cord to lasso the [4] rooster and hang it. The first thing I found was a pair of long leather reins, but since the end was knotted, I couldn't pass it through the hole to make a noose. It was necessary to cut the knot. I took a machete that was there, and with my left index finger I held the end of the knot pinched against a wooden plank, trying not to lose an inch of the reins. Precipitously and without thinking, I swung the big machete, and in the process of cutting the knot I lost the tip of my finger. I let out a pained shriek. My grandma and my uncle Luciano quickly came over to me, and I shook the finger whose tip was hanging by the skin. At seeing me, my grandmother shouted, "Boy! Don't shake your finger!" "But, I want it to get better," I answered with tears. The stir on the hacienda was tremendous. They cured me with

home remedies, and after a while the tip of the cut finger healed over, leaving it forever to look like the head of a viper.

One time my father came to the hacienda. I did not know him. I do not recall if he cared much for me, but the fact is that one day he called me. I answered him with "I'm coming," and I did not come to his call until I felt like it. When I approached him, he grabbed me with two hands and asked why I didn't come immediately when he called. I answered with I don't know what lie, and he reproached me with a solemn air, "I am going to punish you so that the next time you will know that when I call you, even if you are holding Christ in your hands, you are to drop him and come immediately." He thrashed me using a bag filled with corn that was nearby. He took one of the straps of the bag and with it [5] he applied a number of lashes on my naked buttocks, which made me tremble with fear, with rage. What do I know! The truth was that that punishment made a permanent impression. The next day this is how I got my revenge: I had gone to the kitchen of the principal house of the hacienda with a stack of earthenware plates to put on the table for lunch, when I heard the ringing voice of my father calling me. Immediately and without hesitating, I dropped the plates to the ground, which were now nothing but shards, and ran to my father who was in the hall. As soon as I got to him, he asked me what the noise was that he had heard (the noise of the plates, which were smashed to bits when they fell). I answered him very calmly that they were some plates that I was bringing for the table, and that when I heard his call I dropped them on the ground, just as he had ordered me to do the day before. He smiled and said, "Very well." My grandmother and aunt were the ones who were angry at the loss of the earthenware, which was what they used when they put long tablecloths on the table.

As I was not afraid of anything or anybody, my aunts, on whom I played many pranks that disgusted them, always tried to scare me in any way they could. One night around eight or nine I was with the other boys in the patio of the hacienda telling stories of ghosts and apparitions, when unexpectedly a black phantom appeared a short distance away, which said with a spooky voice, "These are the boys I want to snatch away." "Siguanabana! The Water Witch!" cried the other boys, and they ran scattering this way and that. The first thing I did was to retreat [6] a little and pick up some stones to throw at it. When on the second or third time I hit the phantom, it threw off its cloak (which was a woman's black horse-riding cape) and shouted in distress, "Calm down, boy. It is I, your aunt!" In fact it was my aunt Raimunda, who had wanted to scare us, but as the stones probably hurt her and she figured she could get her head split open, she saw fit to reveal herself.

-- II --

Life With Father (1868-1876)

Finally, one day they surprised me with the news that they were taking me to Juigalpa to be with my father. The distance from hacienda La Unión to Juigalpa is some seven or eight leagues. I don't recall anything of that trip.

A little time after my arrival in the town, my father put me in the public school, whose teacher was Don Francisco Escorcia, originally from León. (Many years later I learned that he became a cleric.) I attended that school for three or four months.

In the revolution of 1869, of Martínez against Guzmán, in which my father took an active part on the side of the revolutionaries, they brought me back to the hacienda at the side of my grandmother.

I recall this episode from that time: All the workers of the hacienda left to sleep in the nearby woods, for fear that some squad would come in the night to recruit them. Not one man stayed in the hacienda, only an old man who [7] slept near the principal house on a little slope about ten yards from the interior patio of the house. My grandmother and my aunts were accustomed (like all the country people in those places) to get up very early, go to the patio and pass their water. One morning my Aunt Gregoria went to perform that function, the first to rise. She had not finished taking care of her needs when she saw the old man, who was lying down in the bushes on the slope out front and who, without saying a word, gestured for her to come to him and at the same time pointed to his genitals. That scandalized my aunt, and she went to tell my grandmother of the old man's obscenity. My grandmother immediately went to the scene and when she got near the old man, he repeated the same gestures that he had made to my aunt. Then my grandmother went up to the shameless old man and saw with amazement that a viper of the type called *tamagas* was coiled up sleeping on top of the poor old man's genitals. Immediately my grandmother ordered one of my aunts to milk a cow that was waking up in the corral. She put some milk into a dish and placed it near the place where the reptile was sleeping. As soon as it sensed the smell of the milk, it slowly unwound and went with longing to the source of the milk. The old man did not lose his calm and composure, and when that poisonous snake got off of him, he grabbed a stick and killed it. He was still beating it when I woke up, and at the news I went to the scene. I did not know what [8] to admire more, the hero of that tragic-comic episode, or the terrific reptile that was a yard long.

At the end of the 1869 war, my father returned to Juigalpa very ill, suffering from rheumatism. They brought me to his side once more, but I did not go to school any more.

My father lived as if in marriage with Doña Inés Arteaga, with whom he had two children, Francisco, who then was a little more than a year old, and Lastenia who was just born. They used me in the house as a simple servant. I went to get firewood from the nearby forest, to fetch water from El Tempisque or Tamanes, and sometimes I had to go to the river, which was farther away. Another of my daily duties was to go cut hay in a pasture called El Bajo for a beast of my father, which he kept in the stable. Every day, early in the morning, I went to the slaughterhouse to buy meat for the house, and then I would clean the stable.

So I passed the time without much happiness, despite my expansive and joyful character, for the iron mold in which my father kept me did not permit me to have many boyhood frolics. For the most insignificant fault he would whip my skinny backside. My father had a special manner of punishing me: he called me with a ringing voice, and I came immediately after answering him with a "Señor!" He would use the lash, a whip of rawhide with five tails. When he had the lash, he ordered me to bring a stool over to him,

[9] and he told me to take off my pants. Then my whimpering began. "Silence!" he said. "If you cry, I'll whip you harder." "No, Papa, don't do it!" "Silence, I say!" And over the stool, Wham! Wham! he gave me a couple of whacks which were the equivalent of ten lashes, but in a good mood. When I let out a shriek like a stuck pig, my tormentor would impose silence on me again, and slowly he would explain the reason he was punishing me. I left repressing my sobs and buttoned my pants facing, as always, the stable.

I was very happy when one year -- 1871, I think -- my grandmother was coming accompanied by my aunts, my uncle Luciano and a cousin called Leandro. They came to spend the Holy Week that year in Juigalpa. In front of my father's house, a half block away, was my grandmother's house: a few hops and I was at her side telling her my troubles and asking her for doughnuts, buns, and sweet breads, delicacies which she kept in abundance under key in an enormous trunk.

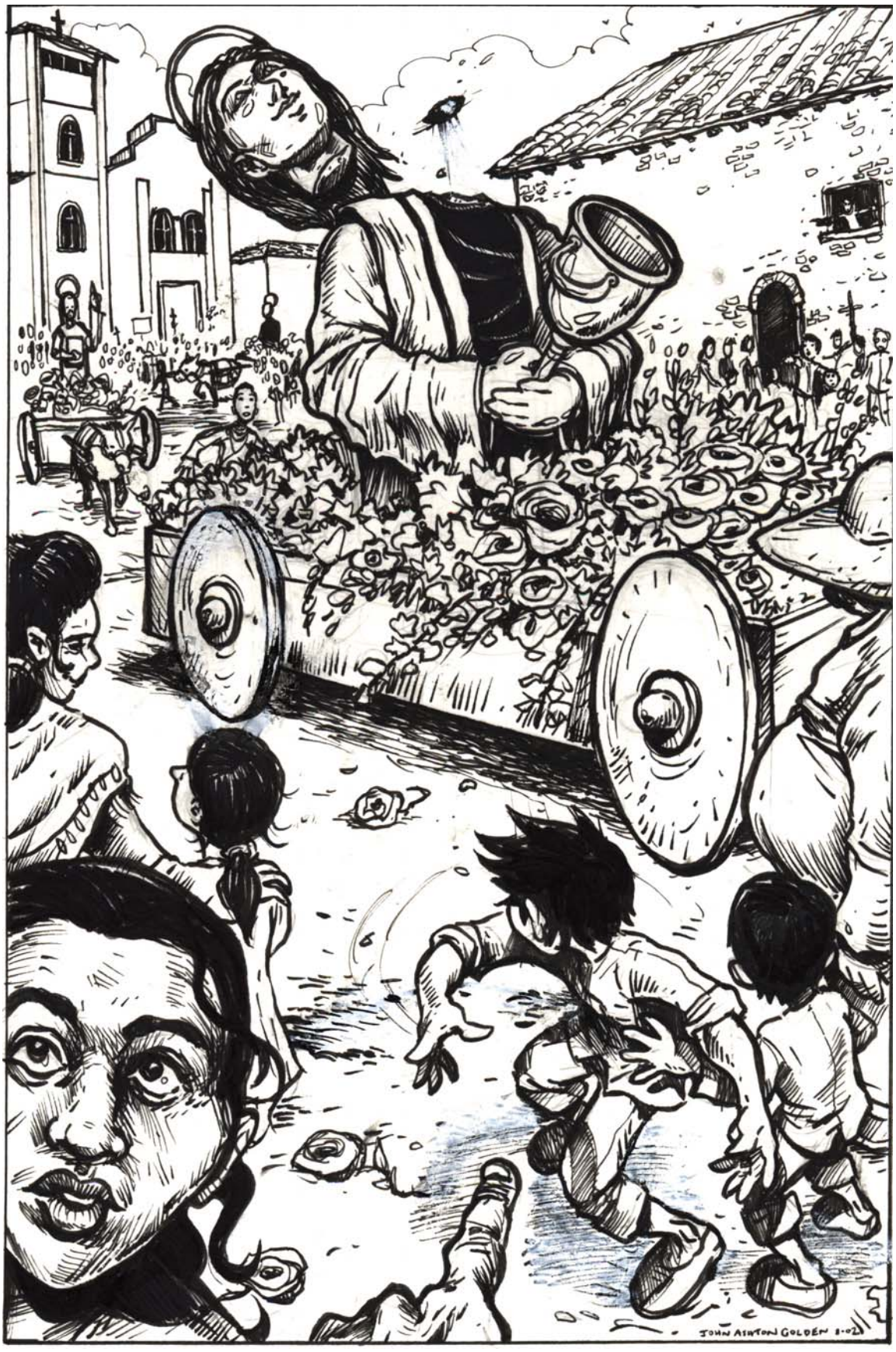
I recall the following memory of my naughtiness during Holy Week that year. Like the rest of the boys in that time, I loved to attend all the processions and all the services of the church, especially at night; not through devotion nor to see the pretty girls, but only to play tricks on the old ladies and the pious women, throwing itching powder (*dolidus pruriens*) on the backs of their necks in such a way that it slips inside; or throwing wax balls into their [10] hair; or even throwing handfuls of *coyol* or *corozo* palm flowers right into their mouths when they opened them to pray.

My cousin Leandro, who was a little younger than I, was my inseparable companion in adventure and villainy. We called ourselves "buddies" and, a strange thing among boys, we never had any quarrels, no differences, thanks perhaps to the docile and gentle character of my buddy.

That was one of the most sensational and solemn holy weeks in the town, since one of the novelties it had was the public display around the plaza of the entire passion of Christ, of the stations of the cross, some of them on stage under branches which served as the scenery. As a matter of fact, even I was tapped to play one of those roles: that of Peter when Christ was preaching in the orchard and the soldiers of Anas and Caifas came. How emphatically I said to Christ, "Master, do you have use for my sword?" and without waiting for an answer -- Wham! -- I slashed off the ear of my friend Malco, a fake ear, granted, but notwithstanding, the edge of my wooden sword scraped the natural one.

In the procession of Good Friday, I remember being with my buddy; it would have been around eight at night. We stopped at a corner to see the parade. One image of a saint passed by, then another. We then saw Saint John in his beatific attitude, with the chalice in his right hand tilted forward a little as if to say, "There is nothing left." As soon as I saw the Evangelist of the Apocalypse coming, with his chalice in front, I said to my cousin, "How much do you want to bet, buddy, that I can throw a stone into Saint John's chalice?" [11]

"No way!" responded my buddy. He had not even finished answering me when I picked up a stone, and -- Ping! Pang! -- the stone sounded like it hit an empty wineglass, but instead of the chalice, what rolled to the ground was the head of the Evangelist saint. The hubbub and commotion that it generated among the people was scandalous, phenomenal. I snuck away into the crowd, but my stupid buddy was stunned; the Police captured him as the presumed author of the deed, and a soldier took him away crying to the jug.


JOHN ASHTON GOLDEN 8-02

Across from where I was with my buddy when I threw the stone at the image of the saint, there was a house with a porch on the street, whose deck was some two meters high. Amidst the outburst of the crowd I managed to climb up on the porch railing, and from that high position I watched the exciting scene. I saw my buddy crying like a baby and protesting that he was not the one who threw the stone. I got down from the railing and threw myself into the multitude until I got near the soldier who was taking him away. I went among them deliberating how to get my poor cousin away from the clutches of the soldier. We must have gone some two blocks when I inadvertently tripped and got tangled up in a thorny branch, called *aromo* or *cachito*, on the side of the street, which was in the remains of a pile of burned grass and garbage. The pricks of those thorns enlightened me with a way to liberate my buddy. I immediately picked up the thorny branch, hunched down like a hunting [12] dog, and reached the soldier without his noticing me. I approached him from behind, got up, and with all my force I struck him on the shoulders with the branch, crying at the same time, "Run, buddy!" The poor little soldier, feeling the sudden pricks in his back from a number of thorns, flinched, let out a barracks epithet, let go of the "prisoner," and jumped on me; but I, quicker than a rabbit, began to run. He followed me, but it was impossible for him to catch me. Meanwhile, my buddy never slowed down or stopped until he got home. The next day the town was talking about nothing but the "sacrilege" committed against the image of the holy Evangelist; and as among the boys of the town I was always held to be the paragon of pranks and travesties, the *vox populi* designated me the author of that irreligious attack, and it was sufficient for my father to make me sing glory on Saturday with a more than excellent tanning; that's why, perhaps, the desire to do other similar pranks in the future left me.

Meanwhile, my father's disease did not abate and, with the aim of getting cured, he decided to move to León in 1872, and he brought me with him. On February 16 (a date which my father recalled to me much later) we left Juigalpa for the little port of San Ubaldo on the Great Lake. We stayed there two days waiting for passage to Granada. Swimming in the lake, I slipped on a rock and suffered a blow to my left shinbone. It swelled up and a few days later the abscess burst and formed a wound that took a long time to heal. I still have the scar. [13]

We arrived in Granada. What a pleasant surprise to see that city!

We lodged in the house of a cousin of my father, Don Celedonio Morales. We stayed there some four days, and later we booked passage on a stagecoach, a carriage pulled by four mules, which took us to Managua passing through Masaya, Nindiri, and the Valley of Gottel. In Managua we stayed in the house of Don Indalecio Bravo, a friend of my father. We were in that city for about a week, and then we went to León, also by stagecoach, passing through Mateare and Nagarote, with a night in La Paz (then called Pueblo Nuevo).

I do not recall anything about our arrival in León. We lived there in a room in the house of the priest, Dr. José María Ocón, situated on the south side of the Seminary in the middle of the block.

My father put himself under the treatment of Dr. Roberto Sacasa, who enjoyed great fame as a physician.

I continued to be a simple servant of my father, without receiving any affection from him, nothing gratifying. My daily duties were to sweep, to go with a stonemason to carry water from the springs at the banks of the Rio Chiquito, and to run all kinds of errands.

After I don't know how many months of being in León, my father put me in the San Ramón School, an annex to the Seminary, directed by a stocky potbellied priest named Gaitán. I attended that school for the space of a month.

I also recall from that time that the only diversions I had were on [14] Sunday afternoons, when my father allowed me to get together with some student boys, sons of the principal families of Juigalpa: Teófilo Montiel, Jacinto Suárez and Adrián Avilés, and at times Carmen Ruiz, the son of my father's laundress, would join us. We went on foot through Subtiaba and Guadalupe, where on several occasions the boys of those barrios would start a stone fight.

It seems that it was at the beginning of November 1872 when my father, now better from his illness, decided we would go to El Salvador, where my uncle/godfather lived, the Reverend Vital Miranda. We made the trip by wagon from León to Barquito (a little old river port, abandoned since the railroad line was established from Corinto to León). From there we went in a boat to Corinto, where we embarked on the steamer *Honduras* which took us to the Salvadoran port of La Unión. (That steamer of the Pacific Mail Co. was wrecked on the sandbar of Lempa on April 24, 1886.)

I still remember the joy of boarding that ship. My father bought second-class passage for the two of us, so they put us in the prow of the ship together with the crew and other rough-looking men. I did not understand the prohibitive rules on board and, enthusiastic over the novelties that I was admiring on that floating house, I went here and there climbing up and down stairs, sticking out of all the portholes and scrutinizing everything. On one of those adventures I came to the principal ladder that led to the [15] dining room. The table service was being prepared. I sat on one of the steps to contemplate the decoration that was so splendid to me then. I was enchanted in my contemplation, when a ruddy potbellied Yankee came up to me speaking his own language. He grabbed me by the ear to yank me out of there. The pull on my ear made me mad and, without hesitating, I grabbed one of his legs with both hands and sunk my teeth into it with all the force of my jaws. The Gringo let go immediately, swearing at me, and left me where I was.

I do not remember our arrival at the port of La Unión, only that we went from there by wagon to San Miguel, and that on the road I was hitched to the tongue of the wagon with my feet in the air. Suddenly, the donkeys left the road, dragging the vehicle along the ground, without giving me time to lift my shins, which were tightly pressed between the strip of land and the bed of the wagon, seriously hurting the instep of my left foot.

After two days and nights we got to San Miguel. The hubbub of the people in the streets was enormous: the whole city was a festival (November 21). Limping along, I accompanied my father through the streets which were filled with transients and Chinese, where every kind of goods and stuff was being sold.

Within two or three days in San Miguel, my father learned that they had transferred my uncle/godfather from the parish of Moncagua to that of La Unión, and that he was [16] performing his duties there. In fact, he sent us well-equipped beasts, and we returned to that port.

During our stay in La Unión, which was more than two years, my father taught primary school. He started a school in which the greater part of the fine and principal youth of the city enrolled. I attended that school and at the same time served as sexton to my stepfather. I swept the church and performed all the duties of an altar boy, without a whit of devotion. In school I surpassed many of my fellow students in my ABC's, but my father was terrible to me. If, for example, he applied the rod twice to one of the students for failing a lesson, he would thrash me four times for the same mistake. In everything I would receive twice the punishment of my fellow students. Thus I learned to read with some correction, to write letters with a good hand, and to solve problems of addition, fractions, and decimals.

On a September 15, on which date our political emancipation was celebrated, at a City Hall social reception the Mayor awarded me a prize of five *bambas* for the recitation of some verses which began: "America, glory speaks your name."

Sometimes my godfather would go to celebrate mass at the neighboring indigenous pueblo of Conchagua and also in Amapala, the nearby port of Honduras. I accompanied him on those excursions of religious traffic.

I think it was in December, 1874, when my papa, my godfather, I and Doña Clara Ortiz, made a voyage to the sanctuary of [17] Esquipulas, Guatemala. This lady was a girl from San Pedro de Lóvago (Chontales) whom my godfather brought to El Salvador, and in his character of Catholic priest, he had her pass for his niece. She called me "uncle."

I could not say exactly how long we were on the road; we went on horseback. I recall that at the entrance to the little settlement called Ocotepeque very early in the morning we drank coffee under a shelter made of branches on the side of the road. They served us some very tasty little tamales, and after the refreshment, my father asked the man what those delicious tamales were made of, and he answered very naturally that they were made of cat. We made many jokes on the road about that -- stuffing tamales with cat.

We arrived at the sanctuary of Esquipulas and stayed in the parish house next to the church. A multitude of pilgrims and merchants camped on the plain that extended almost to the front of the edifice of the Saint, which is situated some 500 yards from the town. The file of penitents who came from afar to enter the church was interminable, incessant, from morning to afternoon, the crudest religious fanaticism overflowing in that ignorant mass.

Behind the church there was a lovely garden pond, and some youngsters about my age invited me to swim there with them. When I got there, I first took off my clothes, and from the edge of the pond I dove [18] into the water, cold as ice. That plunge made a disagreeable impression on me. I swam a little and got out quickly to dress myself. A few hours later an intense fever made me shake, but in two or three days I was running about.

After a stay of six or eight days in the Parish House, we made our return trip to La Unión, passing through San Salvador, a city that was still mostly a rubble from the earthquake of 1873. We arrived in Cojutepeque on January 25, 1875. The town was celebrating the feast of San Sebastian. I remember engaging in one of my deviltries. It was seven at night when I left the hostel, with my father's permission, I suppose, and walking through the rough parts of winding streets, I came to the principal plaza where some folks were gathered. Some boys were playing, throwing burning balls soaked in alcohol at each other. I got right into the game. In that pandemonium of fireballs, nobody was aware of who was throwing the ball at hand. Everyone was laughing and screaming. Soon I received a hit in my side; the blow made me angry, and slowly I picked up the ball to throw it at the one I thought had thrown it at me. All the boys who were near me fled to one side and another, and not finding somebody to throw it at, I threw it with all my force toward a doorway filled with people. The ball hit a public streetlight, smashing it to bits and causing an uproar among the multitude. The Police came, but I [19] had taken to foot and scampered, and I did not breathe easily until I arrived at the hostel.

Finally, we returned to La Unión and continued the same life as before, my father with his school and my godfather with his parish. In those days I had a little Indian pal from Conchagua, whose parents turned him over to my godfather as a servant. He was a little older than I, close to fifteen. We slept in the same bed, and as the filthy boy had the vice of masturbation, it was not long before I acquired it. Dirty destructive vice, that wasted my youth until I was twenty. Ignorant or prudish parents, who let their nubile children (of either sex) sleep together in the same bed, are almost always the ones most responsible for their acquiring that degrading sexual perversion.

One day, one of those aquatic outings was organized with three or four rowboats that went to a point called Chiquirín. A number of women, girls, and gentlemen of the principal families of the port went with us. We arrived at the point around nine in the morning, and then we decided to go bathing on the other side of the point or cape that was formed there. The waves there rose some three yards high and noisily crashed against the beach. All of us boys went about a block away from where the women were bathing. One of the oarsmen and I had gone swimming farther out, beyond the cresting waves, when we saw that the women had left the water and were waving their hands and arms to get us to come [20] to them. We could not guess what their gestures were for. The boys who were on shore ran along the coast to where the women were. The oarsman and I swam in the same direction, and when we got close, above the water some distance from shore we saw a small mass that looked like a coconut, and now and again arms were raised as if calling for help. Immediately we understood that one of the women was drowning and went to her as rapidly as dolphins, and when we got to her, we agreed without hesitating that while one of us would go under to lift the woman's head out of the water, the other would push her to shore. So we were taking her, little by little and with much effort, until we reached a point where our feet touched bottom. When others who were ashore came and took the woman in their arms, she seemed lifeless. Then on shore under the branches of a tree, she was placed mouth open with a chunk of wood under her stomach, and they tried I don't know how many other things which produced a happy

result. That beautiful woman came back to life, who was no less than the wife of the English Consul in La Unión, Mr. Harrison, who after the rescue insisted that I accept a sum of money in payment for saving his wife. I did not accept; I ceded the amount to my heroic companion.

It was in that time when I acquired the first venereal disease that scared me and made me weak. I "cured" myself with injections and drinks that a friend advised me to take. Naturally, since I did not have anyone to guide me in affairs of sexual hygiene, I got wound up with the first available one at hand: a house servant. [21] How evil the hour when I fell on my face into that filthy pond! That was an entirely bestial act, due in great part to the vice of onanism I had acquired.

-- III –

Breaking Away (1876-1881)

I am not sure what year we returned to Nicaragua; it seems that it was at the beginning of 1876. My father, Doña Clara with her son Toño, who was not even a year old, his nurse, and I came aboard a small schooner to Corinto, from there to Barquito in a launch, and from there to León by wagon. My godfather Vital came by land on his own beasts, accompanied by a nitwit servant called Chicho. We met in León and from this city we went to Chontales on horseback. The nurse of Doña Clara's son returned to La Unión.

When we got to Chontales, my father and I stayed in Juigalpa, and my godfather with Doña Clara and her son went to San Pedro de Lóvago. My godfather was named parish priest of that town, where the parents of Doña Clara lived.

A little time after coming to Juigalpa, my father dedicated himself to peddling, and I served him as a servant, helping him with all his deals. On a trip we made to San Pedro de Lóvago as peddlers, I had the opportunity to get to know my mother. I hadn't retained the remotest memory of her. My poor mother! She was an Indian of pure race, her gentle face still reflecting the grace and beauty of her distant youth. She was living in a miserable straw hut on the outskirts of that little town. Some of her children lived with her: Joséfa (now a widow), Pedro Santiago, and Simona, who was the baby of the family. They all embraced me with affection. [22]

We often went to Granada to buy merchandise that we would sell house-to-house in all the towns and byways of Chontales. On two or three occasions we went to San Miguel, El Salvador, for the fairs held during Lent and in November. From there we would bring woolen cloth, Guatemalan fabrics and other articles in high demand among our clientele.

My life during that whole time was very bitter: subjected to all kinds of physical labor, I had no distractions, not a single hour of rest. If I committed some error in whatever I was doing, the whip-of-five-tails fell on my skinny shoulders without mercy. One time, cutting firewood on the patio of the house, either through ineptitude or carelessness, I injured the big toe of my left foot with the blade of the hatchet. I did not let out a wail then, for fear that my father would find out. I went to the kitchen and asked the cook (a good-natured Indian named Secundina) for a little salt to rub into the wound.

The cook, when she saw the amount of blood flowing out of the wound, cried out in fright. Doña Inés and my brother Pancho (Francisco) came and from the loud fuss that they made, my father also came and, strange thing for me, he did not punish me. He limited himself to saying, "What a stupid boy!" and turned and left.

The only consolation and relief I had for the pains I had then was to go to my grandmother Isabel's home; she would caress me with her trembling hands.

Meanwhile, in the course of more than two years, my father had prospered in his business. He had a shop well stocked with merchandise and had bought several pack mules, which I managed together with a servant named López, lame [23] in his right leg but very good at the rough knockabout work of leading pack animals. I went with him to Granada to get merchandise for my father. On other occasions, in the rainy season, we went to the little ports of Guapinolapa (now badly named Puerto Díaz) and San Ubaldo. We also went to San Pedro de Lóvago to get sweets (corn sugar). I passed pleasant hours there with my poor mother and my brother Pedro, who was dear to me.

When we returned from a trip we made to San Miguel, El Salvador, around the middle of December, 1878, my father celebrated his marriage with Doña Inés Arteaga, thus legitimizing the two children he had with her, Pancho and Lastenia. That marriage greatly displeased my grandmother Isabel and had a lot to do with her encouraging me to leave the tyrannical power of my father. In fact, on the night of December 31, I decided to leave home. My grandmother gave me a few *reals* and, in the company of José Blas Castilla, who treated me like a brother, I took the road to San Ubaldo, because he had offered to accompany me up to there. In San Ubaldo I boarded a canoe which took me to Granada where I joined up with Domingo Ramírez, a boy from Juigalpa who was a very good friend. I invited him to go to Costa Rica, and he accepted enthusiastically.

In the early morning of January 6, 1879, we left Granada, Ramírez and I, and after chasing around we took the road to Rivas, making a good pair of vagabonds, whose capital rose to no more than three pesos. We spent the night on the banks of the Ochomogo river under a great c*hilamate* tree. We were sleeping well, very late at night, when [24] a tremendous noise woke us up. A furious hurricane shook the trees. A fat branch of the *chilamate*, the trunk of the branch, fell with a thud a half yard from our heads. If it had fallen on us, we would not have felt our death. As it was clearing up at daybreak, we shook off our drowsiness and began to walk. We came to sleep on the porch of a hacienda house near Rivas. The next day we passed through that town and went to sleep in a little house where we were given lodging, in the suburbs of San Juan del Sur. The next day we continued on the road that led to the Costa Rican border. At the exit of San Juan del Sur, we saw a work gang that was beginning to open the right-of-way for the telegraph line between Nicaragua and Costa Rica. We came to sleep in a settlement called El Ostional, and the next day we bedded down in La Cruz. There I sold a silk handkerchief (bought in Granada for 14 *reals*) for a *real*-and-a-half to buy food, since our treasury had run out.

On the sixth day of our journey we slept in Sapoa. From there we left very early in the morning, because they informed us that we would have to cross a very extensive, completely deserted plain. The only provisions we carried were a tin of sugar and one corn tortilla. By noon we were still walking through the sterile planes of Sapoa. The dryness was consuming us. As soon as we saw a row of green shrubs, we quickened our

steps believing we would come upon the longed-for liquid, but when we got to the place of hope, the only signs we saw were the little streambeds from which water would run in the rainy season. Finally, almost dead of thirst and fatigue, in one of those gullies we found a pool all covered [25] with a layer of green slime. With what yearning we drank that muddy water! Later we saw on one of the banks of the pond the skeleton of a steer devoured by the *zopilote* buzzards. We also ran into the remains of a bunch of *coyole* palm fruit, with whose nuts we completed our lunch: sugar, corn tortilla, and *coyole* nuts. It was beginning to get dark when we arrived at a pool in a place called Potrerillos. There they gave us a pair of roasted plantains and we went to sleep.

The next day we got under way, feeling down and out, our stomachs tied in knots. Walking and walking, we arrived around eleven in the morning at the banks of the Colorado River. With pleasant surprise we met some of our countrymen there, who were lunching peacefully at the edge of the river. It was Don David Báez who was bringing a herd of cattle to the interior of Costa Rica. With him were his brother Carlos, Ubaldo Calero, a good friend of mine, and other boys from Juigalpa. They invited us to eat, and the only thing we did not lack was an appetite. How we stuffed ourselves with beef jerky and fried tortillas! We told Don David about our odyssey in a few words, and he suggested that we could join the cattlemen of the herd. Thus we went until we got to Liberia. There were four hundred young bulls in the herd.

We spent the night about a league from the town on a plain without pasturage. I had picked up a good fat armadillo on the road, and as soon as the herd was rounded up and the camp set up, Calero, Ramírez, and I began to slaughter the armadillo, cook the meat in a pot, and fry it later in a pan. When we finished those *haute cuisine* culinary operations, the three of us formed a circle [26] and with big appetites we began to work our jaws. That armadillo pig-out was Pantagruelian! But poor Calero got sick. In the early morning he was dying of strong indigestion. For that reason he decided to stay in Liberia, and I too, taking care of him. We went to lodge in the house of a Señor Urbina, recommended by Don David. Ramírez, my traveling companion, continued as a muleteer with the cattle herd, and I never heard of him again.

After two or three days in Liberia, Calero recovered completely. One day a friend and countryman, Luis Munguía, ran into us. The three of us decided to go to Puntarenas, but since we did not have the necessary money for the trip, we resolved to work for a couple of weeks as day laborers, working with machetes on a farm of Señor Urbina, earning four reals per day plus food. When that time was over, we set out and arrived in Bagaces. There we had to stay two days, waiting for a boat to land at Bebedero, a little river port, which is a few miles from Bagaces. I recall that when we went there one Sunday looking for something to amuse ourselves, we came upon a billiard room. Calero and Munguía began to play "thirty-one." I was looking on, and some of the regulars invited me to play dominos. I did not know any more about that game than what they call "cover the numbers." However, I accepted the invitation and we began to play. After two or three rounds, I lost some four reals, and I was just about to quit the game when I began to win and win, without knowing what I was doing, until finally the other players retired, all of them losers. I won some four or five pesos [27], and those Ticos were convinced that I was a great dominos player.

The next day we went to Bebedero. When we arrived, there still was no steamer that would take us to Puntarenas. Calero and Munguía went in a canoe to the other side

of one of the two rivers that join there, with the purpose of buying food. In the afternoon Calero came back and told me that he had met a ring of dice players with a lot of dough. They had the sudden impulse to make a lot of money without working, and they got into the game and lost all the money they had. So he was asking me to give him my savings to go and recover what they lost, since they had profound hopes of winning it back. I didn't make any objection and even gave him my last cent.

In the evening Señor Urbina came to the little port and was going to San José via Puntarenas. He asked about my companions, and I said they had gone in search of food on the other side of the river. As soon as Señor Urbina got off the beast he was riding, I offered to help him unsaddle. Then he took a good portion of some appetizing provisions from his saddlebag and invited me to join him in the grub, so I didn't have to beg. It was around eight when my companions returned: without a cent in their purses. They had lost it all in the damn game. To get out of the jam, Calero, who had Don David's blank check for Señor Urbina, asked him for four or five pesos, with which we could pay our passage.

Later that night the little steamer arrived, and very early in the morning it weighed anchor for Puntarenas, where we arrived at I don't know what hour. We lodged in the hostel that belonged to some Chinese, recommended by Señor Urbina. Right away each one of us looked for work. I found [28] a job in the Customs warehouse. I worked there some four days, loading sacks of coffee. The next week I went to work at a liquor depot, transferring rum from some large pipes to some demijohns. One day I joined Calero at the house for lunch. We were finishing dinner when some police agents showed up and took us by force to work in a coal yard. For two or three days they had us in that little hell filling sacks with soft coal and carrying them on our backs to a little river wharf, from which they were taken in launches to the side of the steamer *Irazu*, a national war ship. We were left good and black and badly dusted from the "charcoaling" that the port police furnished us.

Two or three days after that incident (early February, 1879) the steamer *Granada* anchored in the port. I had nothing to do and went to the wharf in search of work. There I learned that on board the steamer they were hiring workers to go work on the railroad of Guatemala. I immediately decided to sign up. I returned to the hostel, paid my bill, took leave of Calero and Munguía, gathered my gear, and went back to the wharf, where I arranged my transport to the ship by rowing a boat. There they signed me up for work. The steamer weighed anchor and I left Puntarenas, always remembering the "charcoaling" they had given me.

After some days of navigation, the steamer anchored in San José de Guatemala and we disembarked. Some eighty of us workers were destined for labor on that railroad, which then began construction from the port to the Capital of the Republic. I arrived very ill, with severe dysentery. All the workers went [29] to a camp called El Naranjo, not far from San José, and we began to work. I felt it was impossible for me to work, but they demanded it of me, though I wouldn't have to excavate with pick and shovel. The work was crude, the food was the worst, and the bosses treated us harshly.

After six days in that prison camp, I was able to make a secret agreement to escape with six other workers, and at an unlikely hour in the night, we beat it for El Salvador, guided by one of the companions who knew the road. It was hard for me to

walk. Fortunately, a little late in the the second day on the road we came to a cattle hacienda at milking time. I asked for a little buttermilk, and I drank up a gourdful with pleasure. I felt a great relief in my stomach at once; I lay down on a hide and slept peacefully for a couple of hours, and then we hit the road. That's how I cured that terrible dysentery, and in eight or nine days we reached Acajutla. In that Salvadoran port we all split up, and I stayed there working on the docks as an oarsman on the launches or as a stevedore in the warehouses.

Among the stevedores were two young little Negroes about my age, originally from Roatán, the Honduran island in the Caribbean Sea. They had come seeking their fortune, like the son of my mother. They were good workers and very formal, and they had no vices at all. I grew fond of them, and we became good friends. We lived together in a [30] place we rented. One Sunday morning a steamer of the Kosmos line anchored some distance from the wharf. The sea was exceedingly rough, to the extent that the waves washed over the deck of the wharf, whose height is some eight meters above water level. The Director of the Commission House who had to go aboard that steamer to get the papers or bills of lading (a Señor Lechuga), directed me and four other oarsmen to go to the ship. No one was in a mood to deal with that furious sea. Only my two little black companions were disposed to take on the job, nothing pleasant for sure. Finally, with the offer of good pay, I got together with the other two and we walked to the wharf. We were having a lot of trouble getting the Director into the launch; the boat was dancing a saraband of eleven thousand demons. I was lifting the governor for the embarkation. When we got on board the steamer, the sailors received us with hurrahs and acclamations, and treated us with beer and food. Upon our return, it occurred to Señor Lechuga to climb up the ladder of the wharf, instead of waiting for the promised land, and one of those documents he was carrying on board fell into the water. As soon as he climbed up, he yelled, "Twenty-five pesos to the one who fetches that paper!" The oarsmen were climbing the ladder, and only I remained in the boat, waiting for the hook from the crane to hoist it with the winch. When that was done, I went to the end of the wharf and saw the paper floating some five meters away. Immediately I took my clothes off and dove into the water. When I came to the surface, a large wave violently slapped me against [31] the pilings of the wharf. I embraced one of them with all my strength and looked to see where the paper was. I detected it over the crest of a wave and swam toward it. I got it, stuck it in my mouth, and returned to the wharf and climbed up the ladder. The multitude of workers and passersby who were observing from above cheered me when I got up on the wharf. Nobody believed that I would get out of that reckless action alive. Today I would not do it again for any amount of money. The barnacles on the piling I embraced made several cuts on my body, from which blood was flowing, making me look like a San Sebastian riddled by arrows. From that day on I enjoyed no little prestige among the workers of the port.

On another occasion, about fifteen of us workers were hauling a car carrying bags from the wharf to the front of the Customs. The car rolled over rails on a very steep incline. Half of the men were in front pulling the car with a cable, and the others pushing it from behind. I was in this group. On my side was a chap who was famous in the port for being a "big man" and a hooligan besides, for which everyone was respecting him.

There was a moment in which the car stopped on the slope. That chap, who was at my side, began to reprimand those who were pulling the cable, treating them like slackers and idlers. As I had observed that that chap was only resting his hands on the top of the side of the car, without making any effort to push it, I looked him in the face and said that he should not treat the others as idlers, since he was the best example, simply resting his hands [32] on the car without pushing it. His only response was to jump on me and punch me in the left cheek (without giving me a chance to defend myself) which spun me half around. My ears rang; I saw thousands of sparks before my eyes, and I felt a burning sensation run through my neck. I ran my hand over it, and when I saw it full of blood, a wave of anger swept up to my head. Immediately I pounced on my adversary, who was not expecting a counter-attack, and I punched him in the pit of the stomach, again and again, without giving him time to defend himself, until he rolled to the ground. I went face to face with him and kicked him until he gave in to me. Meanwhile, the other workers had placed wedges under the wheels of the car and had climbed the walls of the path, from where they celebrated the beating I was giving that cock-of-the-walk, crying, "Bravo, little Nicaraguan! Bravo, little Nicaraguan!" Nobody intervened in the fight. The boss came and helped that wretch get up, who remained completely silent, and he went home. Examining the punch I had received and from which I was bleeding, I decided that around the left ear there was the scab from a cigarette burn I had caused a few days before while playing with one of my little Negro companions, and that the punch had knocked the scab loose, and it was from there that the blood flowed as if it was an injury. When the hubbub was over, we all went back to work. What was most strange to those crude workers, as they later told me, was the enormous difference in size between that pretty chap and myself who seemed like a summer worm. (I have not been able to recall the name of the chap, whose end was very tragic. One night [33] at work, a launch killed him against the pilings of the wharf).

My stay in Acajutla was about four months. One of those days I agreed with my two black friends and another Salvadoran boy that we would to go to San Salvador. We began to walk. We passed through Sonsonate (there was no railroad then), Izalco, Armenia and Santa Tecla, until we arrived in San Salvador in two or three days. We lodged in the Salvadoran boy's house. The next day we went into the streets, the two little Negroes and I, with the purpose of seeking work and getting to know the city. We stopped at a corner of the Central Park. We were peacefully minding our own business when two Police Agents came up to ask us our names, where we were from, and what we were doing. We answered the questions, and immediately they took us to the barracks, where they made us pass a night as in El Alcazar. Around ten the next morning we were brought before a functionary with a ferocious face, who asked us several questions, almost all of them crafty. Later they led us to the presence of the President of the Republic, who was Dr. Rafael Zaldívar. He interrogated us in person over the same points as the functionary with the ferocious face did, inquiring, as we presumed, about facts pertaining to a revolutionary plot. When the President finished his interrogation, he ordered us put at liberty and gave us each a silver peso. At once we found work in a house that was being constructed in front of the Cathedral.

After some three weeks, we went to La Unión, the two black boys and I, [34] passing through Cojutepeque, San Vicente and San Miguel. In this city the black boys left me and took the road to Honduras. I went alone to La Unión. What reminiscences I had when I returned to that port where I spent my adolescent days! A little old rich woman lived there, Doña Chón Escobar, who was very active in politics. Her lodging house was frequented by all the Nicaraguans who came to that port, and especially the political émigrés. She was a very good friend of my father, and she was the grandmother of a classmate of mine, José María Escobar. I showed up looking beaten, and she welcomed me tenderly, giving me asylum in her home. I looked for work right away and found a job at a house that Don Antolín de Vicente was building. I worked there some two or three weeks as a laborer earning three *reals* a day. Then I agreed to be an oarsman on a launch that made constant trips to the nearby port of Amapala. Finally, in a month and a half, I came to Corinto in a bongo, earning my passage as a merchant marine.

In Corinto I passed the days very embittered. I was not finding work, nor did I have food. There were days when my only food was *icaco* and *guayaba* fruits that I went to find on the west coast of the port. I slept in a miserable shack in which there lived a prostitute called Vicenta who, sympathetic with my unhappy situation, let me sleep on a rickety old bed of sticks. By chance I met a Chinese who had a little boat in which he often took passengers [35] to Realejo and Barquito. He was in need of an oarsman, and I reached an understanding with him that I be paid three reals for each trip. One day we brought a Gringo to Realejo, who had recently arrived from California and wanted to establish himself in the country. He didn't understand the Spanish language beyond a few words. When we got to Realejo, I was happy to look for a house for him, and with a few words that I garbled in English, we understood each other about necessary things, for which he insisted that I stay with him. I returned to Corinto where I collected my few things, and on the following trip I stayed with the Gringo in Realejo.

It happened that at that time I contracted my second case of gonorrhea, which made it impossible for me to work hard. I told the story of my setback to that Gringo, so at least I was assured of a place under a roof and didn't suffer any more hunger.

After a few days in that little town of Realejo, which once was a very busy port, one Sunday afternoon I went into the street without any particular purpose, and I ran into the Alcalde (mayor) of the town. I recognized him as such because he was carrying the classic staff with blue and white silk tassels, which was the symbol of municipal authority in that time. At seeing me, he demanded my assistance, ordering me to follow him, and I did so. Then, a little farther on, we met two or three other individuals who also had to follow the Señor Alcalde. We walked several blocks to the end of town and came to a place where there was a group of men armed with machetes and sticks, which they were waving at a man armed with an enormous shiny curved machete [36] with which he was threatening to kill anyone who came near. Nobody dared to make a pass at him. The Alcalde demanded that he surrender, but that did not happen. He was there like a corralled beast. I went up to the Alcalde and in a low voice told him that if he would authorize me, I would make that wild man surrender. On the spot he said yes, I had the authorization. I picked out a stone, told the group to give me room, and threw the tear of Saint Peter at the head of the rebel without giving him a chance to duck. He fell to the ground like he was hit by lightening. Everybody jumped on him; they tied him up, and

he was carried to the jail where he came to in a few hours. The stone had hit him right under his right ear. Afterwards I learned that he had killed two people in a fight, and I believe that if I had not subdued him with my favorite weapon, he would have escaped the hands of those who were after him.

After more than a week of being with that Gringo, I felt worse from my disease and decided to come to León. My capital amounted to some six reals. A brief day trip brought me to this city, passing through Chinandega, Chichigalpa, Quezalguague and Posoltega. I stayed in the house where my old friend Carmen Ruiz lived, a miserable hovel in the barrio of El Laborio. My old childhood friend was living there with his mother and sister Dolores, poor people who with difficulty earned what was necessary to keep from dying from hunger. They welcomed me amiably, and they fraternally shared with me the little food they had. In two or three days I went to the house of Don Esteban Gutiérrez, a great [37] friend of my father, with whom we had traveled before to the fairs of San Miguel. I told him about my situation, and he very kindly told me to move into his house, situated in the south side on the eastern corner of the Central Market. Doña Joaquína, the wife of Don Esteban, treated me like a son. I helped out around the house with all kinds of tasks and managed not to be idle for a moment. In a few days the disease I was suffering from got worse. My testicles were swollen monstrously because of the force I exerted lifting a 150-pound sack of sugar, and I was obliged to take to bed. Don Esteban called Don Rafael Icaza to attend me as a physician, and the latter ordered me to apply linseed poultices fried in pig fat, and he also prescribed other medicines from his boutique, with which I was cured in fifteen or twenty days.

I felt recovered when my father arrived from Chontales to lodge in the house of Don Esteban. It was a great distress for me to have to see my father, but both Don Esteban and Doña Joaquína vigorously insisted that I humbly ask forgiveness from my rigid father. For two days I resisted putting myself through this humiliation, but I finally gave in, and kneeling down I asked his pardon for the wrong of leaving his side. He was satisfied with this demonstration of humility, conceded the pardon, and told me that we would go to Chontales. There he would give me a train of outfitted pack mules so I could work with them, and I would get a third of the profits from the trips, but with the obligation of carrying his cargo free of charge. That spontaneous offer of my father pleased me greatly, and [38] I put myself at his service again with much good will. A few days later we went to Juigalpa, and when we got there the first thing my father did was to give me twelve mules outfitted for cargo.

Assisted by a chap called Fernando, I made constant trips with that mule team to Granada, San Ubaldo, Guapinolapa, and other places where there was work. Upon returning from each trip, I reported to my father and paid him the entire amount of the freightage. He told me that he was carrying the account and would liquidate it at the end of the year, but the truth was that I did not manage to get one cent, and I could not satisfy the desires of my youth. That bothered me exceedingly.

In that time my stepmother Doña Inés Arteaga had employed as a seamstress in the house a little olive-skinned girl called Cornelia Mejía, a joyful sort and very attractive. That girl aroused the most intense feeling of love in me, and she responded in abundance. That was my first true love. Raised under the yoke of crude labor and a

regime of rigid discipline, without feeling a caress, a gratification that would arouse tender affections in my heart, my existence was slipping down an arid slope, without hopes or charms. But when I knew and had dealt with Cornelia, my spirit rejoiced, and I felt a longing to be somebody and to leave that miserable state in which I found myself.

As soon as my stepmother understood that I was in love with Cornelia, she removed her from the house, under what pretext I do not know. But our loves [39] were not interrupted on account of that. Almost every night I went to visit her in her house. Her parents always received me fondly. In that time there arrived from Juigalpa a subject who said he was a topographical engineer, originally from Rivas, whose name I still do not recall. That individual was playing the ladykiller and became an assiduous courtier of Cornelia. He would come to her house two or three times a day until finally, at the request of Cornelia, I resolved to put an end to the intrusion, which invaded my loves like a Jesuit. One night I waited for him on a corner near Cornelia's house, and I hit him with a couple of punches and knocked him down like a fighting bull, which made him run away breathless. That was enough to keep him from continuing with his Don Juan impertinencies. From my loves with Cornelia a girl was born who was named Rosa: she died at the age of four.

Some eight or nine months had passed since I took charge of my father's mules, and I saw nothing clear on my moral and economic horizon. I did not enjoy the product of my labor, and every day I felt more and more the need to have money. So on October 6, 1880, I decided to free myself from my father's power and met with him to tell him in all frankness that it was not worth it to continue in his service. Showing much disgust, he said these very words, in a spiteful way, "All right, go where you want, but know that some day you will regret leaving my side." Forty years have passed, and I do not feel sorry for having taken that step. As to the third part [40] of the income from the mule carrying, which he was saving for me, he gave me nothing. I made a little sack of my few clothes and went to the house of a friend who had offered me lodging.

A few months later my grandmother Isabel died. I cried disconsolately. I knew that in her will she had left me her cattle brand and some cattle, but they never gave me anything, nor did I take the occasion to know whether it was true.

After I left my father, I did day work for a few days. Then I arranged with Don Elías Ríos to manage a mule train, with which I made several trips to Granada, and finally I contracted with Don Jesus Acuña to take the National Mail bag from Juigalpa to Granada, Acoyapa, and La Libertad. I made the trip on foot, with the bag on my shoulders. To go the whole route (Juigalpa-Granada-Juigalpa-Acoyapa-La Libertad-Juigalpa) was scheduled to take five days, but I almost always made it in four. That brought admiration from the administrators of the mail offices and from Acuña himself. On one occasion when my adored Cornelia had gone to Granada with a friend, and I had the desire to be with her there, I left Juigalpa at three in the morning and arrived in Granada at eight the same night (24 leagues). The following day I left the mailbag at the office and went to a farm about a mile outside the city where Cornelia was waiting for me. There I spent the day and the night, draining the last drops from the cup of love. [41] The next day when I returned to Juigalpa, I walked together with Cornelia and her friend.

In February of 1881, I learned that in Managua they were recruiting young men to enter a national Telegraph School, where they would receive free instruction in that art, and without vacillating I went there with the firm intention of being a telegrapher. My mail contract had expired and I did not want to renew it because of some of the things that Señor Acuña did to me. I got my things together and set out for the Capital riding the whole way, it seemed, on the mules of Saint Francis. As soon as I got to Managua, I asked for the lodging house of Don David Báez, who was then Senator from Chontales and who knew me perfectly well. I spoke with him in the house of Señor Barcenas, and I told him of my desire, letting him also know of my penury, for which I was thinking of getting a job as a servant to earn enough to eat. Immediately he accepted my idea and told me to accompany him to the National Hotel, the only hotel there was in Managua then, where he knew that they needed a bartender. We went to the hotel, and he spoke with the owner, Mr. Juan Brown. Don David guaranteed my honesty and diligence, and I was hired on the spot. I earned twenty pesos per month, plus room and board and laundry, and besides that, received permission to attend the Telegraph School.[42] Right away we went to the Telegraph School, situated in front of the hotel, and I had no trouble enrolling as a student.

So I began to work in my new job as a bartender, and from two to four in the afternoon I went to school without having the remotest idea what the telegraph was. Those signs and telegraph equipment were an intricate labyrinth for me. My hand, calloused and awkward, accustomed only to rough work, was not shaped for working the key of the tapper, and sometimes I made the lever jump, separating it from its springs. On more than one occasion I thought that I would never learn how to make the signs of the telegraphic alphabet. However, my desire was vehement, and with tenacity I persevered in the apprenticeship until, on May 31, 1881, the schoolmaster, Don Miguel Vélez, Jr., presented me with the Certificate of Achievement, which reads as follows:

> "Miguel Vélez, Jr., Director of the National School of Telegraphy of the Republic of Nicaragua, certifies:
>
> "That the young man Alejandro Miranda, resident of Juigalpa, has completed the class with punctuality, observing an irreproachable conduct in it, and therefore has acquired the knowledge necessary in the art of Telegraphy for the good employment of any office of the Republic.
>
> "And, for uses that young Miranda finds convenient, I extend the present, which I sign in Managua on the 31st day of May in the year 1881.
>
> "Miguel Vélez, Jr.
>
> "Approved by J. A. Román (General Manager of Telegraphs)."

It is true that I could not decode a message by ear, but since the receiving apparatus was then equipped with a paper tape on which the signs of the message were recorded, it was enough to tap out and read the stream of code in order to perform the job of telegrapher. [43]

On the following June 10, I received from the Ministry of Interior the appointment as Telegrapher of Matagalpa, without having asked for it. Since the assistant secretary in charge of the office of that ministry (on which the telegraph branch

then depended), Don Agustín García, assured me that I would not be able to move to Matagalpa for a month, because the work on the construction of the line still had not been finished, I decided to go to Juigalpa with the principal object of seeing my adored Cornelia, who learned she was being met in an interesting way. With the little money I saved from my bartender's salary, I bought shoes and a sack suit, and with that outfit I transformed myself into a genteel king's page. I arrived in Juigalpa, embraced Cornelia, and returned to Managua.

Finally, on July 28, I left for Matagalpa together with Juan José Vélez and José Bravo. Bravo was to take charge of the Metapa (now Ciudad Darío) office, and Vélez, as Inspector of Telegraphs, was in charge of inaugurating those offices and putting us in possession of them.

-- IV --

Matagalpa, the Indian War, and the Telegrapher (1881)

My arrival in Matagalpa to discharge the duties of a public office, in a position that in those times cloaked its occupant with a certain mysterious character, formed a new era in my life. Through the force of constancy and tenacity, I finally succeeded in freeing myself from the miserable rustic state in which I had been raised and entered, as it were, another social sphere, as a man who thinks and reflects on surmounting [44] the burdens of life and not like the ox who unconsciously pulls the wagon.

Arriving at Metapa, Inspector Vélez arranged to leave Bravo there to finish setting up the office. He and I went on to Matagalpa. When we arrived, we were able to work on installing the batteries and getting the office ready to communicate with Metapa. But nothing worked. Either the line was broken or Bravo had switched the poles of his battery. In face of this uncertainty Vélez decided that I should return to Metapa and see what was wrong.

In those days there had been alarms in Matagalpa over reports of an uprising of the Indians.

Some two or three days before our arrival in that city, Don Enrique Solórzano had been put in charge of the Prefecture (now Political Chief) of that Department, replacing Don Gregorio Cuadra, who had made the indigenous caste of those places hostile, according to public rumor.

The Prefect Señor Solórzano arranged for a beast for my return to Metapa. They gave me a mule with a bad saddle and put me on the road very early on the fifth of August. I didn't have any problems on the trip, and when I came to Metapa around five in the afternoon, I proceeded immediately to examine the batteries and apparatus of the office, and everything was all right. I got in touch with Managua, but with Matagalpa it was impossible. The line was undoubtedly broken.

At five the following morning I started back to Matagalpa. [45] Around noon under a hard dog-star sun, I was going slowly by the point called Loma Larga, trying to avoid the depression from the solitude of the road by killing horse flies that, like swarms of bees, were attacking the neck of the patient mule. Soon I saw that the telegraph line

there was missing some poles. I went up close to see if it was possible to put them back together, but I noted that besides the line being broken, a long stretch of it was missing. Getting the beast back on the road, I saw an old man coming from the direction of Matagalpa on foot, with some saddlebags on his shoulders. When we got close, we greeted each other, and he asked me with an indifferent air:

"Where are you from, little friend?"

"From Managua," I answered.

"From Managua!" he replied, with admiration. "Then you do not know what is happening here?"

"I don't know anything," I said, "So what is going on?"

"Huh...the Indians have risen up and have set siege to Matagalpa, blocking all the roads. On this side they have a reserve force in Pajal (Pastal) and another in Las Tejas. They won't let anybody in or out. This morning they detained two men who came from Matagalpa and they have them prisoners in Pajal. And if you go there, they will take you too, for sure. And...look, I'm going to give you some advice. Don't tell them you have come from Managua but from León. I know what I'm talking about."

After this dialogue with the little old man, I left him, giving thanks for his counsel, and I continued on my way without worrying much about the news that he [46] gave. On arriving at the little valley of Yaule, I went to a house to ask for water. There a little Ladina woman told me, with details, of the capture of two boys, one called Benedicto Vega and the other Juan José Vélez, that morning by the Indians in nearby Pajal. That report hit me intensely, but it did not make sense for Vélez not to have waited for my return to Matagalpa before going to Metapa. Thinking about this, I went on my way, ready to encounter the Indians. Going down the stream that is around Yaule, I met an individual who came on foot. I greeted him and asked where he came from. He said Matagalpa.

"Then it is not true that there are Indians in Pajal?"

"But there are, he answered, and they won't let anybody pass."

"And how did you make it through, my friend?"

"Ah! I came through Las Tejas, leaving the river path and going through the woods on the hill."

"And could I get through there?"

"Yes, easily. When you get to a little house that is on this side of the river, follow the bank around a garden, and there you can go up the hill, almost on the side of the river, until you reach the telegraph line on the other side of Pajal. Once you are there, you won't have any danger."

"Perfect. And many thanks. But tell me where is the entrance to the road that leads to Las Tejas?"

"From here go a quarter of a league and you will see a little road on the right. [47] Follow that and you are going to take a little right to Las Tejas."

I kicked the mule and followed the road looking for the path that the man had indicated. Not much later I reached it and followed it, but I was soon perplexed when I came to another road besides the one I was following. Which of those should I take to go to Las Tejas? In the face of that doubt and uncertainty, I thought that since the beast I was riding was from Matagalpa, it should know the best way instinctively. I made it go back a stretch and then let it take the road anew, loosening the reins so that when it

arrived at a fork in the road, it would take the one it wanted. It took the one on the left and continued going. Farther on there were three roads. I did the same thing as before, and the mule took the one in the middle. Finally I arrived at a little tiled house, which I supposed was the one that was indicated by the individual I had met at the Yaule stream. As I neared the door, two girls came out, and I asked them if this were Las Tejas, and they said yes. The roar of the current of the river could be heard nearby, and I asked them if there was a crossing there and if it was true that there was a contingent of troops there. They both answered me in the affirmative. Meanwhile I had observed that on one side of the house was a garden fenced in with wood and that on the edge of it was a path, which fit the description I had been given. Without hesitating I got on the beast, dearly saying goodbye to the little girls, and continued on that path.

Having gone around the garden, there was no more path, and I continued along the hill, passing through gullies and [48] brambles, but always taking the side of the river as my guide, until finally I saw within the woods the clearing for the telegraph line. But before venturing to enter the clear field, I got off the beast, tied it to a tree, and cautiously went to inspect the road. Everything was silent. I remounted and quickly crossed the river, and upon reaching the cemetery of the city, which was on the side of the road, a number of soldiers unexpectedly confronted me with bayonettes and stopped my way. With more fright than heat I upbraided them with haughtiness, telling them that I was the Telegrapher of the city, and without more ado I spurred the beast and continued on the road, entering one of those streets at a trot to get to the plaza where the office building was. Immediately a multitude of curious persons surrounded me, and the Prefect, Señor Solórzano, approached me to ask how I had been able to come without being seen by the Indians. After telling him about my odyssey while still mounted, he said, "Not without reason are you Chontalean!" After reporting the capture of Vélez and Vega, I told him that if I were immediately given a squad of twenty-five resolute and well-armed men, I would free them. He smiled and answered that that idea was very adventurous and totally dangerous. I insisted, making various observations, but it was impossible to convince him to adopt my project. How many times have I later thought that if the Prefect had had faith in what I told him, the lives of my friend Vélez and the young Vega would have been saved! Innocent victims of that rebellion of barbarity fomented by religious fanaticism.

Not having anything to do in the office, and as all the inhabitants of the [49] city were excited over the proximity of the Indians, the following day I went to the quartel to ask for a rifle and a supply of cartridges. They gave them to me right away and made me look like a soldier, ready to receive my baptism of fire or blood if the case presented itself.

The Jesuits, those black vermin who fanaticize the pueblos with their studied hypocrisy and psychological knowledge, had been expelled from that Department in May of that year (1881), and from the whole Republic in the month of June, thanks to the decisiveness and energy of President Joaquín Zavala and Minister of the Interior, Vicente Navas. Since then, the Jesuit element had been seeking every means to get revenge against that blow which had injured the most intimate of their fanatical spiritual feelings and their personal convenience. In León, in this León so dignified by the best fortune, but so unhappy and miserable for that scab which the sons of Loyola left on it like a

stigma, they tried to rise up against the government, but the iron hand of Vicente Navas contained the insurrection in time.

On May 5, 1881, fifteen Jesuits who inflamed the Indians of Matagalpa were taken from that Department and concentrated in Granada. On the seventh, fourteen Jesuits who were in León were expelled; they were taken from the little river port of El Barquito and put aboard in Corinto. On the eighth the fifteen Jesuits from Matagalpa, three from Masaya, and two from Granada, were put on a small Great Lake steamboat at Granada. And that same day two [50] Jesuits who were in Rivas were removed at San Juan del Sur. Two who remained in Ocotal were taken away later.

The Indians of Matagalpa, descendents of the true autocthonous of Nicaragua, were valiant and warlike. They lived and still live distributed throughout those little valleys called *cañadas*. Many times they had risen up *en masse* to sack the settlements and go off to the woods with their booty. On this occasion, instigated by the fanatics of León, they thought they would do the same, and on August 8, 1881, they spread themselves above Matagalpa, to the number of three thousand led by Lorenzo Pérez, Toribio Mendoza, and Higinio Campos.

In the quartel of the city there were no more than 170 men, with rifles called *negritos* and others much older, which they loaded through the muzzle and discharged with a spark.

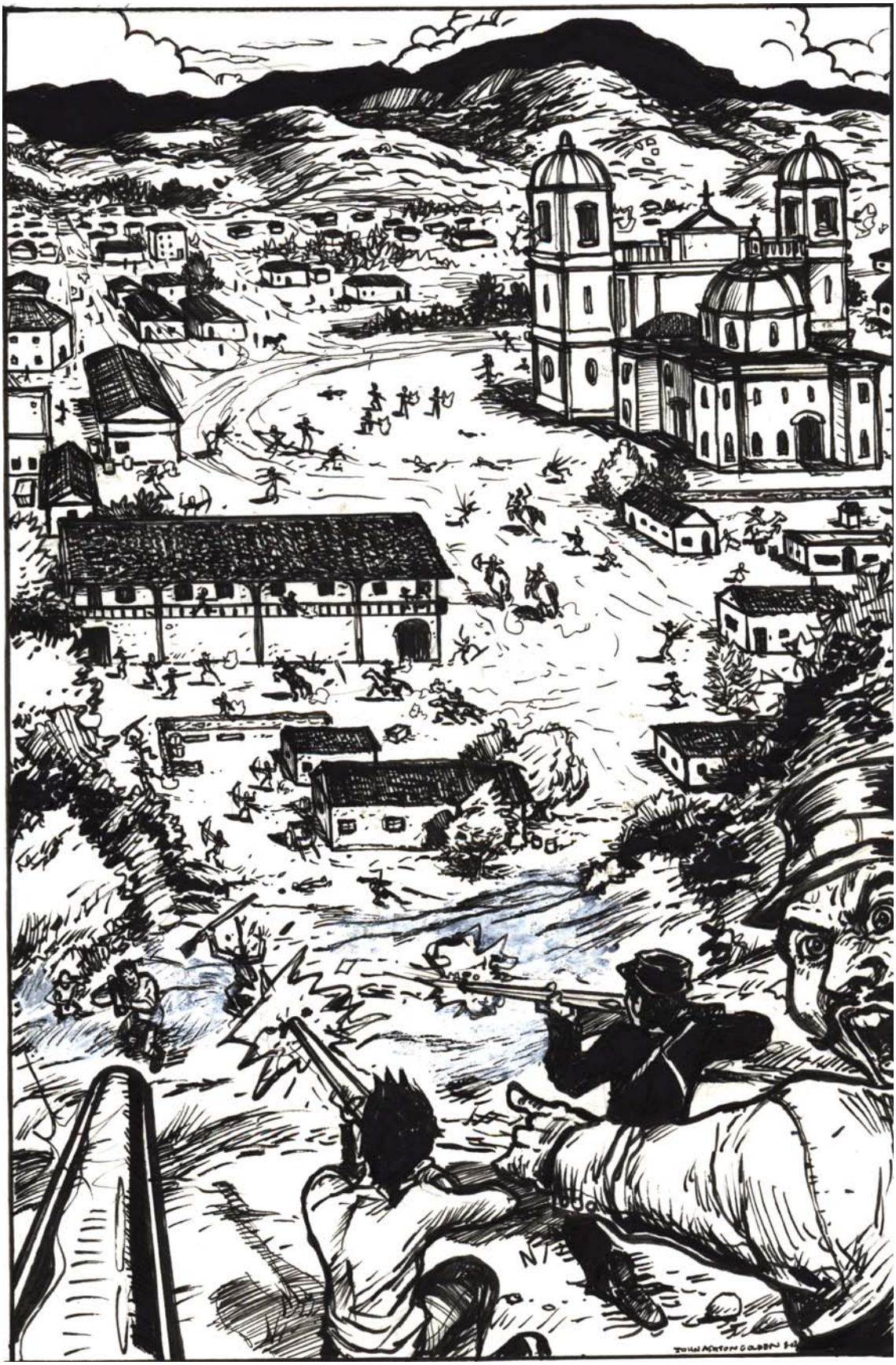
The only military tactics that were employed were the following: On Mico, the little hill situated southeast of the City Hall, they positioned a squad under the command of Captain Francisco Bonilla, a valiant man who defended the position with much serenity and energy. I went to that point carrying my bullets, and I was shooting my rifle with Juan Sierra. I was witness to the furious attacks of the enemy, which were always turned back despite their insistence on taking this hill. On the top of the towers of the church various riflemen gathered under the command of Captain Blas Villalta, Director of the musical band of the city. Those riflemen checked the advance of the Indians at several points. The first [51] platoons of the insurrectionists entered through the barrio of Laborío, taking over and sacking the houses, and establishing a general headquarters in the church of that barrio. That same night they penetrated to the corner house of Don Luis Sierra, and in the mouth of the street they built a parapet like a trench. From there they kept up fire the next day, peppering the city hall and the quartel, and assaulting a squad of seventeen men under the command of Don Cosme Pineda (I formed part of that squad). With valor and fearlessness the squad was able to save the families of don Nazario Vega and Señor Baldizon, who had not gathered in the Plaza. In that squad figured a youth called Benjamín Tinoco, of a good family and very pleasant, armed with a Winchester repeating rifle. Eventually we were able to get all the women of the houses out of danger, leading them through the course of a gully to the city hall. We returned to situate ourselves on the corner of the house of Señor Vega, and from there we opened fire against those who were at the parapet. We were at that kind of game when it occurred to me to go to the middle of the street and fire my gun in the open field, and I returned calmly to the corner to station myself at the lamp post to load my gun again. The young Tinoco did the same, and after him, one after another the rest of the squad followed until it was my turn again. I fired the shot and went to collect myself at the side of the post.

Tinoco, who followed me after discharging his gun, came to my side without any protection. Having emptied his rifle of the spent shell, he went coo-coo, letting out a weak moan. I thought that he took his position so he would not present a target to the enemy, but I fixed on him and [52] saw that his temples were spilling bubbling blood. "Oh, they killed him!" I said to the companions. Everybody gathered around and we immediately lifted him and carried him to the city hall. The shot entered the right temple and exited above the left ear. When we got him to the city hall a beautiful young woman of a distinguished family, Hortencia Boniche, fell over him, distraught with weeping and lamentations. She was the fiancée of the unfortunate Tinoco.

The next night, until dawn on the tenth, was a really sleepless night for all of us who were in the Plaza. Nobody slept. That morning, like the morning before, I heard heavy fire coming from the entrance of the road from Managua, and at the same time detonations from a piece of artillery were heard. It was the column of the auxiliary vanguard that came to us from the Capital. That troop, under the command of Captain Inocente Moreira, upon its arrival at the cemetery, burst its fire against the besiegers and entered combat with spirit and much order, dispersing the groups of Indians who were in Laborío. Many of them perished unhappily there, who, without any other ideal than rapine and religious fanaticism, were thrown into the most sterile revolt registered in our history.

The troop of Captain Moreira marched in taking charge step by step and was dislodging the Indians from all their positions until achieving complete triumph by four in the afternoon. The final bulwark of the insurgents was a house in the barrio, called La Ronda. There some thirty had taken refuge, and the resistance that they made [53] was heroic. A gap was opened in the door with the piece of artillery. On three occasions they were asked to surrender, and each time they only answered with the most profound silence. After each offer, a group of soldiers with bayonets attached approached the door and from there they were turned back by a flight of arrows that flew out of the hole in the door. Thus, those 30 indigenous heroes, worthy of a Homeric epic, maintained stalemate for some three hours, against a little more than a hundred men and a piece of artillery, and armed only with *tafixtes* (slender wooden arrows), until at the end they ran out of arrows and 25 of them succumbed, the five remaining taking refuge in a corner of the house. But they never surrendered. When the assailants, still fearful, entered that den of lions, they only found cadavers, three injured, and five healthy men holding in their hands their bows as their only weapons. Without being humiliated and without saying a word they surrendered to their conquerors. They were obliged to carry their injured, and they took them to the Plaza, but upon their arrival almost in front of the City Hall, a bunch of bad-livered drunks, who were well known in the city, came out. There was a sergeant on top of the quartel who scolded the soldiers for bringing the valiant men, who deserved full military honors, alive. Following up his words with action, he took his rifle and discharged it against the prisoners. These dropped the injured that they were carrying on their shoulders and started running in the middle of the plaza. A rain of bullets left them prostrate. Two or three episodes like that like that took place that tragic afternoon. I do not want to recall them, and my pen resists writing them.

[54] The cadavers of the Indians, which were gathered that afternoon and the following day, were more than four hundred which were buried in trenches that were opened on the other side of the river.



Of the Managua forces that entered the city, three died and 21 were injured by arrows. The day of that rout, the Indians who were in Pajal brought the young men Juan José Vélez and Benedicto up the Susumá creek. There they made mincemeat out of them according to authentic reports that I obtained later.

By August 12, the telegraph line was repaired, and I began to work in the office, incessant work that gave me no time to clear my head.

A few days later General Miguel Vélez, the father of Juan José, came as head of the army to pacify the Indians; and in fact he did pacify them, but with blood and fire. If a month later he had not been removed from the command of the army, it is almost certain that he would have exterminated the indigenous caste from all those places. General Vélez, for the iniquitous death of his son, was implacable with the wretched Indians.

That strong campaign lasted until nearly the end of December of the year. Two of the principal leaders of that seditious movement were shot in the plaza of Matagalpa.

The remains of Juan José Vélez were found and taken to Managua.

In the month of September, in view of the excessive work in the telegraph office, they sent me as an assistant José Leon Quijano, a Telegrapher much more competent than I.

[55] On December 1, I began to take my meals in the house of a family named Navarrete. There were two pious old maids who passed the time between their housework and their devotions in the church. Living with them were two young nieces, Claudina and Enriqueta. Claudina's sweet and gentle face, though not beautiful, was surrounded with an aura of candor and virtue, which made her charming and attractive at first sight. When she was first presented to welcome me, her long and thick black hair hung freely down her back. It was love at first sight for both of us, and we of course began a love affair. From the start I declared my intention to marry her.

The old women were watching us, and it did not take long for them to discover our affair. They tried to impede us at all costs, but all their efforts were futile. Since Claudina was being taunted by her aunts, she moved into the house of her mother, Doña Mercedes Navarrete, who was living with her second husband Don Inés Blandón. Doña Mercedes was a woman of calm disposition and good judgment. She had two daughters from her first marriage to Don Saturnia Montiel, Claudina and Elena. With Señor Blandón she had three children, Fernando, Hector and Claudia (who would later take the name of Claudina).

As soon as I presented my marriage proposal to Doña Mercedes, asking the hand of her daughter, she agreed. On April 20, 1882, Claudina and I were married in Yolagüina Church by the Reverend Ramón Pineda. I do not recall who my best man and grooms were. I only [56] remember a simple ceremony without any kind of ostentation. At four in the morning we were in the church receiving the blessing of the priest and hearing the letter of St. Paul. At five-thirty we sat down at table to drink the ritual chocolate in my mother-in-law's house.

Two months after my wedding I quit the telegraph job and, with my wife's money, I dedicated myself to a small retail business. I bought a little house near my

mother-in-law's for 150 pesos and opened a shop. I made frequent trips to Granada and Leon to buy merchandise, and everything was going well.

I recall the following episode from one of those trips. I was going to León accompanied by a servant who was carrying my valise. Around six in the afternoon we got to a place called El Junquillo where we asked for lodging in a small house on the side of the road with an arbored veranda in front. On the other side of the road, about 15 or 20 feet from the house, was a grass pasture that belonged to the owner of the house. We set our beasts out there to graze. After dinner the servant put up my hammock in the bower, and I went right to bed. The moon illuminated the sky with splendid clarity.

Around eight, the silence of that peaceful night was interrupted by the cracking of dry wood that was breaking violently. I asked the owner of the house what could be causing such noise. He answered that it was undoubtedly a vicious bull that comes into the pasture most every night breaking [57] down the enclosure. "Well, if you'd like," I answered, "this will be the last time that he does." Having said that, I got up with my revolver in hand. "Good," he said, "Go give him a scare for me." I walked to the pasture, passed through the gate, took a few steps, and saw the animal about 20 yards away. I took two quick shots and saw him fall. I returned to the house and told the owner, "Go get it." He went right over to see what had happened to the bull.

"Now we've done it! The animal is dead." "Then go get it," I said briskly. "Huh!" he responded. "If that bull is not mine, it belongs to the Canton Administrator of this district, and as soon as he learns that it was killed in my pasture, he will throw me into jail, without a doubt." "And where does this Administrator live," I asked. "In his house that isn't far from here." "Well, let's go to him," I said, "and I will settle everything according to justice."

We set out and when we came to that administrator's house, a pack of dogs came out slowly, barking at us. On the patio we met him with a group of four or five other individuals. As soon as I informed him of the death of his bull, I indicated in a friendly manner my good intention to pay for the loss I had caused him, and I asked him how much the bull was worth. He answered that he had turned down 20 pesos that he was offered. After a prolonged discussion I proposed to give him 10 pesos and he could keep the meat of the animal. He emphatically refused to accept that offer. Annoyed by his stupid response, I told the man that he could do whatever he felt like doing. I gave him my name, and as we returned to our lodging, I assured [58] my host that nothing would happen. I went to bed peacefully without thinking anything more about the incident.

Around midnight the servant, who was sleeping on the veranda, spoke to me in fright, telling me that a group of people were coming down the royal road with torches burning. I got dressed, put on my boots, grabbed the revolver, and went back to bed, covering my whole body with the blanket, suggested that the servant not talk, and pretended to be sleeping. Not much later the group arrived, and I sensed that they were forming a circle around the hammock, muttering words that I didn't understand. At once I jumped out of the hammock, with revolver in hand, and yelled at them, "Look here, you bums; what do you want from me? " With that, I pushed at two individuals who were blocking my way and jumped out of the circle they had formed around me. There were some twenty men, all armed with machetes and spears, and one of them was raising a shotgun. It was the Canton Administrator who confronted me, and he said to me, "We're

going to take care of the matter of the bull." I replied, "Or is it that you want to meet with the same fate as the bull?" I said that with a strong voice, raising my revolver at the same time, ready to fire a bullet into his body if he attacked me. An old man with a white beard came near and whispered to him. "OK," he said next, "You give me the ten pesos and I'll slaughter the bull." "All right," I responded, "but it was not necessary for you to come and surprise me like that while I was sleeping." I called for my servant to take the valise down from the rafters and light a candle. I took paper, plume, and ink, and wrote [59] a document for the Canton Administrator to sign, in which he certified that he had received the ten pesos as indemnification for the death of his animal, saving the owner of the orchard from any responsibility for anything. When I asked for his signature, he refused it, saying that he did not know how to write. "How is it," I said, "that a canton administrator does not even know how to sign his name? I am going to see that you are removed from office when I return to Matagalpa, since the law is clear and says that one who does not know how to write cannot occupy that position." The man was disturbed by that threat, and he finally decided to sign the paper. Without discussion I made two of his companions sign as witnesses. I gave him the ten pesos, and he left with the others to slaughter the bull. The owner of the orchard went with them and on his return told me that the animal only had a flesh wound between the horns and the rump, but, since that injury could not be the cause of its death, they carefully searched for the other bullet wound. It took some time looking over the whole body until they found the other shot in the middle of the front. Everyone admired my good aim.

Very early I continued on the road to León. On my return I learned that the Canton Administrator was very pleased with the deal, saying that I was every bit a gentleman.

As the days slipped by that year, I was feeling happy with my lovable and virtuous companion for life. When I returned from my travels, she received me in her arms and lavished me with sweet caresses, which made me forget the mishaps and troubles of the road. I was prospering in my business, and only one cloud darkened the [60] horizons of my marriage, but as it is a law of Nature for man that no happiness lasts long, mine eclipsed before long.

In early February, 1883, my wife, who was in late pregnancy, had me worried and anxious. Because of that I would not accept an invitation that the Prefect, don Enrique Solórzano, extended to go with him on an official visit which he was to make to the various pueblos of the Department. Claudina insisted more than once that to profit from that excursion, she would provide some trinkets to sell in the pueblos, since, according to her mother's calculation, the birth would not occur until the end of the month. That relieved me, and I accepted the invitation. We left on the third. The official committee was very numerous. We were in San Dionisio and Terrabona for a day, and later we went to Esquipulas. I was bringing some leather saddlebags filled with various things to sell, and I did not miss a chance to display and sell the merchandise. The second day in Esquipulas, I received a telegram from my sister-in-law Elena in which she notified me of the birth or, better said, the labor of Claudina. I immediately set out on the road to return to Matagalpa. I encountered Claudina lying on her bed with a high fever that made her delirious. A Dr. Cruz and a Dr. Santelices attended her. They were a pair of bleeding doctors, in the style that Le Sage painted in his *Gil Blas*. It is obvious that such

physicians did everything wrong, and that simple childbirth fever took the life of my adorable companion the day after I got to the house. She died at 11:15 in the night of February 9, 1883. Even now, so many years after my heart suffered that profound hurt, I feel the shock that it caused in my spirit. I was stunned, inconsolable, and without the strength to take a fixed course.

After burying my wife's cadaver and finding myself without resources, I decided to go to Chontales with the purpose of obtaining a loan from one of my relatives. There I caught up with my uncle Luciano Astorga, and he gave me a hundred pesos which I agreed to repay. I returned to Matagalpa where I had a headstone made, engraving on it the inscription: "Here rests the dream of my conjugal love. -- A. M. -- Claudina Montiel de Miranda. -- Born October 30, 1860 -- Died February 9, 1883. -- R. I. P."

Having finished that little tribute of remembrance which I supposed would be imperishable, I dedicated myself to liquidating my business and paying my debts. I sold the house and resolved to go to Honduras, leaving the fruit of my brief marriage to my mother-in-law and sister-in-law, who was baptized with the name of my father.

On April 30, I set out on the road to Honduras. A friend of mine, Juan B. Sierra, had telegraphed me saying that he was waiting for me in San Marcos de Colón, and I went directly there, riding a mule that belonged to me. I don't know how many days I spent on the road; I had to travel by chance, as they say. In San Marcos I got together with Sierra and we went to Choluteca, where I stayed [62] about a month. Sierra was working in a public office and for some reason quit his job. Since I could not find work, we decided to go to El Salvador. I sold my beast and we rented others to go to the little port of El Pedregal, and there we embarked on a boat which took us to Amapala, where we left for La Unión in a launch. The telegrapher of that port was an old classmate of mine, and he took an interest in finding me a position in the Salvadorean telegraph. I spoke by telegraph with the Inspector General of the Eastern lines, a Señor Brizuela, who lived in San Miguel, and on the spot he said that he would put me in charge of the office in Usultan. I went with Sierra by cart to San Miguel; I spoke personally with Señor Brizuela and he gave me the appointment in writing. We continued on the road to Usulutan, still by cart, and upon arriving at that city, I took possession of the telegraph office. A few days later, Sierra decided to return to Choluteca, and I remained alone, discharging the duties of my office. There I received a telegram from my sister-in-law Elena in which she informed me of the death of my son Canutito.

Usulutan in that time was a small population with nothing particularly attractive or special which would attract the attention of the recent arrival. I spent all the time reclusively in my office; I only left to take my meals in the house of a family called Ayala, and Sundays I went to take a bath in a small spring two miles from the village.

One day, on the birthday of President Zaldívar, they presented me [63] with a congratulatory message directed to him, so I could transmit it officially. It was signed by a Señor Munguía, the Governor of the Department. I insisted to the person who brought the message that, according to the rules of the branch, I could not transmit it officially. The messenger advised me that the person who signed the message was the Governor of the Department. I replied that although it might be Saint Governor who signed it, if he didn't pay for it, I would not transmit it officially. Soon he returned with two witnesses to

tell me that by order of the Governor I should send said message *de oficio*. In the face of that insistence I took the Telegraph Rules and read them the article corresponding to the case, and I affirmed my refusal. The messenger returned for a third time, still with the two witnesses, to tell me that by order of the Governor I should conduct myself immediately to his office. I answered that, in conformance with the Rules, I could not separate myself from the office during the hours of service without express orders from the Superintendent. That message got to that Governor like water to chocolate, and instantly he directed an official letter to the Judge of the First Instance ordering him to bring an action against me for disobeying his authority. The Judge, a Señor called Chévez, if memory serves me, ate together with me, and when we got up in the morning, he informed me about the letter from the Governor, telling me that to satisfy the formalities, I should come to his Court at two in the afternoon so he could take my deposition. Then he could issue a stay, since there was no basis for an action because I was upheld by the law that governed me. Thus it happened, and nothing more came of the matter. But since the Governor was like a rattlesnake under my foot, he used all his influence to get me removed from my post. That's what [64] Señor Brizuela told me when he ordered me to give up the office to the young Miguel Robelo (a Nicaraguan), and I would be put in charge of the repair of the telegraph line from Usulutan to Umana, for which the Governor had orders to provide me the necessary workers and hardware. On August 3, 1883, Robelo arrived and immediately I proceeded to turn over the office to him and then met with the Governor to ask him for the workers (25) and other things I needed for the work. The Governor bowed his head and with a scowl gave orders to one of his subordinates that he should put at my disposal the 25 men and the hardware I needed, as well as a harnessed beast for me. On the fifth I began the work, placing the workers under the immediate direction of the telegraph line guard who accompanied me. Since they installed that line, they probably had not made any repairs. A number of posts were missing. Others, rotten at their base, were only held up by the wire, and the wire was in contact with tree branches in many places.

One morning, after some weeks of work, we arrived at a hamlet (called El Palomar, as I recall) a league away from the little pueblo of Santiago de María. Around a little straw hut, on the side of the road, there was a great leafy fig tree, through the center of whose branches passed the telegraph line. The line guard consulted with me about whether it would be better to trim the branches or cut the trunk. I thought that if only the branches were cut, their shoots would grow back and threaten the line, and so I answered that it was more convenient [65] to cut the whole thing down. Then a couple of axe-men began to chop. The owner of the property, when he heard the first blows of the axes, came over to the lads to reprimand them heatedly for cutting his tree. They answered that he should deal with me. The man headed for me and with an imperious air asked me by what right I had ordered the cutting of his tree. I simply responded that it was by right given me by a superior order to clear all the obstacles that could endanger the telegraph line. He replied with aspersion that he had nothing to do with superior orders, that his tree would not be wasted. I answered with calm that the tree would be taken down despite the fact that he did not want that; that if someone wanted to complain, he should take himself to the superior authority of the Department. He did not argue anymore; he was furious. He turned around and with quick steps went into his house, some ten or

twelve yards from the road where I remained mounted on my beast waiting for the lads to finish the felling of the tree, without in the least suspecting the bad intentions of that individual.

The front of the house, which faced the road, had only one window. The door was on the left, looking from the road, and on the right, some fifteen yards from the house, stood the tree which was being felled, without anything around that protected it. I remained quiet, with my right leg over the saddle horn. All at once, it was as if a mosquito had buzzed by my ear. I turned my view toward the wall of the house at the very moment when the barrel of a shotgun appeared in the window. I quickly straightened up [66] on the saddle, spurred the beast, grabbed my revolver, went to the door of the house, and yelled at the man, "Hey! You f...er. Over here. Take your shotgun and we'll see who gets it first." Some three or four utterly terrified women came out of the door proclaiming the innocence and inculpability of their man. The racket that those women raised attracted some individuals in the neighborhood who came over. One of them, without doubt the most nervous, said to the man in the house, "Hey! And you are afraid of the guy with the pistol? That junk sometimes doesn't even fire." That cutting remark piqued my *amour propre*, and feigning a good measure of calm, I replied, "If you are referring to my revolver, this gun does fire and it shoots. Watch that beehive come to the ground." And with that, I aimed at the branch that held the beehive, shot, and it fell. That hive, popularly known as "meat-eater," was in a tree situated on one of the sides of the house, some eight or ten yards high; the branch which held it was about an inch in diameter, and the cartridges of my revolver were .44 caliber. In the face of that decisive proof of the good quality of my weapon and of my sure aim, everybody remained stupefied and kept their silence. Without leaving the place where I was, I took a whistle out of my pocket to call my men, and in a few minutes the 26 men of my crew gathered round me. I ordered the line-guard based at a post around the telegraph line to gather the people around the house without letting anyone leave, and with a pocket telegraph which he brought with him in his saddlebags, and which I connected to the wire of the line, [67] I got in direct communication with San Miguel. I called Inspector Señor Brizuela and told him about the whole episode. He answered that he would immediately go to speak with general Letona, Inspector of Arms of the Eastern Departments, to arrange for the capture of the individual. A little later I heard a telegram that Señor Letona directed to the Mayor of Santiago María, ordering him to take a squad of deputies and capture that individual and send him back in chains. An hour later the Mayor arrived, captured the man, and took him away in spite of his shotgun. I never knew what punishment they meted out to that unfortunate, who by mere chance did not shoot me with his blunderbuss.

Having finished the repair work on the whole line to Umana, I stayed there for two weeks in the house of the telegrapher, a young man named Rosales, a very good friend of mine. Then I went to San Salvador, passing through San Vicente and Cojutepeque. Upon my arrival in the capital, I took a room where my friend Rosales's brother lived as a student, for whom he had given me a letter of recommendation. In spite of the letter, that brother of my friend received me in a bad manner, and the same day I moved to the home of Mariano Duarte, with whom I had exchanged letters when I was in Usulutan. Another day he introduced me to the superintendent of telegraphs, a

Señor Padilla, and I asked for employment in the branch. He answered that in order to employ me in an office I would have to submit to a practical exam at the Telegraph School, and so I went to that school, where there were some six or eight apprentices with telegraph apparatus arranged in an orderly manner on their respective tables [68] in the hall. The professor or master of the school, after reading the order of the Superintendent to examine me, called to a lad, who was almost a boy, by the name of Joaquín Sanchez (he still lives; later we were very good friends), and ordered him to transmit to me, from one end of the room to the other, a message of a hundred words. That boy wired me with great apprehension: he was a lightening flash writing on the telegraph key, and I, the fat goat sweating, with great pains was able to write with a pen what that little devil sent me. But I was able to exit gracefully. Two days later, September 22, they turned over to me the position of Telegrapher of Nejapa, a village some four or five leagues from the capital. I rented a beast, asked where was the exit of the road, and very early in the morning I set out. I arrived at the pueblo around noon and immediately took possession of the office, situated in a nook of the town hall, a little narrow, but I accommodated myself to it as best I could. Soon I became acquainted with the principal persons of the town, who showed me much care, especially a good-natured youth called García, the priest of the pueblo; the mistress of the public school, Señorita Julia Quiroa and her sister Emilia; a California landlord named Don Joaquín; a very old Spanish beekeeper called Don Pedro, who had an apiary that produced good yields; and others whose names I cannot remember.

Around the beginning of November of the same year there was an outbreak of smallpox that caused much ravage. There was a day when 21 of the infected died. That was most horrible, since the little pueblo then could not have more than [69] 1500 inhabitants and the pestilence lasted about a month. To mitigate the pain that the scourge was generally causing, four or five of us friends gathered every night, almost always in the house of the priest, to joke and drink a bottle of good liquor, and by ten or eleven at night we retired to our beds a little tipsy. During the day I did not leave the office, since it was not fear but panic that someone had the smallpox. One of those dismal days a young girl, a friend of mine, very nice and intelligent besides, asked me to call. I knew that the day before the pestilence had attacked her, and because of that I told her that it was not possible to comply with her request, since I had express orders from my superior not to leave the office for one moment. Soon her father came to tell me that Evangelina, in delirium of the fever she had, was calling me all the time and demanding that they go and get me, for which he pleaded with me not to deny her the satisfaction of her desire. Never had I been in such a fix. On the one hand, the duty of friendship in the face of a father filled with tribulation who desired to please his dying daughter; and on the other, the profound conviction that I had that if I got near one infected, the disease would be transmitted to me in the moment. The disjunction was atrocious; but the spirit of self-preservation prevailed, and with more or less futile pretexts I excused myself from going. In the night of the same day that angelical creature died. I helped with the burial but protected myself with many antiseptic precautions. Each time that I remember that episode of my life, my heart is oppressed. What could it be that my Evangelina wanted? A mystery that is buried in the grave!

The epidemic passed and the people remained sunk in the sadness of the cemetery. I [70] was considered unmovable in the post I occupied, since I complied loyally with my duties. But I was not thinking that anyone could be sure of remaining in a public office for much time. Surely enough, on January 4, 1884, I was stupefied to receive the order that moved me to the office of Panchimalco. That disconcerted me, but I obeyed the order and went to the capital, where the very Superintendent informed me of the intrigues that were put in play with the Minister of Interior to have me removed from Nejapa.

I moved to Panchimalco, and I was the one who inaugurated the telegraph office in that primitive struggling pueblo inhabited only by illiterate Indians. There I sadly passed the days without any attractions which could mitigate the boredom caused by the contemplation of the misery of a collection of straw farmhouses, between gullies and rocky terrain, without a single street. I was weary of the beauty, and not being able to endure that semi-exile any more, I renounced the post on the thirtieth of the same month and then prepared to return to Nicaragua. I went to embark at the port of La Libertad.

Upon my arrival in León, I had to stay here some days for lack of money, unable to find work. One day on the street I met my good friend Benjamín Martínez from Matagalpa, and we greeted each other affectionately. He informed me that he was going to take a walk with his family and that of Don Nazario Vega, and we went to where they were lodged in the house of the Alanis family. I greeted all those Matagalpa people with joy, who for the first time had left their [71] land to know this Metropolis. Don Nazario, a rich man and almost an old man, was the head of the procession. As he learned that I had nothing to do, he invited me to accompany them to Corinto, serving as their guide. I happily accepted, and the next day we took the train to the port. The retinue was made up of twenty-one persons, including women and boys. Before leaving the lodging house, Don Nazario gave me 300 pesos for expenses, and delegated to me the command of the whole group. I hired two launches, and we embarked in them. We spent three days totally enjoying ourselves, despite the fact that I was spinning like a top in everything and for everybody. For example, in the walks on the beach and on the sea cliffs, everyone scattered about, and one moment when I was least expecting it, one of the señoritas saw a sea creature. At that point she called me yelling "Miranda! Miranda!" I ran to see what she wanted, and when I got to her she asked me with curiosity, "What animal is this?" "That is called anus-fish." "Ah, liar, indecent," she replied to me smiling. Then on the other side I heard the usual cry, "Miranda! Miranda! What animal is this?" "That is a sea urchin." Sometimes I didn't know the name of the crustacean or mollusk they presented to me, and to get away and give myself airs of deep wisdom, I made it up, and the questioners were left satisfied with my scientific knowledge. In compensation for those jolts, at dinner I was given the choice of the best morsels. All those beautiful girls and even the old ones lavished attention on me with affectionate rivalry. In the nights lit up by a brilliant moon, we organized games [72] of forfeits which entertained us and made us laugh until we were satiated. Oh, what pleasant days we had then, so filled with good humor! I sigh with pleasure to recall them....

On returning to León I gave an account of the expenses to Don Nazario, and when I returned the amount left over from the quantity he had given me, he did not want to take

it, telling me rather that he owed me for the good services which I had offered them; but I did not want to take anything.

I then went to Managua. The Director of Telegraphs was Don José Pasos, who had no idea of the art of telegraphy. I introduced myself to him offering my services in the branch, and he named me second assistant of the central office. This was on March 27, 1884. On June 3, I was transferred to Masaya as principal Telegrapher. After a little while at the head of that office I had an attack of jaundice that kept me from continuing in the work. They gave me leave for the duration of my illness. My state was totally deplorable: even my eyes and nails were yellow, and the decline of spirit and the idleness kept my whole body out of sorts. Some friends showed a caring interest in me and found a *coyol* tree on the slopes of Coyotepe and brought me there, almost pushing me, every afternoon to drink the sap of the tree, which was obtained by opening a cut in the form of a canoe near the top. The name *chicha de coyol* is given to this juice and is very agreeable for the first week; afterwards it tastes sharp due to the fermentation [73], enough to make you drunk. It is an effective remedy for jaundice, so I was cured by it after two weeks of continual treatment.

I got back to work on the first of July. In the middle of the following August, I quit my post and went to Managua in search of a new *modus vivendi*. As always I stayed in the National Hotel, where I was received with care by Mr. Brown. Living there on the top floor of the building was Mr. Henry C. Hall, Minister of the United States in Central America. Speaking with him one day, he asked me if I knew some person who could write well, since he wanted to make some copies of documents that he urgently needed, and that he would pay a good salary. I responded that I could do the job, if he was not unhappy with my writing. He invited me to go to his office and had me write some lines on a sheet of paper, and being satisfied with the form of my writing, he gave me the job, which I finished in six or eight days. Later I agreed with Mr. Hall to serve as his scribe during the time he remained in Managua, which paid me a peso per day. Mr. Hall was a venerable looking old man of some seventy-five years of age, who was very methodical in all his customs and no friend of genuflections and pantomimes, which preoccupied the majority of the diplomats. On the whole, he was a straight and simple man, and I got on very well with him. I do not recall the date when he made his return trip to Guatemala; I only remember that I went with him to Corinto and there I made known my desire to go to El Salvador, and with very good will he had me go on board with him as adjutant to the Legation of the [74] United States in Central America, and that paid for my passage.

I got off at La Libertad and took a stagecoach to San Salvador. When I arrived there, I met my uncle (my father's cousin) Don Celedonio Morales, who invited me to go with him to Santa Tecla where he lived with Don Manuel Urbina. Both of them had been expatriated from Nicaragua by President Cárdenas for political reasons. Around the end of November or the beginning of December my uncle sent me to Nicaragua with letters for their political coreligionists in León and Granada, which letters I delivered by hand, according to the instructions which they gave me. I only recall that one of the recipients was Don Liberato Dubón.

Being in Granada, I had a mind to go to Juigalpa. I stayed there in the house of my father, who received me quite tenderly. In the middle of February 1885, they named me Telegrapher of San Pedro de Lóvago, and although the salary was miserable (15 pesos from the Government and 5 from the Municipality), I accepted the appointment for the pleasure of being at the side of my mother. I went there passing by the sites that brought back memories of my childhood, happy memories for sure, which toned my spirit. Upon embracing my poor mother, it gave me pain to see the misery in which she lived, in a little hut covered with branches and leaves, exposed to the wind and weather, lacking even that which was most indispensable for life. Even so, she did not seem uncomfortable. She lived in that shack with my brother Pedro and my sisters Joséfa and Simona. Santiago, my other brother, lived with his wife in the house of his father-in-law. Sabina and Ramona lived with their husbands outside the hamlet. Pedro was working [75] in the town as a schoolteacher, earning eight pesos per month. The priest of the place was my uncle/godfather the Reverend Vital Miranda, who still lived with Doña Clara Ortiz.

All my labors, upon seeing the sad shelter in which my mother lived, were concentrated on building her a little house, even though it would be of straw. With my little money I bought enough wood and other materials to be able to start the work, helped by my brothers. How happy my poor mother was to move into her new house. But I have anticipated the events a little in relation to time. Somewhat earlier the following occurred, which I am going to refer to as a strange thing.

It was Good Friday, April 2, 1885. General Justo Rufino Barrios, President of Guatemala, had announced his celebrated Decree of Central American Union on the previous February 28, and it was learned that he was marching with his army through El Salvador, and that at the end of March he joined the memorable battle of Chalchuapa, whose result all of us Unionists in that Chontales town wanted to know. The night of Good Friday I was in the procession of the Holy Sepulcher. My godfather Vital, priest of the pueblo, presided at the procession and, seeing me, he called me over to ask me in a whisper if I knew of the death of Barrios, since being the Telegrapher, I should be the first to receive such sensational news as that. I smiled and answered that I did not have such, that I had not received any piece of news that would even suggest the death of the Unionist caudillo. Then my godfather, very serious and emotional, replied that he was [76] told in secret that afternoon that Barrios was killed in the battle. As a matter of fact, they killed him around noon on April 2. Who brought that news the same day with the speed of the wind across more than a thousand kilometers? My godfather did not want to tell me who had given him the news, which I did not receive by telegraph until Monday morning, when they communicated it from Granada.

When I arrived at that incipient little pueblo, so remote from the most active centers of the Republic, I thought I would pass the time there at the side of my mother, a quiet and peaceful life, taking care of my duties without getting involved with anyone. But I was lying to myself. In all our rural pueblos local chiefs are never lacking, usually ignorant and malicious besides, who, without any other ideal than to satisfy their whims and feed their passions and vices, hate any resident who does not pay complete homage. In that time, the chief of the pueblo was one Frutos Vega, a very pretentious man who feigned an education but was completely amoral: a drunk, a brawler, and a big crook. Being married with children, one night he enticed an Ortiz girl, the sister of Doña Clara

of the same name, and brought her to a farm without giving a fig for the scandal which was stirred up in the pueblo. Anyway, that chief had it in for me, and I do not recall exactly why I had a row with him. What was certain was that through the Mayor, one Antonino García, he lodged a complaint with the intent of bringing me to jail. Seeing those dirty maneuvers and intrigues, I decided to leave the pueblo and resigned with urgency at the end of August and went immediately to Managua.

I presented myself to the Director [77] of Telegraphs and explained the reasons I had to quit. He sent me then to Tipitapa, telling me I would be there temporarily until a more important office became available. When I was in Tipitapa, one night in October the memorable earthquake occurred that caused considerable destruction in León and Managua. The shaking of the earth was formidable. The dogs howled, the cocks crowed, the bells of the church rang simply from the motion of the tremor. That Saint Vitas dance lasted some thirty seconds.

At the end of November they moved me to the telegraph office of La Paz. I was there some three months, very bored from the lack of diversions, and as the Director of Telegraphs emphatically refused to let me resign, at the end of February, I believe, I surrendered my accounts to the Revenue Office of the pueblo, as the rules of that time prescribed. I arranged all the papers, closed the office, and gave the key to the Mayor, telling him I was thinking of returning the next day, but in case I did not I was giving him the key to the office. I took the train to Corinto where I embarked on a steamer that weighed anchor the same day for El Salvador. On board I got together with the youth José Gutiérrez, the son of Don Esteban (who had died leaving a healthy sum to his wife Doña Joaquína), who was also going to El Salvador to buy some thousand quintals of rice. When we disembarked at La Libertad, José asked me to accompany him on the excursion that he would make through some pueblos of El Salvador for the purchase of rice, because he did not know those places and was finding himself very perplexed [78] in tackling the business alone. I could not excuse myself; his parents had done favors for me in an unfortunate time. We arrived at the capital, stayed in a room in a house belonging to a countryman of ours named Gutiérrez, rented beasts, and went to various pueblos to buy the grain, until we had gathered the desired quantity. We returned to San Salvador, measured out the rice in quintal (hundred pound) sacks, and took the first part to La Libertad, five hundred sacks, which were loaded onto a steamer that sunk, and since it was not insured, it was lost.

Finished with the rice business, I decided to return to Nicaragua together with José, since it was impossible for me to find a position with the Telegraph. In León I stayed in José's house; his mother Doña Joaquína received me warmly.

A few days into León I unexpectedly saw my old friend Benjamín Martínez, who had come from Matagalpa and was going to San Miguel on vacation. He insisted that I accompany him, and I went along with him and the youth Carmen Cantarero. We embarked at Corinto. I did not pay for the passage, because I knew the ropes and managed to go aboard and get a free ride. We disembarked in La Unión, and from there we went to San Miguel. We spent some twenty days on the trip, and when I was going to return to León, Benjamín proposed that I go with him to Matagalpa where he would give

me merchandise that I could sell in partnership. I went with him and he put me up in his house, providing me all kinds of consideration.

Benjamín lived with his sister Merceditas and his brother Bartolo (later President of the Republic), who was still a child in a gown. At the end of August (1886) [79] Benjamín sent me with some five or six crates of merchandise to open a store in La Concordia, a little pueblo situated some fifteen leagues north of Matagalpa. Upon my arrival, I presented some letters of recommendation that I brought for the principal residents of the pueblo, including one for the chief named Averruz, who received me with airs of solemn protection. He was an old man with a ferocious face, a stocky body, and with all the looks of a highway robber. Another of the letters was for the priest named Cerna, a man of somewhat advanced years. He lived with a nice and saucy girl who passed for his niece but was in reality his concubine.

After I opened the store the whole pueblo came to see the novelty and spread the news through all the surrounding countryside. That contributed greatly to the good success of the business, as did the fact of not having competition in the place.

Dedicated to my business, without mixing with anyone, getting along with everyone, and staying away from all the local gossip, I passed the days peacefully until around the middle of October, when two citizens of Managua came to my home (including one Castrillo) with a letter of recommendation from Benjamín urging me to work with them in the upcoming election campaign. Until that date I had not gotten involved in any of those political messes, which among us are like swampy forests where every class of poisonous vermin abound, who live in the shelter of the foliage and in the mire that accumulates in its shadow. Nonetheless, to oblige my [80] friend Benjamín's exhortation, I promised those gentlemen to engage in propaganda work in favor of the election of Don Evaristo Carazo, who was the popular candidate. The chief of the pueblo was opposed to that candidacy; he campaigned for Don Pedro Joaquín Chamorro (Don Adrian Zavala was the straw-man candidate, which is what we called the false candidates in that time.)

I entered the electoral struggle fully and with vehemence, and on the day of the election of the Departmental Counselors (the election was then by the indirect system) I presented myself at the election table wiht enough voters to obtain the victory. That exasperated the chief so much that he snorted rabidly, and as someone had told him I was carrying a revolver within the election room, he emphatically denounced me before the President of the Table of Directors. I did not have any other recourse than to surrender the gun, saying I merely forgot to leave it home. After this incident was over, the voting continued until we obtained the victory, but I lost my revolver.

After that civic campaign in which I spent my savings, the village hatreds fomented by chief Averruz were unleashed on me, and my business decayed considerably. For that reason I was disposed, in agreement with Benjamín, to move to the neighboring pueblo San Rafael de Norte, which enjoys a very good climate and has attractions that La Concordia lacks. I installed myself at a corner of the plaza. The chief of the pueblo was a gentleman named Trinidad Rivera, who received me with much friendliness. I made connections with most of the principal persons and spent my days there happily.

A precious girl named Rosita Ubeda lived across the street from the house that I occupied. I fell in love with her and [81] proposed marriage. She accepted. But when I formally asked her father, he refused his consent. The felony of that girl disillusioned me greatly, and I decided to move to Jinotega in June 1887, where I established the store with a greater quantity of merchandise in the house of Don Margarito Zamora, of whom I preserve very grateful memories for his sincere friendship, his sharp intelligence, and his frank character. I also have good memories of Don Ignacio Chávez and his wife Doña Paulina, who extended affectionate tenderness to me.

Jinotega in that time belonged to the Department of Matagalpa. It is one of the most picturesque towns in the north of Nicaragua. Most of its inhabitants are affable and generous and very friendly in celebrating the arrival of someone new. The climate is delicious, its women graceful and smiling, like the perfumed rosebuds that abound in that place. Situated in a long valley, some two kilometers wide, the town is bordered on the east and west by high mountain ranges which extend parallel to the north, forming an entrance at the end of the two hills, like a bouquet, and farther on extends the beautiful plane called Apanás, where the principal folks of the city go out horseback riding.

I do not recall well if it was the middle of January or the beginning of February of 1888, when there arrived in Jinotega Roberto García, a pure Indian of that region, who several years ago had gone to Guatemala as servant or private secretary of Professor Don Antonio Silva. Through his own efforts he dedicated himself there to the study of pharmacy [82] until he obtained the title of doctor in that field, through which he was able to establish himself at the head of one of the best pharmacies in that city, with a good salary and distinguished considerations. He arrived on foot in his native pueblo and, strange thing, he was given a splendid reception: dances, parades, and feasts. He was given the royal treatment in every way. I became friends with him, and he got me excited to accompany him on his return trip to Guatemala. Resolved to do that, I wrote to Benjamín, calling on him to come up so we could liquidate the business and arrange for the disposing of the inventory of merchandise. Those matters settled, I went with García to Guatemala on February 20, 1888.

-- V --

Journalism, Politics, War, Revolution, and Prison (1888-1895)

My arrival at the capital of the old Captaincy General of Central America began a new chapter in my life.

We arrived in Guatemala on the afternoon of March 10, 1888. García took me to a boarding house of one Señora Mancia, and he went to his home. Living at the house where I lodged were several Nicaraguan students, including Manuel Coronel Matus and Carlos Alegría, whom I got to know right away.

Since my funds were very scarce, I tried to arrange board with the landlady for the first month. She asked me for twenty pesos, which I gave her on the spot, leaving me a balance of two or three pesos.

After I spent some days walking the streets, like a kite without a tail, looking for work and unable to find anything, Carlos Alegría told me that in Public School No. 8, in

Santa Caterina, they needed a teacher [83] for one of the primary grades, and that if I wanted the job, he could recommend me to the principal of the school. I told him I would accept it with pleasure; however, as I knew nothing about pedagogy, I could not carry out the duties very well. "That's not important," he said. "You don't need technical knowledge for that. It is a very simple thing." "If that's so," I answered, "I accept." He gave me a letter of recommendation for the principal of the school and I went directly to meet her. That principal received my affably, and without any reservation she proceeded to hire me for the office, explaining how I should carry it out.

After my two weeks of being supremely annoyed by the tumult of those little kids, Coronel Matus spoke to me of another position which was open: manager of a biweekly periodical edited by Fabián Pérez, which offered a better salary with less work. I didn't hesitate to accept that new position. I went with Matus to Pérez and made a definite agreement with him, putting me that same day in charge of the responsibilities I had to carry out. The paper was political, called *La Unión Liberal*, edited at La Unión Press, and paid for by the public Treasury. It was what they call a semi-official paper. The editorials were written secretly by Enrique Martínez Sobral. I went about managing the periodical as best I could, involving myself enthusiastically in everything involving the publication, even though they were not my responsibilities.

In the office of the paper I had frequent occasion to rub shoulders with persons of high political and social importance, who regarded me with the most sublime [84] disdain, probably because of my poor clothes, because in Guatemala, as in all places where "the habit makes the monk," people are looked on with indifference if they are wearing out-of-style clothes. That induced me to write to my father, painting a picture of my situation and asking him for a loan of some fifty pesos so I could dress decently. He answered by denying me the loan and giving me advice.

Meanwhile, dedicated to the demands of my work, I was balancing my expenses against the salary I was earning. One day Pérez, the editor of the paper, urged me to write small news items. I told him that I did not know a jot about that, but if he would correct what I wrote, I would be very glad to do it, and thus began my journalistic career. I don't recall what trivial thing was the first item of gossip I wrote about, but I do remember that there was very little that Pérez had to correct, which made me very happy inside.

After my first month of work at the paper, they increased my salary from 30 to 40 pesos.

After some five months of publication without interruption, the paper was closed: Señor Martínez Sobral was named Minister of Foreign Relations, and Pérez was elected Deputy to the National Congress. I was now unemployed and totally preoccupied with thinking how difficult it would be to find a new job.

After a few days of rumination over my precarious situation, I received a letter from Dr. José Leonard, editor and publisher of the newspaper *La* [85] *Estrella de Guatemala*, in which he offered me a job on the editorial staff as a copy editor, with a salary of 40 pesos per month. I accepted immediately. In that time only three papers were published in Guatemala: *Diario de Centroamerica*, published by Don Baltasar Estupián and edited by Don Valero Pujol; *La Estrella de Guatemala*, whose owner was a Yankee named Hollander (married to a Chinese woman); and the semi-official *El Día*,

published and edited by Don Federico Proaño. The three editors of those papers were brilliant writers.

Upon my arrival at the editorial office of *La Estrella*, Dr. Leonard introduced me to Mr. Hollander, and he agreed that I should correct proofs for 40 pesos monthly, and if I would write for the paper as a reporter, I would be given one peso per column and paid weekly. The other reporters were paid 75 cents per column. My special responsibilities were the reports of the National Assembly and the theater, which had to be turned in by six in the morning so they could be published in the paper that began circulating at eight.

That opened the field to me, not only in my social relations, but also in journalistic literature, slash-and-smash literature, in which nothing more was required than clarity of concept, although grammar got trampled. One day Dr. Leonard woke up sick, and I went to see him in the morning. The great man was lying in bed: great, yes, for his privileged talent, for his profound linguistic understanding (he spoke seven languages), and for his firm and peaceful character [86]. When I was leaving him, he gave instructions for me to write the editorial, dedicated to the memory of a lad named Saravia, who the day before had died in Mexico, being then Secretary of the Legation of Guatemala. I added some biographical facts on the youth, and I went to the editorial office to write the article. The next day when I went to visit the Doctor, the first thing he said on seeing me was:

"Man, Miranda! What a show you made of the poor little Saravia!"

"Why, Doctor?"

"Because you elevated him to such a height that you made him look ridiculous."

In fact, the article was so pompous that the subject looked like an inflated balloon. I never knew Saravia face to face. In throwing together the article, I supposed I was dealing with a great man and so I made it up, with a mountain of trashy verbiage. How many "great men" thus appeared in the papers "fabricated" by young reporters!

With my reporter's identification card I had access to everything, and I took note of everything that I saw and all that I heard, so I could get the most out of the writing of a gossip piece or an article. One night I left the theater about one in the morning in the company of Luis Felipe Corea and Justiniano Balladares, young Nicaraguan law students. We walked along the street talking amiably when, as we were passing by a tall house, we heard the chords of a happy orchestra and saw the balconies at the top of the house illuminated profusely.

"I wonder who is throwing that happy party?" asked Justiniano.

[87] "That is the wedding party of Mr. Eissen," I answered.

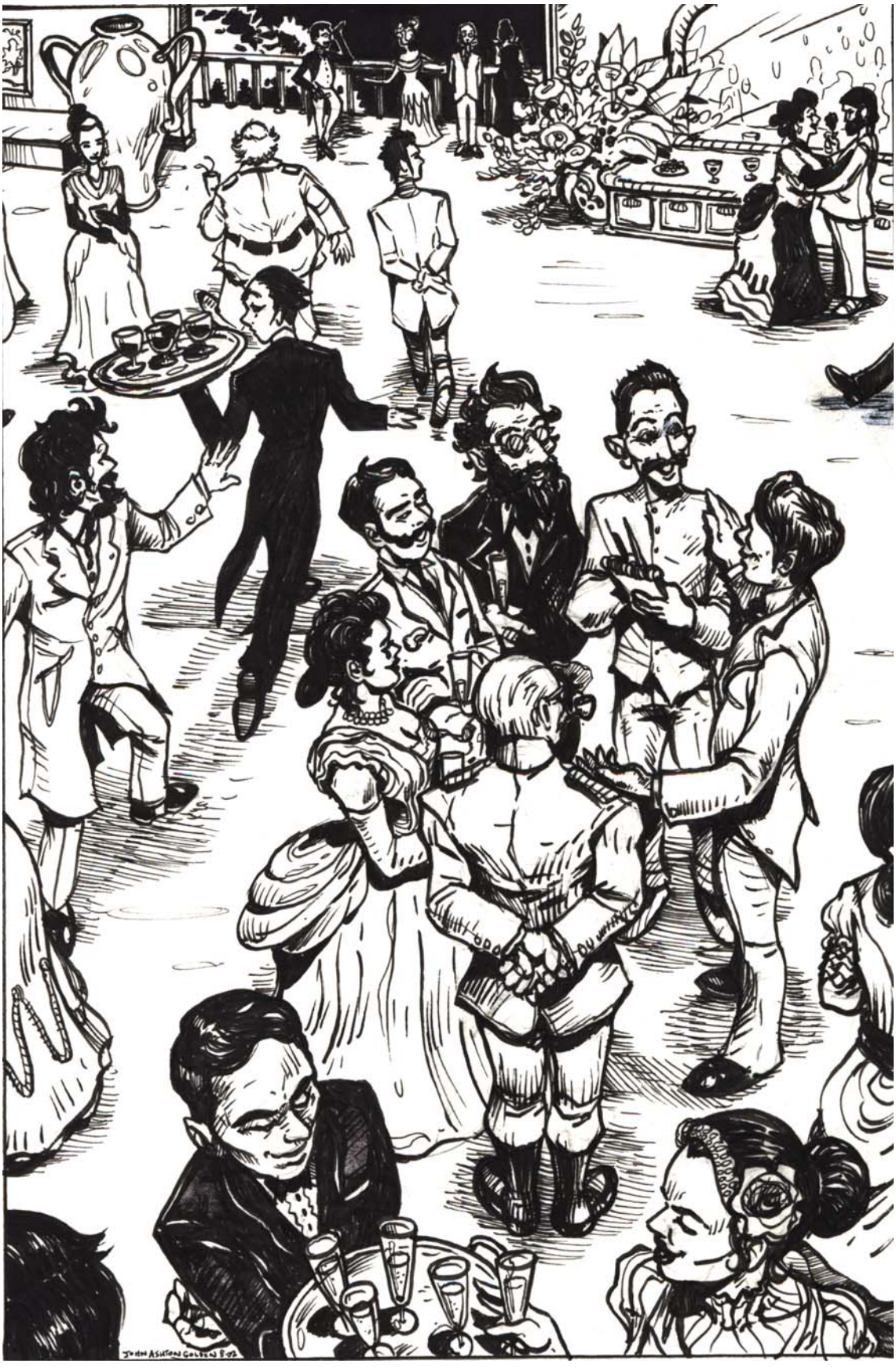
"Aristocratic dance," said Corea. "Why don't you go in?"

"How much would you wager that I can get in?" I replied.

"A bottle of champagne and a dinner at the Grand Hotel."

"All right," I said, and I went up to the main door that was closed. I rapped three times with the knocker and a servant dressed in tails opened the door. "What do you want," he asked arrogantly.

"To speak with Mr. Eissen. Give him this card (my reporter's card)." The servant closed the door and went to deliver the card. Corea and Balladares were still insisting that I could not enter the party when Mr. Eissen himself appeared at the door, greeting me affably and inviting me to come in. I took leave of my companions and went in.



I made it known to Mr. Eissen that I had special orders from the Publisher of *La Estrella* to attend that party and to write a piece on it. That was enough to attract attention, and as I excused myself from entering the dance hall since I did not have gloves, he insisted that I accept a pair of magnificent kidskins which he went to get from his wardrobe.

The most distinguished members of the Guatemalan aristocracy were at that wedding dance. In that elegant world everything was strange to me. The luxury and splendor of the fiesta and that atmosphere, heavy with exquisite perfumes, all made me recall the stories of *The Thousand and One Nights*. Mr. Eissen, with exquisite courtesy, introduced me to several of those blueblood gentlemen, and I was beginning to make notes in my notebook when [88] the celebrated Cuban poet José Joaquín Palma, with whom I had good relations, greeted me warmly and with pleasure gave me names and surnames of those personages for my story, since he was well acquainted with that aristocratic crowd. At four-thirty in the morning I went home and began to write the story of the dance, which appeared in the paper that same morning. Mr. Hollander was very satisfied with me for that effort, because the whole edition was sold out that day. Besides, I won the bet with Corea and Balladares.

I never knew the reason Dr. Leonard left the editorship of the paper, and to replace him Mr. Hollander brought Joaquín Méndes, who in that time was a true bohemian and lived outside of marriage with the inspired poet Lola Montenegro. (Years later he married her when they had a daughter called Lucila).

Under the caustic editorial pen of Méndes, *La Estrella* took a new turn and gained greater force. It opposed the Government of Barillas, and that, in little time, produced the following result in the country. They sent Méndes to be confined in Jutiapa and they expelled Hollander as a pernicious foreigner. That happened on May 15, 1889.

At the beginning of December the year before I had obtained a job as copy editor in *El Guatemalteco*, the official newspaper, whose publisher was Manuel Coronel Matus. There I worked some three hours a day, and that left me time for my work at *La Estrella*, but when that paper was suppressed, I [89] was removed from the other job and remained without employment.

Later, (I think it was in June of the same year), Augusto Mulet de Chambó (a well known Catalan adventurer, but a big smart-ass) founded a paper called *El Imparcial* secretly edited by Manuel Coronel Matus, who spoke to me about putting me in charge of copy editing and also the news stories of the paper. We spoke with Chambó and we agreed that he would pay me seventy pesos per month.

In that time some cattle enthusiasts put on a bull run in the circus of the city and Coronel Matus wrote an article in which he commented on the success of the run and made jokes at the expense of those enthusiasts. These men, who belonged to the top rung of society, that is, the Guatemala aristocracy, were furious at the article. At night they met in the Guatemala Club with the purpose of resolving that measures be employed to answer the attack made on their "honest enthusiasts."

They unanimously decided to commission one of them, Antonio de Tejada, to beat up Coronel Matus. Very early the following day I learned of the decision of the bull enthusiasts, and I immediately sent a card by local mail to Tejada, telling him that I knew that he had been designated to beat up my friend Manuel Coronel Matus, and I let him know that before he touched him he would have to deal with me. In the afternoon of the same day Tejada came to my home with two more individuals. I did not know him. He was a strapping youth of some twenty years, good looking and well built; compared to me he was a giant. With much courtesy he asked me if I had written that letter (showing me what I had sent). [90] Immediately I answered yes. He responded calmly, telling me that if by six in the afternoon he did not receive a retraction of what I said in the letter, he would wait for me in the theater to show me who he was. "All right," I answered. "We shall meet there."

In the theater I was sitting in a seat in the orchestra when Tejada came up to tell me he was ready. "So am I," I answered, "but if it's all right with you, let's wait until the show is over, then we'll go where you'd like." He agreed to this, and when the show was over, I joined him, going silently and secretly to the back of the theater where nobody would be at that hour. He made the suggestion that we should go to the Carmen hill. "There's no reason to go so far," I said, "since here where we are is a place where we can fight without anyone observing. Take your revolver and let's shoot at point blank."

"I do not carry a revolver," he answered.

"Then do you want to fight with clubs?"

"Neither do I have a staff."

"So, what you want is to beat me with punches. Very well. I am going to enjoy it, but with proper rules." We stopped blowing smoke and I got into a boxer's stance. Right then I knew my rival did not know the first thing about boxing, since he was all over me like a furious bull, trying to flatten me with his hefty punches, his arms flailing. I put myself on the defensive, throwing my foot back to dodge the clubbing punches that he furiously aimed at me. Moving backward I slipped on the wet grass of the walk and fell. My adversary, without any trace of nobility and like any roughneck, jumped on me giving me punches with his closed fist. I was able to get up, and with my right hand I tightly grabbed his windpipe, [91] while with my left I held down his right hand, bringing his fingers under control in the cuff of his shirt. With his left hand free, he gave me a strong open-handed slap in my face. Instinctively I opened my mouth and by pure chance trapped one of his fingers with my teeth, and I didn't let go, despite the scratches he was giving me with his other fingers. In that situation I had dominated him, and if in those precise moments some Honduran youths did not arrive, friends of mine (Pancho Cálix, a Reyes boy, and another whose name I do not recall), I would undoubtedly have wasted him. It took some work for the Honduran boys to loosen my grip. The Tejada youth remained stunned. He did not know where he had left his "smoke." When we separated and I got to my feet, I tried to lash out at my adversary, but my friends held me back, and I only said, "Know and understand, Señor Tejada, that this has not been any more than the preamble of our dispute." In that moment two or three friends of Tejada arrived and they took him away. I left with my friends, and we went into a cantina to drink beer. There my friends explained that on leaving the theater, they heard that Miranda had gone arm in arm with Tejada to the rear of the theater. They suspected that

we were going to fight, and they came to the place. I never ran into Tejada again. Nothing happened to Coronel Matus.

I don't now know what my reason was for leaving the editorial staff of *El Imparcial* in the middle of August of that same year, 1889. The fact was that I preferred to be out of work, and in the month of September I took a writing job in the General Accounting Office. The director was Don José María González, who also acted as [92] president of the Supreme Tribunal of Accounts. Señor González was a very serious and methodical man in his office work. The rumor mongers said that he lived together with the wife of Don Valero Pujol, writer and philosopher from the Iberian Peninsula, whose vast talent was reflected in the Faculty of the National Institute, in his brilliant journal articles, and in his magisterial work titled *Compendium de la Historia de la Filosofia*.

April 30, 1890, they named me Assistant Bookkeeper in the Center of Accounts, whose head, Don Manuel Aldana A., under a commission of the Ministry of Budget in that period wrote the "Model of Fiscal Accounting for the Republic of Guatemala," a very meritorious work for its clarity and simplicity in treating the accounting operations of a fiscal office. There were five of us Assistants of the Bookkeeper. They put me in charge of the Book of Current Fiscal Accounts of the Republic. At the beginning, I confess candidly, I did not understand the jumble of those accounts; but very soon I caught up with everything and the thing was running on rails.

At the end of June I received a telegram from my brother Santiago, in which he said that our mother was gravely ill and that I should come if I would see her die. Deeply moved by that news, I immediately arranged my trip to Nicaragua. I asked permission, which was given without hesitation, and with some two hundred pesos that I was able to borrow, I set out on the road the following day, since I knew that in the Port of San José there was a steamer for the South, which would weigh anchor in the afternoon. [93] When I arrived at the port, I went directly to the wharf and boarded an express steamer that only stopped in La Libertad. In two days I jumped ashore in Corinto, taking advantage of the generosity of one Señor Suárez to disembark with him in the launch of the Commander. Suárez came as Confidential Agent of El Salvador before the Government of Nicaragua (perhaps with the object of asking help in putting down the uprising of the Ezetas). The Commander of the Port put an express train at the disposal of Señor Suárez, and he invited me to accompany him. It all turned out perfectly for me, not only for the speed of the trip but also for the economy in the passage. When we arrived at Momotombo a lake steamer was waiting for us, and around eight or nine at night we arrived in Managua. Very early the next day I took the ordinary train to Granada and that same day I embarked on the little steamer *Victoria* which led me to San Ubaldo, where my brother Santiago was waiting for me with beasts on which we rode to San Pedro.

My joy was intense at seeing my poor little old mother recovered from her illness, and she -- Oh with what warm feeling she embraced me within her trembling arms!

I stayed about a week in my pueblo, visiting all of my numerous family, and then I began my return trip to Guatemala. I was not a little surprised the day after my arrival in the *Chapina* capital, to find a uniformed soldier in my home to tell me that on order of the President, General Barillas, I should go to his office immediately. I took my

sombrero and was accompanied by the soldier. We arrived at the Presidential House, and they had me enter a simply furnished study. There I waited [94] for his Excellency, who appeared a little later with one of his Ministers. He greeted me genially and asked me for reports on what I had seen of war preparations in the Salvadorian ports. I simply related what I had seen. Then he urged me to write an article on the affair, which would be published in the *Diario de Centroamerica*. He left me amiably. I went home, wrote the article and brought it to the editorial office of the *Diario*, which they published without hesitation.

Because of the uprising of the Ezetas in El Salvador, the Government of Barillas declared war, and an army of ten thousand men marched into El Salvador, though without any enthusiasm, because in the first encounter in Parajegalan it was completely defeated. Then the Yankee Ministry intervened and peace was signed. When the defeated troops walked through the streets of the capital, Lola Montenegro, who was stopped at a corner, said, "This is because the chickens abound and the eggs are lacking."

A few days later, a tumultuous demonstration occurred among the market people protesting the paper money of the Public Treasury, which they designated with the name *guacamoles*, because they were green and nobody wanted to receive them even for half their value.

In April of that same year Joaquín Méndes had secretly returned from his confinement in Jutiapa, having escaped to El Salvador [95]. Since in those days Don Manuel Lisandro Barillas was ranting over some articles that Don J. Martín Barrundia had published against him in Mexico, Méndes took advantage of the opportunity to offer his pen to the service of Barillas, writing various articles in the *Diario de Centroamerica*, refuting the celebrated Barrundia. Now ingratiated with President Barillas, he obtained official support for the publication of a newspaper called *La Opinion Nacional*, putting behind him the outrage which the same Barillas had committed against him months before, deporting him to Jutiapa. Through that road of abjection he later came to obtain favors from Reyna Barrios, the successor to Barillas, in whose time he published another periodical with the title *El Progresso*. And thus he came to be a favorite of the tyrant Estrada Cabrera, successor to Reyna Barrios, when the latter was finished by the ball of Zollinger. Estrada Cabrera raised Méndes to the post of Minister Plenipotentiary before the Government in Washington. What a shame that such talents like those of Méndes did not carry character or dignity! Men of that nature and condition are perhaps most responsible for the fact that in these forsaken Central American nations such shameless knaves are entrenched in power.

Don Manuel Lisandro Barillas, in the Presidency of Guatemala, was a species of Philip IV of Spain, but without his fondness for letters. He enjoyed distributing favors to poets and writers. From the books of the Center of Accounts, I extracted the following facts, from the salaries that were paid from the National Treasury to the writers of that time: [96]

Valero Pujol	440
José Leonard	200
Federico Proaño	150
José Juaquín Palma	250

Joaquín Méndes	500	
Rubén Darío	840	
Demetrio Viana	100	
Adolfo Vendrell	200	
Manuel Coronel Matus	100	
Lorenzo Montufar	600	
Agustín Gómez Carrillo	100	
José Antonio Mandujano	100	
Ramón P. Molina	100	
José Ernesto Zelaya	100	
Manuel Lemus	100	
Carlos J. Valdez	160	
Carlos Selva (support for his *Diarito* in Nicaragua)	300	
Agusto Mulet de Chambó (for founding and sustaining a periodical in Paris, after the suppression of *El Imparcial*)	1,500	
Enrique Gómez Carrillo (for writing in Madrid)	125	
Total	$5,965	monthly

A total $5,965 per month left the public funds for writers who supported a Government that was inept in every way. Little by little I was coming to know that official pantheon where eagles wallowed about with every kind of insect.

On August 28 of the same year, 1890, J. Martín Barrundia was assassinated in the port of San José aboard the steamer *Acapulco*. Barrundia undoubtedly was a rogue: he was one of the most terrible and fearsome hit-men in the era of Justo Rufino Barrios (1872-1885). An enemy of Manuel Lisandro Barillas (1885-1892) since the beginning of his administration, he went to Mexico, and there he hurled furious filipics against Don Manuel Lisandro, and the latter got so worked up that he lost his temper. When the war was over between Guatemala and El Salvador, which was caused by Ezetas' rebellion, Barrundia [97] went to Mexico to reach an understanding, or perhaps he already had one, with the Ezetas. In Champerico the Commander of that port tried to take him off the steamer, but the Captain of the boat, a Mr. Pitts, refused to give him up. On his arrival at San José, the Port Commander, a Señor Torriello, went aboard with the Assistant Chief of Police of the Capital, a Señor Fonseca, and three police agents. They gave the Captain of the steamer a communication from the North American Minister, who was a Mr. Mizner, in which he ordered said Captain to turn Barrundia over to the authorities of the Republic. After that, the tragic death of Barillas' enemy occurred, which was implausibly reported by those who went to capture him. They said that Barrundia, upon being ordered to surrender, locked himself in his cabin and fired two pistols at the Commander, the Captain and the Chief of Police. What is certain is that none of those

who went to capture him left injured. Besides, in October of that same year, there was registered on the books of the Center of Accounts an item of $16, 875.00 silver, paid to the Agent of the Pacific Mail S. S. Co., for the arrest of Barrundia. The hatred that Barillas had for Barrundia was great. Dr. Fernando Cruz was in charge of clearing Barillas of the charge for that assassination before the National Assembly. Cruz was an erudite man very well versed in the affairs of International Law. It was he who wrote the report on the affair that was presented to the Assembly by the Secretary of Foreign Relations. I know that clearly, because I was the one who helped him correct the proofs of that work, for which I was paid splendidly. Shortly after presenting that Report to the Assembly, Dr. Cruz was named Minister Plenipotentiary of Guatemala in Paris. The Government bought [98] his rich Library for 30,000 pesos and gave it to the Municipality of Quezaltenango.

In the middle of July 1891, I resigned my post of Assistant to the Bookkeeper of the Center of Accounts and entered the editorial staff of a new periodical, founded by Marcial García Salas, with the title *La Republica*. The welcome reception that this periodical had from the public from its inception was due in great part to the publication, in folio, of the precious novel of José María Vargas Vila titled *Lo Irreparable*, a novel which the author published for the first time in folio in *El Fonografo* of Maracaibo, Venezuela. When I was in the editorial office of *La Estrella*, I made a point to cut out that folio and conserve it. On founding *La Republica*, the question of what work would be published in the folio of the periodical was discussed in the editorial board meeting. I let them know that I had that novel which I found so interesting. The author was not known then, but all the editors accepted my suggestions and the good result left them very satisfied.

I was on the editorial staff of *La Republica* only for a short time, because Señor Salas, a man of clearly conservative ideas, rejected an article of mine in which I picked on the priests.

Upon leaving *La Republica*, I tried to establish a small-scale trade in books, but the lack of resources made me give up that idea. Now some time ago I had represented the Agency of *El Motín*, of Madrid, a furious anticlerical periodical, edited by the celebrated José Nakens, who was publishing [99] funny and pungent colored caricatures of monks and friars, putting them in saloon cars. That paper sold like hotcakes, leaving me with regular profits. On one occasion they sent me, along with the paper, some artistically decorated mystical cards. Each card of mystery contained a satirical caricature in various forms of all the cockroaches of the Church. I sold them immediately, and as soon as they circulated they produced a scandal within the Church, to the extent that the Governor of the Archbishopric (there was no archbishop or bishop then in Guatemala), a Señor Albores, launched excommunication proceedings against me. Profiting from that, I made a new request for more mystical cards, and as soon as they arrived, I obtained fat profits.

In that time Don Federico Proaño gave me a complete collection of the *Catilinarias* of Juan Montalvo, whose reading greatly excited me, and I then thought of publishing them in a book, by installments. To realize that project, I took a manuscript copy and when I finished it, I turned the folios over to Don Federico. I arranged for the

publication of the work with the editor of *La Republica* press, who, despite his promise, only published the first three installments for me. The reason was that when they circulated, they produced fear in the owner of the press, and he refused to continue the publication at any price. Such was the panic which that work instilled in the majority of Guatemala society, that even the boys who were selling and distributing the installments refused to continue their task, and I had no other remedy than to go and distribute them personally to the subscribers. I arranged the printing of the fourth Catilinary and the rest with Don Pedro Arenales, owner of [100] *La Unión* press. At the end of the publication of the work, I settled the account, leaving a deficit of eighty-one pesos fifty cents, for which expense I left Señor Arenales with two hundred copies of the complete work. As a business, that work turned out badly for me, but as I had no view for pecuniary profits when I took it on, I was at least satisfied that my name would appear on the first page of that immortal book.

After I finished that editorial work, my good friend Dr. Don Manuel Monje invited me to go with him to spend a short vacation on his hacienda Santa Elena in the Department of Jutiapa, in the jurisdiction of the indigenous pueblo called Taxisco. When I returned, I told about it in an article which was published in the *Diario de Centroamerica* titled "A Voyage," which caused much displeasure for the contractor of the famous Chiquimulilla Canal, a Señor Basseaux.

In that time a misfortune befell me that I shall always remember. One night I went to the theater to see the opera Aída. The audience was extraordinarily numerous. Two renowned singers, Lina Cerne and Olimpia Boronac, divided the sympathies of the public. When one of them was performing in the scene, her sympathizers would applaud noisily, while the partisans of the other whistled and even screamed insults. At the end of one of the acts the scandal was phenomenal: they even threw rotten eggs at the stage. I occupied an orchestra seat together with Dr. Leonard and Don Federico Proaño, and we were quietly observing the commotion that was offending every notion of cultural propriety. [101] At the end of the performance all of us left little by little. I was with Dr. Leonard and Proaño the whole time. When we got to the vestibule a police agent came up to me ordering me to accompany him to the station. Surprised, I asked him the reason, and he answered that I would find out at the police station. Proaño as well as Leonard protested against the policeman's bad conduct, but their objections carried no weight, and I had to go to the jail like a meek animal. At the Santo Domingo station, the police brought me before two individuals who were seated at a writing table in a well-lighted room. One of them, who appeared to be the chief, had the face of an evil thug. He asked me several questions, which the other wrote in a book along with my responses. Then he asked me to turn over everything I had in my pockets, and he did not fail to be surprised when I gave him my revolver, explaining that I had a license to carry it that he would find in my wallet. Then he ordered me to go to a cell. I walked through a corridor, and at the end of it in a room with iron bars I was made to enter the lockup. The room was entirely dark, and the air was foul with the stink of urine and excrement. There were a number of prisoners lying on the floor; how many I could not discern for the darkness of the precincts. To breathe air less tainted, I had to remain motionless against the bars of the door until seven in the morning, when they took me out to put me at liberty, thanks to the actions of my friends. The Chief of Police, a Señor Vásquez, [102] gave me excuses and explanations, removing in my presence the insignias of the indigenous chap who brought

me to the jail. But none of that diminished the intense impression of those six infernal hours that I passed in that pestilent cell like a little parrot on a stake.

After that, one day I received a letter from Luis Felipe Corea, who was the District Judge in Totonicapan, proposing that I be Secretary of his Court, and offering me everything necessary for the journey. The desire to know that part of Guatemala, more than the incentive of the position, induced me to accept Corea's proposal, and in several days the beast and two indigenous peasants arrived to carry my baggage. I set out on the road with another individual who was going to Sololá. I have fond memories of that picturesque trip through the varied and dazzling passages of the landscape. I did not know what to admire more, the caprices of Nature or the magnificent splendor of the marvelous views, especially those which stand out from the heights of the road that passes along the shore of Lake Atitlan before you arrive at Panaxachel. What a splendid panorama! And then, beyond Sololá, some idyllic meadowland, with flocks of short fat sheep and the monotonous sound of their baying. All those vistas were new to me and they elevated my spirit.

After some three days on the road I arrived at Totonicapan. Corea received me with warmth and the next day put me in charge of the Secretariat of the Court. However, to be frank, those tricks of red tape, writs, and declarations of [103] witnesses I found repugnant. I was supremely bored, due to which I took advantage of the first opportunity that presented itself to resign from the post. It happened that the Accountant (Bookkeeper) of the Revenue Office, a youth named Chanais, asked me to take over his job for some two weeks while he went to the Capital to do some business. I consulted with Corea about the matter, and with his consent I accepted. Two weeks went by and Chanais did not return. The Revenue Administrator, Don Federico Rodríguez, was interested in naming me Accountant in my own right. Thus it was that I left the Secretariat of the Court.

Totonicapan in that time had a population in the city alone of 28,000 inhabitants, the majority indigenous. There were no accommodations for strangers, no parks, no clubs, and no place for idle relaxing. It had one building which was probably a Catholic hermitage in times past, and which they now called a theater. School and civic fiestas were held there, which were limited to talks and the awarding of prizes. On October 4, 1892, as the Municipality was celebrating the centenary Anniversary of Morazán, I occupied the stage and delivered the following "speech."

"Gentlemen: All nations have their heroes to whom they pay homage of admiration and respect, and we Central Americans, in the midst of our political pettiness, also have a hero and martyr to whom we pay homage, not only of admiration and respect, but also of gratitude, because he showed us the road to our [104] political and social aggrandizement.

"Francisco Morazán is the personification of a grand idea, the unity of Central America, and for that idea he struggled tirelessly and with titanic efforts up to the last day of his life. His heroic deeds will grow with time, and here in the distance we still hear the cannon booms and the sound of drums and bugles of that distinguished warrior: at Gualcho, Perulapán and Espíritusanto, immortal fields where the genius of Morazán was

crowned with eternal laurels, writing a page of glory in the book of the History of our Fatherland.

"One hundred years have passed since the day on which that Central American hero came into the world, and to the end of celebrating that memorable day, the good sons of Central America gather today to pay our homage to him.

"Those who are sacrificed on the altars of a Holy Cause are martyrs, and 'martyrs become saints,' and saints enjoy the veneration of the world. Our saints, the saints of the Fatherland, who have no altars in the churches, we hold in our hearts. Their names are engraved on the faces of our mountains, and Morazán's is the most resplendent, along with Cabañas, Barrundia (José Francisco), Jerez and the two Barrios.

"We should always honor the memory of the greatest hero of the Unity of Central America."

The applause that I was given for those short uninspired words was warm [105] and prolonged: it gratified my *amour propre.*

A few days later a municipal commission approached me in the name of that corporation to ask that I deliver another speech at a gathering to celebrate the fourth centenary of the discovery of America. I did what I could to excuse myself, insisting to the commissioners with all frankness and sincerity that I was absolutely lacking in the gifts of oration. They insisted that I should speak at the party, and finally resigned, I spit out the following phlegm.

"Gentlemen. I have enthusiasm for all that is great, all that is noble, all that flies beyond the common orbit, provided that it carries the hallmark of genius or talent. It is not my custom to burn aromatic incense before the altars of clay idols, nor to bend my knees before tin figures that attract so many with their jingling and cheap trinkets. Before the great men who are raised to the regions of glory by their deeds, before those indeed, I find myself reverent and am ready to bestow my humble but sincere homage.

"Now we have come together in this modest place of art with the only end, as you well know, to retrieve from memory the record of one of the greatest deeds registered in the history of humanity: the discovery of America; and at the same time to glorify the name of the immortal mariner who discovered it. For that reason I stand before you, not because I should be considered worthy to express my weak words with eloquence, but to respond to the kindly urging given me for this solemn act by the honorable municipal corporation. [106]

"On a day like today, four hundred years ago, the genius of the seas, who arrived on the beach in the rising dawn, filled with wonder and admiration, contemplated for the first time an innocent virgin, pure as an angel of one’s first love. That virgin is America. 'With what candor and feminine curiosity they approached little by little the man-god who had descended during the night from the crystal firmament that encircled the horizon.' It was not called America then; it was simply the Free Land of the Great Spirit that produced gold in abundance, and this vile metal did not serve any other purpose then than to adorn the slender necks and the shapely arms of the daughters of the forest, and never corrupted the virtues nor perverted the conscience.

"Christopher Columbus! What glory surrounds this name! From childhood we have learned to pronounce it along with the name of our fathers.

"I would like a mysterious gust of wind to take me to the idealized region where it is supposed that the spirits of great men enjoy eternal fortune, to see if it is what I imagine: that Columbus occupies the seat of honor there among them, since his name has been made so grand on our planet across four centuries that it extends from one pole to the other.

"Everything is admired in the life of Columbus, but more than all, the firmness of character that did not stop him for one moment from the realization of his golden dream, conquering with indomitable tenacity the great and innumerable obstacles which [107] he faced in each step.

"But, look. Now the name of a friar comes to me. Holy friar! If all were as he, I would be among the most fervently devoted. But if it were only so! Those blackbirds carry in their history the stigma of hypocrisy, of prostitution, and of all the vices that afflict the misery of man. But that is not my affair now. I said that I was recalling the name of a blessed friar. Friar Juan Pérez de Marchena also participates in the glory of Columbus, on account of the fact that it was he who supported him in his vicissitudes and misfortunes.

"And why not remember Isabella the Catholic as well? Oh August Sovereign! If I were lord and master of the world of Columbus, I would proclaim you Queen of America. That woman had the eye of an eagle. She saw Columbus and in an instant discovered that that man was carrying a world in his brain, which he laid at the feet of her who would aid him.

"And the finches? It is fair to mention too the names of those illustrious sailors who not only accompanied Columbus, but also who they were who furnished the caravels which first crossed the Atlantic. The Santa María, the Pinta and the Nina, with their sails swollen by the wind, in the midst of an unknown sea, are the ships that brought civilization and progress from the old Europe to this New World of America.

"But it is not my intention to narrate the events that occurred in the year 1492, but only to touch on them lightly, and for that enough has been said. Surveying the pages of the history of the conquest of our wretched peoples [108] burdens my heart with pain to consider that if our conquistadors brought science, art, and industry for our social perfection, they also brought vices which corrupted our blood: hypocrisy and envy, dishonesty and treason, games and concupiscence, nasty meanness unknown to our parents, and which are propagated amongst us each day more and more.

"Let it be known, gentlemen, that I speak to you as an *Indio* of pure stock from the forests of old Chontal. I am not one of those who boast of being descendants of illustrious Spaniards to give themselves ephemeral importance. With that, to conclude, I shall exclaim: Glory on this day to the genius of Columbus! Grief and tears for the American land."

The enthusiastic ovation they gave me as soon as I finished that peroration was unanimous and warm.

During my stay in Totonicapan, I wrote several articles on local affairs for *La Republica* in the capital and for *El Bien Publico* in Quezaltenango. In one of those articles I satirically criticized some of the local customs. This irritated the souls of those alluded to and was the motive for my being accosted one night in my home. A crazy

mob came and loudly beat on the door, and insulted me with violent screams. I woke up scared, and as soon as I took account of that unexpected aggression, I got up quickly, wrapped myself in my cape, took my [109] revolver, opened the door without making a sound, and screamed at them imperiously, "Look here, fuckers! What do you want with me?" and at the same time I shot the revolver in the air. Everybody ran every which way, dispersing immediately. Nobody returned to bother me after that.

On several occasions, I was invited to fiestas and dances, not only in the village but also in the neighboring hamlets: San Cristobal, San Francisco el Alto, San Andrés, and Salcajá. I enjoyed the entertainment at those fiestas a great deal.

Because of a question raised by the Minister of Finance, Salvador Herrera, regarding the payment of a payroll which the Political Chief presented without following proper procedures, and which I, as the Accountant in charge of the Revenue Office in those days, refused to pay, that Minister imposed a fine of fifty pesos on me, arbitrarily and unfairly. That disgusted me, and I resigned the job of Accountant and went to Quezaltenango in early May of 1893.

In Quezaltenango I had a friend and countryman, Carlos J. Martínez, a conscientious writer, who was then editing *El Bien Publico*, the only biweekly paper which was published in that city, whose owner was the young Antonio Grimaldi, Jr.

Martínez took an interest in making me a reporter and copy editor of that paper, paying some thirty pesos per month.

The news had arrived at the end of April that a revolutionary movement had broken out in Nicaragua against the corrupt government of Roberto Sacasa. Martínez and I were anxious to know the results of [110] that movement, with which we were in sympathy. Around the middle of the following June, I received from the Capital a telegram from Manuel Coronel Matus (who some time ago had gone to Nicaragua), who had arrived in Guatemala as the Representative of the Revolution and was commissioned to seek help from President Reyna Barrios. In the telegram Matus told me that he was waiting for me in the Capital so I could return with him to Nicaragua to enlist in the files of the revolution. I immediately prepared for my journey with enthusiasm. I went to Champerico and took a steamer that took me to San José, and from there I took the train to the Capital. I joined Matus and in two or three days we went to Nicaragua.

When we came to Corinto, we knew that all the fuss had ended, with the so-called Pact of Sabanagrande, leaving the Government of the Republic in the hands of a Junta whose members looked like cats and dogs. The Government of Sacasa fell because it was under heavy pressure. Those who contributed most to his removal were the so-called skinflint *Piches*, who were three: Jesús Hernández Somosa, Fernando Saballos and Francisco Hueso. They were favorites of the President and meddled in public affairs without scruple of any kind and with no view to the common welfare. It is beyond doubt that the chaos of Nicaragua was triggered by the administration of Dr. Roberto Sacasa. As soon as we arrived in Managua, Matus told me that the political climate did not feel at all favorable for us, so I prepared to go to Granada, where I stayed in the house of my uncle Celedonio Morales (cousin once removed of my father). There [111] I was when the counterrevolutionary movement broke out in Leon on July 11, headed by Ortiz, Godoy and Chavarría. I was not able to discover the reason for that movement, and when I learned that it was a reaction to Sacasism, I went with Ramón Morales, with whom I

was associated in those days, to introduce myself to the Commander of Arms of the Plaza, who was a nervous little old man named Benard. After making some wily questions, and having recourse to many circumlocutions, he ordered us to march to Managua, where we would be incorporated in the little army that was being organized there. We went to Managua and presented ourselves to the indicated headquarters, which we found to be in total disorder. The Chief refused to induct us, saying that an order from the Ministry of War was necessary for that. We went to said Ministry, and there the dialogue was better than in the quartel. We were told that we should return the following day. That made me dizzy and I decided to return immediately to Granada alone, because Morales did not want to go with me. The day after I returned to Granada, I learned that a canoe was leaving for Guapinolapa (today badly called Puerto Díaz), and I took it to Chontales. In Juigalpa I stayed in my father's house, where I was received with a little warmth. However he did not fail to reprimand me for the Appendix I wrote in the *Catilinarias de Montalvo*, in which I slung some arrows at the "most good" Dr. Sacasa.

A few days after arriving in Juigalpa I learned of the triumph of the Leonese after the famous Battle of La Cuesta. [112]

With his indisputable prestige José Santos Zelaya (who was then the head of the Liberal Party of Nicaragua, after the death of Julio César) contributed directly to the triumph of the revolution against Sacasa. Despite that, he was not included in the Government Junta that emerged from the Pact of Sabanagrande, remaining on the fringe in affairs of Government. The members of the Junta, mostly Conservatives, could not get along with each other. Then when the counterrevolution broke out, Zelaya was called by the Leonese to head the movement, and he left Managua secretly in the night. Arriving in León, he took command of the insurgents, who had already named a Government Junta composed of José Santos Zelaya, Francisco Baca, Sr., and Anastasio J. Ortiz; but in reality only the name of Zelaya was heard after the triumph at La Cuesta.

I had cordial relations with Zelaya, and when I learned of his triumph, I telegraphed him from Juigalpa congratulating him. He answered me affably, urging me to go to the Capital. Answering that call, I prepared my trip, and when I got to Managua the first thing I did was to go visit him. I found him being installed in the National Palace. He received me warmly and gave me to understand without promising me anything that he would employ me in some capacity.

One day Coronel Matus spoke with me about taking charge of the editing of *El Termometro*, a daily founded by José Dolores Gámez and now owned and edited by young José Navas. Later I learned that the real editor was Gámez himself. The situation was that it would be arranged with Navas that I occupy the position of Writer for the paper. The day after that was arranged [113] (September 15, 1893), the National Constituent Assembly was installed. I attended the ceremony, supposedly as a simple spectator, and then I wrote the news of that proceeding with all the details I had observed. The next morning I brought the original of the report to the press. At noon, when I figured that the proofs were ready, I asked the Director, and he told me that the report had not been given to the print blocks, because Señor Gámez had taken it "to examine it." That disgusted me and I immediately met with Navas and made it known that I did not permit censorship of my writing, that he should get the original of the report in question, and return it to me. He immediately went to Gámez's house, brought the original and

handed it over to me, giving me excuses. My whole response was to tell him that I was not going to continue editing the paper and retired in disgust.

I sent the aforementioned report to Carlos Selva, who published it in his *Diarito*, and he then proposed that I take charge of correspondence for his paper, paying me twenty pesos monthly. I accepted on the spot, and I was sending him daily correspondence signed with the pseudonym "Luis Felipe." In those letters I was dealing mostly with the affairs that were discussed in the Constituent Assembly, all sorts of things.

To give a little idea of the men who made up that Assembly, I am going to copy several of the sketches I made of them that were published in my reports in *El Diarito*. [114] Here they are:

-1-

ADOLFO ALTAMIRANO

He is the youngest member of the Constituent; he isn't even twenty-five years old. His public life begins now.

He is the Deputy from the Department of Estelí, the pueblo of his birth. A little more than a year ago he received his law degree in Granada. He made most of his studies in León. Among his fellow students he was well known for his clear intelligence and his easy and eloquent word. In the Assembly he has won well-deserved applause. His serenity, good judgment, and moderation have often served as a powerful influence among his colleagues in deciding a question. He has the facility to express his ideas, and his voice is soft and harmonious, just as his figure is pleasant and graceful. This young man will come to be one of the principal men of Nicaragua.

-2-

MIGUEL JEREZ

The only grand thing about this unpedigreed Deputy from Chontales is his last name; the rest is but boy in him. His physical aspect makes him seem between thirty and thirty-five. A fervent Catholic in his early years, he was one of those who formed part of the celebrated turmoil of the mystics of Masaya, his native city, due to the cozy seat there of Padre Cáceres, the devilish Jesuit who dazed so many heads in that picturesque city. He stopped being a mystic in order to convert himself into a lech, [115] and he never stopped goading the city like a Don Juan. He moved to Granada, where he was a shyster lawyer, improved his pecuniary lot somewhat, and when Sacasa came and brought the trash to the surface, he was named Judge of the First Instance of Chontales, from where he now is the worthy Representative.

-3-

JOAQUÍN SANSON

Ardent and exalted youth, his temperament is fiery, his intelligence clear and unobstructed. When he speaks on the floor of the Convention, his word inspires, moves, and electrifies the audience. His periods are rounded off, his phrase is correct and thoroughly authentic. He knows how to give force and life to thought; he possesses, in a word, artistic gifts greatly appreciated in oratory. He is thirty years old. He loves glory and fame. He is the Representative of Chinandega, his birthplace. In 1884, he received

the degree of Physician and Surgeon in the School of Medicine and Pharmacy of Guatemala. His thesis was a study of resorcinol. He is liberal in ideas and conviction, and there are reasons to believe of his public life, which now begins, that it appears as white as ermine fur, just as he has entered, according to his own confession. He is a legitimate hope for the Liberal Party which today, more than at any time, needs sane and robust intelligence like that of Dr. Sanson among us. (October 20, 1893) [116]

-4-

AGUSTÍN DUARTE

Even if we had the pen of Tacitus, we could not well sketch this indefinably colorful individual, made from a substance so ductile that not even the chisel of the marble sculptor could chip away at it. He is a species of parasite that always tends to rise above the tree it is climbing. He is 45 years old, a lawyer, and possesses some enlightenment and average intelligence that he employs for his own advantage. He was admitted to practice in the years from '72 to '73. He has written in periodicals, but his pen has not sparkled. He is a Representative in the Convention for the Department of León, the city where he lives. The first job he exercised in the Republic was Judge of Mines, in La Libertad. Other times he has been a Representative in the Chamber of Deputies. In the Administration of Don Pedro Joaquín Chamorro he was Minister of Interior. In the time of President General Zavala, he was one of those who took part in the expulsion of the Jesuits, a sin that he now tries to purge. He has been Prefect of Matagalpla and Magistrate of Justice, in which post they affirm that he was honest. He was Minister of War in the time of Sacasa and was also factotum of that tragic administration. In that time they gave him the rank of General, and his whole pleasure is that they call him General Duarte. The public knows him with the nickname General Great Vanity. Now he is in politics, Liberal-Catholic-Liarist. (October 21, 1893) [117]

-5-

FRANCISCO BACA

He has a good memory together with a death wish for the Liberal Party. This old man is seventy-five years old who now occupies the position of President of the Convention. He was born in León and is the current representative of that department. We do not know exactly when he received his law degree. He was a companion of Jerez and Provisional President of the revolution of 1869. He has been Magistrate several times, in which post he has distinguished himself by his probity.

On three occasions he has been Minister Plenipotentiary of the Republic. In the War of Union in 1885, he was declared a traitor to the Fatherland for having gone to join Barrios. Today he is a Liberal-Catholic, that is, a living anachronism. (October 25, 1893)

-6-

GUSTAVO GUZMÁN

Privileged talent, solid education, and a certain philosophical depth are gifts that are discovered in this man on first view. He is Doctor of Jurisprudence, received in the University of El Salvador in the years '78 to '79.

A distinguished novelist, he is one of the first writers who presently cultivate that genre of literature in Central America. He has published *El Viajero, London Scenes*, and *Margarita de Rocamare*. The first of said works caused much sensation in Paris when it was published. [118]

He seems to be about forty years old. His appearance is graceful and pleasant at the same time. As an orator he is the best on the floor of the Convention, and his philosophical dissertations would earn enthusiastic applause anywhere he'd like. His ideas are clearly radical in the liberal sense, and for the most part he belongs to the extreme left in the benches of the Convention. His eloquent dissertations will serve well in banishing religious preoccupations that have been a suckfish on the advancement of our peoples. (October 28, 1893)

-7-

ADRIAN AVILES

If we can appreciate the merit of men by the stature of the individual, Señor Aviles would be for us a great man. He is Representative of the Department of Chontales. Juigalpa is his native city. In '71 he was studying in León. After many intellectual efforts, he acquired the degree of Bachelor of Sciences and Letters. He was Mayor and Judge of the First Instance of his pueblo in the time of Sacasa. As a Judge he left imperishable memories among his countrymen. The outstanding quality of this little person is his being very crafty in his intrigues. He is more or less thirty-three years old. Sometimes he gets animated when he speaks and leaves his colleagues stupefied. In the Convention he occupies a postion on the extreme right. (October 29, 1893) [119]

-8-

FRANCISCO MONTENEGRO

Firm character, elevated ideas, pure and generous heart: virtues that are met in the breast of this man, as modest as he is educated. He is 42 years old and a native of León. His profession is that of physician and surgeon. He studied in León. He has traveled to Europe and the United State of North America with the principal aim of perfecting the studies of his profession. He belongs to the true liberal school, and he professes his principles from the heart. A decided friend of the people, eager to see the working class count some day, for whom he has ardent sympathies. He is Representative of the Department of Estelí. In the Convention he belongs to the extreme left, and he was finally elected Vice-President of that high body. (November, 1893)

* * * * *

Besides these sketches I made a number of others whose originals or copies I no longer have. I recall that the discussion of Article 47, which deals with the separation of the Church from the State, lasted three days, and the one most opposed to that reform was Dr. Francisco Baca, Sr., who was for a long time head of the Liberal Party of Nicaragua.

On December 10, 1893, the new Constitution was signed, which was to go into force the following July 11.

From the beginning of November, the Government of Zelaya had suppressed [120] *El Diarito*, and I was left without employment, living miserably off the proceeds of

the sale of some personal possessions which necessity obliged me to unload. Through pure habit or inclination I wrote a number of articles for *El Centinela*, a paper which José María Moncada was publishing in Managua.

In that time the Governor of Honduras, Domingo Vásquez, declared war on Nicaragua, and Dr. Policarpo Bonilla, leader of the Honduran ex-patriots here, gathered his people, and with the clear support of Zelaya, marched to the frontier in the night of December 18. I was very good friends with him, and I accompanied him in the campaign until we entered Tegucigalpa triumphantly in the middle of the night of February 22, 1894. Through the whole campaign I served as Director of Telegraphs on the Major Staff of Provisional President Dr. Bonilla.

A few days after entering Tegucigalpa, I was discharged from the job I performed during the campaign. Dr. Bonilla promised me that when the Army was disbanded he would name me Director of Telegraphs of the Republic. During that interlude I received several telegrams from Manuel Coronel Matus (who then worked in Zelaya's Cabinet as Subsecretary of the Ministry of Interior), in which he was calling for me to return as soon as possible to Nicaragua, because "we need you badly," he said. I supposed that he would offer me some employment of importance, and at the end of March, inasmuch as I received my pay for the campaign, I set out on the road to the port of Amapala, where I stayed some days waiting for a steamer to take me to Corinto. [121] There I disembarked on April 24, the day I turned 33 years old. On the afternoon of the 25th, I arrived in Managua and roomed with Coronel Matus, who received me like a good friend.

I was anxious to know what work they would give me in the public administration. Some two or three days after my arrival Coronel Matus told me that they had named me Accountant of the State Liquor Agency, with the monthly salary of seventy pesos. That disillusioned me, but I accepted the post anyway. That agency had not existed before, so it was created at that time. The Director was named Samuel Mayorga. He and I wrote the first revenue code for the Liquor Agency of the Republic, including the establishing of distillation centers.

One afternoon in July, Coronel Matus gave me some issues of a Costa Rican newspaper so I could read some articles by Jesús T. Colindres, a Honduran partisan of Vásquez, in which he passionately told the story of the War of Honduras. Upon giving me those articles, Matus told me, "You who were in that campaign should know if what that Señor Colindres says is all true." On reading that version, which its author assured was true, I noted various errors in it, even the dates on which some events had occurred, and I brought them to the attention to Matus, showing some points in the notebook I had written during the campaign and, I can almost say, from the bottom of the trenches. When Matus saw those notes, he urged me to write the history of the war in a brief treatise. I said it was difficult to do because I didn't have the resources to pay [122] for the printing. "Don't worry about that," he answered. "I will give you an order for the National Press, where they will print it for you free." "Fine," I said, and I started to write the work, which I finished on August 28. On September 12, the first copies of the treatise circulated, which fell like a dynamite bomb on the official element.

Dr. Francisco Baca, Jr., was at that time the General Minister. He called me to his office and said:

"Look, Miranda, your folio has pleased me much, but this part (indicating the pages of the treatise describing the sack of Choluteca) is very prejudicial for us, because it discredits us abroad. I want you to suppress these two pages. Make a new edition of the folio, and ask us what you want."

"Look, Doctor Baca, I replied, *quod scripsi scripsi*, what is written is written. The truth should be told, although it grieves us. I do not accept your proposal."

To that reply, which he probably was not expecting, he got off the sofa immediately in a blustery attitude and, threatening despotically, said in a high voice, "So, you will have to suffer the consequences."

I, for my whole response, tossed my head back in a sign of farewell, turned around, and left the office. The next day, September 18, I received the following official letter:

"Don Alejandro Miranda. -- By Hand -- Today I have issued an order that states:

> "Whereas, Señor Don Alejandro Miranda [123], presently Accountant of the General Management of the Liquor Revenue has published a calumnious folio against the army, which undertook the recent campaign in Honduras, and especially against some of its chiefs, therefore, as an act of public disapproval for said act the President of the Republic orders: that said Señor Miranda be removed from the job he exercises and to name Don Paulino Blanco as a substitute. -- It is communicated. --
>
> Managua, September 18, 1894.
> To: Zelaya --
> From: The General Ministry, Baca, Jr.
>
> This I communicate to you for your information,
> signed S. S. -- BACA, Jr."

The Director of the National Press, where the treatise was edited, only gave me a hundred copies of the five hundred that were printed. When I claimed the rest, he told me that he had orders not to give them as long as the value of the whole edition was not paid by the Revenue Office. Several friends loaned me the money (eighty and some pesos). I paid the whole bill in the Budget office and presented the receipt to the Director of the Press. He took it, and under the pretext that he still had not finished binding the treatise, he held me up two or three days. Finally, he told me that the Minister General had ordered the copies to be kept as a commission. That was a robbery pure and simple: Liberal robbery, that it was.

Meanwhile, articles and news items in the papers were published against me daily, in which I was accused with epithets like "infamous traitor," "vile calumnator," and others of that style. Then I decided to publish my first paper, with the title *La Semana Comica.* The little paper was well received by the public. It was the first paper that was sold by hawking through the streets in Managua. However, the official campaign of hatred persecuted me without letup. When the second [124] issue came out, police agents took the paperboys to jail in order to cut the circulation of the paper. So when the

third number was published, I could not find anyone who would sell it, and I saw it was unavoidable that I had to suspend publication.

In the midst of that, Don Antonio González, a rich coffee man from Diriamba, introduced himself and proposed that I go to his hacienda called Temuá, to put some account books in order, offering me a good salary and travel expenses. I threw caution to the winds in spite of my situation and decided to accept the proposal of Señor Gonzáles. That was around the end of October, 1894. That coffee farm had nothing attractive about it that I recall, except for the fresh and agreeable climate. There was nothing else there worth the pain of mentioning. I was in Temuá about two months, and at the beginning of January, 1895, I went to Diriamba, where I was an honored guest of various people who knew me by reputation, especially Dr. Don Juan Lacayo, a distinguished Physician of much intellectual capacity who, besides, enjoyed prestige in that community.

Soon I got involved with the most select of Diriamba society. On the night of January 20, the inauguration of the Social Club of that community was celebrated with a dance. Various persons of political and social importance attended the fiesta, not only from among the residents of the Departmental capital, but also from Masaya and Granada. They had me deliver the final talk of the inaugural session of the Club, which was as follows:

"Gentlemen: The enthusiasm which the inauguration of this Social Club causes in me is what makes me come to occupy this stage to speak to you, and not because I believe I have the gifts or the merits for it, much less because I think my voice carries something new to please your ears and communicates ineffable joys to your spirits. No, my voice does not have songs, it does not have harmonies. Divested [125] of artistic trappings, it will express what I feel in my heart on this occasion, as we come to celebrate, with the spirit of youth, the definitive establishment of this social meeting center.

"I think, Gentlemen, that back in primitive times, when man lived wandering in the forest, without knowledge of laws, the idea of the spirit of association was surely held. For Nature, wise as it is, implanted in the heart of every living being the electric spark of love which inclines us not only to the propagation of the species, but also to the union of families in lineages, in tribes, in towns or societies. The irrational animals, with some exceptions, are joined in species in order to carry on a common life in harmony with their existence. Man, who is a rational animal, according to the Naturalists, does the same, but with the difference that in this two-handed creature, the passions frequently break the ties that unite the family, the society. From that origin, then, stems the necessity that exists to establish in the towns and cities, these meeting centers, in which, with daily and fraternal contact, the sacred fire of friendship is kept alive, the members sharing their thoughts and hopes for the common good.

"But there is an evil, Gentlemen, which is more and more noticeable every day in our towns. That evil is a cancer in our societies, to the extreme that it is made necessary, indispensable, that all well-disposed men of heart and sane judgement join together to try to check it. You know what the evil is: division. Division brings hatred, it brings profound bitterness, and like the legendary Pandora's box, it is spreading among the towns the seed of backwardness. It is urgent, then, that all of us men of good will unite to

serve to counteract the villains, those who are wont to foment divisions with the purpose of fishing in troubled waters, using the foul hook of the budget or the net of power in the hands of ignorance.

"The Social Club of Diriamba, which has been inaugurated, is composed of young men of good will who, through their own voluntary efforts, have succeeded in establishing it. Its program is directed toward the moral and material perfection of this community. Its vision is plausible, and it will not fail as long as its members, among whom I have had the honor of being admitted, are not dismayed for even an instant from following the road that has been laid out; that they do not shrink from the challenges they will encounter with each step; that their attention is not fixed on mean personal pettiness; and that they succeed, over all, in avoiding contact with persons who are not honorable: the bad apple spoils the barrel. As for the perverse, the criminals, those who would be in prison if social corruption had not invaded the Courts of Justice, we should not allow them to be at our side. Then we would have the satisfaction that we have not soiled our conscience in the manure of vice and crime.

"There is a lever, Gentlemen, with which all social concerns are moved today: [126] the Press. That is the torch that flashes its light on the world and is spreading education through the towns to awaken them from the sleep of darkness into which ignorance has sunk them. A Press is a mysterious workshop where the ideas and thoughts of man are forged, and in time are converted into tangible deeds. With the Press comes the newspaper, the people's voice of progress and civilization. But to say newspaper, do not think, Gentlemen, that I refer to those printed sheets which have no other view than to praise the despicable acts of those people with money who buy an ermine cape to cover their corruption. No, when I say paper I refer to the printed page that educates, which illuminates, which has truth as its standard, justice as its guide, and liberty as its ideal. Thus it brings food of the spirit to the people, healthful and strengthening as the food for the body should be to keep in a good state of health. So, then, I judge that the establishment of a press in this community is indispensable as a challenge to this society that has just been founded, and that this Club should provide the initiative for a press. If we can find a periodical which will serve to let the outside world know the richness of this land, that will be an inducement for immigration, and this will bring us advancement and prosperity. It will serve to demonstrate to the inhabitants of other zones that although we live dying from tropical anemia, we are making efforts that can lift ourselves above our wretched luck, despite the inertia which is killing us. It will serve to teach the People useful knowledge in the Arts, in Industry, with the end of getting away from the routine. The periodical will serve us for that and much more. [127] But if you want to realize that project, let us put the words and promises aside. Let us put our hands to the job. Words blow in the wind. Deeds are eloquent. Better to make a shack on the ground than to build castles in the air.

"I harbor the hope that these humble suggestions of mine will not cause offense. They are candid and frank, born from the heart of an honest man who only longs for greatness for his country and happiness for his fellow citizens."

I received little applause for that pompous speech. Most of the listeners remained silent. Nevertheless, my satisfaction was intense for the demonstrations of approval that my friends in Diriamba lavished upon me, especially Dr. Juan Lacayo.

The officers of the Social Club actively involved themselves in securing a small press that was in Jinotepe, and they put it at my disposal to publish a periodical. I put my hands to work, and on March 10, the first number of the *Semanal de Carazo* came out, which was very well received.

I was almost finished with the second number of the paper when Crisanto Aguilar, the Political Chief of the Department, presented himself in Diriamba on Friday the 15th of March and made me appear before him in the city hall. It was two in the afternoon when I presented myself before this public functionary, who received me with much flattery and, after swearing me in, asked various questions about the editing of the weekly. Then, showing me the first number, he pointed out the following news clip [128] with the headline "What's Going On?"

"The news has circulated here that the Political Chief gave Ecuadoran General Eloy Alfaro $100,000 and all the new arms which have been purchased in Europe, with the aim that he take those resources and those arms for war against Ecuador and Colombia, and that General Alfaro has promised in exchange to give General Zelaya an army of 20,000 members allowing him to proclaim himself President of all Central America. What's going on? Let the official periodical reply. But don't bite us for asking that question."

"How did you learn that news?" Senor Aguilar asked me.

"I believe that as a reporter I have no obligation to say who gives me the news that I publish in the paper. Those are editorial secrets of the paper, which I should not reveal to anyone," I answered.

"Then I have orders," he replied, "to put you in jail if you do not tell who gave you the report."

"Then comply with the orders which have been given to you," I answered, "and order me shot if you want, but I shall not reveal any editorial secrets of my newspaper."

(The above mentioned news was given to me by Dr. Juan Lacayo; and besides, the bootlickers of the press of that time tried to deny it even after it was really known that all that was said in the news item was true.)

To that response of mine, which Aguilar probably did not expect, he became choleric and ordered an official of the guard that was there to take me to prison. Some of my Diriambi friends came to see me there. Around five in the afternoon the guard took me out to lead me on foot to Jinotepe; but at the entreaties and insistence of these friends, [129] that most remarkable Political Chief, who was riding on horseback, allowed one of my friends to supply me with a beast. When we arrived in Jinotepe they put me into the public jail, where 18 prisoners were held for common crimes. It was getting dark when I entered that gloomy place. One of the prisoners gave me a bench that served as my bed. The next day several persons visited me whom I did not know, showing care and sympathy, especially the young Don Antonio Reyes, who took an interest in supplying food for me. After three days of being shut up in that prison, I sent a letter to the Judge of the First Instance asking for my liberty. After another three days passed without the Judge deciding anything, I sent a telegram to the Court of Justice asking for a restraining

order. Finally, after twelve days of holding me in jail, they dispatched me to Masaya on foot in the custody of ten soldiers and an officer.

About a league outside Jinotepe a friend caught up with me with a saddled beast so I could ride it the rest of the way. The officer, after much vacillation, allowed me to mount the beast, and thus I arrived in Masaya, in whose jail I spent the night. The next day they put me on the train to Corinto in a 3rd class coach, always accompanied by a guard. In the same afternoon that I arrived in Corinto, they transferred me by boat to the Island of El Cardón, where there was a garrison of 25 soldiers with their commander and an official. They assigned me the part under the lighthouse as my habitation. That was my bedroom. There over some stones I arranged a plank that was stowed on one of the sides of the lighthouse tower. That was my bed.

After three days of keeping me secluded in that tower, the commander of the garrison [130] said that he was giving me the liberty of the island. That was a great comfort to me, since I did not even have reading to dispel the boredom that a prolonged period of inactivity causes. Usually I would spend the morning hours and the afternoon collecting precious seashells on the western beach of the Island, and other times looking for crabs in the crags, with which the supply officer of the garrison made me hearty soups.

On some occasions the soldiers invited me to swim around a little wharf in front of the jail. None of them surpassed me in the swimming exercises. One day I was collecting shells on the beach around nine in the morning when one of the soldiers came running to tell me that the commander had shot a royal shad off the wharf, and that they could not get it due to the depth in which it was lying, and that everyone believed I could get it. I went immediately with the soldier. We came to the wharf where they showed the place where the fish had submerged, and I dove into the water from the end of the wharf. At a depth of some six to eight meters I encountered a most beautiful rock flower on a large stone. I went toward it with the intention of rooting it out, but I reflected that without the help of a tool I would not be able to get it out whole. In that instant I saw the fish a little way off, spread over a big rock. I felt totally fatigued from lack of breath but, making a supreme effort, I went over to it, embraced it, and surged to the surface of the water. I was thankful that some of the boys were waiting for me in the water and were ready to get hold of the fish, so it would not sink back down. So, no longer bearing the weight which was almost drowning me, I let it go quickly when I reached the surface. [131] We brought that great royal shad to the barracks with great rejoicing. It was some two meters long and weighed no less than fifty kilos. We all ate from it for two days.

After that episode I returned to go back under water, equipped with a piece of old machete to root out that rock flower, which was more properly a marine alga in the form of a bush. I do not recall whom I honored with that "flower."

One of those days, which were so monotonous for me in that place, my brother Francisco, the physician, came to see me. Until then nobody from my family had reconciled with me.

About two in the afternoon of the 22nd of April 1895, a battleship and two English Navy corvettes anchored out at sea opposite Cardón. They had come, we later learned, to demand 15,500 Pounds Sterling from the Government of Nicaragua for

damages and slanders of insult against a consul of that Empire in Bluefields at the time that Rigoberto Cabezas was bringing about the reincorporation of the Mosquito Coast. At four in the afternoon of the 25th they moved me by boat to Corinto and from there by train to Chinandega, where I arrived about ten at night in the custody of a squad that brought me directly to the public jail. Entering that dreadful species of cave, my heart was depressed: the bad atmosphere I was breathing was not the least of it. The den was dimly illuminated by a small oil wick, the ceiling was indiscernible, but the shapes of a number of prisoners could be seen lying on some benches. Some of them sat up when I entered, but none spoke. For a good time I remained perplexed, looking for a place [132] where I could spread out my blanket and lie down, when I noticed a rickety old bed of boards up against the stock. I was happy with the discovery, and I went immediately to take possession of that splendid couch. I took off the cover, used it as a pillow, and lay down, ready to sleep like a blessed man.

The first dream was just getting over when I felt some pinches in my sides, which at first I supposed were fleas biting me. Then I could tell they were bedbugs (crab lice) from the stink I could smell when I scratched myself, since I had undoubtedly crushed one of those nasty pests. I jumped out of bed, lit a match, and -- Oh, what a horror! -- on all sides, in the form of disciplined battalions, thousands of crabs were marching toward the center where I was lying. Very few times in my knockabout life have I had an anguish like what that bunch of repugnant pests caused me. Understanding that it was futile then to try to destroy so many of those insects, I flung the blanket on the ground, took off my clothes, and after rubbing my clothes between my hands, trying thus to kill as many bugs as I could, I got back to dressing and went to take a place, motionless, next to the bars of the entrance, where I spent the rest of the night thinking about the immortality of the crab.

The following day I learned from talk among the soldiers that Dr. Don Constantino Fiallos had arrived in Chinandega, commissioned by the Government of Honduras to try to negotiate the pending matter with the English, who had taken possession of the Port of Corinto. I knew Dr. Fiallos and decided then to send a note to him asking him to intercede for me with the Political Chief for a change of prisons, since in the one where they were holding me I would not last [133] three days before packing my bags for the other world. I do not well recall if Dr. Fiallos answered me. What is certain is that around noon that same day they took me to a place in the old part of the building, where I had a large table that served as my bed. They held me there until the 5th of May, when they took me again to El Cardón. The English by then had evacuated the port, by reason of the payment of 15,500 Pounds Sterling that the Government made to them, which they came to reclaim in their divine manner.

I don't know now which of my friends from Diriamba sent me the confidential information that if I should want to flee, using one of the steamers that were arriving in Corinto, I should deal with the Señors Palazio, who were agreeing to supply me as much as was necessary for my escape. Confident in that promise and trying to exploit the arrival of the steamer *Costa Rica* in the port, on May 20, I wrote a note to the Palazios, asking them to speak with the Captain of the ship so that he pick me up when he passed by El Cardón, where I would start swimming out to wait for him as soon as I might see him leaving the port.

So, when I saw the ship leaving around six in the morning on the 21st, I quickly went down to the rocks around the lighthouse. I made a bundle of clothes and shoes and held it over my head. I fastened my revolver -- (When I left the Jinotepe jail on foot to Masaya, the friend who brought me the beast very discretely gave me my gun that I had left in Diriamba. I was able to conceal it in such a way that no one knew that I had a firearm. When they moved me from El Cardón to Chinandega, I took the precaution upon leaving the island to entrust it to the garrison supply officer who, with all honor, gave it to me when I returned) – I fastened my revolver with a cord diagonally across my chest, and jumped into the water. I had swum some fifteen [134] or twenty meters from shore when a little ahead of me I saw the fin of a shark which made slow zig-zags on the surface of the water. I immediately put my hand on the revolver to try to defend myself from the imminent attack of that fierce marine, but I had tightened the cord that held the gun so snugly that it was impossible to make use of it, since I only had one free hand to make that maneuver. Convinced of the futility of my efforts, I resigned myself to fate, trying not to make noise with the water so as not to attract the attention of the fearsome dogfish. Fortunately, it did not sense me, and it slowly continued its route into the interior of the bay.

I kept swimming until I arrived at a distance some 25 meters from the path the ship was taking. It was not long in overtaking me. When I saw it was not stopping, I called to the Captain in broken English to send me a launch. Slowly the ship was stilled, and in a moment I was approached by a boat manned by an officer and two sailors. When I got into the boat, I thought I was saved and crowned by the success of my efforts to escape. But very soon I was disabused of my illusions and hopes. The officer notified me that he had orders from the captain to return me to El Cardón, because he did not want to be compromised in questions with the Government. He said that if the garrison of the island had not been watching my escape, it would not be inconvenient to receive me on board. Then I noticed that in fact the whole garrison of the island was lined up along the cliff where I had jumped into the water. I had no other remedy than resignation in the face of that unhappy setback. The first thing I did was untie my revolver and hide it in my bundle of clothes.

In a few minutes I disembarked at the little dock on the island and without [135] saying a word to anyone I went to the lighthouse, the place of my habitation. I changed out of my wet clothes and lay down on the bed, putting the revolver under the blanket that I used as a pillow. Pretty soon Loredo, one of the officers of the garrison, arrived with five soldiers, and with authoritative emphasis ordered me to go to the headquarters where they would put me in a jail. An outbreak of indignation made me jump up from the bed in which I was lying, and grabbing my revolver, I warned the officer that if took one step forward, I would dispatch him to hell. I cocked the revolver precariously and pulled the trigger, burying the projectile in the ground a few centimeters from the feet of the officer. The noise of the detonation made him fall back, and the soldiers scattered through both sides of the lighthouse door. When the officer saw that, he hurriedly withdrew to the barracks. I remained like a caged animal, waiting for a new squad to arrive to execute the order of my incarceration, but at the moment they did not insist, and I had time to quiet myself. At noon the supply officer brought me lunch and related that the commander (somebody Aráuz) had received orders from Corinto to shoot me if I again resisted their taking me to the lockup, and with that he tenderly asked me not to

make any resistance. I answered that my moonshine fury had dissipated, and therefore he could tell the commander that I was disposed to go to the jail with all meekness. Thus it was that at five in the afternoon the commander came and with courteous and well-mannered words notified me that he had higher orders to take me to the jail. I told him that if he had approached me as courteously as that in the morning, I would not have offered any resistance. Without any more words I went with him, and when we arrived at the barracks he locked me up in the jail, in a very narrow cell whose wood floor served as my bed. [136]

On June 11, I learned that General Eloy Alfaro had arrived in Corinto, with whom I had exchanged letters since I published the *Catilinarias* of Montalvo in Guatemala. I sent him a little card, greeting him and making him know that they were holding me prisoner on that island for journalistic affairs. He returned the greeting the same day, telling me that he was interesting himself in my liberty. In fact, on the 13th at four in the afternoon, they took me from the jail and brought me to Corinto. As soon as I arrived, the commander of the port, a Señor Roberto González, had me appear before him and, with the arrogance of an Asiatic mandarin, told me that His Excellency the Señor President Zelaya had decided to concede liberty to me under the precise condition that I go with General Alfaro to Ecuador. I answered that I accepted no conditions for obtaining my liberty, and hence he could give the order to bring me back to El Cardón again. Before that rotund negative, the commander, with exalted Turkish airs, ordered that they bring me to the prison of the port. There they held me until the 15th of June, when the officer of the guard notified me that I was being set at liberty without any restriction or requirement.

That Calvary of mine had lasted ninety-three days.

Upon leaving the jail I went to lodge at the inn of Doña Joaquína Huete, the widow of Gutiérrez, an old friend of mine. She also helped me by lending me some five pesos to get me to Granada the next day. My father still lived in that city, and as soon as I arrived I went to him to ask him to give me an order so that [137] my Uncle Luciano, who was taking care of his cattle in Chontales, would give me some cattle that belonged to me. They were born from a cow that my grandmother Isabel had given me in 1868. That request of mine disgusted my father greatly, and when he had pulled himself together, he gave me the order, making me first sign a public document before a notary public named Moncada, an old friend of his, which certified the transfer of the cattle, and stipulated that in no time would I have the right to demand, for any reason, any of his goods. I have complied with that religiously.

As soon as I obtained the above order from my father, I left for Chontales, going directly to the hacienda of my uncle Luciano Astorga, called El Puntiagudo. I proposed to my uncle that he buy all my cattle at a price that would be most convenient for him. He accepted my offer and proceeded to the savannah, which lasted some four or five days. Some 40 cattle over one year of age were collected and brought back, for which my uncle paid me 9 pesos each. The current price of cattle in that time was between 12 and 15 pesos per head. Upon giving me the money, my uncle deducted 100 pesos and interest that I owed him from before. Then I went to San Pedro de Lóvago to give my poor Mother a farewell embrace. How many tears of pleasure the little old woman shed upon embracing me. I stayed with her for some four days, and when I departed I gave

her fifty pesos. I never thought that that farewell would be forever, but it was the last time I saw my mother and my brothers and sisters. Upon my return to Granada I tried to see if I could establish a brick and tile factory, but because many obstacles were presented that I could not overcome, I quit [138] the project and decided to go to Guatemala. In the notes of my files I do not find the date I embarked in Corinto, but, according to my calculations, it was around the middle of July.

(Here in silence I leave a parenthesis of love.)

-- VI --

Rough and Tumble (1895-1897)

A little after I arrived in Guatemala, Dr. Don Manuel Monje, a good friend of mine, spoke with me about going to conduct an inventory of his hacienda Santa Elena, a place I knew since I had been there on an earlier trip. Dr. Monje gave me broad powers to arrange things on the hacienda, as if I were the owner. I made the trip on horseback accompanied by the administrator of the hacienda and a servant. On the second day of travel we reached the hacienda. The administrator had instructions, which Dr. Monje gave him in my presence, that he should place himself entirely under my orders, but I noted that this administrator, whose name was Mollinedo, was not happy with that order. However, he sucked up to me and succeeded in ingratiating himself. To organize the work of the inventory, I first inspected the extensive lands (about 250 hectares) of the hacienda, sometimes on foot and other times by horse, whose riches consisted of coffee, cane, and cattle of horn and hoof.

Since it would be too much to relate all the vicissitudes and incidents that occurred to me during my stay in Santa Elena, I shall mention only two or three. From the first days of my arrival I noticed that the milk production of the 160 cows did not correspond to the amount of curd that the cheese was generating, and I decided to find out what was behind the irregularity. One day I got up very early [139] before the routine began in order to look around. I observed that one of the milkers was leaving very little milk for the small calves, so I reprimanded him and ordered him from now on to leave half the milk. Around six in the morning a number of neighborhood boys began to arrive at the corral, bringing crocks to be filled with milk. I asked the cattleman or head milker if the milk given to the boys was sold to them, and he answered that he did not know, that he gave it to them every day on orders of the administrator. I interrogated the administrator about that and he told me that in order to keep peace with the neighbors, he placated them with the milk. I let him know that such loose practices would lead to giving them not only the products of the hacienda but also the hacienda itself, and for that reason he should absolutely stop making such courtesies. I noted that this displeased Mollinedo greatly. When the milking was finished, around ten in the morning, I went to see how much milk there was. The trough was almost full. Around three in the afternoon, when I figured that the curd would be pressed, I went to be present at the manufacture of the cheese, but before I entered the cheese house, it occurred to me to take a look into the interior through a slit in one of the walls, and at that moment I saw

that the cheese man was hiding a good three or four pound piece of curd under a crate. I returned to the walk and entered the cheesery: the man was removing curd. I asked him if that was all that the milk had produced, and he answered "yes" very coolly. Then I casually went near the crate where the piece of curd was hidden, and I revealed it. [140] "What's the reason for this curd being here?" I asked. "The administrator ordered me to set it aside," he answered. I interrogated the administrator regarding his purpose in ordering that portion of curd to be set aside, and with signs of surprise he answered that he had not given such orders. The final result of that interrogation was the discovery that every day the cheese man made that "economy" from curd, for which he was fired together with his assistant.

Some days later I went to inventory some fatting bulls in a pasture called Los Dolores some two leagues from the hacienda. According to data given me by Dr. Monje, he had 100 young steers feeding in that pasture, and since there only appeared 95, I called the administrator to accounts, and crestfallen he told me that effectively there were 100 bulls, but that 5 had left the pasture and they were nowhere to be foun. When I returned from the pasture after making the inventory, I came back alone, passing by the little town of Taxisco, where I lodged in the house of an old, very good friend of Dr. Monje, to whom I had been very specially recommended. I referred to the missing bulls in Los Dolores, and he told me almost incidentally that Mollinedo (the administrator) had sold three or four fat young steers to the town meat cutters on several occasions, but that he did not know where such bulls were coming from, only that he was sure they had the Santa Elena brand. That made me perk up my ears, and when I got to the hacienda I asked Mollinedo if he had sold some young steer to the meat cutters [141] of Taxisco, and with signs of surprise and displeasure he answered that he had not. I wrote to Dr. Monje about the case, and he answered saying that if the steers did not show up that were missing, he would fire the administrator, because he had not authorized their sale. Consequently, I ordered Mollinedo to go personally to search everywhere for the missing cattle, even if it took a week for the job. After three days he returned saying that he had not found them. I knew beforehand that he would not find them, and so I notified him that his employment was terminated. With signs of much displeasure and directing threats at me, he packed up his bags and set off with his wife.

Another day after that episode around eight in the morning the steward of the hacienda came to me and told me that the team of workers (some 20), who had been assigned to clear a plot of old cane, did not want to work, alleging that the task was excessive which he had assigned to each of them. I strapped on my revolver, took my Collins machete which I had well sharpened, and went to the cane field with the steward. All the field hands were very quiet, chewing on pieces of cane. I asked them about the reason for the strike, and they answered that the task that Mere (diminutive of Hermemegildo, the name of the steward) had assigned them was too great and they could not clear it in a whole day. I reviewed the tasks (10 rows of 100 yards each) and I was convinced that it was not too much. In view of that I said, "I am going to take on a task equal to that which Mere has given you, and if by two in the afternoon I have not finished it, I will pay you twice as much for the job. Let's go, hands to the job, and as for the one who does not accept it, I will not give him any more work on the hacienda. Of course, [142] none of those simple campesinos thought I could finish that job, and everybody agreed enthusiastically to the deal. Recalling the bitter times of my adolescence, in

which I trained in the use of the hatchet and the machete, I set about clearing cane with ardor. When it was twelve noon, I was shooting fire out of all my pores. The cane dust and the blazing sun drenched me in sweat. That work of cutting sugar cane is a job for Negroes. Only they can endure with impunity, under the tropical sun, the dust that the plant throws off and which, like the irritating picapica vine, gets into the skin causing an insufferable stinging. At 1:45 I finished the job. Two of the workers had finished before me. Most of them were finished by 2:30, but there were three loafers who did not finish until 4:00. Thus I settled that strike, which stemmed from laziness and evil intent. That and the proofs which I gave those folks on other occasions, of my good aim with the revolver, had a great influence in maintaining discipline among more than a hundred resident field hands and workers on the hacienda.

When I finished the inventory, I notified Dr. Monje so he would hurry and send a new administrator, and I would be able to return to the city. I was at the hacienda some eight months, and I felt nostalgia due to the lack of a social life. At the end of April, 1896, the new administrator arrived and I took the trip to the capital, bringing some boxes of cheese, vegetables, fruits, and various other products of the hacienda. My friend Dr. Monje was very satisfied with all my works and paid me 500 pesos. [143]

When I arrived in the city, I went to lodge in the boarding house of Doña Chón Orellana, where I had stayed before. The lodgers and guests were mostly students of medicine and some of law: Guatemalans and Hondurans; I was the only Nicaraguan. All of them treated me kindly and held me in respect. They always reserved the seat at the head of the table for me.

My first thought after I had settled in was to get some clothes and various other things I was lacking, and I then dedicated myself to seeking agreeable work. In the midst of that one day a heated discussion broke out among the students at the dinner table. It dealt with freedom of the press in Guatemala. The Guatemalan students were arguing that there was complete and true liberty to write in the periodicals, and three or four Hondurans denied that there was such unrestricted freedom in Guatemala. I kept quiet and was not thinking of taking part in that discussion, but one of the more worked up youths asked me, "And you. What is your opinion, Señor Miranda?"

"I do not like," I answered, "to get mixed up in discussions in which *amour propre* prevails, but neither do I think it impolite to give my opinion on the point you are discussing. In my mind, it cannot be categorically affirmed that here in Guatemala there is true freedom of the press, for the simple reason that the papers, which call themselves independents and which are taken to be opponents of the Government, are only engaged in discussing principles, in expounding doctrines, but not in criticizing and censuring [144] the acts of those who govern by publishing their bad deeds. I hold to the conviction that if a periodical were occupied in that labor in a caustic or satirical manner, the President of the republic would not let it survive, not even a month."

That response of mine caused an uproar among the Guatemalan students, who continued insisting that in whatever form the papers were written, the government would respect the freedom of the press. In the face of that rotund affirmation, I proposed to them that we should make a bet of 50 pesos in this form: I would publish a little periodical for dealing with present social and political affairs; if they suppressed me before one month, they (the Guatemalan students) would lose the bet. "Agreed!" they

replied unanimously. They made a collection among themselves, rounded up the fifty pesos, and with mine we deposited them in the hands of Doña Chón, the matron of the house.

Then I put my hands to the work, and the first number of the periodical was issued June 1, 1896, with the title *El Diarito*. The moral and pecuniary success that I obtained was very satisfactory. The editions sold like hotcakes. After eight days of publishing the paper the owners of the press (Sanchez and de Guise) did not want to continue publishing it. After the paper was quiet for three days, I arranged its publication in a press of the Evangelical Society, called Tipografía Americana. Number 11 was in circulation when, around eight at night on the 19th, the Chief of Police came to the lodging house with some agents and led me to jail without any other procedure than [145] handcuffing. They put me into a narrow and dirty jail, and there I passed the night without being able to get to sleep. At six the next morning they brought me in a coach to the railroad station and sent me in the custody of two police to the port of San José, where they had me incarcerated in a cell until the 24th. Then they put me aboard the *City of Sidney* destined for Acajutla, together with Juan Coronel, a small Colombian Negro, very intelligent, who was publishing a weekly in La Antigua called, if I recall correctly, *El Porvenir*. The two of us were expelled from Guatemala as pernicious foreigners.

Since they didn't give me time to scratch my head when they brought me to the clink, I wrote from San José to one of my friends, Carlos Arellano Torres, for him to send my trunks with all my belongings. I did not open those trunks until I disembarked in Acajutla, and then I was convinced of the great affection which the young students had for me, my housemates in Guatemala. Inside one of the trunks I found a leaf of paper written by hand, which said, "as a souvenir, your friends have taken some of your books; do not forget us." In effect, not only were books taken as a "souvenir," but also some of my new clothes: the same as looting. And as to what happened to the 50 pesos bet, I never knew who got it. In every sense of the word, in winning it I lost it.

In Acajutla, Juan Coronel and I took the train to Armenia and from there we went on a road to San Salvador, where we arrived very early in the morning on June 27. We lodged in a crummy boarding house, because our monetary resources [146] had been completely exhausted. After drinking coffee and changing out of my street clothes, I went into the streets in search of something to do. By chance I met Román Mayorga Rivas, the owner of *Diario del Salvador*. I told him about my odyssey, and he at once offered me a position as a reporter for his *Diario* with the salary of thirty pesos per month. I spoke to him about Juan Coronel and later introduced him. He was looking for work and succeeded in getting a position as editor of the *Revista de Centro-América*.

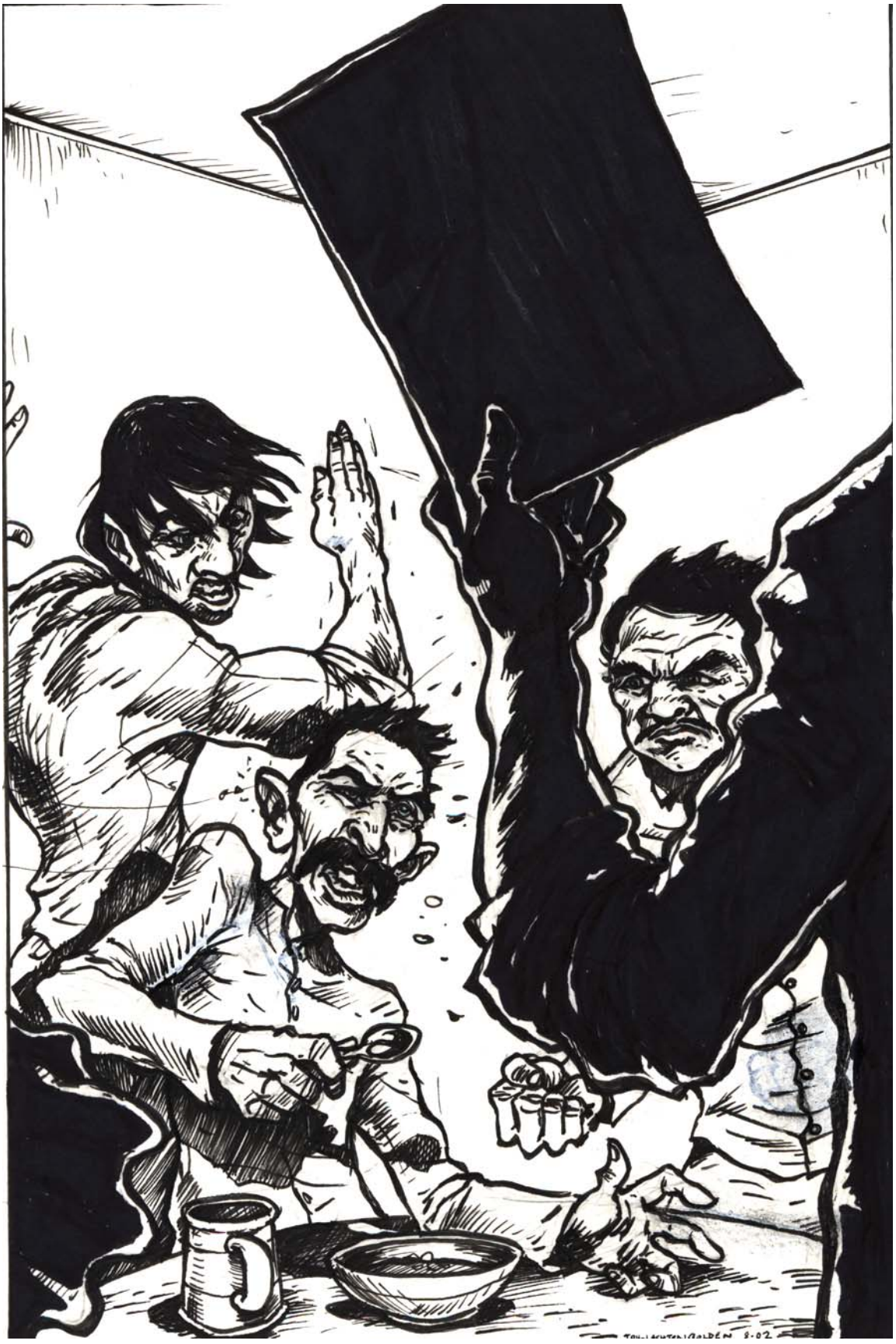
In order to close my account at the hostel and move to another more decent one, I had to hock my revolver in a pawnshop called The Three Balls of Gold.

A month after I started working on the editorial staff of the *Diario del Salvador*, the copy editor retired. He was a young Colombian named Tamayo, and I took over his post with the salary of seventy pesos a month. With that salary I could now procure some comforts. I rented a place in the house of a little old Honduran woman, near the rum factory, and arranged for my meals in the Hotel Ingles.

In that time public opinion in Central America was much agitated over the Cuban revolution. A Señor Alsina came to San Salvador, commissioned by the Revolutionary Junta to establish propaganda and assistance clubs, and he was received with enthusiastic demonstrations. Almost all the Salvadoran people were partisans of the Cuban revolutionary cause. In the *Diario del Salvador* burning articles were published in favor of Cuban Independence, and naturally, in those writings [147] there was no lack of humiliating taunting of the Spaniards. That gave room for the Spanish *Gachupins* living in San Salvador to publish a "manifesto" in a broadside directed to the President of the Republic, asking that Mayorga Rivas be eliminated, for being "the incarnation of all the elements of discord, an enemy of the peace, etc." That made me indignant, and I then published the following handbill:

> WADE UPSTREAM -- There has just appeared a flier signed by forty-four Spaniards who reside in this capital, in which the Spanish Gentlemen ask the President of the Republic to "eliminate" Señor Don Román Mayorga, Director of the *Diario del Salvador*. That means that those gentlemen want the President of the Republic to make Señor Mayorga Rivas disappear, i.e., order him poisoned or order him shot, or that he convert him into a pimp so he can eliminate him. -- We do not know what causes more indignation: the offence which is made against the Head of State of the Republic, asking of him an absurdity, not to mention the commission of an abominable act; or the depravity of those sons of our conquistadors who think that we are still under the yoke of opprobrium in which
>
> they held us for so many years, and that they can please themselves with us in the same way. -- Poor creatures, blinded by their ignorance, who reveal themselves filled with hatred and rancor! But no; more than once I have said it: Away with the colonialists! Down with the *Gachupins*!

I published that flier on the 1st of October. On the 2nd, around seven at night, I was in the dining room of the hotel peacefully beginning to take my soup when four individuals approached my table. While one of them, showing me a copy of the flier and without greeting me, asked me if I was its author, the others took positions around the table. I did not suspect for a moment that those individuals came to attack me in that place, which was frequented by decent persons. I calmly answered the one who asked me the question, that what he should first find out is if I was Alejandro Miranda, since my name was at the bottom of [148] the writing. When I said that, one of them who had positioned himself behind my seat gave me a slap in the face that made my right ear sizzle. Quickly and furiously I pounced on that louse who was treacherously attacking me from behind. I grabbed him around the neck and shoved him against a nearby post. I undoubtedly would have strangled him, but the other three, giving proof of "nobility" and "valor," flustered me with big-fisted blows and coldcocked me trying to smash my head. When he heard the racket of the fight, the innkeeper, a strong man, came to the rescue, and if he had not intervened with force and energy, those Spanish "gentlemen" would have finished me with their blows. The blood from the head injuries poured down my face and covered my eyes. Several Nicaraguans then came to see me, among them Heliodoro Barrios, a medical student, who brought me to his room and nursed my



wounds. Later I learned that the police had captured two of the Spanish "gentlemen," but that they had soon let them go free. I was in bed with a fever for some eight days. The "valiant" Spaniards who attacked me were the following, as I later learned: Manuel López González, Indalecio Arispe, Manuel Valdés, and Julio G. Prieto, who were counted among the signers of the broad sheet.

In that misfortune I had what we call bad luck, since I always went out to the streets carrying my revolver, which I was licensed to carry. But that afternoon, when I left my room for the hotel, I forgot the revolver. I was aware of not having it at the moment of the attack. I could swear that if I had had my favorite gun then, I would have dispatched at least two of those short-pants gentlemen to the other side. And it is also possible that they would have [149] killed me, but not before I had given passports to two or three.

As soon as my wounds healed, I continued my work on the newspaper.

The Criminal Court Judge brought charges against my aggressors, and to prosecute them I named Dr. Remigio Jerez, a countryman and friend of mine. When the Judge issued the arrest warrant for the four Spaniards, he ordered their capture. But the Chief of Police, who was one Luis Felipe Mathies, of German origin and a dirty background, refused to comply with the Judge's order. For that reason I published an extremely caustic article against said Mathies, revealing his wrongful procedural conduct and bringing to light several of his dirty tricks. Being the type of man accustomed to praise and servility, he became furious at seeing his faults exposed to the public in print. Accompanied by four of his gun-wielding underlings, he came to my room at four in the morning on November 8, showed me a copy of the *Diario* which carried the article, and asked me if I had written it. "You don't have to show me that," I answered, "since it has my name at the bottom of it." I had not finished saying that last word when the highly celebrated Teuton gave me a smack with a knife he was carrying. I grabbed the knife, wrestled him, and I was just taking it away from him when his toadies bashed me from behind. At hearing the turmoil caused by the brawl, the little old lady of the house went to the door and started shouting to the neighborhood, "Señors! Señors! They are killing Señor Miranda!" When the highly celebrated Mathies heard the cries, he ordered his henchmen to let me go, and he left.

(That German adventurer, who served as a minion to the Ezetas, and later, through the influence of the short-pants, served as Chief of Police in the time of Rafael Gutiérrez, ended his days miserably in his country. A furniture factory that he inherited was burned one night, and within it [150] he was found scorched.) I forgot to say that when that Mathies came in, I was washing my face getting ready to go out for breakfast. I had my revolver on the little table I used for writing, but I could not grab it because the four police had positioned themselves between the table and me.

As soon as those five assailants left, the little old woman counseled me to close the door to the street, since it was likely that they would return to take me to jail. I followed her advice, which turned out to be good, because within an hour a squad of police agents came and knocked on the door to ask the resident which way I had gone. The woman of the house told them that I had taken the key to the door and she didn't know where I had gone. In the face of that fiasco, they decided to leave two policemen as sentinels at the door. Inside the house there was an escape door that led to the other street. I left through it around eight at night, and I went to lodge with one of my

compatriots. I was there some three days, and then I went to Sonsonate, disguised as a campesino peasant. After two days there, Mathies arrived accompanied by a number of cops, and to avoid capture I went to Izalco, where I lodged in the home of my compatriot and friend, the then Colonel Casimiro González. He and his family welcomed me kindly. In a week or so I received the good news that a steamer was coming to Acajutla, heading south, and I went to that port. To buy the ticket for Puntarenas I changed my name, since I supposed that the port authorities would have orders to capture me. As soon as I was aboard, I breathed freely.

[151] On December 3, I disembarked in Puntarenas with two young musicians, deserters from the Martial Band of Guatemala. I got acquainted with them on board, and together we made the trip to San José. We traveled from Puntarenas to Esparta by train and in Esparta we rented beasts that took us to Alajuela, where we took the train to San José. We arrived on the 5th and stayed in a little flophouse. The next day I left the boys and rented a room in the house of a German cobbler's family. Then I tried to find work; it was impossible to find anything anywhere. After a week or so of going around in search of work, I took to bed with a fever. I had much anxiety in that unhappy situation. A Dr. Justiniani came to see me and prescribed medicines that did me little good. The disease left me prostrate some two weeks, and thanks to the care which the woman of the house and her daughters provided me, who spoke in Spanish with great pains, I was finally able to get up. Meanwhile, my scarce monetary resources were completely wasted, and I had no one to rescue me from my hardship. As soon as I could go out into the street, I went by chance into one of the principal hotels and entered the dining hall. On the blackboard where the names of the guests were written, I saw the name of Francisco Solano. I was wondering whether it was my rich countryman, who used to bring cattle herds to Costa Rica, when Don Francisco himself appeared, greeting me kindly. He invited me to drink a glass of beer, and we talked for a long time. I mentioned being bed-ridden and going through my ups and downs, telling him about my unpleasant situation with all frankness. At the [152] same time I asked him for a loan of one hundred pesos, giving a chit for said amount charged against my brother Francisco the physician. He did not refuse my request, and the next day I brought the chit and he gave me the money. (I repaid my brother the value of that chit when I was in Tegucigalpa.)

Two days before my interview with Señor Solano, using my last cents, I had sent a telegram to my good friend Dr. Policarpo Bonilla, President of Honduras in that time, sharing my bad situation with him and asking him to wire me some hundred fifty pesos so I could take myself to that republic. The day after Señor Solano gave me the hundred pesos, I received the response from Dr. Bonilla, in which he told me that I could pick up two hundred pesos in the House of Rossner in Puntarenas. Content and satisfied with having gotten out of that jam, I set out for Puntarenas, where they gave me the money, and I embarked for my destination, Amapala. I arrived in Tegucigalpa on February 17, 1897.

-- VII --

Settling down in exile in Honduras (1897-1899)

The relations I had in Tegucigalpa during the War of '94 were few but good, especially with the Irías Midence family, who always treated me with a frank and sincere care that I shall never forget.

When I met with Dr. Bonilla, President of the Republic, he let me know the difficulties that were facing him that kept him from offering me a good post in the public administration, due in major part to political promises he had made. [153] I let him know that I was not ambitious for any position of importance and that the only thing I wanted was to earn a living with my work in whatever post, but not outside the capital. He promised me that he would work on the matter, and a week later, February 24, I received the appointment as Administrative Accountant of Revenues for Tegucigalpa with the salary of 75 pesos a month. The next day I took over the position, which presented no difficulty. There was little work, some four hours per day, leaving me time to scrounge around.

Little by little my social relations were expanding, due in large part to my official influence, since everyone saw the kind deference with which President Bonilla treated me.

One day when I was talking with General José María Reina, the Minister of War, and some other persons in his office, one of them recalled with praise my booklet on the War of Honduras, and the General suggested making a new edition of that tract, and he and the others who were there offered to take a good number of copies. I liked the idea and decided to publish in a book not only the tract but also some of my newspaper articles that I was saving in clippings. I made a list of subscribers for the work, arranged the printing of the book in the Popular Press, and on August 30, 1897, it was published with the title *Burbujas* (Bubbles). I collected the entire amount of the subscriptions and paid the printer with it. I did not make any financial profit. The only important thing in that book is the tract on the War of Honduras because of the historical facts that it contains, [154] all exact and verified. Whoever should write the history of that war would have to consult that tract. The rest of the book is pure froth.

Until that time no daily newspaper had been published in Honduras. The only thing published then was a biweekly, published by Dr. Julián Biares, but I do not recall its title. Noting that lack of a daily publication, I decided to start one. I announced my project to all the young intellectuals who were in the Capital: Rómulo Durón, José Antonio Domínguez, Froylán Turcios, Ricardo Picada, and others. None of them wanted to be associated with the business. Everyone discouraged me, saying that if it did not first obtain a good grant from the Government, no periodical could succeed. Notwithstanding those bad auguries, I persisted in my project. I submitted it in detail to the director of the Popular Press, José María Valladares, and he accepted it without scruple or reticence. We made a private contract: he would be the administrative partner and I the publisher and editor partner. On these terms we got to work and on October 15, 1897, the first number of the paper was issued with the title *El Diario*.

The public received the paper with coolness, but after a while with uninterrupted publication its credibility expanded and its circulation increased. In that paper, despite the fact that I was not a politician, I kept up constant struggles against the "established

interests" for their treachery and deceit, against the envy and bad faith of the enemies of truth. I am going to relate, although quickly, some of those struggles and controversies.

Valladares, my partner, in view of the fact that the business of the paper was not producing a profit, separated himself from the partnership on the last day of the following November, and I took over [155] the whole business, obliged to pay him the cost of printing the paper at the press in weekly installments.

At that time there arrived from Guatemala the young poet Juan Ramón Molina, whom I had gotten to known there. Entirely unknown in his town of Comayagüela, poor and without any occupation that could earn him a livelihood, due to his humble origin nobody respected him, not even with a kind greeting. His mother lived in Comayagüela nearly in a state of mendicity. Somehow he had been able to go to Guatemala in search of better horizons, but in a short time he saw that he could not open up a field there, and hitting up his friends he was able to return to his homeland. When he came to the office of my newspaper, I welcomed him with affection, since I knew the exceptional gifts of his clear intelligence. Despite the fact that I knew that the vice of rum was dominating him, I welcomed him with enthusiasm at the newspaper, and I introduced him to the public as a poet of high inspiration. I published several of his compositions, in prose and verse.

One day he asked me to introduce him to President Dr. Bonilla, making me a formal promise not to drink any more rum. Confident in that promise, I introduced him to Dr. Bonilla. A few days later he was named Undersecretary of the Ministry of Development. As soon as he rose to that post, he stopped appearing at the newspaper office, and when by chance I met him on the street or in some official meeting, he greeted me with the airs of a great lord. Later, when Senor Luski, manager of then recently founded Commercial Bank, raised a storm against me for a news item published in the paper, Molina founded a little paper with the title *El Chronista*, paid [156] for by Luski and Santos Soto, just to sling mud and garbage at me from its columns. There was no insult or denigrating epithet that he would not use against me. I had the sufficient calm not to take notice. Sometimes I would shoot off a little firecracker, but always humoristically. When Molina began his campaign of defamation against me, the poet Carlos Gutiérrez was around the office, and he spontaneously offered his collaboration, which I accepted with total gratitude. Gutiérrez handled satire well and knew how to give energetic color to a phrase, as much in prose as in verse, without hints of decadence. (Months after beginning to work with *El Diario*, he published a little volume of verses with the title *Piedras Falsas*. I wrote one of the prologues for that booklet.) So it was Carlos Gutiérrez, with that good satirical and piquant humor of his, who aimed sharp pointed stones at Molina. I remember the following, which was published in the news section without title, which said:

> Type of perfect dandy,
> Elegant, presumptuous
> Mountain of putrid flesh
> Around an abject spirit.

In that little quatrain the portrait of Juan Ramón Molina was engraved in miniature, and the whole public at hearing it said, "That's him!" That teasing caused

great displeasure for poor Juan Ramón. Within the space of two weeks he surrendered to drunkenness, for which they declared him removed from the office he was occupying in the Ministry of Development, and he was then an implacable enemy of Dr. Bonilla.

In that time José María Moncada, a countryman and friend of mine, also arrived in Tegucigalpa, fleeing from the despotism of Zelaya in Nicaragua. It will be enough to say that [157] I received him with open arms and introduced him to all my friends. About a month after he arrived, he began to publish a weekly political paper against Zelaya with the title *Patria*. (Much later I learned that Don Gilberto Larios supplied the funds for that periodical, but I cannot be sure if it is true. The truth is that I knew Moncada well, and I knew that in Nicaragua he did not have the funds available to live comfortably, so that it was strange to see him in Tegucigalpa enjoying luxuries which are not for the penniless.) When he was provoked at my controversy with the Kossack Luski, and for which many dogs were barking at me, Moncada also threw garbage in my face, to the extent that in one of them he attacked my patriotism, saying that I was a bad Nicaraguan who was dishonoring his country.

Such an insult got me worked up, and for my whole response I said in the newspaper that in due time I would prove, with an object lesson, that three and two is five. The next day (Sunday, January 8, 1899) around nine in the morning I saw Moncada passing in front of my home. I took my revolver and a knife and went after him, but I was not able to catch up with him. He entered the building of the Popular Press, where his periodical was being edited, and I decided to wait for him to come out and stopped out front with the holy purpose of applying some slaps in the Chontales fashion. In a little while he came out the door and confronted me saying, "So you want to give me an object lesson? Take your revolver and shoot." As he was saying this to me, he had his pistol in his hand and shot a round at me. I immediately took my weapon and advanced on him shooting it. When he saw that I was calmly coming near him, he quickly [158] fired all the shots from his pistol and then fled inside the press building taking refuge behind the font cabinets. When I got to the door, I had already fired three shots, and I wanted to follow him into the press, but in that moment young Aureliano Bustillo, a friend of mine and the cashier of the same press, who had come into the street through the other door, grabbed me from behind pleading with me to restrain myself. Thankfully, I was not too excited, and I listened to his plea, retiring to the office of *El Diario*, which was located close to the press. A little time later the Police arrived; they took Moncada away, and the Chief himself led me to the lockup. There I learned that Moncada was injured. One of the projectiles had hit him in the right abdominal region, but it did not penetrate him, because it had bounced off the steel of the breastplate he was wearing. It only made a slight scratch on the skin, caused by the crease in the steel plate. The Chief of Police, who was a Señor Leonte Cordoba, was deferential and considerate to me, selecting his own residence as a place of detention. The Judge brought up the case, and at the request of the prosecutor the deed was classified as attempted homicide, rather than shooting a weapon, which would have been more fitting.

After a week they took us to the penitentiary. They put me in what they call the Hall of Flags, and they threw Moncada into an interior calabash. The judicial authorities, for the most part, were against me, while the government men were deferential and considerate.

Finally, on February 19 the case was submitted to the Jury, and it acquitted me. My defense counsel was the young lawyer Jerónimo Reyna, who obtained a truly professional triumph [159] with his defense argument before the Jury.

During the 44 days they had me in jail, Carlos Gutiérrez was in charge of the editing and administration of *El Diario*, so that the publication of the paper was not interrupted, which was what my enemies were most interested in.

When I was in jail, General Terencio Sierra, with whom I had little friendship, rose to the Presidency of Honduras.

Since June 8 of the year before (1898) I had been separated from the position I had in the Revenue Office and was dedicating myself exclusively to the publication of the newspaper. In its pages and with the pseudonyms of "Juventino" and "Colonel X" my sincere and constant labor for the progress and the culture of the Honduran people could be seen and appreciated.

On leaving the prison, I felt weary of the accumulation of vilifications hurled by my enemies in their attempt to destroy me. The triumph that I obtained with my liberty was not a sufficient palliative to remove from my mouth the bitter taste of the bile I had drunk, and I then thought of retiring from the struggles of journalism, seeking the calm of a peaceful home.

At one of those dances that I often attended, I had become acquainted with Señorita Antonia Coello, a young seamstress, poor, but a worker and of a good family. For several months we kept up amorous sprees, and finally I resolved to propose marriage, which she accepted without cant. I made the proposal after getting out of jail. In that interval Carlos Gutiérrez offered to [160] buy *El Diario*, and I sold it for six hundred pesos. The sale took place on April 11, 1899, almost eighteen months after founding the paper, and when the income was greater than the expenses. The 15th of the same month Danielito Fortín, Jr. spoke to me about taking charge of accounting for his business, paying me 150 pesos monthly for five hours of work per day. I accepted immediately. That commercial establishment was then one of the principal houses in the city. The following May 2, I was named Auditor of the Mint, replacing Don Rafael López Gutiérrez, with the salary of seventy-five pesos monthly (Gutiérrez left when he rose to the Presidency.). My responsibilities in that office were limited to watching the weight of the metals that were destined for the minting of money, which did not take more than one or two hours a day. The Director of the Mint was an old German named Fritzgarner, who was titled doctor and who was generally considered to be a well of scientific knowledge, perhaps very deep, because he was watching the water for a long time. I discovered many tricks and hoaxes in the manipulation of the metals, and I was convinced that he was a rat who constantly chewed to the last shavings. Poor old man! On the outside he had the aspect of a classic miser.

On July 18 of the same year I was named Judge of Waters of the Aqueduct of Tegucigalpa with the salary of thirty pesos a month. The work in that office was reduced to two hours per day. The most important of my duties, according to the rules, consisted of collecting taxes from those who were not paying. [161] In that epoch various persons, perhaps relying on their elevated social position, refused to pay the tax with a thousand pretexts, but after the first one that I enforced in due form (a Señor Jacobo Galindo), nobody then refused to pay that tax.

-- VIII --

Unraveling (1899-1904)

At eight o'clock at night on Friday, August 4, 1899, my second marriage, with the Señorita Antonia Coello, took place. Witnesses to the civil ceremony were the Señoritas Elena Bonilla, Rosa Midence, María Ferrari, María Romero, Teresa and Joséfa Turcios, together with the Señors Dr. Cesar Bonilla, Dr. Alejo Lara, General Máximo G. Rosales, Don Francisco Altschul, Don Daniel Fortín, Jr., and Don Jesús Estrada. At 4:30 the following morning the religious ceremony took place in La Merced Church.

I had rented a comfortable little house, which I arranged conveniently, and there I went to live peacefully with my wife, after a honeymoon in the hacienda Guacerique that belonged to my good and unforgettable friend Dr. César Bonilla.

Time passed without trouble or hardship as I dedicated myself to the jobs I performed, in strict compliance with their obligations.

On February 15, 1900, I received a telegram from my brother Pedro in which he gave me the sad news of the death of my mother. It occurred at three in the afternoon of the day before, there in that remote corner of Chontales called San Pedro de Lóvago, without my being able to receive the breath of her last sigh. Poor mother of mine! Not even the consolation of being able to go some day and cry a tear on her ignored tomb would calm me. [162]

On May 30, 1900, I resigned the position of Auditor of the Mint, and they named Don Silverio Laínez in my place.

On March 30, 1902, I left the office of Judge of Waters. The Junta named Don Antonio Lardizábal in my place. I only kept the job of Bookkeeper in the House of Don Fortín, Jr., where they raised my pay to two hundred pesos.

At the end of that year of 1902, elections for President of the Republic were held. There were three candidates: General Manuel Bonilla (he was the most popular), Juan Angel Arias, and Marco Aurelio Soto (nominated by the Conservative minority). General Bonilla undoubtedly obtained the victory at the polls, but President Sierra, influenced by his wife Doña Carmen, as it was then affirmed, put all the tricks in play in the National Assembly, which was common in those cases, so that that high legislative body would declare Juan Angel Arias elected; in accordance with that, Sierra transferred power. Meanwhile, Manuel Bonilla went to the Port of Amapala where his co-partisan and friend General Ordóñez was Commander. There he had the city declare him President of the Republic and give him possession of the office, with which he raised the flag of revolution against Arias.

General Sierra, upon turning over the presidency to Arias, was named Army Chief by him; he then marched at the front of 1500 men to combat Bonilla's revolution, bringing with him 50 chests of money in cash from the Revenue Office. I witnessed all of that. The first clash of forces was in El Aceituno, where Sierra was completely [163] routed and then absconded lickety-split to Nicaragua with the chests of money. Meanwhile in Tegucigalpa, Arias, who was entirely discredited and without power to

dominate the situation, only entertained himself by indulging in his favorite vices -- intemperance and concupiscence -- committing every kind of outrage and illegality, even turning to crime, as he ordered the assassination of Señor Arnero inside the Palace, where he was buried in the dead of night.

But it is not my object to tell the history of that tempestuous period of Honduran life. I have related the above for the connection that those events had with those that followed. Daniel Fortín, Jr., or Danielito, as we his friends called him, when he began to observe the outrages of the so-called President, tried to put himself in a safe place to avoid whatever vexation that might befall him and went secretly to San Juancito, leaving me at the head of his commercial establishment with ample resources for everything. And it happened that one day in the morning a soldier came to the office of the store telling me that by order of the Señor President I should give him a case of B.O.C.B. cognac, and that I should give the bill to the General Manager of Revenues. I answered him that the Casa Fortín did not have an open account with the Revenue Office, and that if the Señor President wanted to obtain a case of cognac of that brand, he should bring sixty pesos and I would give him the case of liqour. The soldier left and returned in the afternoon with the sixty pesos, and I gave him the case of liquor. The next day, an employee of the Minister of Finance came to notify me that the Casa Fortín had been assessed a war contribution of "ten thousand pesos," which should be paid within 24 hours. In face of that [164] arbitrariness, I wrote to Danielito, telling him about the case and asking for instructions. He answered the same day saying that I should pay the money and obtain a receipt signed by the Minister of Finance. That I did and nothing more happened.

On another day one of the employees of the store, who was a pampered boy of the house, refused to obey an order I gave him about the arrangement of some goods on the shelves, and I immediately fired him. About two or three days later, Don Daniel, Sr., the chief executive of the business, arrived from Yuscarán, and when he was informed about the procedure I had used against his favorite employee, he reprimanded me with soft words, went to get the employee back into service, and then left for San Juancito. In view of that, I wrote to Danielito reporting what had happened and told him that for that reason it was not convenient for me to continue in his service. He then answered that he lamented the incident, but that since it was not possible to contradict the orders of his father, I should turn over the business to Don Federico Travieso. Thus it was that on April 3, 1903, I turned it over to Señor Travieso, by means of a written document, and I separated myself from the business.

About that time, the revolution headed by Bonilla was triumphantly approaching the capital, and six or eight days after retiring from the Casa Fortín, the Commander of Arms of the Plaza, Colonel Guadalupe Reyes, summoned me so he could enlist me on orders of the Minister of War, General Maximo B. Rosales, and I was incorporated into the Forces of the Plaza. Around the 10th of April, Bonilla's forces laid siege to Tegucigalpa, and that day, if I'm not mistaken, they gave me command of a squad of [165] green troops and dispatched me to the line of fire at the side of a little farm called Buenos Aires. I do not recall right now who was the commander of that sector, but I do recall that when I came to place myself under his command, in accordance with the instructions I had been given, I saw General Rosales there.

The commander of the sector, after talking in secret with Rosales, ordered me out with my troops to take a position at a stone wall some three hundred meters away, and from there I should open fire against the invisible enemy. To get to the site they assigned me, I had to cross a small square, some fifty meters long, entirely uncovered and dominated by the fire of the enemy situated on the heights of the summit. Frankly, I did not feel any enthusiasm for those two contending bands. I obeyed the order through pure discipline and went to occupy the post I had been assigned. I had barely begun to cross the little plaza with my troops, when a spray of projectiles broke up the formation and all the boys ducking down ran quickly to cross the dangerous stretch. It hurt me to do the same, and notwithstanding the pain I felt, I would get control of my nerves and would not change the pace, succeeding in getting to the other end unhurt. Three of the boys were injured in that crossing and had to return to the barracks. As soon as I arrived at the assigned place, I ordered the troop to open fire into the trees in front of us, because there was no enemy to be seen. Around six in the afternoon I received orders to regather at the barracks. That sham commission which they ordered me to carry out had no military object, for which I supposed that [166] the only preconceived plan was to expose me to the fire from the summit so that my poor humanity would terminate there.

I am not sure if it was April 13 when the troops of Bonilla triumphantly entered Tegucigalpa. The only thing I recall is that in the afternoon of the day before, when the troops arrived, Commander of Arms Coronel Reyes permitted me to go sleep in my house, and I never returned to the barracks. The chaos of Arias and his followers was complete, and as soon as they saw the battle lost, they evacuated the Plaza in the night and set off for Yuscarán. However, they were followed and overtaken by the forces of Bonilla and confined in the Penitentiary.

On the 25th I took my passport to go to San Pedro Sula in search of work. There my brother-in-law Adolfo Coello occupied the position of Judge of Letters. I made the trip in the company of a Coronel Cárcamo and another individual whose name I have forgotten. It seems we were on the road four days before arriving at San Pedro Sula. That city, the capital of the Department of Cortéz, had some 8000 inhabitants, and it was the most important commercial and agricultural center on the north coast of Honduras, united by train with Puerto Cortéz.

When I arrived in San Pedro, I brushed off the road dust and went to seek work in all the houses of commerce. Seeing how hard it was to find anything, I decided to start a newspaper. A Nicaraguan, Don Miguel Romero, had a small press that he ran with his son. I talked with him about my project, suggesting that we open the business as partners, but he would not agree. Finally, I arranged the weekly edition for a very high price (50 pesos for each edition of 600 copies.) [167] I then dedicated myself to selling advertisements, and on June 1, 1903, the first edition came out under the title *El Periodico del Norte*.

A few days after publishing the first issue of the paper, the Bennaton & Co. commercial house made me an offer to be in charge of accounting for the business, with the salary of 150 pesos per month for five hours of work a day. I did not hesitate in accepting, and I had no problems in the work.

Now that I had secured my *modus vivendi*, I wrote to my wife for her to come to San Pedro. When she arrived, we settled together with my brother-in-law in a house that I had rented in anticipation.

After my work in the Bennaton business, I dedicated the whole time I had available to the editing of the paper, which produced no more than was necessary to pay expenses.

On March 1, 1904, my brother-in-law tragically died in the house of a prostitute. At the time, rumor had it that he had committed suicide, but I still believe it was an assassination. The authorities did not take a great interest in discovering the truth, whether it was a crime or a suicide. That incident soured our lives, my wife's and mine, and we thought of nothing but to leave that place.

In the first days of June they subjected me to press censorship on orders of the government, and so I stopped publishing and decided to go to Cuba. My wife did not agree to accompany me, and on the 28th I went to Tegucigalpa, staying for a while in San Pedro to settle all my affairs. [168]

On July 11, 1904, I embarked on a fruit steamer in Puerto Cortez which was destined for Mobile, Alabama, where I stayed some four or five days, staying in the Hotel Southern, waiting for a steamer to take me to Havana. I disembarked on July 21, and I went to lodge in the Hotel Isla de Cuba.

-- IX --

Railroading in Cuba (1904-1907)

The day after I arrived in the capital of the Pearl of the Antilles, I tried to find out where General Máximo Gómez lived, for I had a letter of recommendation from Don José Pérez, a Cuban resident in San Pedro Sula. After winding my way through different streets, I located the house and had an interview with General Gómez. I gave him the letter, and as soon as he read it, he invited me very affably to go to the modestly furnished reception room. He called his wife and daughter Margarita, and introduced me with signs of affection. The celebrated caudillo of the Cuban armies was an old man of seventy years at that time, of medium height, a thin body, but vigorous, his face radiant, a hypnotizing face, which revealed his energy and spirited temperament. When I was leaving, he insisted that I should frequent his house. On the second visit I brought him as a gift a sombrero of fine agave, one of those made in Santa Barbara, Honduras, and which I had bought in San Pedro Sula for this purpose.

One day I was walking peacefully down one of the central streets when I saw a young man coming, Francisco (I have forgotten his last name), with whom I had good relations in San Salvador, first, and later in San José, Costa Rica. [169] As soon as I saw him come near, I thought to greet him with an embrace, but noting an air of indifference and coolness in his demeanor, I contained myself and also showed myself cool and indifferent, limiting myself to greeting him courteously. He told me that he was occupying the position of Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior. I never had

anything more to do with that subject, who showed himself such a good friend to me outside of his country, but inside it.... Oh, human weakness!

For about two months I scoured every nook and cranny of Havana looking for work. It was impossible to find any kind of employment. My monetary resources wasted, and all hope of earning a living there lost, I decided, on the advice of persons I had come to know, to go to the city of Cárdenas, where they assured me I could find a position. Two or three of them gave me letters of recommendation for some industrialists in Cárdenas. Leaving my baggage in the hotel as a guarantee of the debt I owed, I went to that city. I took the train in Regla, a barrio of Havana situated on the other side of the bay. In Cárdenas I put myself up in a boarding house of an old Catalan who had three good-looking daughters who were involved in managing the house. The building was almost in a state of total ruin. I lodged in an inside room at the top of the house. The weekly price of the room was modest, the food worse, but I had not no other choice than to adapt, because my resources did not permit me to seek any kind of comfort.

The day after I arrived in Cárdenas I went to deliver the letters of [170] recommendation, hoping that some one of the persons to whom they were addressed would offer me work. But my disillusion was great in seeing with what cold indifference I was received by such persons, whose names I have left in the abyss of forgetfulness. Meanwhile, the days passed and my scarce resources were being wasted. My desperation was complete, since I was not finding which road to take. A railroad machinist named Manresa, who was working on the Cárdenas and Júcaro Railroad lines, often came to eat at the boarding house where I was staying. I got acquainted with him, and one day when I was talking about my need to find any kind of work there was, he told me that on a branch of the railroad that they were beginning to build to Yaguaramas, they needed workers. Since he was good friends with the director of training, he could give me a recommendation so he would give me a job, not so hard as that of the peons of poles and pikes. In order to get to the place of work I only had to introduce myself to the Administrator of the Cárdenas and Júcaro Railroad, indicating my desire to go to work on the Yaguaramas line, and he would give me a free pass on the train to that place. Of course I accepted, and the next day in the morning I went to the railroad station to obtain the free pass.

I had not gone two blocks when I met a Señor Bardía, owner of the daily newspaper *Heraldo de Cárdenas*. I had been introduced to that gentleman two or three days before. When he saw me, he greeted me very kindly and invited me to drink beer in a nearby cantina. When we drained the first glass, and after some chatting, he proposed that I manage the paper, under certain conditions that did not appear too bad to me. [171] I went with Bardía to the newspaper office, where he introduced me as a good journalist to a Señor Ortega. We continued negotiating the details of the deal among the three of us, Bardía, I, and Ortega, and then we proceeded to write the contract and signed it. I figured as publisher and editor-in-chief, Bardía as administrator, and Ortega as editor. Frankly, I should say that I entered that deal with all sincerity. Although Bardía was stingy, I thought that with him I would be assured of eating, and besides, I was avoiding going to work as a road peon. I was sympathetic with Ortega, and we went to work with true ardor. In less than two weeks, the subscriptions and advertisements increased by fifty percent. At the end of the first month we asked Bardía to pay us in accordance with the contract, but he, very slyly, using a thousand pretexts and lies, only paid us half (some

$10.00). That put us in bad moods, but nevertheless we continued ahead in the work until the end of the second month, when he left us with the same lies as before (that the subscribers were not paying, nor the advertisers, etc.). That made us understand that Bardía was an old wheedler who was not even thinking about complying with the contract. We thought about suing in the courts of justice, but taking into account the circumstances that surrounded us, we resolved, Ortega and I, to resign from the business and give up the product of our labor for lost. How ancient that shamelessness!

Now that I was out of work, my financial hardship in paying for the boardinghouse increased. Seeing myself in that anguished situation, I decided to write the Grand Master of the Masonic Lodges of Cuba, Don Francisco Pellón, who resided in [172] Cienfuegos, expounding the difficulties which I was facing getting work, and asking fraternal assistance in the name of the institution of the Sons of the "V." He was not long in answering me satisfactorily, including with his letter one for the General Administrator of the Cárdenas and Júcaro Railroad, in which he was asking him to give me work of any kind. Immediately I went to the Administrator, Don Francisco Paradela, who received me affably, and as soon as he read the contents of the letter, he personally took me to the office of the head dispatcher, whom he ordered to employ me as a railroad engineer for the sugar harvest. To perform that work I would first learn the ropes of the trains by practicing with a cargo train for some days, for which I was referred by the head dispatcher to the engineer of a cargo train. After a week of practice they put me in charge of a sugar train of the Algorta refinery. In a month they moved me to the Nueva Luisa refinery train, and from there they assigned me to haul various cargo and sugar trains to different refineries.

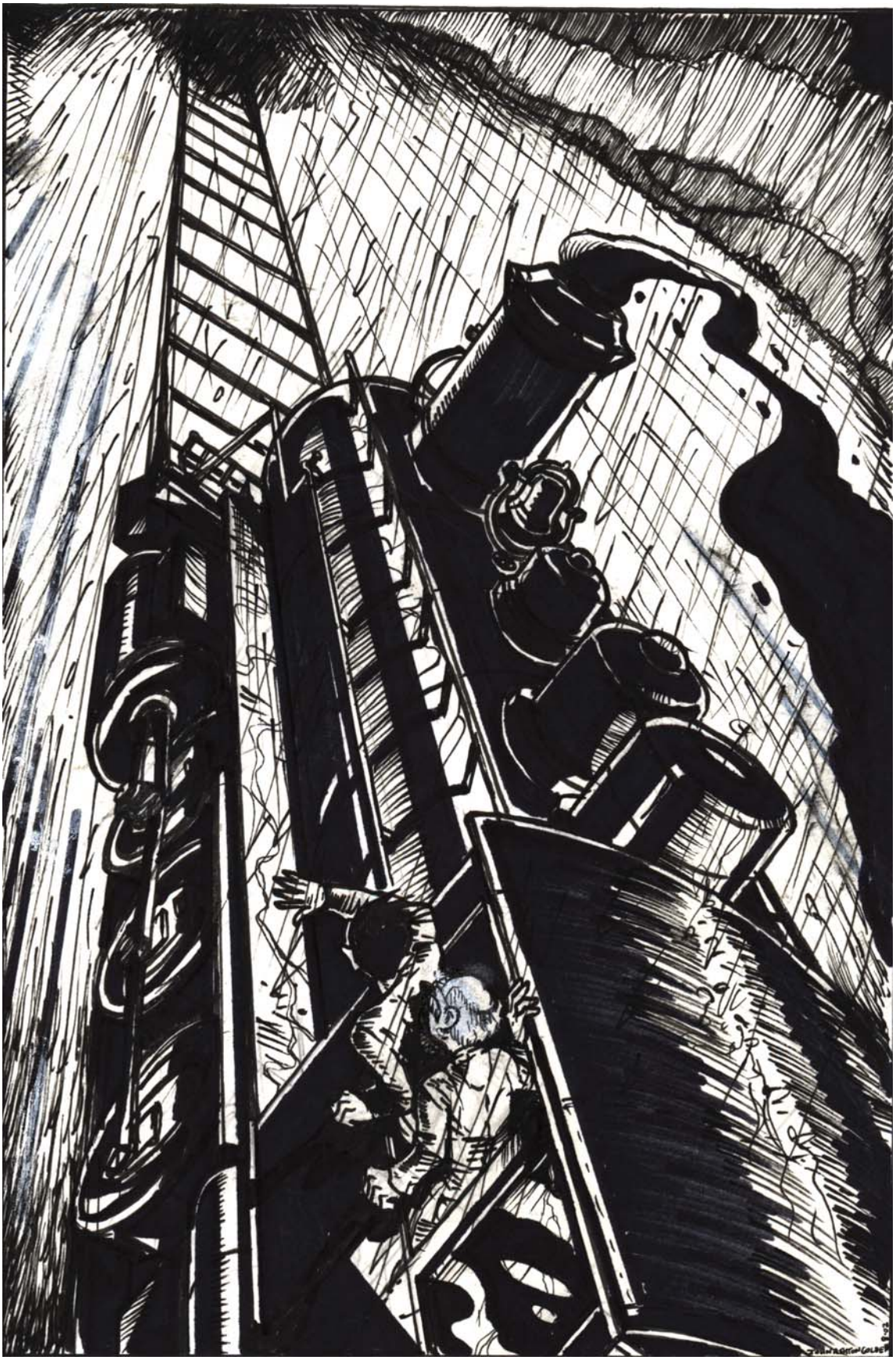
On those rail voyages I had several mishaps, two of which were most impressive. One day I was in the Jovellanos station with my train loaded with sugar, waiting for an open track to take me to the Nueva Luisa refinery. Four more trains were parked on different tracks in the station, also awaiting open tracks to take their routes to different branches. After three or four hours of waiting, the station chief gave me the track, and I ran with the paper in hand to where the machinist was to tell him that we would leave that dead end where we were entirely bored. In that moment the machinist [173] was filling the tender of the engine with water at the station tank, and when he finished, he backed up the engine to hitch it to the train, which was made up of 20 cargo cars of cane. The brakeman (the lad who coupled and uncoupled the cars when they did not have automatic couplers) was not at his post at that moment to couple the engine to the train, and I, to save time, got under the cars to inspect the operation, but with such bad luck, due to my lack of experience, that I got the elbow of my left arm between the catches of the cars to put the bolt inside the holes of the catches, when I noticed it was pressing my arm with such intensity that I still don't know how I wasn't flattened like a tortilla. I let out an anguished cry, and when the machinist heard it, he moved the engine back. I left that moment of martyrdom almost delirious, with an uncontainable desire to defecate, and the first thing I did was to run to the toilet in the station. When I came out a doctor was waiting for me, who examined me and said that I did not have a fracture. After a massage, he put on a splint, and I got into my train and took it to its destination. I had my arm in a sling for about a month, and thanks to some rubbing with a sheepskin, which a

Negro of the Nueva Luisa Refinery told me about and administered to me, I was not left with a shriveled arm. That is a magnificent remedy.

On another occasion I led a train of tankers to the San José refinery, beyond Banagüises. On returning to the station, with two or three empty cars, I received a telegraph order to leave immediately for Cárdenas, but only with the engine. A torrential storm with hurricane winds made it almost impossible to go [174] at that moment. Nevertheless, I ordered the machinist (a little old man named Satres) to get us going, and we left running at full throttle. Those of us in it were the machinist, the fireman, myself, and the brakeman. The little windows of the engine both in front and on the sides were closed. From time to time I opened the left window and looked out to inspect the track. We ran with a velocity of some eighty miles per hour. In one of those glimpses I came to see a bulk about a kilometer away in the middle of the track. I could not discern what kind of thing it was, because of the mist formed by the incessant rain. I immediately closed the window and ordered the machinist to stop the engine, giving it counter-steam. The fireman and the brakeman got onto the footboard of the engine in the rain, and as soon as they saw some cars on the track, they jumped to the ground. The machinist, a well-tempered little old man, was not cowed by the danger. He gave counter-steam to the engine and stayed firmly at his post until he was able to stop the engine some two meters from the cars that were on the main track. We got down from the engine and went to inspect that rare case of empty cars without a locomotive in the middle of the principal line. We noted that next to the place was a siding switch where the ends were left open. The switch was probably put together badly, and the cars, pushed by the hurricane, jumped the main track and were detached there, completely obstructing the traffic. Without the serenity and expertise of the machinist we all would have perished. As it was not possible to hitch up the cars, because we did not have the necessary apparatus, we had to return to Banagüises to tell the head dispatcher what happened. [175]

I pass over in silence many incidents and adventures that occurred during the six months I served as a locomotive engineer on the Cárdenas and Júcaro Railroad. I entered the service on December 16, 1904, and I left on June 15, 1905. In August I went from Cárdenas to Camagüey. The head dispatcher of the Cárdenas and Júcaro Railroad gave me a free pass from Cárdenas to Camagüey on the Cuban Central Railroad.

I carried all my capital in the inside pockets of a purse that I still have, five 25-cent gold coins ($5.00 Spanish gold each one) and outside of the inner pockets some silver coins. When I arrived at Santa Clara (the terminal of the Cárdenas and Júcaro Railroad) where I spent the night, I went to lodge at the only hotel there was. They gave me a big enough room, in which there were four beds, one of which they assigned me for sleeping. Before nine o'clock I lay down, putting my clothes on a stool on the side across from the head of the bed. The direct train from Havana to Santiago de Cuba passed by the Santa Clara Station at five in the morning, so I asked the hotel clerk to wake me at four. That he did. I got up and saw that the other three beds were occupied by persons unknown to me. After I drank a cup of coffee, I went to the station, but before I got there I entered a cantina that was open at that hour to buy some cigarettes. At the station I arranged to check my baggage that I had left there, and [176] when the train arrived, I got into a car. About eleven in the morning we arrived at Ciego de Avila. There I had breakfast. I got off the train with most of the passengers. In one of the halls of the station a long table was prepared with food for breakfast. When I finished, I paid the



price (one peso) and went to occupy my seat in the car of the train. We arrived in Camagüey around four in the afternoon. As I got off the train in the midst of a crowd of men, I figured that the money in my purse only amounted to some 60 or 80 cents in small change, insufficient to pay for carrying my baggage from the station to the hotel, and so I decided to buy a half bottle of beer in the cantina of the station and use one of the gold coins so I would have some change. I drank the beer and took the purse from the bag. I opened the inside pocket and.... Oh! What a surprise I had to discover that those coins had disappeared! The thief was very cunning and perspicacious, undoubtedly, since he figured that if the purse was robbed, when I put my clothes on I would notice it was gone and would make a scene in the hotel.

In that moment in that public place so filled with people I did not know, seen without the monetary resources that I counted on to face life, I felt my spirit fall into an abyss in whose depth misery would devour me. I paid the 25 cents for the beer and then went to the baggage room. They gave me the two trunks and a suitcase. I asked if there was some flophouse nearby, and a porter whom I hired to carry my luggage [177] took me to a cheap inn a block from the station. When I got there I noted that that inn was a true pigsty frequented by shabby people. On the left of the entrance there was a billiard table surrounded by sinister types. But I had no other way to take refuge in that nauseating slum. I contracted my lodging with the owner (a Spaniard with the face of Mother Celestina), agreeing to pay him 2 pesos 80 centavos per week, room and board separate. But what food, and what a room! Praise the Lord!

The next day I introduced myself to the head dispatcher of the Cuban Central Railroad to ask for work. That boss was a Yankee, whose name I do not recall, with a goitered left leg, fat, and ugly. He asked me if I knew the art of telegraphy, the Morse system. I answered that I did. He went on to ask if I knew the ropes of a station. I answered no, since I had only served as an engineer on the Cárdenas and Júcaro Railroad. "Then," he told me, "I do not have work for you; but if you want to learn to run a station, since you are a telegrapher, I could give an order to the station master of this city to teach and train you. When that Master certifies your ability, I will employ you in one of the new stations that are going to be established."

With that prospect, and without any other course to take, I accepted the proposal. He gave the order and with it I presented myself to the station master, who received me kindly and introduced me to the second master.

Besides the employees and operators there were four individuals in the office [178] of different ages, who were apprentices like me, as the second master informed me. Before I left at lunch hour, as the station master was letting me go, he looked at the Masonic insignia attached to the flap of my bag. He put a ritual question of the institution to me, asked for the handshake and password, and we recognized each other as brothers.

Within two days of being in that railroad school I was attacked by a fever and could not get out of bed. Besides, one of my feet was inflamed, and as if to alleviate those evils, at night they robbed a fine quality white blouse of mine, including my watch and watch chain. That was the peak of my misfortunes. When I could, I wrote a note to the station master (his name was Mamerto; his last name I do not recall) sharing with him the lamentable state in which I found myself. He was not long in coming to see me and

give me signs of fraternal kindness, giving me five pesos and then sending me to the railroad physician. The doctor gave me medicines free, and in a week I got out of bed. Bandy-legged and limping I went to the station to continue my apprenticeship and, thanks to my knowledge of accounting, I crowned it off in less than two weeks.

As soon as I obtained the certificate of competence, they named me station master of Paloalto, situated about a league from a little a little town called Cascorro. The station was third class and was installed in two railroad cargo wagons on the side of the rail line and some fifty meters from the house of a hacienda, whose owners gave me food for twelve pesos a month. My salary was 20 pesos per month, [179] but the work was very light. I stayed there some two months, and later they transferred me to the Ignacio station, located on the edge of the shantytown of that name. After a month at that station, they sent me to the one in Majagua, where I stayed for some five months. Afterwards I was transferred to the Jatibonico Station, earning a higher salary (40 pesos per month). Close to this Station was the sugar refinery of a Yankee company. There was much movement of passengers. The climate was not healthy because of the swamps. In about a month I was attacked by malarial fever that impeded my work, and I had to ask for relief, going to Camagüey for a cure, the physician and medicines billed to the railroad.

As soon as I recovered my health, they sent me to the Ciego de Avila station, where I was earning 60 pesos per month. The traffic of that station was extraordinary. I had an assistant and four workers under my direction. In the Cuban Central Railroad where I was working, there was an inveterate custom whereby the station masters of the second and third class personally issued the passenger tickets, and they undoubtedly kept a few cents from each passenger. Thus, for example, if a passenger ticket, according to the tariff, cost 27 cents, the station master would receive 30 cents and would not give back the 3 cents for lack of small change. In that way, for each passenger ticket, the issuer would keep at least one cent. Consequently, in that busy station with so many passengers, I received an average of five pesos daily on top of my fixed salary. I knew that was robbing the public, but the first time I talked about the matter [180] with the traffic inspector, to whom I was going to give the surplus, he wasted no time in telling me that I was a prize idiot and that I had to adjust myself to pocketing those extra cents and not have a case of scruples over that system of swindling the public.

When I found that I had some 600 pesos in my trunk, I decided to go to New York with the principal object of learning the English language if I found work there. Having submitted my resignation, I went to Camagüey and from there I took the train for Nuevitas. The railroad from Camagüey to Nuevitas belonged to another company distinct from the Cuban Central.

In Nuevitas I embarked on the steamer *Olinda* headed for New York. Within three days of navigation we arrived in the Metropolis of Yankeeland. Early in the morning we passed by the Statue of Liberty, and then the steamer docked at one of those Brooklyn wharfs, where we disembarked and registered our baggage. A coach took me to the Hotel America. The day after my arrival, I received a pleasant visit from my good friend Dr. Salvador Córdoba, who was then Honduran Consul in that city. I explained the principal reason for my trip, and he engaged himself in looking for a position for me.

The grandeur of New York, to tell the truth, did not impress me so much. What annoyed me in the first days, or better said the first nights, was the deafening noise of the

elevated railroads. I could not get to sleep, and that was tormenting me a great deal, but I finally got used to it.

After a month in that city of sky-scrapers, going from one [181] side to another, some times on foot, others on elevated trains, and not being able to find work that suited me, I decided, before all my monetary resources were depleted, to return to Cuba. I went to the office of the Munson Line and bought my passage for Nuevitas.

When I arrived in Camagüey, I went to the Superintendent of the Cuban Central Railroad to ask for work. They immediately named me station master of Cespedes, which in that time was a shantytown of five or six houses, among which a sawmill figured as the principal one. I stayed there some eight months.

One day I learned from a Havana newspaper that war had broken out among the Central American Republics, which were turning on Nicaragua. In spite of my enmity toward Zelaya, the governor of my country in that time, I was indignant at hearing that news, and I immediately resigned the post I was occupying and went to Camagüey, where I sent a cablegram to Zelaya, offering my services as a Nicaraguan who longed to serve his country. Zelaya then answered me, offering me thanks and saying he was waiting for me. Then I went to Santiago de Cuba for a steamer that took me to Kingston, where I stayed three days waiting for another steamer that brought me to Colón. I disembarked in that port and took the train to Panama. When I arrived in that Capital of the Panamian Isthmus, I learned that the Central American War had concluded with the triumph of Zelaya at Namisgüe. That news cooled my patriotic enthusiasm, and I decided not to continue the [182] trip to Nicaragua.

I looked for work in Panama and in a few days learned that the Benedetti Brothers needed a bookkeeper. I went to them accompanied by young Abraham Martínez who introduced and recommended me to the gentlemen. Martínez is the son of the widow Doña Julia Pinedo de Martínez, a Columbian I knew in Guatemala many years before and whom I met by chance in Panama. Back when I was friends with Doña Julia, Abraham was a boy.

The Benedettis are two brothers, Ramón and Abraham. Their only business then was a boutique and drugstore. They were nice to me, and I told them about my situation, that I did not want to continue my voyage to Nicaragua. I told them besides that if they did not know my qualifications for the post I was going to fill, I would offer my services free for a week or ten days, and if at the end of that time they were satisfied with my labor, they would give me the job, and if they were not pleased, I would leave without earning a cent. They agreed to that, and the next day I began work. The first thing they had me do was to make a register for copies of letters that had accumulated over the past two years. I brought them up to date in four days.

When the testing period was over, the Benedetti brothers expressed their satisfaction with my work, and I was retained working in the business as bookkeeper, earning 75 pesos a month, with the promise of an increase in salary as the business prospered. In effect, for the five years and two months I was working in the House, they kept raising my salary until I was earning 300 pesos a month. [183]

-- X --

Repose in Panama (1907-1912)

More than fourteen years have passed since I have written a single line in these reflections of my memories, sometimes due to laziness, sometimes perhaps due to a lack of gray matter in the brain. Meanwhile, recollections have been erased from my fragile memory.

In Panama, as I said before, I was employed for five years and some months in the House of the Benedetti Brothers, at first only as bookkeeper, and then they added the duties of secretary and cashier of the business. During that time I was only sick one time with malaria, from which I was cured by spending some time on the island of Tobago.

The only house I visited in Panama was that of my unforgettable friend Don Manuel Calderón Ramírez. His wife, Doña Magdalena Herrera, adorned with the virtues and qualities of a hacienda woman, was very kind to me. One time I was invited by her to spend Holy Week in Chorrea, a small town in the north of Panama, where the Calderóns had a house and a farm.

During my stay in Panama, I wrote several articles for *La Estrella*, the *Diario de Panama*, and other less important papers. For one of those articles titled "Zola," the widow of the great writer, Doña Alexandrina, sent me a very expressive card, conveying her gratitude. In another of those writings, which was published [184] in *La Estrella* with the title "For Italy," several prominent Italians residing in the city sent me such warm and enthusiastic letters and notes of congratulation and gratitude that they raised my spirit.

In the performance of my duties at the Benedetti House, I was making energetic efforts toward everything that would redound to their interests, insisting that the company purchase a press to publish a bulletin to advertise the different articles of the establishments, especially the works of the bookstore. The Benedettis were very reluctant to publish that periodical, but finally, upon his return from his first trip to Europe, passing through New York, Don Ramón bought a small press, with which *El Boletín* was then printed, the first number published on January 1, 1912. I wrote the editorial for that first number. The House still publishes that *Boletín*, but now it is in the form of a 40-page magazine.

For many months during my stay in Panama I took my meals in the Hotel Central in the company of my good friend Don Antonio Agaccio, Consul General of Chile in that time.

When the revolution against Zelaya broke out in Bluefields through the treason of Estrada in 1909, I sympathized with that movement, because I hated the tyranny of the Burro of Tiscapa, and I wrote several articles in the Panamanian papers in favor of the revolution. But when Zelaya abandoned power, fleeing like a coward, I understood that there [185] was no reason for the revolution, and I thought it should lay down its arms. The revolutionary chiefs (Estrada, Díaz, Chamorro and Moncada) did not listen to the voice of patriotism but turned a deaf ear to the grounds for settlement that Madriz proposed to them. The conflict continued bloodier than before, with the Yankees supporting the revolutionaries, intervening directly in all their actions and movements, until they disembarked marine forces in Bluefields to keep Madriz from taking that town. The attitude of the revolutionaries and the Yankee intervention exasperated me to the

point that I wrote an article titled "Nicaragua and Mr. Taft," which the Panamanian papers refused to publish, and I decided to put it out in a pamphlet. At that time, candidly, I had faith in the patriotism of my countrymen, and in that piece I exposed my optimistic thought that before consenting to the Yankee intervention in our internal struggles, they should fight to the last *Pinolero*, the last Nicaraguan. How wrong I was in that estimation of our unhappy people. I did not think then that the national spirit in Nicaragua would be degraded so much under the tyranny of Zelaya.

When the news arrived of the direct intervention of the Yankees, my friend Don Manuel Calderón Ramírez commissioned me to meet with Don Salvador Chamorro, the principal agent of the revolution in Panama, who had a business there, with the object that I explain the conditions that Calderón desired in order to prevent the Yankee intervention in Nicaragua. Señor Chamorro answered that the revolution had no other object than to reach Managua by whatever means, and therefore he was not disposed to hear any peace proposals. In the face of [186] that refusal, so lacking in patriotism, I left the office of Señor Chamorro and cut off personal relations with him.

In a cablegram that I sent to Dr. Madriz, I offered my services. His response distressed me: he only answered telling me "Thanks." Madriz, an entirely civil man without the energy necessary to counteract a situation like that, threw himself into the arms of persons who could not get him out of the mess, and he succumbed under the weight of the mistakes and ineptitude of those around him. He was seen forced to leave fleeing toward Mexico, where he died of measles and nostalgia.

In July, 1912, I decided to come to Nicaragua. When I notified the Benedettis of my resolve, they were very distressed and tried to make me change my mind, but I insisted. When I left them, they gave me the following letter together with sufficient money for my passage to Corinto. The letter reads:

> Panama, July 4, 1912. -- Sr. D. Alejandro Miranda -- E. S. C. --
>
> Most highly regarded and greatly esteemed friend: You have resigned from our company of your own spontaneous will, and for reasons which we consider just.
>
> To demonstrate our regret at your leaving us, we want it to be known that during the five years and two months in which you have discharged the duties of bookkeeper of our company, you have left us totally satisfied with your intelligence, manners, punctuality, and loyalty in your work. And we make special recommendation of your honorability, because your comportment during the sixteen months in which you have managed our House justifies it.
>
> We reiterate our friendship for you, and we hope that your purposes are fulfilled.
>
> /s/ Benedetti Brothers.

-- XI --

Return to Nicaragua (1912)

After 17 years of absence I disembarked at Corinto and breathed the air of my fatherland with love. [187]

I was here in León for a couple of days, and then I went to Granada, where I stayed in the house of my brother Francisco the physician, whom I found married and with a number of children. I went to visit my father, whom I found in his house a little ill. He received me with signs of kindness, despite his dry and withdrawn character.

While I was in Granada, in the last days of July 1912, the revolutionary movement of Mena against Díaz broke out. The latter occupied the presidency of the republic.

Mena was entrenched in Masaya, and after a short time he went to Granada, leaving General Benjamín Zeledón in Masaya after his unsuccessful attack on Managua.

A number of Liberals who met in my brother's house commissioned me to go and speak with Dr. Escolastico Lara, who had come to Granada a little before the revolt, to get him to agree to come to the house that night with the purpose of forming a plan by which, passing through Masaya, he would collect arms and munitions which he would take to León, where he would organize the western departments militarily. Lara secured those arms (some 100 rifles) at great risk and with much astuteness, crossing the Lake of Managua so the arms could be taken up in León, attacking the Plaza, and destroying Durón.

Then came the Yankee intervention, requested by Díaz through his Minister of Foreign Affairs, Diego Manuel Chamorro. The Yankee forces disembarked at Corinto and came with beating drums taking possession of all the plazas of the west until they arrived in Managua. [188]

As soon as I learned that the Yankees had disembarked in Corinto, I took myself to one of the barracks of Granada, near the railroad station, whose quartel was under the command of Colonel Valeriano Torres, composed entirely of commanders and officers (72 in all) and designated with the name Red Cadre. We dressed in fatigues like simple privates, and for a salary we had a daily ration of meat from cattle slaughtered right in the quartel.

After fifteen or twenty days in that quartel, we went to the general hospital, where we fortified ourselves with stone redoubts, and after a few days there we went to a house that was occupied by the monks across from their school. We were in that quartel when one night a battalion of Leonese under the command of General Joaquín Aguilar entered Granada from the Nandaime side, stationed itself near the Hospital, and moved up to it the next day. That troop arrived without arms, and Mena flatly refused to give them guns.

Meanwhile, the news arrived that the Yankees were attacking Zeledón in his positions in Masaya, assisted by the traitors. Then I learned of Zeledón's death in Caterina, and after that the Yankees took Barranca and Coyotepe. The day (the date I do not recall; I have lost the notes) that the Yankees entered Granada, our Red Cadre was moved to the Jalteva city hall, and around ten in the morning of that same day, since I was the officer of the guard in the quartel, Colonel Torres transferred the command of the

cadre to me, turned over the troops which were on guard, and then went to his house. [189]

Around two in the afternoon I ordered all those who were in the quartel at that hour (a total of 21) to load the rifles and the stored weapons to get ready to join the Leonese, because I had news that the Yankees would come to disarm us. The order was executed immediately.

As soon as we got to the hospital where the Leonese were, I proceeded to distribute the guns, which they were very happy to receive. Then I ordered into formation the 21 chiefs and officers whom I had under my authority, and I told them that those who were prepared to die with me should step to the front. What shame! Only one came forward from the file. I disarmed the others, reprimanding them severely, and throwing their cowardice into their faces, I ordered them to go home. Those swine! They were only there for the scraps of meat that they were being provided daily.

Immediately I went up to the top of the hospital, together with a number of Leonese, ready to confront the Yankees if they came to disarm us. In a little while the Chief, General Aguilar (who was walking by the San Francisco barracks talking with Mena) arrived, and he abruptly climbed to the top of the building ordering everyone to go down immediately, leaving abandoned the parapets behind which we had entrenched ourselves. I stayed until the last, and before going down the stairs, I said to old Aguilar: "Keep this in mind, General. You are going to regret this surrender later." (In effect, that is what happened. The Yankees, as soon as they disarmed the Leonese, committed outrages left and right in the space of eight or ten days.)

[190] As soon as I came down from the top of the hospital, I turned my rifle over to young Carlos Castro Wassmer, adjutant of General Aguilar and the only one I knew among the Leonese troop. In the midst of that a squad of Yankees arrived together with a youth named Estrada, who was called General, and they proceeded to disarm the Leonese, even taking their machetes. Fully rabid in the face of that humiliation, I went immediately to my brother's house and fell into bed with a fever of 40 degrees, which kept me prostrate three or four days.

When I got out of bed, I went into the street to see what was going on. When I crossed the Central Park, a patrol of ragamuffins, those traitors who had taken over the plaza aided by the Yankees, detained me and tried to take me by force to work I don't know where. But perhaps by chance, in that moment a Yankee officer appeared. Like a drowning shipwrecked man, without hesitation I picked up the first piece of wood that I saw, although it had splinters, went to the Gringo, and in broken English I let him know the outrage of which I was a victim. The Yankee listened to me, and he confronted the patrol and dispersed it, leaving me in liberty, which I took advantage of to return to the house. That scene was witnessed by Dr. Albino Román y Reyes, who was very quietly sitting on one of the park benches. Oh, Dr. Román y Reyes, so peaceful! After that incident I did not go out into the street any more, in order to avoid whatever outrage might befall me.

As that revolutionary and counter-revolutionary tempest was placated a little, I decided to go to Managua, since in Granada it was impossible for me to find work anywhere. [191]

In Managua I put up at the Hotel America.

Notwithstanding some good contacts I had in the capital, I found it difficult to find work. In order to pay my hotel bills, I had to sell many of my books cheaply.

Finally, one day Don Leopoldo Montenegro told me that he would put me in charge of the review of a bill that was to be presented to the ex-manager of a liquor company, where Señor Montenegro was now manager. We agreed on the price, and I dedicated myself to the work, which resulted in some charges against ex-manager Señor Porfirio Pérez that amounted to some 32,000 pesos in national currency. The review of that account was presented to the shareholders' board of directors, which was convened for the purpose of approving or rejecting it. The number of votes on the board, in whatever matter was considered, was counted by shares, in such a way that if a partner or his representative had or represented 50 shares, the votes of that partner or representative would be 50. Señor Pérez, a crafty man, or as we generally say among ourselves, a sly fox, secured from some of his partner friends the proxies of a number of shares which in any vote would amount to a majority, and thus the bill was presented at the session of the Board, and when the hour arrived, he cast his entire vote against the above charges, leaving himself absolved from responsibility or penalty. That vote was astounding to me.

One day Don Leopoldo Montenegro spoke to me very reservedly with the purpose of proposing that I join a secret society that he was organizing [192] with the exclusive object of adopting an expedient measure to eliminate Díaz from power. I let Señor Montenegro know that to enter a society of such nature, it was necessary first to know the members thoroughly, and that generally I did not know the people of Managua. He answered that those who had enlisted were well known by him and had his entire confidence. With that security I answered that I had no problem with joining that society, as long as their intentions were patriotic. He agreed to tell me the date and hour when they would hold the first meeting. When he so informed me, I came to the designated place around ten at night. Some seventeen individuals of every kind were occupying seats around the hall. Señor Montenegro presided. Of those individuals I only knew, besides Montenegro, Sofonías Salvatierra. After the leadership was organized and the society was established, announcing the *nom de guerre* of each one, there was discussion of the most expeditious method of eliminating President Díaz. The first who spoke said, more or less, that each member should be obliged to form a nucleus of conspirators -- two, three, or five -- so that in the opportune moment that force would operate together as a single man. Another said that each one of the members should acquire one or more guns of whatever type there was and deposit them in a designated place, to take them up when the hour arrived. In this style several of those present were expounding their opinions until it was my turn, and I told them that in my judgment the affair should be treated from the practical point of view, and the practical in this case would be that all [193] of us present should take an oath, and we should form ourselves by lot into groups of three to take the life of Díaz, whether it be with a dagger or a scalpel, with a pistol, or with a dynamite bomb; if the first group perished without achieving the objective, the second group would follow, and after it the third, until coming to the last.

The first to rise in protest against my proposal was Sofonías Salvatierra, who, as I well recall, said, "That would be a scandal against the Liberal Party."

In all, after many perorations and discussions, nothing practical was agreed to, and we adjourned at two in the morning.

The next day, as I was getting out of bed, and I still had not had my coffee, a police officer and two agents came to arrest me and take me to jail, without a remark of any kind and without telling me why.

After I was in jail for three or four days, Don Leopoldo Montenegro came to see me and told me that he was able to post bail before the District Court so that they would put me at liberty. I asked him who had authorized him to ask for that bail. He answered that he had asked for and posted the bail on his own. That caused me disgust, and I told him at once that he should go and get it back. As I noted my disgust, he then left.

After a week of having me in jail, without taking my statement or [194] asking me anything, they notified me that they were going to expel me from the country. I asked permission to go to the hotel to pack my trunks, and I went guarded by three police. I packed what was necessary in a small valise. I gave my trunks to the owner of the hotel and returned to jail, ready for them to deport me. However, around six in the evening the officer of the guard communicated to me that I was being let free. Until then, they had said not one word about the reason or motive of my imprisonment. I had no doubt that it was for the project I put forth in the famous secret society, but who would be the Judas who denounced me? *Eco il problema*. Years later I learned that Salvatierra was a favorite of Díaz, just as he was a favorite of Sacasa when they assassinated Sandino. Mysteries of life! -- which perhaps time makes clear.

When I was free and returned to the hotel (at the end of February, 1913) the prospects of work or an occupation to keep me alive were very bleak. I was in the midst of those meditations when the young Rafael Alduvín proposed to me, in the name of the manager of the Singer Company, that I go establish and become head of the branch of that company in Matagalpa. They would pay me 80 cordobas monthly plus travel expenses. I did not hesitate to accept. I got everything ready for the trip and set out on the road. After 25 years since the last time I was there, my return to Matagalpa aroused many memories in my spirit. The day after I arrived, the first thing I did was to visit the tomb of my adored Claudina. I found no signs of her. The cemetery, completely abandoned, had been closed. The new one was a little [195] distance from the city. What sadness and disconsolation I felt from the lack of care and abandonment by my wife's relatives, not taking care of her tomb nor even visiting it once a year.

Dragging my legs and the sad memories of my lost love, I dedicated myself to the work that I had been given. I rented a part of the house of Dr. Bustamente, which earlier had belonged to the Jesuits, and little by little I resumed some of my old friendships that still existed in that city. Most of them had disappeared. What a change I found in Matagalpa!

In the month of June of that year (1913) some young people founded a weekly newspaper called *The Herald of Matagalpa*. I gave them my help from the first number, and in the month of August I took charge of publishing and editing the paper. I wrote several articles that were published under the pseudonym of José Navarrete.

For several months I took my meals in the house of Dr. Bustamente, whose wife Doña Rafaelita Fajardo and her sister Celina showed me much deference and consideration.

At the end of February 1914, Doña Rafaelita died. I lamented her death very much, and at her interment I gave the following funeral oration:

In The Cemetery

"Gentlemen: Skeptical as I am from conviction acquired in the school of exile and adversity, nothing moves or disturbs me except events like the one we have before us. Within me [196] the ties of pure and nonduplicitous friendship still bind my heart in such a way that when they are broken for whatever reason, that visceral feeling is the only thing that makes me shake with emotion. That is what leads me to speak in this moment before this coffin which contains the mortal remains of the noble and virtuous woman who carried the name of Rafaelita and who honored me with her sincere friendship.

"In this mysterious secret of death the miserable human creature, attacked with inescapable force by the eternal natural law of To Be and Not To Be, meditates and grieves at the contemplation of the cadaver of a loved person who just the day before filled our hearts with joy with her pleasant smiles. And however stoic one is, the sting of pain will always shake the fibers of sentiment when death snatches away a being we love.

"Of us friends who frequent the house of Rafaelita, few perhaps had the opportunity that I had to appreciate her merits and domestic virtues. Such a patient and good-natured spirit! Such an affable and tranquil character, molded to suffer all pains with sweetness! Her voice, always soft and harmonious, never expressed a reproach. Overexcitement, violence, fits of rage -- never in her days. She was gentle as a turtledove who enjoys herself in her nest surrounded by her little ones whom she lulls to sleep with her tender love. And so she passed her life completing her mission of love and suffering, because the destiny of our women is to love, to suffer, to weep. And here among her anguish and hopes she lived always thinking of her absent children, perhaps with the presentiment that she would never see them again, until the fatal day of eternal farewell came, foreseen in dreams some three months ago by the youngest of her children.

"And meanwhile, there remains a home full of mourning, where the misfortune has struck with cruel fury.

"I am overawed by intense compassion to contemplate the profundity of this unhappy one's abyss. And if the source of tears were not dried up in me, I would give them as an offering in place of flowers on the tomb of Rafaelita, accompanied by the poetry of silence." (January 31, 1914)

With the final words of that little eulogy, the tears came to my eyes and infected the majority of those who accompanied the coffin to the cemetery.

Finally, at the end of February 1914, Gustavo Córdoba came to Matagalpa as inspector general of the Singer Company with instructions, as he informed me, [197] to lower my salary to 30 pesos (córdobas) a month, a thing that I did not accept. Hence I resigned the post and turned over everything I had charge of, arranging my trip to León. I arrived here on March 17, 1914.

Running into many difficulties in finding something with which to occupy myself, I wrote to my good friends the Benedetti brothers in Panama, telling them that I had a

proposition to establish a bookstore in this city, for which I was asking them to open a line of credit at three editorial houses in Spain.

Meanwhile, I always looked for work to earn a living. The first one to offer me something was my old friend Ireneo Mantilla, to help him conduct an inventory of a commercial store of Dr. Abraham Marín, which had been auctioned off. I worked there for more than a month. Later Don José Prío spoke with me about making an inventory of all his capital. That work took about two months.

In the midst of all that I received a favorable response from the Benedettis, and I immediately placed my first orders for books with the three Spanish editorial houses and one French. Those orders arrived at the end of December, and on January 1, I opened my bookstore in a place I rented in a house of Doña Angela Bermúdez. That woman notified me when I was there for some two months that she was going to evict me because she did not want to be dishonored for my selling heretical books.

I had no other remedy than to leave that place and move to a nearby house that belonged to Don Ignacio Macías. [198]

-- XII --

Between Life and Death (1912)

Some two or three months after I was installed in my new habitation, I fell ill with an acute pain in the liver region. I called Dr. Abraham Marín to cure me, and he gave me a hypodermic injection in that area; the injection infected me, producing a large tumor. Meanwhile the pain would not let me sleep peacefully. Medicines and more medicines would arrive, and each day it was worse and worse, and I was not able to hire a servant at any price to help me. After some twenty days in bed, while thinking of my death, I asked one of the two or three friends who came to see me if they would telegraph my brother Francisco the physician in Granada and inform him of my anguished situation. He came immediately, and when he arrived here, he gathered a group of doctors to consult on the case. All the members of the group agreed that it was necessary to operate on me. I opposed that decision.

Two or three days later my brother left, and Dr. Marín still kept prescribing medicine for me, which did not produce any good results.

When my brother got to Granada, he sent my sister Francisca to come and care for me. It was a great consolation for me to have that poor sister of mine at my side (who has since died), who came to assist me with such kindness.

Finally, after thirty days in bed, taking the medicines with which Dr. Marín treated me, I discharged that doctor, saying that I did not need any more of his professional services.

I called Dr. Francisco Mateo Lacayo, and when he came to the sick bed where he found me [199] almost dying, he examined me meticulously, asked me several questions that I answered with difficulty, and assured me later that I did not have appendicitis. Immediately he began to give me homeopathic medicine, which I drank as if it were pure water. After a week under that treatment I made an effort to get out of bed, and I could not do it because of my debility. But the next day, yes, it was possible to sit up and get

into a rocking chair near the bed. Thus I was recovering little by little after 38 days in bed during which I shuttled between life and death.

As soon as I could dedicate myself to the work of my new business, and noting that my lines of credit in Europe were not closed, I wrote to my good friends the Benedettis in Panama, informing them of the case of my grave infirmity, asking them to cover my due bills, and promising to remit the funds as soon as I sold the merchandise. By return mail they responded satisfactorily and agreed to restore my credit, which I had considered lost.

As soon as it was possible, I asked for my bill from Dr. Marín, and I paid it on the spot (some 18 or 20 cordobas, as I recall). Dr. Lacayo gave me a bill for $400 in national currency, thinking without doubt that I was a great capitalist. I paid that amount in monthly installments, throwing my expense budget completely out of balance.

———

THE END

———