

On the Precipice of the Labyrinth

A novel by

Brian Snowden

This book is dedicated In Memoriam to my granddaughter, Mylee Frances.

*El sufrimiento es la sustancia de la vida y la raiz de
la personalidad, ya que solo el sufrimiento
nos hace personas.*

*Suffering is the substance of life and the root
of personality, as only suffering
makes us persons.*

—Miguel de Unamuno

One

It is important that I tell my story. I have known this for some time, but just knowing that one should do something is not enough. One has to have the will, the desire, the energy, perhaps even the right time and circumstances to proceed. I suppose there is no time like the present.

I could have, perhaps should have, started this some time ago. I have thought about it countless times. When something is fresh in your memory, it seems a good time to write things down. I actually have some things written down— - some are names, and some are places. However, I have discovered something valuable in all my years on earth. A person simply cannot see events, important ones, profoundly at least, when that person is so close to those events, especially in a temporal sense. That is the odd thing about time. It is not until some time has passed, although I have never known how much time is required exactly, that I can begin to see some of the truth of key events. The truth requires some degree of synthesis. And that synthesis requires time as well as a lot of deep thinking about the events and seeing them from a distance.

My personal life has stabilized somewhat in the last couple of years. I sometimes wonder what this really means. We may seek stability, but stability might convert into stagnation. I hope I never stagnate. I suppose my challenge is to find stability and ward off stagnation. Nevertheless, I'm not going to say that it is time for me to leave my present set of circumstances in order to seek the dynamics of another volatile situation. I know volatility, and one can only handle so much of that. Perhaps I will change my mind someday. I always leave that option open. I hope nothing is ever totally set in my mind. I want to always be open to new ideas.

There was a time when stability meant virtually nothing to me. That was a time that will mark the beginning of my story. The circumstances were very different, if for no other reason than my age. However, before I go back to that point, I would like to explain where I am now.

I teach Spanish at a small liberal arts college in south central Virginia. I feel that this present set of circumstances gives me a feeling of anonymity. I am a writer, although by itself that term may not mean very much. There are many kinds of writers; some are successful, some are not and may always be unknown. Not all writers want notoriety, but I suspect most want to think that someone else is reading what they have written, and that they might make a little money in the end. I don't think much about that really. Money means less to me than it might to a lot of people in America. After the things I have witnessed, there are many things on the list of what I am looking for in life besides what money can buy. I am writing this because I might be able to shed some light on a little piece of history that for most people is little more than a footnote in history books.

I have a simple routine. I live in a small city, one that is often referred to as a college town. There are many across America. There is nothing particularly exceptional about this city and this college, except perhaps to me. I like the school, which is small enough to allow many of us, faculty, administrators, and students, to have pretty close relationships. But the culture does not put pressure on anyone. We mostly move in and out of relationships fluidly, and that is probably typical of institutions of higher education. There are those who are somewhat more reclusive, and that is all right. Sometimes I feel as if I fit into that category.

The students who come here to learn tend not to be the best and brightest perhaps, but I have found few that don't appreciate the learning opportunity and the sense of community that this school

affords those who choose it. The fact that the attrition rate is very low, by comparison, is a sign that once people come here they tend to stay. That goes for faculty, administrators, and students alike.

Our strong suit is certainly not Romance Languages, the department I am part of. There are only three full-time faculty. I teach most of the Spanish classes, at all levels. If there is an overload, we typically find an adjunct from another school in the area. Piero Alessandri, a native of Milan, Italy, teaches the Italian courses, and Jennifer Destin, an American who spent a good deal of her childhood in France, handles the French classes. This semester, between all three of us, of twenty-two majors. I have the least, with just six. But the department is, I think, a special one. The faculty are not really close, as we don't often socialize away from the school grounds, but at school we mesh exceptionally well, I believe.

I have been here for six years. I sometimes think about moving on. I don't have any aspirations of moving up very far. I don't worry about tenure, and I am not interested in administration. I participate on committees, both ad hoc and more permanent ones. I wonder at times what it would be like to teach at a large university. There is probably a lot more excitement than around here, but I imagine the pressures are considerably greater. I like getting to know my students, who seldom count more than twenty to a class. In my upper-level courses, I often have only four or five.

I am single, and always have been. I doubt I will ever find the right person for me. That is not a sign of either fatalism or pessimism. I am an introvert. I like to do things mostly by myself. The main reason for this is simple. When I get excited about something, even something small such as a good movie or book, I have found it hard to get others to experience my level of excitement. If I get involved in something, and I can become deeply involved, and those around me don't get it, I would just as soon proceed alone. I don't see any point in trying to convince others of something that I find very stimulating.

I have not always thought this way. There were a few times when I thought differently. I have thought about having someone to share my life with me. I have thought about children and finding fulfillment in the traditional things that societies think are normal for most people. But the relationships inevitably have broken apart, and I have never felt that one of my goals in life is to produce children to carry on my legacy. I don't have clear idea of what my legacy is. I have seen plenty of tragedy, and even if most of the tragedy was remote to my current time and space, it had a profound effect on me. Having experienced so many disrupted lives, and devastated families, I never felt it was worth the risk.

Now I will commence with the recounting of my story. I feel that the time is appropriate. There is enough distance to know that I have a better perspective, and if I wait much longer I will lose some of the important details that make my story, I trust, a palatable one.

Two

It took me more than month to make the journey. I hitchhiked from Charlottesville to Washington, D.C. All I carried with me was a dark blue duffel bag that my father had used when he was in the Royal Merchant Marine. It had a shoulder strap, so I could put it on my back, and that made walking easier. It was stuffed with as many of my personal belongings as I could get in it. It was a little heavy, but at the time it was just me and that duffel bag.

When I got to Washington I asked around and was told the best way to get to New York was the train. When I acquired about the price, I decided I couldn't quite afford that luxury. So I kept asking people, and finally I was told that there was a depot not far from Georgetown where truckers would gather to find people who they could hire for the trip to New York. You had to agree to help them with their load. That didn't matter to me. I had to get to New York, no matter what, and then find a way to get across the Atlantic.

It didn't take long to find somebody to hire me. Carlo was looking for a young, strong kid that could help him unload a truck full of cargo in Brooklyn. I asked him what was in the boxes.

"What does it mean to you?" he quickly responded. I blushed and felt I had gone too far. But he smiled after that, and I felt more comfortable.

"I take boxes to Brooklyn. You help take boxes off truck. You get twenty-five bucks when we finish. And I don't charge you passage to the city. Why you care what is in the boxes?"

"I don't care. Sorry I asked about that. When are you leaving?"

“We,” he said emphasizing this word, “we are leaving tomorrow morning. You have place to sleep tonight?”

“Actually, I don’t. I thought I would be on my way to New York today.”

“No problem. You sleep in truck, with me.”

It was early in the evening, late in August. It was hot and humid. Carlo told me the coolest place was in the back of the truck, in a little area devoid of crates. He told me to sit there and then he walked away. He came back about thirty minutes later with a brown bag in his hand. He looked at me. “Hungry? What’s your name?”

“I’m William,” I said, wondering if I should tell him my family name too. I decided that it wasn’t important to Carlo. “I’m a little hungry. Is there a place nearby, a cheap place for something to eat?”

He didn’t say anything. He opened the bag and took out two smaller bags. “Cheese or ham?”

“I’ll take the cheese, thanks.” I thought that the ham sandwich must have cost Carlo more, and since I hadn’t done any work yet, it didn’t make sense for me to ask for the better food. Carlo handed me the cheese sandwich, and we sat on the back of the truck and ate in silence. “In the cab I got a jug of water. Have some. When you want.” That was all he said for the next half an hour.

Eventually, he spoke again. “It takes most of day to get to New York. I like to leave early, before sunrise.”

“No problem,” I quickly responded. I liked getting up early. My father had told me countless times that getting up early is the sign of a hard-working person. I was used to going to bed early and getting up early. It didn’t matter what day it was or what activities I had lined up.

“I have blankets in the cab. You can sleep here. It’s safe. Nobody cause no problems.”

“Sure. That’s fine for me. You can’t beat the rate.”

“What rate?”

“I mean that the price is good, sleeping here in the back of the truck.”

“Oh, yes the rate is good, no? Cheap hotel around here will cost maybe ten bucks. You can sleep here for free.”

I dreamed that I was back in Charlottesville that night. I had a recurring dream of being at the University. I was in a class, but whenever the professor started talking I couldn’t understand him. It wasn’t as if he was speaking in another language. The words were either ones I didn’t know or they were blurred for some reason. I would look around the classroom at the other students. Nobody seemed to be having the same difficulty I was. It made me feel like I didn’t belong there, as if I didn’t have enough sense to be in the class. In this last one I saw the professor writing something on the board. It was very difficult to read. It was a mixture of letters and symbols. I could almost feel tears coming to my eyes because I was so frustrated at not being able to follow what was happening.

I awoke suddenly when I felt a hand on my shoulder. At first I thought it was one of the other students in the class, but it was Carlo. *Buon giorno. E la ora de andare.* Good morning. It is time to go now.”

“Good morning. Yes, I just need to take a leak and we can go.” Carlo pointed to a wall a few steps away. Either there was some kind of toilet around there, or a place hidden from view. I went over and saw nothing, so I peed on the wall. Apparently, I wasn’t the only one to have done that recently.

A few minutes later we were on our way. The truck was an older one. Some of the knobs were half broke, and the window on my side had a crack in it. When I tried to roll it down, the glass only descended a few inches. It didn’t matter right now. It was early September, and although it had been

very warm in the afternoons, the morning temperature was what my father had always described as “brisk.”

The trip took a little over eight hours. We stopped three times, once was to have lunch. Again, Carlo paid for it. We ate at a truck stop. The special that day, probably every day, was biscuits and gravy, with a small piece of fried pork that was half fat and gristle. It didn't much matter to me. I had to be very careful with my money, and I was damn hungry by one o'clock when we stopped. We hadn't had any breakfast. Carlo told me he never felt like eating in the morning. He had been raised eating hard bread soaked in warm goat's milk, something he apparently didn't like but was forced to eat by his mother. He said at one point, “I hated that food. I told my mother I would not eat anything at all in the morning when I was old enough. The first time I say this she slapped me, but not too hard. Now, I don't eat nothing in the morning.”

I could tell this wasn't the first trip Carlo had made. He seemed to know exactly where he was going. I was so disoriented I almost got dizzy. I had never seen so many cars and trucks. When we were in New Jersey and approaching New York, I had to close my eyes at times it was so frightening. One time I looked up and a small truck seemed to be coming straight at us. I started to gasp, when I heard Carlo. “*Testa di cazzo!* Penis head” he said and smashed his hand on the horn. “*Non posso credere, quanto e scemo* I can't believe what an idiot he is” he yelled out the window as the driver swerved at the last instant to avoid a crash. “That driver, he's in a hurry. Maybe he's in a hurry to die.”

“That was pretty close,” I managed to say, although I barely had breath to say it. I looked over, but Carlo looked as he had during the whole day. He sat there, driving and sometimes humming very softly to himself.

I was settling down now and was curious about what we would be doing once in New York. “Where are we going in New York?”

“Warehouse. It’s in Brooklyn.”

“And then we are going to unload the boxes? At the warehouse?”

“Yes. We unload tomorrow. It will take several hours. We have to get in line and wait.

Sometimes we wait an hour, sometimes two or three.”

I thought about finishing up the short-term work with Carlo. “After unloading, what are you going to do?”

He didn’t answer right away. Traffic once again was very heavy, and he was focusing on the road. “After that I have to get some load for the truck. Then I maybe go back to Washington, maybe some other city. Sometimes I go to Philadelphia or Pittsburgh. You do good job for me and you can go on next trip. You been to Philadelphia?”

“No, never. But I can’t go with you. I’m staying here in New York, probably for a few days.”

Carlo looked over for a moment. “What are you going to do here? You have family here?”

“Well, kind of. My family, my father, is back in Charlottesville.”

“You from Charlotte?”

“No, I said Charlottesville. You’re thinking of Charlotte, North Carolina. Charlottesville is in central Virginia. It’s where Thomas Jefferson lived. You know him?”

“No, I don’t know nobody with that name. I never been in that city.” I looked over at Carlo. It didn’t make sense to start explaining who Thomas Jefferson was.

“So, you moving to New York?”

“No, I’m only passing through. I’m on my way to Spain.”

“You going to Spain? Why? Why don’t you go to Italy? Italy is beautiful. Sicilia is very beautiful.”

“Well, yes, I would like to visit Italy too, of course. I also want to go to England. I was born there but left as a small child, so I don’t remember much. My dad is from there, but when my grandmother died, and his father went in the army, my dad left and came here to America.”

I started thinking about Carlo’s question. Why was I going to Spain? That was a complicated question. As we wound our way through New York and crossed the bridge into Brooklyn I recalled the events that led up to my decision to go to Spain. No doubt, my decision would have been seen as nothing short of crazy by most people. To the people in Charlottesville, with the exception of those who were connected with the University, Spain must have seemed like a place on another planet.

Three

My father lived in England until he was twenty-three. When the Great War began his world was turned upside down. His father, my grandfather, although in his mid-forties, went into the Army. He had been a constable in his west London suburb and had an excellent reputation. He was also in great physical condition. He had been a rugby player. He was almost six feet tall and weighed at least two hundred pounds. His hands were very large, and my father often described him as a “tough bastard.”

My father told my grandfather that he was going to enlist. But his father told him that he didn't think it was a good idea. They had had a big discussion, my father would later tell me, about the war and being part of it. My father felt it was his duty, but my grandfather kept telling him about how nasty it could be and that he could be killed, or worse. I asked my father what that meant. I'll never forget what he told me. “If you go off to war, and get killed, that's the end of it. They sit back at home and talk about you as a person who made the ultimate sacrifice. But what if you get your leg blown off, or are paralyzed, or blinded? Then you come home as an invalid, and then you will have to rely on others to live. That seems worse to me.”

My grandfather and father found a compromise. Granddad had good connections, and he found out about a Royal Navy job. Men who had a certain minimum education could apply for a position in the Royal Navy's merchant marine service. My father, if accepted, could become a junior officer after the basic training and then go aboard ships as a supply officer, second class. Instead of going to the battlefield, he could serve his country traveling the seas to secure every kind of supply for the soldiers in battle.

My father went with the plan they agreed on. He was accepted into the program, and several months later he was finished with the training and preparing for his first trip on a transport ship. That was in 1915. The trips took him to ports in southern France and down to Portugal and Spain. They collected supplies at each port. When they filled up the ship it would return to Portsmouth to unload. Other vessels were used to ferry soldiers and supplies across the English Channel.

While training, he decided to ask my mother to marry him. He hadn't considered this before because he didn't think it was right for young men to go to war not knowing if they would survive or make it back in one piece. His merchant marine service plan changed that. So, he and Louisa Graham were married in the small church in her village in Cornwall. He left a few days later and then was rarely home during the war.

No doubt he was surprised when he received a letter from her, less than a year later, and she told him she was pregnant with me. I know this, and a lot of things about my father, because he saves most of his correspondence and has kept a diary since he went to work on board the ship. I was born when he was at sea. He would not see me for another two months, but he would never see his wife again. She died from the complications of giving birth to me.

His service continued for two years. My father was promoted and assumed greater responsibilities on board. He came to like being out at sea because he had plenty of quiet time to engage in his favorite activity, reading great literature. He re-discovered Dickens and plowed through some of the longest novels. He read everything written by the Bronte sisters. He picked up on Thomas Hardy and that meant thousands of pages of more reading. He established a few very close relationships with other men on the ships, and I am pretty sure this helped him get over my mother's death. It was truly an ironic situation. He had only agreed to get married because he wasn't nearly as

likely to be killed or injured in the merchant marine, while it was his wife who had tragically died at home. There can be so many ironic situations in life.

When the war ended, my father returned home. He thought about his many options for the future. He had been offered a more permanent position in the merchant marine, and for a while he probably thought very much about accepting it. My grandfather had survived the war but had suffered serious injuries to his back and one leg. He was not an invalid, by any means, but his career in the police force was over. He managed to find an office job in the local administrative office in his hometown. My father apparently did not want to go there to live, as he certainly thought it was too quiet after what he had experienced in his travels on ship during the war.

Eventually, he came to a decision. He decided he wanted to go to America. He had never been to America, but he had a cousin who was living in New York City. Someone must have encouraged him to consider this option. Perhaps it was my grandfather. My father wasn't sure what he was going to do, but he had saved much of his earnings while in the service. Besides, after my mother's death, he had really no expenses, and no non-family ties, at home.

Of course, there was the issue of what to do about me. I was an infant and without a mother. My father has always kept a diary, and at times he has shared his thoughts with me, either by reading directly from the diary or by letting me read a section. I remember, when I was eleven or twelve, that the topic of my mother came up and he handed me the volume that included the time when I was born and my father was returning to England after the war.

It turns out that a distant cousin of his was planning to move to the United States with her husband, a gentleman who had been contracted to run a business office in New York for a British trading firm. Discussions were undertaken and it proved convenient for all concerned for that cousin, named Abigail, to help care for me on the voyage across the Atlantic. My father wrote in his diary

these exact words: “Baby William was more comfortable at sea than many of the passengers and even my cousin. Poor Abigail suffered seasickness for the first several days of the trip and could do almost nothing, much less help tend an infant child of mine. I did much of the work and became accustomed to a routine. William cooperated to a degree I hadn’t imagined possible. Things went extraordinarily well for the both of us.”

My father’s relocation began by his going to New York. The arrangements were made for him to go there and stay with his cousin and look for some kind of employment. His education and service were strong points in his background, and the cousin was optimistic about the potential.

Most of the story of his arrival in New York and the couple of months he stayed there was not recorded in his diary. I imagine he was busy looking into employment opportunities and spending a lot of time out of his cousin’s home. There was an entry, finally, that dealt with an advertisement he had seen in a magazine about a teaching opportunity in the state of Virginia. My father decided to see what he could find out about both the city and the institution. Everything he discovered must have excited him, for he decided to embark on the adventure to the south.

My father was eventually hired by the University of Virginia. James Harold Benning, my father, had been a public school teacher in a London suburb before the war. He taught literature classes and specialized in late nineteenth and early twentieth century novels. His favorite, by far, was Thomas Hardy. He had visited every site that was known to have been a hangout of the writer. He had managed to talk to a number of people who had known Hardy personally, people who had been part of his afternoon tea routine, or people who had known him when he went out in the evening after writing all day to relax at a pub with a pint of bitter.

“Did you ever actually meet him?” I asked one day.

“Well, I came close once. I was in Dorset and was told that Hardy often came into town in the afternoons. He would visit shops, including an antiquary book shop. I went to the store, and the proprietor told me he was expecting Hardy that very day. He had requested some books that had been brought in from London. I stayed in the store for a couple of hours. There was plenty to look at. However, after a while I gave up. I still don’t know if he was in the store that day. That was as close as I got. Later, I found a couple of his original publications, two of which had Hardy’s autograph in them.”

He would tell me about his favorite characters. I have only managed to get through one of Hardy’s novels, from beginning to end, and that was *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. I think my father could actually recite some of the most famous dialogues of the story. Once I picked up his copy of *Jude the Obscure*, but I wasn’t able to connect with it. I know that one of these days, when I am older, I’ll get the bug for Hardy.

My father did not have the necessary degrees, or their equivalents, in America. However, he had an agreement with one of the deans at the University of Virginia. He was given a provisional contract. He could teach a basic course in English to first-year students, but he would have to take classes that would eventually give him a master’s degree from the school. That is the way it worked out. It was pretty obvious, from what I heard and what my father told me, that he was well liked by his students.

I attended a church school through the sixth grade. It was a Lutheran church that only had a total of about sixty students in levels from kindergarten through sixth grade. Someone at the University recommended the church school. The person said the quality of the public schools was low and that it would be better to have a more closed and closely supervised environment.

There was another fact that, as it turns out, had a big influence on my early development. We lived on a quiet street that was near the city center of Charlottesville. It was close enough for us to walk to stores and other businesses. We rented a house at first, and we ended up living there for a long time. Eventually my father bought the home from the elderly owner. Across the street and down a couple of houses was a neighbor that my father happened to meet. That neighbor was a Mrs. Gálvez. Her name was Angela Rosario Gálvez Ramírez, but I always called her Doña Angela. She was from Cuba. She and her husband left Cuba in 1910. He was a businessman who ran into “some business relationship problems” with the Cuban government, Doña Angela once told me. I didn’t have any idea what that mean, but I figured it was something she didn’t want to talk about. They came to the United States and somehow made their way up to Virginia and eventually to Charlottesville. Mr. Gálvez had a small repair shop near downtown. Apparently, he was good at mechanics. “My husband, he can fix anything, anything that is broken” she told me in her heavy Cuban accent.

It was about a forty-minute drive to the school, the Albemarle Lutheran Primary Academy. Doña Angela told my father about the school, where she worked as a secretary and record keeper. It was a convenient arrangement because she had to be there every day, and she left school an hour after classes were over. She asked me one day, a couple of weeks after I started riding with her, if I wanted to learn a few Spanish words. I told her that would be fine. We didn’t have anything better to do on the drive. In the afternoons I was often too sleepy to recite the words and say things in Spanish as she pointed to them, but in the morning I was always ready to kill time. “*Arbol*” she would say, pointing to a tree, and then “*puente*” as we drove over a small bridge. I would repeat the words and point at the same objects – “tree” and then “bridge” If I didn’t get the pronunciation correct, she would repeat the word, a little bit louder or with a little more emphasis on one of the syllables. She would not accept me “sounding like a typical American” she told me plenty of times. When I got it spot on, she would say, “yes, that’s good” with the word “good” lasting longer than normal, or “that’s correct” rolling the

double 'r' just the way you are supposed to in Spanish. Fortunately, I had no difficulty with those rolling 'r's.

At the time it seemed like a game, something to pass the time. But I rode with Doña Angela for about six years. We didn't practice Spanish every day, but we did it pretty often. When I was a sophomore in high school at the Twin Oaks Preparatory School, I was told by the student adviser that I needed to take French. "Why French?" I asked.

"Because it is the international language. Everybody with a good education should study French, and so should you."

"I won't argue about that, but I'd much rather take Spanish. Besides, Mr. Kennedy teaches Spanish. I had him for Western Civ already, and I like him as a teacher."

"Spanish? Are you sure?"

"I know you know best, but I already have a head start with Spanish, because of Doña Angela, I mean Mrs. Gálvez."

"Oh, you do, do you?"

"Yeah. She brings me to school and teaches me a lot of stuff."

"Well, I suppose you can take French in college. You are planning to go to college, aren't you William?"

"Oh, sure. My father teaches at the University, so I'm sure he wants me to go there."

"Yes, of course. We'll see how that goes. You have to have good grades to go to the University of Virginia, even if your father teaches there. It was not an option for me, of course."

"Why not?"

“Because, as everyone knows, women aren’t allowed to go the University. It’s only for men.”

“Oh, yea,” I responded. I had never thought about the fact that women couldn’t go the University. But now it sunk in. I liked having girls in class. I wondered what it would be like to have only boys in the room. If I stayed with my plans, I would find out in a few years.

I ended up taking every Spanish class taught at Twin Oaks. There were three levels, and by the time I graduated, I knew in my heart that I had a deeper knowledge of Spanish than even Mr. Kennedy did. I found out that he had been a History major in college, but that he had minored in Spanish. He knew a lot, and I never once embarrassed him in class, even when I knew a verb form that he temporarily forgot. I had a secret weapon for my Spanish, of course, Doña Angela. By the time I was getting close to graduation, she and I were having actual conversations in Spanish. She told me to be careful because of her Cuban accent. I didn’t understand what she meant by that. I asked her one day.

“Explain this Cuban accent idea.”

“People have accents when they speak. Did you ever meet anyone from New York or Boston? They have different accents. The people here in Charlottesville sound different, don’t they? You don’t sound like your father. He speaks with an English accent, but you do not. Even I can hear those, and English is not my native language. The same is for Spanish. We have a Cuban accent, my husband and I. But my father was born in Spain. He was from Burgos. Do you know where that is?”

“No. I’ve studied the map of Europe in Geography, but I only remember Madrid and Barcelona.”

“Burgos is north of Madrid. It’s very old city, and they speak beautiful Spanish there. I remember my father telling us stories about Spain and his native city. He had a beautiful accent. Sometimes the kids would make fun of his accent, back in Havana. I would laugh too, but I loved the way he spoke. He sounded so educated. And he was educated.”

“What did he do?”

“He was a government official in Burgos. He worked in the public works office. He liked to study city plans and such things. But he loved history and studied history every day. At least that is what he told me. They didn’t listen to the radio in those days the way we do now. People don’t read as much now.”

I watched as she spoke. I didn’t know what that Spanish accent sounded like, but it made me wonder if I would ever hear it. Doña Angela made it sound very special. “Why did he move to Cuba?”

“I think it had to do with politics or something. Spain is a complicated country. He used to say that he loved Burgos and Spain more than anything, but he was tired of all the arguing.” At the time, I was clueless about Spain and political arguing. Those were things that didn’t come up often. My father would talk politics sometimes, but I usually could not muster sufficient interest.

Doña Angela had done me a great service. I doubt I ever expressed my gratitude sufficiently to her. But I think she also knew that she was giving me something important, and it wasn’t only insight into foreign languages, Spanish in particular. She was trying to open my eyes to a bigger world than Charlottesville or Virginia or even the United States. By the time I graduated from the Twin Oaks Preparatory School, I would refer to myself as actually fluent in Spanish. I made mistakes, and I realized there were a lot of words I didn’t know. But if necessary, I could ask for things and have a good idea what people were saying if I were dropped in the middle of Havana. To put it precisely, she had given me confidence, and when it comes to foreign languages, confidence is significant. I teach Spanish in college now, after all.

Four

I should explain why I chose to go to New York City, although I think in part it should be obvious. New York had probably the biggest port in the country, and that meant a pretty constant stream of ships going to Europe. I figured that with determination I could get hired on a ship, in one capacity or another, and make my way across the Atlantic. Since we had a relative, Charles Hunt was his name, in New York, that made the decision even easier. My father had sent Charles a letter on my behalf.

I had the address of his residence in Manhattan, but I didn't have any way of knowing for sure if the letter had arrived. I also had no clue what kind of a place he lived in. I knew New York was a big city, with some beautiful and rich areas, but also areas that were overpopulated with many poor people. I was overwhelmed when Carlo and I first arrived. The city was so large and congested, especially compared to quaint Charlottesville.

As it turned out, Charles Hunt lived about two blocks from Central Park on a small side street. Carlo sent me in the general direction, saying that it was in Manhattan and a 'good ways' up through the central part of the city, but I had to ask a few people for directions before I actually got to the street. It was an apartment building, but nothing like the apartments I had seen in Charlottesville. This building was at least twelve stories high. The lobby was small, but it was elegant. There was a uniformed man sitting at a small desk reading a newspaper when I went in.

"How may I be of service?"

"Hello. I'm here to see Mr. Charles Hunt. Do you think he is in?"

“Not likely. He generally comes in after seven in the evening, and it’s,” he said as he reached for a pocket watch, “a quarter to six. Do you know Mr. Hunt?”

“I’m a relative. Mr. Hunt is my father’s cousin. I’m from Charlottesville.” He looked at me as if measuring the degree to which he could trust that I was telling the truth. Perhaps something about my clothes gave him reason to believe I was from a small town in Virginia and not someone more suspicious. “Well, I can come back in a bit, then.”

“You can wait on the bench outside if you would like. That way you will see Mr. Hunt as he arrives.”

“Yes, I’ll do that. Thank you.”

I must have fallen asleep on the bench. I was awakened suddenly by someone yelling “Taxi!” just as one of those vehicles pulled up to the curb in front of the apartment building. It was a man who seemed to be in a hurry, as he jumped into the taxi and almost bumped into the man emerging. I looked at the gentleman who had arrived and tried to determine if he looked like someone in the fuzzy pictures of a family back in England. My father had pointed to a heavysset man on one side who was wearing a bowler. This person was heavysset, but I still could not tell. “Excuse me, are you Charles Hunt, from England?”

“Yes, I am. With whom do I have the pleasure? Not young William, is it?”

“Yes, I am William.” I extended my hand, and we shook firmly.

“Well, great to make your acquaintance, William, I’m sure.”

“Yes, I am pleased as well.”

“Let’s go up to my apartment. My wife is there, and she will no doubt have a meal ready before long. I assume you don’t have plans.”

“Plans?”

“I mean for the evening. Tonight.”

“Oh, no. I don’t have plans, no.”

“Excellent. So, let’s go up.”

I followed him into the building. He was greeted by the man in the uniform who called to him, “Evening Mr. Hunt.”

“Evening, Chester. Everything well this evening?”

“As well as can be expected, Sir, as well as can be expected.”

“This is my nephew, William, my cousin’s son.”

“Yes, we met,” said Chester. “Will you be needing assistance on the elevator?”

“No, no, we’re fine. Thanks.”

Soon we were in the Hunt apartment. I had never been in an apartment like that one before. It was on the eighth floor. It was not very large, but it was very nicely arranged. The furniture was beautiful, and there were many prints and paintings on the walls. There was a large window at the end of the living room, and when I looked out I saw a view of Central Park. It was beautiful and was just two blocks away. We sat in the living room talking about family in England. Many of the names were familiar to me, but I could not relate to most of them since I had never seen any of them. He told me stories about my father and the adventures they had together when they would have family get-togethers in different parts of England in the summers. Mr. Hunt, or Charles as he insisted I call him several times, was a talker, that is for sure. I had no problem sitting and listening. What could I have told him about us that would have been interesting?

Mrs. Hunt, Diana rather, was rather attractive. She had red hair and was tall, about the same height as Charles, and thin. She was from northern England and spoke with a strong accent. At times I could hardly understand her. However, Charles spoke most of the time, and Diana would frequently agree by saying, "Indeed" or "Quite so."

Dinner was, understandably, the best one I had been served recently, and I enjoyed it fully. And it wasn't until we had finished, and Diana brought to the table a bottle of port, that Charles finally asked me about my plans.

"Do I understand that you are interested in going to Spain?"

"Yes, that's right."

"You know that I am in the transport and shipping business, of course. Our firm gets involved with shipments all around the globe. I have access to news reports from all over the world as it impacts our business. Are you familiar with all that is going on in Spain at this time?"

"I have some idea, yes. I know about the problems that are happening."

Charles looked at me with perhaps the first frown I had seen during the evening. "Calling the things happening in Spain problems is a bit of an understatement, I would say. It's outright civil war now."

"I know the timing is not good. But I feel I have to go. I've been studying Spanish for several years now. I had a kind of tutor in Charlottesville. She is from Cuba originally. She has helped me learn, and I can speak pretty well."

“That is nice, William, but speaking Spanish is hardly a good reason for going to a place that is, frankly, rather dangerous at this time.” He poured more port into our glasses and took a sip. “I thought I might convince you to consider going to England for a visit. You have family there, of course, and I would gladly help make arrangements for you to stay with your relatives. You could visit London and my home city of Birmingham. You haven’t been to England, have you?”

“I was born there, but we left when I was just a year old, so not really. But I would enjoy going, definitely. I will go, for sure, but I have to go to Spain now. I know it doesn’t seem to make sense. I’m not even sure I can explain it completely. I have a strong sense of going there to make a contribution.”

“Well, that is admirable, certainly. But the situation is, to put it mildly, chaotic in Spain. I suspect, from the reports I see, that many of the Spanish hardly understand all of the fuss themselves. Perhaps it is something they should work out on their own. And what kind of contribution do you expect you could make?”

I thought about what Charles was saying. The truth was, I knew little about the situation in Spain. My interest had been sparked by conversations with one of my father’s colleagues at the university. He was a professor of International Relations who had been focusing on the countries of Spain and Italy and the growth of radical politics that were influenced by the Russian Revolution. That professor had invited my father to a dinner, and I tagged along. One of the other people in attendance was from the history department and was apparently a specialist in Ancient Rome. Another was a German professor who specialized in eighteenth century literature, and the last one was a professor from the Philosophy department.

“I’m not sure about that yet, really. I feel as though I should go and see for myself.”

I thought about that dinner in Charlottesville. It had been nothing short of an amazing evening. Despite having been raised in Charlottesville, in somewhat remote central Virginia, I was reasonably well informed. I had my father to thank for that. He was an avid reader, and I picked up the habit from him. We read the newspaper every day, and he would find copies of newspapers from Washington, D.C. and New York, even though a day or two late, and bring them home. We each had our areas of personal interest, but we always checked out the front pages for the latest news, especially in Europe. His most frequent comments were simply, “I don’t see any good coming from that,” and “I simply don’t understand this.”

We stayed at the professor’s home, which was two blocks from the grounds of the University, until well after midnight. The discussion went in every conceivable direction. It jumped from ancient Greece to the Italian Renaissance and then went to nineteenth-century Germany, and then from Plato to Spinoza and on to Nietzsche. My father and I did a lot of listening, and when it came to government and what models were out there he naturally referred to Great Britain and the development of constitutional monarchy. The names that came up, when inevitably the topic settled on the “German problem”, were repeated over and over. The names that came up over and over again were Bismarck, Hitler, Bakunin, Lenin, Trotsky, Mussolini. I had seen photographs in the newspapers of some of these people. But everything still seemed so remote to me. We were living in Charlottesville, and despite having the University so close it was still a very small city whose inhabitants focused on their day to day routines and were little affected by developments so far away.

Perhaps the discussions that interested me the most were those about Spain. There was only one person who seemed well informed about what was happening there, and that was the Philosophy

professor. It turns out he had visited Spain several years earlier. He had been in France on sabbatical, in the southwest region, when he decided to take a few of days to go to Spain. He simply had to cross the Pyrenees Mountains, at the western end near the French town of St. Jean de Luz, and then he was on the border. He made his way to the city of San Sebastián. He said it was one of the most interesting places he had ever visited. The location of the city was spectacular. The people there were some of the most interesting he had ever met. The food was so good he had seemed to go from one meal to the other with little activity in between. He seemed to know more about the politics in Spain than everyone else but quickly admitted, “I have seldom seen such confusion and so many arguments about who should be running the country. Every waiter in every restaurant seemed to be an expert, and everyone had a differing opinion about Spain’s future.”

I think I must have learned more that evening than I had in all the Western Civilization and History classes I had taken. It always seemed like the people and events were very distant, and that the various ages were all so difficult to comprehend compared to the modern conveniences we had in the mid-1930s in the United States. We had automobiles, airplanes, electricity in our homes, and the marvel of the radio. I often thought what history would have been like if the radio had existed in prior centuries.

The next day my father and I were having breakfast. “You know, I have to go.”

My father looked up from the newspaper. “Go where, son?”

“To Europe.”

“I see. Apparently the discussions last evening got your curiosity all aroused.”

“That is for certain.”

“We can probably make arrangements for you to travel to England. The trip is somewhat expensive, however. I’m not sure it would be feasible anytime soon.”

“Yes, I know that. I’ve been thinking about that part of it. I’m finishing school in May, and I have no idea what I am going to do afterward. What kind of job am I going to find with a bachelor’s degree in English? I don’t want to go into teaching right now. I may at some point, but definitely not now.” I looked at my father. I knew that sometimes, when he was thinking about something deeply, he would go for a while without speaking. He was thinking about a response while still looking at the newspaper.

“I suppose we can find something for you to do here in Charlottesville. I have connections through the school. There are opportunities for you, I think if we explore a bit. There is the option of continuing with school too. Have you thought of that?”

“Not really.” I didn’t know if it was a good time to go into what was on my mind, but I decided to go ahead anyway. “I have been working on a plan.”

“A plan? What sort of plan?”

“I want to go to Spain.” I knew he was going to react to this by not reacting. I waited for a few moments, and then continued. “I know this sounds a little crazy, but this is not anything new. I didn’t just come up with this idea recently. It has quite a history to it, actually.”

“Well, I’m not sure what to say. I know when you get something on your mind, you have a tendency to stick with it. You can be very persistent. What did you think of everything you heard last night? Spain sounds like a very difficult and somewhat dangerous destination these days. I can understand your wanting to go to Europe. I’m sure you can find plenty of interesting things in other

places. England is having her share of difficulties as well, you know. But it is a much safer place. I would same the same about France or Holland.”

“Yes, I know. But I have spent all that time learning Spanish. I have learned a tremendous amount. Here I don’t have anyone to practice with, except Doña Angela. But she isn’t in good health these days.”

“You don’t suggest going to Spain to practice Spanish, do you? Couldn’t you go to Mexico? It’s a lot closer and doesn’t have Spain’s problems.”

“I don’t know anything about Mexico.” That was about the best argument against Mexico I could think of. I didn’t know anything about Mexico, but as for the excitement part, there was no way it compared to Spain.

We both sat quietly for a while. My father continued to read the newspaper. I tried to think of some good reasons for going to Spain. “I want to see that culture. I want to see the historic places. I want to see why Pizarro and Cortez left Spain and why they came to the New World. It’s an amazing place. Maybe it is one of the most interesting places in the world.” I had taken a history course called Early Modern Spain and Portugal. A significant part of the course dealt with the conquests of the Inca and Aztec civilizations.

“I don’t argue that. I’ve never been there, and it certainly has an interesting history. However, you are pretty young to be going on such a journey. I’ll worry about you going to such a, well such a volatile place, right now, politically speaking.”

We carried on the discussion for several weeks. I'll give my father credit. He could have tried to forbid me from doing something that he considered "rash." I believe that his approach was for me to come to the realization on my own that my plan was not a sound one. He likely felt that as time went by my enthusiasm would diminish, hoping I might be distracted by a different adventure. But it never happened. During the months of my last semester at the University, I became even more intensely interested in all things Spanish. I went to the library and spent hours in the stacks looking at history books. I read about Carlos I, Philip II, and everything that happened in the incredible sixteenth century. I was ambivalent about the Spanish subduing millions of indigenous people because the cultures were considered inferior. At times I thought it would be equally interesting to visit Mexico or Peru and see the battlegrounds, the ancient edifices, the pyramids of Tenochtitlan, or the recently discovered ruins of Machu Picchu. But inevitably, my thoughts returned to Spain.

In June I graduated from the University of Virginia. For some it was a momentous event. The students' families came to town, and there were parties almost everywhere. Fraternity Row was the most exciting part of the city. I had not been part of that scene, so my celebration was much more subdued. My father and I went to the best restaurant in Charlottesville for our own small celebration. What I was celebrating for myself was the one thing that was keeping me from starting my trip to Spain—finishing school. Now it was over.

The conversation during dinner was rather subdued. I knew my father was thinking about the same thing I was—my imminent departure. No doubt he saw it as something to be avoided, while I saw it as the most exciting experience of my short life. He told me about his cousin, Charles Hunt, who lived in New York. "I have written to Charles to let him know you will be going to New York. You should go see him. He is in the international transportation business. That means he has access to the

latest news about what is happening around the world. I'm sure he has an idea of what is happening in Spain. When he talks to you about it, you might change your mind. If you do, this is all right. You can spend time in New York, and then come back here. You don't have to commit to something that later looks like a bad idea."

"I promise to visit your cousin, of course. I imagine he can be a lot of help." That was the extent of our discussions about Spain. I must admit that there were times when I wondered if my idea wasn't really a poor one. I have a feeling that my father could tell that I was having second thoughts. Perhaps that made him feel a little better. It must have been difficult for him to think that I was going to Spain with a dreamy attitude, that I was going as a casual observer and without the understanding that there were countless potential hazards. My father knew, I felt confident, that I was not going on this adventure blind. I wondered if my idea made sense. But I also thought about my other realistic option. I could stay in Charlottesville and try to find a job. My degree in English probably would not be of much help. There were few teaching opportunities locally, and I had no idea what other kind of work I might try. Compared to going to Europe, and in particular Spain, nothing created anything close to a spark for me.

When Charles and I had said about as much as we could about Spain, he finally said, "Well, William, I suspect you are tired. We have a spare room here, one that we are thinking of converting into a nursery that you are welcome to. It doesn't have a bed, just a sofa. But is not uncomfortable, and you are welcome to stay for as long as you need. Do you know about the trip across the Atlantic yet?"

“I’m working on that. I think the best idea is to get hired on a ship that is headed across. I can’t afford passage.”

“I might be able to help you with that, actually. I have contact with one of the shipping firms. I can contact him tomorrow to find out what positions may be available.”

“That would be great. I don’t expect to stay here long. The sooner I can make arrangements, the better. I would appreciate any assistance. It’s very kind of you to allow me to stay in your nice place here. I am very grateful for that.” I stayed the night, and the next day I spent walking around the city. I had no plan. I wanted to get a feel for the city that was so famous. I walked miles and miles. I saw Central Park and many of the famous buildings. I went to Wall Street and to Greenwich Village. I must have looked like some kind of country bumpkin to the local people. I stared at skyscrapers and other buildings that were beyond the comprehension of most people from Charlottesville.

I returned to Charles’s apartment building after seven in the evening. I didn’t want to go up until Charles was home from work. His wife had been cordial, but I would not have felt comfortable sitting in the living room, thinking she might feel obliged to engage me in conversation until Charles arrived. The doorman nodded when I went into the lobby and pointed to the elevator. I took this to mean that Charles had arrived, and it was all right for me to go up. I knocked on the door and was greeted by Charles a few moments later.

“William, you’ve been out all day, I understand.”

“Yes, that’s right. I want to see some of the city before I leave. It is a pretty amazing place. Compared to Charlottesville, it’s, well, there is no comparison. I wandered all over, not even sure of where I was going.”

“I think that was a good idea. Please come in and sit down. Dinner will be ready shortly.” He reached into the breast pocket of his coat and pulled out a piece of paper. “Here is the name of a

contact of mine. He's English and works for a shipping line. He knows your situation and told me he might have an opportunity for you. The address is here, so I suggest you pay him a visit. He said there is a vessel leaving in three days."

"Oh, thanks so much. I think you have saved me a great deal of work. I was going to start visiting some of the shipping firms to see what kind of luck I might have. This contact might be just the thing I was looking for. I can't thank you enough."

"No thanks necessary. We're relatives, aren't we? I hope that what you are doing is the best idea. I can tell from our conversation last night that you are determined to make this trip. I won't try to convince you otherwise."

Five

The trip across the Atlantic was filled with occasional excitement and a good deal of drudgery. The ship was a cargo vessel that left New York and headed for Le Havre, France. I had been hired as a cargo mate—second class. That meant, I quickly learned, that I had to do whatever by boss told me to do. It quickly became clear to me that on board a ship, every boss or chief had his own little fiefdom and could do whatever he wanted with his charges. There was little recourse and taking things up the chain of command was usually not an option.

I was even doing things before the ship left the harbor. I had never been on a ship before, and I was so excited I could hardly think clearly. I wondered how I would feel when we got out to sea. My boss was a character by the name of Benjamin Shank, whom everyone called Shanker. He was from Newcastle and had a strong northern England accent. The combination of his accent and the slang he used often made understanding him difficult. He told me as soon as we left the harbor, “If you have to throw up make sure it’s outside of this bloody cabin.” The cabin was very cramped. It had bunks for four people, but only Shanker and I were staying it when we left New York. The bed was just under six feet long, because I’m six feet tall, and I almost fit in lengthwise. It was very narrow—it couldn’t have been more than about twenty inches wide. There was a bunk above mine that was only about a foot above my face when I was lying down. However, I had a place to sleep, and I wasn’t going to complain about it.

Shanker had me do odd jobs around the ship. There was painting that had to be completed in one of the lower decks, where a lot of the cargo was stored. We had to go deeper into the ship to an area that was slightly waterlogged. It had a lot of debris on the deck that we had to pick up. That was

pretty nasty work, and we had to go down there about every three days to do that. One of the tasks I didn't mind was going through the main cargo hold and counting containers. Everything had to be accounted for according to the official manifest. We had a list of everything that was supposed to be there, and we had to check it off the list. It meant looking at addresses, box dimensions, and postings of the contents. It was almost like a game. Shank would shout out a name or number, and I had to climb around the boxes and try to find a specific one. The boxes were of an infinite number of sizes. Some were as big as small trucks, while others were typical travel trunks. However, everything in this area was "commercial," according to Shanker.

I was a little surprised that I had several days before I would have the afternoon off. Shanker called it 'down time', and he told me I could do whatever I wanted, but he advised I "lay low in case an officer comes snooping around." I wasn't sure what he meant by that. I knew almost nothing about the ship and who was running it. Of course, we all knew the captain was a Mr. Haughton, but I didn't even see him until we were halfway to France.

At first those quiet afternoons were boring. But on the third one I made a discovery, quite by accident. Shanker asked me to run an errand for him. He gave me a thick folder and asked me to take it up to the bursar, a Mr. Jenks. He told me where the cabin was for this person and sent me off. I got up to the deck where the officer quarters were located. I walked down the galley way until I saw a plaque on the outside of a cabin that indicated it was for the Bursar. It was open, so I looked inside. Seated at a small desk was a gentleman who was smoking a pipe and going through a stack of papers.

"Pardon me, you are Mr. Jenks?" The officer looked up and blew out a steam of smoke.

"Yes. Can I help you?"

I extended my arms with the folder and put it on the desk. “This is from Shanker, I mean Mr. Shank. It asked me to bring it up.”

“Oh, yes. Very well. Thank you, young man.” He returned to his paperwork. I was about to leave when I noticed behind Mr. Jenks a bookshelf. It was tall and narrow, and each row had a bar in front of it. I quickly concluded that the bars were necessary for rough seas, to make sure the books would not fall off the shelves. Mr. Jenks must have noticed me staring for a moment.

“Was there something else?”

“Oh, no, sorry. I was admiring your book collection.”

“The books? Oh, yes, these behind me. Do you like to read?”

“Sure. I’ve read a lot. It’s something I miss.”

“What’s your name?”

“William, Sir, William Benning.”

“Working the crossing, are you William?”

“Yes. I’m down with Shanker.”

“First time at sea?”

“First time, yes. I’m enjoying it. We haven’t had any rough seas yet, I understand, but after the first couple of days I got my sea legs, as Shank calls it.’

“Good for you, William. I don’t think our luck will hold out all the way across, so you might have your sea legs tested yet.” He continued to puff on his pipe. “Where are you from?”

“Charlottesville, in Virginia.”

“Yes, I’m familiar with the city, but not because I’ve been there. I understand it’s a lovely place. It’s at the foot of the Blue Ridge Mountains.”

“Yes, exactly. You should go there some time.”

“I might do that. Now listen, I think you are a trustworthy person. If I lend you a book, will you be sure to return it at the end of the voyage?”

“Oh, absolutely, Sir, yes.”

“Well, then, which one would you like to try. Step up so you can see the titles.” It only took a few moments to see one I wanted.

“That one, the book by Hardy, *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*.”

“Like Hardy, do you?”

“Sure. My father loves Hardy and has read everything the man wrote, I believe. I’ve only read a couple. *Tess* is one I’ve yet to try.” Mr. Jenks reached behind him and selected that volume. He looked at for a few moments and opened the cover.

“This was a gift from my wife. She even wrote a note in it. It’s a particular favorite of my collection, so I’m assuming you’ll take good care of it.”

“Absolutely, if you don’t mind my borrowing it. I could pick another one if you prefer.”

“No, no, this one is all right. I am confident you’ll care for it. People who like to read excellent works know the value of good books. I’ll trust you. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I need to return to work. Perhaps Mr. Shank is waiting for you.”

“Yes, no doubt he is. Thanks so very much. I’ll be extra careful. Good day.”

“Good day,” he said as he resumed puffing on his pipe and reviewing the papers in front of him.

I spent the free time I had on the remainder of the trip reading *Tess*. The circumstances at the time made the book special. The story, I found, was very sad, and even depressing. Hardy was clearly a master at presenting a story and finding ways to evoke emotions in the reader, sometimes unexpectedly. I had to pace myself while reading as I wanted it to last, but also, I wanted to make sure I finished it before we got to France.

Just as Mr. Jenks predicted, we ran into bad weather. It happened in the middle of the night. I was sleeping pretty soundly when I heard a sudden clanging noise. I woke up and felt the ship lurch heavily to one side. My bunk was something like a cocoon, so there was little chance I would fall out. But I quickly realized we were in rough seas. I could hear Shank snoring in his bunk. No doubt it would have taken more than rough seas to disturb that veteran of the ocean.

I felt pretty good while I was lying down, but I wondered what would happen if I got up. I decided to stay put and see if I could make it through the rest of the night. I felt a little dizzy, but I drifted in and out of sleep. I woke up when I heard Shank making a noise. I immediately realized that the seas were still rough. I had little choice but to get up. It turned out to be a challenge. I was not accustomed to the movement, and Shank looked over at me and laughed. “First time in rough seas?”

“Yes, first time.” I said that and had to grip the side of the bunk to keep from falling down. I opened the small door to the bathroom.

“Don’t make a mess in there because you can’t find your sea legs,” he warned me. I decided to sit on the small commode, even though as I was going to do something that normally required standing. When I came out, Shank was standing there as if waiting for me. “Do we have something to work on?” I asked.

“Yep. We have to go make sure none of the cargo is shifting. Let’s go ahead. I brought you something from the galley.” He handed me a small tin tray with a cover on it. I opened the cover and saw what looked like scrambled eggs and some kind of meat.

“I don’t think I’m hungry right now. But thanks for bringing this.” We left the cabin and headed for the first cargo area. I felt a little dizzy, and my stomach felt as though it were full even though I hadn’t eaten anything since the previous evening. It was seasickness, but I didn’t feel like I had to throw up. I stuck with the work routine for the rest of the morning. The trickiest thing was watching for any of the containers that might shift with the strong movement of the ship. Fortunately, I didn’t get hurt. When we were finished, we went up, and I decided to go out on deck to see what was happening. It didn’t take long, after I went outside, to see the motion of the ship. Within a few seconds I did start to feel rather sick. I closed my eyes and took a few deep breaths. It helped a little, but for the rest of the day I was uncomfortable. Shanker told me later in the afternoon, “You’re doing all right for a greenhorn. Maybe you should try this kind of work for a while. I’m sure we could use you on the return trip.”

“Thanks. I don’t plan on doing that, but I’m glad to know I could handle it if I needed to.”

“Well, that’s something to think about. Where are you headed, anyway?”

“Well, I’m going to make my way to Spain.”

“Spain? Why the hell you want to go to Spain? Have you been there before?”

“No, never. But I’m going for several reasons.” I stopped talking. Maybe Shanker was interested, or maybe he was only making conversation.

“Well, I’ve been there a few of times. I’ve been to Cadiz a few times, and once to Barcelona. On ship, I mean. Not on this ship, but with another cargo company. Barcelona was pretty nice. I especially like the Spanish women. They’re pretty, but a little strong-willed, if you ask me. But, if I were you, I’d be careful.” I wondered if he meant to be careful in Spain or with Spanish women.

The remainder of the trip was both peaceful, as far as the weather was concerned, and uneventful in any other sense. I had a few conversations with Shanker, mostly about countries and cities he had visited. His favorites were Hamburg and Stockholm. I could tell by his comments that Shank was not a highly educated person. He told me he didn’t speak any other languages, and sometimes he wasn’t even sure what language people spoke in the cities he visited. He mostly talked about the food and the women. It was hard to tell if he had more intimate knowledge of the women in other countries or was a casual observer. He mentioned other members of the crew and the way they bragged about their ‘conquests’, but Shank never told me about his relationships.

We finally arrived in Le Harve. The weather was miserable. It was raining when we docked, and it continued to rain, off and on for the next two days while the ship’s cargo was unloaded. I continued to work during this period with Shanker. So, I was able to spend a couple of more nights on the ship. On the third day, he came and asked me, “Are going to stay or make the journey back to America?”

“Oh, I’m staying. I appreciate the offer, but I’m sticking with my plans. I’m finished with the big first step, crossing the Atlantic. Now I have to figure out how to get down to Spain. Maybe there’s a ship that goes from here to a Spanish port.”

“There might be, but I think you’d be pretty lucky to find something at this time. You can look around.”

“I’m going to grab my stuff now.” I stuck my hand out to him. “I enjoyed the crossing. And it was nice to share the cabin with you. Maybe we’ll cross paths again one of these days.”

“Maybe we will. You need to go up to the bursar’s office to collect whatever pay you have accumulated. You know where that is. Good luck, William. And you better be careful in Spain. Those people are different, you know.” As soon as he said this I remembered that I still had the copy of the bursar’s book. I took it out of the small locker with my few things in it and grabbed my bag and stuffed my belongings inside. Then I hurried up to the officer’s deck. I went to the Bursar’s office and saw him at his desk.

“Excuse me,” as I stepped into the cabin. “I’m returning the book you let me borrow.” He looked up at me for a moment before recalling.

“Oh, yes, you’re Benning, right?”

“Right, sir, Benning.”

“Well, I have your final pay here,” he said as he lifted his hand to retrieve the book. “Did you finish this?”

“Oh, yes, certainly. It was very good, if a bit depressing.”

“Well, Hardy was more often depressing than not, I’d say. Nevertheless, I have always enjoyed his writing. Now, here is the envelope with your earnings. You are leaving now, I understand?”

“I am. I’m headed toward Spain.”

“Spain, you say?”

“Yes, Spain. I assume you have been there during your travels aboard ship.”

“Indeed, I have, many a time. I like Spain and I have learned a little of the language. I almost married a Spanish woman many years ago.”

“Really? How interesting.”

“Yes, she was a beauty, I’ll tell you. I thought things would work out, but they didn’t. She had problems with her family. They didn’t want her to leave Spain. It was nothing against me, she told me, but she finally said she just could not cut the ties.” The expression on his face told me it was something that still had an effect on him. “How is your Spanish, Benning? You speak it somewhat?”

“Yes, I do pretty well. Of course, I’ll find out once I get there.”

“Yes, indeed. It is a bit dangerous there at this time. I suppose you know that.”

“I do, yes. But I’m going to be careful as everyone recommends.”

“Well, I’ll tell you that I am a little envious. If I were a lot younger than I am now, I might be interested in doing just what you are doing.”

“Really? That is the first time I have heard anything encouraging about my journey.”

“It’s a fascinating place, and I like the people. The food is excellent too, and there is always wine available. Maybe the beer is nothing special, compared to English beer anyway.” The bursar extended his hand, and we shook heartily. “I wish you safe travels and good adventures in Spain, young man.”

The trip from the coast of northern France to the Pyrenees took about ten days. At the beginning I struggled quite a bit. My Spanish did not help very much, and it wasn't until I was approaching the towns in the south that I finally found some people who spoke Spanish. I finally came up with a tactic that helped. Once on shore in northern France, I found a person in a small tavern who spoke English. It was a man who was from England and who had spent years living in Brittany. He told me he was in the dairy business. He made contracts with local dairy farmers to get cheese and butter and send the goods back to England. His name was Clive.

He told me the best way to get to Spain was to find truckers who were going south and go as far as I could with each one. Eventually, he said, I would find one that was going all the way to the Spanish border. His suggestion proved to be very valuable. He helped me by writing a sign on a piece of cardboard, in French, of course, that read “A ESPAGNE – JE PEUX TRAVAILLER FORT’.” It said that I was destined for Spain and that I could work hard,” he told me as he sipped a glass of red wine.

“That’s pretty simple and sounds like it might work.”

“I don’t suppose you are in a hurry.”

“Not really, no.” Of course, I was anxious to get to Spain, but I had very limited funds and there was no way I was going to spend my money on a train. “You haven’t been there, have you?” I asked Clive.

“Spain? Yes, actually, a few years ago. I went to Santiago once to see if I could buy local produce to send back to England. I got frustrated. I didn’t speak the language, and I didn’t know

anyone. But I liked the country, at least that part of it. The food and wine were excellent. One of these days I might go back. Right now, it is too unsettled. I don't keep up with the news the way I should, but I know things are very dicey there. Why are you going in these times? You know someone there?"

That was the same question I had been asked, and that I was struggling with now more than ever before. "I'm going to see the country. I know the timing isn't very good, but I made my decision and I'm sticking with it."

"Well, you are young and you strike me as a reasonable young man. However, you must exercise all due caution." He stopped and waved to the bartender to refill his wine glass. I was drinking a beer and put my hand on top of it to indicate I did not want another. After a few moments, Clive spoke again. "I'll tell you the truth. If I were young like you and didn't have the encumbrances that come with age, I might embark on such a journey myself. I've been to several countries, but I've spent most of my time here or in England. I'm not for adventures anymore." He took a deep draft of his refilled wine glass.

"Well, I appreciate your advice and the idea for this sign. I think it might work for me. I'm going to start out tomorrow morning and see how far I can get."

"I wish you the best, young man." With that he took another gulp of his wine, and I went to the tiny room I had bargained for above the tavern.

Much of the trip through western France was a blur. It was a special experience, and I saw some of the most fascinating land and buildings. I struggled with communicating, but the sign was a major factor. When in doubt I tried a few words of Spanish, and sometimes that actually helped get my idea across. It was incredible to see the architecture and the many historic buildings. There were times when I felt that the areas I traversed were not that different from Virginia, and others when it was obvious I was a long way from home.

There were small adventures along the way. Most of the trip was on trucks of various sizes and a multitude of products. One of them was loaded with fish and other things from the ocean. The driver went from the coast to several small cities. In each he drove to a central market, and I helped him unload his catch in the central depot. Virtually all our communication was through sign language. That driver laughed frequently and spoke as if I understood what he was saying. All I could do was smile back at him.

Another trucker that I worked for carried pigs and ducks to two towns in south central France. That was the most interesting area, from a geographic standpoint, that I saw on the trip. Many of the areas made me think of what the region looked like in prehistoric times. There were rivers winding through shallow canyons that had the most beautiful rock formations. I saw a number of openings that I realized must be caves. They made me wonder what life was like for people who had likely lived in those caves many thousands of years before.

I remember when I looked out across the countryside and realized I was seeing, for the first time, the country of Spain. I was near the town of St. Jean de Luz on the southern coast of France. I had gotten down from my last truck ride in that town and knew that Spain was just right over there. Of course, I couldn't tell any difference. The area was quite beautiful. It was green and there were rolling hills. I was near the Atlantic and had seen it several times during the journey. I knew the Pyrenees Mountains were near. I looked east, but I could only see hills. I imagined that if I went a short distance further inland, I would see the mountains rising in the distance. I felt sure that I would see the Pyrenees eventually. I had been told that in the Pyrenees it was hard to separate the cultures of Spain and France. I had also been told about the Basque people, one of the groups that lived on both sides of the mountains. At the time, I knew virtually nothing about the Basques.

I arrived in St. Jean de Luz in the afternoon. It was early October 1936. The town was quiet, and I decided it would be best to spend the rest of day there and see how to cross the border into Spain the next day. The weather was very nice. I had seen a lot of rainy days on the trip south, but now it was partly cloudy and warm. I was comfortable walking around with only a long-sleeved shirt on.

I spent the rest of the afternoon walking around the town and going to see the beach. At one point I found a grassy area near the shore and decided to stretch out and rest. I must have slept for a couple of hours, because when I woke up I could see the sun setting on the horizon between puffy clouds that floated above the ocean. I went back into town and looked for a place to eat. I happened upon a place on a side street and noticed the name in Spanish, La Bodega de Sanchez. Surely there were Spanish people in that place, even if only the owner. I went inside and saw what looked like a delicatessen. It had a long counter on one side with all types of meat, cheese and breads, and several small tables lined up along the other wall. I looked up and noticed about a dozen burlap bags hanging from hooks in the ceiling. I wondered what was in those bags.

“Bon jour,” I heard, but without seeing a person to go along with the voice. I looked around to see who had spoken. “Bon jour,” I repeated, not knowing to whom I might be speaking. A moment later a man appeared from behind the tall counter in the left corner of the room. He must have been sitting and was able to look through a glass partition below the counter.

“*¿Habla Español? You speak Spanish?*” I took a chance that this this was the proprietor, Sánchez.

“*Su servidor. ¿Que desea? I’m your servant. How can I help you?*”

“*¿Usted es señor Sánchez? You are Mr. Sánchez?*”

“*El mismo. ¿Y tú? I am, and you are?*”

“*Me llamo William. I’m William.*”

“*¿William? Eso no es un nombre español. That is not a Spanish name.*

“*No, yo soy de los Estados Unidos de América. No, I’m from the United States.*”

“*Los Estados Unidos de América. ¿Cómo sabes hablar español?*” The United States? How do you speak Spanish?

“*He estudiado español. Me ayudó una persona de Cuba. I studied Spanish. I was helped by a person from Cuba.*

“*¿Una persona de Cuba? Interesante. A person from Cuba? Interesting.*

I felt a little nervous, but I realized that so far I was doing pretty well. This was the first time, the first opportunity, to speak with a Spaniard. It was the first time I could try to converse with someone other than Doña Angela. I got tongue-tied and didn’t know what to say. What suddenly popped out of my mouth was, “*Tengo hambre,*” as if I was talking to my father and it was dinnertime.

“*Pues, si tiene usted hambre, recomiendo que coma algo. ¿Que le apetece?* Well, if you are hungry, then I recommend you eat something. What appeals to you?”

I had to stop and think what he was saying. I definitely noticed the Spanish accent Doña Angela had told me about. Wow! This was exciting, and I had a chance to test myself. I didn’t want to screw it up, so I took my time. He was asking if I wanted to eat, or what I wanted to eat.

“*Si, quiero comer. Yes, I want to eat*” I started and realized I didn’t know what I wanted, or even what the options were. “*¿Tiene el papel? Do you have the paper?*” That didn’t sound right, and Mr. Sánchez looked at me with a quizzical expression on his face. “*¿Perdón, tiene el menú?*”

“No, no tengo una carta fija. Esto es lo que mi mujer ha preparado hoy, si quiere una comida. I don’t have a menu. This is what my wife has cooked today if you want a meal.” He handed me a small board that was made of wood and had writing on it in chalk. I looked at the writing but could not make out much. Spanish used the same basic alphabet as English, I knew, but this was difficult to decipher. I had a way past this problem. *“¿Qué recomienda? What would you suggest?”*

“The meatballs are the best. Nobody makes them like my wife.” He pointed to the second item on the chalkboard. I thought I could make out the Spanish word for meatballs. *“Meatballs come with tortilla. That’s good too.”*

“Yes, please.” Mr. Sánchez turned and opened a small window behind the door. He shouted something into the window. Then I realized it was a small window into the kitchen, where his wife no doubt was located. He turned back to me. *“Have a seat. It will be ready in a few minutes. Drink something?”*

“Yes, please. Water is fine.”

While I sat and waited, an older lady came into the small business. Mr. Sánchez and the lady spoke in French. She had a basket on her arm, which she loaded with tomatoes, onions, garlic and two loaves of bread. She paid, spoke with the owner a little longer and then left. After that I saw Mr. Sánchez open the window to the kitchen and retrieve the plate with my food on it. He placed the plate on the counter and then grabbed a paper napkin than had been rolled up with a fork and knife inside. *“Here is your plate, young man. Enjoy.”*

“Thanks. It looks very good.”

And good that food was. The tortilla turned out to be an omelet with potatoes. It was delicious. The meatballs too were excellent. I had not eaten garlic many times in my life before, but I now realized that in France and Spain, it was a common condiment. It was strong, but I realized that it was

just a matter of becoming used to it. I didn't realize how hungry I was. I devoured the food, and the amount was substantial. I thought that the Spanish must be big eaters. I looked up at the counter and saw my glass of water. I got up to grab it and drank it all down. I think it was the most satisfying meal I had had on my trip so far.

I went back to the table and picked up the plate and the utensils. I put them up on the counter and looked for Sánchez. I could see he was seated in his chair behind the counter. "Everything was very good. Thank you."

"You are welcome, young man. Coffee?"

I wasn't much of a coffee drinker. At home we mostly drank tea. But I thought it must be a common thing here, so I said I would have one. I sat down again while I waited. I could see Sánchez working with a machine on the shelf behind the counter. It didn't look like the percolator we had at home. A couple of minutes later, he called out without looking at me, "With milk?"

I had never had coffee with milk, but again, if that was the custom, I was going to try it. "Yes, please."

He rapped on the little cabinet door, opened it and shouted, "*Leche* 'milk!'"

A few moments later his wife came up and poured steaming milk into the coffee cup. Mr. Sánchez closed the door and put the coffee cup and saucer on the counter. "It's ready, serve yourself."

I grabbed the cup and saucer and noticed a little tin on the counter with sugar cubes in it. I grabbed two and put them in the coffee. I sat down again to drink it. It was strong, but it was fantastic. The milk took the edge off the coffee, and with the sugar it was a great combination.

Now that I had finished eating and drinking the coffee, I decided it was a good moment to try a longer conversation with Mr. Sánchez. While I was enjoying the dinner, I thought about the questions I might ask and tried to think of the right words to use to be sure I was understood.

When Sánchez returned to the counter I spoke up. “*Usted es de España?* You are from Spain?”

“Yes, of course. I was born in Burgos. You know Spain? Have you been in Burgos?”

“Oh, no. This is my first visit.”

“You are going to Spain now? Don’t you know what is happening there? There is a war going on. You should not go to Spain. Stay here in France. There is plenty to do here. And it is safer. Spain is not safe.” He stopped for a moment, turned to do something behind the bar, and then looked at me again. “You going to fight for the Republicans?”

“The Republicans? Uh, no, I’m not a Republican.” Suddenly I thought I had said something stupid. I was thinking of the Republican party in America, but it couldn’t be the same thing in Spain.

“What are you from, England? How did you learn Spanish? You speak pretty well.”

“No, I’m from America. I learned from a lady from Cuba.”

“Oh, yes, you told me that. Cuba? You were in Cuba?”

“No, I mean I learned from a Cuban lady who is our neighbor, in Charlottesville.” I didn’t think he would know anything about Charlottesville, or even Virginia, for that matter.

“My brother went to Cuba. He lives there now. He had to leave Spain because somebody wanted to kill him.”

“Kill him? Why did someone want to kill him?”

“It was all about politics. I left Burgos ten years ago. I came here, and now I will stay here. My brother went to Cuba, and he will stay there. He’s a musician. He can live and play the guitar in Cuba. In Spain, he might be dead.”

Mr. Sánchez and I spent the next hour talking about his family and what they had experienced over the last several years. He explained to me, even though it was a little difficult to follow, what had been happening in the last few years in Spain. This was my first experience with the Spanish language from Spain. The accent was very different, and there were times when what Mr. Sánchez said was clear and times when I got lost. I thought that besides the accent there must be differences in vocabulary and slang terms. I focused intensely on what the man was saying and tried to grasp every word I could understand. The following conversation was what I was best able to make out.

Mr. Sánchez continued. “I never had any interest in politics. My family had a small business in Burgos. We had a store and a restaurant. We collected food products from around the country and from France and Italy. My father started the business, and he and my mother ran it for decades. I was interested in other things, mostly women and having a good time in bars. My brother was the studious one. We have a sister too, but she went in a completely different direction. She became a nun. There is a very old monastery in Burgos, and that is where she went, and as far as I know she is still there.

“Eventually, after having several different jobs and not getting anywhere in my life, I decided to become part of the family business. My father never put any pressure on me, but I knew he was hoping one of us would get involved. I don’t know what took so long, but I finally figured it out. Meanwhile, my brother was trying to become a musician. He started playing the piano, but he got bored with it and switched to the guitar. He had a friend who was going to our local music conservatory. He played the guitar, and he convinced Rodrigo to go there. My brother had talent for music, and he picked up the guitar playing quickly. He even became pretty well known locally.

“My brother started to hang out with a group of students who had radical ideas. They talked about what was happening in Russia. My brother would come home and talk about ideologies, and things like that. It didn’t mean very much to me. I had never had any interest in politics as I said. My parents were pretty old fashioned. They were strongly religious too and went to mass every week. They didn’t want to hear anything about what was happening in Russia. For them Russia was a long way away and had nothing to do with their lives.

“Rodrigo got frustrated at home. Eventually he left home and went to live with some of his friends. He called them artists, but I think they talked about politics and the Bolsheviks as much as they practiced their music or their art. I told him that he had to be careful, that there were plenty of people in Spain, and in Burgos, who thought that the devil was behind what was happening in Russia and other parts of Europe.

“Then, in the summer of 1936, about a year and a half ago, things became really bad. We heard stories about the killings. We kept thinking to ourselves, those are simply stories that are told to scare people. We didn’t believe, or maybe we didn’t want to believe, that the stories were true. There were bad things, which sounded too horrible to be true. We heard about people being taken out into the countryside and shot in the head and thrown into ditches. We were told that some of the anarchists and republicans went to monasteries and looted the religious art and killed the priests and monks. How do you know if these things are true or not? Who should you believe?”

I listened to Mr. Sánchez speak, and I was frozen, physically and mentally. Time even seemed to be suspended. I had been so interested in Spain, and the language and the culture of these people, and now my first important experience with someone from the country was proving to be very powerful. I managed to say, “So, what did you think? How did you decide what was really happening?”

Sánchez looked at me, and then lowered his eyes, as if he were looking at his hands and trying to analyze what I asked him. After a few moments, he began talking again. “I spoke with my parents. I asked them for their perspective on things. My parents were pretty old at that time, in their late sixties. They were typical of the people from Burgos. They felt that the king should be the authority, maybe not the most powerful person in the country, but still a person who should demonstrate the true power of the government. Besides, my parents were always religious. They went to mass every Sunday, and frequently went to the cathedral for other events. We have a beautiful cathedral in Burgos. Maybe you will be able to see it someday.”

Mr. Sánchez stopped talking. A moment later the door opened and a customer came in. I watched as they spoke French, and Mr. Sánchez put several items in a basket the man had brought with him. A minute later that person was gone. I asked Mr. Sánchez about his brother.

“Rodrigo is younger than I am. As I told you, he was more interested in school than I was. And, he had talent for music. He and his friends, and they were mostly people I did not know, had meetings that he always called ‘musical gatherings.’ I finally figured out that that was not the case. They were meeting, in secret, and talking politics. They were against the Monarchists and didn’t believe in the Catholic church. They thought the church had helped to keep poor people from ever improving themselves. He told me about all of this one night when I put pressure on him to tell me what he had been doing.

“Eventually, we heard about the rising that involved the military, especially the officers who had served in Morocco in Africa. The rising was mostly well received in Burgos, because the people are mostly traditional there. That meant that the groups, like the one my brother was part of, suddenly became very suspicious. I remember reading in the newspaper one day that there were several groups that had been identified in Burgos that were meeting secretly to find a way to fight against the Rising

and the generals in charge of it. I immediately thought of Rodrigo. I found out where he was staying, and I went to see him and we had a big argument. I didn't tell him he was wrong. I just explained that he was in danger, and that at some point his group was going to be exposed. I was very worried about him, and I made that clear.

“I think he understood what I was telling him. That was the last time I saw Rodrigo. He's ten years younger than I am, but we were still pretty close. The next time I tried to find him I was told he had left Burgos. Nobody would tell me where he went. I thought he had gone to one of the cities that were strongly supporting the Republic. My parents thought he had been either put in prison or killed. I refused to believe that. He was smart, and I knew he could figure out a way to get out of a difficult situation.

“Then, about six months later we got a letter from Rodrigo. He had sent it from Havana. He said that a group of musicians from Cuba had been in Spain on a kind of tour, and that they convinced him he should leave with them when they returned to Cuba. I'm sure they realized what a great musician he was and knew he could be a success in Cuba.”

I believed I could detect a sense of sadness in Mr. Sánchez. Cuba must have seemed a long way from Burgos, and from this small town in southern France. I wondered if I should ask about why Mr. Sánchez was here. He had been pretty open to discussing things so far, so I decided to ask.

“What made you come open your store here?”

“That is something I was coming to. My parents got very worried when they heard about Rodrigo leaving. You see, the situation became increasingly tense. There were many groups and political parties that had formed. There have been so many that most people have been confused. The names don't always tell you much about the members and what they believe in. We became increasingly aware of the fact that if you weren't any member of some group, then you looked

suspicious. And if you were a member of a different group, one that went against the ideas of some other groups, you suddenly became the enemy. That is sad, isn't it?"

"It sounds very confusing."

"That is putting it mildly, my friend. Most of us were confused. Then, one day my parents had some people in their restaurant. My father overheard them, and one of them mentioned Rodrigo. My father thought it wasn't a coincidence that they were sitting in the family restaurant and talking about Rodrigo. My father said they were sending a message, and that the message was meant for me. Maybe, they thought that if they couldn't find my brother, then maybe they could do something about me. This was just because Rodrigo was my brother.

"My mother became frantic. She said we had to move to another city, maybe another country. But my father asked her what we were supposed to do with the family business. They were both from Burgos and had never lived anywhere else. How could they just pack up and move?"

"We talked about it a lot. Then, we came up with an idea. My father knew some merchants in France, and he said he might look to them for help. He used his contacts to come up with a plan. One of them lived near this town, St. Jean de Luz. He suggested we open a small restaurant and store. He thought it would have a good chance of making it here. The people had good knowledge of Spain, since it was so close, but there wasn't a single Spanish food restaurant in town.

"My father told me he would use the family savings to help me get started. I wasn't sure it was the best plan. I had a girlfriend, and she got involved too. We decided to get married and then go with the plan. What you see here is the result."

"How about your parents? Are they in any danger?"

“I suppose everyone is in danger in Spain today. But my parents were never interested in politics. They are probably more conservative by nature. I think they would have been fine with the King and some kind of constitutional arrangement. But they never talked about those things outside of our home. Of course, I worry about them, because when there is a war going on, and that is what you have to call it, a lot of innocent people get hurt or even killed.”

The fact that this man, a Spaniard, referred to his country’s conflict as a war made me feel more uncomfortable than anything I had heard before. Was I doing the right thing by going to Spain? Was I going to experience the conflict that Mr. Sánchez mentioned? It wasn’t too late for me to call this thing off. I wasn’t in Spain, and I could certainly work my way back up to northern France and cross the Channel to England. No, there was something inside me, not even something I could identify, that was pushing me on toward my destination. I had to take the last steps of this journey and see the country that so fascinated me. I could always leave if I felt I was in danger.

My thoughts were interrupted by Mr. Sánchez. “When are you going across the border?”

“Sorry, what was that?”

“When are going to cross the border, into Spain?”

“I’m planning to go tomorrow. You might tell me the best way to get there.”

“Of course, I’ll help you. I suggest you stay along the coast and then to the city of San Sebastián, which you will have no difficulty finding. From there you can get transportation to other cities, and eventually to Burgos if you so desire. Before you go, I want to tell you something about the Basques.”

“The what?”

“The Basques, the people who live in the Basque Country. You don’t know about them?”

“I guess I don’t. What is special about them?”

“The answer is not easy. Maybe you know that Spain has always been a country of individual cultures. People from the different regions are as different from one another as English are from Germans. We don’t even all speak the same language. The Basques have their own language, and when you hear it you will think you are in another country. In Cataluña the people speak a different language. If you get to Sevilla, in Andalucía, which is down south, you will have difficulty understanding them, even though they are speaking Spanish.”

“I had no idea of all that.”

“Listen. You will be seeing people from many cultures. Most of them speak Spanish, the Spanish you speak rather well. But there are huge differences.”

“Where do people speak the best Spanish?”

“That depends on who you ask. In Burgos we speak nice Spanish, I think. I have had people tell me that the most beautiful Spanish is spoken in Valladolid or Zaragoza. I don’t know, because I have never been to those cities. Maybe you will visit one of them.”

“Have you been to Madrid?”

“Oh, yes. I have been to Madrid many times. For me, it is too big. In Burgos you can walk anywhere you want to see. In Madrid, it is different. Of course, there is Barcelona, also very big and complicated. But I have not been there either.”

“Why did you tell me about the Basques?”

“Because, young man, that is where you are going to be, in Basque Country, when you enter Spain.”

“Really?”

“Really. So, be prepared. The Basques are different, but I’m not saying I don’t like them. I think San Sebastián is a great city. You will be there pretty soon and see for yourself.”

“I’ll try to remember everything you have told me.” I looked at him and I felt certain that he understood how much I valued everything he had told me. “How much do I owe you for the food and coffee?”

“Nothing, young man.”

“Thanks very much. I will make the effort to visit Burgos and will remember all you have told me.”

“Safe travels, young man,” he told me and shook my hand warmly.

Seven

As I was leaving Mr. Sánchez's business, he asked me where I was spending the night. I told him I was going to find a place to stay. He said that he knew a widow who had a large home and who rented out rooms. She lived a couple of blocks away, so I went there and rented a room. It was very inexpensive and turned out to be the best place I had spent in the night since landing in France.

I had a restless night at first because I knew that in the morning I would be heading to Spain. My journey had begun four weeks earlier, when I left Charlottesville and hitchhiked to Washington, D.C. Now, I was only hours away from my destination. My feelings were tremendously mixed. I was finally a few miles from Spain, but what really awaited me across the border? I had heard mixed information about the country. It had an incredible culture and a special history. But it was going through a very difficult period. There were dangers, and that left me wondering about the wisdom of staying with the plan. Would I see warfare as soon as I crossed the border? Would I see people huddling in fear? I had never been in a truly dangerous situation before.

The widow had chickens and at least one rooster, because just after dawn the sound of the rooster is what brought me out of my sleep. It was early October, and I expected it to be cool outside. I dressed appropriately and went downstairs. The woman was already up and in the kitchen when I went down to the entrance foyer. I could see light from one side of the room and the smell of something cooking.

“Bonjour,” she said as she emerged from the kitchen. She must have heard me coming down the stairs. “*Voulez-vous le petite dejeuner?*”

I knew enough French to respond to that question. “*Oui, si vous-plait.*”

“Bien sur,” she said and then disappeared into the kitchen. I saw a couple of small tables in one corner of the room and went over to sit down. A few minutes later the widow came out with a tray. She placed on the table a cup of tea and a plate with two pieces of toast, a small slab of butter, and a smaller dish with what appeared to be preserves. There was also an egg, still in the shell, that was sitting in a small cup. My father had often prepared eggs that way, but I hadn’t had one in a long time. It wasn’t much, but I was so excited about setting out that I was glad it was all that was available.

It was past seven o’clock when I left the widow’s house. It was cool outside, probably 50 degrees F or so. I decided I was simply going to walk in the direction of Spain. If I managed to catch a ride with someone, so be it. If not, I knew I could just keep going south and I’d get there. I was anxious, of course, but I had traveled thousands of miles, and now I had only a few left.

It turned out to be a pleasant day. It was cloudy early, but by late morning the skies were mostly blue. I stayed on the main roads, watching for signs of ‘Espagne’. As I was walking, I did two things. First, I reviewed the conjugation of Spanish verbs, especially the irregular ones. I had struggled somewhat with irregular verbs in the past, and about how to use the subjunctive voice. The other thing I thought about was what my official status in Spain was going to be. One of my father’s colleagues at the University had helped obtain a passport. I wondered what use it would be, and if there would be someone there when I entered Spain to officially let me in.

As it turned out, there was nobody there when I crossed the border. At first, I wasn’t even sure I was in Spain. I purposely avoided the major roads. I thought that if I went through the standard procedure I might not be let into the country. I didn’t want to take any chances after the time and effort

I spent to get to the country. I could tell I was in Spain because of the signs and street names I saw. They were clearly in Spanish.

The first city I came to was Irún. I had never heard of the city, but that was not a surprise because I certainly did not know the majority of the Spanish cities. I had heard of Madrid, Barcelona, Sevilla, and from Mr. Sánchez, Burgos. I thought that my most immediate need was to find a place to stay. As I entered the outskirts of the city, I realized that I didn't know anyone, I didn't have any well-thought-out plan for what I was going to do, and I wondered if my knowledge of Spanish would sustain me. What if someone asked me, and I knew it was inevitable, what I was doing in Spain? I couldn't say that I was a tourist because I imagined that it would sound very suspicious. So, what would I say?

This thinking got me focused on what was happening in Spain. I was building my knowledge, albeit slowly, about what was going on. The little I knew about the situation told me there were two basic groups in Spain. On the one side, there were those who wanted to go back to the glory days of having a king, and on the other were those who wanted to bring Spain into the twentieth century. Did I have a stand on this question? Would it be appropriate for me to take sides when I was not a Spaniard? I already knew that what was happening in Europe in the current decade was extremely confusing. I had heard about Bakunin, the Bolshevik revolution, Karl Marx, and Vladimir Lenin, the changes in Germany, and the rise of Mussolini in Italy. I didn't understand all of that, and I suspected that even if I tried it would be a big challenge for me. Meanwhile, or so it seemed to me, things were very quiet in the United States. Of course, we were still going through a very difficult period economically, but even that was hard to understand. I realized that I had to go along with what my father told me. He said, "It looks like the country has the right person in charge right now. President Roosevelt seems to have a plan that is working, so I will give him the benefit of the doubt."

I decided that I would simply have to make my decisions based on the circumstances I encountered. The people I was going to meet would probably not hesitate to tell me where they stood. I would listen and then decide which position seemed to make the most sense to me. I didn't feel like it was my place to take sides, but I wondered how long I could maintain my neutrality.

I arrived in the downtown area of the city in the early afternoon. I was pretty hungry by then, so I decided to find a place to eat. I looked at the names of the places, and if there were windows I looked inside to see how elegant the establishment was. I couldn't afford to stop in an expensive place, so I thought I would just look for something small and informal.

I finally decided I just had to pick a place and go in. I saw the sign for a restaurant, or maybe it was a tavern, called Los Gallegos. I didn't know what the name meant, but I was hungry and the place looked inviting. I went inside and saw that there was a long bar on the left side of the room and a short wall in the middle that separated the bar from a small dining area on the left with only a few tables. One of the tables was occupied, but the bar seemed to be busy. It was a little noisy, and there was a small cloud of smoke in the room. Some of it seemed to be coming from the patrons, who were smoking, and some from the kitchen area that was behind the bar with a large enough opening that one could see the cooks at work. There were tall chairs, but many of the people, mostly men I noticed, were standing at the bar. Some were drinking wine and others beer. There were lots of small plates on the bar as well.

The place had a noticeable aroma of garlic and olive oil. I had gotten an introduction to both of these foods in southern France. Over the coming months I would get to know these two foods so intimately that they would become part of my existence in Spain. I looked for a place I could squeeze in at the bar. Toward the rear there seemed to be an area, so I walked in that direction. As far as I could tell, nobody seemed to notice me or think that I might be from another country. I have dark hair and a

complexion that someone might say is not typically Anglo-Saxon. My eyes are brown. I would not go so far as to say I blended in, but I don't think my foreignness was so obvious either.

I got near the bar, but I noticed that the only person who was working behind the bar was engaged in a conversation with two customers toward the front of the place. I decided I would just wait until he came back in my direction. My confidence level was elevated, but it took a quick reversal when the bartender approached me.

“¿*Qué le sirvo?* – What can I bring you?”

“*Una cerveza, por favor.* A beer, please.”

“¿*Quiere de caña o botella?*”

Damn. I didn't understand his question. I knew *botella* was bottle, but the other word? I just looked at the man. He was waiting for me to respond and looked impatient. Then it struck me. The first word must have meant beer on draft.

“*De botella, por favor*”, I said and smiled. I hadn't really caught the other word, so I decided not to take a chance of messing up.

“*Vale*,” he said and then shouted something to a person in the kitchen. I quickly learned that “*vale*” was a very popular expression in Spain that means “okay.” Soon I would be using it as much as everyone else. A few moments later the bartender put a bottle in front of me along with a short, thick glass. Then he did something I found interesting. He picked up a piece of chalk and wrote something in front of me on the wood counter. At first I couldn't decipher what he had written. I looked around and noticed that there were markings all along the bar. What was it? Then I figured out what it was. He was writing down the cost of my order. I saw the number 18 written down, upside down to me, which must have been eighteen pesetas for the beer. I watched a minute later, while sipping on my beer, as the

bartender stopped in front of another patron and watched as he did the addition, with his piece of chalk, of the items ordered.

A moment later the bartender came back and put a small bowl in front of me. It had a liquid in it with something in it that I didn't immediately recognize. There was a man about my age standing next to me. I watched as he put his hand in the bowl and took about a couple of those things and put them in his mouth. I watched as he chewed and then spit something out of his mouth. The floor was already littered with small papers and other debris, including more of whatever he had just spit out. I finally figured out that the bowl contained olives. I decided to try one. I put it in my mouth. It was a little strong and had that garlic taste that I had experienced so many times in France. I didn't like it very much, but I chewed it for a while and spit out the pit on the floor, as that was apparently the custom. I would never have done that back home, but here it seemed normal.

I heard someone say "English," so I turned to see who had said it. The guy next to me was looking at me. He said it again, "English?"

"Yes, I speak English," I said and smiled slightly.

"You are English?"

"Oh, no. I'm from America, not England."

"America?"

"Yes, the United States.

"Oh, United States, yes."

"You speak English, then," I said, wondering what the man might want to talk about.

He hesitated a moment and then responded, "A little, only. I go to England."

You are going to England?"

"No, sorry. I go, last year to England. My uncle had business there, and I joined him. We were only supposed to go for a week, but we ended up staying for almost six months. It be a good opportunity to learn English."

"Did you like it?"

"Yes, I like. It is, how you say, *tranquilo*."

"Oh, tranquil, yes. We normally say it is calm, quiet. London was not exactly quiet, but we were not there. We were in a smaller town. It was quiet most of the time."

"Yes, calm. Spain is not calm. Why are you here?"

"I'm visiting. I want to practice Spanish."

"Good. You can practice, but I think it danger."

"You mean dangerous. It's dangerous. Why?"

"Many people fight, not happy. The government is bad. Nobody likes. So, we must change things. There is fighting, and I don't like."

"Is there fighting here, in Irún?"

"Not here, very little. But, one day, maybe. I don't like."

"I understand. I am going to Burgos from here. Is it calm in Burgos?"

"I think, maybe it calm. I don't know Burgos. Why Burgos?"

"I know somebody from there. It is a nice city, and quite old I understand."

"Many old cities in Spain. Many nice cities, but now there is fighting, much fighting."

We both took sips of our beers and ate more of the olives. I decided I would have to get used to olives and olive oil. The stuff was everywhere. If I kept at it maybe I would acquire a taste for both of these things. I decided to switch to Spanish with this man.

“¿Cómo se llama?”

He extended his hand and we shook. “*Yo soy Francisco, mucho gusto.* I am pleased to meet you.”

“*Yo soy William.* I am William.

“Your Spanish is good, Will. Where did you learn?”

“I had a neighbor, back at home, who was from Cuba. Her name was Doña Angela.”

“Cuba? That is far away. I would like to go to Cuba someday. To Cuba, I think, and then to Peru, or maybe Argentina. They speak Spanish in those countries, and I think they are very interesting. My grandfather, my mother’s father, he go to America, South America. I think he went to Lima, Peru. That was when I was very small. I don’t remember him very well. He died there, I think, in Peru. He had a company that made wagons for the railroad.”

“That’s interesting, Francisco. What do you do here?”

“I work in a shop.”

“What kind of shop?”

“It belongs to my uncle. We make ceramics. We make plates and saucers and cups and things like that.”

“Interesting. I am not familiar with that kind of work.”

“It’s nothing special. We make things for restaurants and bars, mostly. We make the dishes for this place.” He said this and lifted the plate with the olives. He held it up high enough for me to see underneath. There was stamp on the bottom. It wasn’t clear, but he told me, “Ramirez y Hermanos.” My uncle is Carlos Ramírez, and his brother, my other uncle, is Julio.

“How about your parents? Do they live around here?”

“Yes. My parents have a small farm outside of town. They grow vegetables and sell them at the central market. My uncles wanted him to be in the business too, but he wasn’t interested. My brother and I both work for my uncle. Esteban, my brother, works in the office.”

We stopped talking for a moment, and then our attention was directed to loud voices at the front of the tavern. Two men were having an argument, and everyone in the place was looking in that direction. I had difficulty understanding them, partly because they were so excited, and partly because of their accents.

I looked at Francisco. “What is the matter with them?”

“The one in the blue shirt must be a monarchist. He just said something about King Alfonso. The other guy is probably a republican, though I’m not sure. I told you that things are confusing here.”

The discussion continued, and I noticed a man coming from the back of the tavern toward the front. He went up to the two who were arguing. “*¿Señores, señores, porque tienen que discutir aquí? Vayan afuera, no quiero problemas. Por favor vayan afuera.* Why do you have to argue here? Go outside, I don’t want any problems here. Please, go out.”

The two men had stopped arguing. The one wearing the blue shirt pulled a couple coins out of his pocket and tossed them on the bar. He headed toward the door and then turned back. “*Hijo de puta,*

alguien te va a meter un balazo si te ven otra vez en esta ciudad. Son of a bitch, someone's going to put a bullet in you if they see you in this city again."

I looked at Francisco. "That didn't sound very good."

"No. But I think I know what happened. The guy that left is part of the local party called the Falange. It seems that the other one is not from here. He came here from someplace else, and the Falangist think he came here to cause political problems."

"Falangist? What does that mean?"

"The Falangists are the fascists. They are the ones who mostly like what is happening in Germany and Italy. Their leader has been in jail for years. That makes the group even more dangerous."

"Who is the leader?"

"His name is José Antonio Primo de Rivera."

"That's a pretty long name."

"No. We all have long names. We have our given names, our Baptism names, then our family names, first the father's and then the mother's. My name is Francisco Marcos Toledo de Ochoa."

"So this José Antonio, why is he in jail?"

"Because it was convenient for the Republic to shut him up. He was stirring up emotions, like many of the other heads of the groups, and so he was put in jail."

"Did he commit a crime or something?"

"A crime? No. He didn't steal anything or break the law. He was causing problems for the Republicans, so they shut him up. You don't understand this, do you?"

“No, I’m afraid I don’t. I don’t think that kind of stuff goes on in America. Maybe a little, but it isn’t typical.”

“What is typical in your country and typical here may be very different. Here everybody want argue. Everybody get upset. People start to fight. The laws change a lot. You do something to upset someone, or a group, and they’ll find a way to deal with you.”

“That’s scary. How do you know what to do?”

“That’s a good question. Most of us in Spain are trying to figure that out. As for me, I don’t know. I don’t like politics. But I don’t want a bunch of idiots trying to run things either.”

It hadn’t taken me long since arriving in Spain to get a sense of the tensions. I finished my beer and put my hand in my pocket. At that moment I realized I didn’t have any of the local currency. I pulled out a few coins. I looked at Francisco. “I don’t have any pesetas, just French francs.”

“Look, give me some and I’ll take care of it. You can go to one of the banks here and get some of our money.” He made a hissing sound to call the bartender over. He said something to him, and the bartender nodded. “It’s all right, Will, you can go.”

“Thanks very much, Francisco. Maybe I’ll see you again.”

“*Suerte*, he said, Good luck.”

I only spent one night in Irún and then decided to move on. I thought I would head in the general direction of Burgos. There was no other city that I had heard much about, and my conversation with Mr. Sánchez seemed to suggest that it was an interesting city to see. Besides, I had a contact

there, and I didn't have any contacts anywhere else. I realized quickly that I wasn't going to walk to Burgos as I had walked from St. Jean de Luz to the Spanish border and eventually Irún.

My plan of traveling through France had worked well enough. I figured that I would stay with the same idea in Spain. I spoke the language quite well, so it should be much easier. Little did I know at the time that I would soon become involved in the political situation, and that I would gain insights in one of the most unusual of the subcultures of Spain.

I recalled that Mr. Sánchez spoke of the Basques. In Spanish it is Los Vascos and their region is referred to as País Vasco—Basque Country. When I looked at a map, I saw that there was no way to get to Burgos without going through the Basque region. So, I headed out, and did so with the same determination that I had when I left Charlottesville.

Eight

I either hitchhiked or found truckers that agreed to take me if I helped them with some tasks. One trucker was delivering cabbages and had me help load the truck at a small farm. Apparently, the farmer had other goods to take to market and had his own vehicles for local transportation. Another driver was transporting large barrels of wine. When we got to the city of the driver's destination, Mondragón, we went to about five different small businesses and unloaded the barrels. The driver told me that in each of those places the proprietor would siphon the wine from the barrels into individual bottles that would then be put in local grocery stores for sale.

The driver told me that Mondragón was in the heart of Basque Country. He said that the actual name of the city, in the Basque language, was Arrasate. I asked him if he spoke Basque, and he said he knew a few words, just enough to make sure people would do business with him. I asked him if I would understand the Basque language.

There is no way. They speak a completely different language, and it has nothing to do with Spanish. You'll see when we talk to some of the people. Many of them speak Spanish, especially the business owners, but between themselves they almost always speak Basque. You'll soon see."

I did see. The Basque Country, first of all, was something completely unexpected. I had seen plenty of books about Spain and had an idea of what to expect. I knew the central plain of the country was generally flat without a lot of vegetation. Southern Spain was more mountainous but even dryer for the most part. I had seen pictures of the major cities, and I had always had a feeling that the pictures were intended only to show the best parts of the country, in a kind of travelogue mode.

I was totally unprepared for what I saw as I headed inland from the Cantabrian coast. Suddenly, I saw mountains that reminded me of pictures I had seen of Switzerland. They were not the snow-

peaked kind, but they rose dramatically. Soon the truck I was in, with a driver from Bilbao, started to climb up the low mountains. Fortunately, the weather was dry because some of the roads were unpaved. I could imagine what the ride would be like after a lot of rain.

I met the driver on the road inland from the coast. After making a quick deal to work together, he introduced himself. “*Yo soy Lorenzo, es un placer. I’m Lorenzo, and it’s a pleasure to meet you*”.

“*Mucho gusto, Lorenzo. Mi nombre es William. It’s pleasure, Lorenzo. My name is William.*”

“I’m going to Mondragón to deliver tools. You help with deliveries and I pay you.”

“Yes, that would work.” We climbed up the first hills, doing a lot of twists and turns, and the scenery was really something to see. Everything was green. There were lots of trees, but there were also many pastures that rolled and climbed up the short mountains. Occasionally I would see a farmhouse, and the same thought came back to me—is this really Spain? I remarked to Lorenzo, “*Es muy bonito aquí, no lo imaginaba así. It is beautiful here, I didn’t imagine it like this.*”

“Yes, it’s beautiful,” the driver said, “but I like being near the coast. I couldn’t live up here. Besides, everything is spread out. I like being in the city where I can get everything I want quickly.”

“Are you from Bilbao then?”

“No, but I have lived there for quite a long time. I travel quite a bit with my deliveries. My favorite other city is Santiago.”

“Santiago, where is that?”

“You don’t know where Santiago de Compostela is?”

“Oh yes, I think I know that name. Is that really nice?”

“Yes, very nice. I have walked there from Bilbao.”

“How far is it?”

“Driving takes me the whole day because of conditions of the roads. Walking took me four days. You see, there is a big cathedral there and people have been walking there for centuries.”

“I like walking and hiking. Maybe someday I’ll do that.”

“You said you are going to Burgos?”

“Yes. I have a connection there, with a person I met in France.”

“You are English, right?”

“No, I am from America, but I was born in England.”

“Why did you come here? Spain is a difficult place to be now. No tourists are coming here. Maybe you are an agitator.”

“Agitator? What do you mean?”

“There are people coming here from other countries, trying to meddle in Spanish affairs. People come from Russia, Germany, Italy, and France. I have not heard about English people, but I know an American was in Bilbao. He said he wanted to support the Republicans. He was told to leave the city. I don’t know what happened to him. Someone said he went to Pamplona. There has been a lot going on there.”

I sat and listened. I figured the more I knew about everything, the better it would be for me. After a few moments Lorenzo started again. “I know of a guy from Germany. He was in Bilbao. He was considered an agitator, a fascist. He was told that if he didn’t leave, he would have his eggs cut off.”

“His what?”

“Que si no saliera le iban a cortar los huevos, o sea los testículos. He was told that if he didn’t leave, they would cut off his eggs, in other words, his testicles.”

“Oh, you mean his balls.”

“His balls, yes, if that is the way you say it in English.”

“That’s one way. Wow, that is a severe punishment. And, no, I’m not an agitator.” I didn’t think this guy was a danger to me, but just the same I wasn’t going to take any chances. I was starting get a better idea of what was going on and the fact that things in Spain were indeed intense. Was I scared? I don’t think that was the way to put it. If I had been truly scared, I could have headed back to France. I was apprehensive, but I was so intrigued by everything I had seen and heard so far that there was no way I was going to turn back.

We continued for a while in silence. I wanted to ask about the Basque people, but I was a little worried that he might say something about them not liking outsiders. It seemed that the Basques were kind of special, that they considered themselves Basques first, and Spaniards second. I finally had to ask. “Will there be any problems with me being from America?”

“I don’t think so. But when we get to the city of Mondragón, if you are uneasy, then let me do the talking. I’ll give you orders of what to do. You don’t even have to speak. You look a little like a foreigner, but not so much that you couldn’t be a Spaniard. A lot of people here in the north have lighter skin and some are blond too. If you understand me, and then please do what I ask, then they will just think you are from here, from Spain.”

“Yeah, I think that might be the way to go about this.” We continued for a while without talking. I wanted to know more, but I didn’t want the driver to think I was prying into his life. “Have you always lived in this region?”

“No. My family is from Valladolid originally. My father is from there. My mother is from a small town farther south. My father worked in a hospital, as an administrator. My mother was a nurse, and that is how they met. There were some changes in the hospital because of the political situation. He lost his job one day, just like that. The local government changed, and my father didn’t like it. He decided he didn’t want to stay in Valladolid anymore. My father’s cousin was living in Bilbao and had a small business. So we moved there. My older brother stayed there and then was arrested one day. Now he’s in jail.” As soon as he said this, he crossed himself, first on his forehead, then his chest and lifted his fingers to his mouth. I would often see this religious habit in Spain.

I decided to sit quietly in the truck, as we continued the climb and see if Lorenzo wanted to talk anymore. Maybe he was feeling sad because of his brother’s situation. A few moments later he started speaking again.

“I never liked politics myself. I always figured that the politicians are going to do what they are going to do. They are special people who like to take charge and make their ideas known. If you like their ideas, you are with them. If you don’t, then you are their enemy. That’s a sad way for things to be, but it is the truth.

“My brother thought like a lot of people. He said the old days of the Spanish kings and the royalty and all of that was something that should be in the history books. He liked to talk about the French people and the French revolution. Of course, we have a bad taste in our mouths from the French. They invaded Spain during the time of the Napoleons. Personally, I don’t care. French people are people too. All governments do things that are stupid sometimes.

“My brother decided to join a group. It was a group of people who all thought it was time for Spain to join the twentieth century and leave all that history crap behind. In our city that was all right because most of the people seemed to have a similar idea. The group got bigger and my brother

became one of the members of the organizing committee. He was good at organizing things, but he was never bossy. He was just trying to convince people that they had a duty to participate.

“I didn’t join because I wasn’t sure. We started hearing about the various groups that backed the Republicans. Some of them were considered atheist groups, and they talked about all the wealth of the church. They talked about the lands, about the gold in the cathedrals and the fact that the churches and the administrators had too much protection from the governments in the past. My mother was pretty religious, and we always went to mass and every kind of event at the church. My brother slowly separated himself from that after high school. I don’t think he became an atheist, but many of the people in his group were. As for me, I believe in God and I go to mass every week. If other people don’t want to go, I don’t care. I leave them alone, and I want them to leave me alone, that’s all.

“One day there was a demonstration. This was after the rising started. Mostly, people were in favor of change and were afraid of the military. But there was a barracks in the region, and one day the soldiers came into the city. They went to the buildings where some of the groups had meetings. It was a mess. There was shooting, and everybody was out in the streets to see what was happening. Some of the people in that building got away, some were killed right in their offices. My brother was wounded, but it wasn’t that serious. But he was one of about forty people who were put on trucks and taken to a military prison. He’s still there, as far as I know. I hope his is all right.” Again, the driver Lorenzo crossed himself.

I wasn’t sure what to say. I hoped Lorenzo wasn’t getting overly emotional about his brother’s situation. “I’m sorry to hear about your brother, and I hope he is doing well.”

“I don’t know,” was all the driver said to this. I didn’t want to say anything else in case Lorenzo was feeling bad. We went quite a way before talking again. I spent most of my time looking at the beautiful countryside. We saw few vehicles as we climbed our way to the town. At one point we

say a small truck going in the opposite direction. It was open in the back, and I saw about six or seven men standing with masks covering their faces. Some of them had rifles that were pointing to the sides of the vehicle. When we passed right by them, we had to slow down because the road was pretty narrow. One of the men seemed to be staring directly at us, and even at me. I stared back and then I saw as he slowly shook his head up and down. I wondered what he was trying to communicate. I decided to look away and not take a chance of drawing anyone else's attention.

“Those are agitators, but from here,” Lorenzo said when the other vehicle went out of sight in a turn in the road. “Who knows where they are going. I don't think they are going to a party.” That comment was apparently either humorous or sarcastic. Either way, Lorenzo wasn't laughing. I felt a little uncomfortable, but as long as they were heading in the other direction, I didn't think they represented a danger.

There was little conversation for the rest of the drive to Mondragón. When we got to the small city, I realized how beautiful the setting was. The mountains seemed higher, and the city was sitting inside a kind of bowl of mountains and hills. I was both fascinated by being in this city that was in the heart of Basque Country and somewhat nervous at the same time. My emotions were completely mixed. As I would do many times while I was in Spain, I would wonder what I was doing there and what it was I was expecting to accomplish. I was young, I realize, and probably the questions many people asked themselves, and on occasion asked me, was what a young person doing in Spain in the middle of a social and political upheaval.

It was late in the afternoon. Lorenzo drove his truck inside the city center. He managed to navigate the narrow streets by going slowly and having me look out the window on my side. We finally came to a building that had a small lot next to it. He pulled the truck in. I couldn't tell anything about this particular location. He finally spoke up. “This is a warehouse where we leave most of this

stuff. But we have to wait for the morning to unload. There is a room on the upper level. I know one of the owners here. He lets me stay the night. It isn't much, but it's free. His has a dining room for himself and a few of the employees. So if there is enough, we can eat with them."

"*Vale,*" was all I could say in response at the moment. It felt good to use this expression that was so popular. I followed Lorenzo as he went to a rear door and knocked. A few moments later the door opened and a short, heavyset man with a full beard and almost no hair on top of his head nodded to Lorenzo. "*Hola, amigo, bienvenido. Pasa aquí son su compañero.* Hello, Lorenzo. Come on in with your companion"

"*Hola, Don Alvaro. ¿Cómo andas?* Hi, Alvaro, how are you?"

"*Pues, no me va muy bien, porque no soy un político hijo de puta, pero no me va muy mal porque no soy un estúpido.* Things are not so good because I'm not a son-of-a-bitch politician. But things aren't going too bad because I'm not a fool." As soon as he said this, both he and Lorenzo laughed heartily. Later, Lorenzo would have to explain that to me. I had not heard everything, but I sure picked up on the part about a son-of-a-bitch. For a moment I wondered if this Alvaro was referring to me. I was relieved to know he wasn't.

"*¿Quién has traído contigo?* Who did you bring with you?" He said this as he walked away with us following behind.

"*Este amigo es William. Es americano, de los Estados Unidos.* He's an American friend, from the United States."

"*¿De dónde?* From where?"

"The United States. America."

“What the hell is he doing here in Spain? Doesn’t he know what the situation is? Maybe he is one of those agitator bastards.”

“No, no, he isn’t an agitator. He came here to see the country. He’s all right. He’s my helper, so don’t get excited.”

“I’m not excited. If he came with you, he is welcome. He looks quite young. Maybe he should be back home, studying or something.”

“Yes, maybe he should. But he’s here with me. By the way, is there anything left to eat, or did you finish it all?” It was obvious to me that Lorenzo found a convenient time to change the subject.

“No, I didn’t eat it all, but maybe I should have.” He said this, and I saw Alvaro smile. Now he looked a little friendlier. We had stewed rabbit for dinner. It was my first time eating rabbit. I didn’t even know what it was at first. Lorenzo explained it to me by describing a rabbit. I didn’t know that word. Maybe the most interesting thing we had was the apple cider. It was a fermented type of cider, Lorenzo told me. I had never tried it before. Apparently, it was very popular in the Basque Country. It was excellent, and I didn’t realize it was alcoholic until I had drunk a couple of glasses. Then I noticed the light-headedness that I had experienced the few times I had drunk alcohol in Charlottesville.

We were both tired after the long drive. The combination of the journey with the food and the fermented cider made me feel as if I hadn’t slept in three days. At the back of the warehouse there was a staircase that led up to a wooden loft. I followed Lorenzo up, and at the top was a door that led to a small room. Inside were a bed, a cot that was just above the floor, and a table. I didn’t even look at Lorenzo. I stretched out on the cot, and a few moments later I was soundly asleep.

The next morning I was awakened by the sounds of Lorenzo getting up and dressing. I quickly got up and decided I would wait for Lorenzo to tell me what we were going to do. I didn’t have any idea of the time because the small room didn’t have a window. Nor did I have any idea about the

weather outside. It was cool in the room, so much so that while I was lying there for a few minutes I felt myself shiver a couple of times.

“We can have breakfast at a small place that is here on the same block. When you are ready, we can go. Today we will unload the truck. After that, I’m going back to Bilbao. You can go with me, if you want. If not, that is all right too. You said you were going to Burgos, so I suspect that plan has not changed.”

“Yes, I am still planning to go to Burgos.”

A short while later we left the warehouse. It was indeed cool outside. It wasn’t freezing, but it couldn’t have been more than 40 degrees outside. I asked Lorenzo about this. “It is probably about eight or nine degrees.”

“Wow, that is colder than I thought.”

“Of course, that is in Celsius. I don’t know what it is in Fahrenheit.”

“Oh, yeah, I forgot about that. I don’t have a good feel for Celsius, but I know that zero is freezing. Eight degrees is higher than that.”

We walked down the block and Lorenzo turned into a small place. I didn’t even see the name outside. Inside there was a bar and a couple of tables. There were several people standing at the bar with cups of coffee and what looked mostly like toasted bread on small platters. We sat at one of the small tables. A waiter came over and said something that I did not understand at all. Lorenzo also said something that I did not get. I quickly realized that it must be Basque. He didn’t say anything to me, and the waiter walked away. “I guess that was Basque,” I said softly to Lorenzo. He nodded his head. I looked around the small, very simple place. I tried to pick up anything that the other people were saying, but either I couldn’t hear them or I didn’t understand what they were saying.

I few minutes later the waiter returned with two glass cups of coffee and two small metal platters, one with several slices of toasted bread and the other with what looked like thin slices of ham. On the table was a small bottle with an amber liquid inside. I watched as Lorenzo picked up the bottle and spread the liquid over all the slices.

“Aceite de oliva, y jamón. Olive oil and ham.” He pointed to the items. He picked up a slice of the ham with one of the toothpicks on the platter. He put it on top of the bread with olive oil and put the whole thing in his mouth.

I did the same thing. It was delicious. The coffee was very strong, but it went well with the food. I was thinking about how good the olives were at the bar in Irún. I realized that I was starting to become accustomed to some of the common flavors in Spain.

Lorenzo paid for the items and then nodded at me, indicating it was time to go. I realized that nobody had looked at us, or me, and that made me feel a little more comfortable. I still had any uneasy feeling, as if I were in a totally foreign land, and that everyone might be looking at me as someone suspicious, an outsider or maybe even an agitator. We returned to the warehouse and spent the rest of the morning unloading Lorenzo’s truck. Alvaro was there and indicated where certain things should be stored. He didn’t speak very much, so the morning was uneventful.

We finished close to midday. Alvaro said that we could stay and eat with them, but that the lunch wasn’t going to be ready until two o’clock. Lorenzo told him that he needed to return to Bilbao and if he stayed for lunch he would not get back home until after dark. He said he didn’t want to be out driving in the dark. He paid me for my help and then got into the truck.

“What are you going to do now?”

“I’m not sure. I don’t think I want to stay around this place. I don’t feel very welcome here.”

Lorenzo smiled briefly. “That is not so unusual. I don’t always feel very comfortable here either. Here is what I suggest. You come with me and I’ll take you out to the main road. If you want to go in the direction of Burgos, I’ll show which direction that is. You can try to find another truck or somebody going that way. Probably the best thing to do is tell people you are going to Vitoria.”

“Where?”

“Vitoria. It is the biggest city in this region. From there you should have no problem finding a way to get to Burgos. Maybe there is a bus you can take.”

“Yes, I think that is the best idea for now.” I got in, and we headed out of Mondragón. A short time later we were on the main road. Lorenzo found a place where there was room to pull the truck over.

“I’m going down in that direction. You have to go up in that direction,” he said and pointed to the incline in the road. He looked at me for a moment, and then said, “You are pretty young, and you aren’t Spanish, but you seem pretty smart, I think. Even so, this is a dangerous country right now. There are many problems, I told you already. You need to be careful and use your intelligence. Some of the people right now are acting horribly. They don’t care about the lives of other people. If they think you are against them, then you are their enemy. They prefer to get rid of their enemies. And what is worse, they make lots of mistakes. They take action first, then ask questions later. If somebody gets hurt or killed that was innocent, they just shrug their shoulders.” Lorenzo shook my hand and then put his other arm on my shoulder. “*Ten mucho cuidado, William, y vaya con diós.* Be careful, William, and go with God.”

He climbed back in the truck, started the engine, and drove off. As I watched him leave, I saw his hand wave from the window. I turned and looked at the road that steadily climbed and then turned out of sight. For the first time since I left Charlottesville three months earlier, I felt a deep sense of

loneliness. I went to the other side of the road and wondered what lay ahead for me. I hadn't seen a single vehicle moving in either direction since Lorenzo stopped. What if I didn't get a ride this afternoon? It was cloudy at the moment, and the temperature was comfortably cool, but what if it started to rain? I realized I had little choice but to start walking in the direction Lorenzo indicated.

For the first hour I saw only two vehicles. One was a decrepit looking farm tractor that was moving slightly faster than I was. The driver, an old, wrinkled man, looked at me and nodded. The other was a motorcycle with a person who appeared to be an official. I couldn't tell if the rider was a soldier or a policeman. We exchanged glances, briefly, and the driver kept going without slowing down.

Finally, after about two and a half hours, my luck changed. A car drove by me in a hard curve in the road. It came very close to me, probably because the driver wasn't expecting to see anyone walking next to the road. When I came around the curve, I saw that the car had stopped. I wondered if that was a coincidence or it had stopped for me. As I got closer, the passenger-side door opened and a man half stood up.

“¿Dónde vas, joven? Where are you going, young man?”

“A Victoria.”

“¿A Vitoria, quiere decir? You mean to Vitoria?”

I realized I had messed up the name of the city. It was Vitoria, not Victoria. *“Si, Vitoria, perdóneme. Yes, Vitoria, sorry.”*

“Entonces, le ha tocado la suerte. Ahí vamos también. Sube. Then you are in luck, because we are going there too. Get in.” He now got completely out of the car and opened the door widely. He gestured for me to get into the back seat of the two-door car. I had to make an instant decision. It was

either get into a vehicle with complete strangers or continue to walk up a steep and winding road that didn't seem to have any end to it. So, I got in. Besides, I was getting both tired and hungry.

“*Muchas gracias,*” was all I managed to say at the moment. I was going to put my duffel bag onto the other rear seat when I realized that there was another person in the car. I put the bag in my lap and looked over. I don't know why I was surprised to see a woman sitting there, but I was. “*Buenas tardes.* Good afternoon.”

“*Hola, guapo. Yo soy Maria Luisa, pero me llaman Malu.* Hi handsome. My name is Maria Luisa, but they call me Malu.” She extended her hand and we shook.

“I'm William.”

“*Mucho gusto,* William.”

I didn't know that word she used, *guapo*. I later found out it meant ‘good looking.’ She had a very interesting face. She had very dark hair that was tightly pulled back from her forehead, to the point that it looked like her skin was being stretched. There was a ponytail at the back that hung down to her shoulders. Her skin was pale, and she had blue eyes, but it was a shade of blue I had never seen before. The eyes were a darker shade of blue than normal, and unusually large. Her nose was long and thin. Her cheeks seemed somewhat sunken, and she had full lips. I tried not to look at her for very long, but it was hard to take my eyes off her. I couldn't tell her age. She looked like she might be a little older than I was, perhaps in her late twenties. She spoke a moment later, which gave me a chance to look at her some more.

“¿*Tú no eres español, no cierto?* You are not Spanish, are you?”

I barely got my answer out, “No” when I heard another voice.

It was the man sitting in the passenger seat who had turned and offered his hand. “*Hola, yo soy Javier. Esto es mi tío, Tomás.* Hi, I’m Javier and this is my uncle, Tomás.”

“*¿Entonces, vas a Vitoria? ¿Qué pensaste hacer, caminar hasta allá.* So you are going to Vitoria. What were you doing, trying to walk there?” It was Malu speaking again. She said this with a hint of a smile. I could see her teeth. They were a bit larger than normal, as was her mouth. Was she attractive? Yes, I thought upon first sight that she was.

“*Pues, no pensaba caminar hasta Vitoria. Estaba esperando ir con un camionero, para trabajar y viajar.* I wasn’t really thinking of walking the whole way. I was hoping to go with a trucker to work and travel there.”

“*Vale. Ya vas con nosotros.* Right, so now you are going with us.”

“*Les agradezco muchísimo.* I thank all of you very much.”

“*¿Y porque vas allá, joven?* Why are you going there young man?” It was the man sitting in the passenger seat who asked. He looked a lot like the woman sitting next to me. He had the same color of skin and hair, and his hair was combed back in a similar manner. But he did not have a ponytail. His hair was slicked back with some kind of pomade. He was looking back at me, and I detected a small smile on his face. I had the impression that Javier was Malu’s brother. He seemed a little older. The uncle had some streaks of gray in his dark hair, so he was clearly the oldest.

There was that question again. I wondered if there would ever be a time when people would not ask me that. I thought for a moment what to say to these people. “*Estoy visitando España. Soy de los Estados Unidos.* I’m visiting Spain. I’m from the United States.”

Now he changed his expression slightly, and there was a quizzical expression on his face.

“*¿Eres Americano, y estás de visita aquí? Que locura.* You are American and visiting Spain? That’s crazy.”

“Yes, I know that’s a little crazy.” That was the best I could come up with at the moment.

“We are going to Vitoria, too. We have a meeting there. We are part of a group of Socialists, and we are fighting against the military and the goddam king.” His words were strong, but he said this in the same tone of voice he used to introduce himself. “You said your name is William?”

“Yes, William.” People were pronouncing it rather well I found.

“William, I suppose you know something about the fighting going on right now in many parts of Spain.”

“I’m learning about it, yes. Is it going on everywhere?”

“I would not say everywhere, but I would not say there are many safe places, especially for people like you from other countries. Foreign people that we have met are usually here to help out some group or another. Many people have come here from Russia, and some from France. They want to help us, the Socialists and Communists come to fight against the old regime. The old regime doesn’t understand that it is time to change. Spain must change. We are stuck in the last century, or maybe in the eighteenth century. Now, things must be brought up to this modern period. Don’t you agree?”

I wasn’t sure exactly how to answer. I didn’t want to disagree with these people. I didn’t know any of them, and if they were planning to fight, maybe they were upset or something. I knew I had to proceed carefully. “I’m not from here, so I don’t know if I should express my opinion. Besides, I don’t know enough of Spanish history to understand the current situation. Of course, we are living on

modern times, and there have been big changes in people's lives. I mean scientific things, and new inventions. So I think those are important."

"That's a good answer, William. You seem like a smart person to me. Are you from New York, the famous American city, or maybe Chicago?"

"Oh, no I'm not from New York or Chicago. I'm from Virginia. It's in the south of the United States. But my family is originally from England."

"I like England," said Tomás, the driver. It was the first time I heard him speak. He had a deep, gravelly voice. "I was there a few years ago. I was in London and Manchester. I drank a lot of tea."

"My uncle is a mechanic," Javier said. "He works on big engines in factories. He visited several English factories to see engines in operation and learn about them."

We continued up and up in the car. At times I felt a little light-headed. It was due to the movement of the car and the fact that I hadn't eaten since breakfast. I closed my eyes, and I must have dozed off. When I awoke it was because the vehicle had stopped. I looked around and realized we had left the hilly area and must have come up to the high plateau that begins at that point and spreads through the middle of the country. Tomás and Javier were talking, but their voices were lowered. I looked over at Malu, who had also fallen asleep. Her head was leaning back against the seat. The way she was sitting revealed a small opening in the blouse she was wearing, where a button was missing, and I could see the form of one of her breasts. I studied her face a bit more and decided she was indeed attractive.

I turned my attention to the front seat. Both men were sitting quietly.

"Is there something wrong with the car?" I asked.

“No,” said Javier, “we are waiting for a little while. We heard there are some soldiers in the area and we have to be careful. Sometimes the soldiers stop cars to see who is inside and ask a lot of questions. We don’t want them to stop us. We are hoping some cars come by so we can ask them about what to expect near Vitoria. We are less than an hour from the city.”

That was good to hear. It must have been four or five o’clock. I was tired, and the hunger pangs were starting up again. Then I thought we might have to sit there for quite a while. That didn’t happen, however. A few minutes later a car came by in the opposite direction. I saw Tomás wave his arm outside the driver’s side window. The other car slowed down and then stopped. He spoke to the other person, but I didn’t catch what he was saying. The other driver responded and gesticulated with his left hand. I finally heard, “*Gracias, camarada*. Thanks comrade” Tomás started the car and we got back on the road.

We finally got to the outskirts of Vitoria. It didn’t seem like a pretty city to me. The way we came in had what looked like a lot of small businesses. There were lots of trucks and stacks of coal and wood in various places. We drove through this area and then got into what must have been the downtown part of the city.

“¿*Dónde te vas a quedar aquí, William?* Where are you going to stay here?” It was Javier speaking.

“I don’t know yet. Maybe you all could recommend a place. I usually stay in a hostel or something like that. I can’t afford to stay in a hotel probably.”

“I think I know a place you can go to. It’s near the center of the city. It’s a place where university students often stay. There are no classes right now at the university, so there must be plenty of rooms available.”

“That sounds like a good option, thanks very much.” A few minutes later the car pulled up to an old building that looked like a hotel that had been abandoned. It was about five stories tall, and outside, above the front entrance, I could see a faded sign that said “Hotel Malabar.”

“This is the place, William. It is cheap, and mostly a place for students as I said. You can stay here for very little. This area is mostly calm, so I think you will be safe. Then what are you going to do?”

“I’m heading toward Burgos.”

“Burgos? That is a pretty nice place. But I think it is mostly in the hands of the monarchists. I don’t think that will matter to you, since you are a foreigner. You should be able to find a way to Burgos pretty easily.”

“That is good to know. Thanks to all of you. You were very kind to give me a lift here.” I looked over at Malu. She smiled and said, “*Nos vemos, guapo*. We’ll meet again, handsome.”

I hoped that would be true. The more I had looked at Malu the more attractive she became. I wondered if she called me handsome because she found me attractive or because it was a habit, an expression she used frequently. I got out of the car with my duffel bag and shook hands with Javier and then his uncle.

“Good luck, William. If you help anyone here in Spain, I hope it will be us, on the left. We are going to make Spain a great country again.”

“I wish you the best,” I said, and then turned and walked up to the entrance of the building, wondering what it might be like inside. I was about to open the front door when I heard a strange sound. It was a sudden, sharp sound of wheels skidding on the road. I looked out and saw the car I had just been in with the three people as it turned sharply and ran into a light pole. It was only about a

block away. I was frozen where I stood. What had happened to the car? I looked over and wondered if I should run over there to see if everyone in the car was all right. Before I could take a step, I saw four uniformed people run up to the car with guns in their hands.

I could scarcely believe what I was seeing. The door on Javier's side opened suddenly, and I watched as he aimed a gun at one of the uniformed men and fired. In rapid succession two of those men fired back, and I saw Javier go to the ground. Then there was shouting by the men. I couldn't understand them, but it was obvious that they were shouting at Tomás and Malu. 'Oh my,' I thought, 'they are going to kill all of them. How horrible!'

I couldn't move. I was transfixed by the scene unfolding before my eyes. I was frozen in place and found it difficult to breathe. I watched as the four men approached the car with their guns at the ready. Slowly the driver-side door opened, and I watched Tomás come out slowly with his hands in the air. A few moments later I saw Malu come out in the same manner. The uniformed men shouted some more, and both Malu and Tomás got down on the ground on their stomachs, right there in the street. I watched, in disbelief, as one of the uniformed men walked up to Tomás, bent down, and said something that I could not hear, and then shot him in the back of the head. I heard Malu scream something at the men. One of them came up to her and hit her in the head with the butt of his pistol. Her head went down, and two of them lifted her up and carried her to the sidewalk. A few moments later another vehicle came up the street and stopped next to the car I had, about three minutes before, been inside.

Two of the men put Malu in the car that had just arrived and drove off. The fourth man got into the car Tomás was driving and after backing up from the damaged pole, drove off. It made a loud scraping noise as a part of the front fender was broken and hanging down. It had taken at most four

minutes for the whole scene to take place. Then, just as quickly, it was all quiet. I looked around and didn't see another person in the street.

I remained frozen, unable to do anything except wonder what I had experienced. As I was trying to clear my mind from what I had witnessed, I saw several people come out of one of the buildings across the street from the shooting. They went over to inspect the bodies of Tomás and Javier. Another person then came out and seemed to put something, sheets, or towels perhaps, over the two bodies. There was no way, I thought, that either of these men could have survived their injuries. Javier had been shot several times, and Tomás had been shot in the head—how could anyone survive that? I thought about going over to tell them I had simply been traveling with these people, but thought the less I was involved, the better. I didn't know the affiliations of these people and making a connection with the three Socialists might not be in my best interest.

I realized as I went into the building that I had never seen a person killed, or even seriously injured, in my life. As a matter of fact, I had only seen the body of a dead person one time, and that was during a funeral. That person, a man who worked at the university and died of a heart attack, looked as if he were comfortably sleeping in his coffin. Since arriving in Spain a couple of days ago, I had only seen that argument in the bar in Irún, despite everything I had heard about the difficulties in Spain. Now, suddenly, I had witnessed what might have been a double murder. Several people came out of the building I was about to enter. They looked out at the scene of the incident.

“*¿Qué pasó?* What happened?” one man asked, but not to me, but I was standing right next to him.

I struggled with how to tell him what I had seen. I was still in shock, but I managed to get out, “*Alguien mató a estas dos personas, y se fueron y llevaron el auto. También estaba una mujer. Se la*

llevaron a ella. Somebody killed those two men, and then they took their car. There was a woman too in the car, and they took her away in another car.”

“*Jesús. ¿Quiénes eran?* Jesus, who were they?”

“I don’t know. I can’t believe what I saw.”

“Well,” the other man, a young person and maybe a local university student, “in this country right now anything can happen. It’s best to stay out of it. Maybe those people were Socialists. They are having a rally tomorrow, but the Falange has said that if they have a rally some people are going to die. Looks like they are trying to send a message.”

I didn’t know what to say. I sure wasn’t going to tell him I knew these people were Socialists who had come for the rally, which I just realized must be the case. After a moment of staring down the street, the person turned and spoke to me again.

“You are not Spanish. Where are you from?”

“I’m from the United States. My name is William.” We shook hands.

“*Yo soy Manolo Palacios, es un placer.* I am Manolo Palacios. It’s a pleasure. You said you are from America?”

“Yes, America.”

He looked at me as if I might be kidding. “Did you witness this whole scene? Where were you when it happened?”

Again, I decided it was best to avoid any association with the people involved in the incident and simply describe what I had seen. I thought that any moment the police would come around asking questions. That gave me a scare, thinking I might be part of an investigation. “I was walking this way,”

I pointed in the direction we had come from before I got out of the car. “I hitchhiked here to Vitoria, and then I was walking around looking for a place to stay. Someone suggested I check this place, so I was about to go in when I heard the commotion.

“That is amazing, you happened to be standing here when all of this happened. You must have been shocked.”

“I sure was, and I still am.”

As we were speaking, we looked down the block and saw some people had come out from the buildings nearby and were looking at the two bodies. There was a small crowd there now, and as I watched I saw a group of several men arrive who must have been police. I couldn’t believe that a few minutes ago I had been riding in the car with two people who were now dead.

As I stood there reliving the time I had spent in the car with these three family members, I pictured Malu sitting in the back seat next to me. What was going to happen to her? I then heard Manolo speak again.

“You speak Spanish pretty well, for a foreigner, but I hear some kind of accent. Not the typical accent it seems.”

“Yeah, that is because one of my Spanish teachers was from Cuba.”

“Cuba? How interesting. I knew a girl from Cuba once. She was a student in one of my classes at the university. She was damn good looking. I wanted her really bad.”

“Yeah, well this teacher was an older woman. She was very nice.”

“So, uh what is your name again?”

“William.”

“Yes, William. So, what are you doing here?”

“I’m really only passing through. I’m just on my way to Burgos.”

“Burgos, seriously?”

“Yes, that is where I am going.”

“I am from Burgos. My family is there.”

“Really? I am going there, maybe tomorrow. It wouldn’t make sense to leave tonight, but I sure don’t want to stay here for very long after what I saw.”

“What a nasty situation, that’s the truth.” Manolo looked down the street again and shook his head. “The situation is getting ugly here. I mean in Spain. I don’t think this is a good time to visit.”

“Yes, you are right. But I’m here, and I am going to stay. I don’t mean here in Vitoria, I mean here in Spain. This country is truly amazing.”

“Spain is a beautiful country, this is true. We have many problems, and that is unfortunate. I have seen many parts of the country, and there are beautiful places, there is no doubt about it. I am sorry things are so screwed up right now. It is dangerous, and you see what can happen.” He said this as he nodded toward the horrible scene down the street.

“Listen to me, William. You are coming here to stay the night?” He pointed to the building behind us.

“Well, yes. I was looking for a cheap place to stay.”

“This place is kind of crappy, but it’s certainly cheap. I guess you could do worse. I have a suggestion. Stay here for a couple of days. Today is Wednesday, and on Saturday I am going to Burgos. If you want you can come along with me.”

“Really? You are going to Burgos in just two days?”

“Yes, man, I’m going to Burgos. You can come with me. I don’t have a car, of course, but I have a few friends. We’ll get there if that is where you want to go. I can show you the city.”

“What have you been doing here, in Vitoria?”

“I was going to the university, but now there are not many classes. Everything is screwed up because of the politics.”

“What have you been studying?”

“Medicine.”

“Oh, you want to be a doctor? That’s not an easy program. You must like science and math and things like that.”

“Yes, of course. But I can’t get the courses right now. I should probably have gone back to Burgos already. But one of the professors has a clinic here in Vitoria. So, I go to help him. He teaches me things while I help. He pays me a little. For now it is the best I can do.”

“That is at least a chance to keep learning. I hope you can get back to your study routine. There is always a need for doctors.”

“Of course, especially here in Spain. It is not like northern Europe where doctors are discovering new things all the time. Here we are stuck in the past. Maybe I will go someday to France or England, but not Germany. That place scares me.”

We went inside the building. Talking with Manolo had given me a little time to think of something besides that horrible shooting event in the street. There were just a few other people in the lobby of the building, sitting on some old pieces of furniture. It looked like a run-down hotel inside. He

obviously knew the people because they greeted him, but no one stood up to talk to him. Before I knew it he had acquired a key and he told me to follow him up the stairs. We got to the third floor and we went down a hallway. A few of the doors were open, but when I looked inside, I saw the rooms were either empty or cluttered with bags and boxes and sometimes a broken chair or other piece of old furniture.

We came to a room and Manolo stopped. “You get deluxe accommodations, my American friend.” He opened the door, and we went in. It was a studio apartment with a single bed, a small table with two chairs, and a dresser with a lamp that was missing the shade. I thought for a moment that if this was deluxe, what were the other rooms like? Manolo could probably tell what I was thinking. “Look, this is not America, William. But it is deluxe, you see, you have a window and the electricity works,” he said as he smiled and pointed to the window. I walked over and looked out. There was a courtyard below, and behind it was a small garden. At least at one time it had been a garden. There wasn’t much there at the time.

I realized that Manolo was quite a nice person and seemed to be accepting of me being a foreigner in his country at a very difficult time. I felt very fortunate that we had run into each other. The fact that he was from Burgos and getting ready to return there was amazing.

Manolo was a little shorter than me. I’m a bit under six feet tall, and he was probably five nine or ten. He had brown hair and brown eyes that were almost the exact same color. He had wavy hair that was cut short except in the back, where it was a little longer. He had sideburns, but no beard. I later found out that he was twenty-four, a couple of years older than I was at the time. He was somewhat thin, but something told me he was strong. His clothes were plain but clean. He wore short boots of a kind I had seen several times already.

He spoke again as I was looking around the small apartment. “Look, William, I have an idea. You can’t sit around here all day, and you don’t know anything about this city. Why don’t you come out with me to the clinic? I’m sure we find something for you to do. And Doctor Linares might be able to pay you a little something for your work.”

“You are right that there is not much for me to do here. If it weren’t for you going to Burgos in a couple of days, I would start heading in that direction tomorrow.”

“I think my plan will work better. There are some risks with hitchhiking. For now, let’s go out to have a beer and something to eat. I’m hungry and thirsty. It must be about six o’clock now, and I haven’t eaten anything since this morning. I never found time for lunch today.”

“I’ve barley eaten either, so I can go anywhere as long as there is something to eat.”

“Then leave your bag here. Here is the key. We can pay for the room when we leave, day after tomorrow. I know the people who own this place, and they trust me. Let’s go, I know a place where the food is good, there is beer that is cool, and the prices are for good for humble students like me.”

Soon we were in the street and walking in the opposite direction of the terrible event I had seen a short while ago. It was getting cool outside, but it felt good to get out and walk around. Manolo moved quickly so I had to keep up with his pace. He took me down a side street that led to more side streets, each time the streets were a little narrower with older-looking buildings. After several turns I was confused as to where we were in relation to the place we were staying. It didn’t matter, I realized, as long as Manolo was with me.

A couple of blocks later we came to a door with nothing to indicate what was behind it. Manolo opened the door and went in with me right behind him. There was a set of stairs that went down, apparently to the basement. We emerged into a room with a small bar and several tables. I was immediately stuck by two things. There was smoke everywhere from the cigarettes many of the people

had in their hands or mouths, and I also noticed that unmistakable aroma of olive oil and garlic. I felt an immediate grumbling in my stomach and hoped there would be at least something to snack on soon. Two or three people greeted Manolo, and one woman came over and gave him a hug and kiss on both cheeks. She was quite short, but seemed, like most of the patrons, to be quite young. Maybe they were all university students, or at least people of that age.

Manolo spoke to the girl for a few moments and then turned to me. “Isabel te presento a un nuevo amigo. Se llama William, es un americano, de los Estados Unidos. Es buena gente y acaba de llegar a España y Vitoria. Isabel, let me present my new friend, William. He is an American, from the United States. He’s a good guy and recently got to Spain and now to Vitoria.”

I was surprised when Isabel stepped close to me, reached up as far as she could and kissed me on both cheeks. “*Mucho gusto, William. Bienvenido as España. ¿Qué coño haces aquí en este país tan jodido?* Nice to meet you, William. Welcome to Spain. What the crap are you doing here in this screwed up country of Spain?” She said this with something of a smile on her face. Apparently, this kissing routine was popular, and not only for people you were close to. While on our way to Burgos two days later, Manolo would tell me a great deal about Spanish customs, Spanish foods, and a lot of words and expression that were popular. It was like being back with Doña Angela, except this guy was about my age, very interested in women, as I was, and really knew the parts of the country we were in.

I wondered if Isabel was Manolo’s girlfriend. She was quite attractive, with a pretty face and a very proportional body, which was accented by the fact that she was wearing pants and a shirt, not unlike the dress of many of the men I had seen. Before I could respond to Isabel, Manolo spoke. “*No seas indiscreta, Isa. William está aquí porque quiere conocer a España. Tal vez no sea el mejor momento, pero tenemos que ser buenos anfitriones.* Don’t be indiscreet, Isa. William is here to see Spain. It might not be the best time, but we should act like good hosts.”

Isabel smiled at Manolo and then looked at me. “*Tienes toda la razón, Manolo. William, estamos a su disposición.* You are right, Manolo. William, we are here at your disposal. That sounded so nice of her. I felt a glow inside that I’d rarely felt previously in my life. I had just met these people, but they were making me feel more at home than I imagined. The people I had met so far, including Mr. Sánchez in St. Jean de Luz, were some of the most interesting people I had ever met. I realized that regardless of what I heard or experienced while in Spain, these people were something special.

Isabel disappeared for a minute, and when she returned, she was carrying two glasses of beer. So, obviously Isabel worked in this little tavern. She gave the glasses to us and went away again. Manolo and I took big sips of the beer. It wasn’t very cold, but it was delicious at that moment. When we were taking another sip, Isabel returned. She had a small platter in her hand. I looked at it but wasn’t sure what was on it. “*Les traje tortilla de patatas.* I brought you guys potato omelet.”

“Nice work, Isabel,” Manolo said. “William, try this. It’s a traditional dish.”

It was sliced into wedges. I picked one up with the toothpicks on the platter. I put the wedge in my mouth. It was unbelievably good. I had never had anything like it before. I was not used to eating eggs except fried for breakfast. The combination of the beer and the potato omelet was better than I could have imagined.

“Do you like it, William?” Manolo asked.

“Yes, I sure do. It’s great.” I ate two more of the wedges without saying a word. I had been so hungry I was sure I could eat everything put in front of me. I began to feel better almost immediately. I noticed that Isabel had left again, and a moment later she was back with another small platter. Again, it was nothing I recognized. “What’s this?”

“This is fried fish pieces,” Isabel said. Again, there were toothpicks for spearing the small pieces that were roughly formed into a ball. I tried one and found it delicious. I ate several of the pieces, but was careful not to seem like I was eating more than my share.

Manolo said, “You can eat mine, William. I’m not such a big fan of fish. Go ahead and eat what you want.” The next platter that Isabel brought had what looked like chunks of cheese. “William, this is our best cheese in Spain. It is called *Manchego*. It is made from goat’s milk.”

“Goat milk? Seriously? I’ve never had anything from a goat as far as I know.” I grabbed another toothpick and speared a piece of the pale-yellow cheese. It was different, certainly, but I ate it readily. Everything was good, and it washed down nicely with the beer.

I looked at Manolo, who had turned to talk to another person seated near the bar. They were talking so fast that I had a little difficulty understanding them. It was funny that at times I understood almost everything, and at other times I wasn’t so sure. Perhaps people who spoke to me directly were altering their speech, taking more care to say things so I would understand. It didn’t matter to me. I was progressing in my Spanish, and it could only improve. Besides, so far it had not proven to be much of an obstacle.

We stayed for a couple of hours in that place. I never knew the name of it, but it was enjoyable. The only thing that bothered me was the cigarette smoke. I had not picked up the habit, even though it was popular. I had tried smoking a few times, but it always made me feel light-headed. I wondered if smoking had that effect on others. I spent much of the time observing the people. There was another girl who came in after we finished eating. She was stunningly attractive. Manolo didn’t seem to know her. She was dressed in black, had black hair, pale skin, and blue eyes. It was a combination the likes of which I had never seen. I had a hard time taking my eyes off her, and I hoped she didn’t notice me

staring. If she did, I could not tell. Then I thought that such a beautiful woman was surely accustomed to having a lot of men stare at her.

I was surprised when we had finished eating and the place became very quiet. Manolo tapped me on the arm. “Now you will see something special, William. Watch.” I looked over and saw that one of the men had picked up a guitar and sat on a stool that was on a small, raised area. It was so small that I would not have called it a stage. The man began by tuning it, and as he did the beautiful woman who had come in stood up and walked over close to the guitar player. He started to play, and at first the woman simply stood next to him, occasionally clapping her hands with the rhythmic sounds of the guitar. The music was very unusual, but fascinating. The guitar rhythms were quick, and the man played with significant force. After a solo lasting several minutes, the woman took a step forward and started to sing. It was almost haunting, the way she sang. I imagined it was a sad song full of emotion, but I couldn’t grasp a word she was singing. At times she closed her eyes, leaned her head back and raised the volume. At other times she lowered her gaze, looked around the room, and in one instance stared at me so intently that I felt uncomfortable.

She sang several songs, some more exciting and others seemingly in the blues category. The performance ended with another guitar solo. When the music was over, there was warm applause, and the place went back to normal. The guitarist put away his instrument and the woman in black sat down to drink a glass of wine at the same table.

“Manolo, who is that woman? She’s so beautiful.”

“*Es estupenda, pues guapísima, hombre.* She’s amazing, and she’s extremely good looking, man\”

“She certainly is. Do you know her?”

“I’ve met her, but I don’t know her well. She is from Córdoba, I think. Her name is Esmeralda. She travels around.”

“I’ve never seen people sing or play with that kind of emotion before.”

“Esmeralda is quite talented, same as the guitarist. In better times they would probably be making some pretty good money, but not right now with all this political garbage going on. It happens here in Spain. She gets a little money from the owner and some tips. I’ll leave a tip for her. She is very good. I have been told that the guitarist is her boyfriend.”

“Lucky guitarist. She is stunning. I have only been in Spain a couple of days, and already I have seen some of the most amazing women ever. What type of music was that?”

“That is flamenco music; haven’t you heard that before?”

“No, that was totally new to me. It was something special.”

“I think it might be the best-known music of all Spain. But it is mostly played in the south, and especially in the city of Sevilla.”

“Sevilla? Oh, yes, Seville, we say in English. I would really like to go there some day.”

“Perhaps you will, my friend.” Manolo turned now and started talking with Isabel. She had a glass of wine in her hand. I looked at her for a few moments. She was very different from the singer, but she was attractive in her own way. Again, I thought about the relationship Manolo might have with her. These Spanish women were definitely special. I had a tendency to compare them with the girls I had met in Charlottesville. The comparison wasn’t fair. These women were so completely different. I was unsure of how to describe them. The girls in Charlottesville were, well, very simple and unsophisticated. These women seemed worldlier to me. The best word I could think of to describe

them was exotic. It made them somewhat more difficult, or perhaps intimidating. I had no idea how I would approach a Spanish woman if I wanted to have a date with her.

The last time I had any kind of relationship with a woman had been about a year ago. My father and I had been invited to dinner by a local family. The man was a banker that my father met at a social gathering at the University. The gentleman, a Mr. Reginald Kingsley, invited us to his house for dinner. He had a daughter who was part of the gathering that night. She was a student at one of the many women's colleges in Virginia. She was attending Randolph Macon Women's College and studying History. Her name was Suzanne, and she was very attractive. She was tall and had blond hair and light blue eyes. It was difficult not to stare at her during the dinner.

When we finished I think we were both surprised when her father said, "Why don't you two go into the library and chat. Professor Benning and I have things to discuss." It was more than I had hoped for. Suzanne was wearing a beautiful blue dress and had obviously been to the hairdresser recently. She looked like a model in a magazine, and I was wondering if there might be a few moments that we would be alone. It turned out we would be together in her father's library for more than an hour. At dinner she had barely spoken, but once we were alone, in a room with the door closed, she came alive. She told me about Randolph Macon and her friends there. She described every course she was taking in the current semester and gave me a critique of each instructor. I listened with a pretense of interest. What I was waiting for was some kind of reference to a boyfriend, or lack thereof.

She finally ran out of people to talk about. "What are you studying, William?"

"History, just like you, with additional courses in English. I wasn't sure what to major in. My father told me that if I stayed with the liberal arts, it didn't matter much. I have little idea of what I want to do after I graduate."

“Daddy told me to get my degree, and then not worry about things. He said he would find me a suitable person to marry, and that if we are lucky, it will be someone who can work at his bank.”

I didn't think that would be much of a problem. Vanessa was very attractive, and despite her tendency to talk for a long time without stopping, she would make someone a decent wife. I was wondering if she would have any interest in a short-term fling before she prepared for marriage and a life of domestic tranquility.

“Would you like to go out to dinner one night?”

“Are you inviting me?”

“Yes, I am.”

“I'll have to ask Daddy, but if he approves, I could accept your invitation.”

“Great. Why don't you ask him before we leave tonight? That way we can make the arrangements.” After that we talked about school, and then she spent quite a while telling me some family history. Apparently, the family had arrived in Charlottesville early in the nineteenth century and they had been in business, especially banking, for generations. I learned more about the city than I had ever before. Suzanne spoke about eighty percent of the time. We eventually went back into the living room, where our respective fathers were having a glass of Scotch whisky. Not long after that my father and I left.

It seemed somehow unlikely at the time, but before I knew it I was getting ready to meet Suzanne at a restaurant that was near the University two days later, on a Friday night. She had spoken to her father, and the word eventually got to me that she could accept my invitation. I stood on the corner waiting for her father to drop her off. I saw the car drive up and pull to the side of the road. Suzanne got out and was talking with her father. “Is eleven o'clock all right, Daddy?”

I looked into the car as her father nodded.

“Not a minute later than eleven, my dear.”

“Yes, Daddy.”

I waved at Mr. Kingsley. He smiled briefly and then drove off.

“Daddy is very generous, but he is overly protective of me.”

“Really?” I said as I looked at her to see what she was wearing. She had on a black dress with a crimson scarf. She looked like a famous actress or a rich person’s daughter, which was the case.

“Yes. He gives me whatever I want, but he imposes lots of controls.”

I wasn’t sure what she meant about the controls. At the time, I was simply wondering if there would be any chance of serious physical activity with this very attractive female. We went to a restaurant that was popular with students and faculty. During the meal she mostly talked about her family and the bank where her father was the president. She told me about her mother, who was from Boston, and the summers she spent in Massachusetts, where the family had a summer cottage. Her mother was there at the time.

When we finished eating, I asked if she wanted to go with me to a fraternity house. I wasn’t a member, but two of my good friends at school were, and I had been a guest at several social events there. It was a holiday weekend, and many of the students had either gone home or were on road trips to the women’s colleges in Staunton, Fredericksburg, or Harrisonburg. It was a little after nine o’clock, so there was plenty of time to go to the fraternity and then get back for her ride home.

The fraternity house was very quiet. When we went in, there were two of the brothers there listening to the radio. I knew there was a room, a kind of parlor, that we could sit in. It had a large,

comfortable sofa and a record player. “Is it all right if we sit in the parlor for a while? I’m William Benning, a friend of Douglas Allen.”

“Make yourself at home,” one of the two said, without looking up. We went into the parlor and closed the door. Suzanne sat on the sofa, and I went over to the table with the phonograph on it. I turned it on and put the needle down on the record that was sitting on the turntable. A moment later the sound of a band came into the room. It was nice music, and the atmosphere seemed pretty nice to me. I wondered what Vanessa was thinking. Perhaps she saw everything as some kind of set up. I sat on the sofa, but not too close to Vanessa. We talked about the University for a few minutes. She asked several questions and told me that her father had studied there.

I was somewhat surprised when she looked over at me and said, “Why are you sitting so far away, William? You don’t seem very romantic from a distance.”

At first I didn’t know what to think. Maybe she was making a joke. But the expression on her face didn’t seem to suggest that. I moved over closer to her and was surprised again when she put her hand on mine as it rested on the sofa. “William, I want you to kiss me.”

“You do?”

“Yes, please go ahead.” I leaned toward her and gave her a kiss on the cheek. It felt very warm. I pulled back for a moment. She opened her eyes and looked at me from very close. “Is that all?”

I leaned in again, and this time I kissed her, again briefly, on the lips. I was about to pull back when I felt her hand go to the back of my head and prevent from pulling back. Before I knew it, she was kissing me more than I was kissing her. We continued for several minutes before I thought it might be time to press ahead. I carefully lowered my hand from her shoulder to the top of her chest, and then down to one her breasts. So far, everything was going as expected, based on what I had heard from friends. They told me that when the signs of arousal were there, flushed skin in the face and neck,

heavier breathing, and no obvious resistance, you could become a little more aggressive. I knew that I could not have asked for better conditions.

I tried to find a way to slip my hand inside of her dress. When I managed to do it and got within an inch of touching the actual breast, I felt Vanessa put her head back. “Hey, what do you think you are doing?” I was momentarily stunned, and instantly pulled my hand back.

“Oh, sorry, Vanessa. I thought . . .” I didn’t even know how to finish that sentence.

“Well, whatever you thought was wrong. This is our first date, and you were lucky to kiss me. By the way, you kiss quite well. And, I find you attractive. But maybe we should go back to the restaurant. Daddy is going to pick me up at eleven o’clock sharp.” She said this as she stood up and straightened her dress. So much for getting intimate with the lovely and well-connected Suzanne. It was ironic that I would never see her again. She soon returned to Randolph Macon, and the next thing I heard about her was when my father told me she had been engaged to marry a young executive at Mr. Kingsley’s bank.

My attention returned to Isabel. For the remainder of the time in this cozy little place I would observe her. I was careful not to stare, but the couple of times she turned to look at me, she smiled, and one time I thought she even winked at me. Maybe that was a coincidence, but it certainly had me excited. However, I realistically considered my chances for getting anywhere with Isabel and decided they were about zero.

Just as quickly, I saw an image of Malu, the girl who had been abducted from the car in that horrible scene in front of the hotel.

A short time later Manolo came back over. “All right, my American friend, I think it is time to go. We are going to the clinic tomorrow, right?”

“Sure. We can go. How much do we owe for everything?” I immediately put my hand in my pocket and removed a couple of bills. I wasn’t used to the local currency yet, and I simply opened my hand for Manolo to take what he wanted. He grabbed a couple of bills, put them with his money and walked over to the counter. He slapped the money down in front of one of the bartenders. They shook hands, and Manolo turned to me. “*Vámonos, William. Estoy cansado.* Let’s go, William, I’m tired.

The next morning, while I was in the middle of a dream that included images of the three women that had been on my mind the previous evening—Suzanne from Charlottesville, Isabel and the singer—I was suddenly awaked by a knock on the door. When I could think clearly, I realized it must be Manolo calling me to get up and head to the clinic. I got up and opened the door. Manolo came in. “Good morning, William. Down the hall on the left there is a bathroom. If you are lucky there may be a little warm water. Take your time getting ready. I’ll go down and see if there is something to eat. There is a kitchen for the residents, but some days there is nobody there to cook.”

I sat for a few moments trying to clear my head. Suddenly, the images of the previous evening came flooding into my head. I saw the horrible shooting scene all over again. I kept thinking about one thing in particular. What had happened to the girl named Malu? Was she seriously injured? Where would she be now? It looked as if she had been kidnapped, but maybe she had suffered the same fate as her brother and uncle. It was such a strange situation that I could barely make sense of it. I decided I had to get moving, so I went out of the room and headed in the direction Manolo had indicated. I found the bathroom and went inside. There was a small sink, a commode, and in one corner a type of shower

stall. It was small and had a covering on one side. There was a tiny spout hanging from a broken fixture on the wall and beneath it a single spigot. I turned the handle, but nothing happened.

Manolo had said something about some hot water, but it looked like there was no water at all. Then I noticed a bucket on the floor with a long-handled, wooden ladle. I stuck my hand in the water, and it was still warm. On the floor next to the bucket was a small bar of soap. The routine was now obvious. I saw a towel draped over the sink and realized I had everything I needed. I looked around, wondering if anyone else would come into the bathroom. I decided I didn't really care, and quickly took off my clothes. I poured some water over my head with the ladle and started my bathing.

I was slightly startled when the door opened in the middle of my bathing. A man entered in his underwear and went over to the toilet to urinate. I didn't think he even noticed I was in there. But a moment later, he said, without looking at me, "*Buenos días. ¿Cómo le va?* Good morning. How's it going?"

"*Bien, gracias. ¿Cómo está?* Fine thanks, how are you?"

"*No puedo quejar.* I can't complain." He finally turned to look at me. "*No vayas a usar toda el agua caliente, eh.* Don't use all of that water, please."

"I am finishing up now. There is plenty left, I think." I said this and realized that I was completely nude and having a conversation with a guy in his underwear. He was somewhat young and had long, black hair smoothly combed away from his face. He had a mustache that drooped along both sides of his mouth. It was so thick I could barely see his lips. Being there in the bathroom while I was trying to shower didn't seem to faze him in the least. I ladled water over me to rinse off the soap and then quickly grabbed the towel and covered myself. The other guy turned and left without saying anything else. I dried myself quickly, dressed, and then left. I looked to make sure I had left enough water in the bucket and went back to my room.

A few minutes later I went down to look for Manolo. I wasn't familiar with the place and didn't know where the kitchen was. I heard some music and followed the sounds. It led me to a room toward the back of the building. There was a small dining room with several small wood tables. To the side there was an opening that led to a kitchen. At one of the tables two people were seated eating toast and drinking coffee. "Hey William, hungry?" I heard Manolo say from the little kitchen area.

"Yeah, a little."

"There isn't much, but you are welcome to have some." He said this and brought out a tray with plates of toast, cups of coffee, and a saucer with what looked like those great olives I was getting used to. It didn't compare with the great food we had eaten the previous night, but I was learning that for many in Spain breakfast was mostly something to tide you over until lunch.

We ate without speaking very much and then left the building. It was a beautiful fall morning. It was cool, but it felt good to breathe in the fresh, crisp air. For a few moments, as soon as we walked out the door, I thought again about the terrible incident. Now, suddenly, it seemed like a remote and somewhat unreal event. I looked in the direction of the crash and shooting, but there was nothing there. It seemed like a horrendous dream, or nightmare, that I had experienced instead of an actual event.

"*Sígueme, William.* Follow me, William." Manolo crossed the street and then turned to the left. We walked, without talking, for several minutes. Manolo was somewhat talkative, so I wondered why he was so quiet this morning. Perhaps he had a little bit of a hangover. Neither of us had seemed drunk the previous night, but perhaps he had more to drink than I had and was good at showing control.

I finally decided to speak. "I enjoyed meeting Isabel last night. She's very nice."

"Yes, she's great. I have known her for quite some time. She is one of the first people I met when I arrived in Vitoria." I was curious about his relationship with her, but I was not comfortable asking him directly about that.

“What does she do?”

“Isabel? She works with her mother. They have a clothing shop. They sell dresses and scarfs and other things, mostly for women. Some things are new, and other things are made by people here in Vitoria. They are kind of local crafts. It keeps things going for the family during these crazy times. Especially since her father was killed.”

“What? Her father was killed? How?”

“He was caught in the crossfire of a riot here a few months ago. He was a lawyer. I had only met him a couple of times. He seemed like a good man and was respected here. It was a tragedy, but now we have tragedies almost every day in Spain. I want to know when this senselessness is going to stop. I think everyone wants all this mess to be over. The trouble is, if the military and the monarchists win, it will mean repression for many groups. On the other hand, if the Republicans win, I think there will be another kind of chaos. You see, I don’t know what the solution is, and that is a big problem. Many of us here in Spain just don’t know what future we really want. Everyone wants peace, but it seems that many think that the only way to get that peace is by fighting. That is ironic, isn’t it?”

“It’s hard for me to understand, certainly. I know that you Spanish have a different way of looking at things, and the culture is so different to me. I doubt I will ever truly understand it. But I like it. I like the Spanish language, and the food is fantastic. The women I have met so far are, well, intriguing, I think is the best way to say it.”

“Oh yes, there are many beautiful women here. But I think they are difficult sometimes.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“I’m not sure I can explain it. Sometimes the women are quite bossy and stubborn. I get frustrated at them. But at least they are not shy and superficial. What are women in America like?”

I had no idea how to answer that question. “I don’t think I can explain American women. I don’t have enough experience with them. My mother, who died when I was very young, was English. I never knew her, and she wasn’t American, of course. I have only known a few American girls, and I would not say I understand them either.” I thought about Suzanne, suddenly, but I wasn’t sure how typical she was. Maybe she was typical of girls from Charlottesville who had wealthy parents.

We walked for another block before I spoke up. “What is Isabel like? Is she typical?”

“Isabel? No, I don’t think she is typical. She is kind of quiet and reserved. What do you think about her?”

“I don’t know her, of course. I only met her last night. But I think she is nice, and she is very attractive.”

“William, I can tell you she found you attractive too.”

“She did? Did she tell you that?”

“She did tell me that, yes.”

“Really? That’s kind of interesting.”

“Unfortunately, you probably won’t see her again. Day after tomorrow we are going to Burgos, and she lives here. Since she was out last night, she probably won’t be out again tonight. That is her pattern. I see her one night, and then I don’t for another week or two.”

“That’s too bad. I like her, but I guess you are right. I probably won’t ever see her again.” As soon as I said this Manolo stopped in front of a small building. I saw above the entrance a sign that said ‘CLINICA MEDICA GOICOECHEA.’ Manolo opened the door, and we went in. The first thing I noticed was the smell, which was of alcohol and other antiseptics. There was a small lobby with a woman sitting at a desk who greeted us.

“Buenos días, Manolo.”

“*Buenos días, Carmen. ¿Está el doctor en su oficina?* Good morning, Carmen. Is the doctor in his office?”

“*Si, si está. Pueden pasar.* Yes, yes he is. You can go in.”

“*Gracias,*” Manolo said, and he went to a door that was behind the receptionist’s desk. He knocked once, and then opened the door. We went in and saw a man sitting behind a desk. He was middle-aged and had a goatee beard and mustache. He had a receding hairline and thick curly hair on the top and sides of his head. He was wearing a pair of wire-rim glasses and was looking at what appeared to be an X-ray.

“*Buenos días, Manolo. ¿Quién te acompaña esta mañana?* Good morning. Who has come with you this morning” He looked up at me.

“*Buenos días, mucho gusto, doctor.* Good morning. It’s a pleasure, Doctor.” I stepped forward and shook hands with him.

“His name is William. He is from the United States,” William said.

“The United States?” He turned to me with a friendly smile. “Well then, welcome to Spain. This seems like an odd time to be a tourist in our country.”

“He is here to learn Spanish and to meet Spanish women,” Manolo said, and I quickly looked over at him, and then he broke into a big smile. “He is here to learn about Spain, but so far he seems impressed with Spanish women.”

The doctor looked up and smiled. “I can understand that. I have been to America. I went for a medical course on anesthesia in Philadelphia. I was there for three months. I had difficulty with the

language, but I found American women to be beautiful. But they were very different from Spanish women. So, what is happening today, Manolo?"

"I am here to do some work, and William is here to help out today. Tomorrow I am going to Burgos, as I told you the other day, and William is going with me. What can we do to help out today?"

"I am grateful, as always, Manolo. You can do the usual. You can help me with these files and copy my notes in the ledger here. Your American friend can help with the supplies. We got a new shipment from Madrid yesterday, and someone has to unpack the boxes and put things on the shelf there in the storage room. Please show him where those supplies are and help him get started. Then you can come back and help me with these records."

"Of course, Doctor. I'll show him the supply room and be back in a little while." We left the doctor's office the way we came in. We went to another door off the lobby and walked through. That appeared to be a waiting room. There were about a dozen people sitting on benches there. We walked through to the far end of that room where there was another door. As we were walking through the room, I glanced at the people. There was a woman with a small child in her arms that she was rocking gently. There was a man with a bandage on his head that showed some dried blood. There was a woman who was pregnant to the point that she looked like she might give birth at any moment.

I looked at one corner of the room and saw a woman sitting at the end of one of the benches. Her head was drooped down, and she had a bandage on one of her arms. In an instant, I realized that there was something familiar about the clothes she was wearing. Who could that be? Why would I notice something familiar about the way she was dressed? Suddenly, it hit me. It was Malu. I stopped briefly but didn't want her to see me. I felt an immediate chill run from the base of my skull down my spine. I felt the blood rush to my face to the point that I almost had tears in my eyes. At that moment Manolo opened the door and went into the next room. I quickly went in and looked at Manolo.

He looked at me and noticed my unsettled expression. “What happened to you? You look like you just saw a ghost or something.”

“It’s worse than seeing a ghost. I think I know that woman out there, the one sitting in the corner.”

“A woman out there? How could you know her? You just got here to Vitoria yesterday.”

“That’s right. Do you remember that incident last evening? That shooting of those people that I saw?”

“Yes, of course. So?”

“You may not believe this, but I was in that car, and that woman out there was also in the car.”

“You are telling me that you were in that car, with the people who were killed? Why didn’t you tell me yesterday?”

“I was kind of scared. I didn’t understand what was happening. Everything was totally normal until they dropped me off at the building we are staying in. I got out, and they drove down the street. Before I could even get into the building, I heard the screech of tires and then witnessed the shooting. After shooting the two guys, their names were Javier and Tomás, they dragged the woman, Malu, out and hit her. Then they put her in another vehicle and drove away. Someone else got in their car and drove it away too.”

“Damn, William. That was a close call. Somebody was watching that car, probably since it got into the city. Where were you coming from?”

“I spent the day in Mondragón. The trucker I was with there was going back to Bilbao. He said that if I was on my way to Burgos I should try to get a ride here to Vitoria. The car with Malu and her

brother and uncle stopped, and they offered me a ride. They said they were Socialists and were coming here for some kind of meeting.”

“Yes, there is something planned for tomorrow or the day after. But, William, do you realize the danger you were in?”

“Of course not. How could I know? Those people were very nice to me. The whole thing now seems like a bad dream.”

“I can see that. You said that woman’s name is Malu? It must be short for María Luisa. It is a common name here in Spain. Did they say the last name?”

“I don’t think so. I don’t even know where they were coming from.”

“Listen. Let’s go tell Doctor Goicoechea about this. I’m sure he would like to know so he can treat her.” We left the supply room and went back into the waiting room. The first thing I did was look over toward the corner. The woman had her head up now, and we could both see that she had a horrible bruise on the right side of her forehead. There was some dried blood on her lips and a cut above her left eye. Manolo went out to the lobby, and I followed. If Malu had seen me and recognized me from the ride from Mondragón, she didn’t react at all. Manolo spoke to the receptionist. She said something to Manolo that I didn’t hear. She stood up and went over to the waiting room and went in. A few moments later she came back with Malu, holding her arm to steady her as she walked.

They went into another door, and I watched as they entered. She had Malu lie down on a cot. She came back out and shut the door. “I’ll tell the doctor she is in the examining room. He can go to see her and a few minutes.” We waited out in the lobby for Doctor Goicoechea to come see Malu. In a few minutes his door opened, and he came out and walked to the examining room. “Wait for me out here while I see her condition. Then perhaps you can speak with her.” He went into the room.

He came out ten minutes later. “She has had a terrible shock. It seems her brother and uncle were shot in that incident that happened yesterday. I heard about that this morning. She was taken by the assailants, but she managed to escape late last night. She has a broken arm, and some cuts and bruises. She probably also has a concussion. She can barely speak, she is so frightened. She claims it was Falangists that murdered her family members. She is from Bilbao. I am getting the nurse to join me so I can take care of her injuries. You two should take care of the supplies for now, and I’ll give you an update on the woman later.”

We spent the rest of the morning putting the supplies away. It was a lot of work because everything had to go in its exact place. Manolo said that Dr. Goicoechea was very meticulous about his supplies. Also, we had to write everything down in a ledger and make sure it was on the list that the delivery company had left with the boxes.

At midday we went back to see Dr. Goicoechea. “How is Malu, the girl from Bilbao?”

“She is stabilized now. She is resting. I’m trying to figure out a place for her to stay. She needs at least a week or two of total rest. She is lucky. She could have been more seriously hurt. She didn’t talk much, but she told me how she was able to get out of the building she was being held in. A woman member of the group who was guarding her felt bad for her and distracted somebody enough for her to get out of the building.”

“Unbelievable,” Manolo said. “And William knew this girl.”

“Extraordinary? How would you know her?” he asked, looking at me. I told him that I had been hitchhiking from Mondragón and was offered a ride by Malu and her brother and uncle. I also said that they called themselves Socialists and were on their way to some kind of activity in Vitoria.

Dr. Goicoechea looked at me and then at Manolo. “My brother is part of the local Socialists. He probably knows her, or of her, anyway. I can check with him and find out more about the incident. How long have you been in Spain, William?”

“I just got here three days ago. I came in near St. Jean de Luz. My first stop was Irún. I’m on my way to Burgos. I had no particular reason to come here to Vitoria. It just happened to be on the way, so to speak.”

“Well,” Dr. Goicoechea said with a sigh, “I suppose you can find trouble quickly no matter where you are in Spain these days. Again, you are lucky. I hope your luck continues to hold out. Maybe you should have stayed in France.” He said it not in a remonstrative way, it seemed to me. He seemed sincerely concerned for my safety.

“I was in France for about a week. But that was just a way to get here to Spain. I don’t speak French, and it is a beautiful country, but I simply have a strong interest in your country. I understand that it is a little strange that I came here when there is so much, uh, turmoil. But even knowing the dangers, I find that I just don’t want to leave. I want to see more things, meet more people, and continue to learn Spanish.”

“You are doing exceptionally well with your Spanish, young man. As for being here to learn about the country, well, I would say you might end up learning more than you expected. I can tell you that you have met a fine young man,” he said nodding toward Manolo. “You have a person you can trust. And if you are going to Burgos, I think you will like it. It is a nice city.”

Manolo said, “Thank you for your nice words, Dr. Goicoechea. I want you to do me a favor, please. Can you give the girl from Bilbao my address in Burgos? Here, I will write it down. Maybe she does not have family at home now. I don’t know, but you can tell her that she can come to Burgos and we will find a place for her.” Manolo looked at me. “William, do you think she recognized you?”

“No, I don’t think she did. She didn’t get a good look at me. It sounds like she is in a kind of shock right now.”

“Yes,” said Dr. Goicoechea, “she is suffering from a pretty severe trauma. And it is likely as much a psychological suffering as physical. My suggestion is to not try to do anything that might upset her. She needs total peace and quiet right now. This is necessary for her healing process. There is a place on the next block, a kind of pension for women, where she can stay for a few days while she starts to heal. I’ll make sure she gets settled there.”

We left the clinic and went back to the hotel. I followed Manolo into the building, and he headed back to the kitchen area. “Sometimes there is something to eat for lunch. I will check in the kitchen.” He came back a moment later and signaled with his hand for me to follow him. In the kitchen I saw a large pot on the stove. Manolo picked up a bowl and served something with a large ladle from the pot. “*Sírvete un poco de sopa. Es una sopa de garbanzos con un poco de jamón. La hacen bastante buena aquí.* Serve yourself soup. It is chickpea stew with a little ham. They make it good here.” I grabbed a bowl and served myself some soup. There was a basket on the counter with some small rolls. I grabbed a couple and went out to the small dining area with Manolo. The soup was barely warm, but it tasted good. I had never eaten chickpeas before. I quickly ate the soup and bread. Manolo did the same.

“Listen, William. It is the custom here to take a break after lunch. Everything shuts down, offices, stores, government offices, almost everything anyway. So, I suggest you take a rest, or a nap, like me. At four we can go back to the clinic for a while. Then, tonight I have to get my things ready for the trip. We should leave in the morning. Maybe we can get to Burgos by tomorrow night. What do you think?”

“That sounds good to me. I feel a little uncomfortable here. Maybe it’s because of the shooting, I’m not sure. I’m ready to go to Burgos, to tell you the truth.”

“I’m sure you will like it there, William.”

We headed up to our rooms. When I got there, I didn’t feel like sleeping. But when I stretched out on the bed and closed my eyes, it wasn’t long before I was soundly asleep. The last images in my mind were of Malu. I saw her in the clinic trying to recover from her injuries. Then I saw her sitting in the back of the car with me on the trip up to Vitoria. I saw those beautiful eyes and that reserved smile. Then, everything vanished in a sleepy stupor.

I woke up when I heard a tap on the door. I opened my eyes, and for a few moments I thought I was back home in Charlottesville. It is funny how the brain plays tricks on us. I was half asleep and trying to make sense of the surroundings that did not align with my home. It took several moments for the reality to return. I heard the tapping again. “William?” I heard his voice faintly.

I spoke up, but only barely. “I’m getting up now,” I said. “I’ll meet you downstairs in a couple of minutes.” He must have heard me because there were no more sounds from the hallway.

I had no idea what time it was. I didn’t know if I had slept for a few minutes or a few hours. I looked out the window. It was cloudy and raining softly. I took a few deep breaths. I thought about what I had experienced in the last few days. It seemed somewhat unreal to me. I thought about the people I had met. A series of images went before my mind’s eye. I stayed this way for a few minutes, but then I knew I had to go down and join Manolo. The routine was similar to that of the day before. There was something light to eat for breakfast.

We went back to the clinic and spent several hours there. Dr. Goicoechea had gone out to visit patients in their homes. He left a list of chores for Manolo to work on. It consisted mostly of copying

notes into a ledger. We also had to take an inventory of the medicines that were available so a list could be prepared for a new order.

When it was dark outside, Manolo said it was time to leave. We went back to the hotel in a steady rain. It was also cooler outside. I was uncomfortable, but I kept thinking about the imminent trip to Burgos. I was very excited about going to that city. I had never been to Burgos, of course, but it had suddenly become an important and desirable destination, a place that I had deep yearning for. It was strange that only a few days before, at the shop of Mr. Sánchez in southern France, I had never heard of Burgos. Now it was a highly desirable destination.

That evening we ate in the hotel. There was something left over from lunch that had been prepared. It was boiled chicken with potatoes and some green beans. I was paying little attention to anything except the journey to Burgos. I wanted to leave Vitoria as soon as possible. I went up to my room and immediately tried to go to sleep. For a variety of reasons, I could not sleep. I was excited about the trip to Burgos. I kept thinking about Malu and the suffering she was going through. I thought about Malu's family members who had been shot as if they were little more than animals. I thought about Isabel and the fact that after one evening in her company, I was infatuated with her. I turned over and over for at least a couple of hours. I slept for a while and then woke up as if I had heard a loud noise, but when I listened I heard nothing except some water dripping somewhere, perhaps from the window in my room.

I managed to get through the night and sleep reasonably well. I had strange dreams that mixed scenes from the ship on which I had crossed the Atlantic and the journey from northern France to the border with Spain. At one point I was back in Charlottesville showing Manolo the downtown area of the city. When I finally awoke it was just when the first signs of daylight appeared. I got up and went down to the communal bathroom. I wanted to take a bath and hoped there was some warm water

available. I looked in the bucket and it was half full. I stuck my hand into the water. It was just slightly warm. Probably it was left over from the previous night. I bathed, even though I wasn't very comfortable, but it felt good to be clean again. I wondered when I would find myself soaking in a tub full of warm water. At the time, it seemed like an unlikely but pleasant dream.

I found Manolo already downstairs. I had packed my duffel bag and was ready to go as soon as he gave the word. He was sitting at one of the small tables. I went over and sat down. He had brought what looked like a small teapot to the table, and there were two sets of cups and saucers as well as a small tray with a few slices of bread.

“Good morning, William. I have some tea this morning. You drink a lot of tea in America, right?”

“Yes, but I think it is more of a custom in England. My father drinks tea regularly, of course, and I like it. I prefer coffee, especially the coffee I have been drinking in Spain. Tea is fine this morning, for sure.”

We sat for several minutes drinking the tea and eating the bread. Manolo had a newspaper in front of him and was reading something with a great deal of intensity. I wanted to ask him about the trip details, but I didn't want to interrupt his attention on the newspaper. Eventually, he looked up.

“This paper is from Madrid, from three days ago. It is controlled by the military. It says that in many parts of the country people are realizing that they are gaining control and that the Socialists, Communists, anarchists, and all of the others who align with the Republicans are fighting a losing battle.”

“Do you think that is true?”

“Perhaps it is. It is difficult to say. One of the problems is that the groups on the left are attacking the church.”

“What does that mean? Why are they attacking the church? What does the church have to do with politics?”

“That is a complex subject, William. You see, most Spanish people are Catholics, and I mean Roman Catholics. The church, historically, has supported whoever was in power. The kings have always had a close relationship with the church. Remember that when the conquerors went to the Americas and colonized those areas, like Mexico and Peru, they always had members of the clergy with them. The conquerors wanted the wealth that could be obtained, and the priests wanted the souls. They worked hand in hand, and probably the conquest could not have been accomplished without this partnership.”

“But those conquests were a long time ago, weren’t they?”

“Yes, it is true, but the partnership has continued all of this time. Many people see the church as an accomplice, in the negative sense, of the government. The church has always had a lot of power, but a kind of social power. The church leaders knew that people would be reluctant to do anything that went against the church. That gave the church a lot of power. Today, many of the leftist groups see the church, and its representatives, as standing in the way of progress. Sometimes, they believe that the church people won’t stop their support of the old-fashioned ideas unless they are eliminated.”

“I guess I can see how that might happen.”

“Yes, I can too. But even if the church people have not helped progress and have contributed to abuses both at home and in other lands, I don’t think that we can justify the destruction of church property and the killing of nuns and priests.”

“Has that happened already? Have some of those church people been killed?”

“Unfortunately, yes they have. It has happened a number of times. What bothers me is the fact that these people are defenseless. Priests and nuns never have weapons, and they are not supposed to fight back against anyone.”

“I see what you are saying. It is hard to imagine that anyone would harm them on purpose.”

“William, now you see the insanity of what is happening right now in Spain.”

“Yes, I can see you are right. What will it take to stop all of this?”

“That is the most important question of all. Let’s look at this situation. If the leftists dominate, it will mean big changes for Spain. Maybe that is what we need. But if this means that many of the traditions here in Spain will be destroyed, I’m not sure that would be good. If the military and the monarchists win, it will probably mean that many people, many groups, will be repressed. For example, the Basques will suffer if the military wins, because the Basques are seen as a separate group of people who want to be independent and not a true part of Spain. The military will force everyone to comply with their wishes.”

“It doesn’t seem like there is a very good solution to all of this. No matter who wins, there will be plenty of people who are unhappy.”

“That is a very good observation, William. Many people are going to be unhappy and suffer. Maybe the question will be, who will suffer the least if either side wins? I don’t know the answer to that. I hope that no matter what, I will not suffer too much and my family will not suffer too much. You are an American, so you will not suffer because you will go back to your country. But maybe you can go back to the United States and explain what we Spanish people are going through.”

“I would be glad to do that if I had a way to explain things. I doubt anybody would be interested in listening to me.”

“Maybe, and maybe not. You might have a voice, William. If you know the situation, it means you will know more than many people do.” Manolo stood up. “I see you have your duffel bag. Does that mean you are ready to go?”

“I’m ready to go. Where do I pay for my room?”

“We’ll go to take care of that as soon as I come down. I have to grab my suitcase, and then we can go. I’ll be back down in few minutes.”

A short time later we were on our way to Burgos. Manolo explained that there was a bus service that would take us to Miranda del Ebro. In Miranda del Ebro, Manolo knew a person who worked in the transportation business. It was a person who had a truck and made deliveries of fresh produce between cities in the region. Manolo's father had done business with the man who sometimes delivered goods to Burgos. Manolo said that if we couldn't get all the way to Burgos on this man's truck, we would get pretty close. Then we would simply find another way to get to his home city.

That afternoon, after what was probably the worst bus ride I had ever experienced, we got to Miranda del Ebro. There was a woman on the bus who had four small children with her. They wouldn't stop talking and playing for more than five minutes during the five-hour trip. When we were only one hour away from Miranda, there was a problem with the bus. The driver pulled over to the side of the road when he, and everyone else on the bus, smelled something burning. Everyone got off the bus, and the driver spent almost an hour working on one of the rear wheels and the axle. It was a little warmer that day, and Manolo and I watched as the driver took off his shirt and worked tirelessly to get the vehicle ready to continue. Manolo helped a little, when the man needed to move something heavy and had difficulty doing it. Finally the driver announced, "*Bueno, parece que podemos seguir. Creo que llegamos a Miranda, y allí puedo terminar la reparación.*" I think we can continue. I believe we'll make it to Miranda, and I can finish the repair there."

We made it to Miranda del Ebro, and there was certainly nothing I saw there that drew my attention. It was just a small Spanish city, or maybe a big town, and there was nothing that afternoon that struck me as memorable. Because we arrived later than expected, Manolo told me we could stay in

a warehouse that belonged to someone his father knew. We found a small tavern for dinner that evening, and the only thing I remember was that we ate something I had never heard of before, and that made me feel a little uncomfortable at first. We ate a wild boar stew, and I have to say that I enjoyed it. Perhaps it was because I was so hungry. It was also the first time that I got to try Spanish wine. Manolo told me that the best region for growing wine grapes was La Rioja, which was very close to where we were.

We slept on cots that night, and the warehouse had no heating. It was pretty cool, and I slept in my clothes in order to stay warm. Before I knew it, it was morning, and Manolo was waking me up. A short time later, we were out of the warehouse and looking for a place to get coffee. We found a small place that looked more like a bar than a restaurant, and instead of coffee we had hot chocolate and this pastry that Manolo said was a churro. This was a tubular pastry that was made of a dough fried in oil. It didn't have much flavor, but when it was sprinkled with sugar, it went extremely well with the chocolate. The chocolate was thicker than any kind I had tried before. It was so good that I had an extra serving.

Manolo told me that there was a train that went through Miranda del Ebro every morning at about 9 o'clock in the morning. It went to Burgos with very few stops. The only problem was it was a freight train and didn't have any passenger cars. "I know one of the engineers. I gave him a tip and he permitted me to ride in one of the empty freight cars. He just asked me to jump off the train before we arrived in Burgos. He said the train would be going slowly anyway, so it would not be a problem. It worked fine. So, I figure we can do the same thing this time."

"Look, Manolo, I will just follow you. You have shown that you know what you are doing in everything so far. I have no reason to doubt you now. Just show me the way." Everything went according to plan. The train came half an hour late, but by the time it left the station in Miranda we

were on board. The car we got into had been transporting some kind of livestock. It smelled like leather and manure, and there was a lot of sawdust on the floor. But there was a bench at one end, and we sat down for the journey to Burgos. The train seemed to speed up and slow down frequently, but once I got used to the smell, it was a decent ride. At one point the train stopped completely. Manolo went over to the door, opened it slightly, and looked out. “There is nothing here, no station or anything. Maybe they are stopping to fix something. Maybe it has something to do with other trains. I suppose we’ll be moving again soon.”

We finally heard the cars connecting with each other as the train started up again. The rest of the trip went slowly. There must have been some kind of mechanical problem, but I decided that as long as we kept moving, that was good enough. As we approached Burgos, there was a change in the terrain. For a while there were hills and wooded areas. We seemed to descend moderately, and then things flattened out as we entered the outskirts of the city. It was the middle of the afternoon when the train crawled toward the congestion of an industrial zone.

“All right, William, this is where we have to jump off.” He pulled on the sliding door just enough for us to slip through. I watched as he stepped down to a support bar that was just a couple of feet above the tracks. He waited until there was a dirt surface along the rails. He hopped off and I tossed him my duffel bag and then followed. He lifted his hand and pointed to an area that was on the other side of another set of rails. There were some buildings there, and once we got over to them I saw that there was a road on the other side.

“We have to walk about a kilometer and a half and then we’ll be in the city center. My family lives close by. I’m starving, as you must be too. My mother always cooks a lot, and we don’t usually eat until two o’clock. So, there should be something for us. Can you wait?”

“Sure, no problem. I’m very glad to finally be here in Burgos.”

“It doesn’t look so good around here, but we’ll be in the city center soon, and you’ll see it is beautiful.” Manolo was correct. The outskirts of the cities I had seen didn’t provide much indication of what was coming. All we saw for a while was workshops, warehouses, and vacant lots that had accumulated wood, metal, and other debris.

A few blocks later, the scenery started to change. There were some houses and shops. Some of the houses had gardens, while others had walls in front that didn’t permit viewing the entrances. “We are close to the center now, William.”

I followed Manolo and looked all around. I felt that Burgos was going to be the first place in Spain that I would get to know a little better. Unlike in the previous locations, I wanted to get a feel for this city. I was hoping to spend enough time here to get to know the atmosphere and the people. We came to a street where we turned, and before me I saw a long avenue that definitely looked more inviting. It was what I had heard my uncle in New York refer to as the business district. At least, that is the way it looked to me. I turned to Manolo and said, “This is really nice. I like Burgos already.”

“My friend, this is only the beginning. Wait until you see the old city and the cathedral. We will go there later on. For now, we are just a few blocks from my parents’ home.”

We walked on for several blocks, and then Manolo turned down a small street. It was lined with what I called townhouses and small apartment buildings. On the second block, he went up to the front door of one of the apartment buildings. It had three stories, and when we went inside we saw a staircase on the right side and a door on the left. “We live on the first floor,” he said as he started up the stairs. I didn’t understand. Why was he going up the stairs when he said the family lived on the first floor?

“Manolo, didn’t you say the first floor?”

“Yes, the first. That is where we are going. Someone else lives on the ground floor.”

“On the ground floor? Oh, I see now. In the United States the first floor is the one on the ground level. Here you call the second floor the first floor.”

“That is precisely right, my American friend.” As soon as he finished saying that he knocked on the only door on the landing. A moment later the door opened and a woman saw Manolo and almost screamed at him, “*Ay, Manolito, has venido por fin a tu casa.* Oh, my little Manolo you have finally come back to your home.” She gave him a big hug and kissed him on both cheeks several times. “Why have you waited so long to come home?”

“Mamá, it has only been two months.”

“But it seems to me that it has been two years. Who have you brought with you?”

“Mamá, I would like to present my friend from America, William.”

She reached over and hugged me. “Welcome, young man. You are from America? What part of America?”

“He’s from the United States of America, Mamá.”

“I see. He is visiting Spain, then. But this seems like a strange time to visit Spain. We have so many problems.”

“He knows, Mamá. He came close to being killed a couple of days ago.”

“What? Are you serious?”

“Yes. It was in Vitoria. There was an incident involving a group of Falangists who attacked a car with Socialists in it. Two of the people were killed. And a short time before, William had been in the same car with them.”

“*Ay, dios mio, mi hijo.* Oh my God, my son.”

“He is all right, Mamá. He found out quickly about the dangers of Spain. But he is not afraid. He wants to get to know Spain, and so he has come to spend some time with us. It is all right, isn't it?”

“Of course, it is. I am getting lunch ready, so I hope you are both hungry. Come and sit while I finish the cooking. Your father should be here soon. He is at his office still.”

Manolo and I sat in the small living room. The decoration was very simple, but everything was spotless. The light-colored ceramic tile floor was polished to an almost mirror finish. The sofa where Manolo and I sat was made of dark brown leather and was very comfortable. There was a bookcase against one wall, filled from floor to ceiling, two wooden chairs with dark blue pillows on the seats, a long wooden sideboard that had on top a silver tray with several bottles of wine and liquor, and a round table with a lamp and several picture frames. All of the frames looked like they held family portraits, some of individuals and others of groups. I couldn't remember now if Manolo had mentioned brothers or sisters. Apparently, both of us fell asleep as we sat in the quiet, comfortable living room. The next thing I knew the front door opened and a man, Manolo's father certainly, came in.

“*Manolo, hijo, estás aquí en casa otra vez.* Manolo, son, you are here at home again.” He came over and Manolo stood up quickly. The two hugged and patted each other on the back. Manolo kissed his father in the cheek.

“You look good, Papá. How are you feeling?”

“I'm doing well, despite the back problems, as always. You look good, but I think you have lost weight.”

“I feel fine. Maybe I lost a kilo or two. But I feel good. Let me introduce you to someone. This is William. He is from the United States.”

We shook hands, and I noticed the very strong resemblance between Manolo and his father. They had the same hair, even though Manolo's father was balding in the front. Their eyes were the same shape and color. Both had small clefts in their chins. I hadn't noticed such a close physical resemblance between Manolo and his mother. Manolo definitely took after his father.

"Welcome, William. If Manolo says you are his friend, that is good enough for us. Where are you from in the United States?"

"I am from Virginia. But my father is from England. We moved to the United States when I was very young. My father is a professor at the University of Virginia. It is in Charlottesville."

"Yes, I have heard of this state, Virginia. I believe it is in the southern part of the country, no?"

"Yes, Virginia is in the southern part, but it is next to Washington, D.C."

"Yes, and it is where Thomas Jefferson was from, no?"

"That is right, Jefferson is the most famous person from Virginia and Charlottesville. How do you know about that?"

"Because I have studied the history of the United States. I know some of the famous people, such as Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Abraham Lincoln. These were great men, and great thinkers. In Spain we could use some great thinkers right now. We have many problems, but I am afraid we don't have the great people who can take Spain out of this mess we are in."

Manolo looked over at me and said, "My father has studied a lot. He likes history and politics. And, he is right about Spain needing leaders right now. There are many strong leaders, and many groups, but I don't know if any of them really know what Spain needs at present."

"They are all competing for publicity, they all want to take charge, but very few of them deserve to have the authority," Manolo's father explained. "But we need something to change soon,

because a lot of people are being hurt and many are dying. This has to stop, but I don't know who can take over to get on the road to having things settled and more peaceful."

"Well," said Manolo, looking at his father, "There are many who should not take over. But I think the military, and this General Franco, will soon be gaining more control. The military have the means to establish control. The Republicans might have more people in agreement with them, but they don't have a way to take control, not the way the military does."

Manolo's father was about to say something in response to his son when Manolo's mother came into the room with a large platter. "The food is ready, so please stop talking about politics and all of the fighting. It is time to sit and eat and talk about something more pleasant. One should not eat and talk of difficult matters. I hope you like what I have prepared, William."

We all went over to the dining room table. It was at one end of the living room, toward the back of the apartment. There was enough space for about six people, and once the large platter was put down, there was just enough room for the four of us. The platter contained what looked like a giant roast. Scattered around the sides were potatoes and carrots.

"Esta es una pierna de puerco al horno, y espero que les guste. This is an oven-roasted pork leg, and I hope you like it."

"Mamá, you didn't know I was coming, but you made my favorite dish. How did that happen?"

"Maybe I felt in my heart you were going to arrive today. I don't know, but I hope you enjoy it."

"William," Manolo said as he handed me a plate, "I think you will like this. It is my favorite dish, and nobody makes it like my mother."

Manolo's mother served each of us, with me being the first to get a plate. I waited for everyone else to be served, but the smell of the food was almost too much for me to wait. It was incredible. When we finally started eating, I believed it to be one of the best meals I had ever had the pleasure to consume. The flavor of the ham was intense. Manolo told me it had been marinated for twenty-four hours and then cooked for five hours that morning. The potatoes were great as well, and there were asparagus spears on the outside rim of the platter.

"I almost forgot the wine!" Manolo's mother said suddenly.

"You certainly did," Mr. Palacios said, as he stood up to get wine glasses from inside the sideboard. He returned with four glasses just as Mrs. Palacios came back with two bottles of red wine. I wasn't accustomed to drinking wine. My father preferred beer, and at home that is mostly what we had. I had tried wine a few times, but it never seemed to satisfy my thirst the way beer did. That was about to change. The wine that I was served during that meal was very good. It seemed to be darker and more intensely flavored than wines I had tried before.

Mr. Palacios took a deep sip and said, "William, this is one of the best wines we produce in Spain. It is from Rioja, which is just a short distance from Burgos. I have a friend who has a vineyard, and he helps me to keep my supply of wines up. I help him by keeping his accounting records, and he gives me wine. This time, he told me that he was sharing the family reserve, one he usually keeps for himself. It is excellent, don't you think, Manolo?"

"Yes, it's very good." We sat and ate and drank for a while, mostly in silence. Later Manolo told me that it was a tradition from his father's family that during a meal one should eat, and then after the meal would be the time for conversation. He said there was even a Spanish word for this, which is *sobremesa*.

By the time we got to the *sobremesa*, I was so full, and the wine had taken such an effect, that I wasn't sure I could even talk. I decided to listen to Manolo and his parents as they engaged in some serious conversation.

"Your sister seems to be doing well, but we don't hear from her often. And I worry sometimes that she will be hurt," Mrs. Palacios said.

"Where is your sister, Manolo? I didn't know you had one."

"She is at a convent that is near Burgos. She is a nun. Remember what I told you about some people and their attacks on the church? That is what worries my mother. But I think she is safe here."

"What is her name?"

"Valeria. She is a little younger than I am. She decided to join the church after an incident she was involved in." I was curious, but I did not want to ask about a topic that might be difficult to discuss. We sat in silence for a few moments, and then Mr. Palacios spoke up.

"Valeria was the victim of an attack. She was not seriously hurt, but it scared her quite a bit. She talked with us and decided she should become a nun. We didn't think it was best, but she seemed determined."

Manolo looked at me. "My sister is beautiful, one of the most beautiful girls in Burgos. Now, she is in a place that her beauty doesn't mean much. Maybe that's best, but I don't know." As soon as he said that I heard Mr. Palacios clear his throat. He tapped Manolo on his leg.

"I have news for you, Manolo. Do you remember Doctor Heredia?"

"Yes, of course."

“He is back here in Burgos. He is now working at the Municipal Hospital. I saw him at a restaurant recently, and he told me if you want to work at the hospital he could use some assistance.”

“Yes, I would like to do that. I must take advantage of every opportunity. When I finally get back to medical school, I will have a lot of knowledge. That will allow me to finish faster and make up for this lost time.”

“Dr. Heredia said you should go to the hospital when you are back in town and ask for him. He’ll have plenty of things for you to do.”

“Very good. I am going to show William the city tomorrow, and then I will go to the hospital the day after. It’s Sunday today, right? Maybe William would like to go with me. He helped me at the clinic in Vitoria.”

I looked at Manolo and quickly said, “I would be glad to. It’s funny that before I came to Spain I had only been in a hospital one time, and that was when I was very young. I swallowed something that my father thought might be dangerous. I had to go to get my stomach pumped. It was not exactly a pleasant experience, but as I remember the people were very nice.”

“Perhaps you should explore being a doctor, William,” Manolo said.

“Oh, I don’t think so. I wasn’t very good at science, and only so-so in mathematics. When I was in school, I was much more interested in history and literature.”

“My father likes those things too. He especially likes art and Roman history.”

“I think we will have plenty to talk about then, Mr. Palacios.”

“William,” Mr. Palacios said, “you speak Spanish quite well. How did you manage that?”

“I was telling Manolo about that a few days ago. I had a neighbor who was from Cuba, Doña Angela. She used to give me a ride to school, and she helped me with Spanish. Plus, I took Spanish for several years in school.”

“From Cuba? That is interesting. There is a Cuban man I know here in Burgos. He is a carpenter and does amazing work. Every piece of furniture he makes is like a work of art. I congratulate you on your speaking ability. This will make things easier for you as long as you are here in Spain.”

“Thank you. I still have a lot to learn. But that is one reason I am here.”

The rest of the afternoon and evening were very quiet. Everyone took a rest after that meal, and when it was turning dark Manolo and his parents sat in the living room and listened to the radio. There was a segment of news, from a local station, that they said provided pretty accurate developments on what was happening in Spain. I found it a little difficult to follow everything. It seemed to me that the announcers were speaking very rapidly and mentioning a lot of organizations and people that I was not familiar with. I noticed a book on the round table in the living room. It was about the city of Burgos and had many photographs in it, all in black and white. While the Palacios listened to the news, I looked through the book. There were pictures of the cathedral, which looked like one of those gothic cathedrals of France or Germany. A series of pictures showed the old city, including the central gate that dated back several hundred years. I was very much looking forward to seeing the city with Manolo the next day.

In the Palacios apartment there were three bedrooms. The third one had been Manolo’s sister’s room when she was growing up. Manolo said that when Valeria became a nun the family decided to turn that room into a small office. Apparently, there wasn’t much reason to think she would ever come home to live again. They left the single bed in the room but took out the dresser Valeria had used all

during her childhood and replaced it with a desk. There was not much room because there was also an armoire in the room. Manolo told me there were no closets in any of the bedrooms as it was not the custom in Spain to have built-in closets.

The only other furniture was a small table with a lamp on it. When I first went into the room that evening, Mrs. Palacios came with me. “I changed the sheets for you, William. The bed is old, but I think it is still comfortable. You can use this room as long as you want. You are welcome in our home.”

“That is so nice of you, Mrs. Palacios. I promise not to stay for very long.

“That is up to you and Manolo. There is a bathroom down the hall you can use. It is for you two boys. Tomorrow morning I will fix something for you and Manolo before you go out. Good night, and may you have a good rest, young man.”

That night I had a series of dreams, or I should say a series of dream scenes that were oddly connected and overlapping. In one of them I was in the cellar restaurant that was popular with students of Vitoria. The woman who had sung while the guitar player accompanied her was working there as a waitress and talking to me. Then, I was back in the city of Mondragón in the warehouse with the truck driver from Bilbao. This time, however, my father was in the room eating a meal with us. I couldn't believe my father was there, and even speaking Spanish. That was so strange, and when I finally woke up it was just when my father and I were getting on a train that was leaving for Charlottesville.

The next day, after a light breakfast at the Palacios home, Manolo and I see out to see areas of Burgos. The primary destination was the old city center and the cathedral. I could see the architecture change as we got nearer to the oldest part of town. The buildings were older, a little drabber, and the construction materials were more solid. There were plenty of buildings made of some kind of stone, and others of brick. There were homes and businesses mixed together, somewhat different from what I

was used to in Virginia. Manolo explained that many small businesses were on the ground floor, with the owners living above them. In the taller buildings there were additional apartments.

We came into a square, and as I passed along a small arcade of shops and restaurants, I suddenly saw the cathedral. It was quite amazing. It was in the gothic style, and I stood and stared at the main entrance and all the carvings above the large, wooden doors. I wondered how long it took the stonemasons to do all that carving, and how they worked up there, sometimes several stories high. I wondered if any had ever fallen from the scaffolding and been seriously hurt or killed.

The highest part of the church had multiple spires that seemed to reach up and touch the low-hanging clouds that day in late October. Again, my thoughts went back to the thousands of people who worked on the construction of that impressive building. Some of the people would have been highly skilled craftsmen, but many would have been unskilled laborers who did the heavy lifting and basic work that would have been difficult and a little dangerous. I tried to imagine the people working and the kind of daily routine that they might have had. Their standard of living could not have been much above the poverty level. Maybe they felt some consolation knowing they were working at the cathedral site.

It was very quiet in the main chamber of the church. I stood there, no doubt with my mouth partially open and my breath heavier than normal as I looked at the vast interior and all of the decorations and artwork. It was massive, and when I looked up at the ceiling I almost felt dizzy.

“Magnificent, isn’t it, William?”

“I don’t know what words to use to describe it, but magnificent will do for a start. How were they able to do all of this without modern conveniences, such as electricity?”

“My friend, I don’t really know either, but there were dedicated people and of course the leaders, the architects, and the engineers, who had the master plans in place. The people who

understood those plans were the key element. They were the only ones who could imagine what the final structure would be like. The workers, those who had to do the forming of the stone blocks, the ones who carved the wood, the painters, and the tile-layers, they had to follow the orders and do their best work. Those people probably could not always see how it would all fit together either.”

“I can understand that, yes.” We were both quiet again, and we walked along one side of the cathedral and looked in the individual chapels that ran along the side walls. Each one of those was almost the size of a small church back home. It was truly remarkable, and there seemed to be no end to the art and sculpture. I had seen pictures of these kinds of church back home. Many of the great churches were in France, England, and Italy, but I didn’t realize that these gothic cathedrals were in Spain too. I mentioned that to Manolo. “William, my friend, you may not believe this, but one of the largest of these cathedrals in the world, perhaps only smaller than St. Peter’s in Rome, at the Vatican, is the Cathedral of Sevilla.”

“I had no idea. Sevilla? How far away is that city?”

“Sevilla is pretty far to the south, in Andalucía. I have never been there, but my father has. It is quite different. My father said the people are completely different. They walk around in the street singing and sometimes even dancing. We like song and dance here too, of course, but I haven’t seen many times people doing those things on street corners. Do you remember the guitarist and the singer back in Vitoria? They were from that area. Esmeralda is from Córdoba, which is a city not far from Sevilla.”

I followed Manolo for a while as we looked at one site after the other. We came to the central altar and stood for a while in silence. There were no priests around at the moment, and it was very quiet, and it seemed that quiet was expected always. We continued down the opposite side wall observing things all the while. There were tombs imbedded in the walls and floors. We walked slowly

and, I suppose, reverently taking everything in. When we returned to the opposite end of the main chamber, we heard footsteps and turned to see who it was. A man in a dark brown robe, sandals, and a wooden cross hanging around his neck on a silver chain approached us. He had a gaunt face and a goatee beard but no mustache. His hair was short and somewhat curly. He looked as if he had just stepped out of the fifteenth century to me.

“Good morning. Can I help you young men with anything?”

Manolo answered, “Good morning, Father. We are visiting the cathedral. I have a friend here from the United States, and I am showing him the old city center.”

“From the United States? Is that true?”

“Yes, it’s true. His name is William, and I am Manolo Palacios, from here, Burgos.” Manolo reached out to shake hands with the priest and I did the same.

“I am Father Nicolás. It is a pleasure to meet you. Would you like me to show you some things here in the cathedral?”

“Father, that would be very nice, yes please.”

“Then come this way,” he said, and he went through a short door that we had not even noticed. On the other side we were in a room with several wooden tables and four chairs at each one. “This is the secondary refectory, where most of us eat. The main refectory is in another area and is for the higher-ranking officials of the church. The kitchen is over there and where the food is prepared for everyone, but we generally eat separately. If you are still here at one o’clock you can join us for lunch.” Before we could respond, Father Nicolás had turned and was headed for another door. He went through, and again we followed him.

The next room looked like a dressing area. There were three large armoires against one wall and several tables with boxes and folded cloths and other priestly looking items. Father Nicolás did not stop in there. He walked through and went through still another door. This one led to a small outside patio area. It had a stone floor and a roof covering one side. Under the roof there were several wrought-iron benches. This must have been a rest area or outdoor waiting lounge. On the far side there was a tall gate. We watched as Father Nicolás unhooked a latch and opened one side of the gate.

“Follow me, please,” he said as he stepped through. We followed him and found ourselves in a cloister. This was the inner courtyard that was partially indoors and partially outside. It looked like it hadn’t changed in four hundred years. Father Nicolás walked slowly and provided a brief history of the cathedral. He was very well informed, and I wondered if he was the cathedral historian. He told us about the older building materials and showed us a wall that went all the way back to the fourteenth century as part of the original foundation of the building. It was incredible, because in Charlottesville there were only a few buildings I had ever heard of that went back to the early nineteenth century.

We ended up getting a one-hour tour of the place. That included a visit to the library, which had books going back to the time of Christopher Columbus. The place was more like a museum than a church, I thought. “Young men, I have things I must tend to, but if you want to stay a little longer you can join us for lunch.”

“Thank you very much, Father. I am showing William the city today, and there is still much to see. You are kind to offer us lunch, but we should go.” We both shook hands with Father Nicolás, who suggested we return for mass. Manolo said we would do that, and we left.

“Manolo, that is the first time I have been in a cathedral. As a matter of fact, it is the first time I have been in a Catholic church.”

“Really? I don’t go to mass often, but I am Roman Catholic, like about everyone else here.

What is your religion, William?”

“My religion? That’s a good question. You know that my father is from England. The main church there is called the Church of England. My father is quite religious. His family, as far as I know, is not a very religious one. My father doesn’t talk about it very much. I recall when we had people from the university at our house for dinner, there was a discussion about church and religion. My father said that he was a Freethinker. That is the word in English.”

“A what? Oh, I know what that is. In Spanish we say *libre pensador*.”

“*Libre pensador*. All right, then I probably would have to call myself that too.”

“That is fine with me, William. But remember that much of the conflict going on in Spain now involves religion. The conservatives are substantially religious while the Republicans and most people on the left are often anti-religious. You have to be careful when talking about that subject.”

“That is no problem. Religion is not something I think or talk about much anyway. I respect people who are religious, but it isn’t something I find personally very attractive.”

Just as we finished this discussion, we were back at the main entrance to the cathedral. We went out and the day was pleasant. It was still cloudy, but it was getting a little warmer. I thought it was a great day to be out seeing Burgos. I was about to tell Manolo that I was getting hungry when he said, “Well, my American friend, you are going to try something interesting if you are hungry.”

“I’m hungry, and you know I’ll try anything you recommend.”

“Great. Then let’s go over here to a place I know. It is a tavern where the owner makes morcilla, and I think it is the best on Burgos.”

“What is morcilla?”

“Morcilla is blood sausage.”

“It’s what? Blood sausage? Seriously?”

“Yes, and it is amazing.”

“I guess I can try it, even if it sounds pretty strange.”

He led me through a maze of small streets. We eventually came to a very small place on a corner. We were still in the old city center, but I was disoriented with the winding streets and alleys. We went inside and there was only a bar with about a dozen tall chairs. There were only two customers when we went in. Suddenly I heard a voice say, “*Hola Manolo. ¿Dónde has estado, hombre? ¿Qué coño has hecho, y porque no has venido a saludarme últimamente?* Hi Manolo. Where have you been, man, and why the hell haven’t you come to say hello recently?” It was a young man who was behind the bar cleaning glasses. Manolo stepped up to the bar, and the two hugged briefly.

“I was in Vitoria, going to school. But now everything is screwed up, so I have come back home for a while. How the hell are you doing, Ricardo?”

“Not so good, but not so bad either. I don’t get involved in discussions about politics or religion. That is asking for trouble in Spain today, isn’t it?”

“Well,” Manolo said, “better to talk about love and food, right?”

“You are right, my friend. However, love is complicated, but good food is not.”

“You are right. Ricardo, allow me to present my friend. This is William from the United States. William, this is Ricardo, my good friend from high school.” We shook hands.

“Welcome to Burgos. I hope you like the city. If you are a friend of Manolo, you are my friend as well,” he said with a sincere look on his face. “What will you have to drink?”

“William, you want beer?”

“Beer is fine, yes.”

“Good, because it goes great with the morcilla, right Ricardo?”

“Some people prefer it with red wine, but I will have it with anything.” He turned and went back to one corner behind the bar. There was a small window there, like the arrangement I had seen in Irún, that opened into the kitchen. Ricardo said in a low voice, “*Dame dos porciones de morcilla*” Give me two servings of morcilla” Then he went over and served two glasses of beer from a spigot. He placed the glasses in front of us, and then reached back for a small basket. He put it in front of us, and inside were slices of bread. He reached under the counter and pulled up two small plates, each with a fork on it that was partially wrapped in a paper napkin. Right after that we heard a bell, like the ones that are used at the front desk of a hotel. Ricardo went over to the window and brought back a larger plate with two pieces of morcilla. They were shaped like sausages I had eaten before, and I immediately thought of my father and his bangers, his favorite breakfast meat. But these things were very dark. I was a little suspicious, but I had no choice but to try these things. Blood sausage sounded a bit strange, but I could not back off from my promise to try them.

I observed as Manolo got started. I would simply do the same thing as him. I took a sip of my beer and watched as he cut a piece of the sausage with a knife that was on the counter, and then put it on top of a piece of the bread. He stuck that in his mouth, closed his eyes and ate. “*Dios mio, Ricardo, esta morcilla está mejor que nunca, hombre. Mis felicitaciones a tu padre. My God, this morcilla is better than ever. My congratulations to your father. William, you won’t believe this stuff.*”

I did the same thing as Manolo. I put the bread and piece of morcilla in my mouth with a bit of trepidation. But when I started to chew, I realized it was delicious. What was interesting was that it

didn't taste like blood to me. It tasted like a very flavorful piece of sausage, with some elements that were different from any sausage I had ever tried.

“What do you think, my friend?”

“It is excellent, I must admit. Blood sausage? I wasn't sure I would like it, but it is very good.” Ricardo had stepped over to the two people, a man and woman, who were sitting at the bar. He was talking to them, and they too had a plate with morcilla. However, they were drinking glasses of red wine.

Ricardo looked over at us. “So, what does your friend from the United States say?”

Manolo, who had a mouth full of bread and morcilla hesitated a moment, swallowed, and said, “He says it is good but not as good as American morcilla.”

Ricardo looked at both of us with a puzzled expression on his face. “Really?”

Manolo looked at me and then at Ricardo. “Of course, I am kidding. They don't eat morcilla in the United States, do they, William?”

“No, we don't make anything like this. At least I don't think so.”

Ricardo smiled. “You like to tease me, Manolo. And I started to believe you.” They both laughed, and I joined in. We were quiet for a few minutes while we ate the morcilla and finished the beer. Ricardo was busy fixing dishes and serving drinks for other customers who had come in the tavern after us. Without saying anything he came back over and put a dish of olives and chunks of cheese in front us as well as two more glasses of beer.

We finished up and asked for the bill. Ricardo came over with a small paper pad. He handed it to Manolo. Manolo looked at the pad and nodded his head. He pulled out some money and put it on the counter. “That was great, Ricardo, as always. What night can you go out?”

Ricardo looked at us both. “Maybe Thursday. Come by before then, and I’ll let you know. Did you like the food?” he said while looking at me.”

“Yes, it was quite good, thank you. The morcilla was delicious. I’ve never had anything like that, but I enjoyed it very much.”

We left and walked back the way we came.

We walked over four hours that afternoon. Manolo showed me his favorite places in the city. It was obvious how much pride he had in his hometown. At one point he said, “Now I am going to take you someplace kind of special. We have to walk about a kilometer and a half or so, but I think it is worth it.”

“That sounds fine to me, Manolo. I have nothing else to do.”

We walked through a quiet neighborhood that had small apartment buildings and homes that seemed to be made for people with higher income. The architecture was more modern and the lawns and gardens seemed to be more carefully cared for. We were on a long avenue, but when we got close to the end of it, the construction stopped. Then there was a change in the area, and a few blocks away I could see a building that was different from the rest. It was surrounded by gardens and had an elevated roof and a wall that extended to one side.

“That looks like a church, like the cathedral we saw this morning, but it doesn’t have the spires,” I said as we approached the building.

“This is different. It is a monastery. It is called the Monasterio de Santa María la Real de las Huelgas. We call it the Monastery of Las Huelgas. It’s a funny name because *huelga* in Spanish means strike, as in workers going on strike. It was founded by the Cistercians in the twelfth century. That means it is even older than the Cathedral in the city center.”

“That is amazing – the twelfth century?”

“Yes, but the original part is quite small. Most of the rest of the building was built after that, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.”

We were approaching the building now, and I realized that it was indeed much different in layout from the Cathedral. It was spread out horizontally, whereas the Cathedral was taller and more concentrated.

“Will we be able to get inside to look around?”

“I think so, yes. I know someone here at the monastery.”

“Really? Who is that?”

“My sister, Valeria. Remember that I told you last night that she is a nun?” Before I could react, he went up to a small wooden door off to the side of what looked like the main entrance. He knocked and waited. There was no response, so he knocked again, harder this time. Finally, the door opened, and a nun stood before us.

“Buenos días, Hermana. Yo soy Manolo Palacios, hermano de Hermana Valeria. Quisiéramos hacer una visita al convento. Good morning Sister. I am Manolo Palacios, brother of Sister Valeria. We would like to visit the convent for a little while.”

The nun looked at Manolo for a few moments and then stood aside, implying we should go in. We entered a small room that only had two candles burning for light. It was a little difficult to see after coming in from the outside. The nun remained silent and turned to go through an archway. We followed her as she wound through a series of rooms. Eventually, we came to the central part of the church, where the main altar was located. We went in, and the first thing I noticed was the flooring. Unlike in the cathedral, where all the flooring was either tile or stone, this place had wood flooring. It made the whole space feel different, even warm.

The nun indicated with her hand that we should go in and said we were welcome to spend time in the main chapel. She then left, so silently that the only sound we heard was the small creaking that inevitably comes with wood floors.

I was wondering why the nun had not said a word to us. Right after she was gone, Manolo turned to me and said in a quiet voice, “She has taken a vow of silence, I’m sure. Otherwise, she would have said something. It is a tradition with this convent. My sister was in the same situation the last time I was here. Maybe we will see her, and maybe we can even talk to her. I’m not sure.”

The inside of the main chapel was much smaller than the one in the Cathedral, but to me it seemed more elegant. Part of the reason was the wood flooring, but also it felt warmer overall, probably because it was smaller. The decoration of the walls and ceiling was simpler, less ornate and more appropriate for the convent setting. There was nobody else in the chapel at the time. There was a bank of small candles that was on one side of the main altar, and the candles gave the place a soft glow. Manolo and I walked around and looked at the art and the furniture.

He glanced at me and raised his eyebrows, which I interpreted as an indication of how beautiful the place was. I nodded in agreement. He then turned to go out a set of double doors that was on one side of the chapel. We went through and into a hallway. That hallway led us to another set of doors. We went through and found ourselves in a small chapel with stone walls and almost no decorations.

“William, this is the original construction site of the building. It goes back to the thirteenth century. I think this was all that there was here in the beginning, this small room. Can you imagine what life was like for the nuns and priests who lived here during that time?”

“No, I can’t. Life must have been tremendously challenging then.”

“No doubt it was. But, at least the people were not involved in a civil war, the way we are now in this country.”

“I suppose you are right,” I said, but I had no idea of what the conditions were like more than seven hundred years ago in this place and this part of Spain. I wondered what it was like without electricity, cars and even the radio. How would people have known about developments in other parts of the country or anywhere else in the world?

We continued along another corridor until we came to another door. We went through and found ourselves in the inner courtyard. It was beautiful. Along the interior wall, everything was covered by a roof, but there was no wall between the building and the patio. It was in the form of a quadrangle. The central part was uncovered and had grassy areas and a garden.

I had seen photographs of similar places in books about France and Germany. It was a bit of an odd feeling being in one of the places that as a child I could only see in black and white pictures in books. What were these areas called? I tried to remember, and then the word came back to me. This was a cloister. There was nothing in site that could possibly have a connection with the twentieth century. It must have been the same hundreds of years ago.

Manolo spoke in a whisper as he stood close to me. “This is the inner courtyard and the place for peace and reflection, Valeria told me. The only sounds here are of birds chirping. The city is far enough away that those noises do not interfere with this tranquil atmosphere.”

As we looked around, we noticed a bench on the opposite side of the courtyard. There were two nuns sitting there. The one on the left was wearing a black robe and a white headpiece of the kind I had seen in movies. The other was wearing a white robe and the same headpiece. They sat so motionless that it almost seemed that they were mannequins dressed in nun attire.

“William,” Manolo said in a slightly elevated whisper, “that nun, the one on the left, is my sister, Valeria.” I looked over to the bench that was about thirty yards away. I could barely see the faces of either of the women. I immediately wondered if Manolo’s sister had seen us, and if so, if she

recognized her brother. We both stood there, almost frozen for what seemed a long time but was probably less than half a minute. Then, as we watched, Valeria, dressed in black, stood up, turned to the nun who was still sitting, bowed and crossed herself several times. Then she started walking, under the canopy area along one side, toward us.

When she got closer Manolo approached her and gave her a hug and a kiss on each cheek. I stood back out of respect. The two of them talked, but so softly that I could hear almost nothing. Then they both came over to where I was standing.

“William,” Manolo said in a quiet voice, “*esta es mi hermana, Valeria. Valeria, te presento a William, un americano que está visitando Burgos.* William, this is my sister, Valeria. Valeria, let me introduce you to William, an American who is visiting Burgos.”

Valeria stepped closer but did not reach out to me in any way. I assumed that her behavior was based on what must have been strict convent rules. She nodded her head slightly, and I saw just the hint of a smile. I saw the family resemblance immediately. She had the same eyes and forehead as Manolo. Her face indeed seemed angelic to me at that moment. There was no hair visible, and the headpiece included a kind of scarf that draped her forehead, and the cloth came up to just below her chin. Not even her ears could be seen. I wondered what her hair was like and assumed that it must have been like Manolo’s. Then, I heard her speak.

“*Estás muy lejos de tu tierra, William. Espero que encuentres a España y a Burgos muy agradables. Estoy contento de veros aquí en el convento. Perdonadme que no hable inglés.* You are far from home, William. I hope you find Spain and Burgos to your liking. I am pleased to see you both here in the convent. Excuse me for not speaking English.”

“William speaks Spanish quite well,” Manolo added before I had a chance to speak. My problem was I was almost speechless in front of Valeria. I found her tremendously attractive even

though I could see so little of her. I think it must have been her eyes. I stumbled with my first words, so I kept it short.

“I’m pleased to meet you.” She and I made brief eye contact, and the moment I was hoping to keep looking into her eyes, she lowered her face. She then turned to Manolo.

“When did you return to Burgos? I thought you were in Vitoria. And how are my mother and father?”

“My mother and father are well. I was in Vitoria, yes. But the medical school has stopped for now, all classes canceled. I was working in a clinic but decided I could do that same kind of work here in Burgos. How have you been? No more vow of silence?”

“I am well. No, I have stopped the vow of silence for now. Even so, I cannot stay for long. The Mother Superior would not approve.”

“But you are my sister.”

“Yes, of course. I am so glad to see you and that you are doing well, Manolo. You look good, but you have lost a little weight.”

“I think a couple of kilos. But I feel very good. You look great too, Valeria.”

“Yes,” I suddenly said, and hoped I wasn’t out of place. I felt like I should not have said that, and I could feel the immediate heat of blushing in my face. Valeria looked at me, and there was a bigger smile now.

“That is nice of you to say, William. Why have you come to Spain? It is a dangerous place to be right now. I hope you have not experienced anything bad.”

Manolo jumped in now and said, “Actually, William had a close call in Vitoria. He was hitchhiking and given a ride by some Socialists who were on their way to a meeting in Vitoria. After they dropped him off at the student hotel where I stay in Vitoria, the car was attacked by Falangists. Two of the people were killed, and the girl was injured. We saw the girl in a clinic two days later. She had been hurt, but it was nothing that bad. The doctor expects her to recover.”

“Oh my God. That sounds terrible. William, you could have been hurt or killed. If I were you I would have left the country immediately. Why do you stay?”

I looked her straight in the eyes. “I’m not sure I can answer that. I think the country is beautiful, and there is so much history. The food is fantastic, and I have met lots of interesting people. And I have seen such beautiful women.” As soon as I said that, I felt uncomfortable and looked toward Manolo. Now it was Valeria’s turn to blush. I saw the red come up in her cheeks. Perhaps she felt it, because at that moment she turned to look back at the bench where she had been sitting with the other nun. I saw her nod her head very slightly at the woman and then turn back to look at us.

“I must go in now. My time in the patio is over and I must go back to my room and there are some chores I must complete. Manolo, I am so pleased to see you.” She stepped up and hugged her brother. She turned and said to me, “So nice to meet you, William. I hope you will be careful and enjoy your time in Burgos. Perhaps we will meet again someday. God be with both of you.” She turned and walked back the way she had come. She did not turn, and when she got to the bench where she had been sitting, the other nun stood up and the two of them went in another direction.

I said softly, “Manolo, your sister is beautiful.”

“Yes, she is beautiful. You should see her with regular clothes on. The habit and headpiece hide her hair. I have never seen a nun as pretty as my sister.” I was going to say the same thing, but I kept quiet. I didn’t want Manolo to think that I was being in any way disrespectful. Frankly, I was

floored by Manolo's sister. She was spectacular, and I couldn't help thinking that since she was a nun, there was no chance I would ever spend any time with her on a personal basis.

I had been in Spain now for a little over two weeks. I had met four women so far, other than Manolo's mother, and all of them had struck me as attractive. Malu had something special about her, definitely. I wouldn't say she was pretty, but she had an exotic air about her that I found compelling. I wondered how she was faring now, back in Vitoria. Manolo had introduced me to his friend in Vitoria, Isabel. She had an incredible smile, beautiful teeth, and gorgeous hair. She also had dimples that enhanced her look. She was small, but everything was in perfect proportion.

The singer in that underground club also had been attractive. She had a classic beauty, and if I had seen her dressed in clothing from the Golden Age of Greece, it would have been like seeing Helen of Troy herself. That is a kind of beauty that is so stunning that it actually intimidates many men. It made me feel pretty inferior, as if she wouldn't have had the time to even give me a brief glance.

Now, I had to compare those three to Valeria. Valeria was probably the most pure looking of the women. I wondered how much that had to do with the fact that she was a nun; no doubt it was considerable. I tried to remember what movie star she looked like. I could easily imagine Valeria as an actress and being pursued by some leading Hollywood actor.

I was thinking about all of this when I heard Manolo say my name. "William, we should go now. It will take us about an hour to walk back to my home."

"Of course. I can't thank you enough for bringing me here. The convent is beautiful and interesting from a historical standpoint. Also, it was a pleasure meeting your sister."

I was completely smitten by Valeria Palacios. All I could see was her face as Manolo and I walked back toward downtown Burgos. I kept wondering what she would look like in regular clothes, not in her nun's habit. Perhaps this is a good time for me to explain something important about myself.

I had little experience with girls. I had been raised mostly in Charlottesville. However, I spent most of the time around people who were connected with the University. My father was an instructor at the school, but there were no female students. I attended a private high school, but for some strange reason there were no girls in that school that I felt attracted to. There were several female students who were physically attractive. But, once I got to know them, there were always reasons why I didn't have any desire to establish a closer relationship with them.

Eleven

There was one girl in particular who I felt I had a crush on. Her name was Helen Curtis. The first time I saw her, I was a junior and she was a senior. We were in the same History of Europe class and a friend introduced us when we were leaving class one day. We simply greeted each other, and then she went quickly away.

“Wow, that girl is beautiful. What did you say her name is?”

My friend, Anthony, said, “Helen. Helen Curtis. Her father owns a lot of real estate outside of Charlottesville. They have a lot of money and a bunch of horses. I was in their house once, and it was the most elegant house I have ever seen. I think that place has seven or eight bedrooms. The furniture is so nice I didn’t even want to sit on a chair because I thought they would not like it. Helen told me once she has three horses to choose from when she wants to go on a ride.”

“She is gorgeous. I wonder if she has a boyfriend.”

“I don’t quite know. She is probably the best-looking girl in this school. She seems very stuck-up to me. Of course, you never know what might be going on in her mind. Ask her on a date and see what happens.”

It took me a long time to get up the nerve to ask Helen out. There was a dance organized at Fry Springs, a kind of country club in Charlottesville, near Christmas. My father was planning to go, and he suggested I might want to attend. I told him I might want to invite a date, and he said we would help out any way I needed. “I can go pick up your date, and then take her home afterwards.”

I finally asked Helen one day after school. I knew what class she had for sixth period, and that her classroom was down the hallway from mine. I left my classroom and quickly walked down the corridor to her classroom. A few moments later the door opened and the students started to come out. She was one of the last ones to leave the room. She saw I was standing there and looked at me for a few extra moments.

“Helen, do you have a moment?”

“Oh, hi, William. What’s on your mind?”

“I’m, uh, going to a dance at Fry Springs on the twenty-third. Would you be interested in going?”

“Fry Springs? I’ve been there before.”

“My father is going. We can pick you up if you need a ride.”

“Thanks, William. I have to see.”

“It’s in a couple of weeks, so let me know. I think it might be fun.”

“Yes, it sounds like it. I have to see what Lawrence has in mind.”

“Lawrence? Who is that?”

“He’s a friend. He’s a second-year student at the University. He’s taken me on a couple of dates recently.”

“Oh, yeah. Maybe you can’t make it. I understand.” I was getting frustrated with this issue. These girls seemed to always be more interested in guys who were older. As I watched she turned and started walking quickly down the hallway. I realized I had gotten excited about someone totally in

vain. I wondered if this was getting to be a pattern and if I would ever find a steady girlfriend. Maybe I was simply aiming too high.

So as for girls in my life so far, there wasn't much to report. I often wondered if it was because of the way I looked or my facial expressions. Maybe I was in the wrong environment. Charlottesville was a little peculiar, I thought, and my father reinforced that idea when he and I would talk. I even discussed the girl situation with him a couple of times. He never interfered with my social life, but he asked on a couple of occasions if I was "seeing anyone," as he put it. My response both times was, "No." That was about the extent of the conversation.

We didn't talk much on the way back to Manolo's home. My mind kept returning to Valeria. Manolo seemed unusually quiet, and I wondered what was on his mind. We finally got back to the Palacios home. It was evening and the sun was setting, though it was barely visible through a mostly cloudy sky. That evening we had dinner with Manolo's mother and father. The topic for a good part of the meal was Valeria. Mr. Palacios had heard news about problems in some parts of Spain with attacks on churches and convents. In one city a convent had been attacked and five priests were killed and several nuns raped. I struggled with understanding this, and Mr. Palacios provided a pretty good explanation.

Many of the political groups that were associated with the Communists, the Socialists and the Anarchists believed that Spain had committed atrocities in the past. The best example was what the conquistadores had done in the New World. Mr. Palacios described how Francisco Pizarro with a force of less than two hundred mercenaries had almost totally destroyed the Inca civilization of Peru. Always by Pizarro's side were representatives of the church. It was the priests' job to make sure that all survivors became converts to Catholicism.

The other key aspect of the discussion dealt with the close connection between the Spanish crown and the church hierarchy. According to the political groups, both the government and the church worked together to suppress the economic development of the poor people and ensure that the wealth was in the hands of the rulers and the church. Evidence of this could be seen in virtually every church in the country. The altars and other decorations were made primarily of the gold and silver that was brought back to Spain from the New World. Shiploads of gold and silver came back from the colonial Spanish governments centered in Mexico City and Lima.

Mr. Palacios described what he saw as the great irony of everything. The church had the role of ensuring that everyone would maintain their connection with God, and they used this power to control people and guarantee the self-serving system. The royalty depended on the church to keep people in their place, and thereby sustain the system for the rulers. Naturally, Mr. Palacios explained, it was a self-perpetuating system that had functioned for centuries. Then, in recent years, the oppressed peoples decided that the system was highly abusive, and the only way to make up for centuries of abuse was to force the system to break up. The fact that Spain had not kept up with the rest of western Europe economically didn't help.

“But I have a question, Mr. Palacios,” I said when he took a break from his narrative. “The Christian religion is supposed to be one of peace and kindness. How did the church stray away from those ideals, and why do the radical groups today think that hurting priests and nuns will make up for abuses that those people might have had nothing to do with?”

“That is a good question, William. I am not sure I can explain it sufficiently. You see, when people believe the system is rotten, then their goal becomes to destroy and replace that system. Consider what has happened in Russia in the last several decades. There has been untold misery in that country because the modern thinkers felt that the only hope for real change was to completely destroy

the old system. That explains why the Czar's family had to be destroyed. It also explains much of the political change going on in parts of Europe today, such as Germany and Italy. Old regimes are being destroyed and new ones put in their place. But how can a brand-new regime, without any precedent, be expected to work well?"

"I understand that, yes. We had a similar situation in the United States when we got rid of English rule. Of course, as you know, my family is from England, and my perspective is a little different. But I have never lived in England, only in America. When the colonies decided to separate from England, we did not go out and kill everyone who was originally from England. We didn't have to destroy the old system and start a brand new one. As a matter of fact, the new system in the States was based quite a bit on the system in England."

"Yes, indeed. That was the case, even though I don't have such deep knowledge of the history of your country and that of England. But there is another important factor to consider. You are Anglo-Saxons by heritage, and here we have a mixed heritage of Greeks, Romans, Arabs, and other barbarians. Our mentality is quite different. We react to situations in different ways. I have heard that English people, when confronted with a problem, sit around for a long time thinking about what course of actions to take. Here in Spain, we don't do that. We react quickly, perhaps without thinking very much, and try to make changes. Sometimes those changes are no good, but when we want change, we want it right away."

We all sat quietly for a bit. Mrs. Palacios seemed a bit distracted. Manolo was following everything, but it seemed to me that out of respect for his father's knowledge, he was staying mostly silent.

Finally, Manolo spoke up. “William is not a religious person, Papá. We discussed that some. He is a Freethinker. I told him to be careful when saying that because there are people here in Spain who will think he is one of the radicals.”

“I suppose it is best to leave those discussions to others. I doubt William wants to engage people here in Spain in that discussion.”

“No,” I quickly added, “I don’t want to engage anyone in a discussion about religion, or politics for that matter. I have my ideas, but I don’t feel that I have to tell everyone about them. Besides, I am a visitor here and I don’t want to meddle in things that are not my business.”

“I think that is a good policy, William.” He stopped now and it was quiet again. “I have a suggestion,” Mr. Palacios said. “Why don’t we have a glass of brandy and think about these heavy matters quietly for a while?”

“Good idea, Papá,” Manolo said. “I’ll get the brandy and the glasses.” He stood up and walked toward the kitchen.

“Have you tried our Spanish brandy, William?”

“No, not yet. The only liquor we have in my home back in the States that my father always has around is Scotch. That is what my father likes. I usually only drink beer. But I will be glad to try your brandy. By the way, I thought brandy was made in France.”

“Yes, it is originally from France. But as you might know, there has been some substantial interchange between our countries over the last couple of hundred years. We produce excellent French style liquor, such as brandy, and the French produce great Spanish style music, such as the opera Carmen.”

“I hadn’t thought about that. It is certainly interesting.” As soon as I said that Manolo came back with a wooden tray that contained a bottle and four short, rounded glasses. I watched as he opened the bottle and poured a portion of the caramel-colored liquid into each glass. He did this with something of a flourish. He began with the bottle above the rim of each glass, and once the liquid was flowing he lifted his arm quickly but smoothly, until each glass had almost precisely the same amount of liquid.

“This is one of our finest brandies, William. I hope you enjoy.” He lifted his glass and held it out in front of him, obviously as a toast and something the rest of us imitated. “*Salud, amor y pesetas, y tiempo para gozarlos*. Here’s to health, love and money, and time to enjoy all of them.”

He pulled the glass back to his mouth and took a large sip. We all did the same. I almost choked on my first sip, as the brandy was quite strong. I hadn’t had any hard liquor in months, and certainly never any Spanish brandy.

“Easy, William, drink it slowly.”

“I like Scotch whisky, William,” Mr. Palacios said. “I have had it a number of times. But it is a little expensive and not so easy to find here in Spain. That is especially true now with all of the mess we have here.”

We sat quietly for a while enjoying the brandy. I thought it would be like Scotch, but I was wrong. The flavor was more intense, and it also seemed to be more alcoholic. We finally finished, and I was glad Manolo didn’t offer me anymore. Apparently, it was the Palacios custom to get one good serving of brandy, and that was all. It definitely suited me.

“Papá, I saw Valeria today. William and I went to the Huelgas Convent, and Valeria was there. She met William, and we got to talk a little.”

“Did you? This is nice. I hope she is doing well.”

“She seemed fine to me. But we didn’t talk for long. She had to go back to her room.”

“William, you met my daughter today. What do you think?”

“Mr. Palacios, your daughter is very nice, and she has a beautiful face.”

“She takes after her mother,” Mr. Palacios said, and then he laughed and looked at Mrs. Palacios.

“I miss her so much,” Mrs. Palacios said, and it seemed she was on the brink of crying.

“Does she get to come home sometimes for a visit?” I asked nobody in particular.

Manolo was the first one to speak. “She can come once every six months, I think now. It depends on her level at the convent. If she is a novice she cannot come very often. But I think she has moved up rank at the convent. I think she qualifies for more visits now.”

Now I noticed tears in Mrs. Palacios’s eyes. Still, she remained silent. Manolo noticed that I saw that his mother seemed a little upset. He said, “My mother is worried because of all the things we hear about problems with church people in other parts of Spain. She worries that one day there will be an attack at Huelgas. But I don’t believe that will ever happen.”

We were quiet for a while and relaxing after a big meal. I was very tired and hoped that Manolo would suggest going to bed early. He then said, “I am going to turn on the radio and listen to the news. William, if you are tired you can go to bed, as you wish.”

“Yes, I am pretty tired. We must have walked ten miles today. If you hear anything interesting on the news, you can tell me tomorrow. By the way, what is the plan for tomorrow?”

“Oh, yes, I almost forgot. Tomorrow if you want you can join me at the hospital. I am going to spend a little time here to see what work I can do. There is always something to be done there, so you are welcome to come.”

“That sounds fine to me, yes. So, good night, Mr. Palacios and Mrs. Palacios. The meal was great and the brandy very good too, even if it was a little strong. Manolo, I’ll see you in the morning. Please knock on the door when you get up. I can be ready quickly.”

The next day after breakfast Manolo and I went to the local hospital. Manolo explained on our way that Dr. Heredia was one of the surgeons at the hospital and an old friend of his father. Manolo explained that it was Dr. Heredia who had convinced him he should study medicine. Heredia was originally from Madrid but had moved to Burgos to get out of the “intensity” of the capital city.

When we entered the hospital, we were told that Dr. Heredia was in his office on the second floor. We went up, and a couple of minutes later we were in the doctor’s office.

“Good morning, Dr. Heredia,” Manolo said as we entered after knocking on the door. Seated at a modest desk was the physician and family friend. Dr. Heredia looked to me to be in his sixties. He was balding on top but had dark, curly hair on both sides of his head. He immediately stood up, and I saw that he was both unusually tall and thin. For a moment I thought he looked a little like Abraham Lincoln, with the same gaunt features of his face.

“Manolo, que gusto verte de nuevo. Estoy muy contento que hayas venido. Manolo, it is so good to see you again. I am pleased that you have come.”

They shook hands warmly. Manolo then spoke. “Doctor, please meet my friend William, from the United States.” I shook the doctor’s hand, and his grip was like a vise.

“The United States? Young man, you are a long way from home. And you have come to a difficult place. Spain’s problems are terribly serious right now. I think we could learn quite a bit about self-governance from you Americans. Do you speak Spanish?”

“Yes, somewhat. I am learning a lot.”

“Oh, I see you speak very well.”

“Thank you. Manolo has been helping a lot.”

“I’m sure he has, of course. Please, sit down.”

We sat on the two chairs that were to the side of the desk. The room was cluttered with lots of papers, files, ledgers, and some medical instruments.

“Manolo,” the doctor said, “what happened with your studies?”

“The medical school in Vitoria is temporarily shut down. I was helping in a clinic there, but I decided that if I can help out, I would prefer to do it here in my home city.”

“Yes, of course. And I can use your help here. We have had many new patients come in recently. You heard about the attack that occurred recently in Villadiego?”

“No, I didn’t. What happened?”

“Apparently a group of Anarchists came from the east and was looking for the opportunity to cause a problem with some farmers who had failed to take a greater interest in agricultural reform that the Republicans have been promoting. At least three people were killed, and another twelve or so injured. Seven people were brought here to this hospital. Two were severely hurt, and the others less so. The two, a man and a woman are still here. The others have returned home. It was pretty terrible. Several of the people had limbs cut off so that they would never again be able to work their farms. It is

a fanaticism that is hard to understand. The man here with us lost his left arm below the elbow and suffered a skull fracture. I think he will make it. His wife suffered a serious back injury and will have difficulty walking for the rest of her life I am afraid.”

“That is terrible, Dr. Heredia.”

“Yes indeed. But we must do what we can and hope this violence subsides soon. I am a physician and like to stay busy, but I would prefer to treat children with influenza or old people with the typical ailments of the elderly. I am not accustomed to treating people from war zones.”

“Will it be possible for William to help out as well? He is willing to do whatever. Right, William?” Manolo said as he turned to look at me. I nodded.

“There is always much work to get done. I take it William has no medical experience.”

“That is correct,” Manolo said. I quickly added, “I have a university education, so I can do something, I’m sure.”

“Very good. What did you study?”

“I was an English major.”

“Ah, the liberal arts. I wanted to study history and literature and art, but my parents were insistent that I go into medicine. My father was a researcher, and I had little choice. I followed in his footsteps, but I still read great works whenever I have the time.”

Dr. Heredia picked up a pen and started writing in a ledger. A few moments later he stood up. “Very good. I will ask William to come with me to our records office. There is always work to be done there. If William is in agreement, he can work with our records administrator. She has complained recently that there is not enough time to get everything done. We do not have the budget for an assistant, so this might be a good arrangement. Does that make sense for now?”

“That sounds great to me, Dr. Heredia,” I said. “I hope I can make a contribution. If so, it will be a good way for me to learn more Spanish.”

“Yes, that is true. We cannot afford to pay you, but you will have perhaps a benefit from helping us out. Anytime you are here you can eat with our staff. If you need any medicines and even some medical care, we can offer that too.”

“I accept the proposal. Please show me where the office is and I’m ready to start.”

“Thank you, William. I will take you to meet Ximena. Manolo, please wait here for me. I have to make my rounds shortly, and you can join me.”

Dr. Heredia left his office, and I followed him. We went down a hallway, and it seemed that the second floor was all administrative offices. At the end of the hallway there was a door on the right. A sign above the door indicated ARCHIVO GENERAL. We went inside, and I saw a room that was so filled with bookcases, boxes, and stacks of papers that I was not sure what direction we could go in and have room to walk. Dr. Heredia turned to the left, where there was a small aisle with tall bookcases on either side and went down to the end wall. I followed him, and at the end of this aisle there was a wall, and to the left another aisle that was just wide enough for one person to walk thorough. It reminded me of one of those English gardens designed as a maze. But in a maze, everything is green and smells fresh. Here everything was brown and white and smelled like a combination of paper, ink, glue, and medicine.

At the end of this aisle, Dr. Heredia turned to the left, and there was an opening. In that opening there was a desk that was in complete contrast to the rest of the room. It was totally organized, neat and clean. Behind the desk there was a woman seated in an office chair who was reading what looked like a journal. That woman was so absorbed in her reading that she didn’t seem to notice our arrival.

“Buenos días, Ximena.” The woman seemed to be startled at the sound of his voice. She looked up to see who had interrupted her concentrated study.

“Dr. Heredia. Discúlpeme. No me di cuenta que estaba aquí. Buenos días. ¿Cómo está? Dr. Heredia. Excuse me. I didn’t realize you were here. How are you?”

“I’m well, thank you, Ximena.” He smiled broadly. “I have come with good news. Let me introduce you to William, uh, William ...” He looked at me with an inquisitive expression. I quickly realized he didn’t know my family name.

“Benning. William Benning.”

“Yes, William Benning. William has offered his services as a volunteer. He is from the United States and is a friend of Manolo Palacios and speaks Spanish quite well. You know Manolo, don’t you?”

“Yes, Manolo Palacios, of course. The young man who is studying medicine.” As she said this she stood up and offered her hand with a warm smile. “So nice to meet you, William. I am Ximena.” We shook hands, and I had a chance to look her straight in the face.

Ximena had a most interesting face. Her hair was the lightest color of any of the women I had come to know since arriving in Spain. It was what I had heard described once as dirty blond. Her skin was very light too, and her eyes were brown. I thought for a moment that she would have fit in had she been working at the University hospital in Charlottesville. She was taller than many of the women I had seen, and she was a little heavier too. She wasn’t fat, certainly, but she seemed to have a large build. She was attractive, I thought at the moment, but quite different from the other women I had met in Spain. What I found attractive in the other Spanish women was their foreignness, their exotic quality that seemed so different from women I had ever met.

“It is nice to meet you,” I said.

“William speaks Spanish exceptionally well, Ximena. I am confident he can assist you.”

“As you know, Dr. Heredia, I can use some assistance. So, I am glad you have found someone to assist me.”

“Very well. I am going to make my morning rounds. I will leave William here. Can you explain what you are working on and find something William can help you with?”

“Of course. I will be happy to do that.”

Dr. Heredia turned and left. The only other sound we heard was the door closing behind him as he left the office. Maybe it was only my impression, but the combination of circumstances made both of us uncomfortable. There was a strange silence in the office. Not a single sound could be detected. Both of us seemed to be waiting for the other to speak, and neither of us was looking at the other. I was scanning the little area where the office was located. The walls, what could be seen of them, which was not much, were mostly bare. There was a calendar behind Ximena’s desk, and the picture on the upper section depicted a matador staring down an enormous black bull. It was an image that appeared to be a watercolor that had been reproduced to attach to the calendar. Under the calendar there was a small table with a ceramic pitcher on it and two ceramic mugs. I assumed that it held water.

I heard Ximena clear her throat. “William, it is nice of you to offer to help us here at the hospital.” I thought I detected a slight blush in Ximena’s cheeks. I wondered if she felt that someone like me could be useful to her. There was no way I could clearly know what she was thinking. In truth, I had no idea what I might do to help her out, or if I would even like the work. I did not want to make anyone uncomfortable or feel like my presence was more of a burden than a form of improvement on the circumstances. I wanted to say something that would make both of us feel a little more comfortable, but I had no idea what that was. Perhaps she was feeling the same way I was.

“Well,” I began but without knowing what direction I was heading in, “you are probably wondering why I am here in Spain. Everyone shows surprise when they know I am from the United States, and I think I draw attention because I am young. You are probably thinking the same thing, and I understand completely.” I stopped for a moment, and I think I interpreted accurately her facial expression communicating the idea, “Yes, that is my reaction too.” She didn’t say anything, and obviously was waiting for me to go on.

“I don’t know if I can explain very well why I am here. I started to learn Spanish when I was very small. It was due more to the circumstances than to any natural interest learning Spanish. I had a neighbor, a woman from Cuba, who gave me a ride to school every day for several years. She taught me Spanish, and to take an interest in things different from what I was accustomed to in my home country.

“When I finished college, I didn’t know what to do with my life. I didn’t have any specific goals or a profession I wanted to pursue. I had learned from my father and his colleagues, and they were mostly people at the University where my father is an instructor, something about history and philosophy and the development of thinking in what we call Western Civilization. All of those ideas, and my interest in learning to speak Spanish, made we want to come and see what things were like here. I was told about the problems here, and that it might be a dangerous place, but that did not stop me from wanting to come. Now I am here, and I want to stay because it is such a fascinating place. And maybe the most fascinating thing I have seen so far is the people of Spain.”

I paused and wondered if what I was saying meant anything to this woman, who was probably ten years older than I was, and might be thinking I was another burden she might have to deal with. I looked at her, and she looked right back at me, almost staring right into my eyes. The expression on

her face was difficult to interpret, and for a moment I thought that she was going to tell me that Dr. Heredia's idea of me acting as her assistant was simply not going to work for her.

Finally she spoke, and as soon as she did her expression made me feel more comfortable. "I need help here, there is no doubt about that. Dr. Heredia could ask anything of me and I would do it. He is an exceptional person and helps countless people, and not just the patients. He knows that I work quite a lot here and that I have more than I can possibly accomplish. I accept your offer gladly, and I will simply need to think about how you can help me. You can come as often as you want, but you should not feel any obligation. You are a volunteer, and I will respect that."

She offered what I felt was a sincere expression and a small smile. I waited for her to continue. She came from behind the desk, and said, "You know, I think I have something for you to work on to get started. Please come with me to this other area." She walked toward the aisle we had come in from, and I followed her. From behind she looked attractive. The simple dress she was wearing was somewhat tight around her waist and hips, and this emphasized the feminine way she moved as she walked. We came back to the main entrance and she turned down another aisle. In a few moments we were in another small area with a desk. The desk was mostly clear, and I watched as Ximena reached down and lifted a stack of papers and file folders. She placed the tall stack on the desk.

"Here are documents that mostly deal with patients. I am trying to keep these records in order so we can quickly get the records the doctors need when they ask for them. Most of these documents are medical records, so they have a name associated with them. I need to have these in alphabetical order. The problem is the forms can vary, and you have to find the patient's name. The names are not always in the same place. Then you need to put them in order based on the names. But as you probably know now, Spanish names can be complicated and quite long. For example, my name is Ximena Rosario Cáceres de Alameda. The name to focus on is Cáceres because it is my father's family name.

But sometimes people only have one given name, while others may have three. And sometimes people have even longer names. You may have some difficulty at times, but after you have done these for a while I think you will capture the important parts.”

As she spoke, I noticed that she had a funny way of moving her mouth. It looked as if it were slightly tilted to one side. I watched her as she spoke and wondered if it was something I imagined or was real. It was perhaps odd, I realized, but it made her more attractive. She also had one dimple on the left side of her face. With certain movements of her face and mouth the dimple appeared, and with others it was not apparent. I also realized that her eyes were the color of dark chocolate. They were unusually large, something else that made her attractive. I started to feel a little uncomfortable, because I wondered what she was thinking about me. My first thought was that she probably found me too young, and that she was unlikely thinking about my appearance very much, if at all.

I wondered how old she was. She was at least thirty, I thought, but maybe even closer to forty. It was difficult to tell. She was wearing one ring, a gold one with a small black stone, and it didn't appear to be a wedding ring. Still, she might well be married.

I spoke up now. “Thank you for explaining all of this. I am ready to give this a try. Show me which stack to start with, and I will try to do what you need.” I spent the rest of the morning going through one of the stacks of papers. Ximena was right. It was a difficult project. What I quickly realized was that the handwriting that was used in Spain was quite different from what I was used to. When the notes were written by the doctors, it was almost impossible to decipher. When the information was written by someone else, an administrator or nurse, it was a little bit easier. Perhaps the biggest obstacle was the variety of names. There were common ones, such as José, Antonio, María and Susana. But many of them were totally foreign to me.

At about one o'clock, Ximena, who had left me in the small cubicle and not made a sound I could hear in the meanwhile, came over to where I was working and told me it was break time. She said that she would be away for about two hours. She told me that if I wanted to take the rest of the afternoon off, she understood completely. She would be going home for lunch and a siesta. She had to lock the door when we left and said she would return at about three o'clock. I told her that I might not be back later, but that I would plan to return the next morning for sure.

We left the records office and walked back toward Dr. Heredia's office. I stopped here, and Ximena continued to the staircase.

I said, "*Nos vemos mañana*. We'll see each other tomorrow."

"*Si, como no. Hasta mañana*. Yes, of course. Until tomorrow." I watched as she turned to go down the staircase. Then I went back downstairs and knocked on the door of Dr. Heredia's office. There was no answer and decided I should not open the door. Instead, I turned and went down the hallway to see if I could find Manolo.

I saw a nurse walking past and asked her where people would have lunch at the hospital. She pointed down one of the corridors and said the cafeteria was down on the left. I went down the hallway past offices that seemed mostly unoccupied. I came to a door with a sign above it—CAFETERIA. The door was open, and I went in. What I saw was a group of tables on the left side of a fairly large room. There were people at most of the tables. On the right side was a long table that was set up buffet style. Straight back was where the kitchen was located. I glanced around to see if either Manolo or Dr. Heredia was there, but I didn't see either.

I turned back, and at that moment both Dr. Heredia and Manolo entered the room.

"William, we were looking for you. We thought you were up in the records room."

“I was there just a few minutes ago. Ximena said she was leaving for her lunch and siesta break. So, I came down here.”

“That’s good, my American friend,” said Manolo with a smile.

“Did everything go well in the records office?” asked Dr. Heredia.

“Yes. I think so. Ximena is nice, and she explained what I need to do.”

“Very good,” said Dr. Heredia. “I know that Ximena needs assistance. If you feel that it is something you can do, then it is a good combination. I assume that the work made you hungry.”

“Yes, sure, I’m ready to eat something.”

“Very good. I will show you the routine here,” said Dr. Heredia. He walked over to the tables where the food was laid out. He picked up a soup plate and served himself from a large tureen. “I think this is the cabbage and pork stew. It is excellent, one of the specialties here at the hospital.”

“That sounds good to me,” I said as I did the same as the doctor. Manolo came behind me and served himself the same dish. There was a large platter with slices of fresh bread, and all three of us picked up several pieces. At the end of the long table there was a tall ceramic container with a small spigot on the bottom. I watched as Dr. Heredia picked up a glass and filled it with a dark red liquid. I concluded that it must be red wine. I followed suit, and a few moments later all three of us were seated at one of the tables and eating the soup. It was delicious. I didn’t realize how hungry I was until I started to eat.

There was little conversation during the meal. Manolo and Dr. Heredia mentioned a couple of the patients they had seen during the doctor’s rounds. In general, the room was pretty quiet. It was different from other places I had visited in Spain. I found that in many places there was a lot of

conversation and that much of that was quite animated. Everything in this hospital cafeteria seemed more somber. That wasn't surprising, I supposed.

When we finished eating, Manolo asked me what I was planning for the afternoon. I told him that Ximena and I had agreed that I would come back in the morning to continue work on the project. Manolo said he was going to return tomorrow in the morning. We said goodbye to Dr. Heredia and left the hospital.

Outside it was raining. Manolo told me to wait a moment. He went inside the hospital and returned with an umbrella. We walked back to Manolo's home and arrived at almost four o'clock. I was suddenly tired and told Manolo I wanted to lie down and rest. He said that he was planning to rest too. I went to the room I was using, Valeria's old room, and stretched out on the bed. I was soon fast asleep. I had a strange series of dreams. At first, I was in New York, at the apartment of my uncle. Then, the dream switched to the ship I had traveled on to cross the Atlantic. I was on that ship and on deck when an enormous wave lifted the ship up in the air and slammed it down in the water. Before I knew it, the ship was sinking, and I panicked. At the moment when the water seemed to engulf the ship, the scene changed. I was in the record room of the library, and there was Ximena, standing in front of me, completely naked.

I looked at her, and she didn't seem to find anything unusual about the situation. She was looking at a stack of papers, and when I approached her she smiled at me and showed me a document. I wondered what would happen if at that moment I leaned up close to her and kissed her on the mouth. I looked at her substantial breasts, but before I could get close enough to her, I woke up. It was getting dark outside, and for a few moments I was totally disoriented. It felt like I had slept all night and it was early morning. But then I thought that that could not be true. I remained in a fog for a few moments, trying to make sense of the surroundings that were only vaguely familiar.

I left the bedroom and went to the living room. I saw Manolo sitting there with a large book in his hand. He looked up. “William, you had quite a nap. It is almost seven o’clock.”

“Really? I must have been very exhausted. What are you reading?”

“This is an anatomy book. I am looking at something that involves an injury of one of the patients we visited today. Tell me, William, how did things go in the Records Office?”

“It went pretty well, I think. Ximena explained what she wanted me to do. I can do the work, even though I have a little difficulty understanding the information on the documents. For now, it is something to keep me busy.”

“That sounds all right. There may be other things you could do here in Burgos, but I’m not sure how to arrange anything else.”

“I don’t have any problem working at the hospital. I look at it as another opportunity for me to learn more Spanish.”

Manolo looked at me for a few moments, and then said, “Well, I have talked quite a bit with Dr. Heredia today. He is going to treat my time at the hospital as a kind of internship. He thinks that he can give me a write-up after I spend time with him that will give me credits at the medical school. Under the present circumstances here in Spain, I think it is the best way for me to proceed.”

“Yes, that seems like a good idea for you, Manolo.” We both sat quietly for a while. Manolo became absorbed once again in the anatomy book, and I had a myriad of thoughts go through my mind. I thought about Ximena, and the Records Office and the work that was before me. If I was honest with myself, the hospital work was not the kind of thing I would have chosen. I had a sense that working in an office, regardless of the situation, and irrespective of the location, was not something that would give me much personal fulfillment. That office was so quiet, and there was so little interaction with

anyone, in particular Ximena, that I was not sure how long I would be able to stand it. It was ironic that, as things turned out, I would only spend one more day in that Records Office.

The next morning, at around ten o'clock, Manolo and I returned to the hospital. It was much cooler now that it was the beginning of November. Manolo told me that he heard there might be some light snowfall soon. It had been a cooler fall, apparently, and now things were getting somewhat cold. Manolo had an extra sweater that he let me borrow. The sleeves were a little short, but after we had walked a few blocks, I was glad to have the extra layer on.

We arrived at the hospital, and Manolo said he was going to look for Dr. Heredia while I could go straight up to the Records Office. When I got there I opened the main door and went inside. It was totally quite inside, as it had been when I left the day before. I decided it would be best if I went back and said hello to Ximena to make sure that I should continue with the same project I had been working on. I walked through the aisles to the little area where Ximena had her desk. When I got there, I didn't see Ximena. I looked all around the small room, and down the aisles that ran off to the sides. Still, there was no sign of her. I felt that she had to be there somewhere because the main door was unlocked when I arrived.

"Ximena," I called out, but softly at first. There was no answer, so I chose one of the aisles and started in that direction. There was no sign of her. When I came to the end of the corridor, I could only turn to the left, so I did so. "Ximena," I said again, this time a little louder. Again, I heard nothing. It was almost eerily quiet. I walked down this corridor until I heard a noise. It sounded like a box being shoved around on the floor. I walked in the direction of the sound and soon saw Ximena. She was standing on top of a small ladder and going through a box of papers at the top shelf along the wall. She had taken her shoes off and was barefoot. She was wearing a dark green turtleneck sweater and a beige

skirt. The way she was stretching to reach the box had forced the skirt to catch high on her hip. I could see her left leg almost up to her waist. It was intimate view of a woman that I barely knew.

“Oh, William,” she said as she turned to look down at me. “I didn’t hear you come in. Good morning. How are you?” She said this while she tried to balance a stack of papers with both of her hands. I was about to respond to her, when she suddenly lost her balance, and started to fall backward off the small ladder. The stack of papers came flying out of her hands as she tried to grasp on to something to keep from tumbling down to the floor. I stepped up close to her and put my arms out to try to catch her. She was a pretty big woman, as I had noticed the day before. Her full weight came into my arms, but I found myself slightly overwhelmed by her falling body, mostly because the aisle was so narrow. I found I was losing my balance underneath of Ximena. I didn’t want to crash into one of the tall shelves because I thought it would topple over, and possibly cause a chain reaction. So, I pushed off so I would go straight back and land in the aisle I had just come through.

The next few seconds seemed to defy the passing of time. I went backward and Ximena came square on top of me. When I landed on my back, I tried to keep my head from hitting the floor. I thought that if that happened, I would be knocked out. Meanwhile, Ximena’s body came down on top of mine. Her face came into direct contact with my chest, and I felt her arms stretch out to hit against my shoulders. At the moment she made contact with me, she let out a small scream. It was over a moment later, and when I looked up, I saw her face a few inches in front of mine. She was so close that I could smell the scent of her face and her mouth. I thought I could detect the small scent of coffee on her breath.

She said, “*!Ay, dios mío, dios mío!* Oh my God, my God!” She remained frozen as if she wasn’t sure exactly what had happened.

“Are you hurt?” was the only thing I could think to say.

“No, no I don’t think so. But I landed on top of you, so maybe you are hurt.”

We remained for a few more seconds in this position. It was not easy for her to get up because her arms were on my shoulders and she would have to push against me in order to right herself. I looked into her eyes, and for a moment I thought that I wanted to kiss her. It was a thought that entered my mind so quickly and instinctively that it stunned even me. Perhaps it was because we were so intimately close to each other, even though it was under circumstances that were totally random. I was about to help her lift up when she pushed her face closer to mine and put her lips against mine. I could scarcely believe what was happening. I closed my eyes and pushed my lips against hers. It was a totally unexpected result, and I wondered what was going to happen next.

Ximena pulled back for a moment, looked at me with those beautiful eyes, and then pushed her lips against mine again. We stayed immobile and kissed for quite a long time. I parted my lips, slowly and carefully and tried to see what would happen if I pushed my tongue toward her mouth. I felt her mouth open slightly, and then our tongues met. I became instantly aroused and wondered what was going to happen next. I could feel her ample breasts pushing against my chest, and of course I had a strong surge of energy below my belt.

The kissing became more intense, and I put my hands behind her head and rubbed gently on the back of her head and then down on the nape of her neck. It was the first time I had been so intimate with a woman in quite a long time. I felt her hands move up and gently rub my temples. It was, certainly the most spontaneous petting I had ever experienced. I lowered my hands to her sides and wondered if I would be able to put them on her breasts. I had an erection and was pretty sure that Ximena must feel it because of the way our bodies were touching. Did this bother her? It did not seem to.

I was thinking about all of this and what might happen next when I heard a sound. It must have been someone knocking the front door to the Records Office and then opening and closing. Ximena pulled back and looked at me.

“*Ay mierda. ¿Quién está entrando en la oficina a esta hora?* Shit! Who is coming into the office at this time?” She pushed away from me and managed to regain her balance. She stood up as I helped by pushing on her shoulders and she immediately straightened her sweater and skirt. She stepped past me and walked down the corridor I had come down. I got up and made sure that I felt all right. I then went in the direction Ximena had gone in. When I got to the end of the aisle and turned to the right, I saw the entrance area. There I saw Ximena talking with a man that I did not recognize. He was wearing the white half coat with tunic that I had seen other doctors wearing. I couldn’t make out what they were saying, but she nodded her head several times, and then the man left the office.

Ximena came back in the direction we had both come. “William, I am sorry. I feel bad that I fell on you. You didn’t get hurt, did you?”

“I’m fine. How about you?”

“I’m all right. Fortunately, you broke my fall. I, just, well, feel embarrassed.” She said this while brushing off her skirt that had some dust on it from the floor. I wondered about those few brief moments of intimacy. Her attitude now was exactly as it had been before the accident. She was the Records Office administrator, I was a volunteer, and a young man at least ten years her junior. I didn’t want to make her feel bad, so I decided to pretend that nothing had happened after the fall. I would immediately treat it as a fantasy, a dream that still felt intensely real.

“William, I’m sorry, for my, uh, my behavior,” Ximena said, but she was not looking straight at me.

“No, please don’t apologize. You didn’t do anything. I think I am the one who should apologize.” Would she step up close to me and give me a hug? If she did, there would be no way I could resist trying to kiss her. I almost ached inside from the desire to at least hold her in my arms. But I didn’t dare attempt anything.

“Listen, William. I think what has happened has happened. Perhaps we should simply forget about it. Besides, that was one of the doctors here, a surgeon. He needs me to find records right away for a patient that needs immediate attention. I am going to look for what he requested. Can you please return to the job you were working on yesterday? That would be a great help to me.” There was a small smile on her face now, and I think we both felt better. I would have to keep the memory of this unusual event, and I would go back over that scene time and time again.

I spent the rest of the morning working on my project. I had to concentrate closely on what I was doing, but I could barely take my mind off Ximena. Suddenly, she seemed like the most attractive woman I had ever met. This was due in part to the fact that she was older than I was. I had seldom paid any attention to older women, for obvious reasons – obvious to me anyway. I figured older women would simply have no interest in younger men. When I got to be older, I started to realize that there was something about women who were a little older and who thought that younger men might be interesting. But during my time in Spain, this was just a distant idea.

At lunch time I went down to look for Manolo. I found him outside the cafeteria. He saw me coming and walked in my direction. “William, how are things going?”

“Fine, I believe. Same as yesterday, I’m going through files and organizing them. I have a question. What do you know about Ximena?”

“Ximena? Not very much. Dr. Heredia has known her for a while. You know, I remember him telling me once that Ximena was engaged to be married, but something happened to the man she was

supposed to marry. It was kind of mysterious, I remember that. Maybe there was a problem between the families or something. This is not unusual in Spain today with all the political turmoil. It might have been that the families were on opposing sides when it comes to the monarchists and the Republicans. I don't know that to be the case, but I could easily believe it. Why do you ask?"

"I don't know. She is quite friendly, and I find her attractive, even though she is at least ten years older than me. I like being around her, but I still have a hard time understanding women in your culture."

"My friend, I would have to agree with you, and they are part of my culture." He paused and the two of us sat silently for a little while.

Manolo then spoke again. "I spent time observing an operation today. It is quite an education in itself."

"I can imagine, but I don't particularly like the sight of blood and that kind of thing."

Manolo said, as he put his hand on my shoulder, "This is just something you get used to."

Twelve

I waited in the main lobby while Manolo finished his activities. He came into the lobby and signaled for me to follow him out the main entrance. “Listen, I suggest we go somewhere else for lunch today. Do you remember my friend at the bar, the place where we ate the morcilla?”

“Yes, sure. Are we going there?”

“Actually, we are going to another place. Ricardo invited us to a restaurant he knows. He is off today and wants to get together. He sent me a message and asked if could meet him. I’m sure he won’t mind if you join us.”

“That sounds good to me. Lead the way.”

We left and walked to the old city center. It was a nice day. It was sunny now, but still somewhat cool. We walked past the cathedral and entered a small alley. It was only half a block long, and I didn’t see any businesses on either side, at least on the ground level. At the end of the alley, there was a door on the left. It had a small sign over it—LOS GITANOS.

Just as we entered, I asked Manolo, “That means the gypsies, doesn’t it?”

“Exactly correct, William.” Once we were inside, I saw a simple room that at first glance did not seem to be a restaurant. It was a long room, rather than a square one. On each side there were benches with small wooden chairs mixed in. On the walls there were lots of photographs. There were a couple of people sitting on the left side of the room, each with a glass of wine. These were two men, and they were having an animated conversation. I noticed that they were a little older, and that neither of them was Manolo’s friend, Ricardo. We walked down the center of the place almost to the end. I

noticed that there were two main themes in the photographs on the walls. One was bullfighting, and it seemed to be the dominant theme here. The other photographs were of people, musicians mostly, and many of whom were singing. Others were playing the guitar.

“William, do you know what Flamenco music is?”

“What kind?”

“Flamenco. I don’t know what you call that in English. Flamenco music is from southern Spain, especially the city of Sevilla. It is popular among the gypsies. The name comes from the low countries.”

“The low countries? What are the low countries?”

“You know, the low countries. For example, the Netherlands is one of the low countries. And Belgium is another one, along the coast.”

“Oh, now I see what you mean. They are called the low countries because they are just above sea level. That’s interesting. But what does that have to do with Spain and this music?”

“That is a little hard to explain. You won’t know about Carlos I, the king of Spain back in the sixteenth century.”

“Maybe I saw his name in a history book. I don’t remember.”

Manolo smiled at me. “Listen, my American friend, there is a lot of history involved here. My father is the person who knows about this. But basically what happened is Carlos was born in the low countries, but he was the son of one of the kings of Spain. So, when the king died, Carlos was the next person who was in the royal family. He was living, and had been raised, in the low countries due to. So, when he came to Spain, he could barely speak Spanish. His language was Flemish.”

“Wait a minute. Now I think I know the connection. Flamenco must mean Flemish in English. Flemish is a language of the people who live on the coast in Belgium. I know about that because when my father was in the merchant marine he traveled to a city there which is called Bruges in French.”

“Bruges? Oh, of course, that is the city we call *Brujas*. That word in Spanish means witches.”

“Witches? I wonder why that is.”

“I don’t know, my friend. What I do know is that the music in southern Spain, a special kind of music, is called Flamenco. And, as you say, that word means Flemish in English. Remember in Vitoria we saw that woman singer and the guitar player? That was Flamenco music, but on a small scale.” As soon as he said this, we noticed another person had come into the restaurant, or tavern, or whatever it was. It turned out to be his friend, Ricardo.

I watched as the two of them embraced and patted each other on the back.

“Ricardo, do you remember my American friend, William?”

“Of course, he’s the one who makes morcilla in the United States.” We all laughed at this, and meanwhile I shook hands with Ricardo. He was shorter than I remembered. Maybe at the bar where he worked there was an elevated step for the people who worked there.

“Did you ask for anything yet?” Ricardo said as we found a place to sit.

“No, William and I arrived a short time ago, and we have been looking around and talking about Flamenco music. I tried to explain where it came from, but I’m not sure I had all the facts straight.” I watched as both Manolo and Ricardo laughed. The next thing I heard was Ricardo as he called out, in a rather loud voice.

“*Juanito! ¿Dónde estás, coño? ¿Quieres que no muramos de sed? Juanito, dammit, where the hell are you? Do you want us to die of thirst?*” I had no idea who Ricardo was talking to. It could not

have been the two men who were talking. Neither of them even looked up. A moment later, a young man came out from behind a curtain that was at the end of the hallway. I had not even noticed it before. He went up to Ricardo and gave him a big hug. Then Ricardo introduced us to Juanito. This guy looked very different from many of the other people I had met in Spain so far. He was short and stocky. His skin was the color of some of the olives I had eaten. It was a brownish color with a hint of green. His face was somewhat pockmarked, and his eyes had almost an Asian slant to them. His hair was pitch black and combed straight back. His eyes were black, and even the white areas were more of a beige color. He was a striking presence.

Ricardo introduced us, but he couldn't quite get my name right. Juanito shook hands with Manolo and me. I noticed he had unusually long fingernails. He spoke Spanish, but with an accent that I could barely follow. Every time he spoke, it seemed as though he was laughing. After the introductions, he said to Ricardo, "I have a bottle of Jerez on ice in the kitchen. Do you want a glass?"

Ricardo replied, "*¡Vale, coño!*. Of course, dammit!"

Juanito disappeared. Manolo looked at me and said, "William, Juanito is obviously from Andalucía, right Ricardo?"

"Yes, he is. He's from a town near Sevilla."

"Andalucía is the town?" I asked Ricardo.

"No, no. Andalucía is the region in southern Spain. Sevilla is the major city in that area. I was there one time a few years ago. It is incredible. It's completely different from the cities here in the north. Have you been there, Manolo?"

"No, never. But some day I must go, of course. William, someday maybe you will go there too."

“I would love to go south. How is it different?”

“Oh my,” Ricardo said, “it is so different there that you wouldn’t believe it. The climate is different, the people are different, the way they speak is different, the food is different. Even some of the things they drink are different. You will find out about that in a moment. Juanito is bringing us a glass of Jerez. That is a special kind of wine made in the city called Jerez de la Frontera. You have heard of this, of course,” he said to me.

“Actually, no, I don’t think so.” As Ricardo said this, Juanito returned with a small tray. On the tray were three small wine glasses. They were in the shape of typical wine glasses but were rather taller than normal, and the opening at the top was smaller. Inside each frosty glass was a pale amber liquid. Juanito put the tray down on a nearby table.

“*Salud*,” was all he said. He watched as we each picked up a glass. Ricardo lifted his above his head and looked at the glass as if to evaluate the color. Then he brought it down and put his nose right at the rim and inhaled deeply. I watched intently as he went through this small ritual. Then he lifted the glass to his lips and took a sip.

“*¡Vale, vale, mi querido Juanito. Esto si es un jerez de primera!* Yes, yes, my dear friend Juanito. This is a very fine sherry!” Manolo lifted his glass and sipped. I put the glass near my mouth, took a deep breath, and then a sip. It was cold, and different from any wine I had had before. I could not remember the last time I had tried white wine, but it definitely seemed very different from this stuff.

“It is exceptional,” said Manolo. We sat there quietly for a bit, savoring the Jerez. I continued to look around the room and the photographs. I had heard about bullfighting but only read about it in a travel book once. Some of the photos were striking. In many of them the bulls looked enormous and very threatening. One of the pictures was on the wall right next to us. It was of a man seated in chair

with a guitar resting on his leg and he was playing as a man standing next to him was singing. I looked more carefully and noticed two interesting things. First, the guitar player was Juanito, and second, the picture was from this very place.

“Look at this picture,” I said to Manolo and Ricardo. “That’s Juanito.”

“Yes, it is,” said Ricardo. “He is quite the good guitar player, even though he is so young. The man singing in that picture is his uncle. His name is Caramelo, which is a nickname, and he is considered one of the greatest Flamenco singers in Spain today. He came here for a month last year and performed many times right here in this place. I saw him about three times. It was an experience.”

Juanito came back then and had another tray, which he put on the table. This one had about ten small plates. “These are *tapas*, William. I suppose you have already had something like this.”

“Oh, yes, I have. Mostly they have been olives. Did you say *tapas*?”

“Yes, that is what we call these little dishes that we have before dinner. They are little snacks that we like. There are places that are famous for them. In San Sebastián when you go into the *tapas* bars, the counters are filled with *tapas* plates. There isn’t even room to put your beer glass down. They are the best *tapas* I have ever had. What do we have here?” he asked Juanito.

Ricardo answered immediately. He pointed with his finger to each small dish. “We have here Manchego cheese in these two, meatballs in this one, Spanish tortilla in these two, that one has roasted red peppers, and those two have cured ham. Oh, and this last one has olives, of course.” Upon saying this he reached for a small glass that had toothpicks in it. He used the toothpick to stab one of the meatballs. “Delicious, I think you will agree. Don’t be shy, my friends.”

Manolo and I started in with toothpicks. I tried the tortilla first. It turned out to be egg omelet with potato. It was very tasty. Next, I tried the red peppers, which had an almost sweet taste, and were

not spicy at all. Everything was excellent, and we washed down the tapas with the Jerez. It was a pretty amazing combination. None of us spoke for a while. As I took my last sip of the wine, Juanito came back into the room. He had a bottle in his hand, which I assumed was the Jerez. He refilled out glasses.

“¿Cómo os gusta todo? How do you all like everything?” We all immediately expressed our satisfaction with everything we had tried. “How about the cured ham? It is the specialty here. These hams come from Sevilla. I have a friend who sends them to me.”

I immediately grabbed a toothpick and picked up one of the slices and put it in my mouth. What a fantastic flavor that ham had. I will never forget my first taste of what is called *jamón serrano*. That translated into “mountain jam” or “country ham.” Juanito explained the way it was made. I followed him as best I could, but it was a challenge because of his southern accent. The incredible part was that once the legs of pork had been smoked, as he explained to us in significant detail, they were wrapped in burlap and hung up on the ceiling for seven years! I had to ask Manolo if I had understood correctly.

“Yes, that is correct. Those hams cure for years, seven years, according to Juanito.”

Before long, almost everything on the platter was gone. We all sat, somewhat quietly, thinking about how good all the food and drink was. I watched as Ricardo took another sip of his Jerez. When he finished, he looked at Manolo, and his expression looked quite serious to me.

“Manolo, I asked you to come today, but not only for this great food.”

“Really? What is going on?”

“I have heard a rumor.”

“Yes? What kind of rumor?”

“It’s about something that is being planned. At least that is according to the rumor.”

“All right, there is a rumor. There are rumors flying around every day, and one can’t pay attention to most of them as they prove either false or exaggerated. So, what does this have to do with us, or me?”

“The rumor is there will be an attack on a church or monastery in the area. What I heard is that Huelgas would be a good target, for symbolic reasons.”

“Oh, shit,” Manolo said. I immediately thought of Valeria, which is no doubt the first thing he thought of. “Where did the rumor come from? There are rumors every day in this country. Often, nothing happens, and so I don’t believe there is much in these things.”

“You are right, Manolo,” Ricardo said. “But how often do the rumors involve a place where you have a family member?”

“There was a rumor last year. It was something similar to this. Then nothing happened. I don’t think anyone wants to do damage to Huelgas. It is a historic place, and it is beautiful.”

“Look, my friend, terrible things are happening in Spain today. Some of the acts are horrific, and you know that when these groups get something on their minds, all they care about is hurting those on the other side. The more pain they can inflict, the better for them and their cause. You know about some of the horrible things we have seen or heard about. Anything can happen.”

“How about your sources, do you think they are reliable? Who did you hear this from?”

“I have a cousin who lives in Madrid. She is part of one of the groups. Her group is not so bad, I guess, but they are with the Anarchists. She heard that a major attack is going to take place, and it is supposed to be up here, in the north somewhere. They feel that this area is too conservative and that the people don’t care enough to take action themselves. She didn’t say that Huelgas is the target, but she seemed to think it would make sense.”

“Damn. I don’t like the sound of this,” Manolo said, and the expression on his face was as serious as the first night in Vitoria when we met right after that horrible scene. The frown on his face now was disconcerting. I was pretty sure I knew what he was thinking, and that was about his sister.

“Look, my friend,” said Ricardo, “I know you are worried about your sister. I don’t know what to tell you to do. I know if it were my sister, I would think seriously about getting her out of Huelgas.”

“Yes, I understand, Ricardo. It is rather complicated. You know she can’t simply pack her bag and leave. There are rules and things that the nuns agree to when they go into these programs. There is an official process for leaving, but that assumes that she wants to leave. I don’t know what she is thinking either. I am very uncomfortable. And I know my parents would be in favor of Valeria leaving. I don’t know that any of us have ever been that comfortable with the whole thing of her becoming a nun.”

“I don’t know what to suggest. I felt I had to tell you what I heard. I didn’t want to upset you, but I thought that you had to know what the rumors are.”

“Oh, yes, Ricardo, I appreciate you thinking of us. You have done the right thing. I have to discuss this with my parents. I need to know what they think about all of this. We will all be upset if something happens. I know I have to do something, but I’m not sure what is the best way to go forward. I thank you for being a friend and sharing this information with me.” As he finished saying this he stood up, as did Ricardo, and they embraced.

“William,” Manolo said, “I’m sorry for all this drama. I didn’t mean to make this lunch such a serious thing.”

“Please don’t be concerned for me,” I quickly said. “I know this is important. I want to do whatever I can to help. I know Valeria now too, and I want to do anything I can to make sure she is safe.”

Manolo put his hand on my shoulder. “Thanks, William. I know you will support whatever I want to do. You might have to help me out with this situation.”

“You can count on me, Manolo. I’ll do anything I can.”

Ricardo looked at me and then at Manolo. “My friend, I hope I have done right by telling you this information. I don’t know your sister well, but as I said, if it were my sister I would be pretty worried.”

“Of course, Ricardo. I am pleased you told me what you heard. I have to think about my options.”

“Very good. I feel better,” Ricardo said. “Do either of you want anything else?”

“No, nothing for me,” Manolo said. I agreed. Manolo reached into his pocket to take out money, but Ricardo put his hand in Manolo’s arm. “No, my friend, you are my invited guests today. I hope you enjoyed everything.”

“It was fantastic,” I immediately responded. “Thanks for all of the delicious food. I have never eaten so many good things as I have tried here in Spain. Do you eat like this all the time?” Both Ricardo and Manolo laughed briefly, and Ricardo said, “Hey, this is nothing unusual for us. This is just what we eat in Spain. But I must say it is damn good.”

Ricardo was right, and it made me think that foods and what people are accustomed to in different countries mean different things. I thought about the United States, and the fact that we eat a lot of things that seemed simple by comparison. In Spain, it seemed to me that things were never simple. But if that is what they were used to, then that was a cultural matter.

We all stood up. Manolo and I said goodbye to Ricardo, who gave each of us a hug as we were getting ready to leave. As would happen all too often during my time in Spain, I had no idea that it was

the last time I would see someone who had made an impression on me. Ricardo was one of those people.

That night, I sat in the Palacios living room as Manolo and his parents talked about the rumor Ricardo had shared with us. I decided that I would simply listen to the discussion. But at the beginning I told Manolo I would excuse myself if he thought that was a good idea. He told me that I should stay, by all means. Mrs. Palacios got emotional during the discussion. She was imagining her only daughter being mistreated somehow by people who had strong political ideas and had decided to make innocent people suffer in order to make a point. This was starting to be a theme that was apparent in this difficult time in Spain. Many people felt they had to make a point, and if to make a point they had to make others suffer, so be it. It was difficult for me to understand and accept that kind of thinking. I could never do harm to anyone, any person who had done nothing at all to me, only for the sake of making a point that I felt was important.

This made me think back to one of those discussions I had sat in on at my home back in Charlottesville. It was one of those evenings when my father had people from different departments of the University over to our home to eat, drink and talk about what my father called “world issues.” One evening the topic had been nationalities, and the differences between those of a Germanic background, the British, the Scandinavians, and the people of the Mediterranean region. It was quite revealing. The people who spoke most of the time had spent quite a bit of time living in Europe.

There was plenty of agreement on what was typical British behavior. Characteristics described as “stoic,” “reserved,” “dispassionate,” and having a “stiff upper lip” were taken as typical. The same happened with those of northern Europe. The Germans were considered “precise,” “unwavering,” as

being “technically sound,” and above all “obedient to a higher order.” That was not so easy for me to understand.

When the discussion came to the Mediterranean countries, the discussion became quite animated. According to those who had the direct experience in those countries, the Spanish and Italians were “hot-blooded,” “hard-headed,” “capricious,” “very demonstrative” and “highly emotional.” I thought about the people I had met so far in Spain. I wasn’t so sure about all of those descriptions. I had detected some of those traits, but I found the people to be mostly friendly, open, affectionate, and caring. I decided that trying to categorize people based on their nationalities or their cultures was always going to be difficult. Then I thought about how other people would characterize people from the United States. What were Americans supposed to be like? Was I typical or not? How much influence did I have from my English parents?

I was thinking about all these things and not paying much attention to the discussion going on between Manolo and his parents. At one point, however, something dramatic happened, something that surprised Manolo and me. Manolo had a habit of walking around when he was talking. Both Mr. and Mrs. Palacios remained seated, but Manolo, who was more agitated than I had seen before, couldn’t seem to sit still. He walked around the room, and at one point he stepped over near the window at the front of the apartment. It was a window that overlooked the street that ran in front of the apartment building.

Manolo stopped, and for what seemed like a long time, stared at something down in the street. He had been talking, but now was completely silent. Then, he said in a somewhat hushed voice, “*Yo creo que conozco a esta chica, pero no se de donde.* I think I know that girl, but I don’t from where.”

“Who are you talking about, Manolo? What girl?” Mr. Palacios asked.

“There is a girl on the sidewalk, across the street, and she is looking at this building. I think she is looking up here at this floor.” I walked over to see what was going on. I stood next to Manolo and looked out. There indeed was a girl standing on the opposite sidewalk. I looked carefully.

“Oh, my gosh,” I said suddenly, in a raised voice that made me feel immediately self-conscious. “That’s Malu!”

Manolo, without looking at me, said, “Malu? Who is that?”

“Don’t you remember that in Vitoria I was riding in a car that was stopped? And then there was a shooting, and a girl was taken from the car?”

“Oh, yes of course. The girl that showed up at Dr. Goicoechea’s office. “

“Exactly. Don’t you remember that you gave her your address here in Burgos? It looks like she kept your address and has come to see you, or us.”

“You are absolutely correct, William. That is the Anarchist woman, or whatever she is. I don’t actually know. We have to go downstairs and let her in. Come on, William.” With that we quickly went out of the apartment, down the stairs to the ground floor, and then out onto the sidewalk. When we got there, Malu was looking up still.

I heard Manolo speak out suddenly. “*Malu. ¿Qué haces aquí, hombre?* Hey, man, what are you doing here?” As soon as she heard Manolo, she looked at us and ran across the street. She had a bag over her shoulder that looked like a burlap bag of the kind that potatoes or vegetables are shipped in. It must have contained her belongings, what few things she had. She came up to Manolo and gave him a hug, and then she looked at me and gave me a hug too. Maybe I was imagining things, but the hug she gave me seemed to be stronger and lasted longer than the one she gave Manolo.

“I am so happy to see both of you,” she said, and immediately tears appeared and trickled down her cheeks. She hugged both of us again. Then all of us went inside the building. We ascended the stairs in silence, and a moment later we were in the entrance foyer of the Palacios apartment.

“This place is beautiful. I have never seen such a nice apartment before. This is your home, Manolo?”

“Yes, of course. And you are welcome here any time. Please come in.” We followed Manolo into the living room. His parents stood up. “Mamá, Papá, this is María Luisa, Malu. Malu, my parents.” She stepped forward and shook hands with Mr. and Mrs. Palacios.

“It is a pleasure to meet you both. Your son and his American friend are saints, as far as I am concerned. They helped me to survive after the terrible attack in Vitoria.”

Manolo hesitated for a moment and then said, “I don’t think we did so much, but we were hoping you would have a good recovery. You seem to be doing well.”

“Yes, I am doing quite well. I still have some sore places, of course, but I am improving.” She turned and looked directly at Mrs. Palacios. “Ma’am, I hope you don’t mind my bothering you in this way, here in your home.”

Mrs. Palacios looked at her, with no expression on her face that I could detect. “If Manolo says you are welcome, then you are.”

Mr. Palacios then spoke. “Young lady, please pardon me, but why have you come here to Burgos instead of returning to your family?” As he said this, he motioned to her. “Please, take a seat. My wife will get you something to drink, all right?”

“Please don’t do anything special for me, thank you. Your question is a good one. I am from Bilbao, or actually I was born in Guipuzcoa, but I was mostly raised in Bilbao. I was working there in

an office. I am a secretary. I was working for an important person, a person who was part of the Socialist Party in that city.”

“The Socialist Party?” Mrs. Palacios asked, with a hint of trepidation in her voice.

“Yes, madam, the Socialist Party.”

“You know that here in Burgos the people are more conservative. You should be careful when talking about politics here.”

“Yes. Ma’am, I know that. I have not come here to cause any problems. I came here because my family said I should not go home right now. They believe there could be problems for the family in Bilbao, even though I miss everyone there very much. I just wanted to go somewhere I can find peace, and I didn’t have any other options. Your son and his friend the doctor in Vitoria helped me when I was hurt. I will never forget that.” She stopped speaking, and for a moment I thought she was going to cry. She composed herself and continued. “I don’t like all of this fighting and killing. No matter my beliefs, I do not want to hurt anyone, and I do not understand people who feel they have to intimidate other people because of their beliefs. Your son was so kind to leave his address. I didn’t know what to do. I could not stay in Vitoria after what happened to my brother and uncle. It seems that I can’t go home right now. Where was I supposed to go?”

I watched as her face contorted a bit, and realized she was trying hard not to become too emotional.

Then Manolo spoke. “Look, Malu, it is all right that you have come here. I left my information because I was sincere that you could come here. We will help you, do not worry.”

Meanwhile, I had not said a word. I was watching, and I realized that I had actually missed Malu, and that I still found her to be attractive. She looked tired, and there were noticeable bags under

her eyes. However, the natural beauty, especially from her eyes, was clear to me. I was glad she had come to Burgos, and I was excited that I would have some more time around her. Still, I decided to stay in the background in this discussion. This was not my house, and I was a visitor and had no voice in all of this. I wondered what kind of arrangement might be made to accommodate Malu. She obviously had to have a place to stay, and it was also obvious that she didn't have anywhere else to go in Burgos.

"I don't want to bother anyone, and I don't want to cause any problems for this nice family," she said, looking at Manolo.

Manolo responded, "Don't worry about that. We will come up with a plan. As a matter of fact, I am making a plan now. There are some events going on, but I will explain those later. Right now you need a place to stay."

Before Manolo could go on, I spoke up. "Listen, Manolo, Malu can stay in my room, I mean she can sleep in Valeria's room, and I can sleep somewhere on the floor. All I need is a blanket and a pillow, and I'll be fine."

Manolo looked at me and at Malu. "I think we can work out a solution. I think we have a cot someplace, don't we, Mamá?"

"Yes, son, we have a cot. It is stored in our bedroom. Luis can get it for you."

I had forgotten Mr. Palacios's first name. It was Luis. He nodded at all of us, and I took this to mean that at least for the time being, Malu could stay at the Palacios home.

Malu looked at me. "William, I don't want to be in the way. I feel bad you have to leave your room."

“No, please do not feel bad. I will tell you later about my trip from Charlottesville to Spain. I spent some nights in the back of an open truck. I slept once, in northern France, under a bridge, on the ground, with my duffel bag as a pillow. Sleeping in this very comfortable home, with this family, even on the floor, or a cot, will be a pleasure for me.”

Mrs. Palacios said, “I made soup this afternoon. Why don’t you young people sit at the table and eat. Luis and I are going to retire early this evening. You can talk all you want.” She left the room and the three of us sat at the dinner table. A few minutes later Mrs. Palacios came back with three soup bowls and a tureen. She left them on the table and simply said, “Until tomorrow.”

The three of us ate the delicious soup. It had vegetables, pieces of meat, and curly pasta. At first, we simply enjoyed the soup. Then, we started talking about things that had happened to all of us recently. Malu told us about the few days she spent recovering in Vitoria. Dr. Goicoechea had found a pension where she could stay for free. It was not a great place, but good enough for her to rest and gain her strength. She had to share the room with three other women. They all worked in a small factory in Vitoria.

“While I was there, a friend came to visit. She was from Bilbao. She told me that there were many rumors about what happened that day we arrived in Vitoria, when you were with us, William. You saw what happened, didn’t you?”

“Oh, yes, very clearly.”

“My friend told me that according to rumors we were looking for trouble, and we were planning to attack some group in Vitoria. But we were just going for a Socialist Party rally. We had a couple of guns in the car, but they were for our protection, not because we were planning to attack anyone. We were not trying to hurt anyone. There was no reason for them to shoot and kill my brother

and my uncle. Those Falangist bastards! I hope they rot in hell. Their hell, I should say, because I don't believe in hell." We both watched as a couple of tears rolled down her cheeks.

It was hard for me to tell if she was more upset or angry. It almost seemed that her hatred of the Falangists was greater than her loss of two loved ones. The tears that welled up in her eyes told me it was the sorrow that was dominating.

She became more composed and continued talking. "My friend told me she thought it was better for me not to return to Bilbao for the time being. That made me frightened because that is where my mother and cousins live. They are my family, and I don't have anyone else close to me. I thought, where will I go if I can't go to my home?"

Manolo said, "For now we have a solution, even if a temporary one. You can stay here with us, and you are welcome. But I have to tell both of you that I am not going to be staying here in Burgos much longer. I am leaving soon."

"Leaving soon?" I said, almost in disbelief. Manolo was here in his home city, and he had work to do at the hospital while the medical school was shut down. "Where are you going?"

"I am trying to figure that out. My plan is not completely finalized yet. What I am telling you is a secret, so you can't tell anyone. For now I am not even telling my parents."

"Of course," I quickly said, "but who are we going to tell? Malu and I don't know anyone here in Burgos."

"Yes, of course, that is true. I am only making my point. I am going to do something, and nobody must know about it. Except for you, William. And Malu, you can join me, both of you can, if you wish. You don't have to, but if I am not here, I don't know what you all are going to do."

"Manolo," I said, "I am not staying here if you are leaving."

Malu quickly added, “Of course, I am not staying here either, no way. I don’t even feel comfortable staying here in Burgos. I don’t know this city or anyone who lives here. I don’t have many options right now.”

Manolo looked at both of us. “Yes, I know. And I will say now that I very much appreciate what you are telling me. You can join me if you want. I will welcome your company and your help. You have to know that it might be dangerous at times. William, you are from the United States. This is not your battle here in Spain. It is our battle. You have no responsibility in this. Malu, you are involved with your politics. I am not a Socialist, and I don’t believe in many of the things that the Republicans have done. But neither do I like many of the things I have heard about the Monarchists and the Falange. I don’t know what kind of future we are going to have here in Spain. I know that I want peace for the country, and that the hatred I see is terrible. And the killing and the suffering are terrible. I don’t know what to do about all of this, but I know I can do something about my sister.”

Before I could say anything, Malu spoke. “Your sister? Where is your sister? What do you have to do for her?”

“My sister, Valeria, is a nun at the Huelgas Convent. My friend Ricardo has people he knows in Madrid, and they have told him about attacks on the church that are being planned. Apparently Huelgas may be a place that is attacked. I cannot let my sister stay there. She is innocent. She knows nothing about all of the politics. She is lonely, I am sure, in that convent. I don’t want her to be there. Now, if there is an attack, and something happens to Valeria, I will go crazy. I can’t allow it. So. I am going to take her away.”

It was Malu who spoke. “Why don’t you bring her here, to your home? You can keep her here, right? I am not going to stay here for long. I don’t know about William, but your family comes first. Your sister can come right here, back in the room you have said has always been hers.”

“I don’t think that will work. She and my mother don’t get along so well. They don’t fight, but when they are together for a while, there are arguments. Besides, I am sure that the church authorities will get involved. They won’t just let Valeria leave with no reason.”

“What will Valeria think about this?” I asked when Manolo took a pause.

“I am not sure. I have never thought being a nun was the best thing for her. I don’t know what is best for her. I think that she stays there because she is confused and has no idea what to do with her life. She is afraid of many things. She is more nervous than most girls I know.”

“Perhaps that is a good environment for her,” I said, hoping to be helpful and supportive.

“It might be under other situations, but everything is different in Spain at this time.”

I saw Malu lift her hand and put it on Manolo’s shoulder. “I am not a religious person, and that should be no surprise to you. But if the convent is good for your sister, then that seems all right. However, if she is in danger, that is another story.”

“I think she might be in danger. I don’t think I can take the risk in this case. I need to have a plan. I will have one soon.”

That seemed like the end of the discussion for the moment. So, I decided to switch to something else. “Malu, how did you get here from Vitoria?”

“It took me two days. I was hitchhiking most of the time.”

“That sounds a little risky in these times,” Manolo said.

“What choice did I have? I have almost no money. I had to do something. The last part of the journey I got a ride on a truck. It was fine until we got into the city here. Then the bastard who was

driving thought I owed him something once we got here. I told him I was a prostitute with a disease. You should have seen the look on his face when I said that.”

We both laughed at this, and I think it was the first time Manolo and I, and probably Malu too, had a good laugh in some time. I think we all needed something to break up the serious tone of the discussion, and whether she realized it or not, Malu had done it perfectly.

“Very well, then. Tonight, you will sleep in Manolo’s, well, my sister’s, room and I will get the cot for you, William. It should be all right in the living room.”

“That works great for me,” I said. I saw Malu nodding her head in approval.

Manolo said, “I’m pretty tired. I think I’m going to my room. Oh, first let me get the cot for you, William. Wait here a moment and I’ll get that, a pillow, and a blanket. William, can you show Malu Valeria’s room?”

“Sure. I’ll do that now. Come with me, Malu. It’s right down this hallway.” We walked down to the room I had been using for the last several days. “It’s a pretty comfortable room, and I have had no problem sleeping in this bed. I suspect it is better than the place you were staying in Vitoria.”

“It is beautiful,” she said as we entered the room and I turned on the lamp. “It is nicer than the room I have back in Bilbao. I might even feel a little uncomfortable here. This is not my home, and I am not sure I will feel right sleeping in someone else’s room and bed.”

“Really? I haven’t had that problem. These people are so nice and friendly. I’m sure they are sincere about you staying here.”

“Perhaps you are right, William. I have to thank you also, very, very much.”

“Do you need anything?” I asked her as I was about to leave the room.

“Only one thing, I think. I would like to take a bath.”

“I don’t think that is a problem. There is a bathroom that Manolo and I use. Mrs. Palacios keeps it quite clean. It is right across the hall. There is a dark green towel hanging in there. I used it once or twice. You are welcome to use that unless you want me to ask Manolo for another.”

“No, no, please don’t bother him. That towel will be fine. I have not had a bath in three days. I probably smell bad.”

“I haven’t noticed anything, Malu. And you look fine. So go ahead and take your bath. When you finish you come back here and sleep in this bed. Maybe you’ll sleep better than you have in a while.”

“Maybe I will. I’m not sure. Everything is so different for me. I am used to my home. That is where I feel best. I want to see my family, but that is not an option right now.”

“I hope you can rest. I’m not sure what will happen tomorrow. Good night, Malu.”

“Good night, William.”

I went back to the living room, where I saw Manolo putting together the cot. It had a simple wooden frame and a canvas cover. He had a blanket that he extended over the cot once it was stable. There was a pillow on the chair. “I have used this before, and it was all right. It might be a little short for you, William.”

“I couldn’t complain about anything here, Manolo. Your home is so nice, and I enjoy all my time here. This will be fine for me. Malu is going to take a bath. I think she is all set for the evening. I’ll see you in the morning.”

“Yes, William. I think this will work. Good night.”

The temperature in the room was comfortable enough, so I decided I would sleep in my underwear and put the blanket over me. The canvas was a little rough, but I knew it would be fine. I got into a comfortable position and soon fell asleep.

I was dreaming, later, about being back in Charlottesville. I was walking to Cabell Hall for a class at the University, and there were other students walking around me. Everyone seemed to be in a hurry, but I didn't know why. The other students were dressed in their suits or blazers with a dress shirt and tie. I looked at what I was wearing and realized that I was not dressed appropriately. I looked like I was going downtown for a movie or something. I felt very self-conscious and wondered why I hadn't dressed for class. I also wondered why nobody was saying anything to me. It was quite strange. Then I heard someone call my name as if from a distance. Who was that? It sounded like a female voice, but I couldn't see any women around me. There were no female students at the University.

Then, I felt a hand grip my arm. I looked around to see who had grabbed me. Then I heard the voice again.

“William, William, are you sleeping?” I heard a soft whisper right next to my face.

I lifted my head and opened my eyes. Right in front of me was Malu's face. “Malu? Is that you? What's wrong?” I realized that I had been dreaming, but the dream was now blending with reality.

“I can't sleep.” It was dark, but it looked like she was wearing a long pullover shirt or light sweater. It went down below her waist, but it looked like she wasn't wearing any kind of pajama bottoms or shorts or anything.

“You can't sleep? I thought you were as tired as we are. Didn't you take your bath?”

“Yes, yes I took a bath. It was nice. But I went into that room, and no matter what, I could not fall asleep. I think I am scared.”

“Scared? Scared of what? There is no danger here in this house. You have met Manolo’s parents, and they have been welcoming to both of us. I don’t know why you can’t sleep. You were in a dangerous situation in Vitoria, but here in Burgos I think you are as safe as anywhere else.”

“I’m sorry, but I can’t sleep and I’m scared. Maybe it is because I am in an unfamiliar place. Can you come with me?”

“With you? Where?”

“To the room, to Valeria’s bedroom.”

“I suppose I could. What do you want me to do? I guess we can talk, if that is what you want.” I felt a little uncomfortable because I was only wearing my underwear, and the blanket had bunched up on one side of the cot. “Give me a moment so I can put something on.” Just as I finished saying this Malu put her hand out and grabbed my hand.

“Just come with me, William, please, won’t you?” It was dark in the room, so I figured Malu could not see me clearly. She kept hold of my hand and walked me back to Valeria’s room. When we got there, we went in and she sat on the bed.

“William, please, sit here.”

I sat down, wondering what she might want. I was so close to her that I could smell the soap she had used to bathe in. I looked at her, and she looked into my eyes. “William, you need to sleep here, in this bed with me. Please, I am afraid.” As soon as she said this she stretched out on the bed, and pulled the blanket back, as if making room for me. I had several thoughts come into my mind in a

flash. Oddly, one of the first ones was Mrs. Palacios. What if she knew that I was going to sleep in the same room as this new guest, who also happened to be a total stranger?

“What are afraid of? This place seems safe enough to me. Especially here in Manolo’s home. What is it that frightens you, Malu?” I thought back to the scene in Vitoria and the horrible trauma she had been through. Then I felt a little stupid for not understanding her psychological state at the time. I stretched out and moved under the blanket with her. She put her arm on my shoulder and pulled, as if to signal me to get closer. I did so but realized that if I were any closer I would feel her body next to mine. I didn’t feel I had much choice in the matter. If I resisted, I thought she would think I was somehow not accepting her. If I felt my body against hers, I knew she would see that I was sexually aroused in the way a man cannot easily control.

I got closer and felt her thighs next to mine. She put her face up to my neck and nestled it there. I was slightly uncomfortable, so I lifted my left arm and put it on her back. She snuggled even closer when I did that. “Thank you, William. I feel better already. I need someone next to me or I am not sure what I would do.”

Then her hand went up to the back of my neck where she rubbed gently. I was certainly at a critical juncture. Either she was expecting me to continue ahead from a sexual standpoint, or she was looking for a deeper sense of security. I think I have made it clear in my narrative thus far that I had little experience with girls, or women, from a sexual standpoint. The truth is I had never ‘gone all the way’ as I had heard it described plenty of times. I had no idea that I might have my introduction to the world of sexual intercourse under such unusual circumstances. Then, I immediately wondered about Malu and her experience. She seemed older than what I thought she might be. I had calculated her to be in her late twenties, perhaps three or four years older than I was. But, in some ways, and seeing her

without makeup and her hair not pulled back the way it was when I first saw her made her seem a little older than that. Surely she was not still a virgin like I was.

My dilemma ended a few moments later when I felt her adjust her position once more, and her leg ended up right between my legs, right up in the groin area. Then she pulled her face back from my neck and kissed me gently on the mouth. It lasted only a moment, but I had little doubt about the signal Malu was sending me. I kissed her now in return, and when I did, she responded a little more aggressively. Soon, we were kissing deeply and she was rubbing my back and shoulder.

We continued a while like this, and then she stopped and pulled back slightly. "Help me with this," she said, and she lifted the sweater and started to pull it up over her head. I helped her get it off, and in doing so I had a glimpse in the dark room of her breasts. It seemed that the sweater was the only garment she had been wearing along with her panty. She didn't even have a bra on. She reached over and started to pull up my t-shirt, which I then removed. After that, things progressed rapidly.

Before I even had a chance to think about the details, and to appreciate the importance of the moment, Malu and I made love. We kissed at the beginning, but after that it was the two of our bodies slowly but rhythmically moving together. I was unable to control myself and had an orgasm more quickly than I had hoped. When I did, she made the faintest sound of sucking in with her lips and squeezed me rightly. Then she put her face back next to my neck and kissed me there.

I wanted to say something, but I had no idea what that might be. I wondered what she was thinking. I waited to see if she would say anything, but she didn't.

I had read in novels I had gotten access to at the University about women sometimes making considerable sounds and sometimes even shouting out when they were having sex. This did not happen at all. That was fortunate because any yelling would surely have brought someone to the room, and that would have been a terrible embarrassment for me. I wondered if she had an orgasm, but realized

that I didn't have enough experience to know what she might have felt or experienced. I was confident that she had experienced something nice as she remained snuggled against me.

When it was over, she pulled back from me and put her hand up and caressed my face gently. *“Tú eres una bella persona, William. Te agradezco por entenderme y por hacerme sentir tranquila.* You are a beautiful person, William. I thank you for understanding me and for making me feel so calm.”

Malu now turned away from me to get into a comfortable position to sleep, and it seemed that she was asleep in a few moments. I called her name, softly several times, but she didn't respond. I knew she wanted me to stay with her and make her feel more secure, but I decided had to go back to the living room and spend the rest of the night there. I didn't want anyone to know I had been with Malu. When I was certain that she was sleeping I carefully got out of bed and went back to the cot. I tossed and turned a bit, and I kept coming back to the humorous thing she told us about her trip to Burgos. She said she told the truck driver that she was a prostitute with a disease. I sure hoped like hell that she was trying to scare that guy away and that she was not a prostitute. It made me realize that I really knew almost nothing about this somewhat mysterious and highly attractive Spanish woman.

The next morning, I woke up when I heard Mrs. Palacios putting things on the table in the dining area. I wondered what time it was, and then the real question came to me. Had I dreamed that I was with Malu, or did that really happen? For a few moments I was unsure, but once my head cleared, I realized that I was no longer a virgin. Then I wondered how Malu would act toward me when we saw each other a little later. I closed my eyes and went back over the details of what happened in Valeria's room. I could also still smell the combination of her natural odor and the clean, slightly soapy smell. I was starting to get aroused again when I heard Manolo say, “Good morning, Mamá. William, are you awake”?

I put my head up from the cot. “Yes, I’m awake, Manolo. Good morning.”

“Did you sleep well on that cot?”

“Yes, sure. It was fine.”

“I wonder how Malu is. I haven’t heard anything from here yet. She must have been exhausted last night. She probably fell asleep the moment her head hit the pillow. Wouldn’t you say?”

“Me? Oh, yes, of course. She must have dropped off in seconds.” How ironic, I thought. Was there any way that Manolo knew something about our encounter? No, he couldn’t have. I hadn’t heard a single noise while I was in the room with Malu. He wouldn’t have noticed anything, would he? Now I started to feel uncomfortable.

“In a bit I’m going to knock on her door. I have a plan now, and I want to tell you all about it.” He looked around behind him, and then lowered his voice. “I don’t want my parents to know what I am planning. They wouldn’t understand.” I nodded in agreement. Then I decided I needed to get up because I urgently needed to pee. I half wrapped myself in the blanket and headed for the bathroom. When I got there the door was shut. I heard the water running in the sink. I tapped lightly on the door.

“Who is it?” I heard from inside the bathroom.

“It’s me, William,” I said as softly as I could, but hoping she would hear me.

“Wait a moment, William. I’ll open the door.” I stayed there and hoped neither Mr. or Mrs. Palacios would happen down the hallway. Nobody came by, and a half minute later the door opened. I saw Malu peek from behind the door. “What do you want, William?”

“I need to come in, to go to the bathroom.”

“Then come in.” I stepped inside, and she closed the door. She was only wearing the green towel that I said she could use. Her hair was wet, so she must have had a bath. “You can use the toilet, William. I won’t look.”

I felt somewhat uncomfortable again. What if Manolo or his parents came by and knew we were both in the bathroom together? I felt like going right back out, but I couldn’t leave because I had to pee so badly. I stepped over to the toilet and peed. I glanced around for a moment, and I saw Malu using the towel to dry her hair. The towel no longer covered her body, and I realized what a beautiful body she had. I quickly turned back around because I didn’t want her to see me staring. I finished and then turned slowly back around. The towel was wrapped around her again now.

She looked at me and smiled. “Did you sleep well last night, William?”

“Yes, very well. And you?”

“Oh, yes, quite well too. I had a dream about my family and being back in Bilbao. It was so nice, but then I woke up and realized it was only a dream. Did you have a nice dream?”

“I, well, yes, I guess I did.”

“What was it about, William?” The expression on her face told me she was thinking about the episode last night in Valeria’s room. Was she teasing me, or did she think that she had been dreaming when we were together? This woman was truly mysterious. She was physically striking but increasingly mysterious.

“I had a dream about, uh, being back home also. In Charlottesville, my hometown.”

“Is that all?”

How was I supposed to answer that question? What was she implying? I think if we had been in someone else’s home I would have approached her to see what kind of reaction I got. But, under these

circumstances, I didn't dare do that. "Yes, I don't recall much else, really. I slept soundly, and without much dreaming, at least that I can remember.

"I had another dream too. I dreamed that a man came to me and made love to me. And it was beautiful, but then later, the man was gone. So, I think I must have been dreaming. Don't you think so, William?"

I was totally confused. I could not tell whether she was trying to get me to say something, or she was trying to make me feel guilty. She was becoming even more mysterious than I imagined. "Well," she said, "I have to get dressed now. Are you finished?"

"Yes, sure. I'll go now. I can wash up later, after you finish."

I stepped to the door, but before I opened it to slip out, she stepped up close to me. She put her hand on my cheek, and gently rubbed the side of my face. "You were so sweet last night, William. But I think maybe that was your first time."

"My first time?" was the only thing I could respond with.

"That is what I thought. I feel honored, William. But you know what?"

All I could do was look at her, with raised eyebrows. I was speechless.

"Next time, you will have to slow down and make it last." With this she kissed me lightly on the lips, and then pushed me in the back to get me out of the bathroom.

Thirteen

An hour later Manolo, Malu and I were sitting at the dining room table. Mr. Palacios was at his office, and Mrs. Palacios was visiting a neighbor friend of hers in the same building. We had just finished tea and toast with slices of ham. Everyone was quiet that morning, and I am sure we all had our individual issues we were trying to deal with, mostly silently. I could not take my mind off the past night and the time with Malu. She gave no indication that anything had happened. She didn't look at me any more than she looked at Manolo. Manolo was, without a doubt, still thinking about his plan to take Valeria out of the Huelgas Convent. It was hard to say what Malu might be thinking about. She had plenty to go over in her mind. I wondered if our episode was one of those things.

Manolo took a final sip of tea and then looked at the two of us. "I have my plan together now. At least, I have the first part figured out. There are some details to determine, but they will have to come later."

"That sounds good. Are you going to share the plan with us?" I asked.

"Yes," followed Malu, "I want to know too, if you don't mind."

"Of course. William, you two are part of my plan. You don't have any reason to stay here in Burgos, unless, you want to continue working in the hospital." I wondered if he was being serious or ironic.

"I was glad to work in the hospital, and I might feel a little bad that I won't be there to help out Ximena." As soon as I said this, I saw in my mind's eye Ximena's face when it was right in front of mine, and the expression on her face when she heard someone come into the Records Office.

“Ximena? Who is that?” Malu asked and looked at me.

“She works in the hospital here in Burgos. She is an administrator. Manolo was there, helping a doctor, and I had nothing to do. So they asked me to help out in the Records Office.

“Don’t worry about Ximena,” Manolo said quickly, “she will find someone else to help her. Malu, I’m not sure what you want to do. I think you could stay here if you want to.”

“I’m not staying here if you and William are leaving. This place is nice, your home is so nice, and Burgos seems all right at the moment, even if a bit too conservative. But, yes, I am going with you two.”

We both nodded our heads, and I’m sure our expressions told Manolo we were completely in agreement to help him.

“That is great. I will need help, but only if you both are sure. Here is what we are going to do. This afternoon we are going to Huelgas. You will need to pack your things. I am going to put together a bag of things for myself. We will not be coming back here to the house afterwards.”

“No?” I quickly said. “Where are we going?”

“We are going to head toward the east. We are going to get Valeria and head east.”

“Do you have a place in mind?”

“Yes, I do. I have a cousin who lives in Sudanell. Her name is Teresa Tárrega. She has a home that is in the country near the city of Lérida.”

“How far is that from here?”

“The distance is a couple of hundred kilometers or so. It might take us several days, depending on how things go, and if we get lucky with transportation. When it is one or two people, getting a ride

is not bad. But, when there are four of us, it might be a little harder. We could end up doing a lot of walking.”

“I’ve heard of Lérida, I think,” said Malu, “but Sudanell? I’ve never heard of that place.”

“It’s a small town, and most people have never heard of it, I guess. Unless you live in the area around Lérida, you wouldn’t know it.”

“How did this cousin get there? What is there?”

“It’s an agricultural area. My cousin, Teresa, married a man from that area. He has some kind of small packaging operation there. They put things in cartons so they can ship around the country. He has a pretty big place. I think it is a few hectares or so. I have never met him. And I have not seen Teresa in some years. However, my mother is close to that side of the family. I am confident that when we get there we can make some arrangements for Valeria.”

“And after that, what is the plan?” I asked.

“I’m not sure, my friend. For now, we have to make sure my sister is safe. After that, well I’m not sure. But you are going to see quite a bit of Spain. And we will be getting into the Cataluña region. I have never been there, have you, Malu?”

“No, never. But I can tell you that it is a good place to be if you are a Socialist.”

“I suppose you are right, Malu,” Manolo responded.

“Isn’t that where the city of Barcelona is?” I asked.

“Yes, Barcelona is in Cataluña, on the Mediterranean coast. It is a beautiful city, but I have not been there.”

“How about Madrid? We have barely talked about Madrid, and it’s the capital.”

“I’ve been there,” Manolo said.

“I haven’t been to Madrid,” said Malu. “I don’t think I want to go there. It’s too big and there is too much political tension there. I heard the people aren’t so friendly.”

“I didn’t find them much different from people anywhere else,” Manolo pointed out. “But I have heard that the friendliest, the most outgoing, are the people of the south, the people of Andalucía.”

“I have heard that too,” Malu added, after looking at Manolo almost with a frown on her face. “I’m not so sure. Just because a lot of people say something doesn’t make it true, you know.”

“I suppose you are right. But we are Spaniards. We might not be good at judging ourselves. William is not Spanish, so maybe he has an opinion.”

“I haven’t been here for long, just a couple of weeks, but I think there have been friendly people in every place I have been. Naturally, cities like Barcelona, Madrid and Seville are pretty famous. But that doesn’t mean everyone is friendly in those places, I guess. That isn’t something I think about much. I was told the people in France are not friendly, but I met several nice people while I was traveling in France.”

We stopped talking now, and Malu stood up and started to gather the plates and saucers together. “I’ll take these things to the kitchen and clean them. I don’t want Mrs. Palacios to think we made a mess.”

“That’s kind of you, Malu. I am going to put together some things for the trip. You two should do the same, but that shouldn’t take long. Before we go I am going to write a letter to my parents because I haven’t told them about my plans. They might start a big discussion about all of this, and I

don't want to go through that. I'm going to tell them in the letter. They'll understand, at least my motive of getting my sister away from a possibly dangerous situation.”

Manolo told us that his mother was visiting a friend at her home that was several blocks away. He said that when his mother and that friend got together it usually lasted a good part of the day. They would have lunch together and do some kind of activity. She would not be back until later in the afternoon, so Manolo knew that he would not have to meet directly with his parents and tell them about his plan. There would only be a big and difficult discussion, and he wanted to go ahead with the plan and not have a lot of interference. He said that his parents would eventually understand what he was doing and not be upset with him.

Two hours later the three of us left the Palacios home. I had my duffel bag, Malu had her bag, and Manolo had a carpetbag of things he had put together. He also had another bag that looked like a hiker's backpack slung over one shoulder. He told us he had put together a few items of clothing from Valeria's bedroom. We headed toward the convent, and a good part of the time went in silence. When we were about halfway to the grounds of the convent, Manolo started to explain what we were going to do. He was going to approach the convent on his own. We would be nearby, but out of sight. He was going to go inside through the same entrance he and I used the day we went to see Valeria. He was going to ask to see Valeria and explain that Mrs. Palacios had become ill and needed to go to the hospital. Manolo said that was the best idea he could come up with to convince whoever he might talk to at the convent that it was urgent he see Valeria.

Neither Malu nor I had a better suggestion. “What are Malu and I supposed to do while you are inside?”

“You will have to wait patiently. If I don’t appear in about half an hour with Valeria, I want you both to come up to the same door. You are going to knock on the door, and when someone opens, that person is going to see you, William, holding Malu as if she has fainted. When the door opens you have to tell them that you were out walking past the convent when your friend said she felt dizzy, and then she started to faint and almost fell down. You were lucky enough to catch her, and she wasn’t injured. But you think she needs to drink something, that she might be dehydrated or something.

“I’m sure they will let you come in. They will have Malu sit down in a chair in that entrance area, at least. What I am hoping is that this will provide a distraction so I can try to make a move with Valeria. As I said, it is the best thing I can think of.”

Malu and I looked at each other, and she shrugged her shoulders. It was clear to me that it was Manolo’s plan and we would go along with it. I kept wondering why it would be so difficult. Couldn’t Manolo’s sister simply tell the authorities at the convent that she wanted to leave, or that she wanted to take a break to visit her parents, especially if her mother was sick? It was a convent, after all, not a prison. But when I asked Manolo, he simply said, “It is more complicated than that, my friend.”

“What if your sister doesn’t want to leave?” asked Malu.

“That is something I have thought about. I am pretty sure I can convince her to come with me. Valeria is not such a religious fanatic, at least I don’t think so. But the nuns, the ones in authority, have a way of making these girls, especially the young ones, feel guilty if they join and then decide not to stay. I will feel bad if she resists, and then I will have to make quick decision about how to proceed. I don’t want to feel like I am forcing her, but I am more worried than ever that something bad might happen. If it does, and I didn’t get her away, I would blame myself for not being strong enough.”

Malu looked at me and then at Manolo. “I hope your plan works. For me, the church poisons the minds of these young people. They turn these women into mannequins who run around doing things because of some false sense of duty.”

Wow—Malu was letting her real feelings come out. I wondered to what extent this might bother Manolo. But if it bothered him, he did not show it. He looked as if he was focusing entirely on his plan of getting Valeria out of the convent and not much else mattered to him.

We came to the clearing that led up to the Huelgas Convent. I felt my heartbeat increase a bit, and wondered about my companions. Manolo stopped and looked straight ahead. Malu, who had never seen the place before, was staring intently at the building. We remained that way for some time. Then, Manolo said, “Well, I think you two should go over there to that area where there are small trees and shrubs. You can stay there, and if you crouch down you won’t be easily seen. You will still be able to see the entrance, I think. Watch for me and Valeria, and as we agreed, if I am not out in about half an hour, you will have to try your act, just as we have discussed.”

Malu and I left Manolo and went to the area he pointed out to us. We found a place where we could sit down on the ground next to some shrubs and still have a good view of the entrance Manolo was headed toward. Malu and I had a few minutes alone together, and I was wondering what was on her mind. I decided that I wasn’t going to say anything until she spoke to me. It didn’t take long for her to say something.

“William, you are from the United States, right?”

“Yes, I’m American. You know that.”

“Yes, but I don’t know much about your country. I am a little more familiar with England, and I respect the English. The English have a good history of recognizing the rights of the average person.

It may not be the perfect place, but it seems a good place to me. My question is, what are your political views?”

“My political views? What do you mean?”

“What do you think about what is happening in Russia? What about Germany? These are countries that are in transition. They may be indicating what the future of many Europeans is.”

“Look, Malu, I don’t know a lot about those countries. I know almost nothing about Russia. All I know is there was a czar, who was a kind of king, and he and his family were thrown out, and many of them killed. Now there is a leader named Lenin, but I don’t know what his ideology is. The time of kings is past, I think, but there are still some kings.

“I know a little more about Germany but mainly because we got involved in the Great War. My father explained a little of that to me, but what is happening now is not so clear. I have heard about this person Hitler. Some say he is the savior of the German people, but I don’t know what that would mean exactly. I guess if the Germans want him then they should have him. I just don’t know enough about all of this. I have never been interested in politics. I try to stay up with the news, but in Charlottesville we didn’t get very much international news. Of course, at the University we hear a lot more than most people in Charlottesville.”

Malu was quiet for a few moments and then began to speak. “I can see that you have not thought about these things too much. I think it is because America is far away. The things happening in Germany and Russia seem far away to me too, but the truth is they are not very far away. The Russians are seeking a new future for the people. The Bolsheviks have radical ideas, and I can’t say I understand all of those ideas. But I know that here in Spain we are stuck in the past. We still think that Spain is different and special, and that we can stay in the past. But, nobody, no country, can stay in the past. The past had too much ignorance, and there were too many people who didn’t have rights that should

have been recognized by the government. Spain needs change, but the change is not going to come from the Rising, the military or the church.”

“I can’t argue with anything you say, Malu. You know a lot more than I do, of course. In America I think we want to keep the world separate from us. We are different in many ways. We have had some serious problems, of course. The economy has suffered a lot. The financial sector had huge problem. President Roosevelt seems to be making the changes we need. We don’t think that we have to compare ourselves to the Europeans. I don’t know if this is good or bad. Personally, there are many things about Europe that I like. The history is incredible, and the art is beyond comparison. Maybe the price you pay for all this creativity is political and social issues. However, maybe that doesn’t make any sense.”

“I told you I don’t know much about your country. We were involved in the southern part of the New World more, you know, Mexico and Central and South America, and of course Cuba. We messed up the lives of millions of people. That long and difficult phase is over, fortunately. In the United States you had the advantage of the connection with England, and the English have a better sense about government and the rights of people. I’ve met a few English people who have visited Bilbao. None of them could speak Spanish like you do. How did you learn to speak Spanish?”

I was about to tell Malu the short version of my story when we both heard a commotion and remained still and silent. We heard a voice that was raised somewhat. We looked at the entrance Manolo had gone in, but the doors were closed. Where was the sound coming from? We looked at different parts of the convent, and then Malu saw two people on the opposite side of the building. One of them was Manolo, and the other was a woman in a white habit. They were having a discussion, but we could not hear what they were saying. Neither of us moved as we waited to see what would happen next.

The woman disappeared behind a wall, while Manolo walked along that same wall, back toward the door he had gone in. When he got there, he waited for a moment, and then he glanced over at us. He didn't say anything or make any gestures. A few seconds later the door opened, and Manolo went inside. There was nothing for us to do but wait. I heard Malu sigh deeply. But a few seconds later the door opened again, and out came Manolo with another person. It seemed to be a woman, but she was dressed in what looked like a man's clothing. We watched as they walked, at a quickened pace, in our direction.

"Is that his sister?" Malu asked in a very soft voice.

"I'm not sure. I saw her for only a few minutes the other day. I think maybe ..." I didn't get to finish my thought. We watched as another person came out of the same door and started to chase after Manolo and the other person, now clearly a woman. Their pursuer was a man, and he was carrying a club or something in his hand and was shouting at them.

"What the hell?" Malu said.

"I don't know. Let's just sit tight for a moment. Manolo should give us a signal or something." But he didn't. He took off running in the opposite direction we had come in and grabbed the hand of the woman and was pulling her. Surely it was Valeria, I thought. About thirty yards away there was a stone wall that was about four feet high. As we watched Manolo first threw their two bags over the wall, and then lifted his sister part way up so she could project herself to the other side. Then Manolo scaled the wall, and both were soon out of sight. The man with the club got to the wall a few moments later, but instead of trying to go over it he just shouted a final thing before turning and walking back to the door he had come out of.

Malu and I waited until the man was back inside and the door closed. We got up from our location and quickly ran over to the spot where Manolo and Valeria had gone over the wall. Malu gave

me her bag, and immediately scaled up and went over the wall. I threw her bag and my duffel bag over the wall and then went over.

On the other side was a field. We immediately saw Manolo and Valeria. Manolo patted me on the shoulder. "I thought you would figure out what to do. Good. But we can talk about this later. Right now we need to keep moving in case that guy tries to get help and come after us." Manolo turned and set off at a fast pace. He was still holding Valeria by the hand, and on a sudden impulse I grabbed Malu's hand and we followed. The slight squeeze she gave me with her fingers indicated it was a welcome gesture.

We walked very briskly for about an hour, and finally Manolo said that it was time to take a break. We had come to a small, forested area, and there was a clearing that was covered in grass and looked inviting. "Let's take a break now, and then we'll consider what our options are. Malu, this is my sister, Valeria. Valeria, this is Malu, from Bilbao, but I don't know her family name."

"Zabaleta," Malu quickly added. "María Luisa Zabaleta Cáceres. Nice to meet you," she said and reached over and gave Valeria a brief hug.

"Hi," Valeria managed to get out. "*Soy Valeria, hermana de Manolo. Es un placer.* I am Valeria, Manolo's sister, it's a pleasure.

"Do you remember me, Valeria? I'm William."

"Of course, William, yes. How are you?"

"Pretty well now, I think, after all the excitement this morning. How about you?"

"Obviously, I am in somewhat of a state of shock. All of this was unexpected," she said as she looked at Manolo. I could not help but wonder what the relationship was between Manolo and his

sister. There was nothing in his comments up to this point to indicate that there was a strained relationship between them. But I wondered what Valeria's feelings about all of this were.

Manolo interrupted my wondering about how those two got along. "Valeria, you have to listen to me. I know this is all strange, but there is a reason for my actions. Remember Ricardo? He's the guy who works in the bar near the Cathedral. He has a contact in Madrid, with a group, Socialists or Anarchists, I don't recall, and there are rumors that an attack was going to take place at a church or convent. It seems that Huelgas was one of the potential sites. I could not allow you to stay there under these circumstances."

"But what did my parents say about this?" It sounded strange to me that Valeria would say 'my parents' instead of 'our parents' when talking to her brother. It turned out to be typical in Spanish.

"They don't know about this, Valeria."

"They don't know? Seriously? What are they going to say when they find out?"

"They must know by now. I left a note at home when we left to come get you this morning."

"Why didn't you discuss it with them? My father knows a lot, and maybe he would have told you this attack wasn't going to happen."

"Listen, Valeria, I thought about all of this. You know that my mother would have gotten upset and there would have been an argument. I didn't want to go through all of that. But what I want to know is, did you really want to stay in the convent?"

I watched as a single tear rolled down Valeria's cheek. I believed Malu was thinking the same thing I was, that we should stay out of this discussion, yet neither of us got up to move away while Manolo and Valeria talked. We were involved in this situation now, and I thought for one that we deserved to stay informed about what was happening.

“I don’t know,” Valeria managed to say after a few moments. “There were some aspects I liked, but I don’t know if I wanted to stay permanently. Some of the people, the sisters, were nice, but some of them were strict. The behavior of some of the nuns was, at least to me, rather strange. There were rumors about relationships between some of the nuns, which I found difficult to believe, but not impossible. Father Felipe was a frequent visitor, from the Cathedral, and I thought he looked at me in a suspicious way at times.”

“I hope he didn’t try to bother you, you know, in any inappropriate way.”

“No, he didn’t try anything, but he still made me feel uncomfortable.”

“One thing is for sure. You are quite thin. Don’t they feed everyone decently there?”

“I suppose so, but the food is simple, and often uninteresting, bland. It wasn’t what we were used to at home. But I didn’t complain. By the way, where are we going now? Obviously, we aren’t going back home.”

“No, for now we are going someplace else.”

“What someplace else, Manolo?” Valeria asked.

“Do you remember our cousin, Teresa?”

“I think so. She lives east somewhere, right?”

“Yes. She and her husband live in Sudanel. It’s not too far from Lérida.”

“Sudanel? I don’t remember that place. What’s there?”

“Teresa and her husband. They have a business there. It’s agricultural.”

“How are we going to get there? Do you have any money?”

“I have some, yes. It isn’t much, but it will get us to Sudanell. Once we get there, I think Teresa will help us.”

All this time Malu and I had been totally silent. Now that there was a pause in the conversation between Valeria and Manolo and Valeria turned to Malu. “Excuse me for asking, but why are you with us?”

“No problem. I am from Bilbao. I was going to Vitoria to a meeting of the Socialists, and as soon as we got to Vitoria we were attacked. My uncle and my brother were shot, as if they were stray dogs that nobody wanted to have around. I was beaten and taken to a Falangist hideout. I got very lucky because a woman allowed me to escape. Your brother was working in a clinic there, and when I showed up he and a doctor got me on the road to recovery.

“When I was at the clinic your brother gave me his address in Burgos. That was nice of him. He didn’t have to do that. I knew he was a good person when he showed me that kindness. While I was recovering in Vitoria, a friend got word to me that there were some suspicions about me back in Bilbao. They thought that my uncle and brother and I were going to Vitoria to cause a problem, to assassinate someone.”

Valeria looked at Malu intently. “You are a Socialist?”

“Yes. But I am not a bad person, and my family members were not bad either. We were going to meet with Socialists in Vitoria. I don’t know why we were attacked, except that the Falangist pigs want to kill anybody that doesn’t agree with them. *¡Me cago en ellos, son hijos de puta!* I crap on them; they are sons of bitches!”

I looked at Malu and wondered if she were getting out of control with her political sentiments overcoming her. But, despite the strong statement, she didn’t look any different that she had moments before Valeria started speaking to her.

“Well, I am sorry for your loss. That was not right. There is too much killing in Spain today.”

“Thank you,” was all Malu could say in response. She had lowered her face and remained that way for a time.

Manolo now spoke. “Valeria, you met William in the convent last week. But you didn’t have the chance to talk much.”

“Yes, I know. William, you are from the United States, right?”

“Yes, that’s right. I’m from Virginia. It was one of the original colonies of England. It is in the south. My hometown is Charlottesville. It is a beautiful place. I wish all three of you could go there some day and see my home.”

“Is it near New York?” Valeria asked, with what seemed sincere interest.

“No. New York is north. It is up on the east coast. It is pretty far from Virginia.”

“Have you been to New York? I think it is a famous city.”

“I suppose it is, yes. I was just there a few weeks ago. When I decided to come to Spain, I had to go to New York first. Fortunately, my father has a cousin who loves there. I was able to see the city a little bit. I live in a very small city, so it was a little intense for me. But I enjoyed the time there.”

“Why did you come to Spain?”

“That’s the first time anyone has asked that question in, oh, about a week, I think.” I hoped I didn’t sound sarcastic because I didn’t want to seem that way. “I originally came because I wanted to see the country that is the origin of the Spanish language and culture. I knew that Spain was having problems. But my desire to travel and to see this country outweighed everything else. I must say that I don’t regret coming here, even with the difficult situation that you are all experiencing here. I have

enjoyed the people, and the food, and the sights I have seen. Everything has mostly been positive, except what happened in Vitoria, when the car Malu was riding in was attacked. A few minutes earlier I was in that car too.”

“You were in the car that was attacked and resulted in two people being killed?”

Manolo now got involved in the discussion. “Valeria, William had been dropped off at the building I was staying in. It’s a kind of student hotel or hostel now, and Malu and her brother thought it would be a good place to leave William. He was hitchhiking from Mondragón, and he happened to get a ride with Malu and her family members. It was just a coincidence. William was standing outside and, I imagine, thinking about the people who had given him a ride, when the attack happened.”

Valeria turned to her brother, “Mondragón? I’m not familiar with that place.”

Manolo replied, “Mondragón is in the Basque Country, in the mountains, north of Vitoria. William entered Spain from France, on the coast. He went to Irún first, and then went with a trucker to Mondragón.”

Valeria looked at me. “Why were you going with the trucker?”

“Well, that was the way I was traveling. I arrived from New York up on the north coast of France. From there I hitchhiked down toward Spain. One of the best ways to move around is by working for truckers. Truckers take things, food, supplies, all kinds of things, and when they arrive at their destination they often need help unloading the trucks. That is mostly the way I traveled from northern France to the Spanish border.

“Oh, I see,” said Valeria.

Manolo took up the narrative now. “William ended up heading south because he met a man in France, a Spaniard, who was originally from Burgos. That man told William that he should try to visit Burgos, if possible. So, William decided to head toward Burgos.

“When he was in Mondragón he hitchhiked to Vitoria. Malu and her relatives were driving from Bilbao to Vitoria, as you already know. They saw William on the road and offered him a ride. When they arrived in Vitoria, they dropped off William near the building I was staying in. Right after he got out, the car was attacked, and Malu’s brother and uncle were killed. She was captured and taken as a kind of prisoner.”

I now added, “It was the worst, the most violent, thing I have ever experienced. It was terrible. I had been talking with people a few minutes earlier, and then I watched as they were shot as if they were criminals or something.” As soon as I said this, I looked over at Malu. Maybe I had been too direct in what I was saying. I hoped I hadn’t made her feel worse. “I’m sorry, Malu, for talking about this situation. I didn’t mean to make you feel uncomfortable.”

“Don’t worry, William. I have suffered already, and I will continue to suffer, but your talking about it does not make me feel any worse. Don’t be concerned.”

“I can’t imagine all of this,” Valeria said. “I have never seen anyone hurt badly or killed. It is horrible. I only went to one bullfight, and I felt terrible for the poor bull.”

“Listen everyone,” Manolo now said, “We should keep moving now. It is the middle of the afternoon. I imagine everyone is getting a little hungry. We should come to a town before long. We can find a store and buy something to eat. If everyone has had a chance to rest, we can go on.”

Fourteen

We spent two more hours walking, and Manolo always seemed to know what the best way to proceed was. We traveled along small roads that were unpaved but occasionally a few vehicles passed by. On several occasions we saw farmers who were using the road to take carriages drawn by horses. It was something I had seen a few times in the countryside outside of Charlottesville, but apparently it was more common in this part of rural Spain. At one point Manolo stopped to talk to a person who was in a field next to the road. He must have been asking for directions because the farmer pointed in a direction and nodded several times while speaking. Manolo thanked the man and waved for us to follow him.

Eventually we came to a town with a name I found hard to pronounce. It was Cardeñadijo, and it was the destination Manolo had inquired about. The terrain had become a little hilly by now, and it was apparent from the landscape that this was a farming village. There couldn't have been many businesses in such a small place, I thought. All we saw were small houses until we got down to the last block or so. Manolo pointed to a small building, and above the entrance there was a sign that read "Bodega Otero. The place looked deserted, but the door was open, so we all went in. It was a tiny place but was filled with all kinds of food items.

I immediately noticed the smell of fresh bread, and that made me realize how hungry I was and so ready for a piece of the delicious bread I had had so many times in Spain so far. I wondered where the owner was, and then I saw in one corner a stool with a small man sitting there with his eyes closed.

"¿Perdón, señor, es usted el dueño aquí?" Excuse me, sir, are you the owner here?" Manolo asked the man.

For a moment we stared at the man, and he didn't move. After a few seconds he opened his eyes and said without even looking up, "*Yo soy el mismo. ¿En qué puedo servirles esta tarde?* I am that person. How can I help you this afternoon?" Finally, he looked up at us, but he didn't move.

"*Huele a pan fresco. ¿Hay pan de hoy, señor?* It smells like fresh bread, do you have baked today?"

"*Desde luego. Lo hago yo mismo todos los días en el horno que está atrás.* Yes, of course. I make it every day myself in the oven that is out back."

"Great," said Malu, who was apparently as hungry as the rest of us.

The proprietor pointed with a thumb to the front door. "Open that basket, the one there on that barrel next to the door." Malu went over and opened the basket. She pulled out two large, very toasted loaves of bread. They looked incredibly good. She brought them over and the man pulled out two sheets of brown paper from behind him, and in a flash the two loaves were wrapped up.

"Is there any smoked ham, sir?" Manolo asked.

"Yes. It's in that small case on the other side of the door. I made it myself."

"And butter, did you make that today too?" Manolo asked with a smile on his face. Finally, the man seemed to have a reaction to this.

"No, I didn't make any butter today. But, fortunately for you, my wife did." He still didn't smile, but he seemed less serious than before.

"Excellent. We would like five hundred grams of sliced ham, two hundred grams of butter, and a bottle of your table wine."

“I can accommodate you, young man. The wine is against that wall over there, inside those boxes on the floor. I’ll get my wife to bring you the butter. Will there be anything else today?”

“We’ll look around a bit, thanks.” The owner finally got up and when he did we noticed that he was indeed very short. He has shorter than Valeria, who was the shortest of the four of us. He walked with a slight limp, or maybe it was because of stiffness from sitting in the same position for such a long time.

“Wait here for a minute and see if there is anything else you want. I’ll get the butter for you.” After saying this he ambled out the front door. We all looked around the store. I decided I was simply going to follow Manolo’s lead here. Valeria picked up an item or two, and finally took a bag over to Manolo. It was a bag of cookies or crackers, from what I could tell at a glance. A couple of minutes later the man returned, and in his hand was a small package of white paper. “Here are two hundred grams of butter. Actually, it is a little more than that, but I’ll just charge you for two hundred.”

He put all of the items, including two bottles of red wine, in a paper bag. Manolo pulled out a few coins and paid for the items. “Sir, we are traveling to the east. We might need a place to spend the night. Is there any place around here that could accommodate us?”

“By here, you mean in Cardeñadijo?”

“Well, either here or maybe the next village to the east.”

“Let me think. There is nothing here, really. The next town is Carcedo de Burgos. It is about an hour and a half from here, if you are on foot. I haven’t been there for a while. It’s small too. What you might find is somebody there who has a barn they would let you sleep in. Of course, you might have to pay something for that. I don’t really know.”

“I understand. I appreciate the advice, and thank you for these items, sir.”

“You are welcome, and go with God.”

We left and walked to the end of the village. A short distance after that we saw a place under a tree that happened to have a large trunk lying nearby. “Look,” said Valeria, “There is a natural bench we can sit on and eat.” We quickly went over there and sat down. Manolo reached into his bag and pulled out a large knife with a folding blade. He opened it, and then unwrapped one of the loaves of bread. He deftly held the knife and cut a thick slice for each of us. Then he took out the butter and handed his sister the knife. We took turns spreading butter on the bread while Manolo took out the cured ham. It was already sliced, and we each grabbed a few pieces to put on the bread. Manolo pulled out the bottle of wine, and I noticed it had a piece of cloth or something in the neck, not a cork. It was obviously locally bottled and meant to be drunk right away. We didn’t have glasses, and Manolo handed the bottle of red wine to Malu. She thanked Manolo and took a deep swig. Then she gave the bottle to me. “*Salud,*” she said with a hint of a smile.

We ate in almost total silence. It was simple food, but it could not have been better, considering the circumstances. The first bottle of wine disappeared quickly, so we opened the next one. Between the four of us we ate everything. Obviously, we were all very hungry. For the next while we sat on the ground with our backs against the fallen trunk. I’m not sure who fell asleep first, but before long we were all far away from the reality of that day.

I woke up a while later when I heard Manolo making arrangements to get back on the journey. He was putting the wine bottles and extra wrapping paper together and was stuffing everything under a hollow area under the horizontal tree trunk. There was no place else to put the trash, so at least it would not be sitting on the ground as if we left it there without caring.

It was dark by the time we got to Carcedo de Burgos. The store proprietor was right about it being about as small as Cardeñadijo. We walked through the town’s main road, which was only two

short blocks long. I was getting the idea that these villages were not accustomed to having strangers come around. There were no accommodations for people who happened to be passing through. I had heard about and seen a couple of times in rural parts of Virginia, places that were called “Bed and Breakfasts.” I had never stayed in one, but my father said they were quite popular in England. Often they were family homes that had extra rooms that weren’t used, and so the families opened them to travelers. Apparently, this was not a custom in Spain.

Manolo finally suggested we take more of the advice offered by Mr. Otero. We might find a farm near the main road that had a barn or perhaps an outer building that we could spend the night in. I wondered if the local people would find it a little suspicious that four young people, two couples as we were surely represented to other people, and not want to have anything to do with us. I asked the others what they thought.

“I think it is a valid point,” said Manolo.

“Yes,” chimed in Malu, “these country people are pretty conservative, you know. They must think that it looks strange that people our age are wandering around their farmland.”

“I think we have a good explanation,” Valeria finally added. “We simply tell them that we are on a pilgrimage.”

“Oh great,” Malu added quickly. “We are in the middle of nowhere, and on top of that I’m going to become a pilgrim. How ironic is that?”

“Yes, it’s ironic,” Manolo said, “but Valeria has a good idea, I think. We don’t want people to get suspicious of us, do we? It probably does look a little strange that we are traveling through this area. I think it might convince the locals if we tell them we are pious people on our way to a religious place. Of course, it means we have to pretend to be what we say. Malu, that might be hard for you, but I’m sure you can follow along if it means that we attract less attention.”

“I suppose you are right, Manolo. I can pretend if need be. How about you, William?”

“I have no problem with this. Maybe you can even say that you are taking me to a holy place because I have a problem or something.”

“What do you mean?” Malu asked.

“I get it,” Valeria quickly added. “People go to holy sites in order to get cured. It happens in Lourdes, in France, right? So, we tell people, if they ask, that William can’t speak, or something. We can come with an idea. I’m pretty sure it can work.”

Manolo looked at us as if trying to decide if this made any sense at all. “I guess we can try it if we have to. What place will we say is our destination? Santiago de Compostela is in the wrong direction. People go there frequently on pilgrimages, but I don’t think we can say that. We are heading east, so it has to be to the east.”

“Let me think about it a bit,” Valeria said. “I can come up with something, I’m sure.”

We continued to walk and look for a farm that might offer a place for us to spend the night. It was getting dark and the temperature was starting to drop. After a while, Valeria spoke up again.

“I’ve got it.”

“Got what?” Manolo asked.

“Zaragoza. Zaragoza has a Cathedral, and that is where the Virgen del Pilar is kept.”

“Yes, that’s right,” said Manolo. “The Virgin of the Pillar in Zaragoza. That is very good, Valeria. That is what we are going to tell people. We are pilgrims on our way to visit the Virgin of the Pillar and pray for our friend, who is a deaf mute. Can you deal with that, William?”

I jokingly looked at him as if I hadn't heard him. I must have made a funny face, because all three of them began to laugh. I joined them, and it was the lightest moment any of us had experienced that day.

Malu then spoke. "It sounds a little crazy to me, and it won't be easy for me to pretend that I am a devout person. But, considering the situation, I will pledge to make the effort. I must practice crossing myself, I suppose. However, please don't tell any of my friends or comrades."

"What friends and comrades?" Manolo asked, and then laughed heartily again.

"So funny, Manolo. You are a comedian, I think."

Manolo spoke again. "This is actually a great idea. William speaks Spanish exceptionally well, but he doesn't sound like a Spaniard. This way we avoid having him draw attention because he is a foreigner."

He started off again and we followed him. It wasn't long before we came to a farmhouse that was near the road we were on. There were lights on inside, and there was smoke coming from a stone chimney. Behind the house was a barn that was made of the same stone as the house. I think we were all hoping this might be a place we could stay the night.

Manolo went, alone, up to the front door of the house and knocked. There was no answer for a while, so he tried again, a little harder. Finally, the door opened and a woman appeared. We could see Manolo and the woman talking but could not make out exactly what they were saying. At one point she bent her head to the side and looked at us. Valeria nodded her head as if to confirm whatever it was that Manolo was telling her. The door closed, but Manolo stayed there, and glanced back at us as if to signal to us that we should wait a bit.

A minute later the door opened again, but this time it appeared to be a boy. The boy, who appeared to be twelve or thirteen, was carrying a wooden candleholder with a single, large candle. He came out and closed the door behind him. He briefly signaled for Manolo to follow, and we then followed the two of them. We went to the barn, and the boy stepped up and opened the double wooden door. He signaled for Manolo to go in, and then looked back to us. We approached the barn and stepped inside. To the right we saw a pen with perhaps a dozen sheep. Straight ahead there were two stalls with horses inside. To the left there was what looked like a storage area with large burlap bags stacked in several piles.

“Ustedes pueden acomodarse como quieren. Les dejo esta vela que debe durar un par de horas por lo menos. Mi mamá dijo que les ofrezco sopa que sobró ahora. Les traigo la olla? You can make yourselves comfortable here. I will leave this candle for you, which should last at least a couple of hours. My mother said you are welcome to the soup that was left over from today. Should I bring the pot?”

“Por supuesto que sí, joven. Eres un joven caballero y les agradecemos a ti y tu mamá por ser tan agradables y generosos con nosotros, personas extrañas para ustedes. Of course, young man. You are a young gentleman and we thank you and your mother for your kindness and generosity toward us, people who are strangers to you.”

The boy turned and left with saying anything else. The four of us looked around the barn. Despite the animals, it didn't smell bad at all. The temperature was even reasonable inside. I think we were all thinking about the soup first, and then the sleeping arrangements for the night. Manolo said, “Look, I think they won't mind if we arrange these sacks, as long as we put them back the way they are now. I'm pretty sure we can arrange them so we can sleep on them. There is a canvas over there in one corner, and it is probably big enough to cover all of us.”

Manolo and I then started moving the bags around, trying to figure out a way to line them up so we could all rest reasonably comfortably and cover ourselves with the canvas. Just as we were making progress, the boy came back to the barn. He was carrying a large, black pot with a round handle. He set it down on top of a barrel, and from a pocket he produced four wooden spoons. “*Es un caldo de gallina son patatas y zanahoria. Está todavía calientita. Allá hay una jarra de cerámica con agua del pozo. Buen provecho y buenas noches.* This is a stew of hen with potatoes and carrots. Over there is a ceramic pitcher with fresh water from the well. Enjoy the food and good night.” In a moment he was gone.

“I think we got lucky tonight,” Manolo said with a satisfactory expression on his face.

“Without a doubt,” Malu agreed. “What kind of story did you tell the woman?”

“That was not too hard. I told her we were on our way to the Cathedral in Zaragoza, to see the Virgin. She said she had been there as a child and that it was a trip she has never forgotten. She told me that we were welcome to stay the night here in the barn. She’s a widow and lives here with her son. She seemed to be trusting. I’m not sure what we might do to show our appreciation. Tomorrow morning I think I will ask her if there are some chores we could do for her before we leave.”

“That is a nice idea, Manolo. Let’s do that,” Valeria said.

“Let’s try this soup,” Malu said. She picked up one of the spoons and put it into the pot. She lifted the spoon and sniffed. “It smells great.” She tried it and closed her eyes. “This is country cooking. It’s quite good. Manolo, there is still some bread, right?”

“Yes, of course.” He lifted the remaining loaf and broke off a piece. “Help yourselves,” he said as he dipped his piece of bread into the pot. “Yes, it’s very good. Grab your spoons. This will have to be a communal meal. I don’t think any of us are ill, so don’t worry, eat and enjoy.” We all stood by the barrel and ate directly from the pot. The chicken had bones, so we used our hands to eat the meat and

then threw the bones into a bucket nearby. To say that the meal was exactly what we needed would be an understatement.

Before long we had finished all the soup and the bread. We took turns drinking from the ceramic pitcher, and then we all went to sit on the burlap sacks. Nobody said it, but it was obvious that we were all exhausted. I saw Valeria yawn deeply, and then Malu did the same.

Manolo, whom we all recognized as the leader of our journey, looked at the bags we had moved around and said, “William, you can lie here at this end, I’ll be there next to you, then Valeria there and Malu there.” He pointed at the spots for each of us with his finger to make it clear what the arrangement would be. We all accepted his instruction without saying a word.

Malu looked around the barn, and then said, “I wonder if there will be some warm water available tomorrow morning. I have not had a bath since yesterday. I will feel terrible tomorrow if I cannot get cleaned up.”

“I feel the same way,” said Valeria. “In the convent we didn’t have access to warm water everyday so I had to get used to bathing less often and washing up at a sink. But I would welcome some warm water also.”

Manolo looked at them. “We’ll see what is available tomorrow. I imagine the widow will share with us if she can. Now, I suggest we get some sleep.” With this he went over and picked up the canvas. It was a dark gray color and was sufficiently big for all of us. I helped Manolo unfold it and we spread it out over the sacks. Then we folded it halfway down, and it actually looked like a blanket over a large bed. “These bags are rough, so the best idea is to take a piece of your clothing and use it as a pillow.” We all grabbed something and settled in. “If everyone is ready, I’ll blow out the candle.” Nobody said anything, so Manolo blew out the candle and came back to his place. I can only speak for

myself, but while the sacks were hard and lumpy in spots, I found a comfortable position and soon fell asleep.

I don't remember having any dreams that night. Sometimes you go to sleep at night, totally exhausted, and then next thing you know it is morning and you wake up. That was one of those nights for me. We were all up early. The boy, whose name was Juan, came in with a bucket of warm water and some towels, so we were able to clean up a bit, washing our faces and hands. It was not really close to the bath that the girls had been thinking about but wasn't bad considering. That was something that would have to come another day. All things considered, our first night away from Burgos had been a decent one.

Juan told us that his mother had made an egg tortilla that we were welcome to if we wanted. Nobody disagreed, so he left and came back with the tortilla and some bread. For being a free place to stay the night, we were getting pretty good treatment. After we ate Manolo left, and then returned a few minutes later. "The widow Sarmiento said that if we felt obliged to pay for the night and the food, she has firewood that needs to be cut and stacked. William, you and I can do that while these ladies get themselves ready. It should not take us more than an hour." I left with Manolo and just outside behind the barn were some large branches that had been left on the ground. We spent a little more than hour chopping and stacking. When we finished it looked tidy. I felt that we had done a nice service for this woman who had been so hospitable to complete strangers.

We left the widow's farm after expressing our deep gratitude. As we left, she and Juan were out working in a vegetable garden. It was a cool morning, but the sun was out and there were few clouds. It seemed to be a good day to continue our trip.

The widow gave us an idea of the way we should go if our destination was Zaragoza. It wasn't where we were headed exactly, but in general it was fine for the time. Manolo said that we could make adjustments later in the day. As we walked I found myself in the rear of the group more often than not. It was a tacit agreement that Manolo would be first, after that it was a matter of what the rest of us wanted to do. The first day Manolo and Valeria were mostly together, and I spent a good deal of time around Malu. It was strange that we didn't speak very much. It made me wonder about that night at the Palacios's house. What kind of feelings did Malu have for me? Was that nocturnal encounter simply a one-time adventure for which I was a convenient person who could provide her a sense of security? Did she have any feelings for me? What was I feeling about her?

Eventually I found that Valeria was walking somewhat nearer to me than the others. I thought it might make sense to engage in some conversation just between the two of us. I decided to begin with something simple. "There are the two of you children in the family?"

"Yes. My mother had another child, a girl, but she died when she was a baby. It was a year when there was an illness that most people got over, but some children and older people died. I think it might have been influenza. Her name was Daniela. She was a beautiful baby, and when she died it was difficult for my mother."

"I can understand that. I'm sorry."

"It seems such a long time ago now. That is the way life is at times. We do what we can do, but there may be plans we cannot control."

"Do you mean plans by God?"

She thought a bit before responding to me. "Maybe that is the case. I'm not sure. As you know, I became a nun. Really, I am still a nun. But no matter what people tell you in church, they don't have

answers for everything. After a while hearing ‘God has determined that it should be so’ or ‘God acts in mysterious ways’ doesn’t seem to satisfy.”

“But you obviously still believe in God.”

“Yes, I do. But what I sometimes don’t comprehend is that often it is the fear of God that dominates the situation. I find it difficult to understand this. Why should we fear someone, or something, that is supposed to be so good? That is what we are told over and over. God is so good and so we need to be good too. But if we do something wrong, if we sin, then God is going to punish us.”

“That is an interesting point, yes. It sounds as if you are not completely convinced about the whole thing. Please, I don’t mean to ask you questions that might be difficult for you.”

“Do not worry, William. I hardly know you, that is true. However, I can tell by what my brother says about you that you are a good person, an honest person. Manolo says he would trust you under any circumstances.”

“He said that?”

“Yes, he did. Manolo has always been a good judge of character, so I trust him. That means that I trust you too.”

I was pleasantly surprised at this conversation. I had the feeling that Valeria would be a somewhat difficult person to communicate with. Her being a nun had made me come to conclusions about her, but she was proving me wrong in that regard.

“It is funny. I went to the monastery thinking that my beliefs would become solidified, that I would become totally devoted, even if I wasn’t prepared for that life. At first, that is what I felt, and I accepted my decision and everything that came with being in that environment. But after a few months

I started questioning things. There was a sense of resignation that I saw in others, and I don't think I was ready to be so resigned. I am not sure if that makes sense to you."

She stopped talking for a little while, and I was not sure how to respond to her. We were passing a group of houses that appeared to be the central part of a large farm or ranch. It was an impressive view with the rolling hills in the background. It struck me how beautiful Spain was, although the beauty was of another kind than I was used to. It was not the same beauty that is found in central Virginia, where there is so much green, so many trees and grassy areas. Here the terrain was something more rugged but still striking.

I turned my attention back to her. "Valeria, what if we had not come to take you from the convent yesterday? Would you just have stayed there?"

She did not answer me right away. Eventually she said, "I don't know yet. This has happened suddenly and unexpectedly. When I realized what was happening yesterday, I started to cry. But I didn't know if I was crying because of sadness or happiness. I suppose it was a combination of both."

"And today, what are you thinking?"

"Today, I am glad to be out here, and with my brother. It feels good to be out in the open and not to have everything I do observed and criticized by those around me. It also feels good to talk with someone new, someone that I feel I can share my thoughts with. That has never been easy for me."

"That is interesting. It seems that here in Spain people are open and like to talk about what they are feeling."

She stopped walking for a moment and looked directly at me. "Do you think so? I am not sure, but I can only see things from the perspective here. I have never been anywhere else. I have never shared things with anyone except family members or my close friends. I had a friend, María Victoria,

and she and I shared almost everything. She moved a few years ago, after we finished school, and I don't have any other close friends. I have never been able to share my deepest thoughts with my mother. She and I are very different. I think I am more comfortable with my father, but women can't share some things with men."

"I don't have any close friends back in Charlottesville, nobody my age anyway."

"That seems unusual, why not?"

"I'm not sure I can explain it. Part of it might have to do with my father. He was born and raised in England. In the United States, where I grew up, he has never been totally comfortable with the culture. He likes Americans, and he likes living in Charlottesville. But at the University he is around a lot of highly educated people most of the time. I became used to being around those kinds of people. I went to a private school that was outside Charlottesville. So, I didn't have much opportunity to be around kids my age after school. I would just go home and be with my dad. It was funny, but in the neighborhood we live in there aren't many young people. I just never developed a close relationship with any guys. It isn't very typical, is it?"

"No, not typical. But I don't know anything about your country. The United States sounds very foreign to me. What is it like?"

"It has a lot of variety, really. Some places, like New York City, are big and loud and exciting, and other places, like my town of Charlottesville, are quiet and in beautiful locations. Virginia is truly a beautiful place. There is a lot of green, and the Blue Ridge Mountains are nearby. It is quite striking at times. If you go to the western part of the country, everything changes. I have not been far west, but we have places like Kansas and Iowa that are giant, flat places where there is nothing to be seen for hundreds of miles."

“I have been to southern France, in the Pyrenees region. It was beautiful, and hilly and kind of ancient looking.”

“Ancient? What do you mean?”

“I mean that when I was there I imagined what life was like thousands of years ago. Everything seemed, well, primitive, as if that is where cavemen lived.”

“That is interesting. I hope to get up there to see that area. I like the idea of ancient things. I studied a lot of history in school. What did you like to study in school?”

“I? I liked, well, to look at art, at great paintings. We had some books at the school library, and I enjoyed sitting in there and looking through the art books. We weren’t allowed to take them out, because they were too expensive. Someday I want to go to the museums in Madrid and Barcelona and look at some of the greatest Spanish paintings. Then, way in the future, I want to visit Paris and Rome and see the great art there.”

“Why do you say way in the future? It makes it sound like you are going to those places when you are an old lady.”

Valeria smiled, and it was the brightest expression I had seen on her face since seeing her for the first time. Her eyes sparkled, and she showed her beautiful teeth. I again realized how pretty she was. “Yes, maybe it sounds that way. But, you see, I have an uncertain future,” she said as the smile quickly faded. “I thought I was going to be in the church, be part of the church, for the rest of my life. Now, all of this is happening, and I don’t know what the future holds for me. I am a little afraid of being out here.”

“You mean, afraid of being outside the church, outside the convent?”

“Yes, I think so. I didn’t agree with everything that was happening in the convent. I had to force myself sometimes to go through the routines, but I didn’t have to think too hard about things. When the rules are set, you just have to follow the rules. Somebody else takes the responsibility for things. When I was growing up my parents would take care of things. I did not have to make big decisions, and I liked that, I guess.”

“I understand that, Valeria. Not everyone likes to be in charge and make the decisions. In my house it was my father who decided most things. I accepted that, but in part because my father is exceptionally smart and well organized. But he also taught me how important it is to voice my opinion and look for opportunities to have control, to make decisions. I think I have been lucky if you look at it that way. I think you have been lucky to have a family who takes care of you.”

“I don’t disagree with that. Yes, I am very lucky to have the family I do. But now I don’t know how they can help me. That is also true because I don’t know what I want to do with myself. I am twenty-one now. I have spent the last couple of years in a convent. I don’t have a profession, or in his case a good plan for a profession, like my brother. He is going to be a doctor, a great doctor, because he is strong and wants to help people. I don’t know how to work or what I can do to work. I can’t go back and live at home, even though my parents would allow me. But if I don’t live with them, where am I going to live?”

I looked at Valeria and wondered how emotional this discussion was making her. I hoped she wouldn’t start to cry. I would feel as though I caused her to feel uncomfortable. I know that for those few moments I had an overwhelming desire to hug her tightly and tell her that she had a good future. I wanted to feel her respond to me and lift her face so I could kiss her. I wanted to tell her that I could take care of her and make her feel safe and secure. But I also knew that I didn’t have a profession. As a matter of fact, I was doing something somewhat outrageous. Instead of getting myself ready for a

career and a decent living, I was running around a country that was involved in what was actually a civil war.

Furthermore, there was no way, under the circumstances I could kiss and hug Valeria. Malu and Manolo were just twenty yards ahead of us, and both of them were complications for me. It was a strange thought that I had suddenly—if I had to choose between Valeria and Malu, who would I choose? It was strange because I didn't really know either of them. I had intimate knowledge of Malu, although that time spent with her at night in Manolo's house seemed increasingly like a dream. I really had no idea of what feelings Malu might have for me. Now there was Valeria, who was an entirely different person. Compared to Malu she seemed to innocent, so vulnerable and so much in need of support. Malu was obviously strong and was, in a manner, a worldly person. She had not traveled far, but through her learning and her contacts with the Socialists, she was an experienced and savvy woman.

I turned my attention back to Valeria and tried to think of something that I could tell her to make her feel more encouraged. "I am only a little older than you, but I do have more experience. I don't want to sound like I am trying to advise you, but you have plenty of options for things to do with your life. I'm sure that in Spain you have institutes the way we do in the United States. You can go to an institute and learn things, skills that you can use for a job. Some women go to places to learn how to work as secretaries, or nurses, jobs like that. Maybe your brother could help you to become a nurse, with the connections he has at the hospital." I immediately thought of Ximena in the Records Office, and imagined Valeria doing work like that.

"Oh, I couldn't work in a hospital. I don't like to see people suffering and in pain. No, that is not for me. Maybe I could work in a company or something. We have factories in Spain now, more than ever. But right now, with all this fighting and everything, I don't know what the chances are."

“That’s a good point. But this can’t go on forever. There will come a time when things settle down. Then you will have things you can do.” I was trying to be optimistic in my comments. The truth was, I had no idea how long the difficulties in Spain would last. If what everyone was telling me about the situation was true, it seemed it could be decades before things would settle down so people could stop fighting and get on with their lives.

“What are you going to do with your life, William? You can’t stay here in Spain forever. You have to have some kind of life, and maybe a family. I am not sure why you are here. I think it is dangerous, and I wouldn’t blame you if you left right now. You can turn to the north and leave this country.”

“That is true. I have been asked so many times why I am here. I don’t think I have even answered the question well. This is an adventure for me. I am learning about this country, and about the customs. I am learning more Spanish, which is one of the reasons I decided to come. I like Spain, and I like the people I have met. It is quite different from the United States, and I think that is what I like. You are right that it is dangerous, but for some reason I don’t feel the fear that people expect. I witnessed that terrible scene in Vitoria, yes. But I think that was just a coincidence, that it was something that happened and is over. That is surely not the case for Malu, because it was her family members who died, and she was injured.”

Valeria looked up at Malu and her brother. “That was a terrible thing, I know. I feel bad for her, naturally. But she is a radical thinker. She is part of the fighting and the difficulty here. She seems nice enough to me, but I don’t know her well and I think her ideas maybe too strong for Spain. I am not sure. I wish all of this was over, no matter who comes out in charge. I can’t stand all the fighting and the suffering. Maybe that is what I found in the convent, a way to escape the mess we are in.”

“Yes, I can see that. But I have heard of violence against the church in other parts of Spain.

Manolo was getting worried about you. I’m sure you understand.”

Valeria did not speak for a few moments. “Manolo is my only brother, and as I told you I have no sisters. He has always been protective of me, and I appreciate that. He does not try to control me, and I also know that. In Spain older brothers are expected to take care of and defend any sisters. Manolo has those feelings, yes, like most brothers. He is more thoughtful and understanding. Maybe I thought he was doing something that I should have done myself. I don’t know yet. I will have to think about all of this. If I am not going to be a nun, I have to figure out what to do with myself. Perhaps that pressure being imposed on me has given me negative thoughts and caused me to be a little upset with Manolo. But I could never be really angry with him, never.”

We walked now for a while without speaking. I had been glancing occasionally at Manolo and Malu, as they were walking ahead of us. They were not carrying on a conversation, although they may have been speaking to each other sporadically. I wondered if there was something going on between the two of them. There was nothing I had noticed, but I had a gut feeling that Malu found Manolo attractive, and perhaps vice versa.

Fifteen

There was not much happening the next two days. The routine had been established clearly. We were going to walk for a long time. We all accepted that fact, and nobody complained about it. We stayed one night in an abandoned farmhouse, and the next night we slept under the stars in a pleasant tree-covered area a few yards from the road. On the third morning after leaving Burgos, we chanced upon a trucker who had stopped on the road we were traveling. He had stopped to take a break. He had a truckload of supplies that he was supposed to deliver to Soria. We spoke with him for a while, and he seemed friendly enough. We told him we were on a pilgrimage to Zaragoza to visit the Cathedral and see the Virgin of the Pillar. We didn't feel the need to explain that we were going there to find a cure for my supposed dumb and deaf condition, so we were all able to openly talk with the driver.

“You can ride with me if you want. When I get to Soria I will need help in delivering my goods to several warehouses. If you ride with me and help me, I will not charge you for the ride. Nor will I pay you for helping me because I cannot afford to. If you like the arrangement we can get started in a few minutes.”

Manolo looked at me, and I nodded my agreement. Then both Malu and Valeria said they would help out with the deliveries if necessary. Everyone was in agreement, so we got on board. Manolo sat up in front with the driver. Malu, Valeria, and I sat in the back of the truck. It was a covered vehicle and was loaded with what looked to be lots of food items. There were plenty of large sacks, barrels, and baskets. The driver, Ignacio, told us we could move things around, if we were careful, and make ourselves comfortable. We did that, and soon we were on our way. Few minutes had

passed before all three of us had found places we could either sit with our heads resting back or actually lie down, and I was soon sound asleep.

I don't know how long I slept, but when I awoke, I was quite disoriented. I had been dreaming of being on the ship that brought me across the Atlantic, and my father was the captain, showing me how he navigated the vessel. I was talking to him about my mother, and he was saying that she was still alive and was elsewhere in the ship. I got excited and left the control room, hoping to find her. On my way down a staircase, I looked out and saw an enormous wave coming toward the ship. In an instant I went from being thrilled with the prospect of seeing my mother to the fear of being on a ship that was about to be capsized by a giant wave. I heard a voice that brought me out of the dream and the impending danger.

“Hey, wake up all of you, wake up.” It was the voice of Manolo.

“What's happening?” I asked, still in a half-awake fog.

“What's the matter, Manolo?” I heard Valeria say.

“Nothing is the matter. Everything is all right. The driver has stopped here for lunch. There's a small place here to eat. Come down, so we can join him.”

The three of us jumped down from the truck. We were in another small town. There was a light rain falling, and it felt cooler than in the morning. We followed Manolo as he crossed the street and went into a small building. Inside was a tavern with about a half-dozen people sitting at small tables quietly eating. There was a table where the driver sat down. Already on the table in front of him was an unlabeled bottle that was full of a dark red wine. There were several ceramic cups too, one of which was being filled by the driver.

“Come, sit down. The food is good here.” We all sat at the table, which was barely big enough to accommodate the five of us. Without asking, the driver filled the other cups with wine. “*Salud.*” We all took a sip. The wine wasn’t the best I had tried since arriving in Spain, but it served the purpose at the time.

“Antonio,” the driver said in a loud voice. “Antonio,” he repeated. A man came from behind a curtain that was in the corner of the room, a towel draped on his shoulder.

“Good afternoon, Ignacio. Who did you bring with you today?” It was obvious that these two men knew each other previously.

“These are pilgrims, on their way to Zaragoza. I’m giving them a lift. They are hungry, as I am. What have you prepared today?”

“There is fava bean soup with beef, or stewed goat. Both are good. I prefer the goat, but it is up to you.”

Ignacio immediately responded. “I’ll take the goat because I’ve had it before here. It’s good.”

Manolo said, “I’ll have the same. How about you all?”

“The soup for me,” said Valeria. Malu nodded and smiled, implying the same for her.

“I’ve never eaten goat. It’s not common in the United States.”

“It’s good. It is flavorful, but not anything that unusual I would say. If you like lamb, it should be fine.”

“I’ll try it then, sure.”

Antonio turned without saying a word and went back through the curtain. A little while later a young man came out with two bowls of soup. He put those in front of Malu and Valeria, then went

back through the curtain. He returned with the three dishes of goat stew. We all dug in, and I was pleasantly surprised at how good the goat stew was. Manolo explained that there were chunks of goat meat that were still mostly attached to the bone. He said I had to be careful not to bite into a piece and crunch on the bone. The stew was thick, like a gravy, and had potatoes, onions, and green bell peppers. I ate and sipped the wine. Everyone did the same, and it was an oddly quiet meal. I think this was primarily because of the driver, Ignacio, being present. The three of us from the back of the truck didn't know anything about the conversation, if any, that Manolo had with the driver. We were all being cautious.

“Ignacio said we are about two hours from Soria. We should be there by about five o'clock. He has three locations to deliver to, all in Soria. He said it will take us about two hours to make the deliveries. There's a place we can spend the night. It's a pension where workers and outsiders stay that is pretty decent and inexpensive.”

“I've stayed there several times before,” Ignacio added. “Now, I have a friend with a business, and he has a room for me. But there is not room for four more. The pension should be all right for you young people. Maybe a few students will be there, or even some pilgrims like you all.”

I think I noticed a hint of sarcasm in the driver's voice. I looked quickly at Manolo to see if he was a little surprised the way I was. It was hard to tell. I looked at Malu, and she returned my glance with a slight, but noticeable, raise of her eyebrows. Valeria was looking down at her dish and didn't seem to be reacting at all.

Finally, Manolo said, “That place should be fine for us. It is nice of you to give us the recommendation. We are ready to go when you are, Ignacio.”

“I'll ask Antonio for the bill. This place is inexpensive, so you won't have to pull out too much for this lunch.”

“That’s fine, yes. Please tell me what our part is.”

“Sure,” I chimed in, “we’ll pay our part.” I said this and reached into my pocket for money.

“Antonio! Vente, y tráenos la cuenta. Tenemos prisa y esta gente tiene que seguir en su peregrinaje. Antonio! Come over here and bring the check. We are in a hurry, and these people need to continue their pilgrimage.” A few moments later Antonio came back to the table. He had a piece of chalk in his hand and began to write on the table. He mumbled as he wrote, and then gave us the final figure.

Manolo quickly said, “Look, we’ll pay for the lunch, Ignacio. You are kind enough to give us a ride to Soria, so it is our invitation.” He looked at me, and I handed over some bills to Manolo. He added to my amount and left it on the table.

“That is generous of you, young man,” Ignacio said. “I hope you enjoyed everything.”

“Very satisfactory, yes,” said Manolo. We all got up and went outside. It was raining heavier now, so we ran to the truck, and took up the positions we had earlier. When we were seated in the back and we felt the truck start forward, I looked at Valeria and Malu.

“That sounded kind of strange to me,” I said.

“It sounded strange to me too,” said Malu. “I don’t think I like this driver, Ignacio. It’s nice that he is giving us a ride to Soria, but I have a negative feeling about him.” Valeria sat quietly and didn’t offer an opinion.

“I guess it doesn’t matter, after all,” I said. There isn’t anything he can do to us, is there?”

“Maybe, and maybe not,” Malu said. “I don’t trust people, and when I think someone is suspicious, that is important to me.”

“What do you suspect?”

“Maybe this guy is a Falangist, or ex-military man. I don’t know, but I am not comfortable.”

There wasn’t anything else for me to add. Besides, I knew I was a foreigner in this country, and I didn’t understand the subtle differences between all the groups. Malu was a savvy person, and I felt that she had a much better feel for the situation than I did. I didn’t know what exactly Malu’s concerns were, but the fact that she felt that way was enough to make me feel uneasy.

We went quite a way on the road to Soria without saying anything. I was sure that all of us were thinking about the last couple of days, and what would happen once we got to Soria. I wondered about Manolo. What would he and Ignacio be talking about up in the cabin of the truck, if anything?

We came to the small town of Toledillo where Ignacio had to put fuel in the truck. He told us we were about an hour from Soria. It was getting late in the afternoon, and the sky was darkening. It had stopped raining, but everything was still wet outside. I went up and talked to Manolo while Malu and Valeria went to look for a bathroom. “Did you have a conversation with Ignacio?”

“A little. I’m not sure what to think. He told me that he had friends in Soria that are believers in the military, and that they all hope the military rising would soon take command so that there would be an end to the fighting. But he didn’t sound like a really serious conservative or Falangist. It’s hard to say, I guess.”

“Malu said that she feels pretty uncomfortable around him.”

“That is not surprising, knowing how she thinks. But when we get to Soria, we will separate ourselves from Soria as soon as we can, after making the deliveries that we promised. We have to do that because of the distance we have traveled with him today.”

“Yes, of course. But Malu and Valeria don’t have to help with that. You and I can do that while they wait at the pension.”

“Yes, I agree. We’ll ask Ignacio to drop them off there and then we’ll meet them later.”

We were soon back in the truck for the final stretch of road to Soria. When we got to the city, it was almost totally dark. It was a little eerie when we got in town because many of the lights that we saw had a yellowish tint. It seemed quiet, and most of the vehicles we saw were farm tractors or small trucks. At one point we crossed an intersection and saw what looked like a small company of soldiers who were loosely in formation in a small field between two buildings. About two blocks past that Ignacio pulled the truck to the side of the road. A few moments later Manolo came back to talk to us.

“Here is what is happening. Ignacio has to talk to someone about the first delivery. He said that the pension we can stay in is about four blocks straight ahead. There is a church on the right side, and behind that church is a building, which has a sign outside that says ‘Pensión Granada.’ There is a Mrs. Olivos who runs the place. Ignacio said to ask for her.”

“We are going there by ourselves?” Valeria asked.

“Sure. You and Malu go ahead there. William and I will help unload the truck and meet you there in about two hours. But listen to me. Here is what I told Ignacio, so we need to all be on the same radio frequency. I told him that I am a medical student, but that the medical school has been temporarily shut down. I explained that you, Malu, are studying nursing, and you are my cousin. Valeria, you are trying to decide if you want to be a nurse or become a nun. That is why we are going to Zaragoza, because you are going to pray to the Virgin of the Pillar to help you decide.”

“And how about me?” I asked Manolo.

“I told him you are from the United States and you were in medical school there. You decided to come to Spain to learn about medicine from the European perspective. I told Ignacio you are specializing in pediatrics.”

“Pediatrics?”

“Yes, why not? You know about children because you were one. Nobody is going to ask a lot of questions, anyway.”

“I guess you’re right. I think this all sounds fine to me,” I quickly added. I trusted Manolo to come up with a workable plan.

“Thanks, good. Valeria, you and Malu go ahead down there to the pension. Just tell whoever is there that you are waiting for us to finish up some work. Ignacio said there is a room there with a sofa and chairs where you can sit and wait for us.”

“Manolo, do you trust this guy? I’m not sure I do,” said Malu.

“I don’t see any reason not to trust him. In my conversation with him on the road, he seemed to be all right. Besides, I don’t think we have much choice right now. Valeria, do you feel good about this?”

“I think so. And as you say, what choice do we have? I think your ideas are pretty good.”

We collected our bags, and Malu and Valeria agreed to take them to the pension. We gave each of them a quick hug, and they set off down the street. As soon as they were halfway down the first block, Ignacio came back to the truck.

“Good. In the back of this building is the first warehouse for delivery. You two can walk back there and I’ll bring the truck.”

It took us almost three hours to empty Ignacio's truck. One of the stops was on the eastern part of town, some distance from the main commercial area. On the way back he dropped us off in front of the church. We shook hands and thanked him for giving us the ride. He seemed sincerely appreciative of our assistance in unloading the truck. We were both tired, but we almost ran down to the pension, anxious to see Malu and Valeria. We went inside, but there was nobody immediately available. There was a desk on one side of the lobby, and on the other side was the sitting area that Ignacio had described.

Manolo spoke in a slightly raised voice. "*Buenas tardes. ¿Alguién nos puede atender?* Good afternoon, is there anyone here to tend to us?" We looked around the room. There was a curtain behind the desk, and in the back corner of the sitting area there was a staircase. "What the hell? Is there nobody in this damn place?" Manolo said, with obvious frustration building in his voice. "Valeria? Malu?"

"Maybe they have gone up to a room," I said, hoping to make Manolo feel a little less stressed.

"Yes, maybe. But there should be someone here. Who is running this place?" he walked over to the staircase and looked up. Then he decided to go up to see what was there. I followed him because there was no reason to stay down in the lobby. At the top of the stairs, we saw a hallway that went to left. It looked to have about four or five rooms on each side, but all the doors were closed. We probably both felt reluctant to open the doors to look inside. Manolo then turned and went back downstairs. As soon as we got there we saw a woman at the counter.

"Good afternoon, is there something I can help you with?" At least she had a little bit of a smile on her face.

"Yes, we are looking for my sister and cousin. They were supposed to be here a couple of hours ago. Did they come here?"

“Yes. Two women that I didn’t know came here. They said they were waiting for two people, and they sat for a while. I offered to show them a room, but they said they would wait. About half an hour ago they left and said they would return.”

“They left?” Manolo said, slightly raising his voice.

“Yes, they left.”

“Do you know where they were going?”

“No, I have no idea. Would you like to see one of the rooms?”

“No, not now, thank you. But we will want a room later. William, let’s see if we can find Malu and Valeria. They can’t have gone too far away.” We went out the front door, and once outside Manolo said, with noticeable irritation, “Where in the hell did they go? I thought they understood they should stay at this pension and wait for us. Wasn’t that the idea?”

“Yes, that was what we agreed. I can’t imagine why they would have gone anywhere else.”

“I can’t either,” said Manolo as he looked up, obviously trying to imagine where the girls had gone. “We are going to have to look around. What were they thinking?” I knew he wasn’t asking me that question but rather was asking himself.

We went up to the main street, where the church was located. We both stood on the corner, looking in both directions, as if we might see them out walking around. It was dark by now, and the lighting was poor in this part of Soria. Just as we were about to cross the street, we both heard a loud whisper. It sounded like a female voice. We both turned around. At first we didn’t see anything, but then there was a slight movement. There was a side entrance to the church that was partially blocked by a retaining wall. The sound was coming from there. We walked over, and there we saw Malu, half crouched down.

“Malu! Why are you here?” Manolo asked, without raising his voice, but with an obvious sense of urgency.

“I’m here, waiting for Valeria, who is inside the church.”

“Inside the church, why?”

“She said she needed to go in for a few minutes.”

“I thought you two were going to wait for us at the pension, right back there.”

“Yes, that is what we said. But something has happened.”

“Happened? What do you mean? What happened?”

“We saw something. Look at this.” She held out her hand, and in it was a folded piece of paper.

Manolo took it from her, but it was difficult to see in the dark. He walked back toward the pension, with me by his side, and he unfolded the paper. It looked a little bigger than a sheet of writing paper, and it was a crude looking, brownish color. When he unfolded it, this is what we both saw:

SE BUSCAN A LAS SIGUIENTES PERSONAS. SE CONSIDERAN POSIBLEMENTE PELIGROSOS. SON PERSONAS POLÍTICAS RADICALES, SOCIALISTAS Y ANARQUISTAS. SE SOSPECHA QUE HAN RAPTADO UNA MONJA DEL CONVENTO DE LAS HUELGAS EN BURGOS. HAY RECOMPENSA PARA LA PERSONA QUE DE RAZÓN PARA LAS MISMAS. ELLOS SON:

MANOLO PALACIOS

VALERIA PALACIOS—UNA MONJA

MARÍA LUISA ZABAleta

WILLIAN BENIN—POSIBLE AGENTE PROVOCATEUR EXTRANJERO

I was reading and trying to capture exactly what it said. “These people are being sought and might be dangerous. They are political radicals, Socialists and Anarchists. They may have kidnapped a nun from the Huelgas Convent in Burgos. They are Manolo Palacios, Valeria Palacios—the nun, María Luisa Zabaleta, and Willian Benin, a possible foreign agitator.”

“What the hell is this, Manolo? It looks like what we call in the United States a wanted poster.”

“Yes, it is something like that.”

“But who would have done this? The police?”

“No, I don’t think so. I think it must have been a group, maybe the Falangists.”

“At least it doesn’t have any pictures, any drawings of us, like they do in the United States.”

“No, there are no pictures. But it is four people, two men and two women. I don’t think anyone who is paying attention will forget they saw us. We stand out a bit, don’t we?”

“Yes, I think so. This is why Malu and Valeria didn’t want to stay at the pension.”

“Of course, especially Malu, because she is the one with the strong political beliefs. She was involved with that incident in Vitoria, and we don’t know what that was all about, not completely.”

“You are right about that, Manolo. Anyway, this is a complex development. What do you think we should do now?”

“I’m thinking. It’s nighttime now. We are all quite tired. I don’t know if anyone saw us come to this pension. The one person who does know is Ignacio, the driver. Maybe he has seen this poster, and maybe he hasn’t. Then, we don’t know if we can trust him. He seems to be all right, but my instincts tell me not to trust people I don’t know pretty well.”

“If we don’t stay here, where can we go?”

“I don’t have a good answer for that. We need to keep moving to the east. But let’s find Valeria and see what she thinks about all of this.”

We went back to where Malu was hiding and told her to follow us into the church. She came, even if a little reluctantly. We went in the main entrance, which put us in a kind of foyer. To either side there were doors that appeared to lead into the main part of the church. We went inside, and it was quite beautiful, even though in size it was nothing compared to the Cathedral in Burgos. It was mostly dark inside, so we waited a little for our eyes to adjust. Manolo pointed to the right front side of the seating area. There were two people sitting up there, side by side. We didn’t see anyone else at all. The person on the inside was Valeria, and the other person looked like a priest. We walked quietly toward that area.

When we approached they both turned to look at us. Valeria lifted her face and nodded briefly. She stood up and said something to the man. We got up close and then he stood up and looked at us.

“Manolo, say hello to Father Patricio. Father, this is my brother, Manolo, his friend from the United States, and our friend, María Luisa, Malu.” We all shook hands with Father Patricio, who had a warm smile on his face.

“You are all welcome here. Valeria was telling me a little about your journey. You have been traveling heavily, it seems.” There was something kind and reassuring about the priest’s expression and the way he spoke. I was ready to trust him, but I didn’t know about Manolo.

“Father, I think my sister told you we were on our way to the Cathedral in Zaragoza.”

“Yes, indeed she did. I think it is an excellent idea. I commend you on undertaking the journey.”

“Yes, thank you,” Manolo said. “You see, we do not have much in the way of resources. As you know, with all the unrest and problems in Spain right now, life for many of us is difficult.”

“Of course, of course. I understand. Is there something I can do to help you?”

“Well, perhaps, Father,” Manolo said. Malu and I were content to leave things to Manolo for the moment. “We need a place to stay, but only for tonight. Can you suggest something?”

“You know about the pension behind the church?”

“Yes, but we don’t want to spend our money if it is not necessary.” I knew that was partly true, but also that we had reason not to trust anyone at the pension.

“Yes, I see. I might have an idea. We have a small room for visitors here at the church. It is not much, but at least there are two rooms. Since you are pilgrims, I think I can manage to stay out of trouble for allowing you to stay here. You two men can stay in one while the ladies stay in the other.”

“That would be fantastic, Father,” Valeria quickly said, and reached up and hugged Father Patricio while resting her head on his shoulder. “How can we thank you?”

“Your thanks is good enough. I will show you the area if you come with me. Also, there is a little left over from our evening meal, I believe. I’ll bring a basket if you are hungry.”

The rooms were indeed small. They were in a little building that was connected to the church with a covered walkway. Inside the small building it smelled like soap or cleanser. There was a main room with a lot of wood cabinets and a couple of tables and several simple chairs. At the end of the room there were two doors, one on each side of a bookcase.

Father Patricio opened the two doors. “The ladies can stay in here,” he said as he pointed to the room on the right. “Manolo, you and your friend can stay over on that room. I’ll be back in a moment with the basket of food. If you need to use a bathroom, you can go back out to the hallway where there is a door that opens to an outside latrine. It is the only accommodations we have, I’m afraid.”

“This will do fine, Father,” Manolo said with a small smile on his face. We watched as the father left. When we were sure he was gone, I asked, “Do you think this will do?”

Manolo answered first. “It will do, but only because I think we can trust this priest.”

Malu had hardly said a word since we got back together. “It’s all right with me, even though I would prefer not to stay in a church. I’m not going to complain.”

“I will be the most comfortable one here,” Valeria said. “This reminds me of the Huelgas Convent. I like Father Patricio. I think we can trust him for sure. Besides, we are only going to sleep here tonight. Then, early tomorrow we can leave this city.”

Manolo added, “That is precisely my plan. We must get up early and leave quickly and quietly. I’ll figure out what direction we go in tomorrow. Why don’t we put our bags in these rooms for now? When the Father returns we can see what he brings, eat something out here in this room and then go to bed. I’m extremely tired. I’m so tired I don’t know if I can eat.”

A few minutes later we were back in the main room. “The beds are really hard,” I said. “I think they just are wood slats with a thick blanket on top. But I certainly don’t care. I’ve slept in some uncomfortable places in recent weeks. This won’t be the worst.” Just as I said that the door opened and Father Patricio came in.

“I have a few things here for you. You are welcome to whatever you want.” He put the basket on one of the tables. “I will leave you now. I have a prayer vigil I must attend. I hope you are comfortable. I assume you will be leaving in the morning, because I have found pilgrims to be totally dedicated to their journeys and staying on schedule.” He smiled as he said this, and I for one had no doubt about the slightly hidden meaning. We were welcome for this night, but we should be gone early in the morning. We all thanked him, and Valeria went over and gave him a hug. The last words he said were, “*Que descansen, y vayan con diós*. I hope you rest and go with God.” He made a sign of the cross and left.

The basket contained half a round loaf of bread, three apples, a chunk of simple pale-yellow cheese and several slices of what looked like pork roast. There was a large but pretty dull knife included. We cut things up and ate with our hands. Soon, almost everything was gone, as we ate in almost complete silence. I chuckled, but only to myself, as I thought about where we were: “This reminds me of the last supper, the last supper for us in peace on this increasingly strange journey we are on.”

I don’t know about the others, but I didn’t sleep particularly well. The beds were uncomfortable, and there was a steady stream of cool air coming from somewhere in the room. I could not seem to find the right position to allow me to fall deeply asleep. I had strange dreams, which had become something of a habit since I left home. At least I didn’t recall having strange dreams that often when I was back in Charlottesville.

I dreamed that I was in England, and even though I had only been there as a small child, everything seemed familiar. We were in the home of my father’s relatives, none of whom I could remember, but all were smiling and welcoming me. I turned and standing behind me was Valeria. I

introduced here as my girlfriend, and then I kissed her as everyone applauded. I had to translate everything for the relatives, and all along Valeria was smiling and holding my hand tightly.

The dream transitioned, and I was back in Charlottesville. I was outside of our home, and I saw Doña Angela coming down the sidewalk. She smiled at me and started asking about Spain. I told her that I was learning more Spanish than ever, and that I could not thank her enough for helping me when I was younger. In the middle of the conversation I woke up as I heard a noise. I didn't know what it was, but I looked over and saw that Manolo was sleeping and making a small wheezing sound. Maybe that is what I heard. Eventually I got back to sleep, but it was one of the worst nights of rest in quite a while.

I awoke when I felt something touch my shoulder. I opened my eyes and saw Manolo's face. "Good morning, William. How are you?"

"I'm fine, and you?"

"I'm well. I think we should be going soon. It is still early and a bit dark outside. I don't think we should stay here longer than necessary. I mean here in Soria, not the church."

"I agree, yes. How about Valeria and Malu?"

"I'm going to knock on their door right now. Go ahead and get dressed while I check on them." He quickly left the room. I got dressed and wondered when we would be able to bathe again. It had been a couple of days, and I rarely went more than two days without a bath. I was packing my things in my duffel bag when Manolo came back.

"They are almost ready. I saw Father Patricio, and he told me the best way to leave town without being openly visible. It won't take us much out of our way."

“Whatever you think is best. You are the one who is leading this expedition so far, so I see no reason not to continue with the same plan.”

“Thank you, William. I know that sometimes you must wonder what you have gotten into with us. It is probably strange for you to think that one day you were a newcomer to Spain, and to Vitoria, and now you are mixed up in a crazy situation with me and my sister. And, of course, we have the addition of Malu. Don’t you wonder about all of this?”

“Maybe I do. But, as you know, I came to Spain to learn about the country and to improve my Spanish. So far, by hanging around with you, I am doing both of these things. I have done some things, and witnessed things, that I never expected, that is for sure. But I don’t have any regrets. Now, I am getting to know more about what is happening in Spain today, and with all the conflicts going on. I’m not going to complain.”

“You have become like a brother to me. I know we have only known each other for a short time, but the time has been somewhat, well, intense, I guess. Do you know what I mean?”

“Certainly, I do. And that sounds nice. I don’t have any brothers or sisters, and you don’t have a brother. I like this idea that you have stated. We are like brothers, but from totally different cultures.”

“And you know that is often our habit in Spain to say to our friends ‘brother’ or ‘man’ or something like that. It fits, I think.”

“I feel honored to call you my brother, Manolo. But wait a minute. If you are my brother, does that make Valeria my sister?” For the first time in the east three days I saw Manolo smile and then laugh.

“That was excellent, William. You have learned Spanish very quickly. Maybe it makes Valeria your sister. Is that all right?”

“Well, I, uh ...” I didn’t know exactly what to say. If I hinted that I had a kind of crush on Valeria, I was afraid Manolo might not like it. He was apparently very protective of his sister, so he might think I was being out of place if I indicated how much I liked her.

“Easy, William, easy. I know you like Valeria. I think you like her quite a bit.”

“Yes, of course I like her.”

“I mean like as in maybe a girlfriend.”

“I don’t know her that well, you see, so I’m not sure exactly ...”

Again, he interrupted me. “William, I will be pleased if Valeria is your girlfriend. Whether or not she is depends on you and Valeria.”

“Thanks, Manolo. I like her, yes, but I don’t have any idea how she feels about me.”

“I am afraid I can’t help you on that point. She hasn’t said anything to me, but it would not surprise me at all if she likes you a lot.” At that moment the other door opened and Valeria and Malu came into the room. We greeted each other, and Manolo indicated that it was time to leave. There was almost no conversation, and I wondered what, if anything, Malu and Valeria had talked about before they fell asleep. As far as I could tell, very little conversation had occurred between the two of them. I knew they were, in many ways, complete opposites. Valeria seemed younger than her years, while Malu seemed older. Valeria had led a sheltered life, based on what Manolo and she herself had told me. I knew almost nothing of Malu and her early life, but obviously she had been exposed to strong ideas. And, I quickly remembered, she had recently witnessed the killing of two close family members, and she herself had been beaten and held captive.

Valeria projected innocence, although I might have thought that because I knew she was on the path to becoming a nun. Malu looked like a woman of the world. I suddenly had a flashback of the night we spent together in the Palacios home, and there was no question in my mind that Malu wasn't a virgin that night. On the other hand, Valeria probably was still a virgin. There had to be something, I thought, that changed women when they went from being virgins to being complete adults. Had I changed since the night with Malu? I didn't feel that much different.

It was just turning light when we left the church. Manolo pointed in a direction, and off we went. We only saw one person as we walked down one of the smaller streets in Soria. That was a man carrying an implement, a shovel or a hoe perhaps, and it seemed he was on his way to an early farming job. He didn't look at us, as far as I could tell. He was one the other side of the street, so maybe he didn't even notice us.

Within an hour we were completely out of Soria and in an area that seemed less agricultural than what we had seen when we were approaching the city from the west. There were hills and areas covered with trees that were dense enough to be called forests. It was different from the area around Burgos, but it remained, for my eyes, quite beautiful.

The routine on this morning was Manolo and Valeria walking in front, and Malu and I behind them but far enough that we could not hear each other's voices. We barely exchanged a word, but finally I wanted to know how she was doing. I started off with something simple. "Were you two comfortable sleeping last night?"

"Are you serious? Of course not. The beds were like sleeping on stone, the room was drafty and I didn't like being in a church."

"Sure. It was similar for me, anyway. I had difficulty sleeping and had very strange dreams when I did fall asleep. I didn't care about it being a church, though."

“I am against the church, as you know. The church in Spain has been oppressing the people for centuries. I don’t care to have them as my host.”

I thought she had brought up an important subject, so I decided to ask about it. “Where did you get your ideas about religion, Malu?”

She looked at me for a moment, and she smiled. “That is a deep subject, William. My family was typical when I was growing up. I went to church, and my brothers and sister did too. We were like just about everyone else. But we had a cousin who ended up leaving Spain. He was a highly serious student, and he got some kind of scholarship or something to go to study in Germany. He had been studying the German language in school and was the best in his school. So, he was chosen to go to Berlin for a year.”

“Berlin? That’s interesting. Except that the Germans are not known for their strong anti-religious beliefs.”

“You are correct, William. But, you see, Berlin is an incredible city. It has people from everywhere in Europe, and even from your country, I’m sure. He was exposed to a huge number of new ideas. He didn’t like what he was hearing about the National Socialists, especially all of the things being said against the Jews. He thought that was just hateful. He met up with a group of students from Russia, and they told him all about the Bolsheviks. He became more interested in Russian history than German history.

“When he returned to Bilbao, he told us all about what he had learned and seen. He, his name was Luis, immediately set up a kind of activist club in Bilbao. Actually, he called it a committee. He called his group the Committee of Enlightened Thinkers. In Spanish it was called the *Comité de Libres Pensadores*. He found some friends from school, and a few others with strong political ideas, and they

met regularly. After a few months he got a visit from some people from Cataluña. They helped him establish a more organized group. Soon, Luis was a prominent Socialist leader in Bilbao.

“I was working at a local business at the time, and it just so happened that the owner of the business was interested in politics and was against the monarchy. I was proud to have Luis as a cousin, so I became more involved in the political scene. I was quite young, and there were few women, but I think that is what helped me become more important in the organization. I was different from many of the other women. I was not shy about talking about things I was interested in. I also met another woman who encouraged me. My family came to be identified with the movement in Bilbao.”

“That is very interesting, Malu. Back home, in Charlottesville, there was not much in the way of political movements. The city is too small, I think, but I was at the University of Virginia, where my father teaches, and so I was exposed to a lot of political discussions. However, we don’t have the same kind of political movements and the arguing and fighting that you have here in Spain. I don’t think I could be involved in politics. I have too many other things I am interested in, and I don’t care for the excitement.”

“Of course, I don’t know very much about your country,” Malu said. “You had your revolution back in the eighteenth century, I think it was, but now we are going through a somewhat similar period in Spain. We can’t continue to live in the past, not with the way the world is changing. If we don’t make something happen, the military will come in and force everyone to conform. Then we might all have to attend church or we’ll be put in jail.”

“Would the government be able to do something like that?”

“It’s possible, yes. If some want to go to church, that is all right with me. But nobody is going to make me do things I don’t want to do, or believe things I don’t believe in. You are not forced to do things in the United States, are you?”

“No, I don’t think so.” I had not thought about things that way before. “Your thinking is so much different here. It is difficult for me to understand. However, I think Spain is a fascinating place. I would like to see the anger and the violence stop. I think it would be good for everyone, don’t you?”

“Yes, of course. But it is not right for one group to force things on everyone. If we have peace in Spain, but we are forced into things, then we will not be any better off. If the fascists take over, then they will be telling everyone what to do. That is not right, and I must fight against that future.”

“I can understand what you are saying. But do you think these people, the military and the monarchists, are really that bad? Maybe they will set something up like they have in Great Britain. There is the king and the royal family, but they don’t actually have that much to do with the government. Couldn’t something like that be acceptable?”

“No, I don’t think so. You see, in Great Britain there is a history of cooperation, and a history of democracy. We don’t have such a history here in Spain. In many ways the thinking here is not any different from centuries ago. The same is true in other countries, such as Italy. Look at this person who is gaining power in Italy, this person named Mussolini. The history in Italy is different, I understand that. But I think we have many things in common. We are of the old, Mediterranean world, and the people are just different from the northern Europeans.”

“I understand that, yes. Of course, I have only studied the basics of European history. I can’t say that I know much about recent history. I think Ancient Rome was very interesting, and obviously the Roman Empire had a lot of influence on most of Europe. The Romans even conquered part of the British Isles.”

“William, all I want to say is that here in Spain it is time for change. We don’t have any good models for change here. I have heard that the military is looking for a model in Germany, and some want to have a close association with Italy. But that is not going to take Spain in the right direction.

That is going to take us backward, if anything. The changes will have to come from somewhere else, maybe from Russia, although I cannot say that that is best either.”

We stopped talking for a while. I realized that I didn’t have enough knowledge of developments in Europe, nor did I have enough understanding of Spain and its history, to offer any insights to Malu. I could not go against what she was saying, I knew that. I decided to change the topic, or at least to try to.

“Tell me something, Malu. You are single, and you are, well, older than I am. Do you want to have a family eventually? Do you want to have children?”

She smiled at me, but only for a moment. “That is something I have thought about, but perhaps not very much, or not even enough, William.”

“Malu, you are attractive, and I know you are smart, and you are a brave person. What do you want to do in the future?”

“What are you doing, William, proposing to marry me?” At first her face was very serious, but before I could answer her she smiled broadly. At that moment I wondered if what she had asked me was such a far-fetched idea.

“No, no, I wasn’t proposing to you. I’m not looking to get married any time soon.”

“Nor am I. However, it is something almost everyone thinks about, right? Do I want a husband? Maybe, yes. Do I want children? That is a more difficult question. I don’t want to bring a child into a world that I do not like that I do not think is fair, that has so many problems that I would feel I have to protect the child from the reality of the world.”

“Wow, I have never thought about things in that way before.”

“And you, William? Do you want these things? A wife and children?”

“I guess at some point I do. The trouble is that a person must have some idea of a purpose in life. I don’t know what kind of purpose I might have. You see, I went to the University, and I enjoyed that a lot. I liked the exploration of ideas, and the discussions with students and professors. But I did not come out of the University with a career in mind. My father didn’t pressure me in that sense. He wanted me to learn and to have a deeper understanding of lots of subjects. He only asked me a couple of times what I would like to do, you know, for employment, something to make a living. Maybe he took that perspective because he wanted me to be sure I was going to do something I like, not just something to make money.”

“You see, you have a different way of looking at things in your country. Here in Spain, people have to always think about how to have a living, a style of living, that meets their expectations.”

“Whose expectations, Malu?”

“The expectations of the family, or of the society. I’m not sure. But I feel there are many expectations.”

“Maybe I understand, but everything is different here. I know in the future I will have to do something so I can live on my own. My father will let me stay with him for as long as I want. He lives alone, at least if I am not there. I think that is all right for him, but he doesn’t mind having me there with him either.”

“That is similar here in Spain. When children grow up, they don’t leave home for no reason. If a person is not married, and sometimes even if they are married, they stay at home because that is the real home. It takes a lot to make a new home, you know.”

“That is not the way most people think in the United States. My friends and the people I went to the University with mostly felt a sense of pressure to get their education so they could move out on their own and start their own lives. I am somewhat unusual in that sense.”

“I have an idea, William.”

“Yes? What is it?”

“I will go with you to the United States.”

“Really? You want to go to my country?”

“Yes, sure. You ask me to marry you. I will accept, and we will go to your country, and you and I will live together. And we will have children, and we will have a house to live in, and I will have nice things and be comfortable.”

“I don’t think you are being serious, are you Malu?” Was she being serious? I stopped walking at this point and looked at her. She had a way of playing with me, almost teasing me, and it was difficult to interpret her words. “Seriously?”

“Yes, why not? You are a nice-looking man. You are smart, and you will have a good profession, because you are smart. You will be fine for me.”

“Please, Malu, you are teasing me.”

“What makes you think so?”

“Because I know you have other plans. You are going to try to change Spain. You can’t simply leave and go the United States and live with me.”

“No? Maybe, and maybe not. You don’t want to have me as a wife? Maybe you would prefer Valeria.” Oh my, she had to mention Valeria. Why did she do that? Had she and Valeria been talking

about me? Maybe they had done that in the church when everyone turned in early. Maybe the two of them lay in the room and talked about things, including me. What would Valeria have said about me, and what she feels about me? I was dying to know more.

“Valeria? Why do you bring her up?”

“You like her, don’t you?”

“Of course, I do. She is Manolo’s sister, and I like Manolo and his family. Naturally, I like Valeria also. But I don’t know her well.”

“Maybe she likes you a lot.”

“Is that what she said?”

“No, not exactly.”

“What did she say?”

“Now you are very curious.”

“Yes, I am curious when someone talks about me. What did she say?”

“She didn’t say much. She asked a few questions, that’s all. But I can see that you are excited about that.”

“Excited? No, I wouldn’t say that, no.” Now I was unsure of what I was feeling.

Malu went on. “That is what it seems to me. But, you know, she is, well, innocent, I think.”

“Innocent, yes that is a good description,” I said as I looked at Valeria walking with Manolo.

“Yes, innocent. She was preparing to become a nun and do that for the rest of her life. It takes a pretty innocent person to become a full-time church member. Anyway, are you saying you don’t have special feelings for her?”

“Special feelings? I don’t know. We are all in a rather unusual situation now, aren’t we? So, I have special feelings for Manolo, for Valeria and for you. I think you know that.”

Is it because we made love in Manolo’s house?”

I stopped walking for a moment, almost stunned at the frank way she mentioned the encounter we had in Manolo’s home. “Well, uh, yes, that makes you special, of course. I hope the feeling is mutual.” Malu did not speak for a while now. This left me feeling more confused about our relationship than at any time before.

“Look, William. Things sometimes happen than you don’t plan for. That first night I was in Manolo’s house I was afraid, and I was lonely. I needed someone to comfort me. You were the person, at that time, who was closest to me. You filled a need I had at that time. I know that it might have meant more for you. I understand if that is true. You are probably thinking it should be the same for me. Well, maybe, and maybe not. As I said, you were there, you helped me, and one thing led to another and we made love. That does not mean that I love you. Making love does not mean having love for the other person, does it?”

“Now that you put it that way, I suppose not. But isn’t it supposed to be something more important, something deeper?” All I saw was that Malu raised her eyebrows, but she didn’t look right at me. She was making me think, as I had never before, about relationships. Now, I questioned what my feelings for Malu were.

“Well,” I said, with reservations but not enough to stop me, “if we had the opportunity again, would you want to, you know, make love again?”

“Why do you ask me that, William? Don’t you understand what I am saying?”

“I’m trying, but you don’t make it easy, you know.”

“So, what is easy in this life? You want things to be easy?”

“I didn’t say that. But some things, some simple things might be easy.”

“William, you are from another country, another culture, and I don’t see how we will ever understand each other. I like you. You are a sensitive man. As I said before, you are a good-looking man. I think you are smart and you have a good education. These are all things that will make you an attractive man for someone. However, I don’t know what I am looking for in a man.”

Just at that moment I looked again back in the direction of Manolo and Valeria. But I didn’t see them. “Hey, where are Manolo and his sister? They had been ahead of us a little while ago. Then we got into this big conversation, and I forgot about them. Where are they?”

I looked up the road and realized that there was a big bend beyond us, maybe one hundred yards ahead. Perhaps they had gotten quite far ahead of us, especially since Malu and I had been having such a big discussion. “I don’t see them either, William.” We both seemed to get nervous quickly. We started running ahead, hoping that as soon as we got to the turn in the road we would see them. I didn’t want to shout out their names because I think we all understood that we should not, under any circumstances, draw attention to ourselves. We were out in the middle of nowhere, certainly, but we were also in unfamiliar territory. We didn’t know when there might be someone who was watching us.

Malu and I got to the bend, but we still didn't see anyone. This was an area that was more heavily wooded than any we had seen so far. We noticed that the road then took a turn in the other direction. So, maybe they were around that bend. We kept going, but I felt that we should make as little noise as possible. I had a sense of apprehension, and I was sure that Malu felt something similar. We got to the next bend in the road, and we stopped to look around us. Because of the trees, it was difficult to see what was beyond those trees on either side. Suddenly, I heard a sound. It was a whistle or a raspy sound of a voice. Malu and I both stopped and were still, listening for more sounds. I heard it again and turned in the direction it was coming from.

I walked into the first row of trees, with Malu right behind me. We kept going and saw there was a larger tree that was about twenty yards from the road. We went over to look behind it, and here crouching on the ground were Manolo and his sister. Manolo immediately raised his hand to his mouth to indicate we should be quiet. We knelt down next to him.

Manolo said in a whisper, "Don't make any sounds. There is a small military patrol up ahead of us on this road."

I turned to look back at the road, but I saw nothing. "Where are they?" I said very softly. Manolo pointed in the direction we had been moving in. "They are ahead of us, about a half a kilometer, no more. They are going in the same direction as us, and I think they stopped for a rest or something. They are going somewhat slowly. The officers are on horseback, and the rest of the soldiers are on foot."

"What do you think we should do?"

"I'm thinking about that. I saw a sign for a village not too far back. It is a place called Calcena. You see, this area gets hillier, and the terrain is more difficult. I think what we might try to do is get off the road and see if we can find a path to follow toward Calcena. I don't imagine the soldiers will be

going to that little place. They probably are heading toward Zaragoza. We can rest here for a little while, and then go up in this direction.” He pointed toward a higher elevation. “In Calcena we can find something to eat, and we can take the time to see how we should go east from here.”

We all found a comfortable place to stretch out for a break. It was peaceful, and the temperature was reasonably comfortable. I must have fallen asleep, and I woke up when Manolo softly tapped on my shoulder. “I think we should go now. Is everyone all right?” We all nodded, and Malu said, “I’m hungry and thirsty.”

“Yes, we all are,” Manolo said. “Let’s keep moving and see what we come across.” We moved out, and it was quickly apparent that we would be moving mostly up, through a wooded area that was constantly on the incline. For most of the way we followed what seemed like a footpath that had not been used much recently. We followed Manolo, as always, and even though he didn’t know this terrain any better than we did, he seemed to be making the best decisions for the way forward. Several times he looked up and around, as if looking for a cue to lead us toward the village of Calcena. There were not going to be any road signs around here, that was for sure. It was overcast, so we didn’t have the sun to tell us what general direction we were going in. Manolo said that it was toward the northeast, and none of us had reason to doubt that.

At one point Manolo topped and raised his hand for the rest of us to stop. “I hear something,” he whispered. He showed us his palm as a signal to stop and wait for him to explore. He moved up, looking all around as he proceeded. Then, when he was almost out of site in a thicket of brush he stopped again. He raised his hand and signaled for us to move to where he was. He waited there for us. When we got up close to him, he moved ahead. At that point we heard a noise.

“Goats,” I heard Malu say.

“Goats?” I answered.

“Yes, goats. There is a goatherd ahead up here. That is what Manolo heard, the sound of goats.”

“Oh, yes, goats.” I wasn’t used to herds of goats, but I knew that goat cheese, and even goat meat, was popular in Spain, so there had to be goatherds someplace. We came to a clearing, and from there we could look down toward a larger, rocky meadow. Sure enough, there was a herd of goats and a solitary figure walking around the perimeter of the herd of about two dozen animals. I think we were all glad that we had come to the top of this hill and could see a clear way down the other side. Manolo had moved on ahead, and as we watched he approached the goatherd and began to talk with him. As we watched he pointed back up at us and then continued to talk with the person. Eventually he lifted his hand and swept it across his body. We took that to mean it was safe for us to meet him where he was now.

We got down to the meadow and went up to where Manolo and the person, an elderly man it turned out, were now sitting on a fallen tree trunk. “This is Alonzo, everyone. He tends this herd of goats and lives in Calcena. He told me that he likes it up here because it is more peaceful than Calcena.”

As he said this Manolo smiled at us. Yes, the rest of us too found it amusing that there was a person here who was trying to escape the craziness of the city life. Except that Calcena sounded like a place with perhaps a few thousand inhabitants, if that. “The good news is he has fresh bread, a large round of goat cheese and a *bota* of red wine.” We looked at the man and he nodded to us. He appeared to be quite old. He was rather small and dressed as if he lived in another century. He was wearing a cape and had leather pants on. His boots were tall and came almost to his knees. He was wearing a black beret of the kind I had seen in France. He looked like a character out of a Grimm fairy tale. We all greeted him, and he smiled. He was missing the two teeth in the center of his lower jaw and had a

walking cane that was slightly shorter than he was. His right hands gripped the cane, and his fingers were twisted with arthritis.

I didn't know what Manolo was referring to about the *bota*, which was Spanish for boot, but it didn't matter. We were all hungry, and we would have eaten almost anything this guy had available. He led us over to an area where he had a small shelter that was made of logs, tree branches and a type of canvas cover. I had heard of this kind of structure being called a lean-to. Alonzo ducked inside and came out with a wicker basket. Inside the basket was a large, round loaf of bread. He pulled out a ceramic bowl that contained the cheese. He told us that a friend of his made the cheese and that it included fresh local herbs. We watched as Alonzo removed from a leather satchel a large kitchen knife and cut up several slices of the bread holding the bread with one hand and the knife with the other. Then, with the same knife he spread cheese on top and handed each of us a slice.

After we all had a portion, which we were rapidly devouring, he reached back inside the lean-to and pulled out a leather bag. I wondered what that contained, and noticed it had a silver top on it and a metal chain that was connected to the bag. As I watched he unscrewed the top and handed the device to Manolo. Manolo put his piece of bread down and nodded to Alonzo. Manolo lifted the bag over his head and squeezed on the lower part of the leather bag. A fine stream of dark liquid squirted out and went right into Manolo's wide-open mouth. I quickly realized it must be wine and this was what he had called the *bota*.

Manolo finished and handed the *bota* to his sister. She smiled, and then lifted the *bota* above her head and started the fine stream of wine. The first part of the stream hit her chin, but she quickly made the adjustment with her hand and the wine went straight into her mouth. After a long swig she pulled the *bota* back and then wiped the small amount of wine from her face. She handed the *bota* to

me, but I immediately passed it on to Malu. “I don’t think I quite have this down yet. I need to see someone else do it.”

Malu lifted the bota and drank a large draft of wine, without spilling a drop. “All right, William,” Malu said, “you should be able to do it now with three good examples. Here, give it a try.” I took the bota in my hands and looked at it. I slowly lifted it, but before I started, Manolo said, “You have to squeeze the bota and aim at the exact same time. If you do that, it will go right into your mouth. Go ahead, you can do it.”

I tried to do what he said, but the first stream went right to my nose, and I almost choked. I pulled the bota back and stopped squeezing it. Everyone, including the goatherd Alonzo, started to laugh. I felt the pressure and knew that they would not let me relax until I had drunk the wine. I shook my head, lifted the bota, squeezed and aimed. The stream hit my upper lip. I made a quick adjustment and felt the wine got into my mouth. I let the stream go for quite a long time, and then pulled the bota back. A little of the residual wine dripped down my chin and onto my shirt. I had done it, not perfectly, but I felt satisfied.

“Good, good, William, done like a good Spaniard,” Malu said. Both Manolo and Valeria clapped their hands, and I smiled broadly.

“With a little practice I can become good at this,” I said. I passed the bota on to Alonzo. Alonzo drank from the bota and then it went back to the rest of us for another drink. A short time later all of us had eaten and the bota was empty. We all found places near the lean-to to stretch out for a rest. While we were getting comfortable, I heard Manolo talking to Alonzo.

“How long will it take us to get to Calcena?”

“With the herd it takes me about an hour and a half. If you don’t have to mind the goats it will take about an hour, no more.”

“Good. Thank you. Do you have a home there?”

“Not really, no. I have a cousin who has a farm. His name is Esteban Moreno. He lives near the village. He has a barn that I use when I am in the village. Perhaps if you stay in Calcena you can stay in the barn. You tell them that Alonzo said it is fine if you stay there. I won’t be back to Calcena for several days.”

“Very good, thank you for the offer. What is happening in the town these days?”

“In Calcena? Nothing happens there. Six months ago a child was killed by accident when a horse stepped on him.”

“That must have been terrible.”

“Yes, I think so. But I was not there. I was up here with my goats. I was told when I got back to the village. I didn’t know the boy, only the family. It was sad.”

“That’s all? How about the fighting going on around the country? Have you not experienced anything around here?”

“Nothing has happened around here. I hear what is happening when I am there in town. I have heard about other places in Spain. But these are places I don’t know. When would I ever be in Madrid, or Barcelona or Valencia? I am a poor goatherd, but compared with what I hear, I’ll stay right here with my animals and be fine.”

“Yes, of course. You have things good here, my friend.”

“And why are you traveling through here?”

“Us? We are on a pilgrimage to Zaragoza, to visit the Virgin of the Pillar.”

“I see. I have heard of the Cathedral in Zaragoza. It must be something special. Someday I would like to go there. Maybe I will be able to pray to the Virgin of the Pillar.”

“What would you pray for, Alonzo?” Manolo asked the old goatherd.

“What would I pray for? That is a good question. I think I might pray for a long life and no aches and pains when I am older.”

“How old are you?”

“I am going to be seventy-five this year.”

“Seventy-five? That is a long life, my friend. I think living out here is good for your health. I think you will live many more years.”

“Perhaps. Yes, perhaps I will.” With that Manolo stood up and walked over to where the rest of us were lounging on a grassy area, using our bags as pillows. Manolo stretched out, and there was a calm silence as we all rested. In the background I heard the soft sounds of the goats as they wondered around and made small baying sounds.

Sixteen

I was the first one to wake up a while later. When I did, I looked around and saw everyone except the goatherd. I didn't see or hear the goats either. I went over to Manolo and tapped him on the shoulder. "Manolo, do you think we should keep moving and head to Calcena?"

"Where?" Manolo said in a fog.

"Calcena, the village we are going to."

"Oh, yes, Calcena. Where are Valeria and Malu?"

"They are still resting. I'll wake them up."

"Yes, sure." I walked over and shook each of them on the shoulder. Valeria woke right up, but it took Malu longer to respond. "What do you want?" she said as if I had disturbed her in the middle of the night, not the middle of the afternoon.

"It's time to keep moving."

"Moving? Moving where?"

"To Calcena. Remember? The village we are going to?"

She shook her head and looked around. "Oh, yes. I was sleeping so soundly I forgot where we are. I'm sorry if I sounded rude."

"You didn't sound rude, Malu. You sounded tired. We are all tired. Don't worry about it."

We looked around for Alonzo, but still there was no sign of him or the goats. We headed in the direction of the village, thinking we might see him on the way. After almost an hour we saw the first of the small buildings of Calcena. It was at that moment that the rain started. It came down suddenly and very hard. It only lasted a few minutes, but it was so heavy that we were all soon completely soaked.

The first few homes looked quiet, but we finally saw one with a person out on the front porch. It was a man smoking a pipe. "Excuse me, sir, can you tell us where Esteban Moreno has his farm?"

The man sucked on the pipe once more, and then said, "The Moreno farm is on the eastern part of town. If you stay on this road about half a kilometer you will see a tall wooden silo with a curved top. About a hundred meters behind the silo is Moreno's farm."

"That is kind of you. Thank you very much." The man didn't say anything in return. We quickly went in the direction man had told us. We passed through the main part of Calcena, but there was not much to see. It was mostly a series of houses and businesses that presumably all had something to do with the local agriculture. The houses were all painted white and had orange tiles on the roofs. It was picturesque, I thought, and it seemed almost as if we were in a different country. We eventually got to the wooden silo, and we looked behind it and saw a house that was surrounded by trees. We hurried up a footpath and soon came to the front of the house. Manolo knocked on the door, and a woman came to open the door.

Manolo spoke to her. "Good afternoon, ma'am. My name is Manolo Palacios. I am here with family and a foreigner. We met the goatherd, Alonzo, and he suggested we might be able to stay the night in the barn where he sometimes sleeps. We are pilgrims on our way to Zaragoza. We don't want to bother anyone. We don't need anything except a dry place to spend the night."

"My husband is not here right now. If you want to wait in the barn until he arrives, I think that will be acceptable. If he says you can stay, then you can stay. You are all wet, I see. There is a

chimney in the barn and firewood in one of the corners. You can make a fire if you want, and then you will have a place to dry your clothes. There are also two small rooms there where the women can stay, if they would like.”

“That is kind of you, ma’am. We will go over and start a fire, since you recommend it.” We left the front door and went back to the barn. It was almost as big as the house and was made in a similar fashion. From the outside it even looked like another house. It had a front door that was similar to the one we had been standing before a few minutes ago. We opened the door and went inside. It looked like the front room of a house. There were tiles on the floor, a few pieces of simple, wooden furniture, and a large fireplace. We could see three other rooms inside the building. The one in the middle was larger than the others. Manolo and I walked over to that room, which was in the middle of the back wall, and looked inside. We saw the main part of the barn. It was a large room with straw on the floor and, along the back wall, several stalls for livestock. We saw a loft on the upper level and a ladder with railing leading to the upper level. We closed the door and focused on the small living area.

We opened one of the smaller doors, and inside there was a cot and chairs, but nothing else. We opened the other door, on the other side of central door, and it was similar to the small one on the other side. The only difference was this room was bigger and had three cots inside.

Manolo then spoke to all of us. “Valeria, you and Malu can go into that room on the left. William, you and I can use the room on the right. If you want to take off your wet clothes, go ahead. I’ll see if I can get the fireplace going. I’ll collect the wet things, and we’ll figure out a way to dry them out with the fire. I’m sure we all have a change of clothing.”

Valeria and Malu went to their room, and Manolo and I went to ours. We took off our clothes and found dry things to wear. Manolo went out to work on the fireplace and said, “William, please get the wet things from the women and bring them out to me.” He left the room, and I grabbed our things

and headed toward the other room. I tapped on the door, and said, “Malu, Valeria, can you give me your wet clothes?”

A moment later the door opened a little, and I saw a naked Malu standing before me. “What did you say, William?”

I stared for a moment, and then said, “I need your wet clothes so we can dry them out.”

“Yes, of course.” She turned and lifted a pile of clothes from the closest cot. “Here you are, William. This is everything we were wearing.” As she handed me the clothes I tried to peek in and see Valeria. Apparently she was behind the door because I couldn’t see anything except Malu. “Is that it?” she asked me.

“Uh, yes that’s it.”

“Very well, then close the door and stop staring.” There was a hint of a smile on her face, but before I could react to her, she pulled the door closed. I took the wet clothes over to the fireplace, where Manolo was kneeling and adjusting the kindling and several logs that had been stacked off to the side.

“There is everything we need here, William. There are even matches,” he said as he struck a large match and put it in with the kindling. He looked around and saw a small stack of newspapers. He grabbed a handful, rumbled the pages, and stuck them between the logs. I watched as the flames flared up. It wasn’t long before there was a good flame going, with the sounds of the kindling crackling as it heated up. I looked around the room and noticed a wooden stand on the other side of the room. I didn’t know what it was for, but it looked like something we could hang the wet clothes on. I pointed to it, and Manolo nodded his head. I went over, picked it up and set it in front of the fireplace. Manolo looked at it, and said, “I think it’s for drying towels or blankets or something. It will do the job for sure.”

A short while later the fire was burning nicely, and Malu and Valeria came out in the main room. We found places to sit and try to relax. The setting was more comfortable than any of us had experienced in several days.

Valeria said to Manolo, “What if the husband does not want us to stay here? We will have made ourselves at home only to be denied this place.”

Manolo looked at her and responded, “I think I can manage this. I will talk to the husband and explain things using the same story we have had for a while now. I am pretty sure we can make the arrangement, even if just for tonight. I will even offer to do some work if they need it. William and I might be able to do other chores or something.”

We all agree with Manolo, and soon the room was very quiet, except for sounds coming from the fireplace.

A little while later, I looked at Valeria and asked her what I thought would be a simple question. “Valeria, you were staying until a few days ago in the convent. That must have been a comfortable environment.”

“That depends on what you mean by comfortable. The convent rooms were small, and there were usually two of us in each room. The heating was not good, and the blankets were made of a rough material almost like burlap. This place is a different world compared to the convent.”

“Did you like being in the convent?”

“Did I like it? Well, that is a difficult question. I don’t think most women become nuns because they like it. They have their motivation, but that varies a lot too. Many of the women want to help poor people, for instance. They don’t like the fact there are many poor people and so many people with a lot of money. That isn’t right, is it?”

This is when Malu chimed in, and I wasn't in the least surprised. "Listen, Valeria, the church has a massive amount of riches. Haven't you seen the big churches and all the gold and silver? You see, the church was part of the plan to rob the indigenous people of Peru, Mexico, and Central America of their treasures. Isn't it ironic that now the church wants to help poor people? I don't understand that." Suddenly, I felt that my simple question was leading into an unexpected dispute.

"Well," said Manolo, "the church has always had people that supported the poor people. It's true that the conquest of the New World was done always with priests involved, but they were there not to fight with anyone, but rather to save their souls."

"Save their souls?" It was Malu again, and now she sounded a little agitated. "Why did they have to save their souls? Did they ask to have their souls saved? Besides, I don't know what you mean by soul anyway."

"Oh, you must be kidding, Malu." Now it was Manolo who sounded a little agitated. "It is one thing to question the motives of the church people, but questioning the idea of the soul? Really?"

"No offense, Manolo, but you wouldn't understand. People use the term soul all the time, and yet it is a complex matter. We have the physical body, and we have the brain where all thoughts are stored. What exactly is the soul, then? It is an idea, but I have always found it to be really vague. I understand most people just accept the concept based on religion. But that is not something we are going to resolve today. I would like to know what Valeria is going to do now." She turned to look at Valeria.

Valeria looked at Malu and then at her brother. "I don't know, to tell you the truth. I have been thinking about all of this since I left Huelgas. I chose to go there, and I didn't choose to leave, did I? Now, however, I don't think I want to go back. I'm confused. I don't know what I want."

Manolo looked at his sister. “Valeria, this is not something you need to worry about right now. The current circumstances require us to deal with the present and our unusual situation. When things have settled down for us, and when they have improved in Spain, then we can consider all of the options. If you feel the church is the best place for you, then that will be fine. At present, I would say that in general it is not a safe place for you.”

As Valeria finished saying this the main door to the barn opened. In walked a tall man with a beard that looked like something out of a centuries-old painting. He had a mustache and a goatee of thick, black hair and looked like it had been carefully trimmed. He was wearing city clothes, not the garb of a typical a farmer. He had a deep voice when he spoke. “You are the pilgrims?”

Manolo quickly stepped forward and offered his hand to the person who was no doubt the owner of the establishment. “Yes, we are the pilgrims heading to Zaragoza. I am Manolo Palacios, the is my sister, Valeria, our cousin, María Luisa, and our friend from the United States of America, William Benning. We are pleased to meet you and thank you for your kindness. The goatherd, Alonzo, told us about you.”

“Alonzo, yes, of course. You must have seen him then in the hills. He is a friend of the family.”

“He suggested we might spend the evening here, but of course, this is based on your approval. We do not want in any way to inconvenience you or your family, sir.”

“I don’t see any inconvenience, so you’re welcome to stay.”

“That is very kind of you,” Manolo said.

“My wife said you are on your way to Zaragoza.”

“Yes, that is correct. My sister is interested in becoming a nun, and she wants to pray to the Virgin of the Pillar. My cousin is going too, and this person,” he said as he pointed to me, “is an

American, from the United States. He is here to visit our country and learn Spanish.” Mr. Moreno didn’t speak for a few moments, and there was a difficult silence that was interrupted when a couple of pieces of kindling snapped as they caught fire in the fireplace.

“Very well, then. I will ask my wife to fix something extra for dinner.”

“Thank you, but we don’t want to impose on your hospitality.”

“No imposition, I’m sure. I’ll let you know when the food is ready. If you prefer you can eat here. There is everything you need.”

“Yes,” Manolo replied, “you have done a very nice job here of including these rooms with the barn. It is a bit unusual, but nice when you have visitors. Again, it is so kind of you to permit us to stay.”

“You are welcome” was all Mr. Moreno said before leaving.

“There is something about him that bothers me,” Malu said softly after she was sure that the owner had left. There were no windows on the front of the room, but the construction seemed very solid, so it was unlikely anyone could hear anything from outside.

“I understand, Malu,” Manolo said. “He seems to be quite a gentleman. He doesn’t talk like a rural farmer. I’m sure he has more education than average around here. He is probably a community leader or something. And he probably has ties with important people in the region. I’m guessing, but it would not surprise me.”

I could not help asking, “So do we trust this person? Do you think we are safe here? What should we do?”

Valeria joined the conversation now. “I think he is a sincere person, and I don’t think there is any danger for us.”

“What if he was in Soria on business today? What if he talked to someone there and saw the poster that we saw?”

“That is possible, yes. I don’t know what to think. We have a couple of options that we need to think about. I don’t think we should just grab our things and leave. That would certainly draw attention and make us look suspicious. I think we should at least stay and eat something. Then, later in the evening, if we all agree, we can leave this place. That means not staying in this comfortable location, but our safety is most important. It stopped raining, I think, so we could travel tonight if need be.”

We all sat quietly for a while. The fire was going well now, and I felt more comfortable in this place than I had anywhere since leaving Manolo’s home. I suspect all of us felt this way. However, though we were all enjoying the comforts of the Moreno’s unusually nice barn, we were all thinking about the immediate future. My mind wandered to the relationships that we all had with each other.

I thought about Manolo and the fact that in a short time I had grown very close to him. I realized that I didn’t have any close friends back in Charlottesville. I tried to think of why that was the case. I had not developed any close relationships in high school, probably because none of my classmates, either male or female, lived nearby. In the neighborhood there were a couple of boys my age, but I had never made any strong connection with them. They were both very interested in sports and had been standouts in baseball and basketball. I wasn’t that interested in sports, so they didn’t often include me in their activities, no matter what they involved.

At the University I had a group of guys that I enjoyed going to class with. None of them had become close friends of mine. For example, I had never had one of my classmates over to my father's place. If we did anything outside of school it was at local restaurants or taverns near the University. Or we might get together at one of the social clubs, though I had never been a member of a club or fraternity. For personal reasons, which I don't think I have ever quite figured out for myself, I tended to keep my associations at school separate from those of my private life. Part of the reason for this had to do with my father. He was always a serious person and had infrequent visitors himself. I suppose I thought that bringing any of my classmates home would have been an imposition for my father.

I didn't think of Manolo as a best friend, not in the sense that I thought of that term back in the United States. Manolo was a few years older than I was, and if anything, he seemed more like an older and wiser brother. He was more settled, serious and contemplative than any younger person I had known. I looked up to him, and as I have stated previously, because he fit so well into the role of a leader. I think the best way to express my feelings is to say that I had a high level of respect and even admiration for him.

I looked at Valeria and thought about my feelings for her. I quickly realized that I didn't know how I felt about her. She was physically attractive, and had eyes that, when I was able to look right into them, made me feel as if I wanted to hold her tightly. But over the past few days I had learned that Valeria seldom looked anyone or me right in the eyes. Even when we had extended conversations, she would only make brief eye contact with me. She would look somewhere else when she spoke, sometimes even looking at other parts of my face, or so it seemed to me. It made me think that she did

not feel comfortable with me, but I could not think why that would be the case. Perhaps it was because I was not Spanish. Valeria, I concluded, would be the kind of woman I would want as a mother for my children. I could imagine her holding a child and very motherly. I would even say that I felt a kind of platonic love for her.

Malu, on the other hand, represented another kind of love. She looked like the kind of woman I would want to go to bed with every night. I still had a hard time believing I had made love to her. That night at the Palacios's house had been so unusual, and the time Malu and I had spent entwined together so brief, that I could hardly remember the details of it. I thought that maybe it had been a dream. But then I remembered the comments she made the next day. I wondered if it would ever happen again. I had a hard time understanding her mentality and what she thought of others. She, perhaps, represented the ideal Spanish woman, in the sense that she was so independent and proud. These traits were mixed with a kind of sensuality that made her almost unapproachable. The morning after we made love, and were together in the bathroom, I felt as if she treated me like a student and she was the schoolteacher who had given me a lesson in life, and perhaps that was all there was going to be.

As I was thinking about these people so near to me, and with whom I was now irretrievably connected, I closed my eyes and started to drift off. However, I quickly woke up when I heard a knock on the barn door. Manolo jumped up, but before he got to the door, it opened. In came Mr. Moreno carrying a wooden tray with a towel over it. "My wife made a potato omelet this morning, and we had a leg of lamb left over from yesterday. It is still quite good, I believe." He said this and then put the tray on one of the tables. He pulled off the towel, and we saw a large serving platter. On one side was the round omelet, which had been sliced into sections like a pie, and on the other side was a stack of thinly sliced meat. Around the outer edges were slices of bread. "I hope you find everything satisfactory."

“More than satisfactory, Mr. Moreno, for sure. You are exceedingly generous, especially to strangers such as us,” Manolo said.

“Well, if Alonzo sent you here, then you are not complete strangers. He has not done this often. I think he must have liked you.”

“We enjoyed his company, certainly,” Manolo replied.

“In the corner of that room on the back side you will find a bin with wine bottles inside. It is only our everyday red wine, but it will probably go well with this food. You can help yourselves. The cabinet there on the side of the chimney has plates, silverware, and jars you are welcome to use. We have a maid who will clean things up later on. I am going back to the house, so if you need anything, you can come and knock on the door.”

We all thanked him for his generosity, and a moment later he was gone. Malu went to the cabinet and brought over everything we needed to eat. Manolo went to the girls’ room and came back with a bottle of wine that had no label on it. Soon, we were all eating and drinking, and there was not a word spoken for quite a while. I said eventually, “I have tried this omelet before in a bar. It is delicious. It is one of my favorite foods in Spain.”

“My mother makes these several times a week back home,” Malu said. “Sometimes she slices it through the middle, making two layers, and then puts a layer of sliced ham in the middle. That is the best I have ever eaten. We would eat it for lunch and then as a snack before dinner. That, and a glass of white wine, is the best one can do.”

We all dug into the food, and before long we were finishing the last bits. However, I knew I could not have eaten another bite. I was full, and it seemed like everyone else was too. I took my last sip of wine and then stretched out on the floor. There was a blanket folded on one of the tables, which I put under my head as a pillow. This was the most comfortable I had been since being in Manolo’s

home in Burgos. I didn't hear Manolo leave, but I realized he had gone outside when he came back in and shut the door and it woke me up. He was standing at the entrance to the barn and looking at the three of us. Malu and Valeria were sitting in chairs that they had placed against the wall so they could put their heads back and rest.

"What's the matter, Manolo?" It was Valeria, who obviously knew her brother well enough to detect the small expression of concern on his face.

"I went out to just look around a little bit. I walked behind the barn, where there is a stable with horses. I was just looking at the horses when I heard a truck drive up to the main house. I made sure nobody could see me, and I saw about five men get out of that truck. They all went inside the Moreno's house, and at least two of them were carrying rifles."

"Oh shit," I heard Malu say under her breath.

"Maybe they are going hunting," Valeria said.

"Yeah, hunting," Malu quickly added, "they may be hunting us."

"Well, I don't know what they are doing," Manolo said as he came into the room, "but I am becoming increasingly skeptical. I suggest we put our things together right now. These clothes are mostly dry now so let's pack up our bags. Why don't you all do that? I am going through the other part of the barn. There must be another way out of this building, and I want to see if I can detect anything going on in the house."

Manolo went to the back part of the barn, and three of us quickly grabbed the clothes from the rack and went to the back rooms to pack. A few minutes later we were all ready to go. Malu looked at Valeria and me. "I told you I didn't trust this man Moreno. He seems a little too friendly to me. I don't

think people around here are so nice to strangers. They don't know us from anybody, and all this hospitality is not customary. What do you think, Valeria?"

"I don't know. Mr. Moreno seemed sincere to me. But I guess you are right in saying people are not generally so hospitable to perfect strangers." As soon as she said this the door to the main part of the barn opened, and Manolo came back in.

"I think we should go. I can't tell what is happening in the house, but I have an uncomfortable feeling. Is everything packed?"

We all nodded, picked our bags, and went behind Manolo, into the main part of the barn. He led us to a back room where there was a line of about a half dozen stalls. We walked down this line, and the most noticeable thing was the smell of horses and leather. And, it was very quiet, almost alarmingly so. Several of the stalls had horses in them, and a couple of the horses had stuck their heads out to see who was walking in their area. "I like horses," Manolo said just above a whisper. "I wish we could stay and spend some time with them."

Manolo got to the end of the stalls, and he turned and ducked down. I couldn't tell why he was doing this until we got there. There was a shelf with a lot of equipment for the horses, such as halters, saddles, blankets, and leather lines. Below the lowest shelf, about three feet above the ground, was an open area. When I bent down to look at Manolo, I saw him crawling through the space, and at the end was an opening. I looked back at Malu and Valeria, and then I crouched down to follow Manolo, sure that the two women would follow me. Manolo went out the small door, and a few minutes all of us followed him. This must have been a loading area, because on the outside we were standing on a platform that was about six feet above the ground.

The platform extended across a part of the rear of the barn, and at the end there was a wooden staircase. We followed Manolo to the end and descended. At the bottom we could see around the corner of the barn, and there was the main house. Manolo signaled to us to follow him. We went back, along the ground, next to the platform, to the other end of the barn. We stopped there for a moment, and Manolo pointed to a cluster of trees that was about fifty yards from the barn. A moment later Manolo headed toward the trees at a trot. We all followed him in single file. At the moment we got to the first trees we heard a loud bang. We all turned to see what had made that sound.

We saw, at the back of the house, a man holding a rifle up in the air. “*Deténganse inmediatamente, y vengan aquí!* Stop and come back over here immediately!” We froze, and I for one had no idea what to do. I looked at Manolo, who was apparently also unsure of what to do now. As we watched in disbelief, Malu reached into her travel bag and pulled out a revolver. She lifted it up and pointed it in the direction of the man who had now been joined by several others. As soon as they saw Malu point the gun they scattered. “*¡Vayan a la mierda!*” she shouted. “Go to hell!”

A moment later, Manolo said, “Come on, follow me,” and he took off at a full run toward the first trees. We all followed, including Malu, who kept the gun in her hand. As soon we reached the trees and went behind them, we heard a volley of about four shots. One of the bullets nicked the bark on a tree near us. We all made sure we were out of the line of fire. I looked at Manolo, who was standing next to his sister. She had buried her face in his shoulder, and he was patting her on the back. Manolo looked over at us and pointed to an area where the tree coverage looked a little denser. He signaled to me and Malu with his hand, indicating with a nod of his head that we should make the first run.

I grabbed Malu’s hand tightly, took a deep breath, and then took off as fast as I could. She managed to keep up with me, and as we were running we heard a couple of more gunshots. We got to a

large tree and went behind it and got down on the ground. “Those bastards,” Malu said, gritting her teeth with an anger I had not seen on anyone’s face in a long time. “I’m going to shoot one of those sons of a bitch in the balls.” I could hardly believe I was in this situation. In my wildest imagination, even back in Charlottesville when I sometimes imagined being a cowboy in the western part of the country and dealing with marauders, I had not thought about something like this.

I peeked around the tree to see what Manolo and Valeria were doing. The main advantage we had was the fact that it was getting dark now. As I watched they made their run to the same area we were in, but to a different tree. This time I did not hear any shots. I tried to see if any of the men from the house were pursuing us, but I didn’t notice any movement. What occurred to me at that moment was that this was Moreno’s land and he knew it a lot better than we did. He and the men who had joined him would have a huge advantage over us due to their knowledge of the terrain. The only advantage we had, if any at all, was that Malu had a gun and anyone pursuing us would have to take extra precautions.

I tried to see where Manolo and Valeria were, but it wasn’t easy. I would have to expose myself if I moved too far around the trunk of the tree. I looked at Malu, who had tears in her eyes. I wondered if she was as strong as I thought she was. She was obviously upset, but perhaps now she feared for her life and that reality was starting to sink in. It sure was for me. I lifted my hand and made a sign to her that we should leave this tree and head for another one a little way away. My hope was that we could see where Manolo and Valeria were and try to get back together with them. We jumped up quickly and ran. We dove behind another tree, the biggest one we had seen so far, and listened carefully. About a minute later we heard a sound, and right after that we saw Manolo and Valeria run past our tree to another one about ten yards away. They stopped in a position that we could see them.

I watched as Manolo lifted his head. It was a gesture I had seen him use before, and it was as if he was asking, 'Are you two all right?' I slowly nodded that we seemed to be unharmed. I wanted to somehow signal that we were not hurt but that we were both clearly scared. I supposed Manolo had already come to that conclusion. I watched as he nodded his head up and down a couple of times slowly. That told me they were both all right also. Now, we had to figure out, without being able to communicate clearly, what the next move was going to be. I decided that what I needed to do was go over to where Manolo and Valeria were to talk to him about the best next step. Without thinking more about the possible dangers I put my hand on Malu's shoulder and pushed down. "Wait here, I'm going over there to talk to Manolo." All Malu did was slightly nod her head. I didn't think more about the situation. I stood up and ran over to the tree where Manolo and Valeria were hiding.

I slid in like a baseball player trying to steal second base, with my feet first. I pulled next to Manolo. "Are you two both all right?"

"Yes, we are all right. How about Malu?"

"She is all right too. How surprised were you when she pulled out that pistol?"

"Very. But after thinking about it, it is not that surprising, is it? Remember that she watched as her uncle and her brother were shot like a couple of stray dogs. I think she is a tough woman. I just wonder where she got that gun."

"Yes," I added, "she is a tough woman without a doubt."

"Well, no matter about Malu, we have to figure out what to do now. I don't know if these people are going to pursue us. I haven't seen anything yet to indicate they are following us. But, considering everything that has happened so far, I will be surprised if they just let us go on our way."

“I agree, Manolo.” We both sat and thought about the options, but I was sure that whatever plan Manolo came up with was going to be the one we agreed on. Meanwhile I looked over to where I had left Malu. She was lying on the ground and staring over at us. I lifted my hand to make a gesture to her that everything, at least for the moment, was all right.

“Of course,” Manolo finally said, “I don’t know this terrain, but Moreno does. So, they have the advantage over us.”

“Maybe they don’t think it is worth it to follow us,” I suggested.

“Maybe not. But, since Malu pulled out that gun, I have a strong feeling that they were upset by that gesture and are not going to just dismiss this so easily.”

“Yes, I would have to agree.”

“Listen, my American friend, you are in another strange situation. Did you imagine that when you came to Spain you would be involved in things like this? I don’t think so.”

“No, I didn’t imagine it. But I knew that Spain was having problems. That did not deter me from coming. Now, well, I just have to deal with all of this. But I have to admit I didn’t imagine being in a situation in which somebody might want to shoot a gun at me.”

“No, of course not.” We sat still for a couple of minutes. Manolo moved into a position that would permit him to look back toward Moreno’s home. It was too far away to see now, especially because of all the trees. “I don’t see any movement at all. If they are coming after us, then they are being extremely careful.” A short time after Manolo said that we both heard the same sound. It was of a horse neighing.

“Horses,” Manolo said. “Some of them have gotten on horseback to come up in this direction probably.” We both looked around the tree for any signs of movement. Neither of us saw anything. “I

think we had better keep moving up. If they are on horseback, they will be moving faster than we can. I don't think we can sit here and wait. Signal to Malu to come over here, and we'll move out." I did as Manolo said, and a few moments later Malu came running over to our tree. As soon as she got by us, we left. We took off in a trot, after looking carefully below for any sign of the horses. As always, Manolo was in the lead. Valeria and Malu went behind him, and I followed up in the rear.

By now there was a full moon rising, and the combination of the moon and our being out in the dark for so long meant we could see our surroundings quite well. Before long we came to a more open area that had a lot of rocks and even a few larger boulders. It looked like a safer area to me. We scrambled up behind one of the larger ones, got behind it and took a breather. It was quiet, and we all listened for signs that our pursuers were getting closer. We were now on an area that sloped downwards to a less wooded and more open area. I looked at the expanse in front of us and wondered if soon we would be traveling down and looking for a road that would lead us to our destination of Zaragoza.

Manolo said, "I know I heard the sound of a horse a little while ago."

"I did too," I quickly added. "I thought that they had gotten horses so they could better come after us. But now I don't hear anything. How could they be so quiet?"

"I don't know either. Listen, you stay here with Valeria and Malu. I'm going to take a look back from the direction we came in. I have to know if they are after us or not." He stood up and went on the other side of the rock formation we were taking refuge in. I was suddenly so exhausted that I lay there and closed my eyes. I opened them a moment to look at Malu and Valeria and was surprised to see they were stretched out right next to each other, almost hugging. "Are you two all right?"

"We are all right at the moment, yes," Malu answered.

"Valeria? You too?"

I heard Malu's voice again. "She is all right but scared."

I realized then that we all were. I wondered about Manolo. I knew him well enough to realize he wasn't the kind of person who would show fear easily. Someone had to remain calm and collected, and he was the person who had gotten us through everything up to this point. I thought about my own feelings. Was I scared? I realized that I wasn't scared to the point of being nervous. I was even calm, at least for the moment. I tried to think back to a time in my life so far when I had really been scared. I couldn't come up with anything except for the time I was visiting the home of a professor at the University who had invited us to his house. I was about four years old at the time. When we got to that house, I saw a dog that was almost as big as I was, and when it barked suddenly, it scared me to the point of almost peeing in my pants. I grabbed my father's leg and tried to climb up. The owner barked a command, and the dog fell quiet and sat obediently.

Now, it was a much different situation, one I could not have imagined no matter how hard I tried. I was a fugitive, at least in the eyes of some people here in Spain, and as far as I knew I had not done anything wrong or hurt anyone. It was ironic, to say the least. I was on an adventure, one that up until the day before had been exciting and seemed like something out of a movie or a novel. Now, things had become serious. When I was growing up, I had never been accused of anything, not trying to steal a piece of candy at the drug store or trying to see the answer to a difficult question from a classmate on a test in school. I don't want to suggest a holier-than-thou attitude, because I didn't feel that way at all. I just had a pretty good sense of what was right and wrong, thanks to a father who started talking about these things when I was quite young. What was my reaction to all this? I was surprisingly calm and, if I was completely honest with myself, the situation even had an element of exhilaration to it. I tried to understand how this could be the case. When I was thinking deeply about all of this, I heard a noise and turned to see Manolo coming back to our little hiding area.

“Well, I don’t know what is happening. I did not see any movement whatsoever. It is dark, but the moon helps a lot. I watched and listened, but I didn’t see or hear anything that suggested those people have come after us. He stopped for a few moments and then continued. “Maybe they decided it was not worth the effort. It seems that they have better things to do than to chase after people that they don’t know much about. Mr. Moreno seems like a smart person who could control the rest of those people if he felt it was necessary. What would they gain by taking time to come after us anyway?”

“I agree, Manolo. The question now is, what’s next?”

“I am not sure. But at least we can take a little time to think about our options. The immediate thing we need to do is secure ourselves for the night. It must be at least nine o’clock, and we are in unfamiliar territory. I don’t think we should move away from here. It seems that nobody is still looking for us, but that possibility exists. Maybe we can look around this area to find someplace to sleep, and that offers us cover in case someone does come around here. William, you go over that way and I’ll go over this way, and let’s see if there is an outdoor place we can spend the night.”

“Sure,” I said, and took off down the slope and around the large rocks. I thought I might find a place that was surrounded by rocks and would allow us to keep out of sight. I looked all around, and then came to a rock formation that had a small overhang. It looked as if there was a large boulder that had a straight edge facing downward, and the earth below the rock had been eroded away. I crouched down below the smooth service and was surprised to see an opening there. It wasn’t visible when I was standing, but down on my hands and knees it was quite clear. There was an opening that was about three feet wide and inside was pitch dark. I put my head inside the opening and wondered if it led to something. I jumped up and went back up to the area where Manolo said he was going to scout.

I ran over to him and said, “Manolo, do you have a match?”

“No, but I think Malu does. Why?”

“Well, I might have found a place for us, but I need more light.”

I hurried over to where the girls were sitting and talking softly. “Listen, do either of you have a match?”

“I have one in my bag,” Malu said. “Here, hand me my bag and let me look inside.” I knew she had dug into her bag for a revolver a little while ago. Maybe she had some more useful supplies than just her clothes. “Here they are.”

“Great,” I said and took the small box. I went back to the overhang and got down on my hands and knees in front of the opening I had discovered. I took out a match and struck it on the rocky surface above my head. I put the match inside the opening and saw that it was more than a hole caused by erosion. I put my head deeper inside and tried to see. The match flame got near my fingertips, so I dropped it and took out another. I pushed myself deeper into the opening and struck the second match. This time I could see quite clearly that this was a tunnel or a cave. I pushed further inside and saw that the opening took a turn to the left and then dipped down. My curiosity was now definitely piqued, and I squirmed through the turn and started downward, half sliding and pushing off with my feet. I then came to a ledge and put my head over the ledge.

I struck another match and peered down. I was surprised to see that there was a large opening below me, about three feet below the ledge. I pushed forward on my stomach and extended my arms down to support myself. It was awkward, but I managed to pull myself onto the lower ledge, and once I was down there I found out I could stand almost straight up. I had to light another match, but when I did, I realized that this was no mere tunnel. It was indeed a cave. It was a cave that was natural but had certainly had people in it before and whoever it was had worked the sides and the ground to make it easier to move around. The ledge I was standing on now was flat, and there was a path that led down and to the right. The walls appeared unusually smooth, suggesting someone had spent time making this

entrance a more comfortable one. I thought about going down, and decided there was a smarter way to proceed. I would go back up and out of the entrance and get Manolo. We could gather kindling, start a fire with the matches, and then make a torch. This was certainly a place we could spend the night without fear of having anyone chance upon us.

Once I was back outside I went looking for Manolo. I saw him talking with the girls. I quickly went over to them. “I think I have a place, a very secure one, for us to stay. Come and see what I discovered.” All three of them followed me back to the overhanging boulder. When we got there I told them what I had found. “This is an entrance to a cave, but you can’t even see it unless you are practically standing right next to it and you are kneeling down. Look here, do you see it?”

Manolo crouched down. “Are you sure it’s a cave, William?”

“Oh, totally. I’ve already been inside. But, of course, there is no light. We need some kind of torch so we can go in there and explore. I have the matches that Malu gave me, so we have to find something to burn.”

“That should not be too hard,” said Manolo as he looked around. He went over to where there was a tree, and at the base there were some dried twigs and one long branch. Everyone went about looking for things to burn. I climbed inside the opening, and then once I was inside I stuck my head back up.

“Bring everything to me and I’ll put it inside. I think we should start the fire in there. Don’t bring any leaves because they smoke too much. We don’t want to fill the cave with smoke.” For the next several minutes we did exactly this. We gathered enough wood and kindling to last for several hours. I stacked everything on the first inside ledge, and I told Manolo that once he was inside he could hand the things down to me in the larger, open area. Before long, all of us were inside the cave.

The only person who seemed reluctant was Malu. “How do you know there isn’t something inside this place? Maybe there are animals, maybe a wolf family lives in here.”

“I didn’t think about that,” I told Malu. “But I haven’t seen anything to suggest anything, or anybody, has been in here recently. There is no dung on the floor or anything. There are no smells that I can detect. I think it is completely safe. These might be caverns, which are a little different from caves, in Virginia. I visited them one time with a group of students at the University. We had a guide who told us there weren’t many animals in those caverns. He said we had to watch for bats.”

“Bats?” Malu said and started to go back toward the entrance.

“Malu, I’m sure there aren’t bats in this one. They always leave droppings, and there is a strong smell where they stay. Come on, we have a perfectly good, safe place to stay for now. There is no reason to be afraid.”

They followed me down to the main area. I struck another of the matches for all of us to see. Manolo noticed that the path that went down to the right seemed to have a higher ceiling. He went slowly in that direction, and we all followed. “The main thing is to find a suitable area to start the fire. Let’s go down this way, and then you and I can bring back the wood for the fire, William. Everyone, watch your step, because there may be unexpected tunnels off to the side of this path. I have been in caves before, and they are a bit dangerous if you don’t know the layout. There are plenty of caves near Burgos, and that isn’t far from here really.”

We stayed close to each other, and we all put our hands out from time to time to make sure we maintained maximum caution in this cave that none of us had any familiarity with. We finally came to the biggest area we had discovered so far. The ceiling now was ten or twelve feet above our heads, and there was an opening to one side that spread out considerably. “I think we should pick this place. The ground is somewhat flat here and there is plenty of room above us for the smoke when we get the fire

started. William let's get the wood and bring it here. Valera and Malu, you stay right here and keep a match lit. Do we still have plenty?"

Malu said, "Yes, there is at least half of the box left. There must be twenty or thirty matches in it."

"Very well, then. Let's get moving with this. I think we will all feel much better when we have steady light in here. After that we can get all our bags and bring them in here. Are you ready, William?"

"Sure. Let's get this place ready for us. I'm excited about spending the night in here. I have a sense that it is a safe enough place, considering what we have been through today."

Twenty minutes later we were all kneeling down on the ground and watching as Manolo struck the first match and set it under the kindling. It took a few minutes, but then we all saw the first flames starting up. There was some smoke at first that made Valeria cough, but soon enough the smoking diminished and we had a decent fire going. Manolo was right about the ceiling. It was tall enough that the smoke rose and hovered above us without any problems. Before long the fire was burning brightly, and we all began to feel relieved. I picked up a branch with several twigs attached, stuck it in the middle of the fire, and soon had a torch that would last a few minutes. I stood up and looked all around. We were in a somewhat large area. On one side there was a formation of rocks that looked like they had never been touched, but on the other side the walls appeared smoother, as if someone had been chipping away at it to make it flatter. I went along that smoother wall and followed it. There was a natural curve, and then a narrow entrance that I had to crouch down to squeeze through.

I came to another area that seemed even larger than the one where we had made a fire. I looked around and realized that this was likely the first part of a system of caves. It made me think again of the caverns on the west side of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Virginia. I kept going a bit and then heard

a noise. It sounded like water flowing. I went around another bend, and there was a small pool of water with a trickle of water flowing along the rock above it. I put my hand out to touch the water. It was very cool. I cupped my hand, let it fill with water and smelled it. I detected nothing. I put my lips to my palm and took a sip. It tasted like pure spring water.

The next thing I heard was Manolo's voice. "William? Where are you? William? Can you hear me?"

"Yes, I'm in here, Manolo. Keep coming this way, and I'll go back toward you." A few moments later I saw his figure appear. "This place is incredible. I have a feeling this is only a small part of a big cave system."

"I think you are right. You really stumbled upon something, William. You are a good person to have on this journey." He said that and gave me an embrace and a strong pat on the back.

"I am glad that I can least make a contribution to this adventure."

"You make more than a contribution, my friend. I don't think we would have gotten far without you. And this cave is really fantastic. As I told you, there are caves in the areas surrounding Burgos. I have heard that some old bones and other relics have been found by people who have discovered some of the caves in that region. I know that a person at the university in Burgos, a professor of archaeology, has gone in to explore some of those sites. Maybe there are such things in here too."

Manolo and I went back over to the main area where the fire was burning. Malu and Valeria were sitting close to the fire, enjoying the peace and the warmth, it seemed to me. We sat down there too and made ourselves as comfortable as we could. After a while we started talking about what we were going to do in the morning.

Manolo began by asking, “Is there any reason we should not stay with the story we have been using so far?”

“You mean, the story about going to Zaragoza to visit the virgin?” asked Malu.

“Yes, exactly. It seemed to serve the purpose, at least until yesterday. I think we can continue with that. The next time we come to a town, it is unlikely that the people will know anything about us. I just don’t see anybody giving us that much importance. I think there must have been some small reward offered for us, but I can’t believe we are worth much.”

Manolo looked at his sister. “Valeria, you have been quiet. I hope you are not too scared right now, although I would not be surprised if you are. What are your thoughts?”

“I feel better now that we are in this safe place. I never imagined in my life so far that anyone would want to hurt me, or that anyone would point a gun in my direction. That is hard for me to understand. I know that we are going through this terrible period in Spain, but I have not had these issues presented to me personally before today. Sometimes I want to go home and see my parents and stay with them. I don’t think I want to be a nun anymore. These last few days I have thought about everything, more deeply than ever before. I wanted to be a nun, but not for the right reasons. I wanted to find something for myself, something different. I wanted a change in my life, but I was unsure of that. I still don’t know what I want, but now I am thinking more clearly than before.”

I was deeply impressed by what Valeria said. I started thinking that whatever I knew or thought about her previously might not have been accurate. I have already mentioned that I had mixed feelings about this Spanish woman, someone who represented a stark contrast with the other Spanish woman I knew well, Malu. I could not help comparing these two Spanish women, and the complication was that I had strong feelings for both of them. I realized that I would have a difficult time choosing, if I ever

had to do such a thing, between Malu and Valeria. Of course, I had to also consider that neither of them would necessarily choose me.

“Sister,” Manolo said after a few moments of thinking about what Valeria had said, “I find your comments compelling. You are talking like a woman, when I have almost always thought of you as a girl, as my little sister.” I noted that Manolo and Valeria looked at each other, and I thought I saw an increase in the moisture in Valeria’s eyes, that I was sure would result in tears spilling from her eyes. But not a single tear dripped down her cheeks.

Manolo turned his attention to me. “William, you are a visitor, you are our guest here in Spain. But, as you know, you are also my brother. As you know, I don’t have a natural brother, but you are my brother, and you always will be a part of my family.”

I looked at Manolo and, for the first time in my life, had a deep feeling of affection for another man. I didn’t have any brothers or sisters, and I had never developed a close relationship with anyone, except possibly my father. I thought about my father. I realized that while we had a very good relationship, it was based on respect and admiration and did not have a deep emotional component to it. I now had a strong emotional connection to someone, and it was another man. I was taken aback. I have made clear my respect and admiration for this young Spaniard. Now, I felt a stronger emotional attachment than anything previously.

“I don’t know what to say,” is what I was able to mutter. “I am a stranger here in Spain. Your culture is very different from my culture back home. For the first time in my life, I have a sense of belonging and commitment, something I have never experienced before. I even struggle to understand it and to compare it to anything I have experienced or even read about. Sometimes I feel as if I am in some type of dream environment. I wake up in the morning, or even in the middle of the night, and I am confused about where I am and what I am doing in this place that is so different from what I am

familiar with. And yet, if somebody came to me tomorrow and told me, “Come on, we are taking you safely out of Spain, to the French border, and from there you can go back home,” I don’t think I would accept the offer. If I did that, I would feel that I was abandoning the three of you.”

“That is a noble thing to say.” It was Malu, and I could see the expression of sincerity in her face.

“I agree completely,” Valeria said, and smiled briefly at me, before quickly turning her gaze back to the fire.

“Well, William, all of us appreciate your moral support. But we still have to decide what we are going to do tomorrow when we leave this cave. Or, we can make this our home. I am starting to like this place.” I didn’t know to what degree Manolo was being serious, but the cave was certainly a quiet place that permitted all of us to relax, even for a short time.

I finally spoke. “I think sticking with the plan is a good idea. We are supposed to be going to your cousin’s place around Lérida, correct?”

“Sudanell is the name of the town, yes, that’s the place. Whatever has happened over the last couple of days should not distract us from the original plan. We have talked about going to Zaragoza so much that I was starting to think of that as our destination. But that was just part of the story we were telling people. We are going to Sudanell, and I can’t think of a better place to go for now. Somehow, trying to go back to Burgos does not sound like a good idea. It is taking us from our home, and taking Malu even farther from her home, and that cannot be easy to deal with. What do you think, Malu?”

“I say we keep going to the east. I have no interest in going to Zaragoza or seeing any virgins in the church. I don’t care if we continue to use that story, however. I mean no disrespect, Valeria. I think you all know my viewpoint anyway.”

“I tend to agree with you all,” Manolo said. “I think we should all get some rest. Tomorrow morning we will head out of here. I think I know how to get back on track and move on to the next village to the east. I know it is a little cool in this cave, but this is the safest place we can be right now. We might have to put something else on top of our clothes, and I believe we can keep this fire going most of the night. I will stay awake for a while, and then William, you can tend to the fire after that.”

“Yes, sure, Manolo. I will do that, no problem.” The three of us tried to find comfortable positions around the fire. The ground was hard, and it was going to be an uneasy rest. But I was exhausted, and I suspected everyone else was also. The best position seemed to be on my back with my bag under my head as a pillow. I got as comfortable as I could and closed my eyes. I was soon soundly asleep.

It seemed like just a few minutes later, but it must have been longer, I felt Manolo shake my shoulder. I awoke and saw that Manolo was settling into a position to rest. “William, I think if you put a couple of those last logs on in an hour or two, we should be fine for the night. But, if you fall asleep, it is not a problem.”

“I’ll stay awake, don’t worry. You go ahead and rest.” I stood up and looked at the wood we had collected. I found a piece that was longer and thinner. I decided that I would try to get another torch going so I could do more exploration of the cave. That way I would definitely stay awake, and I wanted to see if the cave system was, as I had predicted, more extensive.

I put the branch in the fire and waited for a few minutes. I got it to burn decently enough, and I went back to the area that Manolo and I had been looking around in earlier. Once I was in that area, I went up against one of the walls and followed it. I had to be careful because there was an overhang above me and I didn’t want to slam my head against the hard surface. I proceeded slowly, and I soon found another narrow trail. I had to crouch down again, but I went through until the path got so small

that I didn't think I could get through. I got down on my hands and knees and went forward into the crevice. At one point I almost got stuck, and that made me nervous. I quickly decided that I would press on, rather than retreat. It was a good decision, because when I got through the passage, I came upon the biggest opening any of us had seen yet. This area was bigger even than the area where the others were sleeping. I lifted the branch up, and it didn't strike anything above me. I looked up and could only see a faint outline of the ceiling in this area. I moved around to get a feel for how big this area was, and then I almost stepped on something that both startled and fascinated me. Right there on the ground was a group of bones and what looked like a human skull.

I knelt down to take a look. It was somewhat orderly, as if the person had been lying in the fetal position before he, or maybe she, died. I moved the branch around, and then noticed a couple of feet away, another skeleton. I held the burning branch up as high as I could, and noticed, over against one wall, some additional bones. These bones looked to be more randomly scattered. I immediately wondered how old these relics might be. They had to be somewhat old because they looked so dry and aged, and I could not detect any clothing around them. Furthermore, many of the bones were partially buried in the ground. If these had been recently living people, there would have been some remnants of clothing around. I remembered, suddenly, that one of the professors at the university back in Charlottesville had once talked about bones of ancient humans that were found in south-central France and Spain. Could these have been the remains of cavemen?

I spent a couple of hours looking around the area and found many artifacts. It was a treasure trove of items for an archaeologist. I tried to remember the name of the professor at the University whom I had met. I didn't take any of his classes, but I imagined what he would think if he knew what I had run across here in Spain. I tried to imagine what life was like for these people. Of course, I had no frame of reference for understanding what I saw. I didn't know if these remains were hundreds, thousands or even tens of thousands of years old. What if they pre-dated civilization as we knew it?

I eventually went back to the room with the fire. It was glowing, barely, so I picked up the two larger pieces we had brought in and placed them in the middle of the fire. I hoped they would catch on and keep us heated through whatever remained of the night, which could not be much. Then, I realized that inside the cave we would have no idea if it was morning or not. I stretched out on the ground where I had laid before but noticed that Valeria had shifted position and her feet were over in my area. I got into position as best I could and closed my eyes. I had trouble at first getting to sleep because of what I had seen deeper in the cave. If people had known about the remains, surely someone would have been in here checking out everything. It seemed to me that the things I saw had gone undisturbed for a long time.

I was in a dense fog when I heard my name. “William? William?” I opened my eyes and near my face I saw that of Valeria.

“Valeria,” I managed to say, instantly realizing that I had a pain in my neck, no doubt from the position I had been sleeping in. “Good morning, or I think it must be morning.”

“Yes, it is morning.” I looked around but didn’t see Manolo or Malu. I also realized that the light was minimal now and I could not see very far.

“Where are the others?”

“My brother and Malu went to the opening to see if there is anyone out there. They will be back soon, I think. Did you sleep well?”

“Not bad, I guess, considering the circumstances. How about you?”

“I would say the same. But I feel better after resting.”

“Good. I have to tell you what I found last night deeper in the cave.”

“What was it?”

“I found remains of people. I think they are quite old, and I think they have been here, untouched, for a long time. I don’t know much about archaeology, but it seems that these might have been cave people. They might have lived in here a long, long time ago.”

“Oh, my goodness, really? I don’t think I want to see the bones of dead people, but I’m sure my brother would be interested.” As soon as she said this, I watched her make the sign of the cross, first on her forehead, and then on her face, and she finished by bringing her thumb to her mouth. I had seen this small ritual before and knew it was something Catholics did in Europe.

I stood up and massaged my neck. “I slept in a funny position and my neck hurts,” I said.

“Let me help you, William. My father suffers from these pains in his neck. I figured out how to massage his neck and shoulders to make it better. Kneel down here for a moment.”

I knelt down, and in a moment Valeria’s hands were inside my shirt and rubbing my neck. It hurt, and as she kept going she dug more deeply into the area around the side of my neck and down toward my shoulders. She did one side and then the other. “I know it hurts at first, but you will see that in a while it will feel much better.”

It did hurt, and I tried to keep from voicing my discomfort. At the same time, I was getting a thrill out of having Valeria’s hands rubbing me. She was so close I could smell her. It was not a perfumed smell that men like when they are dancing with a woman, and that can be pretty stimulating. Rather, it was a natural smell that I found pleasing. I was suffering as she pushed her fists into the muscles of my upper back, but I hoped she wouldn’t stop for a long time. A short time later I heard voices, so it must have been Manolo and Malu coming back outside the cave. Valeria did one more rub at the base of my neck and then stopped. She pulled out her hands and gently straightened my shirt collar.

“You will see that in a little while you will feel much better.”

“Thank you, Valeria, it feels much better already. You are kind to do that.” At that moment Manolo and Malu came back in the area we slept in.

“I’m getting to know this place pretty well,” he said. “I can maneuver in the dark and not hit my head on anything. Good morning, William.”

“Good morning, Manolo, and to you too, Malu.”

“Good morning,” was all she managed to say.

It was Valeria who spoke now. “William discovered a burial ground or something deeper inside the cave.”

Manolo, obviously interested, said, “Really? Where is it? You must show it to me.”

“Of course, but we need some more light. By the way, what is it like outside this morning?”

“It’s quiet, I am glad to say. Malu and I looked around and saw no signs of anyone. I don’t know what happened to those people who were pursuing us. I guess they gave up and decided we had escaped. They must be wondering how we disappeared so suddenly. It also tells me that Moreno doesn’t know about this cave. And it’s a little cool outside this morning.”

Manolo managed to get a stick to burn a little, and I took him into the area of the cave I discovered in the middle of the night. He was fascinated by it. He looked all around, and was careful not to disturb anything he saw that might be from the people who had once lived in the cave. “William, you have come across something that might have deep, scientific importance. I told you about the professor at the university in Burgos. If he finds out about this, he will be ecstatic. I don’t know about this subject, but I am pretty sure these remains are really old.” He got down on his hands and knees in one area, and with his fingers he lifted what looked like a piece of stone from the ground. “William, look at this rock.”

“Yes, I see it, kind of. There isn’t much light.”

“I know. I wish we had a lot more light and a lot more time. Anyway, this is not simply a piece of stone. I am pretty sure this is a tool. The professor showed me a collection of stones from the time of cave people. He told me that these were tools that were used in their everyday lives. You see, this edge right here is quite sharp, and there are little indentations. I know it is hard to see in here, so we’ll take this as a souvenir of our stay. We can look at it more closely outside. I cannot wait to get back to Burgos to tell that professor about this. I think you have made an important discovery, William. Maybe you will be famous one day.”

“Yes, sure. Right now I’ll settle for getting to our destination without any more troubles.”

“I will too, my friend. Now, as much as I hate to leave this incredible place, I think we should go.”

We went back to the main area where Malu and Valeria were getting their things together. We all made sure we had our bags packed before leaving yet another little safe haven. “The only thing this place is missing is a tub,” Malu said. “If I don’t get a bath soon I’m not going to be able to stand myself.”

“I feel the same,” said Valeria.

Manolo then said to all of us, “We all need, I know. I think we will manage that later today. I am going to figure what the next stop is as we get moving this morning. I will make it my goal today to find us a place to stay with a bathtub and hot water. I promise.”

Eighteen

A short while later we were outside the cave. It was certainly cooler, and there was a breeze blowing, especially up at our altitude. We all bundled up as best we could and waited to see what direction Manolo was going to take us. We were on the side of a hill, so it would definitely be downward. I hoped that as we got lower the temperature would rise.

We made our way down, and as we descended, the terrain changed from rocky to more wooded. I was starting to get hungry, but I knew that there was nothing for us to eat. Perhaps we would come to a village before long where we might get something. I was craving coffee or tea. One of those hot drinks and Spanish toast with olive oil dribbled on it seemed like just the thing.

The weather, at least, cooperated with us. The early morning clouds gave way to mostly sunny skies, and indeed the temperature went up to a comfortable level. What I found interesting was the fact that we saw absolutely no sign of life. There were no people and not even any wild animals where we were. I wondered what wildlife might be there. Back home, squirrels were everywhere, and it was not unusual to see rabbits. So far, we had barely seen anything. I had heard several times about wolves being more common in Europe. This seemed like an ideal habitat for wolves, but there was no sign of them, and none of the others mentioned them.

It was at that moment that we saw some movement ahead of us. It looked like a dog that was trotting along the same trail we were on, about a hundred yards ahead of us. We all stopped to look more carefully. "It's a fox," Manolo said. "They are common around this area. It is probably a female who is out looking for food for her cubs."

“They aren’t dangerous, are they Manolo?” Valeria asked.

“Female foxes? Yes, of course, they are.” Manolo and Malu both began to laugh. I didn’t understand what was humorous.

“Foxes? I didn’t think they represented any kind of serious danger,” I said. Again, both Malu and Manolo laughed, and even Valeria started to smile.

“William, you are having another Spanish lesson now. The term for a female fox in Spanish has another meaning. In Spanish slang the word refers to prostitutes.”

“Seriously?”

“Yes, seriously. So, you see they can be dangerous.”

“I suppose you are right. I will try to avoid them as much as possible.”

“What? Female foxes or prostitutes?”

Now all of us were laughing. I think it was exactly what we needed at the moment, comic relief. After an hour or so we came to a road, one that was at least partially paved. Before long we saw a sign that indicated we were headed toward a place called Trasobares. The meant nothing to me, of course, but it was as unfamiliar to everyone else. We were not sure of the distance, but Manolo guessed it might be an hour or so ahead. It was mid-morning now, so it looked like the next chance to eat something would be in Trasobares.

There was almost no conversation for most of the rest of the time before we arrived at Trasobares. I spent much of the time thinking about the cave and the remnants of the people who had inhabited the cave a long time ago. I wondered how old those remains were. I had a strong urge to become an anthropologist so I could spend time studying ancient peoples and their customs. I imagined

spending days in a cave such as the one we had spent the night in, digging and scratching the earth to find more clues about life when those people were alive.

We finally came to Trasobares. There was almost nothing there, and we wondered if we would have to traverse another long distance before eating. It was past midday, and we were all hungry and thirsty. There was a village center that contained at most two dozen buildings. Most of them appeared to be houses. We eventually came to one that looked like a business. There was a window at the front of the building, and inside we saw a bunch of those burlap bags that contained the cured hams that Manolo had introduced me to. The front door of the place was unlocked, so we went inside.

The business was a butcher shop. The smell of cured and freshly cut meat struck us immediately. In the middle of room, toward the back wall, was a display counter. There were several chicken carcasses, stripped and ready to be cooked, hanging from hooks. There were several tiny piglets, dead and equally ready for the oven, and strings of sausages lined up. A few moments later a heavysset man wearing a white apron with blood smeared all over the front came up behind the counter.

“Buenas tardes. ¿Qué desean? Good afternoon, how can I help you?”

“Good afternoon, sir,” Manolo said. “We are travelers just passing through and seeking lunch.”

The man, who had an enormous cleaver in his hand, looked at all four of us and said, “Let me see. I have some morcilla that is ready eat, and there is some fresh bread. Most of my goods need to be cooked. I sell to residents here and the surrounding area. Oh, and I have some cured ham, of course, and I sliced up some this morning.”

“Very well, I think we will have something then. Can we eat here?”

“As you wish. There is a table over in the corner. There are only two chairs, but you can make yourselves comfortable any way you can. You are welcome to eat here. What do you want?”

Manolo looked at us briefly, and I think the expression on our faces told him that anything would be fine at the moment. “Please give us a couple of the morcilla, some slices of that sausage over there, and some of the cured ham. What bread do you have?”

He reached down and pulled up a basket. It contained the typical small rolls of bread I had seen many times in bars. They were fat in the middle and tapered at each end. Manolo stuck his hand in the basket and grabbed four of the rolls.

The butcher then said, “I’ll put the other items on a platter for you. Oil?”

“Yes, please, some oil would be good too. You don’t happen to have any red wine, do you?”

“No, no wine today. But I have a bottle of cider that was opened last night. You are welcome to it if you want.”

“Yes, of course, cider will be fine.” We went over to the small table, and Malu and Valeria sat down. Manolo and I stood and waited for the butcher to bring up the platter of food.

“What is with those baby pigs?” I asked Manolo.

“That is a specialty in some parts of Spain. It is called *cochinillo* in Spanish. These are only a few days or weeks old, and they make a great dish.”

“I’m not sure I would want to eat that,” I said.

“Have you eaten lamb before? That is about the same thing, isn’t it?”

“I suppose so. But I still don’t like the idea very much. But we are not eating that, are we?”

“No, we aren’t. By the way, do you like cider?”

“Apple cider? Yes, it’s pretty good, yes.”

“This is special cider. It is fermented. It is delicious and popular here in northern Spain. In the south they drink *sangría*, but here we like cider.”

“Did you say blood?”

“No, not *sangre*, *sangría*, William. Sangría is red wine with oranges and a little brandy. They drink a lot of that in Sevilla, for example.”

Just as he finished saying that the butcher called out for us to pick up the platter. It was simple, but we were all quite hungry. Manolo and I sat on the floor with our backs resting against the wall, the two women sat in the chairs at the table. We all ate as if we hadn't eaten in a week. The cider was good, but Manolo said it was not cold enough. It didn't matter to me. I was satisfied that we could eat and drink something. Malu didn't say a word, and the only thing Valeria said was that the morcilla was every bit as good as that of Burgos. Fifteen minutes later the platter was totally empty.

Manolo took the platter back over to the butcher, who was busy chopping up some large chunks of meat. “The food was delicious. Thank you. How much do we owe you?” The butcher indicated a number, and Manolo and I dug into our pockets for the amount. It seemed inexpensive to me, but this was a small village in the middle of nowhere, so I think it was to be expected.

“Where are you headed?” the butcher asked, without looking up from the block in front of him and continued to shop away.

“We are on our way to Zaragoza, to the cathedral. We are pilgrims.”

“Pilgrims? At this time when the country is going down the drain? That seems a little strange.”

“Yes, it must seem so,” Manolo said, with a casual air. “We are going to see the Virgin of the Pillar, and perhaps we will ask her to help put an end to this foolishness.”

“That sounds good to me. My son is in the army. He was in the south, and even in north Africa for a while. That is where General Franco was when this mess began. I think my son may still be with Franco. I don’t know, because I haven’t gotten any word from him for a long time now, maybe six months. I pray that he has not been killed in the violence, but I don’t know. I really don’t know.”

“What do you think of General Franco, if I might ask?”

“Franco? I don’t know him. I doubt my son knows much about him either. But he appears to be strong and dedicated to getting things under control. I think that for now we need to have things under control. I don’t follow politics closely, but I have more interest now that my son is serving. We have a mess here in Spain, and something must change. I don’t think all of the new ideas from Russia and those people are the best, but I don’t have that much knowledge.”

I knew it was going to happen, and I watched as Malu joined in the discussion. “But, sir, we can’t go back to the past, can we? In the past there were too many injustices. The world is changing, and we have to change in Spain too, don’t you think?”

“You seem to know about these things, miss. You probably know more than I do. And you are probably a follower of these new, revolutionary ideas. If so, I cannot argue these points because I am too ignorant. I know we have to change, that Spain must change, but perhaps first we must stop this violence, this chaos. Then, we can discuss how to go forward.”

“I want the violence to stop also because it has already cost me two family members. But, if Franco comes to power, and the monarchists, they will take us backward. I cannot see how there will be dialogue for bringing Spain to the modern world and ways of thinking.”

“Listen,” said Manolo, “we are not going to solve these issues today. Everyone has the right to say what they think is best. I don’t know which way to go either. But I think we all agree that we need to stop the killing and the damage of property. How this can best be achieved remains to be seen. But I know that we enjoyed a nice meal and we are grateful to you, sir. Now, we have a question for you.”

“Yes, go ahead,” responded the butcher.

“We said that we are on our way to Zaragoza. What is the best way for us to proceed from here?”

“Keep moving down and to the east,” he said as he lifted his arm and pointed out the front of his shop. “You will pass by the ruins of the Tierga Castle. It is only a piece of wall now. Keep going past that, and you will see signs for Zaragoza. If you are walking you still have a day at least. You can’t get there today unless someone gives you a ride. Perhaps you will get lucky and find a transport vehicle. The roads here are not frequently traveled, but if you go toward the south to Morata de Jalón you will see more traffic on the roads. If I were going to Zaragoza, that is what I would try.”

Manolo stepped closer to the man and extended his arm to shake hands. “That is kind of you to tell us. I think we will proceed as you have suggested. We will leave now and thank you again. I hope you son is safe and that he will come home soon and not have to fight anyone.”

“Thank you. I am hoping for the same. Good luck on your journey.”

The butcher’s advice was quite useful. We went in a southeastern direction, past the ruins of the castle, and then toward Morata de Jalón. Late in the afternoon, which turned out to be a beautiful sunny and warm one, we came to a place alongside the road, a little outside Morata. During this part of the journey, Malu started complaining about the fact that she had not had a bath in two days, and Valeria then said the same thing. The truth was, we were all pretty dirty, and probably smelly, and we were all thinking about finding a way to take a bath. This was obviously on Manolo’s mind because he

said to me several times that he was hoping to come across a place where we could all bathe. The rest of us were surprised when we came to a place where Manolo stopped and said, “I think it is time for a bath, William. Malu and Valeria, I know you are both suffering, so I think we can now do something about it.”

The three of us looked around, but there were no houses in sight. We wondered what Manolo was talking about. There wasn't even a stream coming down from the hills anywhere around. At least we could have gone into a stream and rinsed ourselves off. “Manolo, what are you talking about? Do you see something we don't? Or are you dreaming?” It was Malu who said this.

“I'm not dreaming,” Manolo answered, and then pointed a finger to something in the distance. “Look up there. Do you see what I see?”

“Where?” I asked him.

“Don't you see that little shack up there ahead, on the side of the road?” I looked where he was pointing. There was a small building, but it didn't look like anything promising. It was small and didn't seem to be in good condition. It looked like a shack with a large, round barrel on top of it. I couldn't see that it served any purpose at all.

“What is that? What is that thing up on top?”

“That is a water station.”

“A water station? What kind of water station?”

“It's a place for truckers to get water. That thing on top is a water tank. I have seen these things before on other roads.”

“Oh, I see now. But what does that mean for us?”

“It means we can get cleaned up, that’s what.” With that Manolo moved quickly up to the shack. The rest of us followed him, not yet convinced this was going to be the way we would get cleaned up. We watched as he went inside and then came out with two wooden buckets. “You see, we have buckets, and we should have water. Let me go up to the tank and see.” We watched as he scaled up to a small platform that he could stand on. He got there and lifted a small cover on the side of the tank. He put his head inside and then turned back. “There is plenty of water. We can all get cleaned up.” He came back down from the tank platform. Then he picked up the two buckets. “Give me a hand, William,” he said. I went over and inside the shed. There was no light inside but it was bright enough to see a large wooden spigot on one of the walls. I watched as Manolo put one of the buckets on a shelf beneath the spigot, and then pulled out the stopper. A gush of water came into the bucket, and it was filled quickly. He signaled for me to hand him the other bucket, and before long two of them were full.

“Excellent,” Manolo said as he put the stopper back in place, but not until some water had spilled on the dirt floor. “Grab that bucket, my friend, and follow me.” I did as he said. We went out of the shack and then crossed the road carrying the buckets. “Ladies, if you want a bath come along.”

The four of us went over where there was another shack about fifty yards from the road. It was bigger than the first and looked abandoned. At the entrance, Manolo put down the bucket and knocked. There was no response, so he grabbed the doorknob. But, when he tried to open the door, he was unable to. “It’s locked, I think, but no matter. Let’s go around the back.” We followed him, and when we got there, there was a big smile on his face. “You see, things have been a little difficult for us recently, but today we are a bit more fortunate.” At the back of this small building there was an exterior staircase that led up to a back entrance on the second floor. Leading up to the staircase and around the back of the small building was cement on the ground.

“This is pretty simple. One of us stands up on the staircase a few steps, and the other person stands below. One of us will pour water on the others and that way we can all get cleaned up.”

“Wait a minute, my brother,” said Valeria. “That arrangement is fine for you two, but how about Malu and me? We can’t strip down and take a shower here in broad daylight.”

“I don’t see why not. I brought soap in my bag, and now we have water. What else do you need?”

“What else? We need some privacy, that’s what.” At that moment, I saw something that, like so many other things on this trip to Spain, I would remember for a long time. Without saying a single word, Malu suddenly took off her shoes and socks, then removed her coat and shirt, pulled off her pants, bra, and underpants and stuck out her hand for Manolo to give her the soap. I was so shocked I didn’t know what to do. Manolo must have noticed because he quickly said, “Hey, William, bring that other bucket here. Two buckets per person should be fine. As soon as I finish this one, run over to fill it again while I finish the second one. In no time we are all going to be clean again.” I glanced over at Valeria, and she no doubt had the same expression on her face as I had on mine.

I watched as Malu grabbed the soap and Manolo poured the first half-bucket of water over her. The water must have been pretty cool, but Malu didn’t make a sound. She ran that soap over herself quickly, and Manolo started the rinse. When the first bucket was empty, he handed it to me, and off I ran to fill it. I wondered if Malu would be finished by the time I got back. When I returned she was starting to dry herself off with a piece of clothing. All this time, Valeria had been sitting on one of the steps, looking in another direction. I didn’t want to stare at Malu, but it was hard not to. What I found so interesting was her apparent lack of embarrassment at being nude in front of two men that she had not known for very long. As I thought about it and was putting the other bucket on the step, I realized that this action was pretty much in character for this attractive but still quite mysterious woman.

Before we knew it, she was getting dressed again. “That was incredible. I can’t believe how much better I feel now. Valeria, I know you don’t like the idea of this, but you should try it. It will make you feel so much better. Come on, I’ll pour the water for you while these two guys get more water from the tank. “Go, you two, and take your time. And when you bring back the bucket set it on the side of the building, and I’ll bring it over. I don’t think Valeria would like anybody peeking at her.”

It took almost an hour for all of us to go through the routine, but once it was all over, we were four clean people who had a clear change in attitude. The weather cooperated as the afternoon brought bright, cloudless skies. Malu and Valeria had longer hair, and it took a while for their hair to dry. I think we were all starting to get hungry again, but the feeling of being clean was exhilarating for me and the rest I was sure.

Nineteen

We resumed our journey, but the goal now was to find a truck that we could hitch a ride on and that would take us toward Zaragoza. Our luck turned out to be good, because half an hour later a truck came ambling down the road, and we had Malu stand almost in the road and wave her arms. It was pretty predictable that the driver would slow down, see Malu, and probably stop. That is exactly what happened.

We watched as Malu went up to the driver's door and spoke to him. It didn't take long to make an arrangement, because Malu immediately signaled for us to come over. "This gentleman is on his way to Zaragoza and has agreed to give us a ride. He is from Zaragoza, and when I told him we were on our way to the Cathedral, he seemed to accept that and said he can even drop us near there. There is room for someone up front with the driver, and space in the back for the rest. I don't mind riding in the front, especially if it assures us we will get where we are going."

"Sure," Manolo responded quickly. "You go ahead and we'll take a look at the back." Manolo, Valeria, and I went to the back of the truck. There a canvas tarp covered the back, and Manolo lifted it at one corner to look inside. "There is room here, sure." Manolo climbed up, pulled the canvas back some more, and then reached down and gave his hand to Valeria. He helped her up, and then I joined them. The cargo looked to be mostly food items. There were several large barrels, probably containing wine based on the stains on the barrels, and then wooden crates stacked almost to the inside top of the truck. There were burlap bags that contained potatoes and onions. We heard the truck shift gears, and it started to roll forward. The three of us found the most comfortable places we could for the ride to Zaragoza.

We stopped one time for the driver to get gasoline. It was in a small town, and when I looked out the back of the truck I saw nothing of any importance. The only notable thing was the fact that it was now dusk. We would not get to Zaragoza, apparently, until it was dark. The three of us had spent most of the time resting. I wondered how Malu had fared with the driver in the front of the truck. I decided to go up and ask her. She had gotten down from her seat and was stretching when I came up to her. “Is everything all right?”

“Yes, fine. This guy seems to be rather harmless. He is a widower, but he has five children, and lives with one of them. They live in Zaragoza and don’t appear to have much in the way of political convictions. He mostly told me what his children do and the names of his grandchildren. He has four of those.”

“Did he say how much further before we get to Zaragoza?”

“He said we have about three hours to go, maybe a little less. He said his truck doesn’t go as fast as it should. It is in need of repair, but he hasn’t been able to do it yet.”

Manolo looked at me and Valeria and raised his eyebrows. “I guess we can tolerate another three hours in the back of the truck. It will be interesting to get to a big city for a change. I’m actually quite interested in seeing Zaragoza and the cathedral.”

“I have heard good things about the city. I am also interested,” Valeria added. The driver came back around this side of the truck just as we finished talking.

“Very well, our next stop should be home, at least for me.” He went back to the other side of the truck and climbed up to the driver’s seat. Malu got up in her place, and I went back to the cargo space. In a few moments we were on the road again. The rest of the trip to Zaragoza was uneventful. At one point we felt the truck break suddenly and swerve a little, causing us to shift in our positions.

Later, Malu told us that a driver of a small truck had turned off a side road a little too late and caused the sudden maneuver by the driver of our truck. Fortunately, there was no collision.

We could discern from the back of the truck that we were getting close to the city because we heard sounds from a lot more vehicles. Also, our truck had many changes in speed. It indicated that there must be some traffic on the road we were using. A few times Manolo and I pulled the canvas back, carefully, to look out behind us. We saw more vehicles behind us, so it was clear we were approaching Zaragoza.

Finally, we came to the city. We could hear a lot more noises, and now the truck was in in stop-and-go mode all the time. I had a sense of excitement, and I think Manolo and Valeria did too. We were all fully awake now and wondering how much further we would have to go in the back of this truck. We came to a stop, and we didn't move for a minute or so. Manolo and I looked out the back, and we were definitely in the heart of the city. We were still on the road, so we didn't try to step down. A short time later Malu came back and said, "It's time to get off." We pulled up the canvas and the three of us descended from the cargo area. It was dark now, and we were on a side street.

"How was the ride?" Malu asked us.

"Long as hell," Manolo quickly answered.

"I'm ready for a walk," I added, "even if it's a long one. I don't want to ride in the back of a truck again anytime soon."

"I understand," Malu said. "It wasn't that great up front either. The seat was hard, and I didn't feel comfortable falling asleep. I just don't trust anyone right now, present company excluded, not even this grandfather trucker. He was nice and didn't try anything fishy. He told me that we are only a couple of blocks from the cathedral. We just have to go down this street and turn, and there it is." At that moment the truck driver came to the back of the truck. Manolo offered his hand to the driver.

“We are grateful to you, sir. We have had a long journey, and you have made things easier for us today.” They shook hands. I stepped up and did the same, thanking him. He looked at me for a little extra time.

“You are not Spanish.”

“No. I am from England,” I said, which was only a slight prevarication.

“England? That is a little far from here, isn’t it?”

“Yes, somewhat.”

“I hope you like it here, despite the complicated situation right now.”

“Yes, I like it, thanks.”

“You speak the language very well, with little accent.”

“I have been practicing a lot. That is why I came to Spain.”

“I can see that.”

Valeria and Malu shook hands with the driver also. Malu said, “Very well, Mr. del Valle, you are kind to have helped us out. I hope you and your family members remain well.”

“Thank you, miss. I hope you accomplish what you have come for. Godspeed to all four of you.” With this he turned and went back to the cabin of his truck. A few moments later the truck pulled away.

“That was a turn of good fortune for us,” Manolo said. “Should we go ahead to the cathedral now? Does anyone have a better suggestion?”

“I’m hungry,” Malu quickly said. “I don’t know what we will accomplish by going to the cathedral right now. We might not even be able to get in. I think we should find a bar where we can get a snack and something to drink, and then we can determine where we are going to spend the night.”

“I agree with that assessment,” Manolo said. “Valeria, are you all right with this? Do you have some compelling reason to visit the cathedral right now?”

“Not really, no. I want to see it, of course, but we can do that tomorrow morning, can’t we?”

“William, what about you?”

“I’m following the lead of the three of you. Remember, I’m only a visitor here. I do want to see some of this city, but it doesn’t make sense to do that at night, I guess.”

“Very well then,” said Manolo, “let’s continue in one direction and see what we can find. There must be someplace we can eat and spend the night. A city this size must have many options. Zaragoza is bigger than Burgos, I think. Let’s go this way and see what we come across.” After saying that he set out with the three of us following. I was unexpectedly excited about being back in a city. Perhaps the time in the rural areas had caused me to miss many of the conveniences of civilization. I had enjoyed the quiet, the fresh air, and the peacefulness of the countryside. That was true, despite the incident at Mr. Moreno’s farm. That now seemed like something far removed from our present situation.

I realized, as we were walking and looking at the sites in Zaragoza, that I had no idea what day of the week it was. I turned to Manolo, “What day of the week is it?”

He didn’t answer immediately, so he was in the same mindset I was, at least concerning time. “I think it must be a Thursday, why?”

“I was trying to recall. I’ve never been in a situation where I didn’t know what day it was. It seems quite odd, although it doesn’t have much to do with anything. The day of the week doesn’t have much relevance to anything, except from a social standpoint, does it?”

“I suppose it doesn’t. But we are creatures of habit, and each of day of the week always seems to have a special feel to it.”

We both then heard Malu’s voice. “Let’s look in here.” She had stopped and was standing in front of what looked like a tavern or restaurant. Above the door we saw the name of the establishment: Bodegón Manchego. There were no windows to indicate what kind of place it was, but the name sounded appealing. We opened the door and saw a place that was bigger than we expected. It was also quite crowded and noisy. Malu went in and didn’t look back at us to see what we might think. I guessed that she was very hungry and she didn’t feel like walking around much more. I suddenly found myself feeling both hungry and thirsty, and the pleasant smell of food didn’t make me feel like leaving to look for another place.

Manolo went up quickly and grabbed Malu’s arm and with his head signaled for her to follow him. They came back over to the entrance where Valeria and I were standing. When they got there we stood close to the door and put our heads together. Manolo said, “We don’t have a lot of money left, do we?”

“I still have some, but not a great deal. We can afford to eat something here, I’m sure,” I said.

“I have a little also, but we will still need some money to continue the journey.”

Malu now spoke up. “I also have a little money. But here all we need to do is get something to drink and have some tapas. That won’t cost much. A popular place like this is not normally expensive. That’s why lots of people come to a place like this.”

“I agree with Malu,” Manolo said. “Still, let’s go easy. Malu is right; tapas sound good and won’t cost much. Let’s go get something to drink.” We all went over to the bar, and there was a place where at least two of us could stand right next to the bar. Malu and Valeria ordered glasses of wine, and Manolo and I asked for beer. A minute later we had our drinks, and I don’t know if I ever enjoyed beer so much. On the wide counter there were lots of trays with tapas. I recognized the olives, the meatballs, the Manchego cheese, and the potato omelet slices. There were a couple more with things on platters that I wasn’t sure about.

“Look, in this place the tapas have the long toothpicks,” he said as he picked up a meatball and put it in his mouth. “You save the toothpicks, and the bartender knows how many tapas you have eaten.”

Suffice it to say that we spent time at that bar, eating tapas and drinking wine or beer. We barely said a word to one another. I carefully kept track of my toothpicks, but I noticed a lot of them on the floor also. I wondered how often people let them conveniently drop from their hands in order to get a free tapa.

After a while, we slowed down. Everything was tasty, but I was somewhat satisfied. Manolo signaled to one of the four or five bartenders who were working hard to keep the customers’ orders flowing. One of the men came over and simply lifted his chin, by which he asked what Manolo wanted. “We have had four beers and four glasses of white wine. We also have these toothpicks,” he said and held up what must have been twenty of the same. The bartender grabbed a piece of chalk and found a small space on the bar and did his calculations. He told Manolo the total. Manolo and I dug out

some money and put it on the bar. “Are you always this busy?” Manolo asked the man as he picked up the bills and coins.

“It is a popular place, but usually not this busy on a Thursday night. But there is a big rally tomorrow. People have come from out of town. We’ll be busy tonight, and probably stay open late.”

“What rally is that?”

“You don’t know? You must not live here.”

“No. We are only passing through.”

“There is a big Falangist rally tomorrow afternoon. That’s why you see so many people wearing red shirts.”

“Oh, sure.” But I detected that Manolo was as unaware as I was that there were many people in this restaurant wearing red shirts. I didn’t know the significance, but I was sure Manolo did. I decided I would ask him later. Then, I quickly realized that Malu had been very quiet, and while eating and drinking she had been looking around the restaurant more than any of the rest of us. I looked over at her now as a man came up to her and said something. It was too noisy for me to hear what he said. She said something briefly to the man and then turned away, as if to ignore him. But the man didn’t give up. Manolo and I watched to see what would happen next. We didn’t want to cause a scene of any kind.

The man then put his hand on Malu’s arm, as if to get her to pay more attention to him. She obviously did not like that, because she pulled his hand away from her arm and stepped back. Manolo quickly stepped over between the man and Malu. “Please, my friend, this is my friend’s fiancée.”

The man looked at Manolo as if he wasn't sure to believe him or not. I was quite certain this guy had been drinking for a while and was losing a little self-control. He stared at Manolo, and then he looked over at me. I nodded very briefly and stepped over close to Malu. I put my hand around Malu's waist, as if in confirmation of what Manolo had said. Still, I could detect rigidity in Malu. Then I heard her say something that was not immediately clear, because it was not said in a loud voice, but it stopped the man right as he was turning away.

"Cochino facista. Fascist pig."

"Malu, take it easy. He's not going to bother you," Manolo said and stepped in front of her. But the man had turned already and was looking at Malu with an angry face. I heard what the man said, and later Manolo told me that Malu had called him a fascist pig.

"Y tú eres una puta comunista! And you are a communist whore!"

Manolo stood his ground, and I was almost certain the man was going to push Manolo back in order to attack Malu. I immediately went over and put my hands on Malu's shoulders and looked her directly in the eyes, "Malu, please calm down." I could feel the stiffness in her shoulders, and she remained staring at the man. I heard Manolo speak as he turned toward the man.

"Please, sir, we don't want any problems. We are here as pilgrims to visit the Cathedral and the Virgin of the Pillar. My cousin is tired from our long journey. She did not mean anything bad, but she only wanted to be left alone." The man started at Malu and then turned his gaze on Manolo.

"Maybe you should have stayed where you belong. But I don't want any trouble either. You better tell your cousin to not insult people, or she will find herself with a problem."

“You don’t have to say anything threatening. We are going to leave now. Please return to your comrades at the table. We are going.” I watched as the man, reluctantly, went back over to the table with the others wearing the same-colored shirt. They had apparently not been paying attention to what was happening to the man and Malu. When he got there he started talking to them and they all looked back at us. I immediately felt uncomfortable. I looked at Manolo to see if he was also looking at the men. He may have been, but he was turning now and put his hand on Malu’s arm. “I think we should leave now. William,” he said as he turned to me, “let’s pay up and move on. Where is Valeria?”

We both looked around for Manolo’s sister. I didn’t see her and hadn’t noticed her for the last several minutes. “She was still standing at the bar when this little incident started,” I said to Manolo, “and I can’t imagine that she would have left by herself.”

“I can’t either, but I don’t see her. No matter what, I want to leave this place, so you take Malu with you and I’ll look around. It’s possible she got a little frightened and left. If so, she must be right outside.”

I put my arm around Malu’s shoulder and led her to the entrance. I took a quick glance back at the table where the man in the confrontation was with his companions. They were having a big discussion and the man in question was looking at us. That made me feel terribly uncomfortable, so I did my best to get us out of the restaurant as quickly as possible.

Outside it was now dark, and the streetlights seemed unusually dim to me. I turned to Malu, “Are you all right?”

“Yes, I think so,” she said just above a whisper.

“I don’t know what that guy’s problem was. What did he say to you anyway?”

“He said he liked the way I looked and wanted to buy me a drink.”

“That must happen a lot, especially to attractive women like you.”

“Maybe, but he was a fascist. I could tell by the way he was dressed. And he smelled of a lot of alcohol. Maybe there are a lot of fascists in this city. I don’t think I want to stay here.”

“I don’t think there is any reason for us to stay. But, for now, let’s go across the street and wait for Manolo and Valeria. He is looking for her in this place.” We both crossed the street and went down half a block. We stood there and looked back at the entrance to the restaurant. I hoped that both Manolo and his sister would come in the next few moments so we could figure out what we were going to do now. We were in a big city that none of us had any familiarity with. We knew nobody and our money, or at least mine, was getting low. A moment later I saw Manolo come out of the restaurant, but he was alone. I felt my heart skip a beat.

“Manolo is alone,” I told Malu. “Where in the hell is Valeria?” I waved my hand, and Manolo happened to be looking in our direction. He hurried across the street and was soon next to us.

“Where is Valeria?”

“I don’t know, and I don’t understand what could have happened to her. She doesn’t know this place, so where could she go on her own? Damn her, what was she thinking?”

Malu spoke now. “I can only think of one place she might have gone.”

“Is that right?” asked Manolo. “Where?”

“The Cathedral.”

“You know, I think you might be right, Malu. Let’s go there. It’s only about two blocks back over in the direction we came from.” The three of us moved off in that direction. We had seen the spires of the great church but had not gone up to see it from the front. As we were going all three of us

looked around at the people in the streets to see if Valeria were out someplace, perhaps waiting for us to catch up with her.

We finally came to the open square and saw the Cathedral. I reacted the way the others did, I am certain. The building was nothing short of spectacular. The skyline was filled with the multiple spires of the cathedral. No matter where I looked, there was something to stare at. There were carved figures and inlaid colors that made the whole scene almost unreal. Part of the effect was due to the lighting. It was dark outside, but there were many spotlights shining irregularly on the building. The three of us must have stood there for more than a minute staring at the cathedral and taking it all in.

The three of us finally moved forward and approached the front entrance. We pushed on the door and entered. It was quite dark inside, and we stood at the entrance for a few moments adjusting our eyes to the low light level. Manolo was already looking at the back rows to see if anyone was inside. We all noticed that there was a little more light coming from one area off to the left. There was a long table in front of the entrance to one of the side *capillas*, and it was filled with small candles, many of which were burning. Overall, the contrast of light and dark made the interior look both domineering and mysterious. We all approached that candle-lighted area, and indeed there was a person sitting on a small chair at the far end of the table. As we got closer, we realized it was Valeria. Manolo went up to her, and the two of them spoke in low voices, so low that I could not hear what they were saying. I was relieved to see Valeria and that Manolo was not raising his voice, as he had clearly been upset not knowing where his sister was.

Malu and I stayed a little distance away. For a few moments I looked around the inside of the Cathedral. It was too dark to see many details. There were a few other tables scattered around with candles burning, and there were several light bulbs hanging from long cords that provided a little more illumination. It was beautiful and had the typical paintings of centuries past with religious scenes of

every kind. It had the huge columns that spread at the top to the high, vaulted ceiling. My father told me many times as a child that the designers and architects of the medieval churches had one main thing in mind. That was to make the average person feel humble and reinforce the concept that the church was a place of enormous power and domination. It was easy to see that those people accomplished their goals for the most part. The place was clearly intended to invoke awe and demonstrate the power of religion for those who agreed with the concept.

Malu was looking around now too. I wondered what was going on her mind. She was obviously in a completely different camp. She was likely thinking about the fact that the church's enormous power and control for the last several centuries had little, if any, place in the Spain of the twentieth century. What would she propose be done with the Catholic church organization of Spain and the massive wealth that it represented? Another idea came across my mind at the same moment. I wondered what it was like when the Spanish people of the far left decided to take matters in their own hands, which had happened many times during the turbulence in Spain. What would the nuns and priests, for the most part innocent pawns and almost completely defenseless, do when they saw the mobs coming into their otherwise quiet environments?

Suddenly I heard a hissing sound. I looked behind me and saw Manolo and Valeria stranding at the back row of pews in the central *capilla*. He was signaling to us to go back to where they were standing. Malu and I walked back, and on the way, I continued to look all around me at the extraordinary opulence.

When we reached Manolo and his sister, Manolo spoke to us. "Valeria got a little scared in the restaurant. She didn't want to go over where we were confronted by that man, so she slipped out. She told me she was sure we would come here to look for her, and it turns out she was right."

“I’m sorry I left, and sorry if you were worried about me,” Valeria said, without looking at either of us. “This cathedral is beautiful, isn’t it? I think it is more beautiful than the cathedral of Burgos, the one in my hometown.”

“Yes, it is pretty incredible,” Manolo said. “It is in the same category as our Cathedral, but different in many ways. But we need to do something, go somewhere now. All along we have been talking about this being our destination. We have told everyone we have seen since we left Burgos that our destination, as pilgrims, is this place right here. Here we are now. But obviously, this is not the city for us. We have a destination, a place that is further east. Remember that we decided, at the outset, that we would go to my cousin’s place in Sudanell.”

Malu spoke up now. “I think we should keep moving, as you say, Manolo. I don’t like it here. There are too many monarchists and fascists here. We will only run into trouble in this city.”

“I agree with both of you,” I chimed in, “but it must be after nine o’clock. I don’t think it makes any sense to start walking out of town at this time.”

“You are right, my friend,” Manolo said. “Of course, we cannot leave tonight. So, we have to find a place to stay. We will have to find a small, quiet place where we can get some rest and then be on our way first thing in the morning.” Manolo turned to his sister. “Did you see anyone in the church, Valeria?”

“Yes, when I first came in one of the priests was at the main altar. It looked like he was arranging things for a service, probably for tomorrow morning. Then he went back, I think to one of the side rooms. If you want, I can go see if he is there.”

“I think he might tell us a place nearby where we can spend the night, if there is a hostel or something close by.”

“I’ll go see if he can help us.” She went toward the front of the cathedral, and Manolo, Malu, and I sat at one of the pews. I could not stop staring at the incredible interior of the cathedral. There was art and decoration everywhere. I wondered what the average member of the parish thought about when they entered this building. If people are familiar with a place, they often take it for granted. I glanced over at Malu. She had her head between her hands and her eyes closed. If she were a religious person, she might be praying or thinking deeply about a religious concept. But Malu wasn’t a religious person, so I think she must have been wondering when her life was going to change for the better. It occurred to me that even totally non-religious people could not help but find that a place like this one makes them reflect on important things. Manolo was sitting with his eyes closed, but I imagined that he was simply tired and hoping for a good night of sleep.

In a few minutes Valeria returned, but she was by herself. She came and sat down between me and Manolo. “The priest, Father Benicio, said there is a place we can go that is just two blocks away. It is a small hotel, or hostel really, that the church uses for visitors. It is called Hostería El Puente Piedra. Behind the cathedral there is the Ebro River, and the place we are going is at the corner of the river and the bridge. He said it is pretty cheap, and that if we tell the people that Father Benicio sent us we will get a little better price.

“Very good, Valeria,” Manolo said. “I suggest we head over there now. Is that all right with you, Malu?”

Malu looked up with a distant expression on her face. “I suppose that is fine.”

We all got up with our meager belongings and went back to the entrance to the Cathedral. We went outside and Valeria said, “We go around to this side, walk towards the river and then go down to the right. The *hostería* is on the right on the following block.”

We got to the road that runs along the Ebro. It was quiet here, and the river flowed by with barely a sound. The moon was shining and made for a beautiful evening. For the first time in hours, I felt a little more comfortable in the surroundings. The scene at the restaurant now seemed like something from days ago, not a couple of hours ago.

We found the entrance to the Hostería El Puente Piedra easily. The place looked quite old. The building was made of stone, and appeared solid, but through the years the stone walls had become quite dark from being in a large city and a busy area near the river. There was an old-fashioned chain attached to a bell above the entrance. Manolo reached up and grabbed the chain and rang the bell several times. It made me immediately think of this place as stuck in the eighteenth century. I half expected a hooded friar to answer the door with a candle in his hand.

The person who eventually came looked different, however. It was a young man, probably in his early twenties, who looked as if he had been asleep when we rang the bell. He was dressed in simple clothes, which did not suggest that he was a member of the church. “*¿Qué desean?* What do you want?”

Manolo spoke. “*Hola, joven. El Padre Benicio nos mandó aquí. Necesitamos un lugar para pasar la noche.* Hello, young man, Father Benicio sent us here. We need a place to stay for tonight.” We all looked at the young man as he yawned and seemed to look at each of us, trying to determine if he could trust us, despite mentioning Father Benicio. After a few moments he simply stepped aside. We all entered the small lobby. It was mostly dark inside as there was only one light, at a desk in one corner, with a bulb that shone a pale, yellow light in the room. The young man walked over to the desk

and picked up a sheet of paper and a pen and handed them to Manolo. *“Ponga los nombres de todos ustedes en esta hoja, e incluya el número de documento de cada uno, por favor. Put the name of each person on this page, and include a document number for each of you, please.”*

Manolo sat at the desk and began to write. He looked at Valeria. “What is your national ID number?” She provided a number. He did the same with Malu. He then looked at me. “Your passport number, William?” I thought for a moment and then noticed a slight wink of his eye. “Yes, my passport number—it is A7004246.” It was an instantly fabricated number. I trusted that I understood what Manolo wanted from me. “Very good, thanks.” Apparently, I had done exactly what he wanted. He finished writing everything down and then signaled for each of us to come over and sign, which we all did.

“Muy bien, joven, el Padre Benicio nos dijo que había un cuarto que podíamos ocupar sin costo alguno porque somos peregrinos de lejos y hemos venido caminando desde hace más de una semana por ver la Virgen del Pilar. ¿Dónde está aquel cuarto? Very good, young man, Father Benicio told us there was a place we could stay for free since we are pilgrims who have come from far away and have walked for more than a week to see the Virgin of the Pillar. Where is the room?”

I knew Manolo was smart, but this was a brilliant move on his behalf. He obviously realized that the combination of putting things in just the right way, and gambling that this boy was not going to bother anyone that oversaw the hostel at this time of night when he was on watch, was the right way to go. The boy hesitated for a moment, looked at all of us again, and then said, *“Pues, hay un cuarto donde los curas que están de visita usan generalmente. Tiene solo dos camas, y ustedes son cuatro. Well, there is a room that the priests who come for a visit use generally. But it only has two beds and there are four of you.”*

Manolo quickly responded for all of us, “That will be fine. We’ll figure out how to arrange things. Please take us to the room. We are only going to be here one night, and we plan to leave early tomorrow. We won’t be disturbing anyone. And, for your trouble, here.” Manolo said this and handed the boy some coins. The boy immediately turned and led us up a staircase. At the top there was a landing with four doors and then another staircase that went up to the next floor. On the third floor there was a similar arrangement, and the boy stopped in front of one of the doors and unlocked it with a large key he had hanging from his belt. He stepped into the room and turned on a small lamp on a table against the wall to the right. It provided minimal illumination, but we could see two beds on the opposite wall. They were slightly larger than single beds, and my first thought was of the sleeping arrangements.

The boy turned and nodded to us and quickly disappeared. Manolo then spoke. “This is ours for the night. It is not great, but it is free. I think the place is safe and that we can at least relax a little here.”

I quickly added, “It looks fine to me. I’ve definitely spent the night under worse conditions.” As I said this I noticed Valeria was inspecting the beds. She ran her hands over the blanket, lifted it to try to see what was beneath, and then felt the pillows. She even put her face down close to the bed and appeared to sniff at the cover.

“Things seem to be somewhat clean,” Valeria said. I turned to look at Malu. She was looking around the room, but there was not much to look at. Besides the small table and the two beds there was an armoire against the far wall. Malu walked over to it and opened one of the doors. It was difficult to see inside, and from where I was standing it looked empty. I watched as Malu put her hand up on a shelf that was at the top and ran across the width of the piece of furniture. She found something, apparently, because she pulled her hand back and there was something in it.

“What did you find, Malu?” Manolo asked.

“It seems we have a turn of good luck,” she said, and lifted the object. It was a bottle.

“Someone who stayed here recently left a bottle of brandy. And it’s more than half full.” With the bottle lifted toward us, she smiled, probably for the first time the entire day. She then grabbed the cork and pulled it out and sniffed at the top. As I watched she lifted the bottle and took a sip of the dark liquid. “There is nothing wrong with it,” she said as she approached me and handed me the bottle.

I took the bottle and lifted it to my mouth. I had never liked brandy, but under the circumstances it sounded like something I would have to try. I took a larger sip than I was expecting to and found a mouthful of heat. I swallowed a little and winced. This made Manolo laugh, and then the three of us began to laugh. Valeria was sitting on one of the beds with her face between her hands. She heard us laughing and looked up. A small smile appeared on her face.

“William, I thought you were becoming a true Spaniard, same as us, but maybe you are not. The brandy is too strong for you, an American. What do you say?”

“I like it, but I took a big sip, and it caught me by surprise.” I handed the bottle to Manolo and watched as he took his generous swig. Manolo walked over and offered the bottle to his sister. She looked at him and the bottle, and then lifted her hand and took the bottle. She lifted it up, closed her eyes and took a small sip. I watched as she made a face that reminded me of the expression of a person eating something sour. She swallowed, and then took a deep breath before opening her eyes.

“This is the first time I have ever tried brandy.”

“Interesting,” said her brother. “Dad always had a bottle of brandy in the house. You never tried to sneak a taste?”

“Never. I’m not like you, Manolo. I’m not adventurous.” The bottle did the round again, except for Valeria. We were all sitting on the beds trying to relax. There was not much conversation. I think all of us were wondering what was next. We had spent so much time trying to reach our destination, of the Cathedral of Zaragoza, that now that we were here, it suddenly seemed like the ultimate anticlimax. Then I remembered that our destination was a small town in western Cataluña, the place where Manolo’s aunt lived.

“Very well,” Manolo finally said after everyone had had two or three sips of the brandy. “I think we are all tired and that we agree we need to keep moving tomorrow and the earlier the better.”

I think the rest of us were so tired we could not even answer him. He was right, so it didn’t make any difference anyway.

“We have to arrange for tonight. There are only two beds, and even though they are small, they are all we have. I suppose we will have to have the men in one bed and the women in the other. Does anyone have a better suggestion?”

I glanced around the room. There was barely room to stretch out on the floor, and it did not look inviting. Besides, it was rather cool in the room. “That is fine with me,” I said.

I watched as Valeria stood up. “Do you think there is a bathroom around here? I have to go before I go to bed.”

“That is a good question,” Manolo said. “Let me look out in the hallway. There has to be a place for people to use the toilet, doesn’t there?”

He left the room and closed the door behind him. I looked at Malu as she stood up and took off her jacket and then her shoes. Then she pulled back the coarse cover from the bed she and Valeria had

been sitting on and got in. I realized that I had to go to the bathroom also, but apparently Malu did not. A moment later the door opened and Manolo came in.

“There is a room at the top of the staircase. It doesn’t offer much, but if you have to go, that is the place. Valeria, you go ahead, and then you can go, William. Do you need to go, Malu?”

She didn’t answer, and I thought she must already be asleep. I was the last one to go up and then return for bed. It was not very comfortable, but I slept reasonably well. I could feel part of Manolo when I shifted around, but somehow, we managed to rest.

I woke up when I heard a noise in the room, but I had no idea what time it was. It was totally dark in the room, and I realized that there was not a single window in the room. I could not remember ever sleeping in a room without a window, except on board the ship on my trip to France, so I could see a little of the first morning light when it eventually appeared. The noise I heard was Manolo, who was putting his things together in his bag. I got up, changed clothes, and was ready in a few minutes. Manolo had to wake his sister and Malu, and before long we were heading down the staircase.

There was another person in the entrance room, an older man. He was reading a newspaper and had a coffee in front of him. We let Manolo do the talking and explaining, but the man seemed completely unconcerned. He bid us farewell, and out we went into a chilly morning with the faint pink light in the eastern sky.

I heard Valeria speak to her brother. “We are going to have to find a place to wash clothes again, Manolo. I wanted to wear something clean this morning, but I don’t have anything.”

“I know,” Manolo said. “We all need clean clothes, but there isn’t anything we can do about that right now. I’ll try to come up with an idea as we are traveling today. Right now I would settle for something to eat.” I looked at Malu. She looked as if she were still in the fog of having awakened too early and wasn’t quite sure of her surroundings. The fact that she was in a totally unfamiliar place with people she really did not know well could not have made her feel any better. But, at this point, all of us were in unusual circumstances. And if any of us spent too long thinking about our situations individually or together, maybe we would have done things other than continue to travel into continually unfamiliar territory.

We crossed the bridge over the River Ebro. The only thing we saw this early was a man with a horse-drawn wagon filled with large burlap sacks. No doubt he was heading to an outdoor market somewhere in town to offer his produce. It was cool, but there was no wind at all. So the temperature was not an issue, at least not for me. None of us spoke as we crossed and then continued on the same road, which, for the time being at least, we assumed was heading toward the east based on the dim light in the sky. It would not be long before we saw the first light of day, and then we would have a good idea about the direction we were headed in.

An hour later we were in the countryside, and there was little sign of inhabitants along the road we were on. Manolo spoke, almost for the first time since we left Zaragoza. “First, I know we are heading in the right direction. Second, I am getting hungry. Unfortunately, I don’t have a clue where we are going to find anything to eat.”

His sister stopped and looked at him. “Do you know how long it has been since I had a good coffee? We were prohibited from drinking it at the convent. The mother superior didn’t like coffee, and she said that it has possibly sinful characteristics and we should stay away from it. I was never that big of a fan of coffee, but since we couldn’t have any, I started to think about it more and more. For a while it was kind of an obsession. Now that I think about it, the coffee represented a degree of freedom that I was denied at the convent. Now, a steaming cup of coffee and milk, with plenty of sugar, sounds like a dream to me.”

Malu looked at Valeria as if she wanted to say something profound, but she remained silent for a few moments. She then looked around her and said, in a flat voice, “Coffee sounds good to me, and a couple of churros would make the coffee even better. Tough crap that we aren’t going to have any such thing.”

I didn't add to the discussion. I was hungry, like the others, but I was thinking of scrambled eggs, toast, and a couple of thick slices of bacon. Those things, and a pot of orange marmalade and English tea, were my father's standard breakfast items on the weekend. During the week we were both accustomed to cereal or toast and tea. That made me wonder, for the first time in several days, what my father was doing at that moment.

"What day of the week is it today?" I asked. I realized I had asked Manolo that a couple of days ago, and I felt a bit stupid.

"Tuesday, no Wednesday," Manolo said, but seemed to be unsure of the information. We started forward again. After a while the clouds were slowly opening up in the west, and the day promised to be a decent one from a weather standpoint. We had barely seen a vehicle, which made me wonder if we were on a road of any importance in the area. Surely there would have been some kind of traffic by now going into Zaragoza. The road was in pretty good condition as if it were well maintained, but the minimal traffic meant we were off the beaten path. I had begun to notice a little earlier that we must be in a valley. To the north of us I could see at a distance considerable elevation. The area around us was mostly flat and farmland. But in the distance I could see hills that looked much different. I didn't see any color except a drab grayish brown.

"What do those hills or mountains tell us about where we are and the progress we are making, Manolo?"

He stopped to look in that direction. "It means we are moving in the right direction. To the north the mountains start to become more obvious as we get closer to Cataluña. I would say that at the rate we are going, even if we continue to walk part of the time, we are only about a couple of days from Cataluña. First, though, we must get to Lérida. We need to think about riding somehow today. I feel like we need to make more progress than we can accomplish on foot."

“Yeah, a ride for a few hours would help,” was the best I could add to the discussion at the moment.

A half an hour later we finally came upon a small town. We entered and it seemed, like most of the towns we had been through, mostly quiet. We were looking for a small store or bar where we could get something to eat and drink. Malu saw a place on the right called Dona Conchita and on the window was painted in neat letters “Café Cerveza Vinos.” It was either a tavern or a small grocery. We went in and were surprised to see about a dozen people inside. It was laid out like many of the other places. It was both a shop and an informal restaurant. On the left side there were tall bookshelves with canned goods. In the back there was a long counter with baskets of breads and vegetables. On the right side there were about eight small tables, most of which were occupied with customers. But we all noted right away that there was a meeting going on.

There were glasses and plates scattered around as if there had been a meal that was over and now it had converted into some kind of reunion. There was a man sitting in the corner who was speaking when we went in. He stopped for a moment and then continued. I’m pretty sure the four of us were a little uncomfortable with the situation, but we did not turn around and leave. The speaker was talking to the other patrons.

“We know that there are problems in this area with the Republicans. My own brother, who is a pharmacist and lives near Lérida, has joined the ranks of the Republicans, as many of you know. I hope he has not been engaged in any of the activities we have heard about recently. A convent in Lérida was attacked two weeks ago, and as a result two priests and four nuns are dead. These atrocities occur too frequently, and there is seldom punishment for the perpetrators.” He stopped for a long pause. “As the mayor of this community, I have a responsibility to maintain our safety. I will not permit any violence against our sacred churches or those who are trying to maintain the rule of law in

the name of our national government. I ask all of you to be vigilant and to report to me or to our constable if you see anything suspicious.” He stopped again and took a sip of his glass of wine. “I toast General Franco and all those who support his efforts to keep our traditions alive.”

Everyone else in the room raised their glasses of beer or wine and drank. This seemed like the best moment for us to do something. I decided to follow Manolo’s lead, as I usually did. He stepped up to the bar where an elderly man was drying plates and glasses that were on the counter.

“Excuse me, sir,” Manolo said in a quiet voice, “we would like a loaf of bread, a slab of butter and a few slices of chorizo.”

The man looked at Manolo as if he were trying to understand what he had heard. My level of discomfort increased noticeably. Finally, the man spoke. “Sure. How much butter and chorizo do you want?”

“About two hundred grams of butter and three hundred of the chorizo, please.” The man turned and grabbed plates with the items. Manolo looked at the breadbasket and selected a fat loaf. I could hardly wait to get that bread with the butter and chorizo in my mouth. I imagined that Malu and Valeria were thinking the same thing. At the same time, my thought was that we should get our items and get the heck out of the place as fast as we could. The scene didn’t feel right to me at all. I remembered that we heard there was a Falangist rally scheduled for today in Zaragoza. Maybe these locals were planning to attend. The four of us were surprised, and in no pleasant manner, at what happened next. The man who had called himself the mayor spoke up again.

“Welcome to the visitors who just entered.” When he said this, everyone in the store turned to look at the four of us. Clearly, we were all strangers and not from anywhere around this area. I felt my heartbeat jump up and felt the blood rush to me face almost instantly.

“Thank you indeed,” Manolo managed to say after a long silence.

“You are not from this area, I don’t believe,” the mayor said.

Manolo now looked directly at the man. “That is true. We are on a kind of pilgrimage, actually. This is my sister, her friend and a visitor from the United States.”

“That is interesting, young man. I have heard there are Americans in Barcelona who feel they should show their support of the Republicans. Is your visitor on his way to Barcelona? Perhaps he sympathizes with the leftist factions in our country.” I had no idea what Manolo was going to say in response to that. I almost had difficulty breathing.

Manolo smiled and said, “Sir, my American friend has no intentions from a political standpoint. He is younger than I am, as you can see. He is a student of Spanish language and culture and is visiting our beautiful country.” Nobody else in the room said anything, and the silence was as thick as the air suddenly felt.

“That seems unusual at a time of so much unrest in Spain, don’t you think?”

“Perhaps it is unusual, yes. But he has long had an interest in our language and had a teacher from Cuba in his homeland. Everything he learned gave him the strong desire to come to Spain. We met in Vitoria. We are his hosts, and I think it appropriate to show him what we can of our country, even if the times are difficult for Spain.”

“So, you are Basques?”

“Well, no but I have been living in that region and going to medical school. My family is from Burgos. My sister’s friend is from Bilbao.”

“Bilbao is in Basque Country, no?”

“Yes. I have not been there, however.”

I did not know what to think or what might happen next. We were all uncomfortable. I knew this by glancing at Malu and Valeria. Valeria seemed to be on the verge of tears, and Malu's face was getting increasingly red. We had no choice at the moment but to let Manolo take the lead in this. An idea flashed through my mind that something was going to happen to cause us to change course. For the first time since Valeria's escape from the convent in Burgos, I felt the stress growing by each heartbeat that I could not feel in my chest.

The mayor continued to look at us, and more of the others present for this meeting were doing the same. The man tending the bar finished wrapping the butter and chorizo, which he had sliced, in brown paper. He pushed them across the counter toward Manolo. Manolo reached into his pocket. I knew we had almost no money left, but now I hoped we had enough for this transaction so we could finish it and get out of this place as quickly as possible. Manolo had some coins in his hand and asked the barman for the total. It took almost all the coins. Manolo picked up the paper packages and the loaf of bread. He turned to look at me and Malu and Valeria. "Shall we go?"

We all turned toward the entrance. Before Malu opened the door the mayor spoke up again.

"Where did you say you were traveling today, if I may ask?"

Manolo turned back and responded, "East, to a small town where my aunt lives."

After a short pause, the mayor said, "Safe travels."

A few moments later we were outside the shop. All of us looked at one another, and Manolo rolled his eyes. "Damn, I didn't like that scene at all. I don't think that mayor had any good intentions at all. His wish for safe travels sounded ironic to me."

"Manolo," I said, "that made me quite nervous. What should we do now? It will look suspicious if we try to get out of here in a big hurry, but that is exactly what I feel like doing."

Malu spoke then in a hushed voice. “That bastard means trouble. I didn’t like what he was saying about Basques. He is probably one of those people who think we are undesirables and that Spain would be better off without any Basques. That son of a bitch.”

“Look,” said Manolo, “let’s start walking in the direction we are headed. When we get out of this little town, we’ll stop at a convenient place to eat. I know we are all hungry, but I say we hold off for a little bit. We can watch for anything suspicious, especially for someone who might try to follow us.” He turned and started walking down the road we had come from. We all followed silently.

Half an hour later we saw a small grassy area on the side of the road. We were outside of the town, and there were no buildings of any kind in the immediate area. We sat on the ground and started dividing up the food we had bought. We all ate silently, but I knew that we were all still uncomfortable and glancing around to see if anyone might be observing us. There were trees on both sides of the road, and it was hard to see far in either direction. A truck came from the direction of the small town we had been in and drove past us. It looked like it had boxes of food in the open back. The driver didn’t even seem to notice us.

We were finishing up eating when we all heard the sound of a horse not far away. We turned and looked as a man rode up at a fast trot. He lifted his hand as to signal to us. It was hard to tell what he was trying to communicate. We waited until he approached and got close enough for us to hear him speak.

“Hello. I was in Dona Conchita’s place when you went in. My name is Isaac, and I live in the town on a farm.”

Manolo spoke to him. “Hi, Isaac, I am Manolo. What do you want to say to us?”

“First of all, I am a supporter of the Republicans. I imagine you all are too.”

“Let’s say that we try not to get involved in the political situation much, but we cannot support the Monarchists.”

“I understand,” Isaac said. “This is not important right now. What is important is that you have to be careful. The mayor, the man who was speaking when you came in and who addressed you, thinks you are suspicious. He thinks you are trying to hide something. I have come to tell you that he might try to take some action.”

Manolo was quiet for a few moments and then spoke. “We appreciate your telling us this, Isaac. Are you not taking a risk by coming to tell us about this?”

Isaac looked down for a moment and then said, “Perhaps I am. But I don’t like the violence that is going on, and I don’t want to see anything happen to you four. You seem nice enough people to me. This area is pretty much dominated by Monarchists, and I have to keep my ideas to myself. I have a suggestion if you are interested.”

“Please continue.”

“What is your destination?”

“We are going to a town called Sudanell.”

“I believe I have heard of it, but I’ve never been there. It is on the way to Cataluña, and this is the right way. However, this may be the riskier way to go for now.”

“I understand. What do you recommend us to do, Isaac?”

“About another two kilometers ahead you will come to a road that crosses this one. There are only a couple of houses in that area. I suggest you turn to the left and head toward the higher ground there. You follow that road for several kilometers, and you will come to a town. From that town you will see a road that takes you back toward the east. That is safer than staying on this road.”

“That sounds like good advice, and we appreciate that.”

“You are welcome. I wish you a safe journey. I suggest moving as quickly as you can and staying out of sight for the most part.” He tipped his hat at the four of us, turned his horse, and headed back in the direction he had come from.

Malu looked at Manolo. “Do you think we should trust him? Maybe the mayor sent him to tell us to take a different route. It could be nothing more than a trap.”

Valeria and I remained silent. Manolo thought and finally said, “We don’t have any way of knowing who to trust, do we? I think I will go with my instinct on this one. I say we take this guy’s recommendation. He seemed genuine to me. Of course, no matter what we do, there is a risk involved. That has been the case since we left Burgos. We have come a long way now, and I think we proceed in this manner. What do you think, William?”

I thought for a few moments. “We have no way of knowing whether that guy was trying to help us or not. I see it as a fifty-fifty shot.”

Valeria, who had not spoken a word since we arrived in the town, finally said, “My brother, you are the person I trust the most in this world now. You decide, and that is what I will go with.”

Manolo stepped over and hugged his sister. It was only the second time I had seen him show this level of attachment to her.

“Thanks, Valeria. I will take care of you in every way I can. I appreciate your trust in me, and I will not let you down. I only want you to find a life for yourself that suits you and whatever future you may be thinking about. And I am sure our mother and father would say the same thing.”

That left only Malu to comment. We were all looking at her now. She didn’t return the gaze at first, then slowly looked at us. “I have experienced terrible things recently. I had no idea my life was

going to turn out, at least so far, the way it has. Several weeks ago, I was living in a different world. Now, suddenly and with no intention of my own, I am joined together with three people who I did not even know existed before. I don't express myself well, even with people I know or even my family members. But now I have a sense of belonging to whatever the four of us are or what we are doing." She stopped and looked down again before going on. "I feel I am still young. I didn't have any plans for myself when I was living at home. Maybe I thought I would meet a nice man that would fall in love with me and want to marry me. That hadn't happened up until the day I left Burgos with my brother and cousin to go to Vitoria."

I think the three of us were surprised, although pleasantly so, to hear Malu speak. She had seldom spoken much, and I for one wondered if that was part of her personality or a sign of the difficult times she was going through. Not one of us said a word—we knew she was going to continue.

"I was a kind of loner back in my neighborhood. I didn't have any sisters, and there were no girls who lived near us who became friends of mine. I had a couple of girl friends in school, but we were not close. When I was older, I spent a lot of time with the family business. We had to all help out in order to keep the business alive. It was something I had a strong sense of responsibility about. Maybe that is one reason I got involved with politics. That didn't come naturally to me, you see. It wasn't until I finished high school and spent more time with the business that I met people who associated with my brother, my cousin and uncle. Perhaps it was the first time I thought anyone was taking me or my thoughts seriously. They gave me a sense of belonging, although I didn't recognize that at first. Now, I can see that was the main reason I got involved. Now, more than ever before, I want to see the changes we need in this country. We cannot go back to the old days, because that would mean the same old ways of thinking and doing things. The world is changing rapidly, and this is seen all over Europe now. Spain cannot be the country that lags behind, as we used to in much of our history."

Malu stopped again, and I saw the first tears begin to well up in her eyes though none had dripped down her cheeks yet. “I know that this sounds strange to you probably, but I am starting to think of you as my family. I don’t know you and your sister very well, Manolo, and as for William,” she turned now and looked directly at me, “you are a foreigner, a person from a country that I can only begin to imagine, But I can say this to you, I love you and you are a special person to me.”

I was left speechless and without a clue what to do. A dozen thoughts ran through my mind in the next several seconds. What did she mean by love? Was that more of a brotherly type of love? What made me special in her eyes? I knew one thing for certain—Malu was different from any woman I had ever met. She was strikingly attractive, but at the moment I wasn’t thinking about her physical attraction. I was searching for the right words to say when I heard Valeria speak.

“Listen, Malu. We understand how difficult everything must be for you right now. I cannot imagine going through what happened to you in Vitoria. That was nothing less than a living nightmare. How were you able to get through that day and the following days when you were so obviously mistreated? You come from a background totally different from me and Manolo, clearly. If it were not for this horrible situation in Spain, none of us would ever have met. We would never have shared such unusual circumstances. Sometimes I think I must be dreaming, that I am back in the convent in Burgos, and that any moment I will wake up to see my sisters and the priests and the mother superior. What is the reality now? These past several days make no sense to me. All I know is I am glad to be with my brother, and that he and I are sharing all of this with you and William.”

I remained at a loss for words. As was the case with Malu, I had yet to hear Valeria talk for so long. Instead of saying anything I stepped over and put my arms around Malu and gave her a hug. She immediately put her arms around me and squeezed. We remained that way for what seemed a long time. I could tell by her small body movements that she was crying, and I did not want to interrupt

whatever she was going through. After a while she pulled her arms back and stepped backward. She looked at me and moved her head forward and kissed me, ever so gently and briefly, on the lips. She then smiled and put her hand on my cheek.

The next voice I heard was Manolo's. "Very well, this has been an interesting discussion. But I think any further conversation will have to wait until we have achieved more progress. I think we will take that man's advice and go north now. If he has tricked us, we will have to deal with it. We have had to deal with some strange situations already, so I guess we are prepared for almost anything. Shall we go?"

We picked up our things. The food items were mostly gone, and we left the last slice of bread for the birds. We took the side road to the left and found ourselves on an unpaved but mostly flat surface that had dried grooves in it as if from wagons more than cars or trucks.

An hour later it started to rain. It was the first heavy rain we had seen since Burgos, but once it started it looked like there was no end in sight. We found a group of trees that had plenty of full, leafy branches and decided to stay there for a while. We even heard a few claps of thunder and one flash of lightning. We were all going to be soaked, no matter what. After a while we decided to keep moving. Soon the road started to get muddy, and we ended up walking along the side where there was mostly grass.

I saw the sign first. It indicated the town ahead was Castejón de Monegros and that it was eighteen kilometers ahead. "That will take us the rest of the afternoon, I think," I announced to the group, "unless we get lucky. There has not been a vehicle come on this road, and we have been on it for an hour."

"We have no choice, I guess," Manolo said and looked at the sky. The rain continued to come down steadily. We continued ahead, and eventually we did get lucky. A farmer drove up in a cart

drawn by a pair of mules. He had a load of cut hay in the back of the cart. There was place for one person to sit next to him.

“Are you going to town?” he asked. Manolo nodded, and the man gestured for us to get up. Manolo went closer to thank him for stopping, and then the man gestured for Manolo to get next to him. We climbed on in the back. There was a partial tarp covering the load, so we pulled it up and covered ourselves the best we could. It wasn’t comfortable, but it was better than walking.

I realized that the pace of the mules was not much better than what we had been doing on foot. But at least we didn’t have to walk in the increasing slope of the road. I don’t know about Valeria and Malu, but within a few minutes I was soundly asleep.

I awoke to a sudden shake and then mumbled voices. I had been sleeping so deeply that I was momentarily confused as to where I was and what I was doing there. When I opened my eyes, I saw almost nothing, and then realized I had the tarp pulled over my face. I reached up to move it and heard more talking. I finally got out from the tarp and realized a couple of things. First, it was dark outside and that it had stopped raining. Second, Malu and Valeria were getting down from the back of the cart. I heard the voices gain and lifted myself up to see who was talking. When I did I saw a man at the back of the cart with a rifle pointing toward the sky. He didn’t appear to be a soldier, so I quickly wondered what he was doing there. He was speaking with another man who was up at the front of the cart. A short distance away I saw two horses that apparently the men had ridden up on.

At that moment he saw me and said, “*Baje por favor y sin hacer movimientos bruscos. Get down please, slowly and with no sudden movements.*”

I did as he said and a few moments later Malu, Valera, and I were standing in front of that man. He was an older person with thick, gray hair and an equally thick mustache. He was wearing a beret or something similar. He was dressed like a farmer with heavy boots that were muddy and wet. I looked to the front of the cart and realized that Manolo was speaking with the other man. That person was much younger and was holding a shotgun at his side with the barrel pointing down. I could not make out what they were saying. The driver of the cart sat there, intently listening. It did not seem to me that the driver was involved with these two other men. He turned his head and looked at us, and it appeared that he was somewhat baffled at all the commotion too.

I wanted to get closer to Manolo so I could hear what they were discussing, but I was unsure about what the man standing near us would do. His rifle remained pointing toward the sky, and he was simply looking at us with no expression on his face. A few moments later Manolo walked back toward the rear of the cart where we were standing. The man from the front followed him.

“Where are our bags?” Manolo asked looking at me.

I pointed to the wagon. “They are all up there under the tarp.” Manolo climbed up to the frame of the wagon and then reached out and pulled the tarp to the side. There were the three bags we had been carrying with us since we left Burgos. Manolo handed them down to me, and I placed them on the ground. The man who had been in the front of the wagon came over and looked at them.

“Open them, please” he said to Manolo. Manolo jumped down and opened the first bag. “These are only our personal belongings.” Manolo lifted clothes in both hands, and then stuffed them back inside. He reached for the second bag, which belonged to Malu. I knew she kept her pistol in that bag and wondered what Manolo would do.

“Do have any arms?” the man asked. Now, what was Manolo going to say? I wondered for a few moments, and then heard Manolo. “Yes, we have a pistol in this bag. It is only for safety in these difficult times. I am sure you understand.”

“Leave everything in the bag and step back.” Manolo did what the man said. The man who was giving the commands motioned with his head for the person who was holding the rifle near us to go to the bag. The second man lifted the bag and put his hands inside. A moment later he pulled out the revolver. He looked at it and then opened the chamber to see if it was loaded. I don’t think any of the four of us was even able to breathe while all of this was going on.

“There are two bullets in the chambers,” he said. He then took the gun to the first man and handed it to him. He looked it over and then stuck it into his thick belt. He then walked to the front of the cart and addressed the driver. They spoke, but I could not hear what they said. The man came back and spoke to Manolo. “You all can continue to ride the wagon to Castejón de Monegros. We will accompany you there. We are with the local militia and have connections with the sheriff in town. It will be up to him how to proceed. Now, please get back onto the wagon, and we will leave. It will take about an hour before we get to town. Please cooperate, as you have done so far. We don’t want any trouble, and if you have a solid story for the sheriff there should be no problem.” As soon as he finished saying this, he motioned for his partner to come so they could mount their horses and get moving toward the town.

The routine appeared settled. The man who had been in front, the older one, rode alongside the driver of the wagon. His partner rode behind the cart. Presumably this was the way they could keep an eye on us until we reached the town. I looked at Manolo, and I could tell he was thinking deeply about this situation. The creaking of the wagon wheels provided us a little bit of privacy. We could talk in a whisper without the driver or the two men on horseback hearing us. I waited before asking, “What do

you think about this?” Manolo looked at me and then looked at the surroundings. The area was wooded, and it was already dark. After a few moments he spoke.

“It will be difficult to slip away without being seen. I think that if we could get off this wagon and have even a half a minute advantage, we could lose these two guys. But, as long as they are watching us carefully, I’m not sure how to do it.” Malu and Valeria were huddled against each other. Whether it was due to fear of the situation or because they were cold, was hard to say. Perhaps it was both.

We stayed where we were without doing anything for a while. Then, finally, we got a little break. We were surprised when the man in front on horseback called out to his partner. “Carlos, come up here a moment,” he shouted out. Carlos looked at us carefully and then rode up to where the other man was riding. The cart continued forward. The two of them started talking, and every few seconds one of them would turn back and look at us. They continued to talk, and it even seemed that they might be arguing with each other.

I looked at Manolo, and he made a small nodding movement with his head. In a low voice, which I hoped the girls too could hear, he said. “Valeria and I will jump out and go in that direction.” He showed which side of the cart he meant with his eyes. “William, you and Malu are going in the other direction. Run into the trees and keep going in that direction as fast as you can. Valeria and I will do the same. Eventually, we will loop around and meet on the other side of the town.” He stopped, and we glanced at the two men on horseback. “When I count to three, William and Malu will get down first. Valeria and I will go right after that. No matter what, run as fast as you can. They will have to split up to pursue us, but we are four and there are two of them. We will have to figure out how we each move to make it difficult for them.”

The two men on horseback continued to talk. Carlos looked back at us, and then turned back to continue talking. I heard Manolo say slowly, “*Uno, dos y tres.*” Malu and I, each grabbing a bag, jumped down from the cart and ran. We could hear Manolo and Valeria as they jumped down also, and then their running footsteps was the last thing we heard. We could not believe that it took so long for the two men on horseback to react. Malu and I must have been well into the woods before we heard them yelling and the cart coming to a screeching halt. Malu and I were running hand in hand. The forest grew thicker and I thought this had to be an advantage for us. I wondered what Manolo and his sister were doing at that moment. I stopped and signaled for Malu to wait so we could listen for any clues about what was happening. The only sound we could hear was our heavy breathing. I strained to hear anything, but there was no sound I could detect. “I think it would be hard for those guys to chase after us on their horses. There are so many trees, that they could not possibly move as fast as we can.”

“I agree,” was the only thing Malu managed to get out. I thought that maybe the two guys thought we had all gone in the same direction, in the direction Manolo and his sister had taken. I tried to get my bearings and think where the town might be. It could not be more than a mile or two away. If we could get to higher ground and find a clearing, we might be able to see some lights from Castejón de Monegros. I grabbed Malu’s hand and pointed in the direction I thought we needed to go. We walked rapidly, and I felt better about what had just happened.

Malu and I climbed the side of the hill without speaking. We both had the same idea in mind—we had to meet up with Manolo and Valeria, and the sooner the better. Manolo was our leader, and without him we were increasingly uncomfortable. Malu knew no more about this part of the country than I did, and of course I knew nothing.

We finally reached the summit of the hill, though it seemed more like a mountain by the time we got up there. The woods were still fairly dense, but we came to a clearing. We stopped as soon as

we spotted a small cabin, or more accurately, a lean-to. There could have been someone inside, so we both listened and looked around to see if there were any sign of recent activity or people nearby. We could detect nothing. I signaled with my hand for Malu to stay put while I approached the lean-to. I moved as silently as I could as I did not want to attract attention of anyone who might be inside. At the entrance there was a cover made of canvas or something like that. I slowly lifted it and tried to peek inside. It was dark, and I could detect nothing. I stepped inside, though the top of the crude construction was shorter than I was. My eyes adjusted a bit, and I could see it was a temporary place, perhaps for a shepherd.

I turned back and signaled for Malu to come join me. She approached, and we both went inside. We could see sparse furnishings; there was a small table and a cot that was a few inches off the ground. The floor was compacted dirt with some straw scattered across it. There was a ceramic pitcher on the table and a candleholder, but no candle. I lifted the pitcher, but it was empty. It seemed nobody had been here quite recently.

I told Malu, "I think this is a safe place for the moment. If you feel like it you can lie down and take a little rest."

Malu seemed to be studying the place as if to determine if it was clean enough to make her feel comfortable. "I know it isn't much," I continued, "but why don't you sit down and relax a while? This has been stressful. Meanwhile, I am going to look around this area. I'm sure that Manolo and his sister had the same idea of coming up here to higher ground. Maybe they are nearby."

"I don't want to be left alone here for long, William," Malu said after putting her hand down and feeling the cot as if to determine how comfortable it might be.

"Don't worry. I will not go far away. You know it is essential that we get back with Manolo and Valeria. I have no idea what to do or where to go from here, and I don't imagine you do either."

She shook her head slightly in agreement. “Go ahead and rest a bit, and I promise to be back quickly.” I left her in the lean-to and tried to determine how best to go about looking for the other two. I looked in the direction we had come from and walked over to the end of the clearing. I sopped and listened. It was quite dark now and the air was still. If there were any noises in the vicinity, I would surely hear them. I stayed still for half a minute or so, and then I did hear something.

I moved forward a little and then picked a tree that sheltered me but allowed me to look along the path we had come up. I did not hear voices, but there was some rustling of leaves or branches. Whatever it was could not be too far away. The noise stopped, so whoever it was had stopped their progress. I looked around but still could see nothing. I strained to hear or see, but for a couple of minutes there was nothing to detect.

Then there was more of the light crunching of leaves or brush. I looked again and was totally surprised to see a deer about twenty yards away. It was slowly coming up the same path Malu and I had been on. I watched it stop, and it was close enough for me to see its nose slightly opening and closing, obviously attempting to sense what might be in the area. It was, I realized, basically doing the same thing I was. I moved from behind the tree, and as soon as the deer detected the movement it turned and ran off in another direction. I looked around and saw another path that went off to the side, not the one Malu and I had used to come up to the summit.

I started in that direction and realized it was a lateral path, and I noticed what must have been droppings from goats or sheep. I kept going until I came to another clearing, though this one was not as high as the summit. From this place I saw another path going up in the direction of the summit. There was obviously a network of these paths here. I didn't see any signs that people had been here recently, so I decided to go back up and see if there was a path that led down to the town of Castejón. A few minutes later I got back to the lean-to and went inside. I was startled when I saw that Malu was not

there. I put my hand down on the cot to make sure she wasn't there curled up so I could not see her. She was definitely not there. I went out of the lean-to and looked and listened carefully. I heard and saw nothing. 'What the hell?' I thought to myself. She would not have gotten up and wandered off. Had she decided she was too afraid to stay by herself and come looking for me? She would not have known which way I headed.

This was incredible. A couple of hours earlier the four of us had been together, even if under stressful circumstances. Then it was only Malu and me. Now I was alone. For the first time in several days, I had a feeling of loss and loneliness. I felt a lump in my throat and a deep feeling of foreboding. I thought for an instant I must be dreaming. Things could not have turned so negative that quickly. I had to think of something to do, but what should it be?

I went behind the lean-to to see if there were other paths, and I quickly spotted one. I took it and soon it led to another clearing. But this one was different from the others. It had at the edge a rocky area that served as a kind of natural platform. I went onto the rocks, and when I got to the edge, there it was down below. It was, no doubt, the town of Castejón de Monegros. It was late, probably close to midnight. There were only a few lights here and there, but the moon was almost full, so there was no mistaking the town. I looked to each side to see the best way to descend. What else could I do under the circumstances?

I started down but stopped a couple of minutes later when I heard a noise. I looked around, expecting to see that same deer, or perhaps another one. The moonlight gave me hope that I might see something in the middle of the night. I strained to listen, then I finally saw something ahead of me. There were two people, but the distance was such that I could not tell who it might be. My first thought was of Manolo and his sister. I moved forward, trying not to make any sound, but I had to catch up and see who it was I was approaching.

Whoever it was moved steadily forward and down. The path became almost straight at a certain point, and soon I was able to get a better look at who it was. One of the two was considerably taller than the other, so I thought it could not be Manolo and Valeria since Manolo was only a few inches taller than his sister. This one, now for sure a man, was at least half a foot taller than the other. Then, I realized it was Malu. I could now make out that the man had a grasp of Malu by the arm. He had to be one of the townspeople and was taking her down to Castejón. I quickly tried to think of my options. The guy was probably armed, even though I could not see a rifle either in his other hand or slung over his shoulder. He might have had a pistol somewhere.

Just then, for the first time since we escaped from our previous entrapment, I realized that we didn't have our bags with us. When we fled everything had been left in the wagon. That included the pistol that Malu had been carrying with her and was taken by one of the men on horseback, not to mention everything else we possessed. For the time being I could only follow Malu and the man who was holding her to get an idea of where exactly they were going.

At one point, I stopped when I saw the two of them come to a sudden halt. I watched, from about forty yards away and hidden by a shrub, as Malu turned and leaned away from the man, and seemed to cough, and then vomited. I could even hear the sound as she, partly doubled over, vomited once again. The man watched her and was clearly not comfortable with what was happening. Malu stayed bent over with her hands on her knees, clearly quite uncomfortable. I felt I had to do something, but I did not know what.

Maybe I had never considered myself a clever person. Perhaps my father called me clever on a few occasions, but that might have meant that I came up with an idea that made him think of me as more mature than I could be expected to be at that particular age. I remember in high school finding a couple of my fellow students clever because of remarks they made in class that seemed to stump the

teachers. Maybe I confused clever with bold. Whatever the case, I had a sudden idea that I considered clever at the moment. And thus, I acted.

I approached the two and pretended to be as casual as if on a stroll in the woods. “Malu, where have you been?” The words came out of my mouth as naturally as if I had seen her at a store unexpectedly and was pleased to see her. Both Malu and the man guiding her down the slope stopped and turned to look at me. The man seemed to increase his grip on Malu’s arm, and said to me as I approached them, “Who are you?”

I stepped up to a few feet from the two of them. “I am Malu’s boyfriend. We got separated a little while ago, and now I see you have found her for me. Are you all right, Malu?” I asked as I looked her directly in the eye, wondering what this man with her was thinking. Moreover, I wondered what his intentions with Malu were. Instead of answering me, Malu started to cry. I stepped forward and hugged her, leaving the stranger to wonder, no doubt, if he was losing control over a situation that a few moments ago he seemed to have complete control over.

“What is your name?” was the best he could do under the circumstances. At least he had released Malu’s arm, though he still stood quite close to both of us.

“I’m William, and who are you?” I could scarcely believe I was doing this, but at the moment the ploy was working.

“My name is Francisco. I am taking this woman to town. I heard there were people around here, people from País Vasco, who were causing trouble. Somebody said they were Republicans or maybe Communists. Are you from that area?”

“Me? Oh no, I am from the United States. I don’t get involved in politics, especially in another country. It is none of my business what happens politically here in Spain. I am a visitor working on my

Spanish.” The man looked at me with a quizzical expression. No doubt I had surprised him, and he was struggling with what to say or do.

I thought for a moment, and then said, “Does this woman look like a Republican or a Communist to you? I know her quite well, and I have not heard her talk about politics or anything like that. She talks about her family and where she grew up and that kind of stuff.”

The man continued to stare at me, and then he looked at Malu. By now Malu had calmed down and was following the conversation, probably thinking I had lost my mind. But she must have realized that I was changing the situation, at least for the moment, in a positive way for the two of us. I looked at Malu again and said, “Are you not feeling well? I thought I saw you vomit a few minutes ago.”

“I am better now. I am not sure what the problem is. My stomach is upset, even though I have not eaten for some time.”

I turned back to Francisco and spoke to him. “Look, Francisco, I want you to know something. I don’t know what you heard about people from the País Vasco. But I am telling you that Malu and I, and our two friends who have been traveling with us are not causing any problems for anyone. We are traveling east to a small town in Cataluña where my friend Manolo has family. If you heard anything about people traveling through this area, either it is other people, not us, or someone was wrong about who we are. I am sorry if that is the case. We got separated from Manolo and his sister Valeria earlier. Some people got confused and tried to force us to go with them. We managed to get away from them, but we had to separate for that to happen. Do you follow what I am saying?”

He hesitated, clearly not sure how to deal with all this information. “Yes. But I was told to bring people into town if I find them, and I found this woman. Do you understand me? I am doing what I was told.”

“Of course, I do. But somebody was mistaken, obviously.” I watched as the expression on his face told me he was not sure what to do now. I also tried to determine if he was armed in any way. There was no rifle slung on his shoulder, and he was not wearing a holster. Still, he might have a pistol in a pocket or even a knife of some kind.

“Listen. I am not from your country. I am a visitor who came to study the Spanish language and culture. I met these people who have been helping me and teaching me. They are nice people and doing a lot to show me Spain and introducing me to Spanish people. I understand that your country is going through a difficult time. It is none of my business because I am a foreigner. I don’t want to get involved in things I don’t understand.” I stopped and looked at him and looked at me and then at Malu.

“I am not sure, what to do. You two are not from this area, and I don’t understand why you are here. I am doing what I was told to do. I don’t care what you are doing, and I don’t care that much about all the things happening in this country. I live in this town, and I am trying to have a life, even if we don’t have much here. I don’t like politics, and I don’t like the violence I have heard about. I go to mass like everyone else, and I don’t understand why churches are attacked. Our priest here is a nice person and does not talk about the big problems of Spain.”

It was obvious that this man did not know much about the situation in general or about the issues dealing with the people he had been told to watch for. He was simply trying to be loyal to the people of his town and the people who probably had the most power or influence. I felt bad for him and saw him as something of a victim of circumstances he could neither understand nor control. I was trying to think of an immediate solution. Then I thought about Manolo and Valeria. Would they have already been caught by the locals? Were they under guard in the town right at the that moment?

I was wondering about these things when I noticed, out of the corner of my I, that while I was talking directly to this local man who was taking us to the town as virtual prisoners, Malu was

planning to do something. Because of the way we were all standing, I could see both of them, but the local could only see me. He had dropped his vigilance of Malu because I had engaged him in the discussion. Suddenly, I saw Malu bolt. She ran down from where we were all standing, generally in the direction of the town. The sound of her running caused the man to turn to see what was happening. He was frozen for a moment, apparently so surprised that he was not sure what to do. All I heard him say was “*Mierda!*”

The next series of events took only a matter of seconds, but when I look back it seemed that it took much longer. The local man looked back at me for an instant, as if to gain an understanding of what happened. Then he took off after Malu. Before he had taken four steps I jumped after him as if I were a defensive football player trying to tackle a running back who was determined to run for the goal line. I hadn't played sports when I was growing up, and certainly never football. There was too much focus on the physical aspects of the game and players trying to simply hurt the opposing players.

I did not intend to hurt this person, but my instincts told me that this was a situation that required instant action, even if there were unfortunate consequences. When I dove on the man I hit his right-side rib cage with my left shoulder. As I did, I heard a dull crunch, which I later realized probably fractured a couple of his ribs. When the man fell, he hit his head on the hard ground, and I heard a sound that was a combination of him exhaling and coughing at the same. He was clearly stunned by the unexpected tackle, and when I looked at his face his eyes were wide open, but he was obviously having difficulty trying to breathe.

There was nothing I could do for the man. I felt bad for what had happened, but what choice did I have at that moment? I took one more look at him; there was no way he was in any condition to pursue us. I knew I had to follow Malu. She must have had at least a forty-five second head start on me, so I tried to go in the direction she might have taken. It was still dark, but dawn could not have

been far away. We were heading east, which meant we would see signs of light in the sky before long. The vegetation was thinning out now. There were less trees and more shrubs and even patches of tallgrass. I squinted and tried to see Malu or hear her movements. I came to a clearing and saw the first signs of the town we were so close to. There was a building that could have been a house or a small business. There were windows in the back, but no light was coming from any of them. I approached slowly, watching and listening. Then, I heard Malu's voice call my name in a loud whisper.

I looked and saw a stone wall that ran along the side of the property. Malu was crouching on the outside of the wall. I crouched down and went over to her. When I reached her she wrapped her arms around me, and I could tell that she was sobbing. She held me so tightly that I could feel her heart beating in her chest. This was the first time I had seen her so emotionally distraught.

“Are you all right, Malu? Are you hurt?”

For a few moments she didn't move, remaining tightly wrapped around my shoulders and neck. Eventually she pulled slightly back, and I heard her say, softly, “I am all right, yes, but I am scared.” She inhaled and exhaled deeply before speaking again. “What about that man who had captured me?”

“When you started to run, I decided I had to do something, so I jumped at him and knocked him to the ground. I didn't want to hurt him, but I think it was a hard hit. Also, he hit the ground hard. I knew right away he was not going to be able to come after us.”

She pulled back and looked at me. “You did not get hurt at all?”

“No, not at all. When he fell I landed on top of him, so he took the full brunt of my weight. I think that was part of what happened to him. He was pretty small compared to me. I hope he wasn't too badly hurt.”

“He was not friendly to us. Why would you care if he was hurt or not? He could have caused us a big problem.”

“I know. You are right. But I don’t like the idea of hurting somebody I don’t know. Now, we have to decide what to do. How are we going to find Manolo and Valeria?” I turned to look all around us, but there was nothing, no sound, no movement. It was getting lighter now, and it looked like it was going to be a clear morning. I needed a plan, but I could not think clearly. I had not slept well in an entire day, as best I could calculate. My companions on this trip were in the same conditions as I was. And when was the last time we had eaten anything substantial? How could we expect to accomplish anything under these conditions? The goal remained unaltered. We had to get to the town of Sabadell. It represented our sanctuary from this absurd journey that we were on.

I looked at Malu. “Listen, the sun is going to come up over in that direction, which is east. Sudanell is toward the east. Manolo is wondering where we are as much as we are wondering where he is. The only thing we all know is to keep moving east. I say we move in that direction as long as we skirt around this town. What do you think?”

“Yes, I know we have to move to the east. Let’s do that, but first ...”

Malu couldn’t quite get the words out before she threw up. But the only thing that came out of her mouth was liquid. She did it another time, and then put her head back and signed deeply. “I don’t know what is the matter with me. I have barely had an illness or a stomachache in my life. People who know me say I am the healthiest person that have even met. So, why do I feel this way now? Can throwing up be related to being hungry?”

“I don’t have any idea, Malu. But we are going to find something to eat this morning, some way, somehow. I promise you that. For now, let’s get moving.” I stood up, looked around and listened for any sound. I saw and heard nothing, so I gave Malu my hand to help her up, and we started off.

We saw houses a few minutes later and took precautions not to be seen. We were going along a dirt road and then came to a paved one. It must have been the main road going into the town. I looked to the right and saw nothing but a curve in the road. To the left the road was straighter, but it was hard to see what was in that direction because there were a lot of trees on either side. I looked behind us and guessed that the town was to the left. Our dirt road ended here, so we had to decide what to do. East was directly in front of us, but there was not even a walking path that I could see. The vegetation was thick, and behind it there were more trees and probably a forested area.

We started off in that direction and walked for a couple of hours. We came to a small cluster of houses. There was a building across the road that looked like a shop or warehouse. There was activity going on as we heard what I thought might be a saw operating. We stopped and watched, and a few moments later a man came out of the open door and stopped as he saw us.

“Buen día,” he said and nodded slightly.

“Good morning, sir,” I replied. “My friend and I are on our way to a town down this road. We have not eaten this morning, and we are wondering if perhaps you have an extra loaf of bread. We have a little money, so we can pay you.” The man studied us for a few moments as if he were wondering why two people were walking down this road with nothing but their clothes on.

“We just had out breakfast a short time ago. I’m sure there is food left over. Follow me and I will take you to my house over there.” He pointed to one of the houses on the other side of the road. He moved toward one of the houses, and we followed. “Where exactly are you headed? Is it far?”

“We are going to Sabadell. Malu, my friend, has relatives there.” It was not the truth exactly, but it was not far off.

“I know the town. I have done business there from time to time. It’s a decent place.” The man opened the door and gestured for us to go in. It was a one-room dwelling with little furnishing. On one

side was a kitchen area with a stove and a fireplace, and next to it there was a large table with about a dozen chairs. On the other side of the room was a single bed. Sitting on the bed was a woman who was peeling potatoes.

“Good morning, ma’am,” I managed to say. The woman nodded briefly and continued her work. The man stepped over to the table and pointed to two platters.

“There is a potato omelet here and grilled green peppers,” he said as he lifted two small towels and revealed the contents beneath. He went over to a small wooden cabinet and lifted from a shelf two dishes and forks. He put them on the table and gestured with his hand for us to sit. “Help yourselves. I have to get back to the shop and continue working. If you need anything else, Constanza will help you,” he said as he nodded to the woman on the bed.

Malu and I walked over to the table. I knew we were both basically starving, but I didn’t want these people to have any idea that we were in that condition. I hoped Malu would not grab some of the food and stuff into her mouth. I watched as she looked at the items on the table. She reached down and picked up a piece of bread and took a small bite. I saw a piece of the omelet and took a bite. I saw the man walk toward the door we had come in, but instead of leaving he turned and looked at us.

“You are not the first people who happened to come along here this morning.” I was not sure what he was suggesting, so I did not respond. “Two other people stopped here earlier. It was a man and a woman who said they were also traveling east. I suppose that was a coincidence.” Again, I was not sure what he was trying to convey, but I immediately thought of Manolo and his sister. I wondered whether it was a good idea to respond to the statement or not say anything. However, if there was a chance it was Manolo and Valeria, I wanted to know that.

“We met a couple, a man and his sister a couple of days ago. They were heading east and we spent a little time together. How long ago did they come by here?”

The man looked at us, and I thought he might be evaluating the truth of what I had said. “They were here about an hour and a half ago. They ate a little and then left.”

“They were friendly, and we enjoyed their company. Maybe we will meet up with them again.”

This seemed to satisfy the man, and he opened the door and exited. I looked at Malu and we shared expressions of what I thought was a mutual reaction, that we needed to get moving quickly to catch up with Manolo and Valeria. A few moments later I heard the woman speak. “You are not Spanish,” she said, as if it were a question rather than a statement.

“That is right. I am from America.” She didn’t react to that response as far as I could tell. I continued to eat.

“I have a cousin who went to America. He went to a city called Chicago. I have not heard anything from him in a long time. I think he wanted to stay there, and as far as I know he did.” The woman spoke as if she were simply relating facts about someone without suggesting anything she might feel about the cousin’s decision.

“I have never been to Chicago,” I said. “I am from a small city in Virginia, which is pretty far from Chicago. Chicago must be an exciting place to see.” I looked at Malu as if somehow, we might, between the two of us, come up with a good plan for how to proceed. I wanted to tell her that our best option at the moment was to leave and see if we could catch up with Manolo and his sister. But I didn’t want to arouse any suspicion. These people might have more knowledge than we suspected, or they might be totally ignorant of what had happened over the last two days.

“Malu, have you had enough to eat? I don’t think we should take a chance of being unwelcome guests.”

Malu looked at me while chewing and made a small nod of her head. I turned to look at the woman on the bed. “Thank you very much for the food. We still have a way to go on our journey, so we must leave now.”

The woman looked at the two of us, but her face remained expressionless. I could not tell what might be going on her mind. I had barely eaten anything, but now my desire to see Manolo and Valeria again soon was starting to feel overwhelming. We walked over to the door, and I turned back to the host. “It was kind of you to allow us in. Please have a good day.”

She looked at me, nodded, and said, “Go in peace.”

Twenty-one

We left and looked around to see if the man who had originally spoken to us and invited us to the house was to be seen. I heard the sawing sound from the shop and assumed he was back at work. Malu and I set in the direction we had been headed, and we moved at a quick pace.

“What do you think, Malu? Were those people suspicious of us, do you think? That woman was acting strangely, and the man too a little bit.”

“I don’t know. I am not feeling well right now. I ate, but now I wish I hadn’t.”

“I’m sorry for that. Do you want to rest for a few minutes?”

“No. I will be better soon. We need to keep moving and try to find Manolo and Valeria. I am afraid for them.”

I wasn’t sure how to respond. After everything that had happened recently, I had a similar sense. I wanted to relax a little and think that we were all going to be safe soon. The key to this was getting to Sabadell. It might have been a feeling of false security, but it was what I was going to have to use for the moment.

We were still in a hilly area with lots of trees alongside the road we were on. It meant that at any time we would not be able to see far ahead of us or to notice if there was anyone around who might be looking at us. There was a myriad of places people could hide and observe travelers on the road. I wondered if anyone from the village we had been near the day and night before might be trying to track us down. Would they have been motivated sufficiently to try to find us? What would have

been the benefit for them? I went over in my mind what it all meant, but I could not come to any conclusions.

Malu and I walked for a couple of hours. The road was somewhat hilly due to the terrain. The builders of the road, from however long ago, had not spent much time trying to smooth out the route by digging into the hillside. I didn't know how typical this might be in Spain. We came to an area where the road curved down and to the side, and on our right, there was a patch of trees and an area in the middle that was grassy and looked inviting. I assumed that Malu was quite tired, and I knew for sure that I was. This looked like a place we could rest for a while.

"This place looks like a good one for a rest", I told her and moved off the road and into the grassy area. A tree had either fallen or been cut down and looked good enough for us to sit on. Malu took a few moments to stretch as if her back was bothering her, and then she sat on the grass. "Are you doing well?" I asked her.

"I am tired and I have a little pain in my back. I need to lie down here for a bit." She lay back and covered her eyes with one hand. I watched her as she moved a bit, obviously trying to get comfortable. I realized her idea to lie down was a good one, so I lay near her, put my hand under my head and closed my eyes. I think I must have fallen asleep in less than a minute.

I don't know how long I slept, but I was deeply asleep and not even aware of any dreaming. I felt something against my leg and looked up, still in a semi-conscious daze. I could not have been more surprised than to focus my eyes and see Manolo standing above me. However, I quickly realized that his expression was not one I had hoped for. There was more of a sorrowful look than anything else.

“Manolo!” I was about to ask him where he had been when I realized that his hands were behind him and he was being constrained by something. I started to get up and then realized there was a person behind him, someone I did not recognize.

“William. Listen, stay still. Or, better, get up slowly.” I got to my feet and was then able to see that Manolo’s hands were bound and the man behind him was looking at me and nodding his head. I interpreted the message as an instruction for me to stand back from the two of them and not try to do anything. Meanwhile I glanced over and saw that Malu was still asleep. I instantly thought about Valeria and looked around. I didn’t see her. “Manolo, where ...” Before I could finish my question, I saw a flicker in his eyes that meant, I believed, not to mention Valeria. I changed the course of my question and continued, “... where have you been?”

The man standing behind Manolo spoke without looking at me. “Get up and stand over there,” and he pointed at a spot that was next to a tree trunk. “Now, get on your knees and put your hands on top of your head.” I did as he said and then stared at Manolo. I could see his face, but the man holding guard over him could not. If Manolo was going to signal something to me I would see it, but the man would not. It was a tiny advantage, but perhaps it would be an important one. I assumed that the man was holding a gun to Manolo’s back, but I was unable to verify it. At least Manolo’s arms were at his sides and his hands were bound in the front. I glanced over at Malu, who was still sleeping. We hadn’t made any noise and had only spoken in soft tones.

I couldn’t think of anything better to do, so I said to the man, “I think this lady is sick. She might need a doctor.”

“What is the matter with her?”

“I don’t know. She kind of fainted a little while ago, and then I fell asleep because I was so tired. Why are you holding my friend there?” This seemed unlikely to be a useful strategy, but I could not come up with anything else.

“You and your friend are wanted for being communists. There are others coming in a while, so we will wait here until they arrive.”

“Well, I am sorry you think that. We are not communists. My friend, the one you are holding, is a doctor, or actually a medical student, and I am an American, from the United States.”

“You have a different accent, so I can see you are not Spanish. What are you doing here then? And who is this woman who you say is sick?”

“Manolo is trying to finish medical school. He was about to finish when there were problems at school. They had to shut down for a while. The woman is my friend. I met her in Burgos, where Manolo is from, and we have been traveling to visit his relatives in Cataluña.” The man looked at me as if I was telling him a lie.

Manolo then said, “Yes, what he says is true. I was at the medical facility in Vitoria doing my final courses. But then there was a strike, and many of the students stopped coming to class. Classes were canceled, and I returned home to Burgos. That is where I met this man, my friend, who is indeed from America. He came to Spain to learn about the country after studying Spanish in his own country. Why would we not tell the truth to you?”

The man was silent for a few moments, and then spoke. “Maybe you are telling the truth, but I was told by the local authorities that you have to be held until they can speak with you. If you are telling the truth, then there should be no problem. They can find out if you were in medical school and if you are from Burgos, as you say. I am only doing what I was told. You would do the same thing, wouldn’t you?”

Neither Manolo nor I said anything to this. I was continuing to watch this man carefully and noticed that at one point he lifted his right hand as if to make a point. It was at that moment that I saw he was holding a small knife in his hand, and not a pistol. I started thinking about how we might get ourselves out of this predicament. It was going to be difficult without being able to communicate to Manolo what I was thinking and vice versa. I decided that the best tactic for the moment was to continue to talk.

I looked at the stranger and said, “I think you can tell by the way I speak that I am not from Spain. I am from the state of Virginia in America, and I learned to speak Spanish with a woman who was originally from Cuba. I am not interested in the politics of Spain, but I can say it is sad to see all of the problems you are having. I don’t understand how your people here are so divided, and I certainly can’t follow all of the disputes you are having.” I stopped and hoped that Manolo would chime in. He did after a few moments.

“Look, friend,” he started, and I was surprised he had used that word, “I am going to medical school as I want to be a doctor. I don’t care about these issues because when it comes to people’s health, that is what is important to me. My family might be in favor of change in Spain, but in reality, don’t all of us want change from this current situation?”

The man seemed to be interested in the discussion. “Maybe what you are saying is true, but I was told that you are Republicans and have been involved in crimes against the Franco government. I don’t understand all of this, but the people of my town know more than I do. I am doing what they told me to do.”

Manolo looked at me, and I tried to discern what his strategy might be. Before anything else happened, I heard a small noise. I turned and saw that Malu was stirring. She lifted her head and saw

me first. She was about to say something, but then she noticed Manolo standing with the man behind him. “Manolo, what are you doing? Who is that man behind you?”

“Malu, are you feeling well? You look pale. You have been sleeping a long time.” He said this with what looked almost like a smile.

She blinked and wiped her hand across her mouth. “I asked who that man is behind you.”

“Oh, he is from the town where we were earlier this morning. He thinks that we have done something wrong and he is holding us.”

Malu stood up now and moved a little close to me. “Why does the man think this? We are traveling through the area on our way to Sabadell.”

The man behind Manolo now spoke to Malu. “Please stay still, lady. There is someone else coming here soon. You can talk to them if you want, but I am doing what I was told to do.”

“But why are you holding that knife near Manolo? Do you think we are dangerous or something?”

The man hesitated before speaking again. “I don’t know. Maybe you are not dangerous, but I can’t take a chance. Please, I want you to sit down there for now.”

“Yes, I will, but first I have to pee. You will have to let me go over there,” she said and pointed to a larger tree that was about ten years away. The man looked at her as if this was something so unexpected that he did not know how to respond to her. Malu did not wait for him to agree. She simply turned and walked slowly over toward the tree she had indicated. She went around to the other side of it, and we could no longer see her. The man seemed to suddenly come back to the reality of the situation.

“Hey, lady, you have to hurry up and then come back over here.” It was clear to me, and no doubt to Manolo as well, that the man was becoming flustered with the situation. We still had no way of communicating with each other what we should do. I turned, and all three of us were looking at the tree behind which Malu had gone. Was she really peeing as we waited?

What happened in the next few seconds was astonishing, and although it took no more than five or six seconds, it seemed, as I reviewed the event, that it played out in slow motion. As we watched, Malu came back out from behind the tree and slowly walked back toward where I was standing. However, before she got close to me, I saw her suddenly bend over and clutch her stomach. I thought she was going to vomit, and for a moment I tried to decide if I should move close to her and what risk that might represent for Manolo if I did. The next thing I knew, Malu was pulling herself back up, and I heard a screech or scream and saw a terrible look on her face. I looked and noticed that in her hand, which she was holding behind her out of view of Manolo and his captor, she had a rock. All of us were startled by the sound she made, and in an instant, I watched as Malu lifted her arm and threw the rock as hard as she could at the man who was holding Manolo. I could only watch what happened next.

Manolo managed to duck down to his right, but his captor, whose view had been partially blocked by Manolo, could not react fast enough. The rock, even though it was not a big one, hit the man in his cheek. His head flew backward, when he realized that an object was heading toward him, and the rock eventually made contact, and he fell over backward. Manolo instantly turned to see that the knife had been dropped. He picked it up and then looked at the man on the ground. Blood was already coming from the wound that was just an inch below his right eye. An inch higher and the man would probably have spent the rest of life with one eye.

We watched as he put his hand up to the wound and started to cry out. “What have you done to me? You stupid idiot! Why did you do that? You could have killed me?” Manolo was standing over

him how, holding the knife in front of him. I came over with Malu and looked at the man who remained on the ground. It was Manolo who spoke.

“I tried to tell you that we meant no harm, but you would not listen to me. This is your fault, not ours. Nobody likes to have a knife stuck up against them as a threat. Now, my friends and I are going to leave, and there is nothing you can do. If we were your enemies, we could kill you right now. But we are not your enemies, and we only did what was necessary here. I suggest you hold something on that cut until you can get help, maybe from a doctor. You should count yourself lucky that the rock did not hit your eye. And you can tell the people from your village that we are not criminals and wish nobody any harm.”

With that, Manolo turned and motioned for us to follow him. Since we were in a wooded area it was easy for us to get away from this man. No doubt he was much more interested now in stopping the bleeding from his injury and getting back to somebody who could help him than in trying to follow us. It didn't take long for me to realize that someone was missing.

“Manolo, where is your sister?”

“Don't worry, my friend, Valeria is safe. I found a place for her to hide and wait for me. We are headed to that place now. She should be fine. We got separated when I realized that she could not keep up with me, so I found a good spot for her to wait while I went looking for you two. It was right after that that the guy who was holding me a knife point was able to stop me. I could have run away from him, but then I was worried that I would leave Valeria in more danger. Fortunately, because I came across you two, this is all working out pretty well. Valeria is just over this way a short distance. Once we are all back together, I think we will have a good chance of getting to Sabadell. It is not far from here now. I will be so glad when we get there. We should be able to relax a bit and get some proper food and rest.”

We continued in the direction Manolo indicated. His words now started to sink in. We had been on the road now for how long? It must have been nearly a month since we left Burgos. I had never been so disoriented when it came to the day and date on my life.

We headed in the direction Manolo indicated and where Valeria was hiding. We were constantly looking around to see if anyone was following us, and from time to time we would stop and listen carefully for any sound whatever.

Manolo stopped and said, “Valeria is waiting over here. I found a little area that is kind of secluded.”

He looked all around and then stepped off the path and past a large tree that was there almost alone. Malu and I followed him to a kind of hedgerow, and then we saw that there was a small opening that a person could go through. We followed Manolo and came into a grassy area that looked somewhat inviting. There, stretched out on the ground, was Valeria. Manolo stepped over and put his hand on her shoulder as she looked asleep. She did not respond, and Manolo gently turned her so she was face up.

7“Damn, I think she is unconscious,” he said as he put his fingers to her throat to make sure she had a pulse. “Valeria, wake up. Can you hear me, Valeria?” But there was no response from his sister. He used his fingers to gently open one of her eyelids. He turned to look at us. “I don’t know what the problem is here. Her pulse seems normal and her eyes are not dilated. She simply is not responding to me. What the hell is going on?” Manolo patted Valeria’s face on both sides. “Valeria, wake up. What is wrong?”

A few moments later Valeria opened her eyes and looked at the two of us. “Where are we? What are we doing?”

“Valeria,” Manolo said giving her hand so she could sit up, “you scared us. We could not get you to wake up. What’s the matter?”

“I was so tired. I could hear voices, but I thought they were in my dream. I was dreaming about being home with our mother and father. It was so real.” She shook her head and blinked several times. “Where is Malu?”

“Malu is right over there. She is fine. Listen to me. We need to get back on the path to Sabadell. We are not that far away now. There are people out looking for us, so we have to continue to be careful.” Manolo stopped and looked around. “I think that we should go in that direction. It is not directly toward Sabadell, but it will avoid these people, whoever they are, and we can then turn further ahead and go straight to Sabadell. I think we can be there by this afternoon.

Manolo looked at me. “William, Valeria and I will go first. I think it is better that we not all stay together, but nobody should travel alone. After about twenty minutes, you and Malu follow along here in this direction.” He pointed to a path. “I am pretty sure that path parallels the road, and after a while they will meet up.”

As soon as Manolo said this, we heard a sound. It was a loud crack, like a firecracker we used to set off in our back yard on the Fourth of July back in Charlottesville. I quickly looked up and around but did not see anything. I glanced over at Malu and realized that she had slumped over, without making a sound. Manolo crawled over to where I was sitting and pushed me over toward the hedgerow. At that same instant I saw Valeria start to run in the direction that Manolo had indicated. Manolo started to go after her, but a moment later there was another sound. It was a gun, there was no

doubt about it. I watched as Manolo dropped to the ground. I could not tell if he did this to take cover or because he had been hit. There were two more shots coming from an area above and behind us.

“Son of a bitch! Somebody just shot at us,” I said, suddenly freezing in a crouched position and trying to understand what was going on. I glanced over at Malu, who was on the ground now. She was about ten feet away from me.

Manolo crawled over to Malu to check on Malu. There was another crack, and the dirt next to Manolo popped up as the bullet struck the ground. Quickly, Manolo grabbed Malu’s arms and dragged her over closer to where I was. A fallen tree trunk was the only immediate cover we had available. He did it so suddenly, and I was so focused on where the gunshots were coming from that I didn’t have time to help him. I did see, a moment later, that there was blood on Malu’s scalp. Manolo grabbed her wrists and pulled her over to where I was lying behind the trunk.

I looked at Manolo to see if he could make any more sense of this than I could. A moment later there was another sound from a gun. I moment later I felt a stinging sensation in my right leg. We were hunkered down behind a tree trunk, and I was afraid to even lift my head to look at what had happened. My mind was racing in every direction, and I thought that this could only end terribly. I had heard the expression that when one is about to die, their life starts to flash by in their mind. At this moment I could only think about getting out of this predicament alive.

I had not realized it before, but then I saw the blood on the back of Manolo’s shirt, just above the waist. Maybe it was blood from Malu, or even from me. I looked down and saw that there was indeed blood on my pant leg and that the stinging sensation was growing. At this rate, I quickly summarized we would all be dead within a few minutes. We had no weapons to defend ourselves or to fight through this horrific scene.

“Por la puta padre,” I heard Manolo say. There were two more shots, and then I heard a voice that seemed to come from behind us. I looked behind me, and there were two people kneeling near a large tree. There was a man and a woman, although the woman was dressed in a man’s clothing. They had rifles pointed in our direction, but not directly at us. I wondered what they were doing. Could it be they were trying to assist us? It would have been totally unexpected and unexplained. I saw both of them fire above our heads, so they must have been shooting at the people who had been firing at us.

One of the two, the man, ran from his position over to us and kneeled next to Malu. “*Estos hijos de puta han abandonado su lugar. The bastards have left their positions*” he said, but to no one in particular. The people shooting at us had apparently fled. He tapped me on the shoulder. “What happened to you?”

I told him I must have been hit in the leg. He looked down and saw the blood stain and a hole in my pants. He ripped the hole to get a better look. “Yes, you have been hit near the knee. It is bleeding but not a huge amount.” He then turned to Manolo, who was lying without making a sound now. “How about him?” he seemed to be asking me. I didn’t answer, and he looked at Manolo and quickly noticed the bloody shirt. Manolo was lying on his side, and the man turned him gently for a better look. At that moment the woman arrived and started to look at Malu.

“This one is breathing,” the man said, but Manolo had started to turn a grayish color. “This one has been shot in the leg, but I don’t think the wound is so bad. He is awake and looks pretty good.” The woman was now inspecting Malu.

“This woman is in bad shape, I am afraid,” she said. “I think a bullet went into her skull. She has a pulse, but it is very weak.”

I finally spoke up, even though I was in a kind of shock about everything that had happened over the last few minutes. “My name is William. I am an American. These are my friends, Manolo and Malu. We have been traveling together. We were ambushed. Who are you?”

The man spoke first. “We are Republicans. We live not far from here. We are part of the local group, and we seek to protect people who are being sought by the monarchists. This area has few Monarchists left now, but you managed to attract them.” He stopped speaking for a moment, and then continued. “Why would anyone be shooting at you? You are all young and look like you are students or something. Why were you coming in this direction? What was your destination?”

“We are on our way to Sabadell. I’m sorry, but it is a long story. I will gladly tell you, but right now we have to do something about my friends. I am afraid they are going to die. Where can we go for help?”

The woman spoke now. “We have a car that is parked about a kilometer from here. I am going to bring it, but you will have to get over closer to the road. Can you walk?”

“Yes, I think so.” I was more worried about Manolo and Malu than myself. And then I remembered that Valeria had been with us a short time ago. “Did you see another woman as you were approaching us? It is Manolo’s sister. She ran in that direction over there when the shooting started, but I don’t know where she is now.”

“Yes, as were moving in this direction we saw her run past us. I’m not sure where she is now. I assume for the moment that she is safe somewhere. We better focus on these two right now.”

The man and I first looked at Malu. She was unconscious, but I could see that she was breathing. We looked at the side of her head and saw where a bullet had entered her skull. It was not bleeding as much as I thought it would. But there was clearly a hole where the bullet had entered her skull. “Malu, can you hear me? Malu, are you awake?” I didn’t know what else to say or do. Her body

was limp, and it was a struggle to lift her. We would have to carry her the distance to where the car could get off the road so we could load Malu and Manolo. We carried her, and I was clearly limping. I started to notice the pain each time I took a step with my right leg.

We went on for a while, and then stopped for a break. I turned to look back where we had been ambushed, hoping that I would see Manolo coming behind us on his own. But that was not the case. We continued further until we came to a clearing that was about a hundred feet from the road. The woman had hurried past us and was getting the car, as she had promised. “We must go back and get the other person, your friend Manolo,” the man said. “By the way, my name is Paco.”

I looked at him for a moment and wondered what other kinds of things Paco had seen in recent months. It would have to be a conversation for later. I followed him back to the place where we had left Manolo. He was there on the ground, lying on one side. The bloodstain on the lower part of his shirt was difficult to look at. I put my hand on his shoulder.

“Manolo, can you hear me?” I watched as he moved his head slightly, and I assumed it was a nod of acknowledgment. “You are injured, and we must move you to a safe place. Is it all right if this man and I carry you?” I could see a little movement as he twisted his head slightly. He spoke but I could not make out what he said.

“Can you say that again, Manolo?” I asked him.

“Where, uh, where are they?”

“Who, Manolo?”

“My sister. And, you know, the other woman, Malu.”

“Your sister should be fine. She ran as soon as she heard the first shots. I don’t know where she is exactly, but I am sure she must be safe right now.” I waited for a sign he understood me. “And Malu?” he asked barely above a whisper, “where is she?”

“Malu is hurt, pretty badly, I am afraid. She is alive. We moved her closer to the road, and from there we are going to Sabadell. It is not far. Can we carry you?” I saw a tiny nod in response, and Paco and I carefully lifted him.

A few minutes later we were in the vehicle. Manolo and Malu were in the back seat with a man between them. I looked back and realized they were both unconscious or perhaps even dead. I had a severe pain in my leg, but I could not help thinking about Manolo and Malu.

The driver spoke up after a while. “You said you are from America? What is your role here? I have met three Americans here. One of them is from Boston. He is a newspaper reporter who is covering our conflict. Another one is a kind of a medical assistant who travels around to different clinics to help out. He is from Philadelphia. The other one, I’m not sure where he is from exactly, knows a lot about radios and things like that. They all support the Republican efforts here. What were you doing?”

I hesitated before speaking. This man had described three Americans who were in Spain due to their convictions and were probably considered small-scale heroes. I had come to Spain to learn more about the language and the people. What should I say to this man who was a freedom fighter trying to support the idea of a more modern and unifying Spain and was in risk probably every day? My head was hurting now, and I could not help thinking about Manolo and Malu. Instead of answering his question right away, I asked about my friends.

“I am afraid for my friends in the back. How soon can we get them to a doctor? Are they going to live?”

“I cannot answer your question, comrade,” he said as he quickly glanced in the rearview mirror as if he could make an assessment that way. “They have serious injuries, probably worse than yours. We should be in the town soon, and I believe there is someone there who can take a look at them to see what their conditions are.”

I looked at the driver. “I’m sorry for not answering your question. I am glad to discuss everything and tell you. But I would rather wait until we arrive in Sabadell. It is too difficult to talk when I am so afraid of losing my two friends.”

“Do not worry,” he responded. “We will have plenty of time to talk. You are right to focus on your friends at this time. I hope they will both be well soon.”

A week later I was in bed in a small room that was little bigger than a closet and had only a single bed that I barely fit it. I had been given medicine for pain, and it was the strongest I had ever taken. I was in and out of sleep for the entire time I had arrived in Sabadell and the home of Manolo’s cousin. The only thing I could remember was a woman bringing me soup and water from time to time. I had frequent dreams that were at times pleasant and often terrifying. I dreamed of being in Charlottesville and in class at the University. Other dreams found me in dangerous situations, such as on a ship in horrible weather conditions and thinking there would be no escape from drowning. In one dream I was in a church, in Spain, when a group of people armed with swords and ropes stormed in and demanded to know where the priests and nuns were.

That morning I felt more awake than I had since the incident where Manolo, Malu, and I were shot. I thought about the two of them and wondered what had happened. I was going to stand up, but when I tried to lift my right leg, I felt a shooting pain.

“Hello, is anyone there?” The door to the room was not completely closed. A few moments later a woman, who looked vaguely familiar, appeared.

“Good morning. How are you feeling, William?”

“I think I am better, thank you.”

“You have had a tough time. The bullet did not stay inside your leg. There was damage to your knee, but the problem for a few days has been an infection. I finally noticed yesterday that the infection appears to be reducing now.”

“It still hurts, but that is good to know. Who are you?”

“I am Consuelo, a cousin of Manolo’s.” As soon as she said this, I saw a tear well up in her eye.

“Manolo? Where is he now? Is he doing well?”

“I’m so sorry, but no. Manolo did not make it. The bleeding was heavy, and by the time we got a doctor to look after him it was too late. I was with him when he died and, despite the circumstances, he went peacefully. It is so sad that such a nice young man with a great future had to die so soon. We have sent word to his parents, but we have not heard back yet.”

My emotions got the best of me. The tears came, and I turned my head to the side and closed my eyes and saw an image of Manolo. Finally, I said, “I can’t believe it. Manolo was an incredible person. I never really had a best friend, but I know he was my best friend, even though I only met him a month ago.” I stopped and looked at Consuelo.

“I am sure you are going to ask about the girl, but I don’t know her name.”

“You mean Malu? Please tell me that she made it.”

“I’m sorry, but no, she did not. The bullet went into her head, and she never regained consciousness. She did not suffer for sure. She never even opened her eyes again or made a sound that I know of. What a tragedy for two young people to pass away like this. I don’t know all of what happened, but I know people loyal to the king ambushed you. Why do you think that happened?”

I did not know how to respond to her question right away. Instead, I asked her a question. “What happened with Valeria, Manolo’s sister?”

“Valeria is fine. She got separated from the rest of you, but she managed to make it here to Sabadell. She is extremely upset about her brother and has done little but mourn and cry since she arrived.”

“I am so glad she is here and did not get hurt. I can’t imagine how she is dealing with the loss of her brother.”

“On the good side, Valeria has asked about you every day. She has come in to sit with you, but you were always asleep. She says that you are special, like nobody she has ever known. She said you are from America and that you came to Spain to learn about the culture and the people and to improve your Spanish. Why did you come when we have so many problems here right now?”

That question had been asked so many times. I had always tried to explain, but at the moment I was at a loss of what to say. I decided not to respond. “I am pleased that Valeria has been here. Later today I would like to see her and talk for a while. I want to give my condolences for her brother and see if I can make her feel better. That might not be easy, but I want to try.”

“Of course,” Consuelo said, “she will be glad to talk with you, I’m sure. Continue to rest, and I will bring something for you to eat a little later.”

I had to wait two more days before seeing Valeria. She came in one afternoon after knocking lightly at the door. I had been hoping it was her every time somebody came to the room. She stepped over to the bed and looked down at me without saying anything. She reached out and held me by the hand, and it was the best feeling I had experienced since that horrible day.

“Valeria, I have really missed you. I wasn’t sure you would ever come to see me.” I watched as tears welled up in her eyes. She closed her eyes for a few seconds and then used a handkerchief to dry the tears.

“William, I am so glad you are doing better now. I have been worried about you, but I was unable to come before. I am sorry.”

“There is no reason to apologize. You lost your brother, which is terribly sad. I don’t know what to say. He was becoming a brother to me. I have never been so close to anyone besides my father than I was to Manolo.” I held back my own tears as I didn’t want to see Valeria get even worse. “Are you feeling well? You did not have any injuries at all, did you?”

“No, none at all, fortunately. But the pain I am feeling is worse than a physical injury. I can barely stand it, William.”

I decided to allow her to feel her pain, hoping that being with me might be a little helpful. I continued to hold her hand. She eventually sat down, and I moved a little to be sure she had room. I felt a twinge of pain in my leg. We stayed this way for a couple of minutes, and I had a mixed feeling of pain, a degree of guilt for all that had happened, and the pleasure of having Valeria so close to me. I wondered what she was thinking about me. Was I someone partly responsible for this tragedy? If I had not come into Manolo’s life, maybe he would be alive and well pursuing his medical career in Burgos. I had to somehow be involved in all of this, no matter how I tried to see things.

I finally spoke. “Valeria, I understand if you think I share in the blame for what has happened. I don’t know how to express how sorry I am. I never intended for any of this to happen.” I waited a while to see what she might say.

“William, I have gone over all of this more times than you can imagine. I have tried to make sense of it ... it is hard to do. I am trying to accept that Manolo is gone. I feel badly about Malu as well, even though we were different. She should be alive and pursuing her dreams about Spain and what kind of life she would want when this terrible, horrible conflict is over. The situation sickens me, and at times I just want it to be over no matter who ends up with the power and control. But I know Malu would never have agreed with that.”

“I understand completely. Malu was special to me too.” I stopped for a moment as I knew I couldn’t talk much about Malu and the complicated relationship I had with her in front of Valeria. I remembered for a moment that night in Manolo’s parent’s house, and as before, it made me wonder if I had dreamed that intimate interlude with Malu. I thought the best thing to do was change the subject, so I brought up something that had been in my mind during many of the hours I was awake.

“I have an idea, but you will think it is crazy. Still, I am going to tell you about it.” Valeria looked at me, and I could see she was calmer now. “I know that I must leave Spain now. Consuelo told me that arrangements can be made to get me safely to France. As soon as I am able to walk well, that is what will happen.” She smiled a little and squeezed my hand.

“You must do that, William. Spain is not the place for you right now. Go home and be with your father. I can barely imagine what he is thinking right now. He could not possibly know what has happened to you.”

“You are right, yes. But a few days ago I was able to write him a letter, and I am hoping it can get to him in the next couple of weeks or so. I didn’t say much, no details about what happened, just

that I would be returning to America within a few weeks or so. He has little idea of the story I am going to tell when I see him.”

“That is for certain,” was all she could say.

I took a deep breath before continuing. “Listen to me, Valeria. I have an idea, a suggestion I want you to think about. Would you consider coming back to America with me?” There, I had said what I had been thinking for several days but didn’t know how to express. She looked at me, and I saw the frown lines in the space between her eyes. I hoped she would not start to cry again.

“Go with you to America? Really, that is what you are asking me?”

“I am totally serious, Valeria. Think about it. Spain is not a safe place. I can take you to America, and we can live there. We can get married because I have deep feelings for you. You are such a special person to me. Do you realize that? Didn’t you see over the last several weeks that I had special feelings for you?”

The look of complexity deepened. I thought, for a moment, that I had not chosen the best way to express myself. I waited to see what she would say in response.

“I don’t know what to say, I just don’t. Leave Spain? Go to America? Marry you? I can feel my head spinning right now, William. I don’t know what to say or think. I feel like I am dreaming, but I don’t know if it is a good dream or a bad one. All of this is too much for me, really.”

“Please, stay calm and try to relax. I didn’t want to say anything to upset you.”

“I am trying to stay calm. What you are suggesting is almost like something out of a story or a fairy tale. I lost my brother, this country is a disaster, and here you come, a foreigner from a country like America and you want to take me away to be happy for the rest of my life. It sounds so beautiful, but things can never be as beautiful as that. I don’t believe in things like that.”

I wasn't sure how to respond. I knew the mixed feelings she was having and that they might be overwhelming to her. But I had brought up the matter, and I felt I had to continue with the discussion. "I don't want to pressure you. I simply want you to know that this is something to consider. It is something I want to offer you, and I am willing to do whatever it takes. I hope you will consider this."

She was looking down and took her hand away. "I need to think about all of this. I appreciate what you are offering. You are an amazing person. I have never known anyone from America, and if you are typical of Americans then it must be a great place to be."

"I know if I am typical or not, maybe to some degree. We have problems in America too, but not like the ones you are having in Spain today. I suggest you think about this, and in a couple of days we can talk again. I am ready to get out of this room and moving again. I'll tell Consuelo that I am ready to get back to something close to normal. That will also mean that they will make the arrangements for me to go to France."

"I understand. I will think about this, yes. Meanwhile I am waiting for my father to come and find me. I know he must be on his way already. Get some rest now, and we will talk again."

The next day I told Consuelo it was time to get up and moving again. She had one of the men who worked on the property come to help me. I was unsteady at first as my only trips so far had been to a bathroom and back to the bed. Now, I was going to have an extended walk. I knew that I was going to limp and have to deal with the pain in my leg. But I was desperate to get outside and feel fresh air after about ten days in that small room. They brought a cane for me to use.

It was a pleasant morning, if somewhat cool. I stepped outside the front door and took several deep breaths. The air was fresh and clean, and it felt so good. There was a stone path that I started on that led to a garden area and a wooden bench. I decided to go that far and then sit for a bit and not overdo it. I got there and sat. It was the most relaxed feeling I had had in a long time. The cool temperature, fresh air and smells of the garden helped me to feel better. I closed my eyes and tried to clear my mind as much as possible.

I was there for a little while when I heard footsteps approaching. I opened my eyes and saw Valeria coming to the bench.

“Good morning, William. How are you today?”

“Good morning, Valeria. I am better, thanks, but seeing you is making things better still.” She smiled and sat down.

“I know that we have to talk. Is now a good time?”

“Yes, sure. I am relaxed out here, and I trust you are as well.”

“I would think that I am more relaxed, yes.”

“Have you thought about my ideas?”

“Of course, I have. It was very special of you to make your suggestion, your proposal I think I can call it. I have thought deeply about everything. America would be a great place to see, and you are an incredible person. Any woman would be very fortunate to have you as a boyfriend or wife.”

“That is so kind of you to say.”

“It is true, I have no doubt. You deserve whatever good things you find in your life, William. But I cannot be part of it. I know that is not what you want, but I am convinced it is the best for both of us.”

“Why do you say that, Valeria? I think you know how I feel about you. Maybe you simply do not feel the same toward me.”

“No, that is not the case. Ever since we met at the convent in Burgos, I have found you a very nice and attractive man. I was envious at first because I thought you were Malu’s lover. I tried to remain distant from you and not interfere. Later, I was not so sure. I tried to figure out what your relationship with Malu was, but it was hard to conclude anything. I think you loved her, but maybe that was not really the case, or maybe it was a kind of infatuation. She was so pretty and somewhat mysterious. No doubt you found her attractive and special, especially as you were from a different culture.

“I also saw what kind of person you were around my brother. You two became close in a short time, and during all of this you were faithful and supportive of him. It was like you were brothers but from two different families. It is a little hard to explain.”

“Look Valeria, Manolo was very special to me. I admired and respected him, but I also felt that he felt the same toward me. That made me feel more wanted under these strange and fascinating times here in Spain. I will think about him every day for the rest of my life, no matter what happens.”

“Our memories of people, those who have gone, are important. I will never be quite the same without my brother. I have to accept the reality of the situation, as difficult as that may be.”

“Then why can’t you come with me?”

“William, I cannot leave Spain. I simply cannot abandon my country, even if we are in a terrible situation. Also, I need to care for my parents. They are well, I’m sure, but they will get older, and I am the only child now who can care for them. And I have to do something with my life. I don’t know what that is going to be yet. I have come to understand that being a nun was not the right thing. I joined the church because I was confused and uncertain about my life. It seemed an easy solution, but during my time there I realized that I had almost nothing in common with those women. I am not going to give up my beliefs, my religion, but those things are not going to represent me and what I am doing in my life. I don’t harbor hard feelings, but I must determine what is best for me.”

“That is very important, Valeria.” I hesitated for a few moments and tried to think of what I could say. “I understand what you are telling me, everything. I have to say again that I would love to take you back to America and marry you. I think I could make you happy and help you fulfill whatever your desires in life are.”

“I know your feelings, William. You have made that clear, and you are sincere and so thoughtful. However, I cannot leave. I’m sorry. Don’t be sad. You will go home and have a life. You will find someone to spend your life with, I am sure. That woman will be so lucky.” With that she leaned over and hugged me and kissed me on the cheek. “Please get the medical attention you need for your leg as soon as you can. Be careful in your journey to France and then back to America. I will never forget you.” She stood up and smiled and then walked back to the house. I didn’t see her the rest of the day. As it turned out, I would never see Valeria again.

Twenty-two

There was little of note when I made the journey back to America and eventually Charlottesville. I was given a seat on a Red Cross truck that was used for both deliveries and to transport coffins. It took two days to get to the French border, and as I expected we crossed on a small road in a mostly uninhabited area. I crossed into France as easily as I had entered Spain. There were no signs I was in France, but the driver of the truck assured me I was no longer in Spain. He said there was a town a couple of kilometers ahead. The truck then turned around and headed in the direction we had come from.

The route took me across the Pyrenees Mountains and to a series of towns that led northeast. I had a small bag with a few used clothing items that Consuelo had found for me and the cane I had been using. I was still limping, but I was determined to get to the village. I was given French francs that had been collected by friends of Consuelo. It was enough to get me some meager food and to stay in pensions along the way.

It took me almost three weeks to get to the coast of northern France. Once there I checked with the shipping companies to see about working my way back across the Atlantic, as I had done on my way over. I knew my injured leg would be an obstacle, but my patience and perseverance paid off. I happened to meet an officer of a small transport ship who was from Spain. I told him the briefest version of my trip to Spain without explaining all the difficulties in the journey from Burgos to Sabadell. It was a white lie, but I thought it better than telling the truth, when I told the officer that I had been in Spain hoping to provide assistance as a volunteer at a hospital or someplace I might be of

help. I explained that my time had been cut short when I was in an accident and suffered a knee injury that put an end to my plans.

He listened intently and seemed to accept my story. He said that the ship I was assigned to was going to pick up items in a couple of ports on the French Atlantic and then head for Baltimore. He said that many of the crew members on the ship were Spanish and that the language would come in handy. He needed someone to act as a kind of assistant to the captain and himself and that his work would cover the cost of my voyage. I told him that Baltimore was ideal because it was not far from Virginia and I could easily get back to Charlottesville. We shook hands on the agreement, and a few days later we departed.

Needless to say, when I got back home my father was elated. I think that first day we must have spent at least six hours as I recounted much of my adventure. One of the first things he wanted to know was how I was injured and said that he was going to take me the next day to the hospital at the university to see what could be done to improve the injury. He had the same thought I did, but neither of us wanted to say it out loud.

It has been twenty-five years since I made my journey to Spain. I have made a few trips to Mexico and Central America through the years, mostly to attend conferences and do research into my favorite authors. I visited Colombia, where a graduate student who had been in my classes was attending a university in Cartagena. But whenever I thought about Spain, I got such mixed feelings that I quickly abandoned the idea. It was simply too painful to think about. My colleagues, who know some of my story, have asked me from time to time when I might return to Spain. Usually, I tell them that it is an expensive venture and that it is hard to find the time.

I think it might happen someday. When I do think about it, I inevitably pull out the letter that I had gotten ten years or so ago. This is the letter that I have read dozens of times. I had picked it up when I was in Charlottesville on a visit with my father.

Dear William,

I trust you remember me, I am Valeria Palacios, Manolo's sister. It took me time and effort, but I was finally able to track you down. I had to get information about the University of Virginia in a local library as I remembered you said your father was a professor there. I have used the university's mailing address and am hopeful this gets to you eventually.

I live in San Sebastian now on the northern coast. It is a nice and relatively quiet city. As you know the conflict in Spain ended years ago, even though we had to deal with all the tragedy of that and then the Second World War. I suppose you were not involved in the war because of your leg injury, but perhaps I am mistaken.

I too left Spain. After returning to Burgos and checking on my parents, I decided to leave Spain until the troubles were over. The war in Europe made things somewhat complicated, but I went to do my university studies in France. It took me quite a long time, and I had to attend different universities, but I eventually finished my degree in Romance languages. I focused on French, naturally, and then Italian. I even spent half a year in Milan where I did research and improved my conversational Italian.

A few years after the end of the European War I went back to Spain. As you know, Franco and his supporters won the day and now control the country. I decided that the Basque Country was the place I wanted to live. I think that the girl Malu was from the

region—was it Bilbao? My parents, who remained in Burgos, understood, and accepted I would live in another city. I teach now at a university in San Sebastian.

I think about you frequently, William. I hope you are doing whatever makes you happy. I will never forget our time together, even though the memories are mixed with so many emotions. I hope you found someone to love. I can tell you that I loved you even though it was not a love that we would be able to share together.

If you ever return to Spain, you can contact me at the university where I teach. It would be nice to see you, and your family if you have one. I will keep the fondest memories of you until my final days.

With deep affection,

Valeria Palacios

Each time I read the letter I get the same response. I think about how things might have been if Valeria had accepted to return home with me. I imagined our life together in Charlottesville or perhaps in another city. I think about having children with her and one day returning to Spain. But then the reality sinks in. My journey to Spain seems like something from a different lifetime, and at times I remember the smallest details and think that it was like a dream that is so realistic when it happens that when you wake up it takes a few minutes to realize it did not actually happen.

I also think about Valeria and wonder what she looks like now as a middle-aged woman. I wonder what her life is actually like. She didn't mention in her letter a husband or family or anything that might suggest a relationship with anyone. I imagine going to San Sebastián and seeing Valeria and

embracing her with a huge hug but then I know, deep down, this is never going to happen. And that is as it should be.

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